

TEACHING TEXTUAL COHESION THROUGH ANALYSES OF DEFOE'S *MOLL FLANDERS* AND SWIFT'S *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

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RESUMEN

La coherencia y la legibilidad de un texto la crea, por un lado, el escritor en su elección de los elementos léxicos, semánticos y sintácticos que lo componen y, por otro, el lector en su relación con el texto y en su integración de estos elementos en un todo. Estas páginas representan un intento de definir, en primer lugar, un marco teórico –y un instrumento de análisis– relativo a la coherencia/cohesión de un texto a nivel de párrafo y, en segundo lugar, un ejemplo de la aplicación de este instrumento al análisis, comparación y contraste de los estilos de Defoe en *Moll Flanders* y de Swift en *Gulliver's Travels*.

Este artículo intenta a la vez mostrar cómo textos literarios como *Moll Flanders* y *Gulliver's Travels* pueden analizarse mediante el uso de patrones de cohesión. Y como se verá, el lector es capaz de procesar la prosa de Swift con mucha más facilidad que la de Defoe. Swift, en contraste con Defoe, parece planear con sumo cuidado su prosa y es capaz de conseguir en ésta una gran coherencia/cohesión mediante la perfecta combinación de sus componentes sintácticos, léxicos y semánticos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Coherencia, cohesión, cohesión léxica, cohesión semántica, cohesión sintáctica, coherencia léxica, coherencia semántica, nexos, estilo, legibilidad, oración temática, retórica, modelos retóricos.

ABSTRACT

The coherence and readability of a text is created by the writer, through semantic, lexical and syntactic choices, and by the reader through his interaction with the text and the further integration of details into a whole. The following pages will offer, first, a theoretical framework –and an instrument of

analysis— for the definition of coherence/cohesion at the level of the paragraph and, second, an example of the application of this instrument to the analysis, through comparison and contrast of the styles of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

This paper also attempts to show the way literary texts such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* can be analyzed using cohesive patterns. Such an analysis of these patterns reveals that the reader can process Swift's prose much more easily than Defoe's. Swift, unlike Defoe, planned his prose more carefully and thus achieves a greater coherence/cohesion by the perfect meshing of the semantic, lexical and syntactic structures within the texts.

KEY WORDS

Coherence, cohesion, lexical cohesion, semantic cohesion, syntactic cohesion, lexical coherence, semantic coherence, markers, style, readability, topic sentence, rhetoric, rhetorical patterns.

0. INTRODUCTION

Cohesion provides the basic rule by which writers and speakers play the language game, from a simple exchange of utterances to the rich expression of a Petrarchan sonnet. Authors like Swift use it skillfully to generate readable prose; others like Defoe seem to be unaware of it. Several literary critics concur with these conclusions by pin-pointing the apparent internal inconsistencies and lack of coherence of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (Watt 1971, p. 99) which contrasts with the plain, simple style of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Foot 1985, p. 7).

The coherence and readability of a text is created by the writer, through semantic, lexical and syntactic choices, and by the reader through his/her interaction with the text and the further integration of details into a whole. Analysis of two eighteenth century works reveals that Swift's prose is much more easily processed by the reader than is Defoe's. One might say, as does Williams (1979, pp. 595-609), that from the reader's point of view, Swift's style is simple while Defoe's is complex; however, from the writer's point of view, the opposite occurs. Achieving clarity and simplicity of style is much more difficult for the writer than is producing complexity.

The following pages will offer, first, a theoretical framework for the definition of cohesion at the level of the paragraph and, second, an example of the application of this instrument to the analysis, through comparison and contrast, of the styles of Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The detailed analysis of a few key paragraphs highlights and epitomizes the relationship between sentences which these writers develop to produce cohesion or the lack thereof. Thus, besides considering semantic and syntactic cohesion, the analysis will explore related concepts such as digressive sequences¹, levels of generality², topic sentences³ and paragraph length⁴. For the purpose of clarity and brevity, I will consider a sentence as a group of words enclosed by two periods or by a period and a semicolon. Long sentences consisting of sequences of subordinate clauses will be analyzed mainly from the point of view of their main clauses (i.e. elements occupying the position of grammatical subjects). Coordinate sequences (i.e. repeating an anaphoric "and") will be accounted for when they contain an independent subject and verb.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Authors disagree on the difference between coherence and cohesion. Some assume coherence to be a function of cohesion; that is, cohesion refers to local connections that produce a coherent whole. Others see cohesion as embracing both coherence and local connections. Actually both groups differ only in their semantic or syntactic points of view. The former (or traditional definition) views coherence as a semantic phenomenon and cohesion as a set of lexical ties that can only create a local coherence. The latter sees cohesion mainly from a syntactical perspective in which the syntactic elements are not simple cohesive ties, but paradigms embracing whole paragraphs. This paper approaches cohesion from semantic/lexical, syntactic and rhetorical points of view and as embracing, mainly from a reader's perspective, a coherent whole.

¹ A sentence or group of sentences which bear little or no relationship with preceding or following sentences.

² A semantic term implying a movement from a leading or topic sentence.

³ A topic sentence generally indicates what the paragraph is about, what it will describe or discuss. Betty Bomber believes that a clearly stated topic sentence as well as appropriate organizational patterns create coherence. Betty Bamber, "What Makes a Text Coherent", *College Composition and Communication*, 4, december 1983, p. 417.

⁴ For further explanation of these terms, see Ángel F. Sánchez Escobar, "La retórica contrastiva del párrafo inglés y sus repercusiones en la enseñanza del inglés escrito", *Gramática contrastiva inglés-español*, Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Huelva, 1996.

Halliday and Hasan, in *Cohesion in English*, define cohesion from a lexical perspective (1976). They identify two main categories in lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation or placement. In reiteration, the lexical items refer back to another term to which they are related through a common referent (repetition of same word, a synonym, a superordinate word, a general word.) In collocation, cohesion is achieved through the close co-occurrence of relatively low frequency words that appear in similar contexts:

Types and categories of lexical cohesion (Halliday and Hasan).

<i>I. Reiteration</i>	<i>II. Collocation</i>
A type of cohesion in which one lexical element is related through a common referent to a previous element as a:	A type of cohesion in which one lexical element is related to a previous one through frequent co-occurrence in similar contexts by:
1. Repetition (e.g., power/power)	1. Association with a particular topic (e.g., Marx, class conflict, social change)
2. Synonym or near-synonym (e.g., lack of order/chaos)	2. Opposition or contrast (e.g., influence/counterinfluence)
3. Superordinate word (e.g., furniture/chair)	3. Membership in ordered sets (June/July)
4. General word (e.g., power/this entity)	4. Membership in unordered sets (blue/yellow)

For pedagogical purposes, Stotsky reorders Halliday's and Hassan's framework by considering reiteration mainly as a set of semantically related words and by adding to it a fifth factor that creates cohesion: derivation or repetition of a derivational element (1983, p. 441).

Fahnestock agrees with Halliday and Hasan on their ideas about lexical cohesion; however, she perceives one more level, the semantic relationship. She further distinguishes two types of semantic relations between clauses: continuative and discontinuative, which she describes along with related transition words (1983, pp. 400-406) [see diagram on next page]:

Markels (1983, pp. 450-464) sees cohesion as both a semantic and syntactic phenomenon. According to her, semantic ties, generally based on item repetition, obviously contribute to cohesion. She lists the following cases:

Semantic and lexical coherence (Jeanne Fahnestock).

<i>Continuative Relations</i>			<i>Discontinuative Relations</i>			
<i>Sequence</i> Then next	<i>Restatement</i> that is in other words in short	<i>Exemplification</i> for example for instance thus	<i>Premise</i> because since	<i>Anomalous Sequence</i> earlier formuch later meanwhile	<i>Replacement</i> rather instead	<i>Exception</i> even though although though granted of course
<i>Conclusion</i> therefore hence so consequently thus then	<i>Similarity</i> likewise similarly	<i>Addition</i> and so moreover furthermore in addition too finally nor	<i>Denied Implication</i> Nevertheless still	<i>Contrast</i> on the other hand on the contrary conversely	<i>Alternation</i> or otherwise	

But/yet/however: These three words can signal several relations.

1. The straightforward recurrence of a term: "The boy climbed the *trees*. The *trees* were oaks."
2. Synonymy: "The *boy* climbed the fence. The *youth* is a gang member."
3. A more complex kind as the class member relationship: "I wanted some apples. But *they* were all sold out."

Markels agrees that there are sentences that contain some semantic ties but yet lack cohesion:

John likes *oranges*. *Oranges* grow in *California* and Florida. My parents visited *California* last year.

Thus, for Markels, a second step is to describe how recurrences are incorporated into sentences. This can be done with the kernel S.V.O. (subject, verb, object), which controls the functions of these semantic ties, generates the relationship among internally cohesive parts, and offers the basis for an operational definition of cohesion. She adds that cohesion is achieved when a dominant term, explicit or implicit, consistently appears in both the most prominent semantic and syntactic position. Dominance is achieved not simply by the repetition of a term but by the recurrent appearance of those repeated elements in the subject position. If the repeated term does not appear in the position of grammatical subject, dominance is not achieved, and the paragraph lacks cohesion. Hence, cohesion requires the meshing of both semantic and syntactic information.

An increasing amount of research on coherence and cohesion has appeared recently, (See Hoey, 1991; McCarthy, 1991; or Nunan, 1993), but further comments on this topic would go beyond the scope of this study. The different approaches to cohesion/coherence defined above play key roles in the analytical framework developed for this paper. The lexical, semantic, and syntactic components of cohesion offer a very useful tool for the analysis, comparison and contrast of textural patterns in literary texts such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

II. COHESION IN PRACTICE

The variation in paragraph length strikes the reader of Swift and Defoe immediately because paragraphs in *Gulliver's Travels* are gener-

ally longer than those in *Moll Flanders*⁵. For example, at the beginning of *Gulliver's Travels* a single paragraph contains 87 sentences. Furthermore, Swift generally places a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph containing all the incoming information. Defoe, on the other hand, offers less clear opening sentences in his paragraphs and tends to place a digressive sequence at the end of many of them. Thus, the consideration of the topic sentence provides a very valuable instrument for the analysis of textual cohesion.

The following paragraph from *Gulliver's Travels* illustrates Swift's typical use of a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph. One notices how clearly the first sentence of the following paragraph prepares the reader for what follows:

(1) *These people are most excellent mathematicians, and arrived to a great perfection in mechanics by the countenance and encouragement of the Emperor, who is a renowned patron of learning.* (2) This prince hath several machines fixed on wheels for the carriage of trees and other great weights. (3) He often buildeth his largest men-of-war, whereof some are three or four foot long, in the woods where the timber grows, and has them carried on these engines three or four hundred yards to the sea. (4) Five hundred carpenters and engineers were immediately set at work to prepare the greatest engine they had. (5) It was a frame of wood raised three inches from the ground, about seven foot long and four wide, moving upon twenty-two wheels. (6) The shout I heard was upon the arrival of this engine, which seems set out in four hours after my landing. (7) It was parallel to me as I lay. (8) But the principal difficulty was to raise and place me in this vehicle. (9) Eighty poles, each of one foot high, were erected for that purpose, and very strong cords of the bigness of pack-thread were fastened by hooks to many bandages, which the workmen had gird round my neck, my hands, my body, and my legs. (10) Nine hundred of the strongest men were employed to draw up these cords by many pulleys fastened on the poles, and thus in less than three hours, I was raised and slung into the engine, and there tied fast. (11) All this I was told, for while the whole operation was performing, I lay in a profound sleep, by the force of that soporiferous medicine infused into my liquor. (12) Fifteen hundred of the Emperor's largest horses, each about four inches and a half high, were employed to draw me towards the metropolis which, as I said, was half a mile distant. (p. 61)

⁵ All the passages quoted here are taken from Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Penguin, 1985) and Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (Penguin, 1983).

The paragraph proceeds to develop the main ideas expressed in the topic sentence: "people" (associated with "mathematicians"), "mechanics" and "Emperor". Lexical reiteration of related elements based on these three terms can be seen throughout the whole paragraphs "people" is echoed in "carpenters", "engineers", and "workmen"; "mechanics" is echoed in "machines", "engines", "engine", "it" and "vehicle"; "Emperor" is reiterated in "prince", "he" and "Emperor". The following diagram represents this pattern of reiteration:

1.	people	mechanics	Emperor
2.		machines	prince
3.		engines	he
4.	engineers/carpenters	engine	
5.		it	
6.		engine	
7.		it	
8.		vehicle	
9.	workmen		
10.	men	engine	
11.	All	
12.			Emperor

This diagram shows the perfect structure of the paragraph regarding lexical ties. The repeated use of the terms developed from "mechanics" emphasizes the clear coincidence between theme and focus; that is between the image the author is trying to convey to the reader (Gulliver's being carried to Lilliput) and the means used to achieve it (i.e. through the repetition of lexical ties).

Analysis of the paragraph from the syntactic point of view reveals that up to sentence 6, one of the three abovementioned main terms always occupies the position of grammatical subject. In sentence 6, however, "the shout" occupies this position, thereby creating a digressive sentence (it moves to a higher level of generality than the topic sentence) and a new sequence of two sentences (though I have considered "Which it seems" as an adjective clause, as a part of the previous sentence):

(6) The shout I heard was upon the arrival of this engine. Which it seems set out in four hours after my landing. (7) It was brought parallel to me as a lay.

This digressive sentence connects with the preceding paragraph: "I heard a confused noise about me [...]" (p. 55). Moreover, sentences 8 and 11 start new sequences whose subjects are "the principal difficulty" and "I". In spite of these digressive sequences, the lexical ties continue appearing: "workmen", "men", "engine", and "Emperor". In addition, "All" in sentence 11 summarizes the preceding information. These lexical ties contribute to make Swift's paragraph a coherent and logical whole.

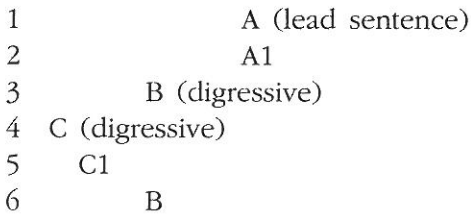
Topic sentences are also found in *Moll Flanders*, but unlike those in *Gulliver's Travels*, they lack the cohesive power to create coherent paragraphs. An analysis of the following paragraph offers a prime example of Defoe's typically diffuse topic sentences:

(1) But I come now to my own case, in which there was at this time no little nicety. (2) The circumstances I was in made the offer of a good husband the most necessary thing in the world for me, but I found soon that to be made cheap and easy was not the way. (3) It soon began to be found that the widow had no fortune, and to say this was to say all that was ill for me, for I began to be dropped in all discourses of matrimony. (4) Being well-bred, handsome, witty, modest, and agreeable; (5) all which I had allowed to my character—whether justly or no is not to the purpose—I say, all these would not do without the dross, which was now become more valuable than virtue itself. (6) In short, the widow, they said, had no money. (p. 91)

The lead sentence, "But I come to my own case, in which there was at this time no little nicety," generates a very broad semantic field that is unable to offer the appropriate cohesive ties. "My own case" is thematically reiterated in "circumstances" and "husband" (sentence 2). "Husband" recurs in the text with "matrimony" and is somehow echoed in "widow". The following sentences have no reiteration of the previous prominent lexical items with the exception of the almost literal repetition in sentence 5 of a part of sentence 3: "the widow, they said, had no money." The following diagram illustrates the problems with Defoe's lexical ties, described above:

1	my own case			
2	circumstances	husband		cheap/easy
3		matrimony	[widow]	[no fortune]
4	—none—			
5	—none—			
6			[widow]	[no money]

This paragraph is even less cohesive due to the elements occupying the position of grammatical subjects. Interestingly, in contrast with Swift's paragraphs, none of the elements reiterated, with the exception of "widow", occupies the most prominent syntactical position in the paragraph. "I" is the subject in sentences 1, 2 and 5; "it" in sentence 3. No subject appears in sentence 4. This verbless sentence begins after a period and ends in a semicolon bearing scarce relationship with the following sentence. Furthermore, analyzing the level of generality allows us to describe different digressive sequences. The following diagram sets up a relationship between sentences in Defoe's paragraph⁶:



This diagram shows that the starting sentence "A" generates a sentence "A1". Sentence 3, however is digressive since it moves to a higher level of generality than the lead sentence. Sentence 4 also moves to a higher level of generality "C" and generates a sentence "C1". Sentence 6 paradoxically seems to move to a higher level of generality with the use of the adverbial "in short" but is a repetition of a fragment of sentence 3 (B).

The differences between Swift's paragraph and Defoe's paragraph seem perfectly obvious by now. Clearly, Swift's paragraph presents a perfect structure and a logical whole. While Defoe's lacks coherence. Defoe's shares no coincidence between the semantic and the syntactic structures and lacks a logical relationship between topic and focus. It seems that the sequence of thought in this paragraph proceeds by association of individual words with a broader theme rather than by any logical relationship between adjacent sentences.

The repetition of cohesive ties at both the semantic, lexical and syntactic levels along with a well defined topic sentence seems to be the basis for what a reader perceives as Swift's plain or simple style. This is true in the four parts of *Gulliver's Travels*. The following paragraph by Swift offers a further example of his simple, cohesive style:

⁶ The left margin is not aligned to show the disparity of the levels of generality.

(1) Upon what I said in relation to our Courts of Justice, his Majesty desired to be satisfied in several points: and, this I was the better able to do, having been formerly almost ruined by a long suit in Chancery, which was decreed for me with costs. (2) He asked, what time was usually spent in determining between right and wrong, and what degree of expense. (3) Whether advocates and orators had liberty to plead in causes manifestly known to be unjust, vexatious or oppressive. (4) Whether party in religion or politics were observed to be of any weight in the scale of justices. (5) Whether those pleading orators were persons educated in the general knowledge of equity, or only in provincial, national, and other local customs. (6) Whether they or their Judges had any part in penning those laws which they assumed the liberty of interpreting and glossing upon at their pleasure. (7) Whether they had ever at different times I pleaded for and against the same cause and cited precedents to prove contrary opinions. (8) Whether they were a rich or a poor corporation. (9) Whether they received any pecuniary reward for pleading or delivering their opinions. (10) And particularly whether they were ever admitted as members in the lower senate. (p.170)

In this paragraph, a well structured lead or topic sentence again generates the unified whole: "Upon what I said in relation to our Courts of Justice, his Majesty desired to be satisfied in several points [...]". This unified whole is also achieved by the anaphoric repetition of the conjunction "whether". In addition, "Courts of Justice" generates a series of cohesive items, namely, "advocates", "orators", "politics", "Judges", etc. Furthermore, "several points" delineates clearly for the reader the different items discussed in the paragraph.

Swift also attains perfect symmetry at the syntactic level: "his Majesty" (sentence 1) is echoed in the pronoun "he" (sentence 3). The rest of the paragraph is admirably developed by a series of wh-clauses dependent upon an indirect question, "He asked". The syntactic ties are tightened through the reiteration of the subject pronoun "they", which refers to "orators" in the last six sentence.

Moll Flanders also offers cases of anaphoric repetition:

And now I was indeed in the height of what I might call my prosperity, and I wanted nothing but to be a wife, which, however, could not be in this case, there was no room for it; and therefore in all occasions I studied to save what I could, as I have said above, against a time of scarcity, knowing well enough that such things as these do not always continue; that men that keep mistresses often change them, grow weary of them, jealous of them, or something or other happens to make them withdraw their bounty; and sometimes the ladies that are thus well used are not careful by a prudent conduct to preserve the steem of their

persons, or the nice article of their fidelity, and then they are justly cast off with contempt. (p. 127)

In this paragraph Defoe uses “and” as sentence connectors 5 times. However, the reiteration of this conjunction is not sufficient to produce a logic whole as in the case of the preceding paragraph by Swift. In the beginning sentence, the conjunction “And”, which weakly connects this paragraph with the preceding one, starts what can be seen as a lead sentence: “And now I was indeed in the height of what I might call my prosperity;” but the main term in this lead sentence is only partially echoed in “to save” and “time of scarcity” (an antonym). Also, “wife”, thematically related to “prosperity” “is only weakly referred to in “mistress” and “ladies”. Other lexical elements seem to be developed by association, namely “jealous”, “steem”, “fidelity” and “contempt”.

In contrast with Swift’s paragraph, Defoe’s lack of cohesive ties parallels his incoherence syntactically. After the conjunction “and”, the subject pronoun “I” is repeated in the first three sentences. The subject of the last two sentences is, however, “ladies” and “they”. The last two sentences proceed to a higher level of generality than the preceding ones, epitomizing Defoe’s tendency to digression at the end of the paragraph.

This paragraph’s transition words (“however”, “therefore”, “or”, “thus” and “then”), have only weak cohesive power. These do not create the appropriate continuative or discontinuative relationship. The following paragraph gives another example of Defoe’s use of transition words:

I dismissed my old man here, and stayed incognito for three or four days in Colchester, and then took a passage in a wagon, because I could not venture being seen in the Harwich coaches. But I need not have used so much caution, for there was nobody in Harwich but the woman of the house could have known me; nor was it rational to think that she, considering the hurry she was in, and that she never saw me but once, and that by candle-light, should have ever discovered me. (p. 253)

Here, the markers do not provide a logical whole, because Defoe seems to use continuative and discontinuative markers indiscriminately.

Swift’s use of transition words differs markedly from that of Defoe’s. Analyzing their use in a paragraph of similar length reveals just how different these writers structure their paragraphs:

I know not whether it may be worth observing, that the Houyhnhnms have no word in their language to express anything that is “evil”, except what they borrow from the deformities or ill qualities of

the Yahoos. Thus they denote the folly of a servant, an omission of a child, a stone that cuts their feet, a continuance of foul or unseasonable whether, and the like, by adding to each the epithet of yahoo. For instance, hhnm yahoo, wihnaholm yahoo, ynlnmawihl yahoo, and an ill-contrived house, ynholmhnnrohlnw yahoo. (p. 323)

The exact use of two continuative markers such as "thus" and "for instance" establishes a perfect semantic relationship among the three sentences. These markers, along with the use of appropriate lexical and syntactic ties, contribute to the cohesion of the paragraph. Once again, as in the paragraphs by Swift previously analyzed, the writer achieves a perfect correlation between topic and focus, between the intended deep structure and the surface structure.

III. SOME CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has not attempted to be exhaustive but has tried to show the way literary texts such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Defoe's *Moll Flanders* can be analyzed, compared, and contrasted using cohesive patterns. This analysis has shown that Swift, in contrast with Defoe, structured his prose very carefully and achieves cohesion by the perfect meshing of the semantic-lexical and syntactic structures⁷. It has also demonstrated that what a reader perceives as a plain or simple style such as Swift's, requires great effort in structuring and word choice on the part of the writer. Conversely, a complex style such as Defoe's, containing many different ideas expressed in long subordinate and coordinate sequences, is hardly readable precisely because it seems to lack revisions or careful organization.

Two further points merit attention. In considering Defoe's complicated style, we may ask whether Defoe is simply imitating the voice of an uneducated woman or just being careless about his writing. I am inclined to accuse him of the latter since his book does contain passages of very well written prose. Secondly, this method of analysis, though limited to the paragraph in this study, offers possible applications to a broader context, at the level of the whole book. The tendency to digression and lack of cohesion in single paragraphs of *Moll Flanders* which we have analyzed finds its echo in a multiplicity of blurred actions and characters throughout the text. Conversely, the care-

⁷ Swift's use of punctuation and transition words is more exact and coherent than Defoe's.

ful, cohesive structure evident in single paragraphs of *Gulliver's Travels* is repeated in the structure of Swift's entire work through linear sequences built around well defined actions and characters and reinforced by the use of precise headings.

The techniques used in analyzing single paragraphs from these two eighteenth century works can be applied to any prose passage from any historical period. More research remains to be done on textual cohesion at the level of the sentence, paragraph, and even entire literary works. Cohesion can open frontiers in the analysis, comparison and contrast of literary styles.

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