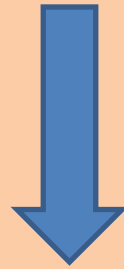# COHESION IN ENGLISH

Before defining what cohesion is, it is useful to reflect on the notion of TEXT:

in linguistics, the word "text" refers to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that forms a unified whole.

In other words, any speaker of English who reads or hears a passage which is more than one sentence in length, is able to understand whether it forms a unified whole or whether it is just a collection of unrelated sentences.

This suggests that there must be objective factors involved, namely certain features which are characteristic of texts and not found otherwise.

So, studying cohesion means to identify what it is that distinguishes a text from a disconnected sequence of sentences. **In other words, what provides cohesion to texts.**

As texts are best regarded as semantic units, the concept of **TEXTURE** is appropriate to express the property of "being a text".

All texts have texture, and this is what distinguishes them from what is not a text.

So, if a passage in English containing more than one sentence is perceived as a text, it means that it has some linguistic features which contribute to its semantic unit and which give it texture.

What we are going to explore are all the resources that the English language has for creating texture.

EXAMPLE:

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

It is clear that *them* in the second sentence refers back to *six cooking apples* in the first sentence.

So, the texture is provided by the cohesive relation between *them* and *six cooking apples*.
In this way, we interpret the two sentences as a whole; the two sentences together constitute a text.

Another example of cohesive tie could have been as follows:

- Wash and core six cooking apples. Put the apples into a fireproof dish.

Here, the item functioning cohesively is *the apples*, which works by repetition of the word *apples*.

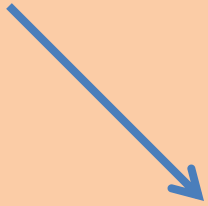The concept of cohesion is a semantic one. So, as other semantic relations, cohesion is expressed through the stratal organization of language. Language can be explained as a multiple coding system comprising three levels, or "strata":
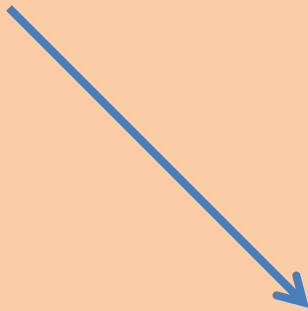
1) The level of semantics (meanings);

2) The level of lexicogrammar (forms);

3) The level of phonology and graphology (expressions)

- Meaning

- Wording

- Sounding / Writing

- (the semantic system)

- (the lexicogrammatical system, grammar and vocabulary)

- (the phonological and orthographic system)

At the level of wording (the choice of words and grammatical structures), there is no clear-cut distinction between vocabulary and grammar. The guiding principle in language is that the more general meanings are expressed through the grammar, while the more specific meanings through the vocabulary.

Cohesive relations fit into the same pattern. So, cohesion is expressed partly through the grammar and partly through the vocabulary. Therefore, we can refer to **grammatical cohesion** and to **lexical cohesion**.

- Reference:

- Substitution and ellipsis:

- Conjunction:

- Lexical cohesion:

- (grammatical cohesion)

- (grammatical cohesion)

- (borderline between the two, being partly grammatical but with a lexical component in it)

- (fully lexical cohesion)

It is important to stress, however, that when we talk of cohesion as being grammatical or lexical, we do not imply that it is a purely formal relation, in which meaning is not involved.

On the contrary, cohesion is a semantic relation and it is realized through the lexicogrammar system. It is for this reason that some forms of cohesion are realized through the grammar and others through the vocabulary.

REFERENCE

There are certain items in every language which have the property of **reference**, in the specific sense that they make reference to something else for their interpretation.

In English these items are:

1) the definite article (*the*);

2) demonstrative pronouns (*that, these, those*);

3) pronouns (*he, she, they, mine, hers, theirs*)

For example:

- Three blind mice, three blind mice. See how **they** run! See how **they** run!

- Doctor Foster went to Gloucester in a shower of rain. **He** stepped in a puddle right up to his middle and never went **there** again.

- There were two wrens upon a tree. **Another** came, and there were three.

All these items show that information is to be retrieved from elsewhere (in the same text).

What characterizes this particular kind of cohesion – that is called reference – is in the continuity of what is being referred to, whereby the same thing enters the discourse a second time.

In other words, in the example "See how they run!", the pronominal reference *they* means not merely "three blind mice", but more precisely "the same three blind mice that we have just been talking about".

The identity of a presuming reference item may be retrievable from a number of different contexts:

Reference:

- **Homophoric**
(general knowledge)

- **Exophoric**
(situational)

- **Endophoric**
(textual)

Anaphoric
(when it refers to preceding text)

Cataphoric
(when it refers to following text)

1) Homophoric reference:

the identity of a presuming item can be retrieved from the general context of culture.

- How hot <u>the sun </u>is today!
(we all know which sun we are talking about, the specific sun of our solar system)

2) Exophoric reference:

the identity of a presuming item can be retrieved from the immediate context of situation.

- Put <u>it</u> down next to <u>her</u>, please.
(if you are in the same place and in the same time, you are able to decode the *it* and the *her*)

3) Endophoric reference:

the identity of a presuming item can be retrieved from elsewhere within the text itself. The identity of the participant has been given at an earlier point in the text:

- <u>She</u> was called Mary by her parents. (the identity of the female participant identified as *she* has been revealed somewhere before in the text)

It is endophoric reference which creates cohesion, since endophoric ties provide the internal texture of the text.

Homophoric and exophoric reference contribute to the text's situational coherence.

The two main examples of endophoric reference are:

1) Anaphoric reference:

this occurs when the referent has appeared at an earlier point in the text:

- When she abandoned herself, a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said <u>it</u> over and over under her breath: "Free, free, free!"

We are able to retrieve the identity of the pronoun *it* by referring back to the referent in the previous sentence: *a little whispered word*.

Typically, anaphoric reference is referred to a participant mentioned nearby (one or two sentences previously), but sometimes it may refer back to an item mentioned many pages, minutes or even hours ago (in spoken conversation).

2) Cataphoric reference:

this occurs when the referent has not yet appeared, but will be provided subsequently:

- <u>The news</u> came as a terrible shock to <u>them all</u>, but most of all to Mrs. Mallard. It seemed her husband Brently had been killed in a railroad disaster. His friend, Richards, carried the sad tidings to Mrs. Mallard and her sister Josephine.

Here we begin with the presuming references to *the news* and *them all*, but it is only in the second sentence that we learn what that news was, and only in the third that we can establish the exact referent for *them all* (Mrs. Mallard, Richards, Josephine).