

An Analysis of Grammatical Cohesive Devices in the Text "After 20 Years" from the Perspective of Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: This essay analyzes the grammatical cohesion in O. Henry's "After Twenty Years," focusing on reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction as put forward by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The exploration of these linguistic features aims to unravel their impact on key thematic elements, including the enduring nature of friendship, the transformative influence of time on individuals, and the repercussions of wrongful actions. The narrative's backdrop in early 20th-century New York City and O. Henry's insightful storytelling provide context for understanding the text's depth. The study concludes by emphasizing the crucial role of grammatical cohesion in enriching themes and enhancing the overall texture of the narrative.

1. Introduction

This essay delves into the intricate web of cohesive devices utilized by O. Henry in his work "After Twenty Years," with a specific focus on grammatical cohesion. As the essay unfolds, key concepts such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction are explored in Section 3. Subsequently, in Section 4, the analysis identifies these cohesive strategies within Henry's work and delves into their nuanced functions, exploring how they contribute to the overall cohesion of the narrative. Additionally, Section 4 offers a comprehensive understanding of how these strategies play a pivotal role in shaping the main themes of the text.

2. Background

Set against the backdrop of early 20th-century New York City, "After Twenty Years" is a short story penned by the American writer O. Henry, a pseudonym for William Sydney Porter.

2.1. Author of "After Twenty Years"

O. Henry, born in 1862, led a life colored by diverse experiences, ranging from working in a pharmacy to serving time in prison for embezzlement. His multifaceted life became a wellspring for his stories, often infused with wit and surprise endings.

2.2. Synopsis of "After Twenty Years"

The narrative unfolds as a policeman walks his beat on a chilly New York night. Awaiting a long-lost friend, the waiting man shares his story with the officer. Twenty years ago, he and Jimmy Wells, inseparable friends, made a pact to meet at a specific location. The waiting man, having traveled a thousand miles, stands at the rendezvous point. When a tall man arrives, the much-anticipated reunion takes an unexpected turn as identities are revealed, leading to a surprising twist.

2.3. Themes Explored in "After Twenty Years"

Balancing Friendship and Obligation: The core theme revolves around the enduring nature of friendship. The waiting man's journey and adherence to a decades-old appointment underscore the powerful bond between friends. When Jimmy Wells decides to have Bob arrested, he prioritizes his role as a police officer, fulfilling his public duty, rather than adhering to the private loyalty he holds for his longtime friend.

The Evolution of Individuals Over Time: Bob's inability to identify Jimmy prompts reflection on the transformative power of time, raising inquiries about the extent to which the two men have or haven't changed. The narrative's structure allows readers to reflect on the transformations that time imposes on individuals and relationships.

The Unprofitable Nature of Wrongdoing: Despite Bob's criminal achievements surpassing Jimmy's career as a patrolman, his involvement in a life of crime inevitably culminates in his apprehension, highlighting the ultimate lack of success in pursuing unlawful paths.

3. Grammatical Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976) [3] classify the categories of grammatical cohesion into four types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction.

3.1. Reference

Reference can manifest as either exophoric or endophoric.

Exophoric reference necessitates that the reader deduce the intended referent by considering the broader context beyond the immediate text, which is shared by both the reader and the writer. For example:

A: Has the paper come today, honey?

B: It's right on the table.

In contrast, endophoric reference is contained within the text itself. Endophora has four types: Personal, demonstrative, and comparative reference.

Personal reference is reference using function in a situation. For example, in the following instance, "she" refers to "Lily".

I met Lily yesterday. She is my colleague.

Here, a personal pronoun is used to accurately convey the semantics, avoiding redundancy and making the text more concise.

Demonstrative reference is reference utilizing function in location. For instance:

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

In this context, both occurrences of the word "this" represent the dreams held by Martin. This simple terminology helps to avoid the repetitive content and enhances the overall cohesion of the discourse, underscoring the speaker's resolute commitment to actualizing these dreams.

Comparative reference is reference employing comparison. For instance:

We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one.

Here, the terms "smaller" and "larger" are part of a comparative reference. Through this analogy, the speaker conveys to the audience that their living conditions have not improved.

3.2. Substitution

Substitution, as explained by Bloor (1995) [2], involves the speaker using another grammatically valid word instead of a specific word to prevent repetitive use of the same vocabulary. There are three types of substitution: nominal (to replace a noun or noun phrase), verbal (to replace a verb phrase), and clausal (to replace a clause) substitution (Ding, 2000) [1].

Nominal substitution is substituting a noun or a nominal group with another noun. Nominal substitution involves the use of 'one,' 'ones,' and 'same' as substitute items.

In the following example, "same" substitutes a chocolate ice-cream:

A: I'd like to have a chocolate ice-cream.

B: The same for me.

Verbal substitute is represented by the usage of: "do." For example:

A: I don't like that movie.

B: Neither do I.

Here, "do" is the substitution for "like that movie."

With clausal substitution, an entire clause is presupposed, and the contrasting element is outside the clause. The arrow is either "so" or "not," or "not ... so" if the verb is "think".

This is illustrated by the following:

A: That man must have had too much mao-tai.

B: I think so. He can hardly stand up.

In this example, "so" substitutes the clause "That man must have had too much mao-tai."

3.3. Ellipsis

Ellipsis is a special case of substitution. It is substitution by zero (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) [3]. Like substitution, ellipsis may also be divided into three categories: nominal, verbal, and clausal.

When a nominal group is elliptical, its interpretation will depend on that of another nominal group. This is exemplified by:

A: Did you win a second prize?

B: No, a third.

In the second sentence, the nominal "prize" is omitted.

Verbal ellipsis happens when part of a verbal group is omitted. In the following example:

A: Will you go to the lecture tonight?

B: Yes, I will.

The verb "go to the lecture tonight" is left out in B.

Clausal ellipsis involves the omission of a clause. In the example mentioned below:

A: I returned home very late last night.

B: When?

The clause "I returned home very late last night" is excluded in B.

3.4. Conjunction

Conjunctions play a crucial role as connectors between sentences or clauses within a text. As Halliday and Hasan (1976) [3] assert, the function of conjunctions lies not in themselves but in the

special meanings they inherently carry.

Conjunctions are categorized into four types: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal.

Additive conjunction indicates a relationship of coordination. Examples of additive conjunctions are "and," "similarly," "in addition," etc. This is exemplified by:

I have never met this man. In addition, I don't remember having seen him (Ding, 2000) [1].

Adversative conjunction expresses 'but or yet' links. This type of conjunction is expressed by words such as "but," "however," "by contrast," etc. For example:

He tried to open the box. But his mother took it away (Ding, 2000) [1].

Causal conjunction marks a cause-and-effect or reason-and-consequence relationship. Such as: "so," "then," "hence," etc. This is illustrated by:

She was never really happy here. So she is leaving (Ding, 2000) [1].

Temporal conjunction marks the sequence of order. Such as "as last," "then," "next," etc. For example:

He opened the door, walked in, and looked around. Then, he went straight to the bedroom (Ding, 2000) [1].

4. Analysis

Note that the following examples were chosen for their effectiveness in illustrating how conjunctions contribute to theme development concisely, despite the existence of other examples.

4.1. Personal, Demonstrative, and Comparative Reference

4.1.1. Personal Reference

Numerous personal references that enhance the development of the main themes are present in the text. For instance, the use of "them" in sentence 3 refers to the "chilly gusts of wind," adding atmospheric depth and effectively setting the tone for the story. Notably, "his" was used throughout the narrative: "His" in sentence 29 refers to "the man" in sentence 29, "His" in sentence 30 refers to "a tall man" in sentence 30, and "my" and "His" in sentence 34 refer to "the new arrival" in sentence 34. "Me" in sentence 35 pertains to "old man" in sentence 34. "His" in sentence 40 relates to "the man from the West" in sentence 40, and "His" in sentence 41 corresponds to "the other" in sentence 41. "His" in sentence 44 refers to "The man from the West" in sentence 44, contributing significantly to character development and emphasizing the changes individuals undergo.

4.1.2. Demonstrative Reference

The text contains numerous demonstrative references that contribute to the themes of the text. Firstly, the reference to "this store" in sentence 10 refers to "a darkened hardware store" in sentence 7, and "this door" in sentence 17 refers to "the doorway" mentioned in sentence 12. The use of "that night" in sentence 15 references "Twenty years ago tonight" in sentence 13. These references contribute to the anticipation and eventual fulfillment of the long-awaited meeting. Secondly, "here" in sentence 14, referring to "New York" in the same sentence, contributes to the exploration of individual evolution by highlighting the changes in the city over time. Thirdly, the reference to "this glare" in sentence 43, refers to "a drug store brilliant with electric lights" in sentence 42, suggesting that the pursuit of unlawful paths leads to inevitable exposure and consequences.

4.1.3. Comparative Reference

Within the relatively limited use of comparative references, the recurring deployment of the term

"other" emerges as particularly prevalent, substantiating its contribution to thematic development. For instance, in sentence 17, "Other" is indicative of "you" in sentence 16. Similarly, sentence 24 features "other" denoting "I" in sentence 21. Furthermore, sentence 34 employs "other" with reference to "the man" in sentence 33, thereby accentuating the relationship between Bob and Jimmy Wells, contributing to the thematic exploration of balancing friendship and obligation.

4.2. Substitution and Ellipsis

The narrative expertly utilizes substitution and ellipsis for thematic depth. In sentence 27, the ellipsis, "The few foot passengers [0: were] astir in that quarter and hurried dismally," accentuates the desolate atmosphere, reinforcing themes of temporal change and the fruitlessness of wrongdoing. Sentence 34 employs an ellipsis, "The old [0: restaurant] gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there," evoking sentimental attachment and emphasizing the theme of balancing friendship and obligation. Additionally, the substitution of "one" for "man" in sentence 47 enhances the exploration of the Evolution of Individuals over time, suggesting broader implications for the collective human experience.

4.3. Conjunction

Similar to references, conjunctions in the text are noteworthy. The use of four types of conjunctions: additive, temporal, adversative, and causal, contributes to the development of the main theme of the text. The adversative conjunction "but" in Sentence 5 highlights a potential conflict between public duty and personal feeling. The additive conjunction "and" in sentence 12 connects Bob's dedication to the long-awaited meeting with the portrayal of the man's face, prompting reflection on the changes individuals undergo. The temporal conjunction "when" in Sentence 50 allows readers to observe the evolution of emotions, contributing to the exploration of individual changes over time. The causal conjunction "so" in Sentence 52 reveals the cause-and-effect relationship leading to Bob's arrest, emphasizing the ultimate lack of success in pursuing unlawful paths.

5. Conclusion

Cohesion in a text, crucial for its quality, manifests as a texture formed by interconnected language ties. This essay focuses on grammatical cohesive ties—reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction—analyzing their role in enhancing cohesion and enriching themes in O. Henry's "After Twenty Years." These linguistic elements explored in-depth, serve not just as structural binders but as conduits shaping the narrative's nuanced exploration of friendship, time, and morality.

References

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