

UNRAVELING THE TYPES OF COHESION, COHERENCE, AND THE PROBLEM OF THEIR CORRELATION

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In the realm of text linguistics and discourse analysis, two concepts stand as pillars supporting the very idea of meaningful communication: cohesion and coherence. While often used interchangeably in casual conversation, they represent distinct, albeit deeply intertwined, aspects of how a text functions. Cohesion concerns the visible "stitching" of a text—the grammatical and lexical links between sentences. Coherence, on the other hand, deals with the invisible "fabric" of meaning—the logical sense a reader makes of the text as a whole. Understanding the various types of cohesion, the nature of coherence, and, most importantly, the problematic relationship between them is crucial for anyone seeking to analyze or produce effective writing.

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Cohesion is the surface-level glue that holds a text together. It is tangible, identifiable through specific grammatical devices. The foundational work of Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorizes cohesion into several key types:

1. Grammatical Cohesion:

Reference: This occurs when one item in a text points to another for its interpretation. It can be **anaphoric** (pointing backward, e.g., "The CEO entered the room. *She looked confident"), **cataphoric** (pointing forward, e.g., "*Listen to this: the project is cancelled*"), or **exophoric** (pointing outside the text to the context, e.g., "*Look at that!*").

Substitution and Ellipsis: These are ways to avoid repetition. Substitution replaces a word or phrase with another (e.g., "*I need a new phone. This old one is broken*"). Ellipsis omits it entirely (e.g., "*Who wants coffee?*" "(I) Do.>").

Conjunction: This involves using linking words to signal the logical relationship between clauses or sentences. These include additives (e.g., and, furthermore), adversatives (e.g., but, however), causals (e.g., so, therefore), and temporals (e.g., then, finally).

2. Lexical Cohesion: This is achieved through vocabulary choice. It includes repetition of key words, the use of synonyms or antonyms, and collocation (the tendency of certain words to frequently appear together, e.g., "salt and pepper," "hypothesis and test"). A text rich in these cohesive devices appears well-connected. The sentences flow smoothly from one to the next, creating a sense of syntactic unity.

Coherence: The Semantics of Meaning

While cohesion operates on the sentence level, coherence operates on the level of the entire discourse. It is a cognitive phenomenon, constructed in the mind of the reader based on their background knowledge, expectations, and ability to infer logical connections. Coherence is not a property of the text itself but an outcome of the interaction between the text and the reader.

A coherent text makes sense. It has a clear topic, a logical progression of ideas (often following conventional patterns like problem-solution, cause-effect, or general-to-specific), and

a consistent perspective. For instance, consider the following sequence of sentences: *"The sky grew dark. The man opened his umbrella."*

There is no explicit cohesive tie between these two sentences—no conjunction like "so" or "because." Yet, most readers instantly create coherence by inferring a cause-effect relationship: the sky grew dark, indicating rain was coming, so the man opened his umbrella. This inference relies on our shared world knowledge. Coherence, therefore, is the "mental model" or the "situation" that the text evokes.

The primary problem in the cohesion-coherence dynamic is that the presence of one does not guarantee the other. This leads to a complex and often non-linear correlation that can be broken down into two main issues.

1. The Problem of Cohesion Without Coherence: It is entirely possible to create a text that is highly cohesive but utterly incoherent. This demonstrates that simply connecting sentences grammatically is insufficient for creating meaning. For example: "The financial report was comprehensive. However, it was printed on blue paper. Furthermore, blue is the color of the sky. The sky is clear today. Finally, clear weather is good for picnics." This text is rife with cohesive devices: "however," "furthermore," "finally." It uses reference ("it") and lexical ties ("blue," "sky," "clear"). Yet, it is nonsensical. The ideas do not build a logical argument or a consistent topic; they jump arbitrarily. The cohesive markers are used mechanically, without supporting a deeper, coherent message. This illustrates that cohesion is a necessary but not sufficient condition for coherence. A writer can mistakenly believe that by peppering a text with "therefore" and "in addition," they have created a logical flow, when in reality, the underlying ideas remain disconnected.

2. The problem of coherence without cohesion: Conversely, a text can be coherent with minimal overt cohesion. This often occurs in contexts where shared knowledge is high, such as in informal conversation or certain literary styles. The classic example is the dialogue:

A: "Coffee?"

B: "Sure. Could use it."

A: "Black?"

B: "Milk, please."

This exchange is perfectly coherent. We understand it as an offer, acceptance, and specification of preferences. However, it lacks almost all standard cohesive ties. There are no conjunctions, and ellipsis is used extensively. The coherence is achieved through pragmatic understanding and the collaborative nature of the interaction. Similarly, in Hemingway's minimalist prose, the connections are often implicit, requiring the reader to actively build coherence from the starkly presented events. This demonstrates that coherence is the ultimate goal, and skilled writers or speakers can achieve it by relying on the reader's inferential abilities, sometimes bypassing explicit cohesion altogether.

In conclusion, the correlation between cohesion and coherence is therefore asymmetric and problematic. Cohesion is a tool—a set of devices available to the writer to guide the reader toward a coherent interpretation. It facilitates comprehension by making the logical pathways explicit, especially when the subject matter is complex or the audience lacks specific background knowledge. Ultimately, effective communication lies not in maximizing cohesion, but in strategically deploying it to support the text's underlying coherence. The writer must constantly navigate the gap between what is explicitly stated and what must be inferred, understanding that the seamless dance between the visible stitches of cohesion and the invisible fabric of coherence

is what truly brings a text to life. The problem of their correlation reminds us that writing is not merely a grammatical exercise but a complex act of meaning-making, always negotiated between the text, the writer, and the reader.

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