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The role of lexical repetition in English written texts

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Abstract---Repetition is the process of repeating a word stated earlier in the text either in the same form or with some modifications. It is one of the key signaling devices available for setting up relations and, thereby, for the patterning of discourse or text. This study is a textual analysis of the role that repetition plays in English texts. It aims at investigating the different roles of repetition in these texts. Moreover, it aims at finding out if repetition contributes to making explicit the logical and prominent relationship between ideas, and thus creating a hierarchical text structure. To achieve the aims of the research, the following hypotheses are made: 1. English uses repetition heavily. 2. Repetition is multifunctional in English. 3. English avoids exact repetition by using other types of repetition. The data for analysis consist of five texts chosen randomly. These texts represent the five major text types recognized by Werlich (1976). They are: descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative and instructive. The analysis of the data which has been based on Hoey's (1983 and 1991) models of repetition has verified the validity of the first and second hypotheses, whereas it has refuted the third hypothesis.

Keywords---lexical repetition, role repetition, written texts.

Introduction

Repetition can be defined simply as repeating the same word or phrase. It is the phenomenon in which a lexical unit is repeated either in its exact form, or with inflectional or derivational change. Moreover, the information content of the lexical unit is totally or partially repeated through a semantically related lexical unit, such as a synonym, an antonym, a hyponym/superordinate, a meronym, or an instantially related unit to a previously mentioned lexical unit. The problem is

that most people believe that repetition is a characteristic of poor writing, a belief that this study tries to refute. To the best of our knowledge, no attempt has been made to study the role of repetition in all text types in English. This is why this research is conducted. Moreover, this study tries to address the following questions:

1. What is the role that repetition plays in English texts?
2. Does repetition act as a signpost in directing the reader's attention to the progress of the meaning of the text?
3. What are the main forms of repetition in English?

This study aims at:

1. investigating the different roles and types of repetition in English texts.
2. finding out if repetition contributes to making explicit the logical and prominent relationships between ideas, and thus creating a hierarchical text structure.

In order to achieve the aims of the study, the following hypotheses are made:

1. Repetition is multifunctional in English.
2. English makes a heavy use of repetition.
3. English avoids exact repetition by using other types of repetition.

The data of this study consist of five texts taken randomly from books, newspapers and magazines. This study adopts Hoey's (1983) and (1991) models of repetition with some modifications, since they meet the requirements of the study.

Definition of repetition

Repetition has been defined differently by different scholars. Jefferson (1972), for instance, defines repetition as "an object that has as its product-item a prior occurrence of the same thing, which performs some operation upon the product-item" (as cited in Szmrecsanyi, 1976, p. 23). Halliday and Hasan are among those scholars who treat repetition as a part of reiteration. They state:

Reiteration is a form of lexical cohesion which involves the repetition of lexical item, at one end of the scale; the use of general word to refer back to a lexical item, at the other end of the scale; and a number of things in between – the use of synonym, near-synonym, or superordinate. (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 278)

de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p.54), on their part, point out that "the direct repetition of elements is called recurrence since the original occurrence merely happens again". However, Hoey (1983, p.24) views repetition as "a clause relation signal". He adds that many relations are signaled by repetition. To Stein (1992) repetition does not refer to the process of repeating but rather to its result, i.e. to the item with which the writer has repeated the corresponding element. According to Cook (1994, p.31), "repetition of the original nominal can create the same sort of chain as pronouns, conveying the same semantic content, though with the different stylistic effect" (see also Cook, 1989).

Donnelly (1994, p.97) remarks that “repetition is simply the repeated use of the same word or phrase”. It helps cognitively reinforce key ideas and new terms. Karoly (2002, p. 91) asserts that repetition is “one of the most fundamental and essential linguistic devices”. It occupies “a significant place in the study of cohesion, coherence, and text”. From what has been stated above, repetition can be defined as a process of repeating a word appearing earlier in the text either in its exact form or with some modifications.

Roles of Repetition

Repetition is used to serve various functions or roles in various texts. In this connection de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p.55) point out that recurrence is “prominently used to assert and re-affirm one’s viewpoint, or to convey surprise at occurrences that seem to conflict with one’s viewpoints”. Hoey (1983) notices that sentences are unable to carry all the information that might be given on a subject; they are by their nature selective. Repetition is, accordingly, a way of ‘opening out’ a sentence so that its lexical uniqueness may be used as the basis for providing further related information. He adds that repetition is not only a common method of connecting sentences but also a significant contributor to their interpretation. When two sentences have a material in common, it is what is changed that receives attention by the reader. On the other hand, the repeated material acts as a framework for the interpretation of the new material.

Halliday (1985) states that the continuity may be established in a text by the choice of words. This may take the form of repetition; or the choice of a word that is related in some way to a previous one-either semantically or collocationally (see also Gramley & Patzold, 1992). Quirk et. al (1985, p. 1441) are of the opinion that “even in language that is being used in a less specialized way, repetition is common enough to convey emphasis”. According to them, “repetition in ordinary discourse occurs to indicate the repetition, extent, or confirmation of a phenomenon” (see also Schwehr, 1988, Troxel et.al, 2005).

According to Johnstone (1994), repetition functions didactically, playfully, emotionally, expressively, ritualistically; it can be used for emphasis, clarification, and confirmation. Pointing out the reasons behind using repetition, Longknife and Sullivan (2002) assert that repetition helps to echo key words, to emphasize important ideas and main points, to unify sentences, or to develop coherence among sentences. Moreover, the skillful repetition of important words or phrases creates “echoes” in the reader’s mind: they emphasize and point out key ideas. They add that one can use these “echo words” in different sentences – even in different paragraphs- to help “hook” ideas together.

Karoly (2002, p. 91) remarks that one of the cohesive functions of repetition is that it is “a widely echoed assumption that certain patterns of repetition make an independent contribution to the quality of the texts”. Kompaore (2004) is of the opinion that repetition actually plays a double role in a text; while it maintains thematic continuity, it is also the springboard for the introduction of new information as well as of a topic shift in the text. For Neste (2004) repetition of key words, phrases or concepts is one of the common and multifaceted means of

creating cohesion. It can occur without any artistic intent simply as the result of the continued discussion of a common theme, or can occur as a deliberate device.

To Steeb (2008) using repetition as a cohesive tie is beneficial for discourse functions like emphasis of an atypical state or an action. These cohesive devices refer to cohesion achieved through the application of lexical items; therefore, they are also referred to as lexical cohesion (see also Dodigovic, 2005 and Taylor 2006). Similarly, Johnstone (2008, p.173) points out that repetition "can signal cohesive relationships among utterances or sentences." She adds that repetition can serve specialized functions that vary from a culture to another. To sum up, repetition is one of the most important cohesive devices. It plays many roles in the text including emphasis, confirmation, and clarification. It also functions as a way of revealing new information. It connects different sentences in the text to form a meaningful piece of writing. Moreover, it is the best way of continuing the text.

Hoey's (1983, 1991) Models

Hoey(1983, 1991) presents two approaches to the study of lexical cohesion. His models of lexical cohesion involve interesting information about the role of lexical cohesion in a text. Both models are entirely about repetition.

In his model (1983), Hoey divides repetition into five major types:

1. Simple repetition
2. Complex repetition
3. Substitution
4. Ellipsis
5. Paraphrase (Hoey, 1983, p.107-112).

On the other hand, in his model (1991), he divides repetition into the following category:

1. Simple lexical repetition
2. Complex lexical repetition.
3. Simple paraphrase
4. Complex paraphrase which involves antonymy, link triangle, Superordinate, hyponymic, and co-reference repetition. 5. Substitution which involves personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, modifiers, and other substitution links (Hoey, 1991, p. 52-74).

However, the categories that are going to be considered in our analysis are the following:

1. Simple Repetition which involves exact repetition and singular and plural forms.
2. Complex repetition where two words share a lexical morpheme but are not formally identical or where they are formally identical but have different grammatical functions.
3. Simple paraphrases where one of two items can be substituted for another in a particular context with no discernible change in meaning. If this works

only one way, that is, *a* can replace *b* but *b* cannot replace *a*, then it is called *simple partial paraphrase*; if it works both ways in a context, then it is called *simple mutual paraphrase*.

4. Complex paraphrase which involves two sub-types: *antonyms* and *link triangle*.
5. Substitution which involves personal pronouns (he, she, it, and they) and demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those)

The *ellipsis* category has not been involved in the analysis because to the researchers' point of view in order for a thing to be repeated there should be something present in the text either in the same form or with a different form. The proforms (do) and (so) have not been involved in the substitution *category* since Hoey does not present a lot of information concerning the way of using them as repetition. Superordinate, hyponymic and co-reference repetitions are also excluded from complex paraphrase category since for Hoey the true paraphrase is one in which the items under consideration are interchangeable in the context. From substitutions category, only personal pronouns and demonstratives are included in our analysis because Hoey does not give clear explanation about other types of substitutions. Table (1) below illustrates the types of Repetition adopted in the model.

Table (1) Types of Repetition in the Model

Types of Repetition	Sub-Types of Repetition		
1.	Simple Repetition	Exact Repetition	Singular and Plural
2.	Complex Repetition	Formally not Identical	Formally Identical
3.	Simple Paraphrase	Simple Partial Paraphrase	Simple Mutual Paraphrase
4.	Complex Paraphrase	Antonyms	Link-Triangle
5.	Substitution	Personal pronouns	Demonstratives

The data

The data for analysis consist of five texts chosen randomly. These texts represent the five major text types recognized by Werlich (1976). They are: descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative and instructive (see Appendix)

Data analysis

The analysis of the data has been based on Hoey's (1983 and 1991) models of repetition. First, types of repetition in each text types are investigated. Then, roles of repetition in each text type are identified.

Discussion of the Results

Types of Repetition

The analysis of the types of repetition in the English data shows the total number of instances of repetition is (101) as shown in table (2) below. The first type of simple repetition, exact repetition, is the most frequent type of repetition in the data with a total of (39) instances accounting for (38.6%). The first type of complex repetition, where two words share a lexical morpheme but are not formally identical, comes second in frequency with a total of (18) instances which account for (17.8%). As for the second type of simple repetition, singular and plural forms, it comes third in frequency with a total of (14) instances accounting for (13.8%). The second type of simple paraphrase, simple mutual paraphrase, comes fourth in frequency with a total of (10) instances which account for (9.9 %). The second type of substitution, demonstratives, comes fifth in frequency with a total of (7) instances accounting for (6.9 %). The first type of complex paraphrase, antonyms, and the first type of substitution, personal pronouns, come sixth in frequency with a total of (5) instances each, accounting for (4.9%) each. The second type of complex paraphrase, link triangle, comes seventh in frequency with a total of (2) instances accounting for (1.9%).

On the other hand, the second type of complex repetition, where two words are formally identical but have different grammatical functions, is the least frequent type of repetition in the data with a single instance of occurrence only accounting for (0.99%). The analysis also reveals that the narrative text has the highest frequency of types of repetition (at 23.7%), while the descriptive and argumentative texts have the lowest frequency of types of repetition (at 16.8%). On the other hand, the frequencies of types of repetition in the other text types are as follows: (21.7%) in expository text and (20.7%) in instructive text.

Roles of Repetition

The analysis of the roles of repetition in the data reveals that clarification is the most frequent role of repetition with a total of (41) in number accounting for (34.7 %). As for the role of emphasis, it comes second in frequency with a total of (27) instances which account for (22.8 %). The syntactic role comes third in frequency with a total of (22) in number accounting for (18.6 %). Regarding the stylistic role, it comes fourth in frequency with a total of (16) instances accounting for (13.5%). On the other hand, the role of continuity is the least frequent role observed in the data with a total of (12) in number accounting for (10.1 %). These results are summarized in Table (3) below.

The analysis also reveals that the highest frequency of the roles of repetition is recorded in expository and instructive texts (at 22%) each, whereas the lowest frequency of the roles of repetition is recorded in the argumentative text (at 15.2%). As for the frequencies of the roles of repetition in other text types are as follows: (21.1%) in narrative and (19.4%) in descriptive text.

Table (2): Frequency of the Types of Repetition in the Five English Text Types

	Types of Repetition	Sub-Types of Repetition	Descriptive Text		Narrative Text		Expository Text		Argumentative Text		Instructive Text		Total	
			number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio
1	Simple Repetition	Exact word	8	47%	6	24%	10	45.4%	6	35.2%	9	42.8%	39	38.6%
		Singular and Plural	2	11.7%	4	16%	2	9%	4	23.5%	2	9.5%	14	13.8%
2	Complex Repetition	Formally not Identical	2	11.7%	3	12%	5	22.7%	3	17.6%	5	23.8%	18	17.8%
		Formally Identical	zero	0%	1	4%	zero	0%	zero	0%	zero	0%	1	0.99%
3	Simple Paraphrase	Simple partial paraphrase	zero	0%	zero	0%	zero	0%	zero	0%	zero	0%	zero	0%
		Simple mutual paraphrase	2	11.7%	4	16.6%	zero	0%	2	11.7%	2	9.5%	10	9.9%
4	Complex Paraphrase	Antonyms	1	5.8%	Zero	0%	1	4.5%	1	5.8%	2	9.5%	5	4.9%
		Link Triangle	zero	0%	2	8%	zero	0%	zero	0%	zero	0%	2	1.9%
	Substitutio	Personal	1	5.8%	1	4%	1	4.5%	1	5.8%	1	4.7%	5	4.9%

5	n	Pronouns												
		Demonstrative Adverb	1	5.8%	3	12%	3	13.6%	zero	0%	zero	0%	7	6.9%
		Total	17	16.8%	24	23.7%	22	21.7%	17	16.8%	21	20.7%	101	

	Roles of Repetition	Descriptive Text		Narrative Text		Expository Text		Argumentative Text		Instructive Text		Total	
		number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio	number	ratio
1.	Clarification	11	47.8%	6	24%	10	38.4%	6	33.3%	8	30%	41	34.7%
2.	Emphasis	3	13%	10	40%	6	23%	3	16.6%	5	19.2%	27	22.8%
3.	Syntactic	3	13%	3	12%	6	23%	4	22.2%	6	23%	22	18.6%
4.	Stylistic	4	17.3%	5	20%	2	7.6%	2	11.1%	3	11.5%	16	13.5%
5.	Continuity	2	8.6%	1	4%	2	7.6%	3	16.6%	4	15.3%	12	10.1%
	Total	23	19.4%	25	21.1%	26	22%	18	15.2%	26	22%	118	

Table (3): Frequency of the Roles of Repetition in the Five English Text Types

Conclusions

The present study has come up with the following conclusions:

1. English makes heavy use of repetition. It is the most important cohesive device in the different text types. This verifies the first hypothesis which states: English uses repetition heavily.
2. In English, repetition plays various roles in the text. It can be used for clarification, emphasis, continuity, syntactic, and stylistic roles. This validates the second hypothesis which reads as follows: Repetition is multifunctional in English
3. In the data, clarification is the most frequent role of repetition. It represents (34.7 %).
4. The role of emphasis comes second in frequency in the data. It accounts for (22.8 %).
5. In the data, the syntactic role comes third in frequency. It represents (18.6 %).
6. The stylistic role comes fourth in frequency in the data. It accounts for (13.5 %).
7. Continuity is the least frequent role of repetition in the data. It represents (10.1 %).
8. In the data, the highest frequency of the roles of repetition is observed in the expository and instructive texts (22%).
9. The lowest frequency of the roles of repetition is recorded in the argumentative text (15.2%).
10. The first type of simple repetition, exact repetition, is the most frequent type observed in the data (38.6%). In other words, English uses exact repetition more than any of the other types of repetition. This refutes the first part of the fourth hypothesis and validates the last part which reads: English avoids exact repetition by using other types of repetition.
11. In the data, the second type of simple repetition, singular and plural forms, comes third in frequency. It represents (13.8 %).
12. In the data, the first type of complex repetition, where two words share a lexical morpheme but are not formally identical, comes second in frequency. It accounts for (17.8 %) of the data.
13. The second type of simple paraphrase, simple mutual paraphrase, is frequent in the data. It represents (9.9 %).
14. The first type of complex paraphrase, antonyms, accounts for (4.9%) of the data. Similarly, the second type of complex paraphrase, link triangle, represents (1.9) of the data.
15. The first type of substitution, personal pronouns, accounts for (4.9 %) of the data.
16. The first type of simple paraphrase, simple partial paraphrase, is never used in English. On the other hand, the second type of complex repetition, where two words are formally identical but have different grammatical functions, is rarely used in English.
17. In the data, the narrative text has the highest frequency of types of repetition (23.7%).
18. In the data, the descriptive and argumentative texts have the lowest frequency of types of repetition (16.8%).

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Descriptive Text**“Montreal”**

Montreal, one of Canada’s largest cities, is a popular tourist destination for several reasons. First, the city has a beautiful location. It sits on an island in the middle of the St. Lawrence River. In addition, Montreal is both modern and historic. There are many luxury hotels, it has clean and efficient subway system, and visitors can find a wide variety of shops and restaurants, especially downtown. The oldest area of the town, the Vieux Montreal, is very beautiful because many of its oldest buildings were protected as areas of the city were rebuilt or developed. The most interesting thing about Montreal may be its French quality. Approximately two-thirds of the people living in or near Montreal are of French origin, and they speak French as well as English. In addition to the strong French influence, there are large groups of people from Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, the West Indies, and China living there. All of this makes Montreal a great place to visit.

Narrative Text**“Charles Dickens”**

Charles Dickens (1812-70) is one of the greatest writers in English literature and is especially remembered as one of its greatest novelists. He was the son of an office worker who could not pay back money he had borrowed and was sent to prison as a result. This meant that the young Dickens was sent to work in a London factory as a young boy. He remembered these hard times all his life and they helped to shape his ideas as a writer. As a young man, he first worked in a solicitor’s office and then at 22 he joined a London newspaper. He began to write for a magazine, too, and he started producing stories such as (Pickwick Papers) in monthly parts, or instalments. These began to appear as books in 1836, and in the same year he also married. In the following years, he produced many more novels in monthly instalments, including (Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and A Tale of Two Cities). (Great expectation), which appeared during 1860-61, was one of his later works. In all these books, Dickens created huge numbers of wonderful characters. He also showed his life-long anger with various social evils, an anger that began with his experiences as a child. He worked extremely hard-and not just as a novelist. He wrote short stories and plays, too. He also became famous for public readings from his work, which he gave around Britain and abroad. Many of his novels have become successful film, TV, radio and theatre productions. (Macfarlane, 2010, p. 75)

Expository Text**“How to Deal with Stress”**

Just as people become stressed in different situations, so their bodies respond in different ways. In order to deal effectively with stress, it is important to identify the symptoms of stress for you as an individual; how does stress manifest itself? It might begin with a feeling of nervousness, an accelerated heart rate and an

increase in the rate of breathing. The individual might start to feel tension in the neck or shoulders and a sick feeling in the stomach. Depression, headaches and fatigue may be other responses to stress.

People deal with stress in a variety of ways; some people find meditation a useful way to relax. For other people physical activity is the best stress-reliever, e.g, a work-out in the gym, or an aerobics class can help get rid of the tensions of the day. Being in touch with nature through gardening or walking are other very common ways that people manage stress. Taking deep breaths can be another simple, but effective way of coping. Finding ways to relax is of course important in managing stress. However, once the triggers of stress have been identified, e.g, a certain situation at work, it is equally important to try and deal with the causes of the stress, rather than simply relieving the symptoms. In addition, a change in lifestyle may be required to make life less stressful overall. This may involve getting more sleep or changing diet. Ten cups of coffee a day may increase stress levels rather than reduce them. Generally stress is not something that happens suddenly. But is actually an accumulation of various factors. Awareness of these factors is the first step in determining how to deal with it. (McCormack & Watkins, 2007, p. 94)

Argumentative Text

“Advantages and Disadvantages of the Lecturing Method”

Lecturing as a method of teaching is so frequently under attack today from educational psychologists and by students that some justification is needed to retain it. Critics believe that it results in passive methods of learning which tend to be less effective than those which fully engage the learner. They also maintain that students have no opportunity to ask questions and must all receive the same content at the same pace, that they are exposed only to one teacher's interpretation of the subject matter which will inevitably be biased and that, anyway, few lectures rise above dullness. Nevertheless, in a number of inquiries this pessimistic assessment of lecturing as a teaching method proves not to be general among students although they do fairly often comment on poor lecturing techniques. Students praise lectures which are clear, orderly synopses in which basic principles are emphasized, but dislike too numerous digressions or lectures which consist in part of the contents of a textbook students of science subjects consider that a lecture is a good way to introduce a new subject, putting it in its context, or to present material not yet included in books. They also appreciate its value as a period of discussion of problems and possible solutions with their lecturer. They do not look for inspiration-this is more commonly mentioned by teachers-but arts students look for originality in lectures. Medical and dental students who have reported on teaching methods, or specially on lecturing, suggest that there should be fewer lectures or that, at the least, more would be unpopular. (Jordan, 1990, p. 75)

Instructive Text**“Dealing with Verbal Abuse”**

If you are living with a man who abuses you verbally with criticism, complaints, and insults, you should take steps to change your situation. First, realize that you are not to blame for his abusive behavior. This may be difficult for you to believe. Years of verbal abuse have probably convinced you that you are responsible for everything that is wrong with your relationship. But that is a lie. If your partner is verbally abusive, it is his responsibility to learn why he chooses to deal with his problems by saying nasty things. Perhaps he observed his father treating his mother that same way. Maybe he never learned any more positive ways to deal with negative emotions, like anger, fear, or disappointment. Steps two and three need to be done one right after the other. Step two is for you to announce that you will no longer tolerate being verbally abused. State that you are a person who deserves respect and civil behavior, and that you will accept no less. Next, offer to go with him to talk to a counselor who will help both of you learn new ways to communicate. While he learns to express his feelings without attacking you, you can learn to stand up for yourself and express your feelings clearly. If he refuses to take responsibility for changing his abusive behavior, then you must consider step four: to leave him. You were not put here on earth to have your self-concept demolished by serving as someone else’s verbal punching-bag. (Langan, 2001, p. 185)