The Application of Cohesion and Coherence Theory in Advanced College English Teaching

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In 1976, Halliday and Hassan put forward the concept of cohesion and coherence theory for the first time in their book *English Cohesion* and discussed five types of cohesion: reference, substitution, omission, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Some scholars enriched and expanded cohesion and coherence from the perspective of cohesion conditions, phonology, structural relations at the level of meaning and discourse. Predecessors pay much attention to the theoretical discussion, while from the perspective of the theoretical application, the cohesion and coherence theory is used for analyzing the advanced college English textbook to provide the guidance for teachers and students in teaching and learning-teachers can judge and adopt appropriate teaching methods according to the cohesion and coherence theory; Students can understand cohesion and coherence in the text as well as the influencing factors, and adequately use the cohesion and coherence mechanism in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Keywords: cohesion and coherence theory, theoretical application, the advanced college English textbooks, teaching guidance

I. The Formulation and Development of the Cohesion and Coherence Theory

Halliday and Hasan firstly put forward the idea of cohesion in the book *Cohesion in English* (Halliday & Hassan, 2001) in 1976.

At the semantic level of a discourse, the relationship between meanings constitutes cohesion. Cohesion exists when the meaning of one component needs to be interpreted by the other (Halliday & Hassan, 2001).

Halliday and Hasan mainly discuss the five Cohesion types of Cohesion: reference, substitution, omission, conjunction and lexical cohesionin *Cohesion in English* (Halliday & Hassan, 2001). Hasan expands the scope of cohesion to the structural relations in text in the level of meaning in *Language, Context and Text* (Halliday & Hassan, 2001, p. F32). Zhuanglin Hu further expands the scope of cohesion in his monograph Cohesion and Coherence of Texts 1994 (Halliday & Hassan, 2001, p. F32). Firstly, the transitive structural relations are taken as a cohesive mean. Secondly, the cohesive device is put forward in the phonological layer and classifies the phonetic pattern into the cohesion range.

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Cohesion and coherence go hand in hand. Cohesion mechanisms and patterns are used to achieve logical coherence. Delu Zhang (1992, 1993, 1994) studies the coherence conditions in this paper and discusses the limiting effects of context, information structure, thematic structure and junctions on the coherence (Halliday & Hassan, 2001, p. F32). Besides these, the scope of cohesion mechanism and its relationship with discourse coherence are studied. The concept of external reference cohesion, which is regarded as the cohesion between the text and the discourse, and the one of the implicit cohesion are put forward. From this perspective, the external cohesion and the implicit cohesion will contribute to the text's coherence.

II. The Theoretical Application in Advanced College English Textbook.

To achieve the goal of textual coherence, cohesive mechanisms in a text is critical important. There are two kinds of cohesive mechanisms: overt and covert mechanisms. Explicit cohesion is expressed through surface structure, and the semantic relationship is clear. Explicit cohesion can be achieved by the grammatical devices: reference, substitutes, ellipsis, and conjunctions and lexical devices.

In *Language Context Discourse*, published by Halliday and Hassan in 1985, Hassan expanded the definition of cohesion and classified cohesion into structural cohesion and non-structural cohesion. The non-structural cohesion contains the cohesion of component relations and the cohesion of organic relations. The cohesion of constituent relations includes four of the five cohesive elements in Halliday and Hasan (1976): reference, substitution, ellipsis and lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hassan, 2001, p. F32). It corresponds to the lexical devices and lexical devices in the categorization of explicit cohesion.

The analysis follows about the grammatical devices-reference, substitutes, omission, conjunctions and lexical device of explicit mechanisms, taking *Ships in the Desert* (Zhang & Wang, 2010) in advanced English textbooks as the example.

A．Grammar Devices

1. Reference

Reference refers to the relationship between one linguistic element in a text and another that can be mutually interpreted (Zhu, 2001, p. 14). Halliday and Hasan classified the reference three categories: personal reference, indicative reference and comparative reference (Hu, 2001, p. 37).

> 1a. Industry meant coal, and later oil, and we began to burn lots of it—bringing rising levels of carbon dioxide, with its ability to trap more heat in the atmosphere and slowly warm the earth (Zhang & Wang, 2010, p. 27)

> 1b. 工业意味着煤而后是石油的消耗，我们开始燃烧大量的煤和石油---导致大气层中二氧化碳含量增加，而二氧化碳会使更多的热量停留在大气层中，进而使地球慢慢变暖。(Xue et al., 2015, p. 287)

In the original English sentence, the pronoun "it" presets to the preceding phrase. Instead of translating the pronoun "it" directly into "it," the Chinese use "mei he shi you " instead of "it" to refer to a sentence. To realize the cohesion of the text, it is prevalent in English by using the reference, while for Chinese, the text often is enhanced by repeating a word, phrase or sentence. It has been translated into the preceding phrase "mei he shi you", which indicates the preceding content.

In teaching, the teacher can judge whether the teaching method is appropriate according to the theory of cohesion and coherence. After the cohesion and coherence theory was taught, students are aware of the cohesive

mechanism of reference-it, and know how it makes the text coherent. Students are more sensitive to the reference of it in listening and speaking. The students can understand the connotation of it in the text better in reading and apply it in writing and translation. Thus, the students can enrich students' knowledge about the referential expressions, improve their command and better understand the coherence of the text.

2. Substitution

Another cohesive device is called substitution. Substitution refers to the usage of one word item to replace another word item. The substitution and the substituted one form the cohesive connection. Substitution not only avoids repetition in expression but also makes the discourse more coherent.

2a. Human civilization is now the dominant cause of change in the global environment. Yet we resist this fact and find it hard to imagine that our effect on the earth must now be measured by the same yardstick used to calculate the strength of the moon pull on the oceans or the force of the wind against the mountains (Zhang & Wang, 2010, p. 33)

2b. 人类文明如今已经成为地球环境变化的主要原因。然而，我们却不愿承认这一事实，并且觉得难以想象，我们给地球带来的影响现在得用测量月球对海洋的引力或风对高山的作用的标准来测量。(Xue et al., 2015, p. 289)

In the original text, "this fact" is used to replace the first sentence in paragraph and show the reason of environmental changes , which not only strengthens the connection between sentences and semantic coherence, but also avoids repetition and verbosity. And the theme of the phrase is highlighted by the separate sentence "We are unwilling to admit this fact".

In teaching the substitution application, teachers can judge whether the method is appropriate according to the theory of cohesion and coherence. After taught about this, students are aware of the cohesive mechanism of substitution and know how it makes the text coherent. Students are more sensitive to the substitution in listening and speaking. The students can understand the connotation of this fact in the text better in reading and apply the substitution in writing and translation. Students have increased their language knowledge about substitution, improved their ability to use substitution, and enhanced their ability to understand the coherence of the text

3. Omit

A language structure omits an element form, which is called omission. It is a concise, compact and clear rhetorical method used to avoid repetition (Halliday & Hasan, 2001, p. 61). Generally, the old and less information is omitted while the new or important one is retained. According to Halliday and Hassan, the omission can be classified into three categories-nominal omission, verbal omission and clause omission (Halliday & Hasan, 2001, p. 146).

3a. For example, it is now an axiom in many fields of science that more new and important discoveries have taken place in the last ten years than in the entire previous history of science. (Zhang & Wang, 2010, p. 34)

3b.例如，在许多科学领域中都有一个公认的事实，即在过去的10中产生的重大新发现比之前整个科学史上的总和还要多。 (Xue et al., 2015, p. 289)

Endophoric reference refers to the fact that a language component presents the textual context by what it referents in the text (Zhu, 2001, p. 16). The inner finger can be classified into an aphora and preindication. The anaphora foreshadows the above, and the preindication foreshadows the below (Zhu, 2001. p. 16).

The ahead pronoun "it" is a formal subject, which refers to the content of the following that clause. That is called a preindication. In English, however, textual cohesion requires clearly expressing the coordinate relations where the Chinese will not have to pay attention. The usage of the personal pronouns in English is more frequent than that in Chinese, while omitting and repeating in Chinese far exceed that in English (Zhu, 2001, p. 38).

In the teaching process, teachers can judge whether it is appropriate to use omission according to the cohesion and coherence theory. After taught about this, students are aware of the cohesive mechanism of omission and know-how omission makes the text coherent. Students get more and more sensitive to the omission in listening and speaking. In reading, the students can understand the connotation of omission better in text, then output and apply the omission in translation. Students have increased their language knowledge about omission, improved their ability to use omission, and enhanced their ability to understand the coherence of the text.

4. The conjunction

The conjunction is a means of using transitional words to express the logical relations in a text. Halliday and Hassan divide the connective components into four types: additive, transitional, causal and temporal (Hu, 1984, pp. 184-85). Chinese pay attention to parataxis, which connects a line through semantics in context. Then the conjunctions are omitted, and the logical relations are inferred from the meaning of the word without causing ambiguity. Native English speakers, however, pay attention to the form to express logical relations and the completeness of language structure depending on the conjunctions or phrases.

4a. The problem is not our effect on the environment so much as our relationship with the environment. As a result, any solution to the problem will require a careful assessment of that relationship as well as the complex interrelationship among factors within civilization and between them and the major natural components of the earth's ecological system. (Zhang & Wang, 2010, p. 35)

4b. 问题不是人类对环境的影响，而是人类同环境之间的关系。因此，任何解决这一问题的方法都需要认真评估那种关系，还要认真评估人类文明内部各要素之间的复杂关系以及这些要素与地球生态系统的各个主要自然组成部分之间的相互关系。(Xue et al., 2015, p. 289)

The consequence adverbial clause leading by "as a result", shows the causal relationship between the two sentences. "As a result" is added in the translation, so that the translation is smoother. The meaning focus shifts from the human's influence on the environment to the relationship between human beings and the environment.

In the teaching process, the teacher can judge whether the teaching method about conjunctions is appropriate or not according to the principle of cohesion and coherence. After learning, students are aware of the cohesive mechanisms of conjunction and learn how conjunction makes the text coherent. Students get more and more sensitive to the conjunction in listening and speaking. In reading, the students can better understand the conjunction of this fact in text and output and apply the conjunction in writing and translation. The students' language knowledge about conjunction and the ability to use conjunction is improved. Thus, the coherence of the text is better understood.

B. Vocabulary Devices

There are some circumstances called lexical cohesion when some words in a text are semantically related to each other, or they are repeated, or they are replaced by other words or appear together (Hu, Wang, & Xu, 1984, p. 112). Lexical cohesion is grouped as follows: repetition, general reference, similarity, classifiability and

collocation (Hu, Wang, & Xu, 1984, p. 115). Halliday and Hasan divide English lexical cohesion into word repetition and word co-occurrence. The repetition of a word refers to the original word, synonym, near-synonym, superword, hyponym, general word (Hu, Wang, & Xu, 1984, p. 115). Synchronization refers to the tendency of words appearing together in the actual use of language (Huang, 1998). A discourse appears to express the topic with related words which are more frequent and concentrated.

> 5. Nevertheless, during the earlier stages of the nuclear arms race, each of the superpowers assumed that its actions would have a simple and direct effect on the thinking of the other. For decades, each new advance in weaponry was deployed by one side for the purpose of inspiring fear in the other, but each such deployment led to an effort by the other to leapfrog the first one with a more advanced deployment of its own. Slowly, it has become apparent that the problem of the nuclear arms race is not primarily caused by technology. It is complicated by technology, true; but it arises out of the relationship between the superpowers and is based on an obsolete understanding of what war is all about. (Zhang & Wang, 2010, pp. 35-36)

The means of co-occurrence and repetition of words are used in this paragraph. "nuclear arms," "super powers", and "technology" are used repeatedly to express the national's race. The text also uses a set of synonyms "nuclear arms", "war" "weaponry", "leapfrog", "race", "technology" to express a rejection relationship. The means of word alternation help reform the words, avoid repetition and contribute to the cohesion and coherence of a text.

In the process of teaching, teachers can judge whether the teaching method of co-occurrence and repetition of words is appropriate according to the theory of cohesion and coherence. After taught about this, students are aware of the cohesive mechanism of co-occurrence and repetition and learn how co-occurrence and repetition make the text coherent. Students get more sensitive to the co-occurrence and repetition in listening and speaking. In reading, the students can better understand the co-occurrence and repetition of "this fact" in text and apply the co-occurrence and repetition in writing and translation. Students' language knowledge about co-occurrence and repetition and the usage ability of co-occurrence and repetition are improved, then students better understand the coherence of the text.

III. The Instructive Significance of the Theory for Teachers and Students in Teaching.

In the book of Cohesion, Halliday and Hassan put forward more than 20 principles of cohesion. They mainly involve reference, lexical cohesion, ellipsis and substitution, etc (Zhang & Liu, 2003, p. 261).

Among them, the cohesion principles in discourse are the focus of teaching.

Cohesion and coherence theory plays an essential role in the whole teaching process. On the one hand, whether the teaching language and the teaching environment are cohesive or not will show whether the teaching method is appropriate or not. The usage of the cohesion and coherence theory for teachers and students is effective in improving the teaching methods. On the other hand, the theoretical application of cohesion and coherence is very effective in organizing the teaching and solving the problems in language teaching (Zhang & Liu, 2003, p. 250).

By applying the cohesion and coherence theory in discourse teaching, students will be more sensitive to recognize and will have the propensity to apply cohesive mechanisms. In the whole process of knowledge impartation, knowledge transformation and actual language application training, students can gradually understand the coherence of the discourse; students can be able to explain why discourse is coherent and what are

the factors that make it coherent; In speaking and writing, students not only can produce a coherent discourse, but also can use the cohesive devices properly (Zhang & Liu, 2003, p. 266). In addition to avoiding language mistakes and improving language knowledge, students can cultivate students' main language quality, develop their "meaning potential" and improve their overall quality to achieve foreign language teaching (Zhang & Liu, 2003, p. 250).

IV. conclusion

With the focus of language theory shifting to the whole text, language learners pay more and more attention to text analysis. To achieve the effect of the overall text analysis, various cohesive mechanisms and the example of *Ships in The Desert* (Zhang & Wang, 2010) are combined to analyze the cohesion and the coherence in the text. In language teaching practice, teachers can judge the appropriateness of teaching methods according to the criteria of cohesion and coherence, then adjust and adapt the teaching method in time. In language learning practice, language learners not only can solve language learning problems but also can analyze the commonness and differences of the cohesion and coherence theory in English and Chinese. It is a good way for language learners learn to transform the cohesive mechanisms flexibly and get inspired to reproduce the textual cohesion and coherence inwriting and translation.

The above attempts to apply cohesion and coherence, the prominent theory of discourse analysis, in advanced college English teaching practice. Further research and discussion are needed for more profound problems.

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