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**Discourse Analysis**  
**Higher Studies- P.hd**  
**What is Cohesion? 4**

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## What is Cohesion? complement

### 12. Propositional Relations:

Propositional relations such as these,

- a) He fell asleep, in spite of his great discomfort.
- b) Although he was very uncomfortable, he fell asleep.
- c) He was very uncomfortable. Nevertheless, he fell asleep.

whether overtly signalled or not, have been the focus of the work of a considerable number of linguists. Another example, this time from Crombie (1985), where a propositional relation, that of reason–result, in this case, is established, without the use of an overt signal:

I missed the train. I'm going to be late for work.

The focus is on Crombie's approach, because her work was developed with the aim of direct application to language syllabus design. Crombie's preferred term, Binary discourse values, are defined as 'the significance that attaches to utterances by virtue of the specific type of relationship which they bear to one another. Binary discourse values are divided into two groups:

- 1) functional components of conversation and
- 2) general semantic relations, which are concerned with relations between the propositional content of utterances.

Crombie develops a taxonomy of nine general semantic relations, as follows:

- 1. temporal; 2. matching; 3. cause–effect; 4. truth and validity; 5. alternation; 6. bonding; 7. paraphrase; 8. amplification; 9. setting/conduct.

These nine basic categories are further subclassified into between one and four subcategories. Thus category 1, temporal relations, is divided into chronological sequence and temporal overlap; category 4, truth and validity, is broken down into statement–affirmation, statement–denial, denial–correction and concession–contra-expectation; while category 7, paraphrase, on the other hand, is not subdivided.

## **15. APPLICATION TO PEDAGOGY**

### **15.1 The case for cohesion**

There are differences between how cohesion is signalled, or realised, in different languages. Therefore, need to be the focus of teaching and learning. If we take as an example a language which is typologically distant from English, say Chinese, we can see how this operates in terms of function.

**Chinese** is often referred to as a ‘high-context’ language. That is, it relies greatly on context in the interpretation of meaning.

**English**, on the other hand, can be described as a relatively ‘low-context’ language. It tends to signal meaning explicitly through the linguistic system rather than relying so much on the context.

What this means with regard to cohesion is that certain cohesive features which are signalled in the linguistic system in English are left to be determined by the context in Chinese.

### **15.2 Ties, chains and bonds**

A lot of those teaching and learning materials which do deal with cohesion focus on connecting pairs of sentences, using a slot and filler or ‘fill in the blanks’ approach. This can be a useful exercise in raising learners’ awareness of the forms and functions of reference in English .

However, although the cohesive tie linking two clauses is the fundamental unit in cohesion, attention needs also to be focused on the role of chains and bonds. Hatch uses the following text to highlight the subtleties needed to deal with what might seem even quite simple identity chains:

Our speaker today is Dr. Sheryl M. Strick. \_\_\_\_\_ is a professor in the Department of Vegetarian Diet at the College of Agriculture and Environment at UCLA. \_\_\_\_\_ graduated from Florida State University, and after a summer as an assistant seed breeder for the Burpee Company in Texas, \_\_\_\_\_ went on to do

graduate work in plant genetics at UC San Diego. After receiving \_\_\_\_\_'s Ph.D., \_\_\_\_\_ jointed the Pennsylvania State University faculty where \_\_\_\_\_ remained except for trips to the Himalayas and Outer Mongolia to collect potato varieties and do research on potatoes. \_\_\_\_\_ wrote that \_\_\_\_\_ was bitten by the potato bug in \_\_\_\_\_'s grade schooldays and never completely recovered. \_\_\_\_\_ remembers all the excitement \_\_\_\_\_ felt when \_\_\_\_\_ placed \_\_\_\_\_'s first mail order for seed and how \_\_\_\_\_ did everything wrong in sowing the seeds. Later, while still at home, \_\_\_\_\_ spent every available hour working on the farm that \_\_\_\_\_'s mother managed. It was clear even then in \_\_\_\_\_'s life \_\_\_\_\_ would deal with plants. It is a pleasure to introduce to you \_\_\_\_\_ who will speak to us on 'The Potato.' \_\_\_\_\_.  
Sherry.

Is it the case that each of the blanks in this text should be replaced by a simple she or her? At some points, it would seem appropriate to reintroduce either the full or partial name. Such reintroductions might be because the name has not been mentioned for a while and the listener needs to be reminded of it; or because other characters have been mentioned since the name was last used and there may hence be possible confusion? Is there a need to put the emphasis on the person being introduced rather than her accomplishments? Hatch raises all of these possibilities and they all might feed into a consciousness-raising discussion of the structure and functions of reference chains in discourse. Similar intricacies are likely to be at stake with similarity chains.

To exemplify this issue with regard to second-language usage, the following text was written by a Hong Kong secondary school student.

1. Playing computer games has become such a popular hobby that many teenagers spend a lot of time and effort in the virtual world. Some people think that playing computer games is a harmful hobby which wastes time and money, while others believe that it can be a serious activity that requires practice and may turn into a career. So I strongly believe that playing computer games is a harmful hobby.

2. It is easy to get addicted to computer games. As we know that, computer games are attractive and it takes quite a long period of time to win the games. After you have won the first round, you may want to continue playing because you are attracted by the game. As the result, it is easy to get addicted.

3. **It** (1) may lead to eye strain and other health problems. We all know that playing computer games for too many hours will make our eyes feel tired or dry and **it** (2) would lead to eye strain. **It** (3) also will cause mental problems as it may affect their feeling or attitudes. **It** (4) may make them feel angry or sad or carry away and may occur accidents. **It** (5) is quite dangerous for the people who cannot control him or her emotion because you don't know when she or he loss the game, what will happen next.

If we look at the third paragraph of this text, we see that there is an identity chain involving five uses of it (bolded and numbered). With the first example of it at the beginning of the first sentence in paragraph 3, the referent of it is already unclear, although, with careful analysis of the text, this referent may be traced back to the previous sentence 'it is easy to get addicted' (which itself is a repetition of the first sentence of the paragraph). Getting addicted (worded as to get addicted) is, therefore, the beginning of this chain. The student might have done better by writing 'Such addiction' rather than just it, to establish clearly this first link in the chain. As the identity chain develops, however, by repetitions of it and with no use or repetition of the full nominal (addiction), the meaning becomes increasingly difficult to unravel. There is a place, here, therefore, for pedagogic intervention, in terms of cohesion.

### **15.3 Lexis**

Students need be made aware of lexical fields and lexical sets to build up the various semantic relations involved in lexical cohesion. The way in which we can observe speakers moving from superordinates to hyponyms and from synonyms to antonyms and back again is a common feature of conversation and learners can be equipped to use this skill by regular practice.

## **15.4 Propositional relations**

Crombie (1985) proposes using propositional relations as an organising principle for syllabus design. She argues that propositional relations are a universal phenomenon, common to all languages. She argues that propositional relations can provide a framework for introducing the signalling items of the target language and also how the relations may be expressed by other means (referred to as ‘unsignalled value assignments’):

For the language teacher and syllabus designer, the introduction into teaching programmes of the value signalling systems of the target language provides a framework for the introduction of the learner to language as a communicative dynamic. The ultimate aim is that the learner should reach a degree of competence at which he can not only recognize and use value signals, but also recognize where and when they need not be introduced and where and when they must not be.

### **CONCLUSION**

Thornbury summarises some of the general teaching implications arising from a consideration of cohesion:

1. Expose learners to texts rather than to isolated sentences only.
2. Draw attention to, and categorise, the features that bind text together.
3. Encourage learners to reproduce these features, where appropriate, in their own texts.
4. Provide feedback not only on sentence-level features of learners’ texts, but on the overall cohesiveness as well.