Identity Chains: Meaning and Function in Texts

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This paper has three purposes. First, it presents a descriptive approach for the analysis of the identity chain in different types of Arabic texts. Second, it shows the ways and methods by which the chain is constructed and how it functions. Third, it attempts to find out whether chain interaction is essential for judging textual coherence. The text-types subjected for this analysis are dialogue and/or narrative texts.

Before I start the analysis, it would be illuminating to define the concept of chain; how does it function? All these will be presented in the following sections.

2. Definition of a Chain

A chain is defined as a connected or a series of links that has the power of binding, connecting, and relating items to each other. It is a thread of continuity running through the whole text. Hasan (Halliday & Hasan 1965) points out that a chain is formed by a set of items each of which is related to the others by semantic relations, i.e. co-referentiality, co-classification and co-extension. Such semantic relations describe the operation of many cohesive chains, each of which withstands and purifies the field of meaning for the others. Taking this type of relation into account, one can sub-categorize chains into two types: identity chain and similarity chain. These two types of chains will be briefly defined in the following sections.

2.1 Identity chain

The identity chain is a chain that has to do with co-referentiality. That is, every member of a chain refers to the same thing, event, attribute or relation. For example, Adam and he form an identity chain since the relationship between these two items is that of co-reference, where he refers to the same noun Adam. According to Hasan
(Halliday & Hasan 1985), identity chains can be realized by devices of reference such as the pronouns he, she, it, etc. and demonstratives such as this, that, these, etc. The relation of co-referentiality can also be realized by other devices such as comparatives. However, what is typically known about co-referentiality is that it can be realized by devices of reference.

From a different perspective, the notion of co-referentiality can be developed further. For example, items such as I, my, and me, make an identity chain if, and only if, each item in the chain refers to the same person. If we take the criterion of referring to the same person, then all of these variants of the first person singular pronoun will form but one identity chain (Hasan 1979).

2.2 Similarity chain

The similarity chain is a chain that has to do with either co-classification or co-extension. In this chain, members are related to each other by the above two categories (e.g., co-classification and co-extension). In co-classification relations, things and processes to which two members refer belong to an identical class, whereas in co-extension, the two items refer to something within the same general field of meaning.

Before I embark on the analysis of the text and its main attributes, structure and texture, it would be extremely significant to give an idea about the meaning of a text. This is very significant as chains can only be constructed in texts.

3. Definition of a Text

A text can be defined as any passage, spoken or written, that has a unified whole; it is a language that is functional (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 10). What Halliday means by functional is that language is doing something in some context. Text is related to context in the sense that neither one can operate without the other. A text is a semantic unit and a social exchange of meaning (Halliday 1977; Hasan 1978).

Taking this general perspective into account, it should be pointed out that unity is displayed throughout texts; it is what distinguishes a text from a non-text. Hasan (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 52) points out that the basis for the judgement of whether a text is complete or incomplete lies in the notion of unity. A text also displays continuity and connectedness and these are very important elements for the unity of any text. The idea of connectedness, as Hasan suggests, can be mediated through lexical cohesion relations;
these relations are undeniably significant for the continuity of a text. Lexical cohesion relations can be expressed in terms of co-reference, co-classification, and co-extension and such relations, when they are strung across the text, constitute what is called the identity chain.

Identity chains are very powerful as integrative devices; they are only created in well-formed texts. The way these devices function will be manifested later in the analysis.

Furthermore, chains can be constructed in which the relation between the members is not that of identity or situational meaning; chains can also be constructed in which the relation between the members is that of similarity of situational meaning. Hasan points out that the relation of similarity of situational meaning exists between the following items:

1. synonymy: e.g. have and take.
2. antonymy: e.g. take and give.
3. hyponymy (including co-hyponymy): e.g. fruit, banana, and orange.
4. meronymy (including co-meronymy): e.g. dollar and cent.

Hasan points out that any item that stands in any of these relations to the others will constitute a similarity chain (60).

Considering what has been previously stated, one can realize that chains are found in all texts, but whether a chain is dominating or not is a different issue. The important element here is that well-written texts manifest texture and structure. These will be illustrated in the sections that follow.

3.1 Texture

My justification for focusing on structure and texture lies in the fact that structure and texture are necessary attributes of text. That is, the unity of a text, as manifested by its texture, is a function of the unity of the contextual configuration within which the text is embedded. Therefore, if there is not texture, there is no text. Texture is very appropriate in expressing the property of being a text. According to Kress (1976), a text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text; it derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a unit with respect to its environment.

Hasan points out that texture is a matter of meaning relations between its parts (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 71). It is these relations (i.e. ties or meaning relations) that are constitutive of texture. Texture can be manifested by certain kinds of semantic relations between its individual
messages. These relations are realized through lexico-grammatical patterns. The property of texture is related to the listener's conception of coherence.

It would be entirely untrue, therefore, to claim that a tie is not an important concept in the formation of texture, as a tie cannot appear alone; it requires the presence of two members. These also appear in a tie unless there is a relation between them. This observation of a tie is shown in Diagram I.

![Diagram I: Representation of a Tie.](image)

It can be realized that x is separated from y, but the thing that correlates between them is the relation of meaning. This nature of interconnection is called a semantic relation; it ties together the two separate members, which, in one way or another, forms the basis for cohesion among the individual messages of a text.

There are certain kinds of meaning relations between the two members; such relations are co-referential relations (pronominals and demonstratives), co-extension, and co-classification which are constitutives of textual unity and continuity of a text.

3.2 Structure

Structure is also an important source for the creation of unity; it is an expression of the unity of the social process as an event. Structure is an ordered arrangement of elements in chain relations. It is a generalized statement of the meaningful relations between elements. It is a unifying relation. The parts of a sentence or a message obviously cohere with each other. Hence, these parts that cohere with each other display texture; the elements of any