

COHESION AND COHERENCE

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Cohesion has been defined in a number of ways. Widdowson (1982: 52-55) defines it in terms of the distinction that is made between the illocutionary act and the proposition. In his view, propositions, when linked together, form a "text" whereas illocutionary acts, when related to each other, create different kinds of "discourse." According to Halliday (Halliday 1994: 309–311), cohesion is the set of language resources which express relationships or links through a text or discourse separate from the structural level of sentence grammar.

Halliday and Hasan recognize five types of cohesive devices in English and in the lexicogrammatical system of the language. They are *reference*, *substitution*, *ellipsis*, *conjunction*, and *lexical cohesion*. Reference, substitution, and ellipsis are grammatical; lexical cohesion is lexical; conjunction stands on the borderline between the two categories. In other words, it is mainly grammatical but sometimes involves lexical selection.

Grandparents 'juggle career and caring'

People in 50s and 60s feel pressure to work on

John Carvel
Social affairs editor

Growing pressure on people in their 50s and 60s to stay in paid work is set to divert grandparents from helping their working daughters and sons with childcare, according to a report today from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

It found a shortage of young people in the population – confirmed by the national census on Monday – would make employers do their utmost to retain older staff.

This would shrink the number of retired people who were able to care for their grandchildren or frail older

relatives, said researchers from the Institute of Education in London.

After a survey of more than 1,000 employees over 50 and recently retired local authority staff, they identified a 'pivot generation' of people combining work and care roles.

Two-thirds of people between 50 and retirement were in paid employment, one-third had grandchildren by the age of 50, and 60% had living parents.

Nearly half the local authority staff had some caring responsibility. One in three looked after an elderly relative or friend, one in six provided care for a grandchild and one in 10 did both.

From *The Guardian* newspaper – 2.10.02

Text cohesion is achieved by a number of ways:

Pronoun and possessive reference – at various points in the text a pronoun or more frequently a possessive is used instead of a noun. In the first sentence (*Growing pressure on people in their 50s and 60s ...*) *their* is used to refer back to *people*.

Like most texts, the article has many examples of such pronoun and possessive reference. The second *their* in paragraph 1 refers back but this time to the noun *grandparents*, whereas *their* in paragraph 2 refers back to *employers*. Such **anaphoric reference** can operate between paragraphs too. *This* which starts paragraph 3 refers back to the whole of paragraph 2, whereas *they* in paragraph 4 refers back to *researchers from the Institute of Education* in the previous paragraph.

Article reference – articles are also used for text cohesion. The definite article (*the*) is often used for anaphoric reference. For example, in paragraph 4 the writer refers to *retired local authority staff*, but when they are mentioned again in paragraph 6 the writer talks about *the local*

authority staff, and the reader understands that he is talking about the local authority staff who were identified two paragraphs before.

However *the* is not always used in this way. When the writer talks about *the national census*, he assumes his readers will know what he is referring to and that there is only one of it. Such **exophoric reference** assumes a world knowledge shared by the discourse community who the piece is written for.

Tense agreement – writers use tense agreement to make texts cohesive. In our ‘grandparents’ article the past tense predominates (*It found*) and what is sometimes called the ‘future-in-the-past’ (*would make*) also occurs. If, on the other hand, the writer was constantly changing tense, the text would not hold together in the same way.

Linkers – texts also achieve coherence through the use of **linkers** – words describing text relationships of ‘addition’ (*and, also, moreover, furthermore*), of ‘contrast’ (*however, on the other hand, but, yet*), of ‘result’ (*therefore, consequently, thus*), of ‘time’ (*first, then, later, after a while*), etc.

Substitution and ellipsis – writers frequently substitute a short phrase for a longer one that has preceded it, in much the same way as they use pronoun reference (see above). For example, in *He shouldn't have cheated in his exam but he did so because he was desperate to get into university* the phrase *did so* substitutes for *cheated in his exam*. Writers use ellipsis (where words are deliberately left out of a sentence when the meaning is still clear) in much the same way. For example, in *Penny was introduced to a famous author, but even before she was she had recognised him* the second clause omits the unnecessary repetition of *introduced to a famous author*.

In a nutshell, cohesive devices help to bind elements of a text together so that we know what is being referred to and how the phrases and sentences relate to each other. A cohesive text is possible though it is not coherent, like the following example:

This made her afraid. It was open at the letters page. His eyes were shut and she noticed the *Daily Mail* at his side. She knew then that he had read her contribution. Gillian came round the corner of the house and saw her husband sitting in his usual chair on the terrace. She wished now that she had never written to the paper.

For a text to have coherence, it needs to have some kind of internal logic which the reader can follow with or without the use of prominent cohesive devices. When a text is coherent, the reader can understand a least two things:

The writer's purpose – the reader should be able to understand what the writer's purpose is. Is it to give information, suggest a course of action, make a judgement on a book or play, or express an opinion about world events, for example? A coherent text will not mask the writer's purpose.

The writer's line of thought – the reader should be able to follow the writer's line of reasoning if the text is a discursive piece. If, on the other hand, it is a narrative, the reader should be able to follow the story and not get confused by time jumps, or too many characters, etc. In a descriptive piece the reader should know what is being described and what it looks, sounds, smells, or tastes like.

In short, coherence is achieved by how a writer sequences information, or constructs a text. This brings the issue of genre in which different genres provoke different writing (in order to satisfy the expectations of the discourse community that is being written for). When the writer strays outside text construction norms, or does not conform with the way a specific genre is written in the given discourse community, coherence is at risk. Still, the choice to follow or not the genre norms is up to writers.