

Article

The Use of Reference as a Grammatical Cohesion Device in English Short Stories: A Discourse Analysis

Saidova Mukhayyo Umedilloevna¹

1. Associate Professor, Bukhara State University

Abstract: This article explores the use of reference as a grammatical cohesion device in English short stories through a discourse analysis approach. It aims to investigate anaphoric, cataphoric, exophoric references contribute to the cohesion and coherence of narratives. The findings reveal that reference plays a crucial role in guiding readers through the narrative structure, ensuring clarity and reducing redundancy. This study highlights the importance of cohesive devices, especially reference, in shaping the overall unity and comprehensibility of literary texts, and offers insights that can be beneficial for both literary analysis and language teaching focused on discourse competence.

Keywords: Cohesive Device, Coherence, Grammatical Cohesion, Reference, Anaphoric, Cataphoric, Exophoric

1. Introduction

Reference is a key grammatical cohesion device that helps maintain coherence in a text by linking words, phrases, and sentences. It allows writers to avoid repetition while ensuring clarity by using pronouns (e.g., *he, she, it*), demonstratives (e.g., *this, that, those*), and comparative expressions (e.g., *more, similar, different*). Reference can be anaphoric (pointing backward to previously mentioned information), cataphoric (pointing forward to information that appears later) and exophoric (pointing to something outside the text, relying on shared context between the writer and reader [1]. While anaphoric and cataphoric references create internal cohesion by linking parts of the text, exophoric reference connects the text to the external context.

Together, these references help maintain coherence, guide readers through the text, and contribute to the overall flow and meaning [2]. In narratives and academic writing, reference enhances readability by guiding the reader through the logical flow of ideas. Without effective use of reference, a text may become disjointed or difficult to follow, highlighting its crucial role in textual cohesion.

2. Materials and Methods

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Michael Halliday, emphasizes the functions of language in communication. This approach views cohesion as the way language is used to achieve specific communicative purposes. Cohesion is analyzed through cohesive devices that connect ideas and actions, such as reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunctions and lexical chains, while coherence is understood as the logical consistency of ideas, where sentences are structured to fulfill a communicative function in a context [3]. Here we will explore grammatical cohesion types in "*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*". The story is written in O. Henry's characteristic style, blending humor, irony, and sentimentality. His ability to craft characters who appear simple on the surface but

Citation: Umedilloevna, S. M. The Use of Reference as a Grammatical Cohesion Device in English Short Stories: A Discourse Analysis. International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics 2025, 4(2), 154-157.

Received: 11th Mar 2025

Revised: 13th Mar 2025

Accepted: 17th Mar 2025

Published: 24th Mar 2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

carry deep emotional and social significance is on full display in this story. The twist ending is unique to O. Henry's writing style adds an extra layer of depth to the narrative, making it both humorous and thought-provoking. *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen"* is a delightful narrative that explores themes of generosity, tradition, and irony, all characteristic of O. Henry's style. Set during the Thanksgiving holiday, it highlights the customs of kindness, charity, and ritual that emerge around this time of year as well as offering O. Henry's signature twist at the end.

3. Results and Discussion

As we mentioned above grammatical cohesion includes reference, ellipsis, substitution and conjunctions. Referencing in O. Henry's *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen"* involves examining how pronouns, definite articles help maintain clarity and coherence throughout the story. Anaphoric and cataphoric references are key elements of grammatical cohesion in texts, helping to create links between ideas, sentences and paragraphs [4]. In O. Henry's short story *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,"* both types of references play a significant role in maintaining cohesion by guiding the reader through the relationships between characters and events. Here we can see how these references function in the story. Anaphoric reference words refer looking backwards to something previously mentioned in the text. In O. Henry's story, these are used to connect sentences and ideas, creating a flow that avoids redundancy. Example: *He was an old man and very poor, and yet every Thanksgiving Day, for the last nine years, he had made the same offering to the same man.* In this sentence, the pronoun "he" refers back to the previously mentioned "old man." This is an example of an anaphoric reference that links the pronoun to the original subject without restating it. Throughout the story, O. Henry uses such references to link characters and actions already introduced [5].

For instance, the repeated use of "he" and "him" to refer to the central character helps avoid repetition and keeps the focus on the narrative. Cataphoric reference words refer looking forwards, that is to something that comes later in the text. This often serves to create suspense or curiosity, guiding the reader to look forward to the eventual revelation of the referent. Example: *Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years, you have dined with me. Why?* Here, "you" refers to the gentleman, whose identity is revealed in the next lines. The pronoun sets up the revelation, creating a cohesive link between this pronoun and the person who will be named shortly after [6]. In the story, cataphoric references help build suspense and engage the reader by encouraging them to continue reading for clarification. This is particularly essential in the structure of *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,"* where the story reveals details about the characters progressively. Both forms of reference contribute to the overall grammatical cohesion of the story by connecting different parts of the text. Anaphoric references ensure that previously mentioned information stays relevant, while cataphoric references keep the reader engaged, encouraging them to anticipate the unfolding story. In *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,"* the combination of these reference types allows for a smooth narrative flow, preventing the repetition of names or phrases and maintaining coherence as the story shifts between past events and the Thanksgiving Day tradition.

This balance between anaphoric and cataphoric references is a hallmark of O. Henry's storytelling style, contributing to both the humor and the emotional depth of the tale. It helps keep readers connected to the evolving relationship between the gentleman and the old man, enriching the thematic exploration of generosity and tradition. In the story *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,"* exophoric references contribute to grammatical cohesion by pointing to elements outside the text itself. Exophoric references are not directly part of the text's internal structure but, they rely on shared knowledge between the reader and the writer, usually referring to elements from the broader world or cultural context. Exophoric references occur when linguistic elements refer to something outside of the text and considered looking outwards. Unlike anaphoric and cataphoric references,

which link to other parts of the text, exophoric references assume that the reader can fill in the meaning by drawing on their own external knowledge or understanding of the world. These references can create cohesion by linking the narrative to shared cultural, historical, or social knowledge. In *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,"* author uses exophoric references to anchor the story within the broader cultural context of *Thanksgiving* and *American traditions*. These references create cohesion by connecting the events of the story with widely recognized aspects of American society, making the story accessible and relatable to readers familiar with these customs.

The most significant exophoric reference in the story is *Thanksgiving* itself, a central theme around which the entire plot revolves. O. Henry assumes that his readers are familiar with the cultural significance of Thanksgiving in the United States, including the traditions of feasting and generosity. Example: *There is one day that is ours. There is one day when all we Americans who are not self-made go back to the old home to eat saleratus biscuits and marvel how much nearer to the porch the old pump looks than it used to.* In this sentence, the reference to Thanksgiving is implicit. The narrator alludes to the collective experience of Americans going back to their roots, sharing a meal, and participating in the rituals of the holiday [7]. The reader's understanding of Thanksgiving provides cohesion to the text because it ties the characters' actions to a larger cultural framework. This reference to Thanksgiving as "ours" relies on the reader's pre-existing knowledge of what Thanksgiving represents in American culture – gratitude, feasting and family traditions. The story also references the broader social expectations of *charity* and *helping the less fortunate* during the Thanksgiving season. The old gentleman's annual tradition of feeding the poor man on Thanksgiving taps into the well-known social custom of providing for those in need during holidays, especially Thanksgiving. Example: *No less than America's tradition of Thanksgiving had he kept alive. It was his custom every year to find the same poor man and take him to dinner.*

This statement presupposes the reader's understanding of the importance of helping others during Thanksgiving. While the specific reference to Thanksgiving dinner is part of the text, the broader idea of holiday charity is exophoric, as it relies on cultural knowledge of how Americans celebrate the holiday. O. Henry also uses exophoric references to American symbols and historical context. For example, the story indirectly references the *Pilgrims* and the *founding myth of Thanksgiving*, where the act of giving thanks is rooted in American history. Example: *We can't do much for the Pilgrim Fathers, but we can make it a hard day for the turkeys.* This humorous statement plays off the well-known historical narrative of the *Pilgrim Fathers*, the early settlers who are credited with the first Thanksgiving feast in the U.S. The reference assumes that the reader is familiar with the American mythos surrounding Thanksgiving and its association with the Pilgrims and turkey feasts. Although exophoric references do not directly create links within the text, they contribute to the story's cohesion by grounding the narrative in a shared cultural and historical context.

These references allow O. Henry to rely on the reader's external knowledge to create a deeper sense of meaning and connection to the characters' actions and the setting. For example, when the story talks about the *tradition of Thanksgiving feasts*, the reader automatically fills in details about what that means – large meals, gathering with family, expressing gratitude which adds depth to the narrative without requiring O. Henry to explain everything explicitly. In *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,"* exophoric references serve as a subtle but important form of grammatical cohesion. By drawing on shared knowledge about American culture, particularly the traditions associated with Thanksgiving, O. Henry creates a narrative that resonates with readers who understand the broader cultural context. These references enhance the story's meaning and link the characters' individual experiences to the larger themes of charity, tradition, and social expectations, making the story more relatable and cohesive within its cultural framework.

4. Conclusion

We can conclude that reference as a grammatical cohesion device plays a crucial role in maintaining unity and coherence in English short stories. By using anaphoric, cataphoric and exophoric references, writers effectively connect characters, events, and ideas throughout the narrative, guiding readers smoothly from one part of the story to another. The analysis shows that reference helps avoid repetition and ensures clarity, making the text more engaging and easier to follow. Understanding the use of reference in literary discourse provides valuable insights into how cohesion is achieved in storytelling and can enhance both literary analysis and language learning.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, London, UK: Longman, 1976.
- [2] R. Salkie, *Text and Discourse Analysis*, London, UK: Routledge, 1995.
- [3] S. Tanskanen, *Collaborating Towards Coherence: Lexical Cohesion in English Discourse*, Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006.
- [4] O. Henry, *The Gift of the Magi and Other Stories*, A Ladder Edition at the 1000-word level, London, UK: Macmillan, 2005.
- [5] M. A. K. Halliday, "Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning," London, UK: Edward Arnold, 1978.
- [6] R. Beaugrande and W. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics*, London, UK: Longman, 1981.
- [7] D. Biber, S. Conrad, and G. Leech, *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, London, UK: Pearson Education, 2002.