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Cohesion: its Types

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Abstract

Whenever we read a passage or hear some conversation, we find certain resources which determine whether the passage/conversation is a unified whole or not, whether it is meaningful or not. These elements or resources which provide organization to the passage or the conversation not only make it meaningful but also coherent. Thus, the elements which help us to make out the meaning are called cohesive devices and their act of providing coherence is called cohesion.

Keywords: Cohesion, Conversation, Semantics, Substitution, Collocation

According to Holliday and Hasan “cohesion is a semantic relationship between an element in the text and some other element crucial to the interpretation of it.....” Furthermore, cohesion takes place when the interpretation of some element in the text or discourse is dependent on that of the other. For example-

1. Seth Amirchand was a shadowy figure (i), He hated politics but was forced into it by the love of his people. (ii)

From the above example we easily understand that ‘he’ of the second sentence stands for Seth Amirchand in the first sentence. Therefore, ‘he’ in the second sentence and Amirchand in the first sentence is interrelated to each other and hence, provide cohesion to the whole sentence.

However, these cohesive elements responsible for cohesion are of four types –

1. Reference
2. Substitution and Ellipsis
3. Conjunction
4. Lexical items.

Reference: It is the first of cohesive devices. It is established when an item in one sentence refers back to an item in another sentence. For example, ‘He’ in the second sentence refers back to Seth Amirchand in the first sentence. So ‘He’ is an item of reference here to Seth Amirchand in the above quoted example. Substitution and ellipsis: Substitution like ellipsis is

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a process which occurs within the text. It is defined as a process in which one item is replaced by another. Ellipsis is also a kind of substitution in which an item is not replaced but omitted. In other way, we can say that both are the same processes. It can be best understood by the following example:

[1:2] Aasha Rani went back to her room and chose flashy sari- she wore the sparkling pink one with sequins all over. . . .

Here 'one' in the latter part of the quoted example, functions as a substitute for 'sari'. It becomes pertinent to tell that in reference, the presupposed item may be found either in the text or outside the text. But in substitution, the presupposed item is retrieved within the text. Like 'one' in the above example, is presupposing 'sari'.

Types of substitution:

1. Nominal- one, ones, same
2. Verbal- do
3. Clausal so/not

Although ellipsis has been defined along with substitution but something more needs to be said about it. Ellipsis simply means something left or unsaid.

According to Holliday and Hasan: ellipsis is a structural mechanism which leaves specific structural slots to be filled from elsewhere. This is exactly the same as presupposition by the substitution except that in substitution an explicit counter is used eg: 'one' or 'do' but in ellipsis, nothing is inserted into the slot. But the word or phrase which is unsaid or not repeated can be easily understood. For example-

[1:3] If you are shitting in your pants, you leave. Why should I? [Shit in my pant and leave] the structure of the second sentence is left unsaid which will possibly be completed by the presupposed item/clause why should I leave?

4. Conjunction: Etymologically, conjunction is used to connect one word from another or one text from another. It is a grammatical relation between the words and structures rather than relating them through meanings (like reference ellipsis and substitution). Conjunction provides different type of semantic relationship in which the preceding event is systematically connected by the following event in any text.

For example:

[1:4] They completed their work. Afterwards they left the office.

Here we find that afterwards in the second sentence expresses the time sequence which provides cohesion. Afterwards in the second sentence connects the event which has passed in the first sentence functioning as conjunction.

5. Lexical cohesion: It is related to choice of words. Generally, lexical items are neglected in description of English, but they play a very crucial role in achieving cohesion by means of selection of words.



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Thus, it can be said that reference, ellipsis and substitutions, and conjunction are part of grammatical cohesion while lexical cohesion is entirely a case of vocabulary. This cohesion may be the outcome of various devices-

1. word repetition
2. synonyms or near synonyms
3. collocation
4. superordinate

The above devices import us suitable atmosphere to remain engrossed with the names of persons and other identical items which give some additional information about them during the process of reading. They minimize the difficulty level of the readers in grasping the meaning comfortably.

Analyzing text by application of cohesive devices

Through this article, I have tried to acquaint the general readers of English literature how cohesive devices i.e. reference, substitution and ellipsis, conjunction and lexical items determine the meaning of a text in a passage. The present analysis has adopted the cohesion model of Halliday and Hasan according to which all these cohesive devices generally weave the text into a complete whole.

However, for this purpose, I have selected a passage from Shobhaa De's *Starry Nights* (1990). Keeping in view the convenience of the readers, I have denoted the used cohesive devices by their initial letters as follows-

R- for reference

S- for Substitution

E- for Ellipsis

C- for Conjunction

L- for lexical items.

Before presenting the original text, it is necessary to provide the back ground of the passage.

Background of the passage-

Starry Nights is basically the story of an aspiring film star Aasha Rani who comes from a very small town of Madras to try her fortunes in the Bombay film Industry with her mother who happens to be her 'madam' also. In the beginning, she has been nothing but a 'gaon ki chori' (a village-girl). She needed someone to beck her. Her mother found kishenbhai (K.B) a small time producer with whose support she finds various roles in various films. Aasha Rani was merely a fifteen year old girl and kishenbhai took undue advantage of her innocence. Actually, kishenbhai is a kind of in-charge who looks after her accounts and gets contracts signed for her. She has become 'his' and he has become to love her.



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Passage: When kishenbhai discovered Aasha Rani she had been nothing. (1) ‘dhool ka phool’ the film rags gleefully dismissed her (2) An awkward, ungainly, overweight girl from Madras.(3) And so dark. (4) Chee. (5) Kishenbhai did not like dark girls. (6) He had always gone for ‘doodh ke jaisi gori’ woman herself. (7) His own swarthy complexion was worked over with Afghan snow and pond’s Dream flower talc, a part of his daily post bath ritual. (8) Aasha Rani had laughed and laughed when she’d found him at his careful toilet. (9) But that was later. (10) After she had become officially his. (11) No, he had not married the bitch or anything. (12)But it was known in their circle that kishenbhai had got hold of new ‘chidiya’ (13).

Analysis and Description of the passage-

Sentence No.	No. of ties	Cohesive item	Type	Presupposed item
1	2	Kishenbhai Aasha Rani	L L	Kishan Aasha Rini (preceding text)
2	2	Film Her	L R	Filmi- (preceding text) Aasha Rini
3	1	Girl	L	Women(preceding text)
4	1	And	C	5.3
5	5	0	-	--
6	4	Kishan bhai Did not like Dark Girl	L L L L	- Kishenbhai - dismissed - dark - girl
7	3	He Gori Woman	R L L	-Kishenbhai Dark Girls
8	3	His(2x) Swarthy	R L	He→ Kishenbhai Dark
9	4	Aasha rani Him/his Toilett Laughed	L R L L	-Aasha Rani --→he→kishanbhai -bath -Laughed (preceding text)
10	2	But That	C R	(5-9) (5-9)
11	2	She Her	R R	Aasha Rani →his→Kishenbhai
12	4	No He	E R	(5-11) →his(→)Kishenbhai



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		The(bitch)	R	Scheming bitch (preceding text) Bitch (preceding text)
		Bitch	L	
13	4	But	C	-(5-12)
		It	R	-(5-11)
		Their	R	-(5-11)
		Kishenbhai	L	-(Kishenbhai)

Now, it becomes clear from the above analysis that the three main cohesive devices that occur are Lexical items, Reference and Conjunction. We also find one example of eclipsis in sentence no.12.

The number of lexical items is =16

The number of Reference items is =11

The number of conjunctive items is = 03

The number of elliptical devices is only 01

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