



Tikrit University

College of Education for Women

English Department

Linguistics- 4<sup>th</sup> year-

Lecturer: Ruqaiya Burhanuddin Abdurrahman

[rabdurrahman@tu.edu.iq](mailto:rabdurrahman@tu.edu.iq)

## **COHESION AND COHERENCE**

## **Cohesion**

We know, for example, that texts must have a certain structure that depends on factors quite different from those required in the structure of a single sentence. Some of those factors are described in terms of cohesion, or the ties and connections that exist within texts. A number of those types of cohesive ties can be identified in the following paragraph. My father once bought a Lincoln convertible. He did it by saving every penny he could. That car would be worth a fortune nowadays. However, he sold it to help pay for my college education. Sometimes I think I'd rather have the convertible. There are connections here in the use of words to maintain reference to the same people and things throughout: father – he – he – he; my – my – I; Lincoln – it. There are connections between phrases such as: a Lincoln convertible – that car – the convertible. There are more general connections created by terms that share a common element of meaning, such as “money” (bought – saving – penny – worth a fortune – sold – pay) and “time” (once – nowadays – sometimes). There is also a connector (However) that marks the relationship of what follows to what went before. The verb tenses in the first four sentences are all in the past, creating a connection between those events, and a different time is indicated by the present tense of the final sentence. Analysis of these cohesive ties within a text gives us some insight into how writers structure what they want to say. An appropriate number of cohesive ties may be a crucial factor in our judgments on whether something is well written or not. It has also been noted that the conventions of cohesive structure differ from one language to the next, one source of difficulty encountered in translating texts. However, by itself, cohesion would not be sufficient to enable us to make sense of what we read. It is quite easy to create a highly cohesive text that has a lot of connections between the sentences, but is very difficult to

interpret. Note that the following text has a series of connections in Lincoln – the car, red – that color, her – she, and letters – a letter. My father bought a Lincoln convertible. The car driven by the police was red. That color doesn't suit her. She consists of three letters. However, a letter isn't as fast as a telephone call. It becomes clear from this type of example that the “connectedness” we experience in our interpretation of normal texts is not simply based on connections between words. There must be another factor that helps us distinguish connected texts that make sense from those that do not. This factor is usually described as “coherence.”

## Coherence

The key to the concept of coherence (“everything fitting together well”) is not something that exists in words or structures, but something that exists in people. It is people who “make sense” of what they read and hear. They try to arrive at an interpretation that is in line with their experience of the way the world is. Indeed, our ability to make sense of what we read is probably only a small part of that general ability we have to make sense of what we perceive or experience in the world. You may have tried quite hard to make the last example fit some situation that accommodated all the details (involving a red car, a woman and a letter) into a single coherent interpretation. In doing so, you would necessarily be involved in a process of filling in a lot of gaps that exist in the text. You would have to create meaningful connections that are not actually expressed by the words and sentences. This process is not restricted to trying to understand “odd” texts. In one way or another, it seems to be involved in our interpretation of all discourse. It is certainly present in the interpretation of casual conversation. We are continually taking part in conversational interactions where a great deal of what is meant is not actually present in what is said. Perhaps it is the ease with which we ordinarily anticipate each other’s intentions that makes this whole complex process seem so unremarkable. Here is a good example, adapted from Widdowson (1978).

her: That’s the telephone

him: I’m in the bath

her: O.K.

There are certainly no cohesive ties within this fragment of discourse. How does each of these people manage to make sense of what

the other says? They do use the information contained in the sentences expressed, but there must be something else involved in the interpretation. It has been suggested that exchanges of this type are best understood in terms of the conventional actions performed by the speakers in such interactions. Drawing on concepts derived from the study of speech acts (introduced in Chapter 10), we can characterize the brief conversation in the following way. She makes a request of him to perform action. He states reason why he cannot comply with request. She undertakes to perform action. If this is a reasonable analysis of what took place in the conversation, then it is clear that language-users must have a lot of knowledge of how conversation works that is not simply “linguistic” knowledge.