

# *An Analysis of Text Cohesion in TEM-4 Dictation*

Yueheng Pan

*School of English Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China*

**Keywords:** TEM-4; text cohesion; dictation

**Abstract:** TEM-4 (Test for English Major-Band 4) has been always considered as a significant benchmark of qualified English proficiency. As the first part of TEM-4, dictation accounts for 10% of the total score. The performance of TEM-4 dictation influences the whole test. However, dictation is also the most time-consuming and lowest-scoring part for students. Text cohesion is an efficient and necessary perspective in discourse analysis and comprehension. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the distribution features of cohesive devices in TEM-4 dictation using Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory and then explore in-depth the practical strategies of coping with dictation. The results show that there are a total of 246 occurrences of cohesion devices in dictation texts and reference is the dominant one in the dictation parts with 127 instances. Besides, specific examples are used to explain how to grasp keywords and improve the accuracy of dictation based on cohesion theory. It is truly expected that the present study can enhance the learning self-efficacy, confidence and language competence.

## 1. Introduction

TEM-4 is a standardized English proficiency test specifically for English majors in China. As the first part of TEM-4, dictation has become an indispensable testing item in TEM4 since 1991, and the performance of it will affect test-takers' confidence and then the performance of the following parts of TEM-4. However, dictation has always been a problematic and irksome part for the students and teachers<sup>[1]</sup>. Although students have spent a significant portion of our time and energy to practice, they got bad grades in most cases<sup>[2]</sup>, thus showing fear of dictation part<sup>[3]</sup>.

The dictation material of TEM-4 is a meaningful discourse, which has textuality. It is possible to explore the learning strategies to improve dictation ability from the perspective of the discourse planning mechanism-cohesion. As an important terminology in text linguistics, the study of text cohesion will help test-takers reduce the error probability and improve the listening competence. There is no denying the fact that the recognition and usage of cohesive devices are very effective ways of tackling the problems in completing the dictation.

However, the investigation of cohesion in the listening tests of TEM-4, especially the dictation part has been neglected before. The applicability of text cohesion or cohesion theory in various parts of TEM-4 and TEM-8, such as English writing of TEM-4<sup>[4]</sup>, cloze test in TEM-4<sup>[5]</sup>, proofreading and error correction in TEM-8<sup>[6]</sup> has been testified successfully and efficiently. Therefore, this research tends to apply the cohesion theory proposed by Halliday and Hasan to analyze the dictation parts in the listening tests of TEM-4, filling up the research gap and developing the effective way of improving students' dictation scores and their listening ability.

## 2. Theoretical Foundation

### 2.1 Cohesion Theory

Cohesion theory has drawn much attention from scholars both at home and abroad and been developed to a certain extent and implied widely since it was proposed. Since 1930s, Malinowski and J. R. Firth tried to study discourse but they did not propose a concrete theory. Hasan illustrates the term “Grammatical Cohesion” thoroughly in her *Grammatical Cohesion in Spoken and Written English* in 1968. With the publication of Halliday and Hasan’s *Cohesion in English*, the cohesion theory has been formally established<sup>[7]</sup>. Halliday and Hasan (1976:4) deems that cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical relationships between elements of a text. If one linguistic component of a text plays a key role in the understanding of another component, then there is a cohesive relationship between these two. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. Therefore, the analysis of text cohesion is of vital significance for the improvement of dictation part in the listening test for the strong relationship between cohesion and text comprehension.

### 2.2 Types of Cohesion

#### 2.2.1 Reference

Reference involves items that cannot be interpreted in their own right, but which make reference to something else for their interpretation. What reference does is to help the reader to keep track of the various participants in the text as he or she reads<sup>[8]</sup>. Reference is also called anaphoric relation, which involves exophora and endophora. The former comes from the pragmatic level related to context outside text, and plays little role in discourse cohesion. There are two kinds of endophoric relations: those which look back in the text for their interpretation, which Halliday and Hasan (1976) called anaphora, and those which look forward in the text for their interpretation, which are called cataphora<sup>[9]</sup>.

#### 2.2.2 Substitution

Substitution is, in order to avoid repetition and be concise, the replacement of one item which has appeared in the text more than one time. Halliday and Hasan divided substitution into three types: nominal substitutes (like one/ones, the same, so), verbal substitutes (e.g. do) and clausal substitutes (e.g. so, not) In contrast to reference, substitution refers not to a specific entity but to a class of items. Reference is a relation between meanings; whereas substitution is a relation between linguistic items, such as words or phrases. In terms of the linguistic system, reference is a relation on the semantic level, whereas substitution is a relation on the lexicogrammatical level, the level of grammar and vocabulary, or linguistic form.

#### 2.2.3 Ellipsis and conjunction

According to Halliday (2004), ellipsis is a special form of substitution, which can be defined as substitution by zero<sup>[10]</sup>. Basically, there are three kinds of ellipsis: nominal ellipsis, verbal ellipsis, and clausal ellipsis. Conjunction is different from other cohesive devices discussed above, for it is no longer any kind of a search instruction, but a specification of the way in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before. It serves the function of linking sentences to express the logical relationship between two or more sentences, pointing out in what sense the

sentences are related to each other. Categorized into four groups to express additive, adversative, causal and temporal relations among sentences, conjunction devices express the “logical-semantic” relation between sentences rather than between words and structures<sup>[7]</sup>.

#### **2.2.4 Lexical cohesion**

The concept of lexical cohesion is not totally clear. Like most linguistic categories, although clearly defined in the ideal, it presents much indeterminacy in application to actual instance. Lexical cohesion is an approach to achieve cohesion in terms of vocabulary selection and mainly includes two types- reiteration and collocation. Collocation includes two different language phenomena: the lexical collocational items belong to the same semantic field, such as “red” and “green” both belong to the semantic field of color; the lexical items do not belong to the same semantic field but they often co-occur, for example, “ill” and “doctor”. It does not cope with semantic and grammatical connections but with connections based on the words used.

### **3. Methods of Analysis**

#### **3.1 Data Collection**

Dictation allows the language learners to both comprehend and produce the language in the context of meaningful discourse<sup>[11]</sup>. Aiming at improve the reliability of the study, the study collected the texts of dictation parts of the TEM-4 from 2014 to 2024(due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, TEM-4 was not taken that year), for which can provide test-takers and teachers with a better understanding and enlightenment of preparing for the TEM-4.

#### **3.2 Procedures of Analysis**

Firstly, in order to solve the research questions proposed in the first part, this paper collected TEM-4 of the recent ten years from 2014 to 2024, so as to ensure timeliness and extract texts from the dictation part. Secondly, the study established the categorization standard of cohesion and coherence. The standard consisted of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) theory and types of text cohesion. The statistical tables that presented the distribution of data and the discussion of calculated results will be provided, like the distribution features of text cohesion, the least and most frequently used cohesive devices in the dictation parts of the TEM-4 from 2014 to 2024. Eventually, according to the results, this research intends to put forward the impacts of learning cohesive devices on the improvement of dictation ability.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Results**

As is known to all, English is hypotactic, which needs explicit language forms and structures to achieve text-internal cohesion. This part presents the distribution features of cohesive devices used in the texts of dictation. The figures and percentages of each type and subtype will be summarized one by one as follows.

##### **4.1.1 The analysis of cohesive devices**

The result of the study shows that every cohesion device is used in dictation part of TEM-4. Moreover, the proportions of each device in the 10 dictation passages are different, as shown in the

Table 1 below.

Table 1: Overall types and frequencies of cohesive devices used in the dictation parts of the TEM-4

	Cohesive devices	Frequency	Percentage
1	Reference	127	51.63%
2	Conjunction	53	21.54%
3	Lexical cohesion	46	18.70%
4	Substitution	19	7.72%
5	Ellipsis	1	0.41%
Total		246	100%

As can be observed in the table above, there are a total of 246 occurrences of cohesion devices in the dictation passages. In addition, it is apparent that the reference is the dominant one in the dictation parts with 127 instances, making up 51.63%. The type of conjunction is the second most frequently used cohesive devices in the dictation tests with 53 instances, accounting for 21.54%. Table 1 shows that lexical cohesion occurred 46 times at the percentage of 18.7%, which consists of repetition, synonyms, hyponyms, meronyms and so on. Lexical cohesion as the name suggested that it is different from grammatical cohesion which establishes semantic link through the use of grammar uses the vocabulary as a way to set semantic links in the texts. Next is the substitution (7.72%) and the smallest number belongs to ellipsis (0.41%).

In Halliday's cohesion theory, conjunction can be further classified into four types, namely, adversative, additive, casual and temporal conjunction. According to the statistics calculated from the dictation passages, the additive conjunction presents highest frequency of occurrence (see Table 2).

Table 2: Frequencies and percentages of different types of conjunction

	Cohesive devices	Frequency	Percentage
1	Additive	19	35.85%
2	Adversative	14	26.42%
3	Causal	13	24.53%
4	Temporal	7	13.20%
Total		53	100%

From Table 2, it can be seen that additive conjunction is the most recurrent one among conjunction types with 19 cases, equal to 35.85%. The second most common type employed in the dictation is the adversative conjunction (26.42%), followed by the causal conjunction (24.53%). The last one is temporal conjunction with 7 instances, making up 13.2%.

#### 4.1.2 The analysis of reference

Under the heading of reference, it has been further divided into three subtypes, i.e. personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference, and among which personal reference is the most frequently used cohesive device (see Table 3).

Table 3: Frequencies and percentages of different types of reference

	Reference	Frequency	Percentage
1	Personal reference	57	44.88%
2	Demonstrative reference	53	41.73%
	Definite article: the	41	77.36%
3	Comparative reference	17	13.39%
Total		127	100%

Personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, etc.), possessive determiners (your, his, her, etc.) and possessive pronouns (mine, his, hers, theirs, etc.) are all personal reference, accounting for 44.88%, which is the most frequent one used in the texts of dictation parts of the TEM-4 from 2014 to 2024. In terms of the frequency of usage, the demonstrative reference is second only to personal reference. Both the personal and the demonstrative reference play an important role in the comprehension of the dictation parts. Among the demonstrative reference, the definite article “the” is relatively the most frequent used cohesive device, which accounted for 77.36% of the total. The type of comparative reference employed in the dictation parts of TEM-4 (2014-2024) with 17 cases, making up 13.39%, which is used relatively infrequently. Although at a lower frequency, the comparative reference, like same, equal, such, different, more, fewer, less etc., is of vital importance for the comprehension of the listening materials, for which can show the likeness, similarities or differences between the different elements. It is the similarities or differences that make the separate words into a well-knitted and meaningful texts. To sum up, it is worth mentioning that these three subtypes of reference matter a lot to the construction of the meaning and the formation of coherence of the texts, because the misunderstanding or ignorance of one cohesive device will directly affect the comprehension of the other one, even the whole texts or discourse, which leads students to the failures of the dictation parts of TEM-4.

## 4.2 Discussion

As can be observed in the above results, it is obvious that there are lots of cohesive devices employed in the dictation parts of the TEM-4. Researchers at home and abroad have found that students with the knowledge of cohesion theory can perform better in language tests. Therefore, the analysis of the distribution features of the cohesive devices will clarify the role of them in the meaning construction and then improve the students’ ability of taking dictation and their use of listening strategies. Ultimately, this study will help students get good grades in the TEM-4 by proposing some useful suggestion.

First, according to the statistical results, reference is the most frequently used cohesive device. It has the ability to explore the role of working memory in discourse comprehension. To understand a simple pair of sentences, the antecedent must be held in working memory long enough to be linked with the anaphor. Therefore, it is the reason that reference is usually the most dominant one in the texts, and thus the grasp of it will enhance the students’ ability to deal with dictation and furthermore to improve their scores of TEM-4. It is also need to mention that the personal reference is more frequent than the demonstrative and the comparative reference. And in the demonstrative reference, it is found that the definite article “the” is the dominant one in dictation passages with 41 cases, making up 77.36%. Therefore, for students who have difficulties in the dictation or listening part, they need to pay more attention to the pronouns, determiners, and the definite article “the” in the daily listening exercises. Besides, when hearing the demonstrative reference, i.e. “this”, “that”, “those”, “these”, they should be more attentive to the following words which may be the reference of the former word.

Secondly, different types of conjunction have different roles in the texts. Additive conjunction is the easiest to notice and understand, which serves to add some new information to the former discourse. Due to the consistency to the context, it will not be the hardest one for students to deal with. However, the adversative and causal conjunction may raise difficulties for students to comprehend meanings of the passages. Adversative conjunction has the ability to make a meaning turn and so that test-takers need to do a brain twister game and make some positive or negative inference. Even though they represent the same semantic relationship, there are slight differences among these words and sometimes they cannot be interchangeable.

Among all the cohesive devices, substitution and ellipsis are the least used ones. Ellipsis is the least frequently used device with only 1 instance. Ellipsis is the omission of one item, which is usually employed to highlight the main information and avoid repetition. In the past ten years, results show that there are only 1 case that involve ellipsis, which possibly in order to reduce the difficulty of listening comprehension and avoid misunderstanding of listening materials. All in all, students should grasp the knowledge of ellipsis and substitution and pay more attention to the substitution and ellipsis used in the listening texts, which will highly improve the listening accuracy of the dictation parts.

As the third frequently used cohesive device in the dictation parts of TEM-4, lexical cohesion can be divided into two types, namely reiteration and collocation. For example, “Now, home has implied meanings of a feeling of belonging and affection, a place where you can find refuge and rest. It means something intimate and private (TEM-4 of 2021).” These three pairs of words “belonging” and “affection”, “refuge” and “rest” and “intimate” and “private” are synonyms or near-synonyms, like both “belonging” and “affection” refer to the feelings of affinity or close relations. Overall, lexical collocations in a text can be understood through clues provided by the author and the reader’s knowledge of general discourse features, which contributes to the meaning construction and development of the dictation passages. Lexical collocations can make the whole texts move more logically and smoothly. Not only the reiteration but also the collocation can make the texts more cohesive and easier to comprehend. When the students recognize some word successfully, the relative words can be inferred and written down. Therefore, this inspires test-takers that when they are doing a dictation and fail in recognizing some words of the sentences, they should calm down and concentrate on the following words. At the same time, students should learn to grab the key words and infer the following words in the contexts by cohesive devices.

## 5. Conclusion

Through the application of Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion theory, the present study discovered the distribution features of cohesive devices used in the dictation and then found that the instruction of text cohesion knowledge can help students perform better in dealing with dictation in TEM-4 for different cohesive devices contribute the meaning and form structure of the texts.

Reference makes the selected texts more compact and well-knitted. The meaning of the dictation passage is easy to comprehend and the structure is clear, which enable students find cohesive chains easily and then help them grasp the gist of the dictation passage. Secondly, conjunction device emphasizes the logical relations between sentences, which could help students infer and reason the logic of the texts so that student will be able to find and correct the logical mistakes in the last 2 minutes period. The knowledge of lexical cohesion can help students summarize the regularities of word selection. If students fail to listen to some key words, they should be more concentrated on the following words, because the synonyms, hyponyms or the repetition would appear later.

However, there are also some limitations. The size of the sample is very limited. It would be better to select a large scale of samples in the future research. Meanwhile, this study only analyzes the standard dictation passages of TEM-4, but ignores the mistakes in the dictation texts committed by students. The future research should collect the dictation versions of students and analyze the errors of cohesion in them to make it more comprehensive and scientific.

## References

- [1] Jufang, Kong. (2024). Adhere to the orientation of moral cultivation and highlight the characteristics of English majors—Evaluation and analysis of the TEM-4 of 2023. *Foreign Language Testing and Teaching*, 1, 1-7+31.
- [2] Weiyan, Qi. (2017). Thematic choice in passages from TEM-4 Dictation. *Journal of Chengdu Normal University*, 2, 63-66.
- [3] Haiming, Zhou. (2013). An empirical study on English majors’ listening strategy in TEM4 dictation. *Journal of*

*Jiangxi Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 4, 133-139.

[4] Tiekai, Liu. (2005). *On the development and coherence of paragraph in writing of English majors grade four*. *Journal of Social Science of Jiamusi University*, 6, 152-153.

[5] Liu, W., & Zhang, Y. (2024). *A Study of Cloze Test in TEM-4 from the Perspective of Cohesion Theory*. *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, 10, 150-154.

[6] Mao, Y. (2024). *Cohesion and Coherence in Proofreading and Error Correction in TEM-8*. *English Language Teaching*, 17, 54-63.

[7] Halliday, M. A. K. & R, Hasan. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

[8] Eggins, S. (1994). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London: Pinter Pub.

[9] Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[10] Halliday, M. A. K. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar (Third Edition)*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[11] Jafarpur, A., & Yamini, M. (1993). *Does practice with dictation improve language skills?* *System*, 21, 359-369.