INVESTIGATING COHESIVE TIES IN SELECTED UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE CLASSROOM COMPOSITION TESTS

By

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Abstract
Cohesion is a salient feature of any well formed piece of writing. It is a very significant aspect of the grammar of English to the extent that there appear to be very few literatures available on this aspect of text linguistics. This paper is a contribution to text linguistic analysis. It focuses on the word elements in structures of English language as composed by a few Nigerian learners of English. Features of repetition, ellipsis and lexical cohesion have been carefully examined in the selected expository and narrative compositions of some undergraduates in a Nigerian university. To serve as a roadmap for the analyses of textual agreement within structures, the functionalist approach to the study of language popularised by Michael Halliday (1976) has been adopted. The cohesive devices noticed in the essay types include reference, substitution, intra-part and inter-part cohesive terms, among others. We have observed nine imperative cohesive devices in the written essays of the randomly selected twenty students of the University of Ado-ekiti, Nigeria. We have also observed that many of the literate and illiterate writers of the essays obey the cohesive and referential rules without paying any attention to them. This suggests that apart from the notional, grammatical and proximity concordrules which are mandatory in good spoken and written English, textual concord is also sine qua non to good writing. We can conclude that the ESL learners that served as subjects in this study may be adjudged to be coherent in their use of the English language if the grammatical irregularities in the data from them were totally disregarded. Cohesion is, therefore, a characteristic pre-requisite of any texts even obeyed by inexperienced users of English language.

Key Words: Cohesion, references, inter-part, intra-part, anaphor, cataphor, ellipsis,composition

Introduction
Testing written compositions is a unique adventure not uncommon in evaluative spheres of the English language teaching and learning in Nigeria. The popularity has, however, not received any ovation because of the previous controversies that have bedeviled those studies. The testing of written compositions has been reported to have been plagued with the fear of unreliability (see Obanya & Opala 1984a) as well as (Onocha& Opala, 1995). Finlayson, (1991), and Grieve, (1965), among others, have shown that it is not easy for people to assess the same piece of writing the same way. However, the fear of subjectivity is not applicable in this study since cohesion is a directly accessible aspect of language that could be uniformly tested by different examiners.

Our study of cohesion in discourse is on the platform of grammar. That is why we shall briefly discuss English language grammar as follows: In Standard English grammar, there are four categories of functional structural analysis according to M.A.K Halliday. These categories are described in terms of unit, structure, class and system. Two of these categories, i.e. unit and structure are categories of chain which are said by Halliday (1961: 246) to refer to the syntagmatic axis or axis of combination. The category of unit relates the linear constituents of discourse to one another as they combine while the category of structure is concerned with the syntagmatic relationships within units. The other two categories are class and system; which are categories of choice of the paradigmatic axis or the axis of selection. In the words of Fish (1981: 60), all the four categories "make it possible for the linguist to segment his text either horizontally or vertically". In other words, they make possible an exhaustive taxonomy.

In a different vein, the scales and categories highlighted above have been described in terms of complexes - Word complexes, Group and Phrase complexes and Clause complexes by Halliday (1994:309). Therefore, a complete grasp ofthe rules governing the exact use of the English language is essential, especially among native and non-native users of English. This is because daily texts are formed and discourses are initiated in different contexts. But in order to construct, discourses or texts appropriately, it is necessary to stress in an article of this kind that users of English require the ability to establish additional relations within the text that are not subject to limitations, i.e. relations that may involve elements of any extent, both smaller and larger than clauses, from single words to lengthy passages of text; and that may hold across gaps of any extent, both within the clause and beyond it, without regard to the nature of whatever intervenes.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is simply to investigate how much compliance to clause cluster rules there are in the different writing types of learners of English as Second language in Nigeria. To achieve this, a cross section of over two hundred Nigerian students (undergraduates) who were participating in a teacher training programme were selected on the basis of the three regional affiliations of the country (North, East and West) to ensure fair representation of the three regional groups in Nigeria. These people were given a task to compose an essay of about two hundred words each. To ease the herculean task of using two hundred essays for this study the essays were grouped into twenty, out of which one essay each was randomly selected. Overall, twenty essays were selected and analysed.

The topics on which the students wrote were either "Substance Disorder" or "A Gory Sight on Taiwo Road". While the former is an expository type of essay, the latter is a narrative. One hundred well written essays were randomly selected with both types of essay forming the corpora. However, only twenty essays which reflect the varying cohesion features cutting across the students' essays were selected. The students belong to the following departments: Counsellor Education, Primary Education Studies (PES), Adult Education, Biology and Economics.

Significantly, the overall choices made in this paper would further contribute to the available literatures in Nigerian English studies. Unlike in the seventies (70s) when there were not many Nigerian teachers of the English language, there seems to be some progress in the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian fee paying schools today. We intend to find out the extent to which Chomskyan structural principles, i.e. structural dependency (see Cook 1988, p 2.) and the submissions of the sociolinguists (see Labov 1970: 180) have been internalized by Nigerians using Hallidayan functionalism as a working tool (see Halliday 1994). Since the three

approaches pose some difficulty because they are somewhat conflicting, we are relying mainly on Halliday's elements of cohesion in discourses. The matter in this article is not merely that of grammatical structure but on certain non-structural resources for discourse (COHESION).

Cohesion in English

From existing literature on cohesion (Halliday 1994:309) there are four ways by which cohesion is created in English: by reference, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical organisation.

Reference: a participant or circumstantial element introduced at one place in the text can be taken as a reference point for something that follows. In the simplest case this means that the same thing comes again like the boy who looks after the sheep being referred to as… he...him... .in a sentence. But it may also mean that it serves as a basis for comparison like Henry can't play today we'll have to find someone else we'll have to find someone else means 'someone other than Henry'. There is either a cataphoric or an anaphoric reference inter-structurally.

Ellipsis: A clause or clause complex, or some longer stretch of text, may be related to what follows it by one or other of a specific set of semantic relations. These relations are basically of the same kind as those which obtain between clauses in an expanded clause complex. The most general categories of conjunctions are those of apposition and clarification, addition and variation and spatio-temporal, manner, causal-conditional and matter.

Lexical Cohesion: Continuity may be established in a text by the choice of words. This may take the form of word repetition; or the choice of a word that is related in some way to a previous one - either semantically, such that the two are in the broadest sense synonymous, or collocationally, such that the two have a more than ordinary tendency to co-occur. Lexical cohesion may be maintained over long passages by the presence of keywords, words having special significance for the meaning of the particular text.

Halliday (1994:310) explains that the features of cohesion are resources which collectively meet the text-forming requirements in writing. Cohesion creates a link between items of any size, whether below or above the clause and also a link between items at any distance, whether structurally related or not. Ayodabo (2002: 329-331) uses the terms - intra - part cohesion and inter-part cohesion to refer to the two likely links creatable by cohesion.

In Ayodabo's (ibid) examples, the words 'company', 'candidates', 'employment' and 'position' cohere with the word VACANCIES because 'they all collocate within the same semantic field'. He states that cohesion is achieved in the foregoing example through the relationships of 'whole-part/components. In his second example, the words - 'male candidates...' position' cohere with the word "secretary', 'shorthand typist'; copy typist and graduate trainees and 'successful candidates'. He states that 'syntactic parallelism and repetition are used to achievecohesion. All the words and phrases preceding the repeated words 'candidates' collocate and rightly function as adjectives in the noun phrases in the respective parts. Although the essays to be analysed in this paper do not exceed a page of the students' scripts, we have examined the degree of use of cohesive elements subconsciously in the selected essays.

Sampled Essay Analysis

Twenty essays have been selected for analysis in this study. They are labeled Texts 1 to 20. The individual essays have been screened for conformity to the use of cohesion in the use of English in the order of introduction, body and conclusion. The introductory part of the first essay defines the concepts of 'substance disorder' while the second chronologically narrates 'the gory sight on

Taiwo Road'. From these organised pieces, the elements of cohesion found in the compositions are stated thus:

Reference:
Several referential indicators exist in English language. References, according to Ayodabo (2002:318), identify a particular thing or class of things that are referred to and the cohesion lies in the repetition of the same thing in a discourse over and over again. The reference items that reflect in the writings of our subjects have the semantic property of defmiteness. They include Exophoric (situational) and Endophoric (textual) references. Intertextually, the anaphoric and cataphoric references have been used by virtually all the subjects. Other notable reference types in the texts include personal referencing, demonstrative referencing and comparative referencing.

Anaphora:
In anaphoric reference, reference is made to the preceding text. In our texts, we have examples such as;

Text 1: "...*SUBSTANCE DISORDER* also means drug abuse *IT...*"
"...MIS USE some substance... for doing *THAT..."*
Text 4: *SUBSTANCE DISORDERS are THOSE SUBSTANCES...*
Text 5: I intend to visit *MY* friend.
Text 7: *DRUG ABUSE* means a *CHEMICAL SUBSTANCE* Text
8a: "...*DRUG ABUSE* has gone beyond tolerable level in our society. *IT* isacankerworm..."
8b. DRUG is any *SUBSTANCE* that could be used..."
Text 9a: *THE LADY* was in a haste to join a cab.. .but was too in haste that SHEran into the stationary lorry..."
9b: Sympathizers rushed to save *HER* life
Text 10: "An INDIVIDUAL WHO is physically and psychologically dependenton drugs..."

The obviously recurring anaphoric reference type in the texts exemplified above is the personal reference. Halliday & Hasan (1976) describe it as reference by means of function in the speech situation through the category of person. Also in text 4, we find a demonstrative reference described as reference by means of location on a scale of proximity, as used by the subject in the expression, *"substance disorders* are *those substances".* Although demonstratively used, it is an anaphor in this context but a pronominal, according to Chomsky (see Cook & Newson 2007: 167).

Another major element of cohesion is the effective use of conjunctions and other linking devices/markers within the clauses.

Text 1: 'TO *START WITH, I* will define what substance disorder means..."
Text 3: "the driver could not stop the car AND so hit the okada rider..."
Text 4a: SUBSTANCE DISORDER,. .THIS can also be called drug abuse"
4b: SUBSTANCE DISORDER can also cause DEATH
Text 11a: HOWEVER, drug abuse are those people or youths who take drugs in ..."
11b.: IMMEDIATELY, he overtook to make a fast u-turn..."
11c.: ON THE OTHER HAND, people plying Iwo road..."

11d. “curiosity to have a good time BECAUSE friends are doing it...”

From the foregoing structures varying conjunction types have been employedby the students to achieve cohesion. ‘Also’, is a linking device used to indicate additional information or meaning (contextually).‘And’, is also used for the same purpose. TO START WITH, is indicative of an opening, while ‘however and on the other hand’ are used to show ‘alternative’ points, ‘because’ has been used in text lid to join the clauses together by giving the reason for the curiosity. The adverbial element ‘immediately is indicative of time of action. It is a conjunctive adjunct. Conjunctive Adjuncts are of three types, namely: adverb, compound adverbs and prepositional expressions. Halliday (1976) identifies four categories of conjunction as ‘additive’, ‘adversative, causal and temporal. Conjunctions are creators of cohesion within the syntactic units of patterns of well-marked dependencies; the phrase, clause and sentence. These go to show that cohesion within a phrase, clause or sentence is more direct and obvious than cohesion among two ormore such units. Ayodabo (2002:324) quotes Beaugrande & Dressier (1992)to report that: procedurally, the basic phrases and clauses of English can be viewed as configurations of links. Between pairs of elements, many of them have further linkage (p.50.).

Cohesion is said to be upheld by fitting elements into short-range grammatical dependencies in closely knit units such as phrases, clauses and sentences. Conjunctions and linking devices or transitional markers reduce monotony and enhance cohesion in writing. Unlike much experienced young group of writers in secondary schools who hypothetically may not observe some of the elements of cohesion in writing poetry and other compositions, the researcher will briefly revisit the students’ script to see elliptical phrases and clauses as they have observed it.

Ellipsis: subcutaneous use

Ellipsis is substitution by zero’. In stylistic palances, three dots are used to express unfilled slots or events. An elliptical item leaves specific structure slots to be filled from elsewhere. This is exactly the same as presupposition by substitution, except that in substitution, an explicit ‘counter* is used, e.g. ‘one’ or ‘do’ as a place marker for what is presupposed, whereas in ellipsis nothing is inserted into the slot. That is why ellipsis can be regarded as substitution by zero (cf. Ayodabo 2002:321). Further elliptical instances in the data of the present paper are highlighted below:

Text 4a: “This can be__by behaving in an abnormal way”

Certain event is being referred to in the statement above. SO is a precedent term for an antecedent demonstrative in the structure of the writer of that sentence. The issue of reference in this context may be cloudy to a non-interlocutor or someone who has no access to the context of discourse in question. Substitution by zero as illustrated here has a cause-effect relationship intratextually. Above all, the sentence in text 4a above appears ambiguous; who or what informs the abnormal behaviour?

b. ‘can also cause death of a person or lead to TOTAL DISORDER Only the effect juncture of the event in ‘b’ above is made known to a non-interlocutor or someone who has no access to the full text. Certain event being referred to in the structure could lead to total disorder, but the ‘thing’ is not overtly expressed in the sentence by the writer. The noun phrase ‘total disorder* is

a term that has its antecedent referent in the sentence as written by one of the subjects. Text 9: "sympathizers, instead of safing (sic) her...she gave up the ghost' (not expressed).

A major deficiency in the text above is the wrong spelling of the word 'safe', put in a progressive tense by the writer rather than simply 'safe' or a progressiveverb form, 'saving.' The subject pronominal 'she' or the objective case'her' are co-referents of the subject of the verb in the sentence in question. In the text above between 'her' and the 'she' certain events have been elided.

Text 10; 'the vehicle collided with the man that was how he STUMBLED ... (not expressed)
The student who wrote the sentence above did not repeat the subject 'the man' but went ahead to complete the second clause 'he stumbled'. Although the word 'stumbled' is not the actual register in the context because the sense in stumbling is to lose one's balance, whereas what actually happened to the man was more pathetic, the writer used the word instead of a more appropriate 'died on the spot' after reeling in the pool of his blood on the tarred road. Ellipsis thus could be implicitly presupposed.

Text 11: 'as a result of THIS, lives and property could be safe..." (unexpressed)
The word THIS is a demonstrative, a referent of certain event which the writer has omitted. The few instances of gaps in structures cited above are evidences of referencing in the writing of amateur undergraduate users of English in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, many of the students are either unaware of the elliptical gaps they leave in their sentences or subconsciously write ambiguous or redundant expressions. "SO' is elliptically anaphoric in text 4a. The word is pregnant with a meaning that is presupposed by the writer. "TOTAL DISORDER' in text 9 is supposed to be a qualifier preceding a prepositional complement of a prepositional head and a completive, as in 'total disorder of alertness', etc. In text 10, the sympathizers instead of 'safe' (sic) her from her predicament, or from danger or from death, etc. left her to give up the ghost. The writer omitted a prepositional phrase (from her predicament, etc) and completed the sentence. In text 10, the writer did not tell us what the vehicle stumbled on...In other words, he stumbled on what? Also in text 11, 'lives and property could be safe from what?'The writer inarticulately expressed himself. A great deal of structural weaving makes for what is portrayed in writing as cohesion. This feature in literacy skill demonstration is experientially significant especially lexically. Well-formed structures are imbued with necessarily unmarked but carefully chosen lexical items. This goes to explain that lexical relation or cohesion harmonizes structural dependencies, which result in the composition of a good writing.

Lexical Cohesion:
In the words of Halliday (1994: 310), 'continuity may be established in a text by the choice of words". This may be demonstrated by word repetition, semantically, such that two elements reoccur referentially. Typically, a reiterated lexical item is accompanied by a reference item, usually an article, 'the', 'a' or 'an'. Data sources of repetition', 'substitution' and 'collocation' are contrived for analysis below.

Text 1: *I will like to define what SUBSTANCE DISORDER means. The wordSUBSTANCE DISORDER also means drug abuse. IT...*
Case 1: Repetition of the word *SUBSTANCE DISORDER*
Case 2: The word *IT* is a substitution for the word *SUBSTANCE DISORDER*

Text 2: *There are various ways in which we can MISUSE DRUGS*
Case 3: *An OKADA RIDER MAN for the hold...*
Case : word collocate
MARCHED the BREAK
Case: word collocate
Text 4a: SUSTANCE DISORDER are THOSE SUBSTANCE...
Case: Referential repetition
4b. *SUBSTANCE DISORDER can make a person...behaving in anABNORMAL way...*
Case: substitution of act: disorder and abnormality
Text 7: *DRUG ABUSERS are THOSE PEOPLE or youths who take drugsirresponsibly*
Case: Repetition of subject in complement, i.e. subject-complementconcord for cohesion.
Text 7b: *"... drugs as a result of INFLUENCE of PEER GROUPS to remove...'*
Case: word collocates: "peer group influence".

Cases of repetition, substitution and collocation appear scarce in the writings of our subjects. This is largely due to the kind of writings being used in this study as data. It is a free style paragraph essay unlike poetic style of writing which requires various stylistic imports. Cohesion is achieved inter-textually and intra-textually.

Inter-part Cohesion
Supposedly, a network of interrelationships exists among lexical items in a text. Instances of inter-part cohesion in students' writings are illustrated below:
Text 1:
a. Substance disorder
b. Misuse
c. Substance
d. Drug abuse

The sequence of usage of the words above indicates inter-part cohesion. The words are not syntactically inter-twined but are inter-structurally connected. The connection is observed in the relevance which each word presents in enhancing the flavour which cohesion brings into writing.
In text 2:
a. Psychoactive drugs
b. Those drugs
c. Influence
d. Workings of the mind
e. Affect moods

The words above inter-textually/ partly cohere. Psychoactive drugs cohere with their repeated form as [4t]those drugs". The word influence informs the predicative "workings of the mind", while the drugs at the end affect the moods of individuals.
In text 3:
a. Addiction
b. Prolonged usage
c. Drug abuse

d. Self medication
e. Untrained
f. Medical care
g. Without effective regulation

The words above are contrived in such a way that the ordering of the structures makes any reader toe the writer's paradigm of reasoning. The word 'addiction' informs a prolonged usage of a drug which may be said to be an abuse. When medical care is however received from an unskilled medical practitioner or without a professional advice, it is tantamount to self medication. Inter-part cohesion is sine qua non to the overall cohesive ties that should exist in a good writing and use.

Intra-Part Cohesion

Lexical Cohesion is witnessed more in intra-part order. It is more of collocational representation of items. It is also utilised in the anaphor and cataphor referential patterns. For instance in Text 7:

DRUGS, ITSELF means a CHEMICAL SUBSTANCE that can be USED to TREAT or PREVENT DISEASE which affects HUMAN BODY In text 8:

"drug abuse is raising its ugly head..."

"drug is ANY SUBSTANCE that could be USED as MEDICINE in the TREATMENT and PREVENTION of ailment"

The following words intra-textually cohere: drugs, substance, used, medicine, prevention and treatment of ailment. Unlike in writings that are meant for public readership, such as advertisements where gothic and bold letterings are used to achieve cohesion by calling the attention of the public, the data in this study have given no room for such excesses. The students however, were not aware of the intention of the tester.

Frequency of Cohesive Devices

There are nine notable devices whose use has been investigated in this study. They include 'anaphor', 'cataphor', 'ellipsis', 'conjunction', 'repetition' and 'substitution'. Others include collocation as well as intra-part and inter-part cohesion. The anaphor and cataphor belong to the referential category while ellipsis represents omission. The words used functionally as conjunctions serve as linkers and transitional markers. Repetition, substitution and collocation are devices used in achieving lexical cohesion. On the whole, intra-part and inter-part are the two cohesive ties observed in the essays of our subjects.

References were made inter-structurally, anaphorically and cataphorically **unsuccessfully.** Cataphoric references had zero representation in the corpus. Ellipsis was observed in some instances where subconsciously or ignorantly the students wrote incomplete sentences, taking so much for granted. Thus presupposition was a common phenomenon in this study. Repetition of subject or agent role slot of clause structure is observed with the use of pronominal. In cases of substitution, pronominals were also employed. To achieve cohesion from word collocates a few of the students chose their words appropriately. Therefore, intra-part and inter-part cohesion form the word collocates and choices used by the learners to achieve cohesion. Overall, the frequency of cohesive devices is presented below.

1. Anaphor-61%

2. Cataphor-0%
3. Ellipsis-3%
4. Conjunction - 45%
5. Repetition-5%
6. Substitution - 48%
7. Collocation 52%
8. Intra-part Cohesion 53%
9. Inter-part Cohesion - 54%

Anaphor in intra and inter part forms was more frequent in the data than other cohesive devices.

Implications of Cohesion in English as a Second Language

This study has pedagogical implications for the study of English at the secondary and tertiary institutions of learning.

a. Attention of English language teachers will now be drawn to the need to teach students cohesion in writing.
b. Users of English both in writing and speech will consciously mind their use of language to ensure coherence.
c. In as much as adherence to Standard English syntax is rule governed (Chomsky 1957) and strict, cohesion may now draw more attention to the study of English structures.
d. Even though learners of English observe cohesion in their structures (unconsciously) knowledge of the internal organisation of language is important,
e. This study will bring to the fore the need for cohesion in texts especially where the interpretation of some elements in their discourse is dependent on that of another for meaning decoding and such recourse vice-versa.

Conclusion

The attention of this paper has been focused on cohesion in the written English compositions of some selected university undergraduates in the University of Ado-Ekiti. The paper employed the functional approach of M.A.K. Halliday to Grammar in investigating structural concord or cohesion in the essays written by the sampled undergraduates,, The data were scrupulously examined to assess the level of conformity to concord rules as well as to the proper use of cohesive ties inter-structurally in English language. On the whole, it was observed that a very appreciable number of students whose written essays were examined conformed to the standard.

We found that both the inter-part and the intra-part cohesive ties were observed by the students. A few lapses in the actual use of registers were also observed. Although very few, some of the scripts had grammatical irregularities which were not basically the focus of this paper. Overall, Second Language Learners of English can be adjudged to be coherent in writing. Coherence, therefore, appears to be a subconscious rule which is seldom flouted by second language users of English particularly in writing. Cohesion as a matter of fact, subsists in the innate competence of English as Second language performances.

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