

An investigation of lexical cohesive devices in the speech “iran nuclear accord announcement” by Barack Obama

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Abstract: This paper aimed to identify the reiteration of lexical coherent devices used by American President Barack Hussein Obama in his July 2015 speech. The findings of the study revealed that he used lexical reiteration with repetition, synonymy, antonymy, and superordinate components frequently. By utilizing those cohesive devices, such an outstanding leader could make his speech more powerful. The results show that these lexical coherent devices have discourse value, allowing them to be employed as a tool for social engagement with the purpose of influencing the country. By analyzing lexical coherent devices in the speech, the researcher produces several implications in the process of teaching related subjects such as lexicology and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Political discourse, lexical cohesion, cohesive devices

1. Introduction

Discourse in general and political discourse in particular play a crucial role in communication across cultures, which no one can downplay. As a matter of fact, the study of political discourse has been a perennial theme of discussion amongst researchers since time immemorial.

As an excellent leader, Barack Obama has participated in different events and delivered a variety of speeches. His speech, titled “Iran Nuclear Accord Announcement,” was the one that was delivered on July 14th, 2015. It is one of the political rhetorical speeches. His words are considered one of the most effective tools that help him become a persuasive speaker. In addition, a speech will be successful if it requires coherence, which is one of the most important factors. Therefore, this paper aims at identifying lexical cohesive devices that predominate in Barack Obama’s speech and explaining how lexical cohesion creates coherence while he is making his speech.

2. Literature review

Lexical cohesiveness is a linguistic strategy that aids in the creation of text-discourse unity. Lexical cohesion, as opposed to grammatical cohesion, is “the cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary.” (Halliday, p. 274, 1994). Reiteration and collocation are the two major categories of lexical cohesiveness in Halliday and Hasan’s taxonomy. This study, on the other hand, will concentrate on reiteration, which encompasses repetition, synonyms, antonyms, and superordinates.

2.1. Repetition: Repetition is the most direct and obvious source of lexical cohesion since it is the mere

identical recurrence of a preceding lexical item.

2.2. Synonym: Synonymy refers to the fact of two or more words or expressions having the same meaning. In this case, “[...] lexical cohesion results from the choice of a lexical item that is in some sense synonymous with a preceding one [...]” (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 331). However, different types of synonymy can be distinguished as identity of reference and without a unique point of reference

2.3. Antonym: An antonym is a relationship in which two words have different (written and sound) forms and are opposite in meaning. For example, cold and hot; old and young; and soft and hard. Jackson (1988: 64) explains that an antonym deals with the oppositeness of meaning, a word with the opposite meaning of various kinds. An antonym is also a word that means the inverse of another word (Bloomsbury, 1999: 77).

2.4. Superordinate: Superordinate terms, known as hypernyms, are nouns that can be used to stand for an entire “class” or “category” of things. Thus, a superordinate term acts as an «umbrella» term that includes within it the meaning of other words. For example, «flowers» is the *superordinate concept* for “roses,” “tulips,” and “narcissuses.” Therefore, this is another way of avoiding repetition while still referring to the referent for the noun.

3. Methodology

This research adopted a mixed methodology to conduct an analysis of lexical cohesion devices such as repetition, synonym, antonym, and superordinate based on Halliday and Hassan’s (1976) model. After reading and understanding the content of Barack

Obama’s speech, the speech was divided into clauses or sentences, which were numbered to find out the type of lexical cohesive devices in the clauses. Then, all the types of cohesive devices were classified based on their types and then put on a checklist provided. After that, the number of lexical cohesive devices was counted in the form of a percentage. The results of the identification of cohesive devices were interpreted based on the realization of cohesive devices in each text and the percentage of each type of cohesive device. Then, the use of cohesion in the speech was interpreted.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Repetition

The cohesive function of repetition is an important part of speeches. For the speech to be successful, one of its necessary features is that it be cohesive. Repetition is a valuable tool not just for creating cohesion but also because repeating the main points makes the speech or the main points easier to remember. Below are the repetitions Barack Obama used in his speech.

Table 1. Repetitions used by Barack Obama in his speech

Words/ phrases	Number	Words/ phrases	Number
deal	14	stockpile	4
Negotiate	4	Reactor	5
Nuclear	9	facilities	4
Nuclear weapon	14	Built on	2
Decades	5	sanctions	11
Change	3	sanctions	11
Country	5	Steps	3
World	12	restrictions	2
Region	6	Ballistic missiles	2
Effort	7	Related to	3
Because of this deal	7	Without this deal	3
International community	4	congress	6
Verify	4	Scenario	3
Put in place	4	Access	5
negotiations	4	resolution	4
Necessary	6	Nuclear program	6
Bomb	3	President	5
Centrifuge	4	Iran	40
Enriched uranium	4	Produce	6
Friends	3	Security	4

As can be seen from the table, repetition was used in terms of words and phrases in Barack Obama’s speech, the majority of which are words related to the topic. “Iran, world, nuclear weapon, sanctions” are the ones that were used most. They are associated with each other tightly and semantically and thus can contribute to the consistency of developing one central topic in Barack Obama’s political rhetoric. It can be inferred that the use of repetition in the speech

“Iran Nuclear Accord Announcement” serves several functions.

Cohesive repetition helps the speaker to create a fluent speech by using the same word or phrase to show the connections between sentences, paragraphs or speech. Johnstone et al. (Johnstone et al., 1994, p. 14) supported that the occurrences are repeated with a distance among themselves; they serve to make the text more coherent and interconnected. “As the American people and Congress review *the deal*, it will be important to consider the alternative. Consider what happens in a world *without this deal*. *Without this deal*, there is no scenario where the world joins us in sanctioning Iran until it completely dismantled its nuclear program”.

The repeated phrase *without this deal* and its variants are occurring three times in the speech in order to emphasize the magnitude of the Iran accord announcement.

Repetition functions as making the text cohesive and more suitable for the audience’s perception of the speech but it also helps to emphasize key points and helps listeners to remember them by repeating. Sometimes repetition may be used only for trying to please hearers’ ears and as such it can make them pay attention. The influence on listeners may be seen in helping them to be better acquainted with the speech and to direct their concentration to the points the speaker wants them to. Also the repetition of key words throughout the speech is helpful for remembering.

4.2 Synonym

Table 2. Synonym used in Barack Obama’s speech.

Words/ phrases	Synonym
world	international community
powers	countries
achieve	obtain
negotiate	agree
Investigation	research
sanction	agreement
perspective	scenario
compel	force
chance	opportunity
matter	issue
partners	allies
bring about	lead to
global	international

Michael McCarthy in *Discourse for Language Teachers* confirmed that in English discourse, it is not frequent to find direct repetition of words and very

often finds considerable variation from sentence to sentence in writing and from turn to turn in speech. Because each new word, even if it is essentially repeating or paraphrasing the semantics of an earlier word, brings with it its own connotations and history of occurrence, such variation can add new dimensions and nuances to meaning and serves to build an increasingly complex context. Obviously, some words in Obama's speech can illustrate Michael McCarthy's theory. *In addition, Halliday and Hasan in Cohesion in English* pointed out that reiteration is "the repetition of a lexical item, or the occurrence of a synonym of some kind, in the context of reference; that is, where the two occurrences have the same referent." Reiteration could be in the form of repetition, synonym, hypernym, or general word. All these devices have the function of reiterating the previous item, either in an identical or somewhat modified form, and this is the basis for the creation of a cohesive tie between the items. Besides, it makes the text more cohesive. Specifically, the phrases "bring about & lead to" or "phase in & take steps to implement" appear in two paragraphs that are close together; therefore, they create the cohesion of two meanings and content. Similarly, the two words "chance & opportunities" exist in two different paragraphs to create their cohesion as well as cover the main content of the beginning of Barack Obama's speech, which mentions good fortune.

4.3 Antonym

As a persuasive and famous speaker, Barack Obama knows how to choose examples of universal interests. However, these things are not enough to give him a successful presentation. Besides repetition and synonyms, it is the antonym that is a magic tool, making a strong impression on the audience. As usual, antonyms are formed by the addition of a prefix to the same morpheme. Moreover, the term "antonym" is here used in its broader sense, referring to any pair of words that could intuitively be recognized as "opposites." We can see them in the following examples:

"If, in a worst-case scenario, Iran violates the deal, the same options that are available to me today will be available to any U.S. President in the future". or "It shows we are stronger not when we are alone, but when we bring the world together"

While poor speakers are incapable of using synonyms or antonyms to achieve language variety, competent speakers like Barack Obama can make their discourses colorful. Contrastive pairs of words are constantly used to create different effects.

4.4 Superordinate

When looking through Barack Obama's speech, we can easily find the superordinate "machines" using the broader meaning of "centrifuges" as followed:

Because of this deal, Iran will remove two-thirds of its installed centrifuges - the machines necessary to produce highly enriched uranium for a bomb - and store them under constant international supervision. Iran will not use its advanced centrifuges to produce enriched uranium for the next decade.

Obviously, superordinate terms play an important role in promoting 'cohesion' by providing writers with a more explicit means than would be possible using only pronouns (*it, they, this, these, those*) for linking their ideas either back to earlier pieces of text, or forward to upcoming information.

5. Conclusion

Cohesion analysis has shown what principles exist that create semantic links within text between sentences and paragraph boundaries. Cohesion in texts creates one kind of texture through the ties that coordinate ideas and experiences, and texture is one of the three functions of creating meaning within language. Through being a charismatic speaker, traveling internationally and focusing on political problems, Barack Obama has been showing the power of language, including cohesion. Together with his power and his impressive attitude, the words he uses are touching people's hearts, helping Iran from producing nuclear weapons and inspiring them to a better and safer world. Without the presence of cohesive devices in speeches, hardly could he attract others with what he says.

This can have several implications for teachers, who should raise the students' awareness of the importance of cohesive devices in English texts. Providing and teaching students some commonly-used cohesive devices is highly recommended so that they can have more understandings and knowledge while they are studying several deeper subjects such as discourse analysis, semantics-lexicology... as well as they can better grasp what they have read and listened to, as well as produce better and more cohesive and coherent compositions and presentations.

References

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