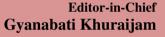# Modern Research Studies

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A Study of Cohesion Devices in John Keats' "Ode to Autumn"

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Abstract: Cohesion is the glue that holds a piece of writing together. Generally, logic is regarded as a provider of unity. Sentences must occur in some logical arrangement. However, cohesive devices are such linguistic devices which impart a text clear unity and bind the sentences together. Reference, ellipsis, substitution and conjunction are major cohesive markers. Cohesive ties contribute to the stability, economy and efficiency of a text. It is a measure of the strength of functional relatedness of the various elements of a text. The present paper is a study of different cohesion markers in Keats' 'Ode to Autumn.'

Keywords: cohesion, ties, unity, text, linguistics, Ode to Autumn.

Introduction

Cohesion is the glue that holds a piece of writing together. "Cohesion may be defined as the formal linguistic realization of semantic and pragmatic relations between clauses and sentences in a text" (Cook 1994, 29). In other words, if a text is cohesive, it sticks together from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. If

sentences are placed in a haphazard sequence, the text which they make up will seem strange. Lloyd Davis and Susan McKay (1999) emphasize the importance of cohesion in the following words:

> A paragraph that is coherently organized will help the reader understand the relationship between the central idea and supporting points. (56)

Generally, logic is regarded as a provider of unity. Sentences must occur in some logical arrangement. But logic is not the only thing. "There are also various linguistic devices which may be used to connect sentences with one another so as to provide a continuous and coherent piece of writing" (Scott 1968, 204). Cohesive devices are such linguistic devices that bind a text together. "Wherever cohesive linguistic devices are used, there is less danger of a piece of writing being a mere collection of unrelated sentences, because cohesion connects sentences to each other" (Toolan 1998, 24).

The idea of cohesion was first developed in detail by Roman Jakobson with reference to poetry. Jakobson, in his essay "Linguistics and Poetics" describes the phenomenon of cohesion in the following words:

> The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. (Jakobson 1960)

In poetry, structures tend to be combined in a linear or sequence. However, the concept of cohesion was exclusively developed and explained by M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan in their book *Cohesion in English* (1976). After the publication of this book, the notion of cohesion was widely accepted as a tool for the analysis of text beyond the sentence level. Halliday and Hasan view cohesive relationships within and between the sentences as primary determinants of a text. Cohesion occurs "when the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another" (Halliday and Hasan 1976, 4).

There are two main types of cohesion: *Grammatical*, referring to the structural content and *Lexical*, referring to the language content of the text. A cohesive text is created in many different ways. In fact, "Cohesion is a blanket term for a range of linguistic signals and strategies which enable us to know that sentences belong together and in a particular sequence" (Ballard 2001, 170). In *Cohesion in English* (1976), Halliday and Hasan identify five general categories of cohesive devices that create coherence in texts:

➢ Reference
➢ Ellipsis
➢ Substitution
➢ Lexical Cohesion
➢ Conjunction

Two further important cohesive devices are

➢ Parallelism
➢ Repetition

Analysis of these cohesive links within a text gives us some insight into how writers structure what they want to say, and may be crucial factors in our judgments on whether something is well written or not.

Objective

My aim in this paper is to show how cohesive ties can unite a text and make it easy to understand. First, I will define and explain major cohesive devices and then illustrate their use in the text "Ode to Autumn" by John Keats.

Methodology: Cohesive Devices

Reference cohesion, synonymous with co-reference or cross-reference, is the prominent type of cohesion. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976, 31), these references are not semantically interpreted but direct readers to read whole text for grasping their meaning. Reference cohesion is divisible into two types: *exophoric* and *endophoric*. In exophoric reference, meaning is not in the text but lies in the outside context of the situation. Readers have to study the whole set of circumstances leading to the composition of the text in order to

understand the meaning of the text. On the contrary, when meaning becomes clear by reading the text itself, this reference is endophoric. Endophoric references can be further studied under two headings: anaphoric and cataphoric. When a reader has to look back at the text for understanding the meaning, it is called anaphoric reference. If, on the other hand, a reader has to read sentences that follow to get hold of the meaning, it is called cataphoric reference. Brown and Yule (1983) helps readers to understand these reference types with the help of the following examples:

Types of co-reference relation

a. Exophora: Look at that. (that=Ω)
b. Endophora:
    (i)   Anaphora: Look at the sun. It is going down quickly.
    (ii)   Cataphora: It's going down quickly, the sun.

<div align="right">(Brown and Yule 1983, 193)</div>

Repetition is the second major device for achieving cohesion in a text. We can tie sentences and paragraphs together by repeating certain key words. The repeated items may recur within a given sentence or in more than a sentence. The repeated item may be a single lexical word, a clause or a particular structure. For example,

> We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender…[1]

In this example, we shall is repeated ten times. "Repetition of key words helps to emphasize the main idea of a piece of writing" (Ballard 2001, 172). However, repetition may result in tedious sentences. So,

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[1] This extract is from a famous speech delivered by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom on 4 June 1940, commonly called *We Shall Fight on the Beaches*.

synonyms are the best option to use. Synonyms will repeat the same thing but with different forms.

Next device for creating cohesion in texts is *Substitution*. "Substitution is a device for abbreviating and for avoiding repetition" (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973, 294). Substitutions are interpreted from the content of the sentence. For example,

> Michelle was lying on crouch. It was a hard one.

Sometimes we do not need even to provide a substitute for a word or phrase which was already been said. We can simply omit it. Omission on the assumption that an earlier sentence or the context will make the meaning clear is known as *Ellipsis*. Halliday and Hasan termed it as "something left unsaid." "Ellipsis can be thought of as a 'zero' tie because the tie is not actually said" (Hatch 1992, 225).

> E.g. They are small cookies, take two.

Ellipsis also operates across sentence boundaries. It is a method of avoiding repetition. By omitting "retrievable information" (Ballard 2001, 157) attention can be focused on new material, as in the following conversation:

> A: Have you spoken to him?
> B: (I have) Not yet (spoken to him).

Another formal link between sentences and clauses is called *Parallelism*. It is a device which suggests a connection, simply because the form of one sentence or clause repeats the form of another. This is often used in prayers, speeches and poetry. It is a useful "aide-memorie" (Cook 1989, 15). There are three main types of parallelism:

a. Syntactic parallelism occurs when the form of one sentence, clause or phrase repeats the form of another.
b. Morphological parallelism is when morphemes repeat.
c. Phonological parallelism is manifest in rhyme and rhythm.

Yet another type of formal relation between sentences and perhaps the most apparent is provided by those words and phrases which explicitly

draw attention to the type of relationship which exists between one sentence and another. These are *Conjunctions*. Conjunctions perform multiple functions. They are used to add more data, to compare data or to arrange data in order. They are also useful for providing reasons and for explaining purposes of events. Conjunctions are also called discourse markers. These can be addition markers, e.g. *and, or, furthermore*, contrast markers, e.g. *but, however,* relating to time, e.g. *then, finally, until,* etc. *Conjunctions* bind the parts/sentences of a text together. A minor cohesive device is *verb form.* The form of the verb in one sentence can limit the choice of the verb in the next.

Analysis

Now I will analyze "Ode to Autumn" by using cohesive ties. Variously described as "sensitive", "pictorial", "imaginative" and "sensitive", Keats' poetry is widely acknowledged to be the true voice of feeling. "'To Autumn' is a rich and vivid description of nature, expertly achieved within a fairly intricate stanzaic pattern" (Unger 1956, 183). Keats personifies autumn in human form, investing it with qualities of warmth and friendship. Ode is divided into three stanzas of eleven lines each. First stanza describes autumn's conspiracy with the sun to load and bless the earth with a rich harvest. Second stanza depicts different aspects of season in the figures of a reaper, gleaner and cider maker. Third stanza points out the musicality of autumn season.

Beginning with minor cohesive device, such as Verb form, we can find that there is a degree of formal connection in the ode as all the sentences are written in present tense. Here, the opening lines of the poem are given as an example:

> Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness
> Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun
> Conspiring with him how to load and bless (1.1-3)

'Ode' is rich in Referring Expressions. Keats has made use of anaphoric references and only one cataphoric reference. In the first stanza, pronoun *him* is used to refer back to maturing sun. In order to interpret *him* correctly one needs to read the second line. Hence, two lines are interconnected. In line number four *that* is used to refer back to vines.

They and *there* are used to refer back to bees. In second stanza, autumn is referred as *thee, they* and *thou*. These pronouns link second stanza with first stanza. In third stanza, 'songs of spring' are referred as *they* in the same line and with *them* in next. Here also autumn is referred as *thou*. This *thou* again refers back to first two lines of stanza first. The word 'music' in line twenty-four of third stanza is a cataphoric reference. It refers forward. Next lines describe the music of autumn. Hence line twenty-four is linked with rest of the stanza and stanza itself is linked to first two stanzas as it describes another aspect of autumn. Therefore referring pronouns link three stanzas with each other. Referring expressions fulfill dual purpose of unifying the text and help economy because they save us from repeating one thing again and again.

Repetition is not always undesirable but too much repetition may result in "bad style" (Cook 1989, 19) but elegant repetition provides variety to the text. In elegant repetition synonyms or more general words or phrases are used. Various elegant epithets are used for describing autumn as "season of mists", "mellow fruitfulness", "close bosom friend", "gleaner", "cider presser", "winnower" etc. The use of such devices results in an elegant style and precision in the 'ode'. These are also examples of substitution as all these words refer to autumn.

The device most beautifully employed in the 'ode' to provide coherence is ellipsis. In the first stanza, poet describes autumn as "season of mists" and "close bosom friend of sun". Once the identity of autumn is established, Keats talks of the conspiracy autumn is hatching with sun but he does not say again and again that autumn is doing this and that but he describes things autumn plans to do. Similarly in the third stanza also Keats explains the music of autumn but he does not specify that it is the music of autumn but we can understand it.

> Then in a wailful choir the small Gnats mourn
> Among the river shallows, borne aloft
> Or sinking as the light wind live or dies
> And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn. (3.27-30)

Three types of parallelism have been recognized however "one might even extend the idea and talk of semantic parallelism where two

sentences are linked because they mean the same thing" (Cook 1989, 16). In the second stanza, lines 14-16 and 19-21 are examples of semantic parallelism:

> Thee sitting careless on a granary floor
> Thy hair soft lifted by winnowing wind
> Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep
> …………………………………………
> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook
> Or by a cider-presser, with patient look. (2.14-16, 19-21)

All these lines are closely linked with each other because these lines are defining the character of one thing i.e. autumn.

Conjunctions are explicit markers of cohesion in a text. Analysis of 'ode' reveals that only two types of conjunction are used: additive and temporal. Additive conjunctions *and, or* are used. And is used for eleven times and or is used for three times. *And* serves two functions, it is used to add more things:

> And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core
> And still more, later flowers for the bees (1.6-7)

And is also used to connect two phrases. It acts as a coordinator for instance "season of mists" is linked with "mellow fruitfulness" with *and.* Similarly we have "load *and* bless", "to swell the gourd *and* plump the hazel shells." Hence lines of the ode are interconnected. Temporal conjunctions that are used in the ode are *then* in line number 26 and *until* in line number 10.

Conclusion

This analysis of 'ode' by using cohesive devices reveals that cohesion ties contribute to the stability, economy and efficiency of the text. 'Ode to Autumn' emerges as a cohesive unit. The dominant cohesive devices used in the poem are *anaphoric referring expressions, ellipsis, substitution* and *conjunctions.* Halliday and Hasan are not wrong when they say that cohesive ties provide texture to text, "A text has texture and this is what distinguishes it from something which is not

text" (Halliday and Hasan 1976, 2) and "Cohesive ties between sentences stand out more clearly because they are the only source of texture"(Halliday and Hasan 1976, 9).

Though Hatch terms the study of cohesive ties as "local level analysis" (Hatch 1992, 229) as they are explicitly expressed in the surface structure of the text but cohesion is the measure of the strength of functional relatedness of the elements and by relating one part of a text to another part of the same text, it lends continuity to the text.

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