

# Coherence of English Political Speeches from the Perspective of Cohesion Theory

Wang Hao

High School Affiliated to Southwest University, Chongqing 400715, China  
zhanchi@swu.edu.cn

**Abstract:** As an important theoretical branch of discourse research, cohesion theory research began in the 1960s. Since then, great progress has been made. In political speeches, coherence is the key to conveying information, ensuring efficient communication, developing trust and audience appeal and approaching the audience by means of various strategies, rhetorical devices, communication skills, etc.. In discourse, cohesion is semantic concept rather than a structure. Cohesion theory can be divided into explicit cohesion and implicit cohesion, which determine the coherence of discourse. In this paper, the linguistic features of discourse are analyzed, the result of which suggests that the coherence of discourse is the result of the joint action of explicit cohesive devices and implicit and giant cohesive devices.

**Keywords:** Cohesion theory; English political speeches; Coherence

## 1. Introduction

Political speeches are strong pep talks, which means the speaker needs to arouse the audience's resonance with a strong calling and express the responsibilities and obligations that the speaker and audience share to achieve some certain purposes. The use of English language differs in emphasis on different occasions. In election, for example, political speeches are the most commonly used. In language communication, figures of speech play an important role, such as strengthening tone, clarifying thoughts, diversifying expressions, transferring feelings, stimulating associations, expressing passion or creating a rhythm [1]. In the process of communication, communicators are also influenced by implicit cohesion, including implicit meaning caused by social factors, specific cultures, experiences, communication situations, etc. Although these can not be expressed in form, they affect and restrict the deep coherence of language use.

The explicit cohesion mechanism has aroused widespread academic concern since the theory of coherence and cohesion in English was developed by Halliday and Hassan, whereas little attention has been paid to the implicit cohesion mechanism. Discourse coherence predictors are the basis of quantitative research into discourse coherence. In terms of discourse coherence research, its recognition and acquisition is of methodological significance [2]. It is consistent in register because it is coherent in context. In the discourse itself, it is coherent and thus cohesive. Both are indispensable and cannot cover each other. People will always be amazed at the popular, concise, accurate and rich language in famous speeches, especially the expressive rhetorical devices. Therefore, careful analysis of the coherence in English political speeches is required in modern English language teaching to realize the effective use of this language.

## 2. Cohesion Theory

Halliday and Hassan mentioned repeatedly in *Cohesion in English*: "cohesion is a semantic connection, which refers to the phenomenon that different components in a text are related in meaning." The use of cohesive devices such as repetition, ellipsis, substitution and connection is conducive to the simplicity of expression and understanding, that is, to enhance the stability and economy of the text. According to cognitive discourse analysis, coherence is the conceptual connection between various referred entities in the text and the connection between various events described by text elements (e.g.,

person, indication and comparison) instead of a single language expression in a text Referential relation refers to the index relation between the expression form and a word in the language or an entity or thought outside the language. The lexical pattern here means the words in the text that reappear in a specific way. It can also be interpreted as coherent even if there is no cohesion in the text, which is known as the implicit cohesion mechanism. He pointed out that explicit cohesion was the embodiment of surface structure, whereas implicit cohesion was semantic coherence [3].

Coherence is first of all coherence in meaning, which must be reflected in language form. According to cognitive discourse analysis, coherence is not based on a single language expression in a text. Instead, it is a concrete type of coherence It regards not only the structural cohesion on the surface as an expression system of semantic coherence, but also the cohesion as a grammatical expression for explaining deep semantic coherence. If one part of a text plays a key role in understanding the other part, there is a cohesive relation between the two parts [4]. Halliday argued that it was of little significance to study the cohesion within sentences in discourse analysis, but the cohesion between sentences was different. This is the basis on which the connection between sentences and a group of sentences are made. Cohesion relations without formal presupposition can be called "empty-ring" cohesion relations. A good text is cohesive through the repetition of words. There are two core concepts in lexical cohesion theory: "connection" and "connection" [5]. Some researchers believe that the expression and transmission of English language information "should not be confined to the grammatical category, but should be extended to the semantic level" [6].

Theoretically speaking, it is possible to form a connection relation centering on a word only if two or more connections are formed. Thus, there are many gaps in the language form, which in turn require the audience to guess the common knowledge, common cultural background and existing situational context of the speaker. In other words, In other words, cohesion is a means to achieve textuality. Cohesion is a formal connection that marks the relations between different sentences in a text. It is a means of text construction that enables the author or speaker to establish relations across sentence boundaries and make sentences in a text link together. In the traditional cohesion mode, this phenomenon is dealt with in lexical cohesion, but the fundamental difference between referential and lexical cohesion lies in identity.

### 3. Explicit Cohesive Devices

#### 3.1 Reference coherence

Reference refers to the same reference or "psychological object" in a coherent and repeated text. Text coherence means the consistency between concepts and their meanings in the text. Halliday's "substitution" and "omission" were renamed as "structural cohesion" for two reasons. First of all, the information of substitution and omission can only be recovered by comparing two structures, such as comparing noun phrase structure, verb phrase structure and even clause. Secondly, structural cohesion can include phenomena that Halliday-Hasan model fails to deal with. Cohesion is a semantic connection, which refers to the phenomenon that different components in a text are related in meaning. If one part of a text plays a key role in understanding the other, there is cohesive relationship between the two parts. Establishing various cohesive relations is an essential but not the only component in discourse construction. This kind of connection creates an "empty ring", also known as "vacant cohesion". The "vacancy" of discourse meaning is realized through situational context.

There is also a semantic structure at the higher level and macro level of the text. Coherence is a linguistic means to express different levels of commitment. For example, if a speaker hopes to bring some social benefits to voters and provide people with opportunities to increase their income in the future, he can use coherence. To achieve coherent discourse, it is necessary to the front to the back. In addition, various cohesive devices are also required depending on the scope permitted by its register. These cohesive devices provide us with direct and explicit linguistic clues, which are not only suggestive and beneficial to the generation and understanding of texts, but also one of the important means to establish coherent relations.

### **3.2 Relational coherence**

Discourse is the object and basic unit of translation. To maintain coherent semantics and clear organization in translation, translators are supposed to analyze the original text from the discourse level rather than translate words and sentences separately in the original text. Halliday held that discourse coherence must meet two conditions: cohesion from top to bottom and the requirements of register. Coherence can be implicit or implied, but it can also be expressed explicitly by connecting elements (such as conjunctions or adverb phrases). It can brilliantly and concisely reflect the close relationship between two things or reasons that restrict or depend on each other, clarify the organic connection of dialectical unity of things and make the two parts reflect each other and establish clear relationship.

Example 1: It has been said of the world's history hitherto that might makes right. It is for us and for our time to reverse the maxim, and to say that right makes might. (Abraham Lincoln).

Repeated words "might" and "right" are read sequentially and backwards, which are neat and symmetrical and creates a sequential loop.

Emotional system is people's emotional response and temperament to things or phenomena, which is mainly realized through the psychological process. It modifies the relationship process and conceptual metaphor (nominalization). Different languages differ in rhythm characteristics. English is an accented beat language. Where the duration from one stressed syllable to the next is roughly equal, which is called rhythm isochronism. In contrast, Chinese, French and Spanish belong to syllable beat languages with independent stress and syllable types all syllables seem to stand out equally in these languages [7]. This semantic structure is not manifested in the relationship between a certain proposition and other propositions, but in the overall meaning relationship between one group of propositions and other propositions. And that between the whole sequence of one group of propositions and other groups of propositions [8].

Example 2: For instance, why may not any portion of a new confederacy a year or two hence arbitrarily secede again, precisely as portions of the present Union now claim to secede from it? All who cherish disunion sentiments are now being educated to the exact temper of doing this(Abraham Lincoln).

It can be seen from the selected paragraph that the ellipsis in cohesion can't be found in the context, which is the characteristic of implicit cohesion both the audience or speaker can only infer it according to the situational context and cultural background information at that time. The so-called up-down cohesion refers to linking different components in a text in meaning by grammatical means (e.g., anaphora, ellipsis, substitution and connection) and lexical means (repetition, synonymy, hyponymy and collocation).

## **4. Implicit Cohesion Means**

### **4.1 Metaphor and discourse coherence**

In normal communications, discourse participants always rely on the assumed common knowledge as clues to understand discourse intention. Cohesion and coherence are multi-level instead of being limited to grammatical means and lexical means. The social symbol layer that includes context and pragmatics lies at the top of the multi-level model. Metaphor plays a tie role in the coherence mechanism of discourse. A metaphor is a semantic field that restricts the development of the whole discourse information. The negative transfer of Chinese syntax not only affects the expression of a single sentence in the target language, but also greatly impacts the processing of the whole text structure. To make up for this defect, Halliday later wrote a chapter on clause complex to analyze its logical semantic relationship. The former is shown as juxtaposition and master-slave relationship; the latter explains the semantic expansion of clauses according to detailed expansion and enhancement.

In English political speeches, independent adverbs are used prominently in some high schools of speech. In the grammatical sense, these independent adverbs are independent individuals with specific meanings. It is not reflected in the surface structure of discourse, but by means of deep-seated means such as cultural situation, communication information, psychological cognitive process and semantic empty-ring cohesion.

Example 3: So Bush certainly wasn't the greatest, and Obama has not done the job (Donald trump).

In this case, the speaker can fully arouse the curiosity of the audience, so that the audience can actively participate in the speech and enhance the dialogue function of the speech. The use of these adverbs can not only satirize competitors, but also express the speaker straightforwardly and properly compare themselves with their opponents as a way to belittle their opponents and build themselves up. When a speaker evaluates an event with an emotional expression, he is actually inviting audience to share that emotional response with him. Whether the audience is an American citizen or a foreigner who has never experienced the event, he will be influenced by the speaker's emotion and give his own emotional evaluation of the event.

#### ***4.2 Iconicity and discourse coherence***

Iconicity is a hot and important topic in cognitive linguistics. Iconicity refers to the inevitable connection between signifier and signified of language symbols. Iconicity plays a cohesive role in use. With the progress in text translation research, the role of cohesion and coherence has become increasingly prominent. There may be gaps in meaning between sentences in a paragraph. To make up for these gaps, it is necessary to study context, register, common knowledge of language users and the knowledge on cultural background. People are used to understanding more abstract experiences from basic physical experiences, taking abstract ideas, feelings and other intangible concepts as concrete and tangible entities, referring to them, quantifying them and categorizing them and discussing them rationally. In fact, when a speaker makes some emotional response to a thing or a phenomenon, he invites the audience to share his emotional response, or at least makes the audience think that his emotional response is correct, justified or understandable. There is certain inheritance relationship in meaning. They all contain some meaning components of root to different extents [9].

It is difficult for them to explain those linguistic phenomena that bear no formal cohesive markers but are semantically coherent or contain many formal cohesive markers. Cohesion is the relationship between surface language forms and propositions, whereas coherence is the relationship between communicative behavior.

Example 4: Can you go to Edinburgh tomorrow?

Generally speaking, the iconicity of a language can be divided into three categories: image iconicity, quasi-iconicity and metaphorical iconicity. Quasi-iconicity is more greatly relevant to language and literary texts. In the process of output, learners' assumptions about the interlanguage are constantly verified or overturned, thus making interlanguage move towards the target language and reducing the influence of language fossilization. Therefore, it is critical to carefully analyze the similarities and differences in cohesion between English and Chinese, fully consider how to follow each other's language habits, and re-express the original information in a way suitable for the target language readers in translation to ensure the translated text is cohesive and structured.

#### ***4.3 Communication and discourse coherence***

Discourse is the product of both rich human speech activities and complex human cognitive activities. It is difficult to describe it in a highly formalized way because it is highly idealized and abstract cognitive method that cannot fully reflect linguistic facts. For example, the rule of parallel connection in traditional grammar is not always applicable in discourse. When the parallel structure turns upside down and loops back and forth, the corresponding loop words are flexibly replaced in the second sentence to match the content. This still does not lose the rhythm and makes the aftertaste more meaningful.

Example 5: The Negro needs the white man to free him from his fears; the white man needs the Negro to free him from his guilt. ((Martin Luther King)).

In this case, the word "fears" is replaced by "guilt", which makes the loop structure neat and semantic prominent. If the speaker and the audience stay in a common cognitive environment, the information exchange between them will be smoother and smoother.

Speakers don't easily tell their moral or legal judgments about certain behavior directly. Instead, they leave room of maneuverability for the inconsistency between their own judgments and those of the audience. It is most common in English political speeches. As mentioned above, the use of imperative

sentences reflects the speaker's powerful position, but now the speaker wants to maintain equal relationship with the audience and win their support and trust. Most of the linking variables that are significantly correlated with the overall coherence of a text belong to the category of cross-paragraph variables, which is closely related to the relationship between paragraphs and the layout of a composition.

The information known by both parties is different from the cultural context mentioned above. Different pronouns give the speaker play different roles. Unlike the judgment system that evaluates human behavior, the appreciation system evaluates products and processes [10]. The connection of sentences doesn't have to depend on connectives. Sometimes, the zero form doesn't affect the semantic coherence nor does it damage the semantic cohesion. And the writing is concise.

Example 6: This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. (Martin Luther King).

In Example 6, Martin Luther King used "Swelling Summer" and "Invigorating Autumn". Obviously, due to slavery in American history, black people mostly lived in the extremely hot south of the United States. Since the speaker, audience and readers are familiar with the climate in the south, the content of the speech is understandable.

Discourse coherence exists not only at the linguistic level, but also at the non-linguistic level. The establishment of non-textual coherence mainly depends on some pragmatic principles and people's understanding of the objective world. When a process involves two participants, there is a problem of voice selection. For example, when students argue on a certain issue reading teaching, some teachers also hold the view of "personality teaching": it is good to have differences. English political speakers use other people's reporting factors, so that the audience can think that he is standing in a neutral position and the information he delivers is more objective and easily accepted by the audience. This will make it easier for him to gain trust from the audience.

## 5. Summary

Cohesion theory is an important theory of discourse coherence. Explicit cohesion and implicit cohesion are important components of cohesion theory. Not only can explicit cohesion mechanism deliver coherence of discourse meaning, but implicit cohesion mechanism is also an indispensable means to realize discourse semantics. The use of various rhetorical devices can enhance the effect of language expression, beautify the language, make people think and arouse emotions in English political speech. Different relations between the speaker and the audience can be created by making different choices audience/audience. In functional grammar, all levels play a role in the generation and meaning of discourse. It means the relevant cohesion and coherence categories are mainly realized at the semantic level. Linguistic approaches enable the speaker to properly choose his own identity and endow the audience with different identities. In this way, effective interactions can be established.

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