Variability of Cohesive Devices Across Registers

Janina Buitkienė

Abstract. As throughout our lives we deal with a great variety of texts and discourses, we intuitively know what lexical and syntactical patterns we should use when we want to produce discourse appropriate to certain situations. Text producers and recipients also feel that in some cases they are free to choose from a variety of linguistic means to express their communicative purposes, while in others there are strict regulations imposed on what lexis and syntactical structures to use. Thus, the paper aims to investigate frequency and distribution of cohesive devices across registers. Three texts belonging to different registers were analysed: a legal text is considered as a sample of a restricted register, a short story belongs to an open-ended register, while a newspaper article could be placed somewhere in the middle of this continuum. The major groups of cohesive devices were taken into consideration: lexical cohesive ties, referential cohesive devices, ellipsis / substitution cohesive ties, and discourse markers taken together with conjunction. The results obtained prove that lexical cohesive devices, being members of open systems, prevail in the texts belonging to different registers. Distribution of different types of cohesive devices within the general framework is, however, influenced by register. Closed registers give preference to lexical cohesion at the expense of reference, ellipsis and substitution.

Introduction

The paper presents a study of the correlation between cohesive devices (their distribution and frequency) and different registers. The issue was chosen due to the fact that the correlation between register and cohesive devices has not been thoroughly investigated in linguistics. The results of the analysis of cohesive devices in scientific and fiction texts as well as newspaper articles prove that cohesive devices could be attributed to the factors, which, in distributional patterns of cohesive devices, depend directly on the type of register chosen for a particular situation or audience. The aim of the paper specified the choice of the material: a short story, a newspaper article, and a legal text. The texts were chosen taking into consideration the fact that registers vary from closed / limited to relatively free (Halliday and Hasan, 1991; Esser, 1993). Thus, on this continuum, the language of the short story (by K. Mansfield "The Tiredness of Rosabel") could be defined as a sample of an open-ended register, while the legal text, i.e. restricted register ("Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament relating to common positions") is placed at the other end, the newspaper article being placed in the middle (The Times and Times Online, considered as one piece). All the texts are approximately of the same length, i.e. ~ 6,500-7,000 characters. The following major groups of cohesive devices were taken into account: lexical cohesive ties, referential cohesive devices, ellipsis / substitution-type cohesive ties, and discourse markers taken together with conjunction.

General Overview of the Distribution and Frequency of Cohesive Devices

As the Figures in figure 1 show, *lexical cohesive devices* constitute the majority of cohesive ties in all texts: 52% in the short story, 84% in the newspaper article, and even 91% in the legal piece. The result was predictable, as many researchers agree that lexical cohesion predominates (Hoey, 1991).

Reference comprises 41% of all cohesive devices in the short story, 12% in the newspaper article, and 4% in the legal text.
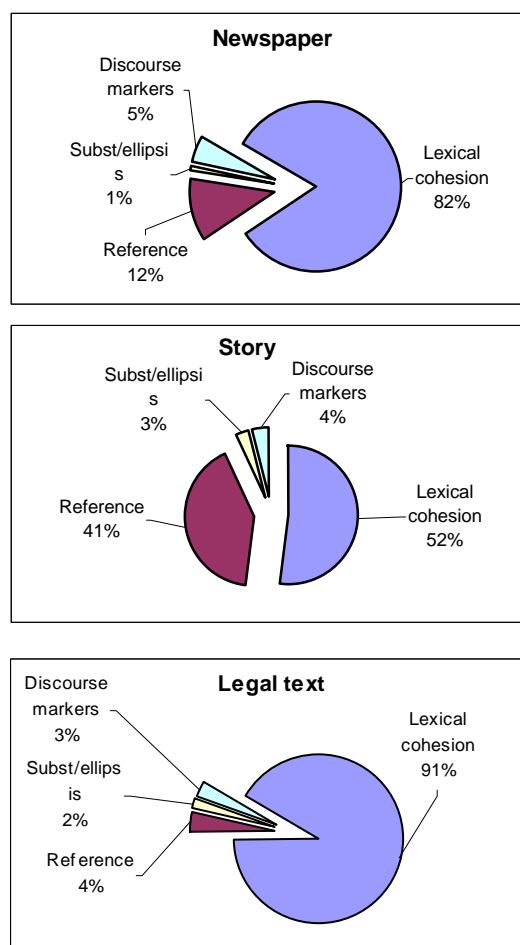

Figure 1. Distribution of cohesive devices in different registers.

The difference in the percentage depends on the registers texts belong to. As more restricted registers strive for clarity and avoidance of ambiguity which can easily occur because

referential items tend to be connected to the wrong antecedent (Hoey, 1991; Bhatia, 2004), the language of the newspaper article and the legal text demonstrates a lower percentage of referential links. Consequently, to ensure textual cohesion, both the newspaper article and the legal text rely more on lexical cohesive devices. The language of the short story, on the other hand, allows greater variation in the choice of cohesive devices.

To avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding, low percentage of *substitution / ellipsis* is traced in the newspaper article (1%) and the legal text (2%). A higher percentage of this type of cohesive devices in the short story (3%) demonstrates that it is more characteristic of conversation, dialogue, or the representation of thought in fiction. The distribution of *discourse markers* in the texts is as follows: 4% in the short story, 5% in the newspaper article, and 3% in the legal text. The lowest percentage of discourse markers in the legal text could be explained by the fact that it is an extract of the rules of procedure (official document) and, as every legal document, is divided into smaller clear-cut parts (e.g., "Rule 74 Communication on the Council's common position", "Rule 75 Extension of time limits", etc.). Therefore, the need of discourse markers to connect different parts of discourse is not so relevant.

The Distribution and Frequency of Lexical Cohesive Devices

Lexical cohesion comprises the following categories of lexical ties. *Simple lexical repetition* comprises cases (Hoye, 1991) when a lexical item that has already occurred in a text is repeated with no greater alternation than is explicable in terms of a closed grammatical paradigm. For example, *was looking* is a simple lexical repetition of *looked.* Following Hoey, *complex lexical repetition* occurs when two lexical items share a lexical morpheme, but are not formally identical, or when they are formally identical but have different grammatical functions. For example, *drug* and *drugging,* or *human* (n) and *human* (adj.). *Synonymy* is understood rather widely here to include the repetition of a synonym, near synonym, or the use of a general word (Halliday&Hasan, 1976). The class of general nouns is a small set of nouns having generalized reference, e.g. *person, thing, stuff,* etc. Under *synonymy* we also include such lexical items the cohesive effect of which depends not so much on any systematic relationship as on their tendency to share the same lexical environment, situation, or to occur in collocations with one another: *candle – flicker, beach – sunshine, hair – comb,* etc. *Hyponymic repetition* includes the use of superordinate. *Meronymy* describes pairs of lexical items related as part to whole, while *antonymy* – pairs of opposites (Ellis, 1992).

The figures in Figure 2 show that *simple lexical repetition* predominates in all texts: 79% in the short story, 83% in the newspaper article, and 90% in the legal text. Simple lexical repetition can be defined as the most stable way of pointing to a particular referent. Therefore, the highest number of this type of cohesive ties is observed in the legal text – a piece of writing which requires precision and clarity, while the short story and the newspaper article leave more space for other types of cohesive devices. In contrast, complex lexical repetition takes up a considerably smaller part in all texts: 5% in the newspaper article, and 6% in

the legal text, and 4% in the short story. An important point to note here is that there exists a clearly observable relationship between the lexical items used in the headlines and the number of repetitions of the same lexemes in the texts themselves – the nominative chains involving lexemes used in headlines are considerably longer than any other chains. This demonstrates that text producers, despite the register type, place the key information in the headline.
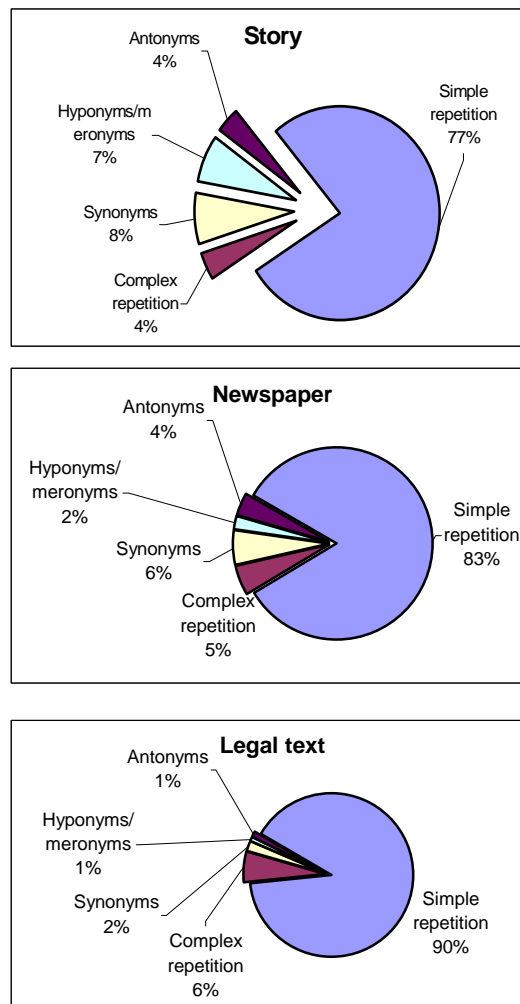

Figure 2. Distribution of lexical cohesive devices.

Synonyms (understood in the above presented wide scope) demonstrate the following distributional pattern: 8% in the short story, 6% in the newspaper article, and 2% in the legal piece. There were observed synonymic only situation-dependent ties. E. g. the relationship between *simple* lift and *inexpensive* lift (the short story) is purely situational – these words would not be understood as synonyms in another context. *Hyponymy* and *meronymy* constitute 1% in the legal extract, 2% in the newspaper article, and 7% in the short story. Antonyms are not used extensively either: 1, 4, and 2% accordingly. Thus, as *synonyms, hyponyms, meronyms,* and *antonyms* imply some degree of ambiguity, they are not extensively used in newspaper and legal texts; they are more typical of fiction. The synonymic ties in the newspaper article and the legal piece include close or near synonyms, e.g. d*ocument – text, the poor – less well-off families*, etc.

The Distribution and Frequency of Referential Ties

Reference first evolved as an exophoric relation, and the basic referential category of *person* was deictic. Naturally, the first and second persons *I* and *you* retain their deictic sense, whereas the third persons, *he, she, it,* or *they,* although possible to use deictically, are more often anaphoric or cataphoric – they point either back to the preceding text or forward to the following information. Therefore, of the personal pronouns only *he, she, it,* and *they* are treated as fulfilling a cohesive function, while *I, you,* and *we* are purely exophoric and, consequently, not taken into account in this research. Possessive determiners are considered here as a separate and independent group of personal reference. Other types of reference considered are:

- *Demonstrative reference* understood as reference by means of location on a scale of proximity (expressed by determiners *this, these, that, those,* locative demonstratives *here, there,* and temporal demonstratives *now, then*).

- *Comparative reference* contributes to textual cohesion by setting up a relation of contrast or contrast and is expressed by such adjectives as *same, identical, equal,* adjective in a comparative degree, and adverbs such as *identically, likewise, so, such,* etc.

Closely related in meaning to demonstrative pronouns is the *definite article* which, however, was not taken into consideration in this research because of its prolific nature and the considerable amount of time and effort necessary to process each instance.

The prevailing type of referential items in the story and newspaper texts is personal pronouns, while in the legal discourse their percentage is twice lower. Literary text, as well as a newspaper article, being more person-centred, involves more personal pronouns compared to other referential items. Personal pronouns *he, she, it,* etc. most often refer to characters, people described, items discussed. But the legal text, due to its nature (earlier and further sessions being compared) gives preference to comparative reference. A major difference among registers can be noticed in the case of possessives which also predominate in the story (41%). These referential items express either the relationship of "ownership" between two lexical items, e.g. *the girl – her brougham,* or the so-called "inalienable part", e.g. *the girl – her first finger.* Differently, a much lower percentage (7) of possessive pronouns in the newspaper article can be accounted for by the fact that the article on economics cannot allow ambiguities. Instead, the nouns in the genitive case, such as *Brown's, Government's,* are employed. Demonstrative reference is more typical of the newspaper and legal discourse. For example, in the newspaper article demonstratives function as devices connecting bigger portions of discourse, e.g. *That means…, This compares…*
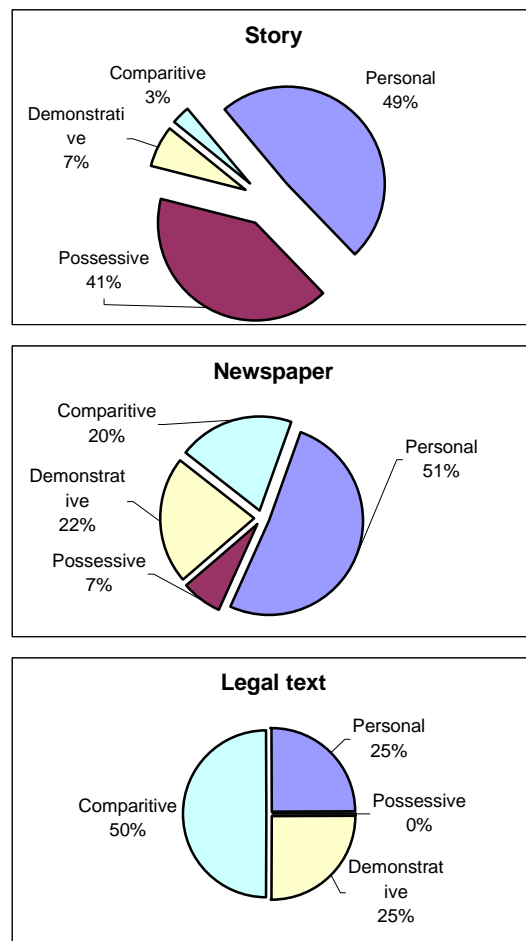

Figure 3. Distribution of referential ties.

The Distribution and Frequency of Ellipsis / Substitution-type Ties

Substitution and ellipsis are variants of the same time of cohesive relation. When ellipsis is used, we presuppose something by means of what is left out. A substitute serves as a place-holding device or some pro-form, showing where something has been omitted and what its grammatical function could be. Ellipsis as well as substitution help to avoid repetition and depend entirely on the hearer's / reader's ability to retrieve the missing information from the surrounding co-text. According to McCarthy (1991), ellipsis is the omission of elements normally required by the grammar which the speaker / writer assumes are obvious from the context and therefore need not be raised. Both substitution and ellipsis can only be used when there is no doubt as to what is being substituted or ellipted. Otherwise, the result might be a total confusion.

As it can be seen from Figure 1, the need to be precise and avoid confusion accounts for fewer cases of ellipsis / substitution in legal (2%) and newspaper (1%) discourses, while this type of cohesion is more typical of conversation and literary texts.

The Distribution and Frequency of Discourse Markers

The last group of analyzed cohesive devices is *discourse markers.* The term itself is two-facet. On the one hand, there are linguists (Stubbs, 1995) who argue that discourse markers

are purely conversational. The examples of such discourse markers are *well, like, right, so, now, okay,* and the like. On the other hand, there are language researchers (McCarthy, 1991; Aijmer, 2002) who claim that the term *discourse markers* embraces not only conversational words but also conjunctions. Both the views were taken into account in this paper, and this term was used and understood as involving all the above-mentioned means possessing cohesive force in a text. Their distributional pattern in the analyzed texts does not differ greatly.

Conclusions

1. The distribution and frequency of cohesive devices depend directly on the degree of "openness" of a register, i.e. the more open the register, the more various cohesive devices are being employed and vica versa.

2. Lexical cohesive devices are the most extensively used ties in texts belonging to different registers. They constitute the major part of cohesive ties in all the three varieties of texts, therefore the study of lexis could be considered as the study of the major part of cohesion. Simple lexical repetition is the most often used cohesion-ensuring cohesive device as well as the most steady way of pointing to a particular referent; therefore, the highest number of this type of cohesive ties is observed in the legal text – a text which requires an unambiguous approach to the matter. On the other hand, the short story and the newspaper article (texts more or less tolerating some degree of ambiguity) leave more space for other types of cohesive devices, both grammatical and lexical.

3. Reference, constituting the second major group of cohesive devices, is clearly register-dependent: restricted registers employ more lexical ties at the expense of referential cohesive devices, while in open registers reference is used extensively. The short story, belonging to a relatively free register, naturally employs a higher number of referential cohesive devices and appeals more to the reader's emotions than to precision, while the newspaper article, being more restricted, and the legal text, the most closed register type, employ considerably fewer reference items. The prevailing type of referential items is personal pronouns, while possessive pronouns are much fewer due to the fact that they are restricted in their grammatical distribution: they require a recoverable head noun, or they are limited to special construction types. This explains the overall frequency of these forms in relation to personal pronouns. Substitution / ellipsis type ties are also register-dependent – more usually employed in open registers and avoided in the restricted ones. Demonstrative pronouns refer, mostly in more restricted registers, back to bigger parts of discourse – preceding sentences or paragraphs – relating them in this way.

4. The analysis also shows that ellipsis / substitution tend to occur in open registers more often than in restricted ones. It is universally acknowledged that substitution and ellipsis belong to the realm of conversation, dialogue or fiction. Consequently, it is predictable that the language of the short story includes more instances of ellipsis / substitution.

5. Discourse markers are used more or less equally in all registers because they do not hinder the interpretation of the message and can be considered neutral in comparison to other cohesive devices. All the discourse markers in the texts of analyzed registers demonstrated a unified tendency to connect larger parts either contrasting, linking parts within a sequence or presenting some result.

References

1. Aijmer, K. (2002). *English Discourse Particles. Evidence from a corpus.* John Benjamins Publishing Company.

2. Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of Written Discourses.* Continuum.

3. Ellis, D. G. (1992). *From Language to Communication.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

4. Esser, J. (1993). *English Linguistic Stylistics.* Max Niemeyer Verlag.

5. Halliday, M. A. K., Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English.* Longman.

6. Halliday, M. A. K., Hasan, R. (1991). *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-semiotic Perspective.* Oxford University Press.

7. Hoey, M. (1991). *Patterns of Lexis in Text.* Oxford University Press.

8. McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers.* Cambridge University Press.

9. Stubbs, M. (1995). *Discourse Analysis.* Basil Blackwell.

Janina Buitkienė

Registro ir tarpfrazinių ryšio priemonių koreliacija

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama registro ir tarpfrazinių ryšio priemonių koreliacija. Teisinio, publicistinio ir grožinio tekstų analizė leidžia teigti, kad teksto kohezija, kuri yra realizuojama kalbos leksine-gramatine sistema, gerai atspindi teksto priklausymą laisvos ar griežtos struktūros registrui. Registras daro įtaką ryšio priemonių atrankai ir jų kiekybiniam pasiskirstymui tekste. Nors tyrimas parodė, kad visuose tekstuose vyrauja leksinis ryšys ir referencija, konkrečių rišlumo priemonių pasirinkimas skirtingų registrų tekstuose yra gerai pastebimas. Grožiniame tekste ryšio priemonių atranką lemia ir autoriaus stilius.

The Author

Janina Buitkienė, Ph. D. in linguistics, works at Department of English Philology, Vilnius Pedagogical University, Lithuania.
Area of research interests and main research results: discourse analyses, pragmatics, literary text analysis, ESP. The author has published about fifteen papers dealing with text cohesion and coherence, functioning of cohesive devices in English and Lithuanian, needs analysis in ESP; she has also participated in conferences in Lithuania, Germany, Croatia. The above mentioned issues have been covered during lectures in Kristiansand (Norway), Heidelberg (Germany) and London (Great Britain).
Address: Department of English Philology, Vilnius Pedagogical University, Studentų 39, LT- 08106 Vilnius, Lithuania.
E-mail: janina.buitkiene@vpu.lt