

Reference Cohesion as Narrative Enhancer in the Nigerian Film script

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Abstract

This article analysed the use of reference cohesion type and ties as narrative enhancers in the Nigerian video film script. Reference cohesion, one of the five cohesion types identified by Halliday and Hasan (1976) as the most plausible cohesive device is often featured in text formation for explicit referencing. Used as either endophoric or exophoric tie, the reference cohesion devices serve as inter and intra sentential connectors. The corpus consists of four Nigerian video film scripts randomly selected from Amtel Malta Box Office productions. The findings of the study show that reference cohesive devices are necessary features of the narrative film discourse. Specifically, they function as reference ‘specifiers’ in context to guide mental connection between lexical items, places and persons in any unfolding discourse. The study further finds out that the utilization and high frequency of the reference cohesion types and ties are chiefly responsible for the longer narrative content typical of the Nigerian video films. The study thereby recommends that film script writers, directors and screenplay actors should learn the appropriate use and placement of the reference cohesion ties and types in film discourse.

Key Words: Cohesion, Reference, Video Film script, Ties, Discourse, Narrative

Introduction

There cannot be a narrative without context. In a prelude to this claim, Mey (2001) asserts that ‘no matter how natural our language facilities or how convention-bound their use might be, language users always operate in context’. This leads to fact that ‘context looms large and must be taken into account’ whenever thoughts are translated to language according use by the placement of appropriate ‘reference items’. It therefore becomes a linguistic protocol to make reference to existents, characters, places, events and issues in any premise of discourse (Toolan, 2010). With the aid of such reference lexical items in any given discourse, narrative genres in general and film discourse in particular, draw interpretative value at both intra and inter sentential levels thereby giving

ground for explicit referencing, interconnectivity and narrative continuity (Toolan, 2007:142 and Malgwi, 2008:110).

As a priority in corpus linguistics, it has become a norm to identify and subject all forms discourse to various types of analysis; one of such being pattern analysis, a ground for determining how orientation and socio-cultural factors define the premise of discourse (Hart, 2005). This brings to fore an identifiable pattern of 'film discourse' out of which the Nigerian video film genre emerged as tenable corpus with hermeneutical boundary for analytical consideration. Available literature on the Nigerian video film as a brand registers the Nollywood as both a socio-cultural expression and a commercial industry with the highest production rate of 1500 to 2000 in different locations premiered in Nigeria and the diaspora. Akpabio (2001), Chukwueke (2006) and NFVC (2010) emphasize the economic and cultural value of the Nigerian film industry as the largest video film format in the world. With a significant per capital registration in the Nigerian national budget, the industry has a revenue generation capacity of not less than 5 billion US Dollars per year with a growth rate of 6%. The significance of this prolific genre as it comes to bear on the Nigerian society, equally rests on its pedagogical resources largely as vehicle of mass enlistment and education in a multicultural and trilingual nation (Chikwendu, 2004:131).

This significant impact has become phenomenal in language and communication studies introducing a new challenge to film corpus analysis and understanding of the form, pattern, content and linguistic features of the Nigerian video films (Okome, 2007:2). It poses a problem where most Nigerian film script writers and directors find it difficult developing standard screenplays even at post production level (Ekwuazi, 2002:12). This problem is further made cumbersome with overstretched narration and an additional component (Information Text IT) to the conversational discourse (Conversation Text CT); thereby making the Nigerian films more dialogue driven visual base DDVB than visual driven dialogue base VDDB. This paper sets in therefore to investigate the reference as textual cohesive device and a tie prominently featured in the Nollywood film genre as narrative enhancers (Ngamsa, 2013:12).

Review of Related Literature

The most plausible yardstick in understanding any discourse is vested in cohesion, a term commonly used in text linguistics to explain devices that create text and texture (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). This claim is further explained in Richard et al (1992:111) where the provisions of discourse in reference deals with: How articles, pronouns and references affect context and, or how cohesion is created; the relationship between utterances in discourse; and the moves made by speakers to introduce a new topic, change the topic or assert a higher relationship to participants.

While Richard et al (1992) harps on the interpretative aspect of the text formation, Halliday and Hasan (1976) on a more exhaustive scale offer an elaborate perspective on the concept of cohesion in discourse analysis. Halliday and Hasan (1976) further explore details of text, texture and ties. In their definition, text refers to any passage spoken or written which forms a unified whole _prose or verse, monologue or dialogue. Text, according to them, expresses the property of a texture, while ties specifically refer to cohesive devices chiefly known as reference, conjunction, substitution, ellipsis and lexical cohesion types.

Johnstone (2008) and Kolstrup (2009) further proffer related concepts on the place of reference cohesion in determining the premise of discourse. Kolstrup (2009:12) particularly, places the ‘prior discourse principle’ into the context of double compositional construction upon which Johnstone (2008) concept of intertextuality and interdiscursivity thrives. Their submissions differently though, provide an analytical leverage to place even volumes of separate textual components as one as long as they cohere under a particular theme. Corroborating this fact, Sharndama (2008:35) on another note further explains how cohesive devices remain essential to text relations and information organization in sentences, clauses, phrases or longer discourses. By all these submissions on reference cohesion, an unfolding text for instance could be connected or interpreted by ranges of intra and inter-discoursal ties where lexical reference items among others are particularly found in context.

Since the central concern of this paper is to study cohesion particularly the reference as a type/tie in the Nigerian video films, it behoves this investigation to put in perspective Halliday and Hasan (1976) as model for the theoretical frame work. In this model the term cohesion is operationally accepted and broadly classified by the duo as both grammatical and lexical. Reference cohesion belonging to the grammatical aspect of ties, remains primarily distributed according to its applicable functions, namely: endophoric, exophoric, anaphoric and cataphoric pointing devices. In explaining the premise, Halliday and Hasan (1976:31) define reference cohesion as: the specific nature of the information that is signalled for retrieval. In the case of reference the information to be retrieved is the referential meaning, the identity of the particular thing or class of things that is being referred to; and (that) the cohesion lies in the continuity of reference, whereby the same thing enters into the discourse a second time.

Divided into four patterns of ties, types and expressions, the reference cohesion first takes cue from an endophoric (within the text) base which provides for other extended referencing _exophoric (outside the text) base pointing to referents outside the text through deixises and indexicalities (Mey, 2001:53 and Jauro and Ngamsa, 2012: 70). Endophoric reference, seemingly opposite to exophoric reference but equally hosting other forms of the ties, signals “something” in the universe of the text which is either anaphoric (backward) or cataphoric (forward). By this definition, the reference stands as

the commonest of all cohesive devices tenable in narrative discourse whether at intra or inter textual levels.

Additional studies into corpus annotation of four Nigerian video film scripts shown in Ngamsa (2012:82) corroborates the fact that Reference cohesion type as a tie features more than the other four types put together in any film discourse because of high narrative content typical of storylines. The study reveals that out of the frequency count of 9448 sum total of the five cohesion types (reference, conjunction, lexical, substitution and ellipsis), the reference cohesion type alone, registers 6189 representing 66.21% above the other four types put together numbering 3259 with 44. 79%. The table below further shows the distribution of the five cohesion types according to frequency of occurrence and percentages:

Table 1: Frequency Count and Percentage of Cohesion Types in Four Video films

Types of Cohesion	Total No. of Occurrences	% of Occurrence
Reference	6189	66.21
Conjunction	2253	23.21
Lexical	444	4.75
Ellipsis	361	3.86
Substitution	201	2.86
Total	9448	100

Source: Ngamsa (2012)

While the table above shows the reference cohesion type as the highest, the counting in conformity with Butler (1985) justifies the place of statistics in corpus linguistics; showing in graphic terms representative implication of laying emphasis on a particular variable_ the Reference. This consideration equally adheres to the Mey (2006:52-66) a perspective on reference and anaphora that seeks to clarify ‘inter subjective ambiguity’ caused by ‘unclear reference’ items like ‘I’ and ‘You’ where there is no corresponding subject or object in the discourse. The emphasis then rests on the reference cohesion type as the most essential placement input in film discourse not frequently substituted or elided to in any narrative.

Nwogu (1998) on medical science journals, Vassiliou (2006) on the film discourse and Sharndama (2008) on the legal text all extensively saw the reference cohesion type as a necessary pointing item particularly drawn in discourse to avoid repetition of names, places, words and in rare cases, phrases. These perspectives at theoretical level, therefore provides the premise for a methodological consideration to determine the patterns of occurrence

and distribution of the reference cohesion type in the film discourse.

Methodology

This paper is primarily descriptive and based on a corpus of selected Nigerian video film scripts. The four film scripts selected from Amtel Malta Box Office productions of the Digital Jungle Studios are certified content by the National films and Videos Censors Board of Nigeria for home video and cinema hall exhibitions. The use of Reference as cohesive type in the Nigeria film discourse was investigated according to Halliday and Hasan (1976) found in the two text parts of the video films_ Information Text IT and Conversation Text CT parts. The Corpus consist of the following film scripts:

Table. 2. Corpus Selection and Classification Table

TEXT No.	Film Scripts	NFVCB classification Rating	PRODUCTION *Date *Awards	SCRIPT Writers	GENRE/ THEME
1.	<i>SITANDA</i>	PG-Parental/ Guidance Required	Winner of the Ambo.1 Reality TV show 2005	Fidelis Akpon	An Epic centred on African tales of taboo/cast system
2.	<i>WHITE WATERS</i>	G-General Exhibition	Box Office Winner Ambo 2 2006	Izu Ojukwu	Romance centred on the struggles of a villager to stardom
3.	<i>CINDY'S NOTES</i>	18-For Matured Audience	Box Office Winner Ambo 3 2007	Felix Odion	Heroic Drama/ feature film on National Youth Orientation in Nigeria
4.	<i>THE CHILD</i>	G-General Exhibition	Box Office Winner Ambo 4 2010	Tunde Aladese	An Epic dealing with chieftaincy clan struggle

The procedure of analysis for this study arranged the features of reference cohesion type and ties according to sub categorical functions in the film scripts in the following order: personal reference, anaphoric reference, cataphoric reference and the exophoric reference. The passages selected for the descriptive analysis and annotation, were classified according to the serially numbered video films and text parts. Pages of the text parts were also cited below the passages in brackets to substantiate the eclectic choice of the reference devices in the video film scripts.

Discussion and Findings

In all the selected scripts of the corpus at both intra and Inter-sentential levels, the aim of the writer/presenter to reader/viewer is to identify the Who and What reference is being made to. This objective is then purposed at avoiding repetition of names, phrases and words often used (Vassiliou, 2004 and Sharndama, 2008). The study identifies the consistent occurrence of the following group of words and reference items: I, She, He, You, Him, They, His, Her, We, One, The, That, Us and Them as referents often used in the texts to refer to things, names, events and issues in the Discourse. Such words and lexical items classified either as pronouns, articles or demonstratives in the corpus are found in context to refer backward (anaphorically), forward (cataphorically) and external (exophorically); all as references internally resident (endophorically) in ‘the hosted text’ (Toolan, 2007).

Personal Reference

In The Child (Text No. 4) of the corpus, there is clear use of personal pronouns referring to characters and people in the screenplay. Some of the personal referents/pronouns used are hereby shown in the following discussion between two chiefs in the conversational text part:

Chief 2

That one? Are you sure he is still alive?

Chief 1

Did you kill him?

Chief 2

*I don't have to. If a sheep insists on going
To bleat in front of the Lion's den, sooner
Or later the lion will answer his call.*

(CT 4. P.3)

From the discussion by the two chiefs, the underlined lexical items: You, He, and His, function in context as personal pronouns- Referents/Subjects that are better placed in the process that create the discourse. In the verbal exchange, the personal pronouns co-refer to both Chief 2 (you) and Ifueko's brother—‘He’ (as subject of the discussion who seems to be under threat of being killed). In this speech interaction, where Chief 2 enquires about the possible survival of the character in question, the discourse appears to be both reportorial and rhetorical: asking, reporting and metaphorically establishing the issue at hand, whether Ifueko's brother personally referred to as ‘that One’, ‘He’, ‘Him’ and metaphorically as ‘His’ (sheep) ‘bleating in front of the metaphorically’ Lion's den’, is killed or not. In the text, the pronouns: You and He which refer to Chief 1 and Ifueko's brother respectively, are used to achieve cohesion in the corpus.

In the Instruction text part of Sitanda (Text No. 1), the personal pronouns: Her, She and It, are found to be commonly used; largely, to compliment the collateral aspect

of the narrative. A sample of such collateral text (Information Text IT) describing an action preparatory to a conversational interaction is hereby presented as follows:

*Ann shuts the door after her. She saunters to the bed and sinks her body
In it. Amanzee is already in bed and seems engrossed in a book in hand.
Ann rises and walks briskly to the bathroom. (IT 1 P.1)*

The group of pronouns underlined in the narration above, are predominantly used in the corpus of the study. In this context, the referents are mainly third person pronouns. The pronouns She and Her have strong tie with Ann as the central subject of the passage. While the pronouns She and Her refer back to Ann in the first sentence, the It in the second sentence also anaphorically refers to bed (a non-personal pronoun). This narration and a score of similar referents in the text are noted as facilitators that add to referential exactness and denotative explicitness of the film scripts.

The information text particularly, the instruction text in this context, emphasizes the role played by characters. While these text parts and references in the representative scripts are for narrative and action, they also provide a ground for visual-verbal cohesion of the discourse which appears to be exophoric. At both intra and inter-sentential levels, this class of personal pronouns are purposely used in referential communication; setting in to point out and establish the identity of a recent referent by drawing attention to roles in the ensuing discourse (Halliday and Hassan (1976:74).

Anaphoric Reference

Anaphoric (backward) reference is one of the most practical ways by which pronouns are generally used to refer to objects, subjects and issues in all discourses. As a major pointing device commonly found in the corpus of this study, anaphora is specifically used to connect discourse/sentence with its antecedents at either sentential or inter-sentential levels. The following commentary from an information text is a clear example:

*Omono walks at the village road. Suddenly she freezes with a look of shock.
She holds her palm out and stares in delight at the drop of water which lands
On it. ...She looks at the sky, grinning. Then with a jump of excitement,
She starts to run.(IT 4 P.10)*

In this text part of The Child, Omono's activity is described pictorially as a prelude to a dialogue. It remains loaded and bonded by two categories of anaphoric references: to Omono herself and to the action she took '*Holding her palm out with delight at the drop of water which lands on it*'. In the first instance, the repeated use of the pronoun She and the single anaphoric reference to Her in the four sentences create an inter-sentential cohesion. The use of *her* specifically as a third person pronoun foregrounds the reference to an activity of the anticipated action of the drop of water on her hand. It also marks the place of It as a third person pronoun (subjective case) pointing at the second referent in the discourse. While the reference *to her palm* stands in the third

sentence as the second referent determined by *It*, the anaphoric reference is noted in this context as setting in to reinforce how the typicality of linking devices improves the coordination of visual and verbal information in the film discourse generally.

This anaphoric reference technique occurs and is noted as a reference marker that improves cohesion in the filmscript. It also sets to function as a pointer in all forms of references whether in the information or the conversation text parts of film scripts to perfect the narrative sequence of dialogue and change of scenes.

In White Waters (text 2) and Cindy's Notes (text 3), the anaphoric references that generally occur are personal pronouns. They are used to serve the purpose of multiple referencing to objects and subjects at both inter and intra discursual levels (Amoruwa, 2011:74-75). The argument between Banji and Osa in text 2 is a typical example that shows inter-discursive anaphoric uses:

EXAMPLE 1

Banji

1. *He is definitely behind professionals like us.*
2. (Osa a young man of Banji's age group cuts in.
3. He has just arrived behind them alongside Ahmed,
Another athlete of the same age group)

Asa

4. *Don't be too sure.*
5. *There are lots of guys in the streets
Who could give us a run for our money.*
6. *They simply lack Opportunity.*
(TEXT 2 P 12-13)

EXAMPLE 2

Cindy

When do I receive my deployment letter?

Zonal Coordinator

I am not the Post Master General of the federation.

You will get it whenever we receive it.

In example 1, the Anaphoric Reference items used are: He, Us, Our, Them and They. The pronoun He in sentence 3 of the information Text from example 1, points back to Osa, one of the young men addressing Banji's argument. Osa as both the referent and the subject, extends the border of his reference Us in the collective sense; bringing in every athlete as the object/subject of his description.

The pronouns us (objective case in sentence 1), and our in Osa's speech which is (possessive in sentence 5) are both used to achieve cohesion. The two reference items in the speech equally points back to 'guys' in the discourse; showing an interlock of references applicable in an inter-discursive circumstance. The same reference chain-link uses they in Osa's speech to refer to guys and them in the instruction text. In this

application they and them referring to the ‘said’ non-professionals, draw a contrast with “us”, ‘the professionals’ earlier mentioned in Banji’s statement. This group of pronouns, stand in as narrative pointers to they (subject) and them (object) of the on-going discourse. Such pronouns bring about intra and inter-discoursal interaction in both the collateral and dialogue text parts of the film scripts- for the on-going narrative that unfolds the story.

In example No. 2 Cindy’s Notes (text 3), the dialogue shows another use of anaphoric reference at inter discourse level. From the conversation between Cindy and the Zonal Coordinator of the NYSC, the highlighted reference to the–“letter” as the subject, is further referred to as “it” (personal pronoun). This repeated reference to the “letter” in the first segment of the second statement is for emphasis. In clear terms it reduces the loaded nature of the discourse by not repeating the referent ‘letter” thrice in the discussion. In all of the above samples, the study notices that the anaphoric references are used to achieve specificity and accuracy through a process of using linguistic expression to pick out a subject. This technique is used to elaborate and simplify narrative discourse in all film scripts.

Cataphoric Reference

Cataphoric reference known as cataphora earlier defined as forward looking is mutually different from anaphora (which is backward looking). Cataphora is used in stylistic and discourse analysis to describe the cohesive ties between items and those which follow after them in sequence (Finch, 2000:204). In the context of this study, it is noted as an opposite of anaphoric reference, equally encountered in the corpus as co-referential. There are instances of cataphoric references and some of them are used as linkages between pronoun and the noun-phrase. In most cases they are used to create suspense by either deductive or implied presentation of details before the mention of a referent. The following example from The Child (text 4) is typical of the cataphoric reference:

Slowly, he takes out an arrow and puts it into the bow. He lets it fly, but he does it wrongly and the arrow falls harmlessly. The deer hears and flees. Osaze takes off after it running through the bushes and checking to dodge branches. (IT4P.42)

In the narrative build up, the continuous use of the pronoun He as a cataphoric reference item anticipates the introduction of Osaze whose action as an amateur hunter is earlier described. Clearly, this reference is cataphoric coming after a general narrative build up describing Osaze’s attempt to shoot a deer with a bow and arrow. This action particularly builds suspense and expectation typically noted in a film narrative. Cataphoric reference is noted to be a narrative device that engages the viewer/reader/hearer in expectation. As a reference ‘specifier’, cataphoric is equally put in context to guide the mental connection between items and the material in adjacent

sentences – formally to disambiguate them (Toolen, 2000, 2007:26). At best in sustained but longer discourse, such connectivity is often referred to as coherence or supra-discoursal connective device that is more logical and structural.

In another instruction text part – Cindy's Notes (text 3), an illustration of the cataphoric reference is made:

The man with the purse stops in front of Wilson who has gotten up to his feet. Wilson looks up from the purse to the person's face. It's Akafi. Akafi stretches the purse to him. (IT.3.P.56).

Still, as in most text parts of the corpus, this forward reference to Akafi in this narration is dramatic. The man, although a proper noun points to his a personal pronoun that again refers forward pointing to the person's face (an adjectival noun phrase). The forward reference eventually ends in the two last sentences pointing to Akafi in the following forward march:

1 2 3 4
The man ----- this – the person's faces—Akafi...

“The” as article pointing forward to Akafi is tagged with the pronoun ‘man’ (1) and adjectival noun ‘the person's face’ (3) to cataphorically refer to Akafi. Such usages, beside building up suspense from the anticipation to know who the referent is, stand out as comparative constructions which specify what (the action) is or the people referred to. In this context, the, remains a specifying agent (Halliday 1976:70), serving to identify a particular individual – ‘Akafi’ in the passage above. It is also noted that as a demonstrative like any article “the” in this context is identified by a noun that equally depends on: a referent for full meaning at the end of the narrative. This cataphoric pattern of reference is mainly noticeable in the instruction text parts of the video film scripts than in the dialogue text parts. In most parts of the corpus, cataphoric references are used as discourse markers that facilitate ‘flash-fronts’ to expected dialogue/action in a screen play – in describing activity and action that guides the characters and moves the action forward.

Exophoric Reference

While the term exophora is defined as ‘outside’ against an endophoric context, the term is adopted to mean a reference relationship that depends on the context of situation for textual meaning (Brown and Yule 1983:192). According to Finch (2000:214), it has a deictic application in terms of locating persons, place, events and time outside or beyond the “textual” environment. In our corpus, an extended placement of demonstratives like this/these, here, then, there, that, time adverbials, articles etc., have been found to be commonly in use. The following passage from The Child (text 4) offers an example of exophoric reference in the corpus:

(The Zama Council of seven chiefs are in the middle of a meeting.

Hiding behind a pillar and listening to the on-goings is Efueko).

Chief 1

What about his brother?

Chief 2

That one? Are you sure is still alive?

Chief 1

Did you kill him?

Chief 2

I don't have to. If a sheep insist on going to

Bleat in front of the lion's den, sooner or later

The lion will answer his call.

(Text 4 P.3).

In the passage above there is a typical deictic ascription to a person “that one” and a metaphorical reference to a place, the “Lion’s Den”. The two exophoric reference markers have to be sought for outside the text in the context of situation (Brown and Yule, 1983:192). For meaning making, the reference system here helps in relaying the plot line of the narrative. The morphological blending of the ‘lion’s den’ equally compresses the long narrative. Clearly, the pronominal reference and the locative ascription of events to spots, places and scenes are notable applications that are made more real by exophoric reference devices.

Another instance of an exophoric reference is illustrated in the following conversation between Banji and Osa in Cindy Notes (text. 2):

Banji

He is definitely behind professionals like us.

Osa

Don't be too sure. There are lots of guys in the streets who could give us a run for our money.

They simply lack opportunity.

(CT 2.P.13).

The two pronouns – he and they and the noun guys are referred to here as exophoric. He, in the discussion particularly refers to Melvis, the non-professional athlete who is not seen but used as the subject of discussion. The other entry/use of guys equally referred to as they in the third sentence by Osa, are not seen at the scene of the ongoing discussion. The participants referred to in the context are equally expected to suddenly appear. In this context, there is a general expectation that is facilitated by what could be termed as a ‘flash forward’ – setting a ground for the introduction of Melvis as a non-professional to give Banji and others ‘a good run for their money’. In given usages like this, proper nouns and pronouns are used to specifically ‘postmark’ and introduce people, issues and events in narrative and as discourse topics. As narrative, the people and events are often described as prelude to the anticipated action.

Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained from the descriptive analysis of the corpus, it is realized that reference cohesion type and ties are extensively used in typical Nigerian film scripts as narrative enhancers. Commonly found in both the text parts of the scripts, the reference cohesive devices also provide narrative continuity, subsequently prolonging the narrative and the story line.

It is clearly shown from the analysis that narrative continuity is basically achieved through extensive and appropriate utilization of the reference cohesion type and ties namely: the personal reference, anaphoric reference, cataphoric reference and exophoric reference items. These ties are also used in all the text parts and the entire corpus to achieve referential exactness. In addition, the study realized that the same reference items are largely put in place to equally achieve specificity and accuracy in pointing out objects and subjects under discussion. While it is realized that the reference cohesion type in particular enhances narrative through pointing devices, it is also discovered that at intertextual level, the reference cohesion type duplicates reference and thereby elongates the narrative.

The study therefore recommends that all stakeholders in the Nigerian film industry (the Nollywood) should review the structure of the typical Nigerian film script with it in mind to learn the appropriate use of reference cohesion devices for effective narration. While the reference cohesion type facilitates explicit pointing for context specification, the study also enjoins the film script writers, directors and screenplay actors to learn the effective and accurate utilization of the reference cohesion type and ties in both the Information Text IT and the Conversation Text CT.

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