

A Comparative Study of Cohesive Devices in English and Chinese Based on Halliday's Theory of Cohesive Devices

Shengwei Lai

School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Institute of Technology Zhuhai, Zhuhai, China

Abstract

Cohesion theory is the core of text linguistics which has been studied by many linguists at home and abroad. Cohesion serves as one of the basic conditions in forming a text so the use of cohesive devices can assure the cohesion and completeness of a text. Halliday and Hasan divided cohesive devices as lexical cohesive devices and grammatical cohesive devices in Cohesion in English. This thesis studies the use of the five basic cohesive devices which are lexical cohesive device, reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction in the speeches of the two presidents of China and America. The author extracts specific examples from the texts to illustrate the application of the five cohesive devices and analyzes the reason of the differences in the using of the five cohesive devices in Chinese and English language. In English and Chinese languages, cohesive devices are used as important ways for textual cohesion. English uses more cohesive devices within which reference usage takes the largest quantity. While the use of cohesive devices is a bit different in the paratactic language Chinese. Lexical cohesive devices are used most often due to the lack of change in gender, tense, case and so on.

Keywords

English and Chinese speeches; Cohesion and coherence; Cohesive devices; Comparative study; Reason analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

Halliday and Hassan's book Cohesion in English aroused huge reaction in linguistic circle. There are numerous essays that study cohesive devices and other elements related to cohesion that contribute to coherence within texts. However, cohesive devices have been studied widely among the linguistic circle but mainly are conducted in English texts only. Comparative study between Chinese and English cohesive devices is not so common in the linguistic circle and the existing studies are mainly conducted in the field of morphology and phonology while there are just a few researches have been done on cohesive devices. Cohesion theory is the core of text linguistics. It has been widely applied by scholars. Among the articles that analyze cohesive devices, most of them are conducted limitedly to one specific cohesive device like lexical cohesive device. So it's very necessary to have a comprehensive and systematic comparison and analysis of cohesive devices. Because the analysis of cohesive devices is based on the form of texts specifically speeches, so through comparative study, we can dig out the inherent differences between English and Chinese texts.

1.2. Research Purpose and Significance

Cohesion is a concept of semantics, and it is one of the most important elements in forming a whole text. The effective use of various cohesive devices guarantees for the wholeness of a text. Textual cohesion is important for the text as well as the readers to understand the meaning of

the text. The analysis of cohesive ties between sentences and sentences is based on the text. We can dig out the intrinsic differences between the Chinese and English texts by comparative study. This paper aims to achieve the following goals through the comparative study of cohesion within Chinese and English texts by comparing the speeches of the leaders of the two countries. By doing the exhaustive, comprehensive and systematic analysis, the author tries to find out the similarities and differences of the cohesive devices within two contexts delivered by the leaders of the two countries China and America. It can better apply cohesion theory to actual textual uses and also the theory can be better studied because the research is based on the real data. Therefore, the cohesion theory can be more practical and pragmatic in actual uses.

1.3. Method of the Study

The research method in this thesis is based on the Halliday and Hason's cohesion theory. The thesis is processed abide to the theoretical framework of their cohesion theory which contains five divisions.

In addition, a comparative study will be adopted with the research method of the exhaustive statistics. Firstly, all the cohesive devices in the speeches will be collected, then a comparison of quantity, frequency and distribution of these cohesive devices will be analyzed. Lastly, the study will try to find out the cause of the similarities and differences in the quantity, frequency and distribution of all kinds of cohesive devices in Chinese and English texts.

2. THEORY OF COHESIVE DEVICES

Text linguistics is a new branch of linguistics that began to develop in 1950's. In 1970's, with the publication of Halliday and Hasan's book *Cohesion in English*, the study of text linguistics reached a new stage. And that was at that time pragmatics came onto the platform of linguistics as an important new branch.

Cohesion, a linguistic term being popular for Halliday and Hassan, refers to a variety of linguistic devices such as grammar, vocabulary and sounds. By the use of these devices, the sentences are glued together to form a large linguistic unit, such as paragraphs, chapters, and so on. Cohesive devices are important for language uses. By using connected words such as however, nevertheless, etc., a sense of strengthening argument, explanation, contrast, emphasis will be made, especially in a complex text.

3. COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE COHESIVE DEVICES IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE SPEECHES

3.1. Lexical cohesive devices

Lexical cohesive devices are a semantic connection within a text between some particular words that have some similarities or connections on meaning. The connection can be repetition, synonyms, antonyms and so on. Hu Zhuanglin thinks only in the case of the relative centralization of vocabulary can the theme and semantic union of a text be realized. Halliday and Hasan proposed that lexical cohesive devices consist of two main categories that are reiteration and collocation. Reiteration involves four main sub-categories which are repetition, synonymy, antonym and hyponymy. It means the use of two or more words which can be referred back or forward to corresponding the particular lexical item. Collocation refers to the regular co-occurrence of lexical items.

The lexical items are associated with each other in pairs in meaning or other ways. In the texts chose by the author, it is apparent that Chinese uses more lexical cohesive devices than English. Because in English, some cohesive devices as reference, substitution and ellipsis are used more than Chinese and in Chinese, these are used more simply as repetition of the identical

words. But for all, there are no dramatic difference on lexical cohesive devices in two languages because lexicon is the core of a language, it is not only abundant but also crucial in forming texts. Halliday states that “lexical cohesion comes about through the selection of items that are related in some way to those that have gone before.” In this section, sub-categories of lexical cohesive devices namely reiteration which includes repetition, synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy and collocation are calculated and analyzed. Here are two examples:

(1) And so, as our troops continue to transition back home—back to our businesses, our schools, our congregations, and our communities—it’s up to all of us to serve them as well as they have served us.

In example (1) “home” and “our businesses, our schools, our congregations, and our communities” form a relation of inclusion. “our businesses, our schools, our congregations, and our communities” are specific things in our “home” that Mrs. Obama refers to.

(2) humankind has only one Earth, each nation coexist in one world. World peace and development requires people of all countries to help each other and advance together. The Chinese people have always been a staunch force in promoting world peace and development. No matter how the international situation changes, the Chinese people's firm determination to pursue the path of peaceful development will never be shaken. (In Chinese)

Here, “world” and “each nation” and “each nation” and “China” form hyponymy. “Each nation” is included in “world” while “China” is included in “each nation”. By using hyponymy, relation in this paragraph is set and the intention of can be expressed that are the progress of the world needs cooperating of all the countries and china will be the still supporter and contributor to the peace of the world.

3.2. Reference

Halliday and Hasan put forward that reference occurs when an item in a text cannot be interpreted by itself but by something else. Reference as cohesive devices is to use reference words usually pronouns that point back to an idea mentioned previously to tie sentences and paragraphs together. The relation between references can be acquired within a text and a context. So Halliday and Hasan divide reference as exotrophic(situational)reference and endophoric(textual)reference. If the reference exists in the text, it is called endophoric reference while if it exists outside the text, it is called exophoric reference. Halliday and Hasan point that only endophoric reference functions as cohesive devices in textual cohesion and coherence. Exophoric reference only helps with the creation of a text. They divide endophoric reference into anaphora and cataphora. Anaphora is the use of a grammatical substitute as a pronoun or a pro-verb to refer to a denotation of preceding word or group of words. Cataphora means the use of a grammatical substitute as a pronoun that has the same reference as a following word or phrase. Endophoric reference includes three types personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. The thesis does comparative research on the three kinds of references which contributes to the cohesion and coherence of the speeches in English and Chinese language. Through the respectively counting of the quantity of three kinds of references, it can be told that the differences between two languages mainly exist on demonstrative references. The quantity of comparative references in two languages are almost the same. Demonstrative reference in English language is relatively more than that of in Chinese. The main difference exists in personal reference. In English, the quantity is so much more than that in Chinese. This is the main reason that leads to this dramatic difference. In Chinese language, zero reference is frequently used. And besides zero reference, Chinese language usually use lexical cohesive device repetition to describe things or phenomenon.

3.3. Substitution

The use of substitution is a process of replacing one item by another and thus form a relation of the “presupposing” substitute and the presupposed. Reference is a relation in meaning while substitution is a relation between vocab or phrases. Halliday and Hasan said in 2006 that a substitution is “a sort of counter which is used in place of the repetition of a particular item”. The relation it forms helps the cohesion and coherence within a text. Substitution is very useful in creating a text because it helps a lot in reducing restless redundancy of repeat of the identical word. Substitution is a concept in grammar not in meaning. So it is classified grammatically as three types: nominal, verbal and clausal. In Chinese the classification is the same. Here is a comparative table showing the classification and corresponding substitute words or phrases.

Table 1. Classification and corresponding substitute words or phrases in Chinese and English

	English	Chinese
Nominal	One/ones/the same/so	's, same, same (in Chinese)
Verbal	Do/do so	Do (five different expressions in Chinese)
Clausal	So/not	Or, yes/no, this way, not this way (in Chinese)

Though the classification is the same, the usage is totally different.

3.4. Ellipsis

Ellipsis is similar to substitution because they both are based on the level of grammar. Substitution is the replacement of an item occurring in a text while ellipsis is the omission of an item. For example: (3) We ended one war and began to wind down another (war). (4) Peace, development and cooperation are the call of the times, and (peace, development and cooperation) are the common interests of people of all countries. (In Chinese)

In these two sentences for the speeches we can see that the words or phrases in the brackets are omitted. Ellipsis includes three kinds just as substitution. It is classified as nominal, verbal and clausal ellipsis. Ellipsis is a very efficient way of expressing ideas and it is an expression so economical principle of language. Ellipsis is very similar to substitution and Halliday and Hasan even view it as zero substitution. If we see ellipsis on the structural level, we can say that the structure after using ellipsis is incomplete. But as its the use of language and conveying meaning is the ultimate goal, ellipsis as cohesive devices has no side effect in understanding of a text and conveying meaning and moreover sometimes it presupposes what will happen later in the text so it helps the understanding of a text to some extend. In the speeches, the quantity of the use of ellipsis in English and in Chinese speeches differs much. The dramatic difference comes from the reason that Chinese language uses zero reference in a large amount which is also a kind of ellipsis.

3.5. Conjunction

Conjunction is a relation between clauses, sentences and paragraphs. by using conjunction, readers have a clearer understanding of the semantic meaning of the text. Halliday and Hasan said that “Conjunctive elements are cohesive not in themselves but indirectly; they are not primarily devices for reaching out into the preceding or following text, but they express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other elements in the discourse.” What should be mentioned is that the conjunctive elements have no cohesive meaning. They function as a bridge. In the book Cohesion and Coherence, Halliday and Hasan classifies conjunction as four

categories: additive, causal, adversative and temporal conjunction. The following table shows some common expressions of these four conjunctions.

Table 2. Common expressions of the four conjunctions

additive	and, or, in addition
causal	because, so, therefore, as a result
adversative	but, however, on the other hand
temporal	first, before, at last

4. THE CAUSE OF THE DIFFERENCES ON COHESIVE DEVICES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND CHINESE TEXTS

In the third chapter, we have discussed the difference and common features of cohesive devices. So the reasons that cause such differences need analyzing. And we have discussed the fundamental reason of the differences that is because they come from different language families. Here the author did a concrete analysis on the causes.

It is because of the difference of Chinese and western ways of thinking. The language a nation uses reflects the way of thinking of a nation. Language is the carrier of thinking. It is the most important tool for human communication, and it is the main means of expression for people to communicate. Therefore, differences in languages, including the differences in cohesive devices, comes from different thinking of different nations. Chinese people pay attention to harmony between man and nature and the overall balance in every aspect of life. Chinese people have a strong emotional and intuitive feeling, so people use language in a paratactic way. Chinese language emphasizes the integrity of the content and meaning without the restraints of structural form. In western culture, logical thinking is emphasized. So in language using, people pay much attention to the form which is not that important for Chinese language. English is a hypotactic language so there are abundant inflections and additional components within texts such as gender, number, case, time, suffix and prefix. These elements can ensure the competence in grammar and structure. Besides this, there are syntactic markers especially connectors as relational pronouns, adverbs, prepositions which can tight words, sentences and paragraphs together and make the text more organized. Differ from Chinese, English pays more attention to the consciousness of objectivity. The westerners completely separate subject and object and regard them as two opposite and independent sides. So when talk about something they will consciously pull things away and think very objectively. In the expression concerning of distance between the speaker himself and the addressee, the actual distance of time and space will be regarded as the basic judgment. What should be noticed is that when we say that English is a hypotactic language while Chinese is a paratactic language we don't think it in an absolute way. That is to say Chinese language is also hypotactic while English language is paratactic to some extent. In other word, hypotaxis for English and parataxis for Chinese are two extinct features.

5. CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, we can draw a general conclusion that English and Chinese both use cohesive devices in a large quantity and English uses a little bit more than that of Chinese. In English, reference takes the largest proportion in all the cohesive devices while lexical cohesive devices take the largest in Chinese. Chinese language is paratactic and lack of changes in gender, case, tense and so on. In many cases it needs reiteration to get the completeness in structure and meaning. Many zero references which can be seen as ellipsis in Chinese language is also a sign showing Chinese is paratactic. We can say that Chinese language often uses implicit cohesive devices to construct texts, while English tends to use reference conjunction and

substitution. This thesis has discussed the five cohesive devices based on the speeches of the two presidents roughly. It leaves much space to be filled in especially it only involves one literary style.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is a result of the Beijing Institute of Technology Zhuhai First-class Undergraduate Course Research Project; Project name: Integrated English 1; Project No.: YLKC2021011

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