

Cohesion through Word Formation: Exploring the Level of Sublexical Cohesive Ties

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In their seminal account of cohesion, Halliday and Hasan (1976: 7) describe various types of semantic “text-forming relations which cannot be accounted for in terms of constituent structure”. Their subtypes of cohesion are situated

- 1) on the level of grammar (reference, substitution, ellipsis),
- 2) on the level of the lexicon (reiteration and collocation) and
- 3) on the intermediate level of conjunction.

What Halliday and Hasan (1976) do not discuss at all, by contrast, is the question whether cohesive ties can also be recognised below the level of words. Since their original definition of cohesion does not contradict this possibility, the present paper discusses the potential of the sublexical level as a possible complementation of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) classical model. The paper explores how word formation processes and the morpho-semantic units they combine can bring about cohesion in texts.

The past decades have seen research on multiple aspects of cohesion, but this topic is still surprisingly unexplored, with few studies e.g. by Dederding, Dressler, Kastovsky, Lipka and Wildgen dating mainly from the 1980s.

The present contribution goes beyond previous research by providing a systematic and comprehensive discussion of word formation and morphology in the light of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) model of cohesion. We will first determine whether it is possible to find equivalents for Halliday and Hasan’s original cohesion categories on the sublexical level and then discuss to what extent these sublexical cohesion categories are restricted by level-specific aspects like part of speech, word formation type (e.g. compounding and affixation), headedness and spelling (e.g. with a space or a hyphen; cf. also Sanchez-Stockhammer 2018). Finally, we will explore whether the characteristics of the suggested new level of cohesion (like the partial recurrence described e.g. by de Beaugrande & Dressler 1981) give rise to any completely new types of cohesive tie.

References

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