



Application of Cohesion Theory in College Listening EFL Teaching

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Abstract

Cohesion Theory of Halliday and Hasan is widely applied in different subjects of EFL teaching, particularly in reading comprehension, writing and translation practice. However, it is not very often applied in college listening to EFL teaching. As grammar and vocabulary have, often was laid great importance in listening comprehension. Cohesion theory which involves grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion can also be applied in college listening to EFL teaching with great efficiency. Thus, the details and examples of its application in college listening to EFL teaching have been stated in this article. We may conclude that the listening materials can be understood much better by applying the cohesive devices. Both the teachers and students will benefit a lot from this application. On the one hand, the teachers will improve the teaching efficiency of listening classes. On the other hand, the students' listening abilities would be improved with the cohesive devices.

Key words: Cohesion theory; College English; EFL teaching

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INTRODUCTION

The cohesive relations of language which are very important for listening comprehension have been usually

neglected in college EFL teaching. In fact, there are many cohesive relations no matter in short conversations, long conversations or passages. Some of the cohesive relations are visible and some are invisible. If the students identify the cohesion in the listening materials, they may understand the materials accurately and correctly with the clues of cohesive markers no matter they are visible or invisible.

During the stage of applying Cohesion Theory to college listening EFL teaching, two aspects were mainly demonstrated. One is grammatical cohesion and the other is lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is mainly expressed in the forms of reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction, while lexical cohesion is about the aspects of reiteration and collocation. The short conversations, long conversations, passages from the teaching material *New Horizon College English Listening and Speaking (Book 2)* were all involved. During the empirical teaching, the cohesive devices would be mainly analyzed for the listening comprehension and used as useful ways for getting the right choices.

1. COHESION THEORY

It is well known that Halliday and Hasan have made great contribution to the research on cohesion and their book *Cohesion in English* is regarded as the mark of the beginning of Cohesion Theory.

According to Halliday and Hasan, cohesion is a semantic relation that makes a passage as a whole and united one, and it combines all the elements of the text in order to get a single new unit. Besides this, cohesion is also a concrete means of obtaining unity and forms a discourse or a text, distinguishing it from a non-text one. It also reflects the unity of the discourse or the text. In listening comprehension, if the listeners can catch the tangible network from the perspective of cohesive approaches, the meaning of the whole text or discourse

then can be understood. Halliday and Hasan state that cohesion does not only grammatically exist within the sentence structure, but it also integrates larger chunks of text non-structurally.

As for the selection of words and grammatical structures, there is no hard-and-fast division between vocabulary and grammar. The related guiding principle is that the grammar expresses the more general meaning, while the vocabulary expresses the more specific meanings. Cohesion fits into the same overall pattern. It is partly expressed through the grammar and partly through the vocabulary. According to such statement, they systematize their concepts and further classify cohesion into a small number of distinct categories, which can be mainly divided into two categories. One is grammatical cohesion which includes reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction, the other is lexical cohesion which includes reiteration and collocation.

2. APPLICATION OF COHESION THEORY IN COLLEGE LISTENING EFL TEACHING

The cohesive devices are not applied alone sometimes, they can often be used together. This interactive

application of both the grammatical devices and lexical devices can be of great help for the students to obtain the right understanding and interpretation of the listening materials. It can also help the students get higher scores in listening comprehension test. If they apply the cohesive devices frequently during the listening process, they will make great progress in their language acquisition. The approach of cohesive devices should be taught by the teachers in their listening courses. The application of Cohesion Theory in college listening EFL teaching is from two aspects, one is grammatical device and the other is lexical device.

2.1 Application of Grammatical Devices

Grammatical cohesion consists of four kinds of cohesion devices which are reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. During the listening comprehension, the relation of cohesion is usually implied. The cohesive markers sometimes are visible and sometimes are invisible. Thus the listeners should firstly have the awareness of cohesion, and then identify it with the help of some markers.

The examples of short conversations from the teaching materials are analyzed by using the grammatical devices in the following part.

Example 1

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Audio scripts | M: Australians are so relaxed about time! It drives me mad! W: That's the way they are. While you're here, you'll have to get used to it. Q: What advice does the woman give the man? |
| Choices | A: Learning more Australian traditions. B: Telling Australians what he's used to. C: Relaxing more when dealing with Australians. D: Getting mad every time he is kept waiting. |
| Right answer | C |

Example 2

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Audio scripts | W: Come on, you can eat this cake. You don't have to deny yourself sweet food just because you're in the Olympics. M: Yes, I do! With the games coming so soon, I have to stay on a healthy diet. Q: Why does the man refuse the woman's offer? |
| Choices | A. Because he wants to be ready for the Olympics. B. Because he is used to denying himself. C. Because he doesn't like healthy food. D. Because he doesn't like sweet food. |
| Right answer | A |

Example 3

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Audio scripts | W: Are you noticing the frowns on the faces of the runners? Not one of them looks happy. M: You can be sure the two runners from our country are happy. Out of the five races, they've won four . Q: How many races have the runners from the speakers' country won? |
| Choices | A. One. B. Two. C. Four. D. Five. |
| Right answer | C |

Example 4

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Audio scripts | W: It's time for "International Clock Talk"! Time to discuss how you feel about time! M: Well, since we all come from the same country, I think our views will be similar. Q: Why does the man believe the people will have similar views? |
| Choices | A. Because they are all in the same country. B. Because they are all from the same culture. C. Because they have already discussed their views. D. Because there is no time difference in the country. |
| Right answer | B |

In Example 1, the grammatical device of reference is applied. Both "it" and "that" refer to what the man says, which is "Australians are so relaxed about time!" If the students understand this reference, they may understand that the woman suggests the man to do as Australians do, which refers to "being relaxed about time". Then it is not quite difficult for them to choose the right answer "Relaxing more when dealing with Australians."

In Example 2, the grammatical device of substitution is applied. There is a substitute for what the woman says "You have to deny yourself sweet food because you're in the Olympics". To complete the whole meaning of what the man says, he means "Yes, I have to deny myself sweet food just because I'm in the Olympics." So if the students know that "do" in the sentence "Yes, I do." substitutes for what the woman mentioned before, it will be much easier for them to have the interpretation that the man refuses the woman's offer of eating the cake just because he is going to prepare for the Olympics. After getting this understanding, the right answer "A. Because he wants to be ready for the Olympics." should then be chosen quickly and unquestionably.

In Example 3, the grammatical device of ellipsis is applied. The man says "Out of the five races, they've won four." Actually, the word "races" is omitted in this sentence, in which the man means that the two swimmers have won four races. If the students identify this ellipsis, the right answer "C. Four." will be gotten undoubtedly when they listen to the question "How many races have the runners from the speakers' country won?"

In Example 4, the grammatical device of conjunction

is applied. The word "since" suggests that the causal type of conjunctive device is used here. The sentence "We all come from the same country." Is served as a reason for "Our views will be similar." It's not quite enough if the students only get this conjunction, they have to understand the meaning of the whole sentence "We all come from the same country." The sentence has the meaning similar to the meaning of one choice "They are all from the same culture." The lexical device of reiteration is also applied here, because "The same country" has the indication of "the same culture." Two types of cohesive devices are used in this example, which shows that the cohesive devices are not used separately, they are often used interactively.

In these examples of short conversations, four types of the grammatical devices are used which are reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction respectively. Sometimes, they are not applied alone, they can often be used together. This interactive application can be of great help for the students to obtain the right understanding and interpretation of the listening materials and it can also help the students do a good job in listening comprehension. If they use such method frequently during the listening process, they will make great progress in their language acquisition. The approach of grammatical cohesion should be taught by the teachers in their listening courses.

Four types of the grammatical devices are not only used in the short conversations, they can also be applied for the listening comprehension of long conversations and passages.

Example 5

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Audio scripts | I was born in Liverpool in February, 1938 , so I was only 18 months old when World War II broke out. During the bombings , my family lived in an air raid shelter in the back garden of our house. My father did his normal work during the day and Home Guard duties at night. After the terrific pounding that Liverpool endured in May, 1941 , from German bombers, my family had to move away to the countryside. I started school in 1943 but I had to carry a gas mask with me everywhere I went. Liverpool suffered heavily in the bombing and it became quite common to see the horrible bomb sites. But everyone remained tough in the face of so much danger, and Britain won in the end. |
| Questions | 1. How old was the speaker when World War II started? 2. Where did they live during the bombing of their city? 3. Why did his family move away? 4. What did he carry to school with him? |
| Right answers | 1. B. One and a half years old. 2. C. In the shelter behind their house. 3. D. Because the city was being attacked. 4. D. Masks to protect him from gas attacks. |

In Example 5 of a passage, the grammatical devices are also applied. Actually, the temporal device of conjunction is used here. This passage is in time sequence,

and the questions are all about the details of certain period of time. A specific information is stated in the following Table.

Table 1
Time Sequence

| Time markers | Things happened |
|---------------------|--|
| In February, 1938 | I was born in Liverpool. |
| 18 months old | World War II broke out. |
| During the bombings | My family lived in an air raid shelter. |
| In May, 1941 | My family had to move away to the countryside. |
| In 1943 | I had to carry a gas mask with me everywhere I went. |

From this table, we can easily get the general information about the passage in time sequence. Those four questions of “How old was the speaker when World War II started?”, “Where did they live during the bombing of their city?”, “Why did his family move away?” and “What did he carry to school with him?” are all related to either the time or the things that happened during certain time. The sentence “I was only 18 months old when World War II broke out.” is the answer to the first question. For the second question, the answer is from the statement that the speaker mentioned that his family lived in an air raid shelter in the back garden of their house during the bombing. The third question is a little difficult, we get the information that Liverpool endured the terrific pounding in May 1941. That can be served as the reason for the speaker’s family leaving away. The last one is quite easy, if the students identify the word “mask” during the listening, they will get the right answer.

The above analysis is from the aspect of conjunction in grammatical devices. If the students have this awareness of temporal conjunction, they may understand the passage. What’s more, with the time sequence in this passage, the students can link the time with what is happening easily. That is helpful for them to get the right answers no matter the questions are about time or events.

Meanwhile, this passage can also be analyzed from the aspect of lexical devices.

For example, “18 months old” is the synonym of “one and a half years old”, if the students identify the number, they can choose the right answer just by simple calculating. Furthermore, the expression “an air raid shelter in the back garden of our house” also has the similar meaning to “the shelter behind their house”. For the third question, “pound” in the passage has the similar meaning with “attack” in the choice. The word “mask” is exactly the repetition of the same word in the last

question. This example of passages shows again that the cohesion devices are not used separately, they are often used interactively. However, if the students want to get the right answers, the pre-condition must be that they understand the meaning of those words and are able to identify them during the listening process.

2.2 Application of Lexical Devices

The short conversations, long conversations, passages from the teaching materials can not only be analyzed by using the grammatical devices, they can also be analyzed by using the lexical devices. Some lexical cohesion is also implied in the listening.

Lexical cohesion is from the aspects of reiteration and collocation. Accordingly, there are two kinds of lexical cohesion devices which are reiteration and collocation. There are mainly four types of reiteration approach: (a) repeating the same word; (b) using a synonym or near-synonym; (c) using a superordinate; (d) using a general word. Collocation includes not only the synonyms or near-synonyms, but also superordinates and different kinds of pairs of opposites. In other words, collocation has to do with the relationship between words on that they often occur in the same context, including not only the synonyms or near-synonyms such as “car...automobile”, “disease...illness”, and superordinates such as “girl...child”, “car...vehicle”, but also different kinds of pairs of opposites, for example, the complementaries such as “boy...girl”, “man...woman”, antonyms such as “hate...like”, “true...false”, and converses such as “order...obey”.

The examples of short conversations from the teaching materials are analyzed respectively in the following part. Through the application of lexical cohesion, the listening materials will be understood much easily and effectively. The examples and corresponding analysis are stated in the following part.

Example 6

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Audio scripts | W: Just hearing the Olympic song fills me with determination to go out and win. W: It was first played in 1896, but it wasn't the official song until 1958 . I like it too. Q: In which year did the Olympic song become official? |
| Choices | A. 1958 . B. 1975. C. 1896. D. 1869. |
| Right answer | A |

Example 7

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Audio scripts | M: I've heard that Chinese people are very relaxed about time. W: That used to be true. Nowadays, people are increasingly bothered by lateness. Q: According to the woman, how have Chinese people changed? |
| Choices | A. They are more relaxed about time. B. They are more likely to be annoyed if people are late. C. They relax more often than before. D. They are more likely to tell the truth about time. |
| Right answer | B |

Example 8

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Audio scripts | M: I watched a TV show last night, called "All that Glitters Is Olympic Gold." W: I watched that too. It was about the training and sacrifice necessary for athletes to compete in the Olympics. Q: What was the TV show about? |
| Choices | A. The competitive nature of the Olympic Games. B. The huge effort Olympic athletes must make. C. The lives of Olympic sports stars. D. The gold medals awarded to Olympic winners. |
| Right answer | B. |

Example 9

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Audio scripts | W: Can you explain why you're always five minutes late for conferences? M: Oh, I'm sorry. In my country, people are often late. Q: Why is the man late for conferences? |
| Choices | A. Because he knows he's in another country where rules are different. B. Because he has made a habit of it since moving to another country. C. Because he is used to being late in his own country. D. Because he thinks people in this country are always late. |
| Right answer | C |

In Example 6, the reiteration approach of repeating the same word is applied. "official song" and "1958" are almost the same words in the question and answer. It may be much easy for students to get the right answer. Although they can choose the right answer, they may not know that the reiteration approach of repeating the same word is used here. In order to enhance their awareness of the cohesion, this reiteration approach must be mentioned.

In Example 7, the reiteration approach of using a synonym or near-synonym is applied. If we compare the sentence in the conversation "People are increasingly bothered by lateness." with the sentence in the choices "They are more likely to be annoyed if people are late." We may know that there are three occurrences of synonyms in this short conversation. The first pair is "increasingly" and "more likely to". The second pair is "are bothered" and "be annoyed". The third pair is "lateness" and "people are late."

In Example 8, the reiteration approach of using a superordinate is applied. "The huge effort" is a superordinate of "the training and sacrifice". If the students understand this kind of reiteration approach, they may know that if the athletes have the training and make

sacrifices, they have made huge effort.

In Example 9, the reiteration approach of using a general word is applied. In the sentence "In my country, people are often late.", "people" is a general word, which also includes "me" here. So the speaker means that he is often late in his own country.

Two types of the lexical devices are applied in these examples. Sometimes, they are not applied alone but used together. In other words, the cohesive devices are usually applied interactively. If the students use them during the listening process, they will make great progress in their language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

From the examples and analysis above, we may conclude that the listening materials can be understood by applying the cohesive devices. The cohesive devices are usually applied interactively. If the teachers apply Cohesion Theory in college listening EFL teaching accordingly, the students can get better understanding of this theory. Meanwhile, they may apply the theory in their listening comprehension process and possibly have the right understanding of the listening materials. Furthermore,

their listening abilities would be improved if they practice such methods frequently.

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