

COHERENCE

By Kithaka wa Mberia

Definition of Coherence

According to the Collins Concise Dictionary, to cohere is to hold or stick firmly together; to be connected logically; or to be consistent. Therefore, coherence is the logical or natural connection or consistency. Coherence is also referred to as cohesion.

Judith Kilborn and Nathan Krieger observe that:

Cohesion is the glue that holds a piece of writing together. In other words, if a paper is cohesive, it sticks together from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. Cohesive devices certainly include *transitional words and phrases* such as *therefore, furthermore, or for instance*, that clarify for readers the relationship among ideas in a piece of writing. However, transitions aren't enough to make writing cohesive. Repetition of key words and use of reference words are also needed for cohesion

Demonstration of the Effects of Coherence in a Text

A LONG DAY AT THE UNIVERSITY

I woke up feeling very tired. I came to the University. I had a stylistics class to teach. I had a number of other chores to perform. I needed to send some three e-mails from my office. I had to sign one of students' theses. I was to pick my sister from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. I had to consult the College Principal. I accomplished all the three missions by 12.00 noon.

I left my office for the class. It was raining. The class attendance was excellent. The attendance was more than 70% of all the students registered for the course unit. I went to my office to keep my teaching tools: a folder, a felt pen and an eraser. My wish was to leave my office as soon as I had finished keeping those items and to proceed to my residence to rest. My intention to go home did not materialize. I received a phone call. I answered it. It was from the Secretary in my Department. She wanted to inform me that a professor from Cameroon was in Nairobi and that she had called the Department to inquire whether he could talk to me. I agreed to meet her. I postponed going home.

Prof. Rose Ntong knocked on my door. I asked her in and after exchanging greetings, we sat down for a discussion. She explained that she was in Nairobi to seek collaboration with Kenyan linguists. Her preference was those working on Bantu linguistics. We discussed possible areas of collaboration. We discovered that we had a lot in common academically. We had both worked on aspects of Bantu phonology. She had done her PhD on Kichagga while I had done mine in Kitharaka. Since completing her PhD studies, she had embarked on the study of Kikuyu phonology which is one of the languages of the Central Kenya Bantu sub-family, a language sub-

family on which I have been researching. Our discussion lasted one hour. I bid her farewell and she left.

I received another visitor. His mission was to have some translation done. He gave me a five page document which he wanted translation into simple Kiswahili. He did not want any neologisms in the translation. He wanted the translation to be such that it would be read by ordinary Kenyans and especially farmers who were his intended consumers of the document. He wanted to have the translation immediately. He wanted to have it within one hour. I told him that translating five pages within one hour was not practicable and that he could only have it between 6.00-7.00 p.m. He left after we agreed that he would come back at 6.30. At this time I was feeling really exhausted. I managed to finish the translation by 6.00. I felt so relieved. He returned and I handed over the translation to him. My long working day was over. I was able to finally lock my office and go home.

A Long Day at the University

Yesterday morning, I woke up feeling very tired. *However*, I came to the University because I had a stylistics class to teach. *Besides the class*, I had a number of other chores to perform. *First*, I needed to send some three e-mails from my office. *Second*, I had to sign one of students' thesis. *Third*, I was to pick my sister from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. *Finally*, I had to consult the College Principal. I accomplished all the three chores by 12.00 noon.

At exactly 1 p.m., I left my office for the class. *Surprisingly*, *although* it was raining, the class attendance was excellent. *In contrast to some earlier classes*, the attendance was more than 70% of all the students registered for the course unit.

After the class, I went to my office to keep my teaching tools, namely, a folder, a felt pen and an eraser. My wish was to leave my office as soon as I had finished keeping those items and, thereafter, to proceed to my residence to rest. However, my intention to go home did not materialize. *No sooner had I entered the office* than I received a phone call. I answered it. It was from the Secretary in my Department. She wanted to inform me that a professor from Cameroon was in Nairobi and that she had called the Department to inquire whether he could talk to me. I agreed to meet her. *Consequently*, I postponed going home.

At about 3.30 p.m. Prof. Rose Ntong knocked on my door. I asked her in and after exchanging greetings, we sat down for a discussion. She explained that she was in Nairobi to seek collaboration with Kenyan linguists *especially* those working on Bantu linguistics. *For the next one hour*, we discussed possible areas of collaboration. *During our conversation*, we discovered that we had a lot in common academically. We had both worked on aspects of Bantu phonology. She had done her PhD on Doula while I had done mine in Kitharaka. *Since completing her PhD studies*, she had embarked on the study of Kikuyu phonology which is one language of the Central Kenya Bantu sub family, a sub-language family on which I have also been researching. Our discussion lasted one hour. *At 4.30*, I bid her farewell and she left.

Within five minutes of Prof. Rose Ntong's departure, I received another visitor. His mission was to have some translation done. He gave me a five page document which he wanted translation into simple Kiswahili. *Specifically*, he did not want any neologisms in the translation. He wanted the

translation to be such that it would be read by ordinary Kenyans *and especially* farmers who were his intended consumers of the document. He wanted to have the translation immediately. Indeed, he wanted to have it within one hour. I told him that translating five pages within one hour was not practicable and that he could only have it between 6.00-7.00 p.m. He left after we agreed that he would come back at 6.30. *Although at this time*, I was feeling really exhausted, I managed to finish the translation by 6.00. I felt so relieved. *At exactly 6.30*, he returned and I handed over the translation to him. My long working day was over. I was able to finally lock my office and go home.

Strategies of Achieving Coherence

Coherence may be achieved through a number of strategies. Some of the strategies are appropriate title, credible preview, referencing (that is using pronouns), repetition, connectors (that is, transitional words and phrases), elision and substitution. Below, I illustrate the use of repetition, connectors, elision and substitution.

Repetition

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where *little black boys and black girls* will be able to join hands with *little white boys and white girls* and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day *every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight*, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. *With this faith* we will be able to hew out of *the mountain of despair a stone of hope*. *With this faith* we will be able to transform the *jangling discords* of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. *With this faith* we will be able to *work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together*, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all the God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. *Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride*, from every mountain side, *let freedom ring*. "And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. *So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania! Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado! Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!* But not only that; *let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia! Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee! Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi*. From every mountainside, *let freedom ring*.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro Spiritual. "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Connectors

Connectors are words or phrases that are used to connect different elements in a text. Connectors are also referred to transitional words or phrases. They are classified according to their function. Thus, they include connectors whose function in a text is:

- a) To add to a previous point: in addition, moreover, not only, also, furthermore and besides.
- b) To contrast a point with the previous point: nevertheless, however, although, not withstanding, in spite, despite and in contrast.
- c) To rephrase: in other words, put differently and that is.
- d) To summarise: in summary, to sum up, briefly, to put it briefly and in a nutshell
- e) To conclude: in conclusion, to conclude and finally.
- f) To exemplify: for example, for instance and to illustrate.
- g) To show sequence: first, second, third, then, subsequently, finally, lastly
- h) To show space: to the right, to the left, above, below, under, next to, beside
- i) To comparison: similarly, in the same vein, in the same token and likewise
- j) To show cause effect, as a result, consequently, because, hence and thus
- k) To indicate time: previously, concurrently and simultaneously
- l) To give detail: particularly, especially
- m) To emphasise, indeed, surely and in fact
- n) To suggest: with this in mind, with that purpose and taking cognizance of
- o) To concede: anyway and till

Elision

Deleting part of a sentence:

- a) Question: What is your name?
Answer: Rose Achieng. (Instead of “My name is Rose Achieng”).
- b) Question: When are you going to Lodwar?
Answer: Tomorrow. (Instead of “I am going to Lodwar tomorrow”)

Substitution

- a) I wanted an interesting book and *this* is what I have found.
- b) If you are waiting for Halima *she* is here.

Conclusion

When we read a text with good coherence, we spend less time on it than when we read work with little coherence. When we read the later, sometimes, we spend time going back to sections that we have already read so as to fully comprehend the text. The reason for this is that without a good level of coherence, the text will have gaps in the follow of information. Readers try to resolve those gaps by going back to what they have already read in an attempt to either make information complete or more logical. If, as writers, we build strong coherence in what we write we will have saved readers such inconvenience.

Prof. Kithaka wa Mberia teaches linguistics and communication in the Department of Linguistics and Languages, University of Nairobi. He has also taught at Virginia State University (USA), University of Warsaw (Poland) and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (S. Korea). Besides being an academic, he is also a poet and playwright. His published creative works include: *Mchezo wa Karata* (1997), *Natala* (1997), *Kifo Kisimani* (2001), *Bara Jingine* (2001), *Maua Kwenye Jua la Asubuhi* (2004), *Redio na Mwezi* (2005), *Msimu wa Tisa* (2007), *Rangi ya Anga* (2014), *Doa* (2018), *Mvumo wa Helikopta* (2020) *Kwenzi Gizani* (2021) and *Walikiona cha Mtema Kuni* (2021). Several of his creative works have been translated and published in English. They are *Death at the Well* (2011), *Natala* (2011), *Flowers in the Morning Sun* (2011), *Another Continent* (2011) and *A Game of Cards* (2011).