COHESIVE TIES IN CARL SAGAN’S ‘PALE BLUE DOT’

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The article focuses on a study of cohesive ties in Modern English. The investigation is based on Carl Sagan’s ‘Pale Blue Dot’ (1994). The priority is given to highlighting the types of reiteration as main means of constructing the said text. We maintain that the specific feature of Carl Sagan’s ‘Pale Blue Dot’ is in intensive usage of lexical cohesive ties. The lexical cohesive ties in the text are of oppositeness, antonymy, synonymy. Collocations function as ‘topic holders’ and distant repetition conveys leitmotif ideas. Grammatical cohesive ties are used sparingly in places of semantic tension of the text.

Key words: distant reiteration, cohesion, consecutive reiteration, parallel construction, principles of textuality.

Introduction
A text contains specific language units for creating a coherent meaningful communicative product. Cohesion can be regarded as the principal component of the said resources. In this article cohesion is understood as the action or fact of forming a united whole [7, 338], and when viewed purely linguistically, it is one of the seven principles or standards of textuality outlined by R. Beaupre and W. Dressler (1981), with coherence, informativity, intentionality, intertextuality, situationality, acceptability to mention them all [1]. Influenced by the studies conducted by M. Halliday and R. Hasan, through last four decades, linguists have sought to explain and examine cohesive features of texts [3; 4; 5].

The aim
The aim of this investigation is to identify the scope and character of cohesive means used by guru Carl Sagan in his powerful text ‘Pale Blue Dot’ (1994).

The theoretical background
According to M. Halliday and R. Hasan (1976), the concept of cohesion is of semantic character [2]. It has to do with the relations of meaning within a text. When the interpretation of some element in the text is dependent on that of another,
a relation of cohesion is set up. The one presupposes the other, and cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. The said elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are integrated into a text. M. Halliday and R. Hasan’s interpretation of cohesion is further elaborated by putting forward the notion of a cohesive tie viewed as an occurrence of cohesively linked units. Cohesive ties are created in two ways: lexically and grammatically. Lexical cohesion is “the cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary” [2, 274]. Lexical cohesion includes reiteration (any type of repetition of words). Thus the relation between the two items is a relation by means of repetition, synonymy, or occurrence in the same lexical environment (ibid.). This relation may be: 1) one of oppositionness (patient/practitioner), 2) antonymy (love/hate), 3) converses (punishment/sin), 4) a relation between sets of words, 5) a relation between part-to-part (individual/society), 6) part-to-part (sin, guilt, crime), 7) co-hyponyms of the same general class [6]. Grammatical cohesion, in its turn, is structurally bound, and five main cohesive ties can be identified: reference (cataphoric/anaphoric), substitution (nominal, verbal and clausal), ellipsis (nominal, verbal, clausal), conjunction (coordinating (e.g. ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘but’), subordinating (e.g. ‘because’, ‘although’, ‘if’), and conjunctive adverbs (e.g.: ‘on the other hand’, ‘nevertheless’), and we add the sixth — parallel constructions to the list. The latter is effectively used by Carl Sagan as will be subsequently shown.

Methods

This investigation is explanatory in nature and follows the research method for the cohesive analysis of a text (M. Halliday and R. Hasan [1976]).

In the text under analysis lexical and grammatical cohesive ties are used unevenly. The sentences b, c, d, of the example (1) contain parallel constructions, and fit to the SVA/C pattern, which is closely followed by OVS pattern with who / that in deep structure. In doing so Carl Sagan achieves the informative saturation of the message, compressing it into short, abrupt fragments. Then the pace slows down, the series of short sentences is broken and the tension is released by introducing a long sentence, but semantic pressure is still maintained with the help of lexical cohesive ties, e.g. initial that’s (b), (c), (d)), abundant everyone, ever, every (e). The said repetition of the cohesively linked units is followed by a semantically related pair lived lives (e). Sentence (f) contains a mixture of lexical and grammatical cohesive ties. The coordinating conjunction and connects consecutive lexical cohesive ties of various shades of relations ranging in this article in decreasing order: converse (hunter and forager; mother, father, child), oppositionness (hero and coward, inventor and explorer, creator and destroyer; morals — corrupt), antonymy (joy and suffering; king and peasant), relation between words (religions, ideologies, doctrines). Semantically related words are repeatedly introduced by every which strengthens the link of the part of the text under investigation. And again there is a distant repetition of the word lived. Let’s turn our attention to cataphoric — anaphoric relations in the example (1). In a) cataphoric that dot is explicated by here, home (b, c) and anaphoric-cataphoric there in f).

Cataphoric us is fully detailed in e), f):

(1)

a) Look again at that dot.
b) That’s here [SVA].
c) That’s home [SVC].
d) That’s us [SVC].
e) On it everyone you love [OSV], everyone you know [OSV], everyone you ever heard of [OSAV], every human being who ever was, LIVED out their LIVES.
f) The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every “superstar,” every “supreme leader,” every saint and sinner in the history of our species LIVED there — on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

In the example (2) the nature of repetition is slightly different from what we observe in (1). The lexical ties are predominantly based on relations of synonymy (stage — arena in g); glory and triumph h; generals, emperors, masters in h)). There are still sporadic occurrences of lexical repetitions of the same element, e.g. j) inhabitants or based on antonymy or oppositionness g): small — vast; one — other the latter are followed either by synonyms (stage — arena) or repetition of the same word (corner), which to a certain extent smoothes the polarity of the thought expressed. Parallel constructions in the form of initial Think of (h), i) and how they / how their (in i) add to the impression of hopeless tiredness (frequent, endless in 2 i) from absurdity of events happening on Earth. And again there is a drop of the word KILL, almost unnoticed (in i)), but this is a leitmotif marker together with LIVE in (1, i) and (f)):

(2)

g) The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena.
h) Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot.
i) Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to KILL one another, how fervent their hatreds.

Let’s turn our attention to example (3), which also differs from (1) and (2). The first thing that meets
the eye is the shift from the 3d person plural pronoun
they / their in (2) to the 1st person plural our / us / ourselves in (3). I think, it is the author’s intentional movement from past, distant events to present situation that we bear full responsibility for. The lexical cohesive ties are of part-to-part relations (posturings, self-importance, privileged position in (3 j)). Besides there are lexical cohesive ties with implicit semantic relation of antonymy: point of pale light — vastness (3 j, l)); lonely speck — great cosmic dark (3 k);

(3)
   j) Our posturings, our imagined self-importance,
the delusion that we have some privileged position
in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale
light.

k) Our planet is a lonely speck in the great
enveloping cosmic dark.

l) In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is
no hint that help will come from elsewhere to SAVE us
from ourselves.

The text fragment (4) is constructed on 1)
endophoric reference nowhere else (4 m)), which
extrapolates anaphorically to vast cosmic arena (2 g),
the Universe (3 j)) and 2) on grammatical cohesive
ties (ellipsis in 4 o), p)). The final part of the text (5)
is entirely anaphoric: (5 r) humbling and character-
building, (5 s) folly of human conceits, (5 t) more
kindly refer to fragments (2) and (3). We, our (5 t)
anaphorically ties all personal deictics in (1) — (4).
And distant repetition of ever echoes the fragment
(1 e), f)). Cf.:

(4)
   m) The Earth is the only world known so far
to harbor LIFE.

n) There is nowhere else, at least in the near
future, to which our species could migrate.
   o) Visit, yes.
   p) Settle, not yet.
   q) Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where
we make our stand.

(5)
   r) It has been said that astronomy is a humbling
and character-building experience. s) There is perhaps
no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits
than this distant image of our tiny world.

t) To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal
more kindly with one another, and to preserve and
cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we’ve ever
known.

The text under analysis contains collocations
(the association of one word with another from the
preceding text), which are grey colour highlighted:

(1) a) Look again at that dot. ....................
    f) a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.
(2) g) The Earth ..................... a fraction of a dot.
    i) ...................................... this pixel.
(3) j) point of pale light.
    k) Our planet is a lonely speck in the great
    enveloping cosmic dark.
(4) m) The Earth is the only world ................
    q) the Earth
(5) r) our tiny world.
    t) ........................................ the pale blue dot.

In (1) these collocations are placed to form a frame,
embracing the whole fragment like a container filled
with the explanation, who inhabits that dot. The second
example (2) explicates the meaning of the planet
the Earth at the very beginning, then at some distance
goes a fraction of a dot followed distantly by this
pixel. No frame arrangement observed. In (3, j, k)
the collocations are immediately close adding sense
to one another. In (4, m, q)) the distant repetition of the Earth + collocations to denote LIFE form a kind of
frame. And the fragment (5) has a collocation
r) tiny world and t) pale blue dot crowns it all, being
distant repetition of (1 a) and thus presenting a sequence EARTH is HOME for LIFE. The just
mentioned notions occur in the text with varying
degree of intensity. EARTH is the dominant topic,
HOME and LIFE are leitmotiv repetition holding
the whole text together. Sporadically used KILL and
SAVE semantically relate to LIFE.

Conclusions
Carl Sagan’s Pale Blue Dot is constructed
primarily on lexical cohesive ties, grammatical ones
are employed only in places of semantic tension,
therefore are secondary.

REFERENCES

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