



功能语言学论丛

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# Cohesion in Text and Text Aboutness

语篇中的衔接和语篇主旨大意的关系

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李元科◎著

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中山大学出版社



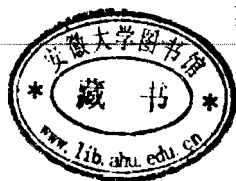
功能语用学

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· 广州 ·

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# Foreword by Professor Michael Hoey

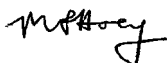
In the mid-1970s, linguistics was dominated by a range of generative grammars that all owed a great deal to the influence of Noam Chomsky. The key features of these grammars were that they were formulated from the perspective of the sentence producer rather than recipient (though they claimed to be neutral in this regard) and that they took the sentence both as their object of study and as the highest level of linguistic organisation. It was into this generative world that in 1976 a book was published that made very different assumptions about language: this book started from the viewpoint, contrary to what the generative grammarians were saying, that texts had an organisation of their own and it also considered the way they were organised in part from the point of view of the recipient. The book in question was *Cohesion in English* by M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, and over the years it has become recognised to be a classic linguistic text. The underlying message of the book was that the coherence of a text is in part explicable in terms of the semantic relationships identified by the reader or listener as a result of a specific range of linguistic choices made by the writer or speaker. These cohesive ties, as Halliday and Hasan termed them, took a number of forms, some grammatical, some lexical, and their book is largely devoted to providing a comprehensive categorisation of the different kinds of ties.

Just over 35 years later, the linguistic world has undergone a complete transformation. Although generative grammars still survive in some quarters, particularly in the US, they are now jostled by discourse analysts, text linguists, sociolinguists and

corpus linguists (among many others) for space in the journals and bookshelves. That texts have organisation is now generally accepted and the role of cohesion in that organisation is no longer much disputed. The claims made about cohesive ties by Halliday & Hasan have stood the test of time. There have, though, been a number of shifts of emphasis in the study and explanation of cohesion. Firstly, it is now generally recognised, not least by Ruqaiya Hasan herself, that lexical cohesion is as important as grammatical cohesion, and, secondly, that cohesion (whether lexical or grammatical) has a cumulative effect. Cohesive ties form chains that run through extended stretches of text and these chains may interact to help create the coherence of the text in which they appear. Some, like myself, have concerned themselves with the relationships formed between non-adjacent sentences in a text by the cohesion they share, and there has been the beginning of an interest in the ways in which cohesion may be used to find shared meaning in separate texts.

But linguistic research goes in fashions. Although (or perhaps because) cohesion is relatively uncontroversial in 21st century linguistics, it is less the subject of investigation today than it was twenty years ago. This makes Li Yuanke's book all the more welcome in that he looks again at the way cohesive chains and their relationships contribute to the coherence of text, identifying in the process a number of factors that may strengthen or impede a reader's perception of which parts of a text are central to its meaning. Since his way of identifying the aboutness of a text is to elicit reader summaries of the text they have read, his book is also about the way readers identify those parts of the meaning of a text that are most important to them. An original and exciting contribution of his book to the study of cohesion is that he cleverly combines my method noted in Hoey (1991) that analyzes the repetitions in text of single item with Halliday's approach to clause grammar, coming up with a method that analyzes the repetitions in text of the combination of Processes and their Mediums. Since the Process and its Medium together constitute the nucleus of a clause, according to

the Hallidayan approach, Yuanke's method in effect enables us to analyze the repetitions in text of the proposition expressed by the clause. In passing, too, the book contributes to our understanding of how cohesion may connect texts from different sources—in this case newspaper texts by journalists and summaries of those texts by a wide range of readers. It shows us that cohesion is still a field far from exhausted and opens new avenues for investigation in the future. I benefited from reading it and think you will too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Hoey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Michael Hoey  
March 2012

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 A short review of studies on cohesion and of aspects of cohesion that have not been explored sufficiently

The early 1970s saw the emergence of studies on cohesion, that is, studies that explore ‘the way certain words or grammatical features of a sentence can connect that sentence to its predecessors (and successors) in a text’ (Hoey, 1991: 3). Most of the early work on cohesion was concerned with categorizing cohesion and discussing the lexico-grammatical devices that realize different types of cohesion. Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) *Cohesion in English*, which is widely considered as a landmark book on cohesion, discusses the nature of cohesion and the contribution of cohesion in making a text a meaningful product that does not consist of ‘a collection of unrelated sentences’ (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 1), categorizes cohesion and surveys the different types of cohesive devices. Inspired by *Cohesion in English*, studies on cohesion burgeoned in the two decades that followed, but the studies that followed often did not research cohesion for its own sake but associated cohesion with particular characteristics of text. For instance, Hasan (1984), Halliday and Hasan (1985), and Parsons (1991a, 1991b) examine the contribution of patterns of lexis in text to the coherence of text. Hoey (1991) discusses the contributions of patterns of lexis in text to the coherence, organization and meaning of the text. Mann and Thompson (1988a, 1988b) discuss the contributions of the relations that hold between the clauses or larger parts of a text to the organization, coherence and meaning of the text.

There are, however, two aspects of cohesion that have not been explored sufficiently in previous studies on cohesion. Firstly, a number of previous works that discuss the relations between the clauses or larger parts of a text, such as Eggins (1994, 2004), Halliday and Hasan (1976), Halliday (1994), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Hoey (1983, 2001), Martin (1992), Martin and Rose (2003), Martin *et al* (2010), Mann and Thompson (1988a, 1988b), McCarthy (2002), Matthiessen and Thompson (1988), Matthiessen (2002), Quirk *et al* (1972, 1985), Thompson (1996, 2004, 2005, 2010), and Winter (1977, 1994), have claimed that the relations that hold between the propositions contained in a text are important to the meaning of the text. But these works have provided relatively little empirical evidence in support of this view.

Secondly, there have been only a small number of studies on cohesion that have explored the impact of cohesion in a text on readers' interpretations of the text's meaning, though Kintsch and Keenan (1974), and Kintsch and Van Dijk (1978) are exceptions. These two studies analyze texts in terms of the propositions contained in them. A proposition is described by them as consisting of a process and one or more of its arguments. Both studies found that the propositions that share arguments with many other propositions in a text are recalled by readers much more often, and are therefore more important to the meaning of the text, than those that share arguments with few other propositions. A natural way to investigate recall is to ask readers to summarize what they have read, but few studies have examined summaries in this light. There has been research into the memory value of summaries and the methods that are often used by readers to write summaries. Reder and Anderson (1980), for example, asked some university students to read chapters taken from college text books and other university students to read abstracts that summarized the main points of the selected chapters. They found that the students that read the abstracts of the chapters recalled the main points of the chapters much better than those that read the chapters. Kintsch and Van Dijk (1983) noted that *deletion*, *generalization* and *construction*

are often used by readers to summarize texts. The works of computational linguists that are concerned with automatic summarization of text often use summaries written by competent readers to evaluate the outputs produced by the summarizing schemes they developed (see Mani and Maybury, 1999). None of these studies have however examined summaries with a view to exploring the impact of cohesion in a text on readers' interpretations of the text's meaning.

## **1.2 The aim of my present study**

The aspects noted above that have not been explored sufficiently in previous studies on cohesion will be dealt with in my present study. The aim of my study is to investigate the relationships between cohesion in a text and the meaning of the text. Most previous studies that worked on patterns of lexis in a text, such as Hasan (1984), Halliday and Hasan (1985), Parsons (1991a, 1991b) and Hoey (1991), have analyzed texts in terms of the repetitions of single elements. My present study, on the other hand, analyzes texts in terms of the repetitions of the combination of two elements, a Process and its Medium. I analyze texts in such a way because according to the Hallidayan approach, the Process is the centre of a clause, and the Medium is more closely related to the Process than any other type of participant roles (see Halliday (1994: 163 – 164), Halliday and Matthiessen (1999: 174)). A clause consists of a Process and the participant(s) being involved in the Process; and in addition there may be circumstance(s) of time, space, cause, manner, etc. that qualify the Process in some way. Therefore, the Process is the centre of a clause, and both the participants involved in the Process and the circumstances relate to the Process in some ways. Of the participants involved in the Process, there is one type defined by Halliday as 'the participant through which the Process is actualized' (1994: 163). This type of participant is referred to by Halliday (1994: 163) as the Medium. The Medium is obligatory in all process types. The Process and its Medium together form 'the nucleus of a clause' (Halliday,



1994: 164). Analyzing the nuclei that recur in a text is in effect analyzing the propositions that recur in the text. The term proposition derives from logic, and, as already noted, is widely viewed by many authors, such as Brown and Yule (1983), Kintsch and Keenan (1974), and Kintsch and Van Dijk (1978), as consisting of a process and one or more of its arguments. The nucleus of a clause can be seen as a miniature representation of the proposition expressed by the clause.

My present study also analyzes the summaries written by competent readers to give what they think of as the gist of the texts that they read, with a view to identifying which of the recurrent nuclei in a text that they are summarizing seem to be important to the meaning of the text, and exploring their characteristics.

In short, my present study analyzes texts in a new way, and explores the characteristics of those cohesive features in texts that also occur in the summaries, with a view to investigating the impacts of cohesion in those texts on readers' interpretations of the texts' meaning. I hope these will give sufficient reasons for reading the book.

### 1.3 The organization of the book

The next chapter, chapter 2, reports on studies that have investigated the contributions of cohesion in a text to the coherence, organization and meaning of the text. The chapter begins with the works of Hasan, one of the co-authors of *Cohesion in English*, which discuss the contribution of patterns of lexis in stories written by young children to the texts' coherence. I point out the limitations of her method of analyzing the texts, and discuss ways of refining her method. I then report on Parsons (1991a, 1991b) who tested a range of Hasan's claims. I then discuss Hoey (1991), who researched a type of cohesion that had not been sufficiently dealt with in *Cohesion in English*, namely lexical cohesion, and discussed the contribution that patterns of lexis in a text make to the coherence, organization and meaning of the text. The chapter