

# A Study of Cohesion in Simultaneous Interpreting

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**Abstract**—Cohesion in simultaneous interpreting is the semantic relation between two or more elements in an interpreted text on the grammatical, lexical and phonological levels. It is an influential factor in SI for the audience's comprehension and gratification. This thesis attempts to apply cohesion theory in simultaneous interpreting by analyzing the features of SI text. During the whole communicative process of SI, a text makes sense to the audience only when it is appropriately connected and interpreted with the help of different types of cohesion, such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction lexical cohesion and phonological cohesion.

**Keywords**—Cohesion; Simultaneous Interpreting; Discourse Analysis; Audience Comprehension

## I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the cornerstones in the study of discourse, cohesion has been widely discussed in academic circles, since its conception, as befits such an important topic. Despite the importance attached to cohesion, it is a relatively new field of study within the greater discipline of discourse. In 1960, a seminal paper analyzing syntactic structures and parallelism in literary texts with reference to poetry was published by Roman Jakobson's. It suggests that literary texts have cohesion or internal patterning and repetition. This academic paper is considered to be the first one to introduce the idea of cohesion. In the next four decades, the study of cohesion generated a phenomenal growth of interest from scholars from a variety of academic fields, particularly after the publication in 1976 of Halliday and Hasan's preeminent work on cohesion, *Cohesion in English*. All over the world, scholars from a myriad of backgrounds turned their attention to the nascent theory of cohesion. These scholars began to study cohesion by applying paradigms from their respective fields of study.

Considering the fact that since its inception, cohesion study has attracted scholars from a variety of fields, the concept of cohesion has been widely applied in a vast range of academic disciplines, such as stylistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, language teaching and learning, translation studies, and psycholinguistics. The field of translation studies acts as fertile ground for the practical application of cohesion theory. Further, it serves as a platform for cross-disciplinary research. As pointed out by Newmark, the topic of cohesion has always appeared to be the most useful constituent of discourse analysis or text linguistics applicable to translation [1]. However, the bulk of studies on cohesion's implication in translation are focused on written-text translation, leaving interpreting, especially simultaneous interpreting seldom covered.

This thesis intends to synthesize the various categories of cohesion developed within the field of discourse analysis, where there is a plethora of previous scholarships and distinct categories intended to properly define cohesion within the field of discourse analysis, and the features and challenges of simultaneous interpreting. From this synthesis, this thesis proposes a set of categories that can identify and quantify the usage of cohesion within simultaneous interpreting.

## II. COHESION IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In discourse analysis, cohesion is divided into two categories, namely, grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is a combination of terms between sentences that form a grammatical aspect to help bind a text together. It is realized through reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. Reference refers to the semantic cohesion devices in a text that, rather than being "interpreted semantically in their own right" [2], can only be interpreted with information either to some other parts of the text or world experienced by the sender and the receiver of the text. Reference is semantic relation by which one part of the text functions as reference point of other parts of the text.

We use three examples to further illustrate reference.

(1) Three blind mice, three blind mice.

See how they run! See how they run!

(2) Doctor Foster went to Gloucester in a shower of rain.

He stepped in a puddle right up to his middle and never went there again.

(3) There were two wrens upon a tree.

In (1), it refers to three blind mice; in (2) it refers to Gloucester; in (3) another refers to wrens.

Based on examples given above, we can see that all the items mentioned are directives, indicating that information is to be retrieved from elsewhere in the text. The information to be retrieved is the referential meaning, the identity of the particular thing that is being referred to. The continuity of reference creates cohesion when the same thing enters the discourse for a second time. The specific nature of the information is "signaled for retrieval", and this characterizes the type of cohesion we are discussing about-reference. Moreover, we can see from (2) that two items connected can be of different grammatical categories, because reference indicates semantic rather than only grammatical relation.

Substitution is a grammatical relation within the text and can be thought of as the replacement of one item by another to avoid the repetition of a particular item. In Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory, substitution is constrained to a very

strong grammatical condition. The substitute and the substituted must fall into the same grammatical class. Ellipsis occurs in a text when something that is structurally necessary is left unsaid. There is a sense of incompleteness associated with it. An elliptical item is one that leaves specific structural slots to be filled from elsewhere. This is actually the same as the situation of substitution. The difference is that, in substitution, an explicit place-maker, e.g., one or do is used into the slot, whereas in ellipsis, nothing is inserted into the slot. It can thus be said that ellipsis is “substitution by zero”.

Here are three examples of substitution and one example of ellipsis.

(4) My axe is too blunt. I must get a sharper one.

(5) You think Joan already knows? – I think everybody does.

(6) Has Barbara left? – I think so.

(7) John brought some carnations. Catherine (brought) some sweet peas. [2]

In the first three examples, one, does and so are all substitutes. One substitutes axe, does substitutes knows, and so substitutes Barbara left. In (7), the structure of the second clause is that of subject and complement, leaving a structural slot predicator brought to be filled from the preceding clause.

As Halliday and Hasan put it, conjunction is “a specification of the way in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before” [2]. As such, conjunction describes the cohesive relation between clauses or sections of text. This process could also be considered as the linking of ideas or segments, which is achieved by using conjunctive adjuncts, also called cohesive conjunctives. These words and expressions indicate conjunction and, at the same time, usually indicate the type of relations that operates between elements being joined. Halliday and Hasan had four headings for conjunctive adjuncts, namely, additive, adversative, causal and temporal.

Additive conjunction serves to further the discourse topic. It introduces a new clause as supplemental information; Adversative conjunction is explained as introducing an item of information which is “contrary to the expectation”. The expectation may be derived from the content of what is being said, or from the communication process, the speaker-hearer situation. Causal conjunction marks the relationships of reason, consequence and purposes. Temporal conjunction specifies the time sequence relationship which exists between sentences.

Here are four examples.

(8) ...I was very nearly opening the window and putting you out into the snow! And you'd have deserved it... (Additive conjunction)

(9) All the figures were correct: they had been checked. Yet the total came out wrong. (Adversative conjunction)

(10) The next morning, she was glad and proud that she had not yielded to a scare. For he was most strangely and obviously better. (Causal conjunction)

(11) (Alice) began by taking the little golden key and unlocking the door that led into the garden. Then she set to work nibbling at the mushroom... till she was about a foot high... (Temporal conjunction) [3]

Lexical cohesion, as stated by Halliday and Hasan, refers to “a cover term for the cohesion that results from the co-occurrence of lexical items that are in some way or other typically associated with one another, because they tend to co-occur in similar environment” [2]. The cohesive effect of lexical cohesion is achieved when two or more lexical items across sentence boundaries are associated.

Lexical cohesion is so important that some scholars believe that “the study of the greater part of cohesion is the study of lexis, and the study of cohesion in text is, to a considerable degree, the study of patterns of lexis in text” [4]. Even in Halliday and Hasan’s sample texts, lexical cohesion is the dominant type of cohesion in that over 40% of the ties are lexical. It is also regarded as the only type of cohesion which can establish multiple connections, thus leading to a greater level of cohesion in a text.

The classification of lexical cohesion is highly controversial. According to Halliday and Hasan, it can be divided into two types, namely, reiteration and collocation, among which, reiteration can be achieved by five means, namely, repetition, synonym, antonym, superordinate and general word. Hoey amended Halliday’s classification of lexical cohesion as follows: simple repetition, complex repetition, simple paraphrase including mutual and partial, complex paraphrase including antonym and link triangle, superordinate and hyponym, and co-reference. Many scholars classify lexical cohesion into more different categories based on their own perspectives. Considering the importance of practicality in empirical studies on cohesion, scholars mainly followed Halliday and Hasan’s initial simple classification or used lexical cohesion the whole as a variable instead of further subdividing it.

Here are some examples of lexical cohesion.

There’s a boy climbing that tree.

(12) The boy’s going to fall if he doesn’t take care. (Repetition)

(13) The lad’s going to fall if he doesn’t take care. (Synonymy)

(14) The child’s going to fall if he doesn’t take care. (Superordinate)

(15) The idiot’s going to fall if he doesn’t take care. (General word)

### III. COHESION IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

Simultaneous interpreting is a complex and highly demanding task. A simultaneous interpreter must walk a fine line between two aspects. One is ensuring that meaning gets across to the audience, whose members, in certain cases, have completely different cultural backgrounds. The other is being faithful to source-language text. With the assistance of special equipment, the interpreter listens to the speaker express the original message (source-language text) and immediately renders the translation in the language required by the audience (target-language text). As a final product received by the audience, a simultaneous interpretation made by an interpreter is theoretically considered to be a unified whole from the view of discourse analysis. It shares some similarities with other forms of text, but also has distinct features as an interpreted verbal text produced in a simultaneous manner. Also, unlike

other forms of oral text, the lynchpin of SI is that the audience members receive a final product that is faithful to source-language text.

A basic feature of text in simultaneous interpreting is that it occupies a mediating role. The interpreter builds a bridge between source-language speaker and target-language audience. The text, which the audience members receive, is expected to be an equivalence of the original speech regardless of the real quality of the original one. Considering that the audience members have no idea of the speech made by the original speaker because of language barrier, they would generally assume the speech to be at least unified and coherent, and also intelligible. If the interpreter fails to produce a text in this way, "his listeners' first thought will be that it is the interpreter who is incompetent, not the speaker" [5]. Given the vast differences of two languages in grammar, syntax and other aspects, cohesion should be employed by interpreters to smooth the transition and produce a text that is more understandable to the audience and reduce their burden of cognitive processing. When encountering a poorly organized speech, interpreters should spend more effort in the use of cohesion.

As succinctly pointed out by Daniel Gile, "the act of communication occurring in the translation setting can be analyzed as a set of two parallel components, namely, content and package, which interact to provide the desired effect." [6] The package that Gile refers to is comprised of the words and the linguistic structures of speech, as well as the voice and the delivery. In simultaneous interpreting, the text is sent orally to the audience (receiver) by the interpreter, so it is in a large sense voice-based. Comfortable phonological cohesion presented by a good voice with appropriate intonation and phonetic, may occasionally do more toward convincing a listener than the quality of the idea that is formulated or the information that is delivered, and vice versa.

Characterized by its immediacy, the text in simultaneous interpreting is almost produced on the heels of a source-language speaker. As for the audience, their comprehensive process should therefore follow its pace without doubt. Moreover, with linearity as its distinct feature, a target-language text in simultaneous interpreting challenges the audience more than the readers of a written text. The written text can be examined back and forth, put aside and re-examined. Therefore, readers can go through the texts at any point where they get lost in the information; whereas in simultaneous interpreting, the text undergoes "rapid fading" except in so far as the audience can remember it. So, the audience members have difficulty in tracing the confusing part as new information comes in continuously. Thus, this added challenge requires more from an interpreter's skill to reproduce the text in an audience-friendly way by using suitable forms of cohesion to facilitate chunking and connecting information.

Simultaneous interpreting is a service "performed in a professional setting" [6], in which the speaker, the interpreter(s) and the audience, in some way, share the same context in real time. This shared context is built in the same physical environment that they are all suited in and in the same psychological environment in which they all have some shared

knowledge and active participation. It may influence an interpreter's choice of words, as well as the audience's understanding of target-language text. For instance, an interpreter is working in a forum titled "The Forum on Revitalizing the Old Industrial Bases in Northeast China", when the speaker expresses in Chinese "非常感谢大家出席本次'振兴东北老工业基地论坛'!" This sentence can be interpreted as "Thank you very much for your presence here today" under the Principle of Economy. The audience would have no difficulty figuring out where "here" is because this is their shared-knowledge with speaker and interpreter in the specific environment of interpreting. In this sense, using cohesion, such as reference or lexical cohesion in target-language text would be a reasonable way to save an interpreter's effort and time.

Cohesion in simultaneous interpreting is the semantic relation between two or more elements in an interpreted text on the grammatical, lexical and phonological levels. It is an influential factor in SI for the audience's comprehension and gratification. During the whole communicative process of SI, in the three levels mentioned above, a text makes sense to the audience only when it is appropriately connected and interpreted with the help of different types of cohesion, such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

Here, we have three points that need to be emphasized to defined cohesion. First, cohesion in this thesis focuses on target-language text, the product of simultaneous interpreter(s). Second, cohesion is the objective property of the text rather than the subjective perception of the text. Third, this paper focuses on cohesion across sentence boundaries, whereas that within a sentence is not explored.

Considering the fact that information processing in simultaneous interpretation is auditory based, there are certain unique factors which does not exist when dealing with cohesion in other types of text. With reference to features of the text in SI, cohesion in simultaneous interpreting can be categorized as grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion and phonological cohesion. Grammatical cohesion can be further subdivided into three groups, namely, reference, substitution and ellipsis, and conjunction. These three major categories of cohesion, as well as the three sub-categories, can be observed in target-language text in empirical study. Their correlation with the audience's comprehension and gratification is also investigated.

Reference in simultaneous interpreting indicates a semantic relation between elements. It functions in the audience's perception by the retrieval of information, which is already mentioned by an interpreter in a previous text.

As its classification in traditional discourse analysis, there are three types of reference, namely, personal, demonstrative, and comparative.

Personal reference is reference by means of function in the speech situation, through the category of person (Table 1).

TABLE I PERSONAL REFERENCE [2]

Semantic Category	Existential	Possessive	
Grammatical Function	Head	Modifier	
Class	Noun(pronoun)	Determiner	
Person: Speaker(only) Addressee(s), with/without other persons Speaker and other person(s) Other person, male Other persons, female Other persons; objects Object, passage of text Generalized person	I, me you we, us he, him she, her they, them it one	mine yours ours his hers theirs its	my your our his her their its one's

Here is an example of personal reference in SI:

(16) 上海地处长江三角洲前缘，正当我国南北海岸线的中部，地理位置优越。

Shanghai is on the tip of the Yangtze Delta, in the middle of China's coastline running down from the north to the south. It is very well located.

Demonstrative reference is reference by means of location, on a scale of proximity (Table 2).

TABLE II DEMONSTRATIVE REFERENCE [2]

Semantic Category	Selective		Non-selective
Grammatical function	Modifier/Head	Adjunct	Modifier
Class	Determiner	Adverb	Determiner
proximity: near far neutral	this, these that, those	here(now) there, then	the

The following is an example of demonstrative reference in SI:

(17) 但是，随着经济形势的变化，又出现了一些新的矛盾和问题。比如，国有企业改革问题、大量失业和待业问题。两极分化问题、腐败问题、金融风险问题、生态环境破坏问题等。

But, as the economic climate changes, there are now new problems. These include the reform of the state-owned enterprises, substantial unemployment, the polarization of income, corruption, risks in the financial sector and ecological and environmental damage.

Comparative reference is indirect reference by means of identity or similarity.

TABLE III COMPARATIVE REFERENCE

Grammatical Function	Modifier: deictic (see below)	Sub modifier/Adjunct
Class	Adjective	Adverb
General Comparison: Identity General Similarity	same, identical, equal, similar, additional	identically similarly, likewise so, such
Difference (i.e. non-identity or similarity)	other, different, else	differently, otherwise
Particular Comparison	better, more, etc. (comparative adjectives and quantifiers)	so, more, less, equally

An example of comparative reference in SI is the following:

(18) 他做出这个决定是可以理解的。如果是我，我也会这么做。

His decision is understandable. If I were him, I'll do the same thing.

Substitution indicates a grammatical relation in a text of simultaneous interpreting. With the help of substitution, an

interpreter wishes to avoid the repetition of a lexical item by drawing one of the grammatical resources of the language as a replacement. Ellipsis is a special type of substitution which can be achieved by the omission of the replacement.

Substitution and ellipsis can be divided into three categories by their grammatical function, namely, nominal, verbal and clausal. [2]

TABLE IV THE SUMMARY OF SUBSTITUTION FORMS

		Non-Prominent (Given)	Prominent (New)
Nominal	Thing (Count Noun)	one(s)	the SAME
	process (nominalized) Attribute Fact	so	do be the SAME say
Verbal	Process (+...)	do	DO so
Clausal Report, Condition, Modality	Positive	so	so
	negative	not	NOT

Let us take a look at examples of substitution and ellipsis in SI.

(19) 我最终辞去了这份工作。这么做之后，觉得好多了。

I finally quitted this job. Having done so, I feel better.

(20) 许多外国公司都打算对这个项目进行投资。但是截止上个月，都还没有开始。

Many foreign companies were going to invest on this project. But they still haven't (invested on this project), last month.

In simultaneous interpreting, an interpreter employs conjunction to connect ideas which are expressed in a sentence followed by previously mentioned information. Conjunctions validate the relationship such as adversative, causal, etc. between separate sentences, which carries relevant information, clear to the audience. In this way, information coming in a linear manner in the audience's receiving process can be treated as a whole instead of loose segments. Conjunctions play a vital role in coherence as they help the audience keep the content manageable and understandable.

(21) 说老实话，我们过去机关里面或者企业里面，很多人觉得他能力不强。他不是能力不强，被分配到一个他最不适合的岗位上。

To be honest, in our institutions or enterprises, many people thought that an individual is not an able person. But that is not the case. It is more likely that he had been assigned to a job that did not suit him at all.

Lexical cohesion in simultaneous interpreting indicates a semantic relation between words and phrases in the text, which includes the syntax of the text, the sentence structure and the diction. In a lexically cohesive text, words and phrases work together to create a clear argument or point. By choosing appropriate words and phrases to achieve lexical cohesion, for example, repetition and synonym, an interpreter wishes to give the audience a sense of consistency of the whole text. Furthermore, based on was mentioned above, with cohesion a simultaneous interpreter must interpret the meaning of the source text rather than rendering a direct translation in which lexical cohesion may be lost.

(22) 美国人 1969 年 7 月登上月球、实现了月球行走后，月球探测就由于各种原因停了下来。

In July 1969, American astronauts succeeded in landing on the moon and walked on the surface of it. But since then, for various reasons, lunar exploration halted.

In early studies on cohesion, phonological cohesion was the metaphorical runt of the cohesion litter, falling far behind grammatical and lexical cohesion in the order of importance to early researchers. With the development of cohesion theory, more scholars tend to acknowledge the special grammatical and semantic functions of phonological cohesion in oral text.

Phonological cohesion in SI is how an interpreter uses phonological factors to maintain coordination in expressions, indicate turn allocation, reflect real intention of source-language speaker, etc. In some cases, phonological cohesion works by "strengthening lexical and grammatical cohesion, whereas in other cases, it works independently". [7]

Here are several examples of phonological cohesion, a typically cohesive function of intonation in reflecting real intention of a source-language speaker. Based on marking system of Systemic-Functional Grammar, T1 is falling tone, T2 is high rising tone, T3 is low rising tone, T4 is falling-rising tone and T5 is rising-falling tone.

(23) John loves Mary. John loves Alice. (T1+T1)  
(Progressive)

(24) John loves Mary. Mary does not love him. (T1+T3)  
(Alternative)

(25) Mary is so beautiful. John loves her. (T3+T1)  
(Clausal)

(26) John fell in love with Mary. They got married.  
(T3+T5) (Temporal)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Cohesion, the set of linguistic means available for creating "texture", is a prominent property of a text that is an interpretable whole rather than a group of unconnected sentences. In this thesis, a brief summary of the history of cohesion theory as well as its application in various academic fields and, in particular, the relevant section of cohesion theory to translation are introduced to give the necessary context. Then, it puts forward a definition and a classification of cohesion in the context of simultaneous interpreting. Both the classification of traditional discourse analysis and the features of SI target-language text are taken into consideration. Cohesion in simultaneous interpretation is only a small fraction of cohesion in discourse analysis. As it stands, cohesion in SI

can be split into five categories, namely, reference, substitution and ellipsis, conjunctions, lexical cohesion and phonological cohesion. This study is expected to create impact on aspiring interpreters, particularly trainee interpreters, for they can benefit from the results of this study to train themselves in the application of cohesion and improve their performance in interpreting. Aside from giving trainee interpreters a new tool with which they can use to improve their interpretation products, this thesis picks up a complex and confusing concept in linguistics and filters it through the much more familiar prism of simultaneous interpreting. Furthermore, interpreters are able to discover their problems and improve the structure of the use of cohesion in their interpretation so as to influence the audience's comprehension and gratification in a positive way.

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