An In-depth Discourse Analysis of One Radio Interview From the Perspective of Cohesion

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As a major criterion for textuality and a prominent term in discourse analysis, discourse cohesion is used on the one hand, to identify the linguistic features that cause the sentences to “cohere”, and on the other hand, is to make the sentences in the discourse display some kind of mutual dependence. The paper has intensively analyzed the radio interview between Edward Heath and an interviewer from the perspective of discourse cohesion. After an in-depth analysis, the paper concludes that the interview is quite structurally cohesive by adopting several grammatical cohesive devices or ties, such as the verbal form, the time relator, the conjunction, the reference, the substitution, and the ellipsis, especially the reference and conjunction.

Keywords: cohesion, discourse cohesion, cohesion devices

Introduction

As a major criterion for textuality and a prominent term in discourse analysis, discourse cohesion is used on the one hand, to identify the linguistic features that cause the sentences to “cohere”, and on the other hand, is to make the sentences in the discourse display some kind of mutual dependence (HUANG, 1987; HU, 1994). In order to gain insight into discourse cohesion, one typical radio interview (see Appendix) is thoroughly analyzed in the paper. The radio interview is between Edward Heath and an interviewer concerning the topic of British currency unification and British’s relations with the European Community after entering the European Community. In the interview, Edward Heath pointed out that the majority of British people want to see a united Europe, which suggests that he supports the currency unification within the European Community. Edward Heath who took charge of British during 1970-1974 was quite a prominent Prime Minister in the British history. Edward Heath’s government, 1970-1974, was a turbulent one, and at that time there appeared some difficult problems in economic development. One of his most remarkable contributions is his decision to take British into the European Community and his advocating of currency unification within the European Community for Britain.

Theoretical Framework

Cohesion and coherence, two important terms in discourse analysis, are the major criteria for textuality. Cohesion is about how the words in sentences are formally connected with each other, while coherence focuses

on meaning-based connections of the words (CAO, SONG, & YANG, 2003). Cohesion is about the lexical or grammatical relationships between different sentences or between different parts of a sentence in a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The main function of discourse cohesion is, on the one hand, to identify the linguistic features that cause the sentence to “cohere”, and on the other hand is to make the sentences in the discourse display some kind of mutual dependence

Halliday and Hasan (1976) used the term “tie” to refer to a single instance of cohesion or one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items. Therefore, the connections between sentences and between clauses can be called “cohesive ties” or “cohesive devices”. That is to say, cohesive devices which mean the formal links between sentences and between clauses are used to connect pieces of text together in specific ways. It is the connectivity that functions as a role of discourse cohesion. Besides, the methods of connectivity are various, such as grammatical devices, lexical devices, logical connector, as well as pragmatic and semantic implication (ZHANG, 2006). HUANG Guo-wen (1987) thought that grammatical device, one of the most effective and prominent cohesive devices, consists of the following devices, such as the verbal form, the time relator, the reference, the substitution, the ellipsis, and the conjunction.

Analysis and Discussion

The author has cited an appendix at the end of the paper and also marked the material with numbers according to the number of sentence lines so as for the readers to quickly locate specific sentences. The paper, which focuses on the grammatical ties or devices, thoroughly analyzes the radio interview from the perspective of discourse cohesion.

Verb Form

The form of verb in one sentence can limit the choice of the verb form in the next, and it is justified that a verb form in one sentence is “wrong”, or at least “unlikely”, because it does not fit with the form in another (Cook, 1989). Here is an example cited in the interview to illustrate how verb form in one sentence affects that in another.

Example (1) Lines 12-15: see Appendix.

In Example (1), all the verbs are in present tense, which is a result of a kind of formal connection between them, a way in which the first tense conditions all the others. The word “is”, a typical symbol of present tense in the first sentence, has determined the correct and proper verb forms in the next sentences, such as the choice of “is”, “are”, “judges”, and “don’t want”. Besides, the material in the radio interview between an interviewer and Edward Heath who was the England Prime Minister during 1970 to 1974 is a conversation in terms of discourse genres. Consequently, the present tense should dominate on the whole except for the contents whose primary discourse function is to describe the past events.

Time Relator

Time relator is a cohesive device in which words concerning time is used to make discourse more cohesive. When it comes to the classification, the discourse device of time relator can be categorized into earlier time expressing one event happens before another; same time focus on showing simultaneity in terms of event sequence and later time which reverses the earlier time.

The interview also has something to do with the devices of time relator and adopts the same time ties and later time ties in it.

Example (2) Line 12: see Appendix.

Example (2) is a typical case of “same time”, in which two different events occur simultaneously. That is to say, “the year of 1992 is on the way” and “the talk of European unity” takes place at the same time, which indicates that there is no priority for their sequences.

Example (3) Lines 20-22: see Appendix.

An instance of “later time” is cited in Example (3), during which the basic sentence structure of “...after..., they will...” shows that the event of “these obstacles has been removed” presupposes that of “they will...”

Conjunction

According to McCarthy (1991), conjunction presupposes a textual sequence, and demonstrates a relationship between parts of the discourse. In other words, conjunction is the relation of one thing with another, and if the relation exists between sentences, it binds sentences and is therefore cohesive.

In terms of conjunction ties or devices, the interview is organized in three concrete categories. Here is the intensive analysis of it.

Additive. The following sentence provides some complementary information about a topic (such as, and, moreover, what is more, in addition, furthermore, additionally, similarly, in other words, as well, besides, etc.).

Example (4) Lines 18-19: see Appendix.

Example (5) Lines 19-20: see Appendix.

Example (6) Line 31: see Appendix.

Example (7) Lines 3-5: see Appendix.

Example (8) Lines 9-11: see Appendix.

From the above sentences, it can be concluded that the discourse has featured in the following two aspects: Firstly, Examples (4)-(7) imply that it is positive additives such as “and, also, moreover, etc.” rather than negative additives such as “nor, neither, etc” that produce a cohesive conversation discourse; secondly, Example (8) says that the additive relation can be in an alternative form, often by using “or”.

Adversative. The second sentence is in a contrastive relationship with the first, which expresses the opposite semantic relationship (such as but, however, yet, nevertheless, in contrast, while, whereas, etc.) (CAO et al., 2003).

Example (9) Lines 3-4: see Appendix.

Example (10) Lines 13-15: see Appendix.

The word “yet” in Example (9) serves as an adversative, which suggests that what follows it is contrary to the expectation. In place of “yet”, the words may often be used just as Example (10), “however”, “despite”, etc.. However, the contrastive adversative that is used in “internal” situations include “in fact”, “actually”, etc. and the corrective adversative whose main function is to make corrections of what has been said have not been adopted and presented in the radio interview.

Causal. Causal marks a cause-and-effect or reason-and-consequence relationship, and they establish the so-called “so” links.

Example (11) Lines 2-3: see Appendix.

Example (12) Line 16: see Appendix.

Example (13) Lines 21-22: see Appendix.

A reversed causal is obviously presented in the radio interview, and the Examples (11)-(13) are all of this kind. The use of “because” in Examples (11)-(12) is rare in written English but common in communication. Here they are interpreted as “the reason of... is...” just as the case in Example (13). Yet, the other two members in the family of causal—the conditional causal and respective casual have not been involved.

Ellipsis

Ellipsis can be called “deletion” or “omission” in transformational items. A part of the latter sentence that repeats a word, phrase, or idea explicitly mentioned in the former sentence can be omitted, making the latter sentence is logically connected with the former sentence (CAO et al., 2003).

Example (14) Lines 18-19: see Appendix.

Example (15) Lines 4-5: see Appendix.

Example (16) Line 31: see Appendix.

Example (17) Line 32: see Appendix.

It is commonly stated that there are three kinds of ellipsis, namely, the verbal ellipsis, the nominal ellipsis, and the clausal ellipsis.

As for the radio interview, there is no sign for the first one as no noun in the conversation has been mentioned for a second time;

Examples (14)-(15) are some of the kind of verbal ellipsis. To be specific, in the first sentence, the operator “talk about” is omitted, so is Example (15).

The latter two sentences are the typical examples of clausal ellipsis, and they are a kind of “WH Ellipsis” whose main function is to avoid the repetition of the same clause in the real communication. Taking Example (16) for example, although the behavior “go on forging ahead as the top class” is deleted, the listener will understand what the speaker means due to the discourse cohesion under the aid of ellipsis device.

The main function of ellipsis is to make the discourse sentence clear, cohesive, and comprehensible. Besides, it is found that the conversation would be more tedious, verbose, and tiring if the ellipsis were not used after making a comparison of the following two sentences.

They don’t want to have customs and permits and all the rest of it.

They don’t want to have customs and (they don’t want to have) permits and (they don’t want to have) all the rest of it.

Substitution

Substitution refers to the replacement of the content that has appeared in the discourse by different pro-forms. As for the different pro-forms, Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorized substitution into three basic types, namely, verbal substitution, nominal substitution, and clausal substitution.

Example (18) Lines 31-32: see Appendix.

Example (19) Lines 7-8: see Appendix.

Example (20) Lines 25-30: see Appendix.

Generally speaking, substitution refers to not a specific item but a group of items in contrast to reference. Due to the topic and discourse genre of the material, the use of nominal substitution is not used in the interview.

Verbal substitution often uses a proper form of “do” to take the place of verbs or verbal expressions. Examples (18)-(19) belong to the verbal substitution since the word “will” and “had done” in the sentences refer to specific verbal expressions of “go on forging ahead the top class” and “cooperate with EU” respectively.

Clausal substitution is the third type of substitution tie which means replacing a clause by certain words such as “so, not, it, etc.”. Example (20) is a part of interview in which the underlined word “it” stands for the whole sentence “what does it mean if we get left behind, if we miss the proverbial European bus? In practice, what does that mean for us?”

Although substitution ties do not dominate the whole discourse, yet the use of clausal substitution and verbal substitution is of great importance to make the discourse a cohesive, coherent, and concise one.

Reference

Reference, one of the most commonly used cohesive devices or ties, means characteristics that cannot be semantically explained without referring to some other characteristics in the text (Crystal, 1997).

Three types of relationship are recognized: exophoric relations, looking outwards for their interpretation; cataphoric relations, looking forwards; and anaphoric relations, looking backwards (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). What is more, they have divided reference devices into three different sub-types: personal reference, demonstrative reference, and comparative reference. The author elaborates on the three sub-types combining with the above three types of relations based on the radio interview.

Personal reference.

Example (21) Lines 16-19: see Appendix.

Example (22) Lines 19-22: see Appendix.

The above two instances are both of anaphoric relation, and Example (21) will be used to illustrate the discourse features. For Example (21), the subject of the first sentence is the underlined part: “the great majority of the people of the British people” which has been substituted by the personal pronoun “they”. Their relation is an anaphoric one in which “the great majority of the people of the British people” is the antecedent and “they” is the anaphoric expression.

Example (23) Lines 14-17: see Appendix.

Example (24) Lines 21-23: see Appendix.

Example (23)-(24) are both the typical examples of exophoric relation. For Example (24), “I”, “we”, and “my” all have exophoric use, referring to “any British citizen” rather than a specific person.

On the whole, the four cases all belong to the personal reference, which is realized by personal pronouns, possessive determiner, and possessive pronouns. The use of personal reference plays a key role in making the discourse more clear, cohesive, and coherent. The radio interview has adopted the personal reference so as to make the conversation an understandable one.

Demonstrative reference. Demonstratives (this, that, these, those, etc.) are cohesive ties as well and can be anaphoric, cataphoric, or exophoric. It is actually a form of verbal pointing. The speaker or writer identifies the referent by pointing to it, using demonstratives (HUANG, 1987).

Example (25) Line 5: see Appendix.

Example (26) Lines 17-21: see Appendix.

Examples (25)-(26) indicate that demonstratives can also regularly refer to something within the context situation, which is the primary form of verbal pointing. And the selective nominal demonstratives above—"this" and "these" define the specific "fashion" and "obstacles", making the conversation more cohesive and explicit.

Example (27) Lines 27-30: see Appendix.

The definite article "the" is also used exphorically, where the situation makes referent fully specified.

Example (28) Lines 21-22: see Appendix.

Example (29) Lines 2-3: see Appendix.

Example (30) Lines 12-13: see Appendix.

The above sentences featured the circumstantial demonstratives which are also called demonstrative adverbs or adverbial demonstratives, "here" in Example (28) and "now" in Examples (29) and (30) refer to the location of a process in space or time.

Demonstrative reference is typically used in the radio interview by employing the three categories: selective nominal demonstratives, the definite article, and the demonstrative adverbs, making the conversation fluent.

Comparative reference. Comparative constructions include the following items: similar, identical, same, such, alike, equal, different, comparable, less, analogous, more, ordinal numbers (first, second, etc.), as + adj., and comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs. Most comparatives are used for anaphoric reference.

The first type of comparative reference "general comparison" which expresses likeness between things does not embody in the whole conversation due to the discourse genre and topic of the material sample.

The particular comparison demonstrates the comparability between things concerning a particular feature of quality and quantity.

Example (31) Lines 6-8: see Appendix.

Here "the thing we'd done" is compared with "other things that we'd done before", and the aspect in which comparison is made is the quality of the things the authors had done now and before.

Conclusion

According to the in-depth analysis above, the radio interview between Edward Heath and an interviewer is cohesive virtually by using grammatical cohesive devices or ties, such as the verbal form, the time relator, the conjunction, the ellipsis, the substitution, and the reference devices. Due to the discourse genre and oral topic of the material, the reference, the conjunction, and the substitution devices are more used than the other four devices. In fact, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976), there are also some other cohesive ties besides those mentioned in the paper, such as the place relator, the lexical ties, the parallelism, theme and rheme, and the tense. The paper analyzes the material only from the perspective of grammatical devices, which leaves much room for other scholars to analyze the material from other perspectives of logical connector or pragmatic and semantic implication, etc..

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Appendix: A Radio Interview

Int: 1 Let's just talk for a moment about our relations with the European Community
2 because it's very nearly fifteen years now since you as Prime Minister took us
3 into the European Community as a member, and yet there we are still dragging
4 our feet and in danger of being left behind again; people are talking about
5 missing the bus and so on. Why have we gone on in this fashion?

EH: 6 Well, you say there we are still- 1972 when I took Britain into the Community
7 we weren't still dragging our feet. It was the last thing we'd done. We'd
8 cooperated very closely with the Community in our own interests. A
9 community is something in which nobody gets everything they want. You try to
10 reach a consensus in which most people are getting something or all-
11 everybody's getting something.

Int: 12 Now, with 1992 approaching, talk of European unity is in the air once again.
13 But is it possible that the Prime Minister is correct and that you are incorrect in
14 that she judges the mood of the British people that they don't want to go down
15 that road towards European unity?

EH: 16 No, I think that she's completely wrong on that because the great majority of
17 the people of the British people do want to see a United Europe. They want to
18 see all these obstacles removed. They don't want to have customs and permits
19 and all the rest of it. That's what ordinary people want and when they're moving
20 from one country to another, we shall see when these obstacles have been
21 removed, they'll say 'Damn, the only reason I've got to stop here is I've got to
22 change my money. Why should I change my money? Why can't we have one
23 currency? No reason at all, except that apparently the British Government
24 opposes it.

Int: 25 What does it mean if we get left behind, if we miss the proverbial European
26 bus? In practice, what does that mean for us?

EH: 27 Well, it means that, as one Foreign Minister in the Community described it to
28 me three weeks ago, 'Oh, if you want to become a second-class country in a
29 second-class tier of the community, that's up to you. We shall go on forging
30 ahead as the top class.'

Int: 31 And you think they will?

EH: 32 Oh, no doubt about that at all. Absolutely no doubt.