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**English Department**



**Discourse Analysis**  
**Higher Studies- P.hd**  
**What is Cohesion? 1**

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**2023-2024**

## 1- Introduction

### What is Cohesion?

Cohesion the formal or (semantic) links between clauses, how an item – a pronoun, a noun or a conjunction – in one clause may refer backwards or forwards to another clause.

What is Coherence?

It is the overall interpretation of a text as a unified piece of discourse, not just the formal links. Based on many linguists (for example, Brown and Yule), it is possible to have coherence without cohesion.

Widdowson gives the often-quoted example of an exchange between two people:

A: That's the telephone.

B: I'm in the bath.

A: OK.

This piece of discourse has no formal links between the three clauses that make it up, but at the same time it can be understood as a coherent piece of discourse; one person is calling someone to answer the telephone and the other is saying that s/he is not able to answer it because s/he is having a bath. We can say that cohesion contributes to coherence, although it is not a sufficient condition.

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 2) give the following example:

Wash and core **six cooking apples**. Put **them** into a fireproof dish.

In this example, *them* in the second sentence refers back to the *six cooking apples* of the first sentence. The cohesive relation is created both by the referring item, *them*, and the item it refers back to, the *six cooking apples*. It is the resolution of what is presupposed by *them* (*six cooking apples*) which creates the cohesive relation between the two sentences.

The relation between the two elements is referred to as a *tie*.

Halliday and Hasan describe cohesion as a *semantic* phenomenon.

Cohesion can occur both within the clause and across clauses and sentences, although most linguists focus their attention on the *interclausal* or *intersentential*, as opposed to the *intraclausal*, variety.

*Interclausal: Cohesion within the clause*

*Intersentential: Cohesion within the sentences*

A sentence is understood here in the way that Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) define it, in the sense of one or more clauses. Thus, in the following example (a), which is a single clause and at the same time a sentence, the tie is intrasentential, *her* referring back to *Mary* in this same clause/sentence.

*Intraclausal: cohesion across the clause*

*Intrasentential: cohesion across the sentence*

a)- **Mary** put the money in **her** purse.

In the next example (b), which is a sentence consisting of two clauses, *it* and *her* refer back to *the money* and *Mary* respectively. The links are interclausal, but not intersentential.

b)- **Mary** took **the money** and put it in **her** purse.

In a third example (c), where we have two simple sentences, each consisting of one clause, we have two intersentential links, between *she* and *her*, on the one hand, and *Mary* and *the money*, on the other.

c)- **Mary** took **the money**. Then **she** put it in **her** purse.

Halliday and Hasan classify cohesive devices into five categories: Reference, Substitution, Ellipsis, Conjunction, and Lexical cohesion.

## **2. Reference**

### **2.1. Definition forms and functions**

A reference item is a word or phrase, the identity of which can be determined by referring to other parts of the text or the context.

They include:

Pronouns, possessives, demonstratives, and definite article the.

Types of reference:

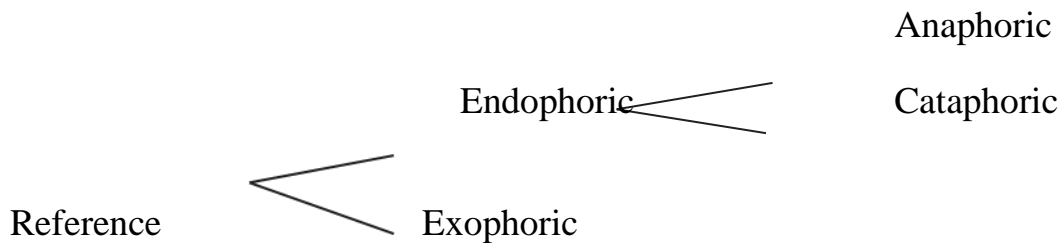


Figure 1: The English reference system.

- Endophoric: reference within the text.
- Exophoric: reference outside the text.

Within endophoric reference, there are two categories: anaphoric (referring back) and cataphoric (referring forward).

Here are a few more examples:

- Prapoth** struggled frantically to tear himself from my grip. **His** mouth was agape with fear and **his** eyes were rolling.
- And **the allegations concerning a member of the royal family**. What about **those**?

Cataphoric type, is much less frequent than either the anaphoric or exophoric types. An example of cataphoric reference would be the following:

*Remember **this**. Never trust a stranger.*

In this example, we can see how a reference item can refer to a whole sentence, not just a single noun or noun phrase. *This*, in this example, refers forward to the whole following sentence, *Never trust a stranger*.

In written text, cataphoric reference often occurs after a colon, semicolon or dash following the reference item, as in this next example:

*The following are the winners: Susan, Christopher and Ali.*

## **2.2- Definite reference**

We listed the definite article, *the*, as an item that can be used as a referring item. This is a less transparent type of reference, which is known as “referential the”.

Here is an example:

There was a man in the park. The man was having an ice cream. The ice cream was scrumptious.

Referential *the* has no content of its own. It obtains its meaning by attaching itself to another item and in doing so makes that item specific and identifiable. Thus, if I say ‘*the tree*’ or ‘*the enemy*’, or ‘*the man*’, I am presupposing that there is some tree or some enemy or some man in the context in which I am using these expressions.

Probably the most frequent use of definite reference is exophoric. Halliday and Hasan identify two ways in which exophoric definite reference refers. First, it may refer to something which is specific to the given situation. If I say, *The water’s too cold* when standing with my interlocutor by a swimming pool, I am clearly referring to the water in the pool. Second, exophoric definite reference may refer to something which is specific to a community, for example, *the president, the baby, the piano*. This type of reference is also sometimes called *unique reference* or *homophora*. Martin (1992) provides a set of examples of this type of definite exophoric reference related to the community, or context of culture, as shown in Table 1.

Exophoric definite reference may also refer to a whole class of items: *the newspapers, the possibilities, the differences*; or an individual considered as a representative of a whole class (referred to also as *generic reference*): *the lion, the alligator*, as in: *The alligator is notorious for its bone-crushing bites*.

Halliday and Hasan refer to two uses of the definite article which are endophoric, as opposed to the exophoric. The first is cataphoric, where the reference item refers forward to the modifier in a noun phrase, for example, *The title of the book, The capital of France*,

*The boy sitting in the corner.* In examples such as these, the definite article signals forward that the modifier is to be taken as the defining feature of the item in question. It answers the question *Which book? Which capital? Which boy?* These uses are not cohesive, given that they only refer within the nominal group.

The second type of endophoric reference is anaphoric. This is the only type of those discussed which is truly cohesive. With this category, *the* may attach itself to a repeated noun, a synonym or a semantically related noun. The following are examples.

- a) Last year I bought a new house. *The* house is very well built.
- b) Last year I bought a new house. *The* place is very well built.
- c) I went into the house. *The* rooms were very dark.

**Table 1** Examples of exophoric reference as specific to the community (context of culture): (Martin, 1992: 122)

<i>Community (context of culture)</i>	<i>Homophoric nominal group</i>
English speakers	The sun, the moon
Nations	The president, the governor
States	The premier, the Department of Education
Businesses	The managing director, the shareholders
Offices	The secretary, the photocopier
Families	The car, the baby, the cat