Understanding Cohesion in English

Morihiro Shibayama
College of Medical Care and Technology
Gunma University

Cohesion is Hasan's term. The concept of cohesion, however, is not well-formed and its mechanism is still to be studied. In this paper, the author says: 1. Both cohesion and a tie are semantic concepts. 2. Cohesion in a text is a set of ties between sentences. Based on the definitions, the author discusses the formal and lexicogrammatical factors which generate cohesion.

Introduction

A text refers to one or more sentences which occur sequentially and are related to each other in their meanings. This paper is concerned with the relations between sentences in an English text. The interest in the relations between sentences in a text is relatively new in the study of English. It was Fries(1952) who discussed sequence signals of English sentences for the first time. He pointed out some syntactic devices which relate sentences, though his discussion was far from enough. There were some others, like Francis(1958) and Harris(1963), who developed the study a little further in the same line. But we had to wait until Quirk(1972) and Hasan(1976) were published before we saw any major work done in the study of sentence connection. Quirk mentioned three factors which relate sentences: 1) implications in the se-
mantic content, 2) lexical equivalence and 3) syntactic devices. His discussion of syntactic devices was as comprehensive as we could expect so far, though he did not go very far into the areas under the first two headings. Hasan presented the notion of cohesion to denote relations of meaning in a text. And by discussing cohesive resources in English, she elaborated a detailed categorical syllabus of cohesion.

The study of sentence connection has made great progress from Fries down to Hasan. However, when we review the past studies, we notice that we must re-examine some basic concepts so that we may know what we are really talking about. For example, the concept which refers to relations between sentences has been named differently — sequence, connection or cohesion — depending upon what is meant by it. Hasan says that cohesion is basically semantic. However, as Van Dijk(1977) says, her concept of cohesion is not well-defined. The aim of this paper is to refine the concept of cohesion, especially in its conceptual relation with a tie, another term of Hasan's, and explicate the mechanisms in which cohesion is generated.

1. Language

Language is complex phenomena. Broomfield(1933) described how language occurs in a practical situation. When a person has an idea that he wants to convey to the other, he expresses his idea either in speaking or in writing. We define the idea the speaker intends to express as meaning, the actual linguistic performance he makes as form, and the environment in which the idea and the performance occur as context. Chomsky(1965) paid attention to the competence that the speaker has in order to transform meaning into form. The linguistic competence of a person is considered to be composed of lexicon and grammar. Lexicon is a knowledge of words which provides the speaker
with the lexical items that he needs to convey his idea. Grammar is concerned with the selection and the integration of the lexical items into a certain form to be expressed. To sum up, language has a process from meaning through lexicon and grammar to form in its production and, in the same vein, a process from form through lexicon and grammar to meaning in its reception. And both the productive and receptive processes occur in a certain context as illustrated in the following:

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       MEANING  LEXICON  GRAMMAR  FORM
          ↑        ↓        ↓
          CONTEXT
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The distinction of the three linguistic levels and the knowledge of context are essential in the investigation of sentence connection. Let us take an example:

There is a boy in front of the gate. (1)
He appears to be waiting for somebody. (2)

Anyone who has knowledge of English feels there is a certain connection between S(1) and S(2). The connection is realized with the existence of a boy and He, which is understood from the fact that the connection breaks up if you replace He in S(2) with She or a boy in S(1) with a girl. The written words a boy and He belong to the level of form, while the connection produced through the interpretation on the lexico-grammatical level is a connection in meaning, that is, on the semantic level. The interpretation of a boy and He includes the recognition of the fact that those two words refer to a person who is standing in front of the gate in the situational context.
2. Cohesion

Hasan defines cohesion as a semantic concept which refers to relations of meaning that exist in a text:

The concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text. (Hasan 1976:4)

We notice, however, there is something ambiguous about Hasan's concept of cohesion when we see it applied to actual discussions. The author assumes that we need to distinguish between cohesion as a linguistic phenomenon and cohesion in a text. Cohesion as a linguistic phenomenon is understood to be a relation set up between the presupposing and the presupposed as Hasan says:

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. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text. (Hasan 1976:4)

On the other hand, the author assumes, cohesion in a text should be defined in its relation with a tie, another of Hasan's terms which is also unclear in its concept. Hasan defines a tie as in the following:

We need a term to refer to a single instance of
cohesion, a term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items. This we call a tie. (Hasan 1976:3)

Then taking an example of the following pair of sentences, Hasan says that the cohesion in them is expressed in no less than three ties; the elliptical form you can't, the reference item they, and the lexical repetition of fly.

Time flies.
         — You can't; they fly too quickly. (Hasan 1976:4)

The questions here are: What does Hasan really mean by a tie? Which linguistic level does it belong to? Does it belong to the formal level, the lexico-grammatical level or the semantic level? The best answer seems to be that she means a tie to be on the formal level, for she says that it is a term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items. However, if a tie means a pair of forms, the term tie is misleading, because the cohesive relation between a pair of words is a semantic relation, not a formal one. The two forms flies and they in the example above are not related either in their phonological or orthographic systems, but the relationship that ties them exists in their meanings. Hasan says that a tie is a single instance of cohesion, so if we literally keep to that definition, we should regard a tie as a semantic concept and clarify the relationship of cohesion with a tie as in the following statement:

(1) Both cohesion and a tie are semantic concepts.
    A tie is a single instance of cohesion. In other words, cohesion consists of one or more ties.
Thus defining a tie, we can avoid another confusion in Hasan's discussion. Cohesive ties exist not only between sentences but also within the sentence. But Hasan could not make any conceptual distinction between cohesion between sentences and cohesion within the sentence. She simply said:

Cohesion within the sentence need not be regarded as essentially a distinct phenomenon. (Hasan 1976:9)

However, with our definition of cohesion and a tie, we can distinguish the two by stating:

(2) When we say cohesion in a text, cohesion means a set of ties between sentences, though cohesive ties exist within the sentence as well as between sentences.

Then, based on our defining statements (1) and (2) presented above, we can illustrate the cohesion in the following pair of sentences as shown below them:

Mr. Smith bought a book. (3)
He gave it to his son. (4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S(3)</th>
<th>COHESION</th>
<th>S(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>tie</td>
<td>He</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a book</td>
<td>tie</td>
<td>it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>tie</td>
<td>his</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Factors

The factors which generate a tie or with which a tie is
expressed are here divided into the formal and the lexico-grammatical levels. The relationship between the factors on the two levels is that it is through lexico-grammatical devices that formal signals produce a tie or the latter is expressed by the former.

1) Formal Level

There are two factors to be considered on this level. They are sequence of sentences and sequence signals. The sequence of sentences, the author assumes, is one and only one formal signal by which we identify a text, though it is not a sufficient condition for sentences to be a text. The relationship between the sequence and a text is that if the sequence has cohesion in it, it constitutes a text and if not, it doesn't.

The dealer knew nothing. (5)
He had bought it from another shop. (6)

The year is 1980. (7)
That is very small, isn't it? (8)

In the above, S(5) and S(6) are a text since they have cohesion with a tie expressed with The dealer and He. On the other hand, S(7) and S(8) are not a text but just a juxtaposition of sentences, for no cohesion can be detected in them. Furthermore, what is important here is that the sequence has an inclination to become a text by playing an active role in the generation of cohesion. Quirk explains how it happens:

A reader normally expects coherence and takes it for granted that there is a connection between sentences that occur sequentially in speech or in writting. He
searches for relationships implied by the juxtaposition of sentences with their semantic interpretation. (Quirk 1972:653)

So, even if there is no other signals than the sequence, the sequence itself causes the sentences to create a tie between them if it is possible in their semantic implications. The following example does not have any other signals than the sequence:

It was raining. (9)
I decided not to go out. (10)

However, since S(9) and S(10) are juxtaposed, we interpret them adding a logical connecter as in the following:

It was raining. (9)
So I decided not to go out. (11)

Then if we examine how sequence signals, the other formal factor, produce a tie, we notice an interesting fact that it is the sequence that causes sequence signals to generate a tie.

I assisted with a birth last night. (12)
The baby was smaller than expected. (13)

In the example above, it is just because S(12) and S(13) are placed sequentially that The baby in S(13) is understood to mean the baby born in a birth in S(12), thus creating a tie between them.

2) Lexico-Grammatical Level

The devices on this level are concerned with interpreta-
tion of forms into meaning or production of forms from meaning. It is, therefore, through the devices on this level that a sequence of sentences of a pair of sequence signals create a tie. In this paper, the devices are categorized into three major types and explained with a few examples, for our interest here is in the general mechanism in which ties are set up. Fairly comprehensive lists of sequence signals and their practical examples are already printed in Quirk and Hasan.

(1) Synonymic Devices

A pair of words or phrases equivalent or near-equivalent in their meanings can create a tie. The simplest example is reiteration of the same word:

I am glad you came. (14)
I want you to help me with this. (15)

In the above, the reiteration of the same words, I and you, is the lexical device through which the ties are set up. A pair of related words like the following belongs to this group, too.

He went into the living room. (16)
A large picture was on the wall. (17)

Because of the kinship of the words room and wall in the lexicon, we understand the wall to be the wall of the living room, thus setting up a tie between S(16) and S(17).

(2) Referential Devices

English grammar has various devices with which reference is made. In S(16) and S(17), the co-referential word the is
helping wall to be related to the living room. However, principal referential devices are substitution and ellipsis. The following is an example of substitution:

The meeting was on Monday. (18)
I was in Tokyo then. (19)

In the above, then in S(19) substitutes for on Monday meaning the on Monday in S(18), thus a tie being set up between them. And the next is an example of ellipsis as a cohesive device:

The door is open. (20)
I'd like to know why ( the door is open ). (21)

The ellipsis of the door is open in S(21) is a sort of zero form of substitution which creates a tie between S(20) and S(21).

(3) Connective Devices

The devices in this category are what Quirk calls time and place relaters and logical connecters. Time and place relaters establish relations in time and place between sentences respectively, while logical connecters set up logical connection between sentences. An important thing is that such a relation of connection often exists, to a certain extent, in the meanings of the pair of sentences themselves:

He thought something passed by him. (22)
Later he found it had been a cat. (23)

I don't like my job. (24)
On the contrary, I hate it. (25)
Between S(22) and S(23), the time relater Later establishes a tie which more or less exists in the semantic implications of S(22) and S(23). The same is true of the logical connecter On the contrary in S(24) and S(25).

Conclusion

Cohesion is a set of semantic ties which relate sentences in the text. The devices which create cohesion can be discussed on the formal, the lexico-grammatical and the semantic levels. On the formal level, the devices are sequence of sentences and sequence signals, of which the former is basic to cause cohesion and the latter shows the location of ties. The devices on the lexico-grammatical level, which are concerned with interpretation or production of sequence signals, are categorized into the synonymic, the referential and the connective devices. Although the devices on the semantic level are left to be discussed, the author assumes that their major categories might be equivalence, reference and connection corresponding to the categorical types of lexico-grammatical devices.

References

6. Quirk,R., Greenbaum,S., Leech,S. and Svartvik, J., A Gram-
