

# Study on Cohesion Application to Passage Reading of CET-4

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**Abstract**— The paper, based on the theory of discourse cohesion from Halliday and Hasan, is to analyze the reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction of passage reading in CET-4. The analysis indicates that the tests of passage reading in CET-4 is characterized by semantic categories and syntactical functions, enlightening the pedagogical implication and learning methodology.

## 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

CET-4 is a nationwide exam spread in advanced education in China, aiming at testing the students' comprehensive proficiency who are not majoring in English, covering writing, listening, reading and translating. Among the four items, passage reading occupies 20% with ten questions from two passages. However, it is a part that students often find difficult to fulfill with efficiency and accuracy. Therefore, it is worth studying the discourse analysis especially the features assigned in reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction of passage reading.

## 2. THEORY OF COHESION

The description of cohesion by Halliday and Hasan, is accepted as well-established analysis to account for the principal ways in which sentences are connected coherently. The two linguists classify it into the following basic dimensions to research how a succession of sentences is treated as a semantically coherent unit, which include reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction.

## 3. RESEARCH TARGET AND RESULT ANALYSIS

The research is based on the software AntConc and Excel, and the application of reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction to 60 passages of CET-4 from 2014 to 2018 is studied.

### 3.1. Reference

Lyons (1968: 404) says that 'the relationship which holds between words and things is the relationship of reference: words refer to things' [1]. While from the point of Halliday and Hasan, reference can be divided into three types, including personal, demonstrative and comparative reference. Personal reference is reference by means of function in the speech situation, through the category of person; demonstrative reference is expressed by means of location, on a scale of proximity and comparative reference is indirect reference by means of identity or similarity [2]. The following are the main ways to express reference in the discourse of passage reading in CET-4.

TABLE 1: APPLICATIONS OF REFERENCES (2014-2018 CET-4)

| Category                | Reference            | Figure |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------|
| Personal reference      | he                   | 59     |
|                         | she                  | 57     |
|                         | they                 | 431    |
|                         | it                   | 654    |
|                         | him                  | 1      |
|                         | her                  | 43     |
|                         | them                 | 92     |
|                         | its                  | 104    |
|                         | their                | 278    |
| Demonstrative reference | here, there          | 124    |
|                         | this                 | 95     |
|                         | that                 | 349    |
|                         | the                  | 2521   |
| Comparative reference   | most                 | 76     |
|                         | more, better, higher | 251    |

As is seen from the table, reference is frequently employed in the passage reading of CET-4 in order to explain the identity of what has been said earlier, which is termed anaphora. For instance, the different forms of third person show up such as the personal pronouns *he*, *she*, *they*, *it*, *him*, *her*, *them*, *its* and *their*. Among these categories of person, *it* and *they* are applied with the most frequency, implying that most topic of the passage reading is a substance and the person related to the subject refers to the plural forms of the person. Furthermore, person is a typical examining point. For instance, *most people would probably say that they want to be independent from imported oil* (2014). In this sentence, *they* is an anaphora of *most people*. In 2016, “*Especially girls and teens*” says Record. “*Seventy percent of girls aged 10 to 18 report that they define perfect body image based on what they see in magazines.*” Here *they* is the reference of *girls aged 10 to 18*.

Besides, the location on a scale of proximity such as *here*, *there*, *this*, *that* and *the* can be found in passages, among which the most frequently used neutral demonstrative is *the*, with 2521 times. The example is taken in 2017, *we found that for some lottery winners who had won more than £500,000, the positive effect was definitely there*. But the most common usage for *there* is the inverted form *there be*. For instance, *there could be a number of reasons*. And the comparative reference by means of identity and similarity *more*, *most*, *better* and *higher* is also expressed in these passages, among which the expression *more* appears most frequently. For example, *advances in AI will make human beings smarter; more able and "just better human beings* (2018). Three comparative forms are employed, covering smarter, more, better.

### 3.2 Substitution

Substitution, understood to “replace”, is a relation on the lexicon-grammatical level, a relation between antecedents or presuppose item by Halliday. As a relation within text, the majority of substitution is anaphoric. Taken as the relation of syntax and lexicon, substitution is generally from the perspectives of noun, verb or clause [3].

TABLE 2: APPLICATIONS OF SUBSTITUTIONS (2014-2018 CET-4)

| Category                      | Substitution     | Figure |
|-------------------------------|------------------|--------|
| Substitution for noun phrases | same             | 21     |
|                               | ones, one        | 68     |
|                               | many, much, half | 133    |
| Verbal substitutions          | done, did        | 57     |
| Causal substitutions          | so               | 3      |

The figures in the table show that substitutions are not common usages in passage reading of CET-4. The words *do* and *does* are used for many times but they are usually used as auxiliary verbs in the interrogative sentences or as a way to express negative sentences. The positive substitution *so* less occurs in passage reading of CET-4, illustrating that the reading materials usually do not contain the conversations. For example, *a designer can't survive without participating in Paris Fashion Week. Our argument is that the same would be true of New York Fashion Week.* In the latter sentence, *same* is applied to substitute the former statement *A designer can't survive without participating.*

### 3.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis can be categorized in elliptical noun phrases and clausal ellipsis. For instance, *Modern techniques for producing and shipping food led to greater variety and quantity, making us more vigorous than our ancestors. Yet plenty has been lost too, even in cultures that still live to eat.* The word *plenty* is a kind of ellipsis of the modifier.

### 3.4 Conjunction

Conjunction refers to conjunctive relations between adjacent clauses and it is usually explicitly expressed by conjunctive expressions. Halliday discusses conjunctive items in the logical-semantic relations held between the primary clause and a secondary clause to describe the expansion and projection, which cover the subtypes of elaboration, extension and enhancement [4].

TABLE 3: APPLICATIONS OF CONJUNCTIONS (2014-2018 CET-4)

| Category    | Conjunction                                 | Figure |
|-------------|---|--------|
| Elaboration | for instance                                | 5      |
|             | in other words                              | 2      |
|             | that is                                     | 3      |
| Extension   | and, also                                   | 754    |
|             | but, however, while, whereas, instead       | 210    |
| Enhancement | because, so, as a result, consequently      | 196    |
|             | then, after that, similarly, first, finally | 70     |

It is clearly seen in the table that extension involving addition or positive *and, also* are commonly used in the formal written texts of reading in CET-4. Moreover, the addition, adversative *but* and *however*, replicative, variation *instead* are applied. Furthermore, enhancements, the expansion of one clause by qualifying with circumstantial features of time *then, first, after that, finally*, causal-conditional *because, so, as a result, consequently* and manner *similarly* are overwhelmingly found in passage reading of CET-4. In 2016, *because in I hate tipping, because I believe I would be in a better place if pay decisions regarding employees were simply left up to their employers.* and the conjunction *but* in *But as it turns out, waiters see only a tiny bump in tips when they do an exceptional job compared to a passable one* can be taken as examples.

#### 4.CONCLUSION

The thesis, which abstracts the samples of CET-4 from 2014 to 2018, has studied how reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction are applied in the reading passage of CET-4. The data results show that references and conjunctions are typical semantical and syntactic characteristics in passage reading. Then the analysis plays role in pedagogical and learning perspectives. First, from the pedagogy, the frequent application of personal reference and the comparative reference to passages and the questions reminds the teacher to emphasize on the two points to lead students to locating the examining points when students read. Secondly, for students, the research on substitution, ellipsis and conjunctions is helpful for students' understanding cohesion in reading and writing. Meanwhile, there are limitations in this paper, such as the lack of statistics on the personal or demonstrative reference *those*, *these*, as well as the equivalent usage of that (the clause or the demonstrative reference), making room for the future researchers.

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