

Ellipsis and Substitution in Short Stories: Maintaining Textual Cohesion in Literary Discourse

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Abstract:

The article investigates the use of ellipsis and substitution as grammatical cohesion devices in English short stories, focusing on their role in maintaining textual cohesion within literary discourse. The study identifies various forms and functions of ellipsis and substitution, including nominal, verbal and clausal forms, and explores how these devices contribute to the overall flow and unity of the text. The findings highlight that ellipsis and substitution are essential tools for creating cohesive literary texts, allowing writers to achieve brevity while ensuring clarity and continuity. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of cohesion in literary writing and offers insights that may benefit both literary analysis and language teaching focused on discourse competence.

Keywords: grammatical cohesion, ellipsis, substitution, nominal, verbal, clausal.

Cohesion is an essential feature of any well-structured text, as it ensures that sentences and ideas are logically connected and flow smoothly. Among the various grammatical devices that contribute to cohesion, ellipsis and substitution play a significant role in maintaining textual unity and avoiding unnecessary repetition. Ellipsis involves the omission of words or phrases that are understood from the context, while substitution replaces one element with another to prevent redundancy. In literary texts, especially short stories, these devices are frequently used to create concise and coherent narratives that engage readers and enhance the aesthetic quality of the writing. Despite their importance, the role of ellipsis and substitution in literary discourse has not received as much attention as other cohesive devices, such as reference or conjunction. Therefore, this study aims to explore how ellipsis and substitution function as cohesive devices in English short stories, highlighting their contribution to textual cohesion and narrative coherence.

Ellipsis involves the omission of certain elements in a sentence because they are understood from the context. In *“Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen”* by O. Henry, ellipsis helps maintain coherence and avoid redundancy by leaving out parts of the sentence that are implied or easily inferred by the reader. As we know ellipsis may be nominal, verbal and clausal. Nominal and verbal ellipsis are used as forms of grammatical cohesion to maintain narrative flow and coherence. Let’s break down how each type of ellipsis functions in the story.

Example: *You remember that last Thanksgiving Day you kind of had to wait for your second helping.*

In this sentence, the nominal ellipsis occurs with the omission of the noun "meal" or "dinner" after "second helping." The reader understands that "helping" refers to a serving of food, even though the specific noun "meal" is not stated. The ellipsis of the noun "meal" is implied because in the context of Thanksgiving, it is clear that the speaker refers to the act of eating. The word "helping" is enough to convey the message without having to repeat "meal" or "dinner."

This helps to avoid redundancy and keeps the narrative concise. Several reasons occur to refer to nominal ellipsis. The first considered is contextual references where the noun phrase “the old man” is understood as referring to the person Mr. Beasley helped. The repeated use of “the old man” could be omitted in subsequent sentences, relying on the context to provide clarity.

Example: *Mr. Beasley, a wealthy gentleman, made it a point to help someone in need each Thanksgiving. The old man he chose this year was particularly grateful.*

The next reason is for avoiding repetition: *Mr. Beasley approached the old man and offered him a dollar. The latter was astonished by the gesture.*

In this sentence, “the latter” is a nominal ellipsis referring to “the old man.” The use of “the latter” avoids repeating “the old man,” streamlining the narrative.

The other one is for clarifying character roles: *Every year, Mr. Beasley helped someone in need. The person he chose this time was an elderly man.*

Above, “the person” is a nominal ellipsis that refers back to “someone in need.” The specific details are omitted but understood from the context.

Verbal ellipsis involves omitting parts of a verb phrase when the meaning can be inferred from the context. This helps to avoid unnecessary repetition and keeps sentences fluid.

Example: *I'll see you on the same bench, at the same hour, and I'll bring the same turkey as I did last year.*

Here, the ellipsis of the verb "bring" occurs in the second clause. It is understood that the character will bring the turkey, even though the verb does not need to be repeated. The context makes it clear that the action of bringing is being referenced again, so the ellipsis omits the repetition of the verb "bring." Here we can see the situations where the author omitted the verbs. First is to avoid the repetition: *Mr. Beasley gave the old man a dollar, and the old man accepted it gratefully.*

In this case, “accepted it gratefully” omits the verb “gave” (i.e., “Mr. Beasley gave it to him”). The meaning is clear from the context, so the verb is not repeated.

The next is when in streamlining actions: *Mr. Beasley helped the old man, and then went home to celebrate.*

The phrase “went home to celebrate” omits the subject and the verb phrase related to “celebrate,” assuming the reader understands it refers to Mr. Beasley’s actions.

The last is to avoid redundancy: *The old man was surprised by the generosity and expressed his thanks. Mr. Beasley was pleased, as he had hoped.*

In “as he had hoped,” the full verb phrase “as Mr. Beasley had hoped” is implied but not repeated, keeping the sentence concise.

Thus, we can say that nominal ellipsis helps maintain focus on the main characters and events without unnecessary repetition. It allows for smoother narrative flow by referring back to previously mentioned entities without repeating their full descriptions. It keeps the reader engaged and avoids redundancy, making the text more readable and cohesive. When it comes to verbal, it streamlines the narrative by omitting parts of verb phrases that are redundant or implied. It ensures that sentences do not become cumbersome with repeated verbs or actions and maintains the narrative’s pace and clarity by avoiding repetitive elements, allowing for a more fluid reading experience.

When it comes to clausal ellipsis, it refers to the omission of part of a clause because its meaning can be inferred from the surrounding text or context. This is a form of grammatical cohesion in which unnecessary repetition is avoided, allowing for a more fluid and efficient communication. O. Henry uses clausal ellipsis in “*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*” to create a smoother narrative flow and maintain focus on the characters and their actions, while allowing readers to infer certain details without being explicitly told. They occur when part of a clause, often a verb phrase or the subject, is omitted because it is understood from prior context. This keeps the narrative from becoming repetitive or overly explicit while still ensuring that meaning is conveyed. Clausal ellipsis works as a cohesive device by encouraging the reader to fill in the gaps, creating a more engaging and dynamic reading experience.

O. Henry uses clausal ellipsis to streamline dialogue and description, often in interactions between characters where what is being omitted is clear from context. His characters often speak in an informal and direct manner, with ellipsis frequently used to make their speech sound more natural and conversational. In dialogues, part of the sentences or responses are omitted because the meaning is obvious from the preceding clause.

Example: *'Thank you,' said the Old Gentleman; 'I hope you have enjoyed your dinner.' 'Thank you,' said the Old Gentleman again.*

In these exchanges, O. Henry doesn’t repeat the full responses of the poor man. The reader understands from the flow of dialogue that the poor man would have responded to the Old Gentleman’s question or comments. The ellipsis here helps maintain a natural conversational rhythm without unnecessary restatement. The author uses clausal ellipsis in his descriptions to avoid overloading the narrative with unnecessary details. This helps focus the reader’s attention on the essential elements of the story.

Example: *The Old Gentleman sat across the table from him, smiling, cheerful, still hungry.*

The phrase omits a complete verb clause like “he was” or “he looked,” but the meaning is clear. The ellipsis allows O. Henry to condense the description into a tighter, more efficient expression. The reader can easily infer that the gentleman is smiling, cheerful, and still hungry, without requiring additional explanation. There are also examples where actions are implied but not repeated because the previous sentence has already established what is happening.

Example: *Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years, the Old Gentleman had come to the same park bench, found the same poor man, and fed him.*

This sentence omits some redundant details. The reader can infer the steps taken each Thanksgiving, and O. Henry doesn’t need to repeat every individual action. For example, the verbs “had come,” “had found,” and “had fed” imply the completion of these actions without having to restate that each year the man physically arrives, finds the poor man, and takes him to dinner. Clausal ellipsis includes some functions to be used. The first one is when clausal ellipsis allows the author to be economical with language, reducing unnecessary repetition and making the narrative more concise. This keeps the focus on the evolving relationship between the two men and the core

themes of tradition and generosity, without bogging down the reader with redundant details. The next is considered naturalistic dialogue, where the use of ellipsis in dialogue gives the characters a more realistic and conversational tone. It reflects how people naturally speak, often leaving out parts of sentences that can be easily understood by context. This helps the dialogue flow more smoothly and keeps the focus on the emotional exchange between the characters. The other function is building reader engagement. By using clausal ellipsis in these situations, O. Henry encourages readers to actively participate in the narrative by filling in gaps. This can create a more engaging reading experience, as the reader is prompted to infer missing information and become more involved in piecing together the characters' thoughts and actions. The last one is integration of cohesion and fluidity, when clausal ellipsis enhances the cohesion of the text by avoiding repetitive clauses while maintaining clarity. It creates a fluidity that allows the story to move quickly, particularly in sections that emphasize action or routine, such as the recurring Thanksgiving dinner tradition. The ellipsis allows the reader to understand the continuity of these events without needing each step spelled out every time.

In *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen"* clausal ellipsis is used to create a more efficient and natural narrative. By omitting redundant parts of clauses, O. Henry ensures that the story flows smoothly, particularly in dialogue and repetitive actions. The ellipsis helps maintain grammatical cohesion while allowing the reader to infer meaning from context, making the story more engaging without sacrificing clarity. This technique is part of what gives the author's writing its signature wit, subtlety and rhythm.

The next key grammatical cohesion device that helps avoid repetition and creates a more concise, fluid narrative. It is substitution and it refers to replacing a word, phrase, or clause with a shorter element (such as a pronoun, auxiliary verb, or clause) that retains the meaning of the original word or idea. There are three types of substitution as well and they are: nominal, verbal, and clausal. Each plays a role in making the text more cohesive and maintaining the story's flow without unnecessary repetition. Here are some instances how these forms of substitution are used in O. Henry's story *"Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen"*. We will start with the nominal substitution. It occurs when a noun or noun phrase is replaced with a shorter nominal element, such as a pronoun or a word like "one" or "ones." This reduces redundancy by referring back to something already mentioned without restating it.

Example: *Two Thanksgiving Day gentlemen met on a bench in Union Square. The same bench where they had sat for many years.*

In this sentence, "the same bench" is a nominal substitution for the bench previously mentioned in the first sentence. Instead of repeating "bench" with additional description, O. Henry uses "the same bench" to refer back to the initial noun.

Example: *The same old gentleman had been doing this for nine years.*

In this case, "the same old gentleman" is a nominal substitution for the person previously introduced. The phrase prevents repetition of the character's name or more elaborate descriptions, and the reader understands who "the same old gentleman" is from the context.

Nominal substitution contributes to the story's cohesiveness by tying references to characters or objects back to earlier mentions without being redundant. It allows the author to maintain focus on his characters and their actions while keeping the prose succinct. Verbal substitution happens when a verb or verb phrase is replaced by a shorter element such as "do" or another auxiliary verb, referring back to a verb phrase previously mentioned. This avoids repeating full actions.

Example: *The old gentleman had always fed him on Thanksgiving, and today he would do the same.*

In this example, "do the same" is a verbal substitution for the action of feeding the poor man. The phrase "do the same" replaces the entire verb phrase "fed him on Thanksgiving", making the text more concise while keeping the meaning clear.

Example: *He had already eaten two Thanksgiving meals, but he could eat one more, just as he always did.*

Here, "did" is a verbal substitution for "ate one more meal" in the context of past Thanksgivings. This substitution avoids repeating the action of eating and helps create a smoother flow in the story. The author uses verbal substitution in the story to avoid unnecessary repetition of verbs, particularly in sections where the poor man's eating habits or the old man's actions are described repeatedly. This keeps the text streamlined and prevents monotonous restatements of similar actions. Clausal substitution involves replacing an entire clause with a shorter expression, often using words like "so," "not," or auxiliary verbs. This form of substitution helps condense sentences and maintain cohesion by referring back to previously mentioned ideas or events without restating them in full.

Example: *He wondered if the old man would invite him to dinner again, but he was certain that he would.*

In this sentence, "that he would" is a clausal substitution for "invite him to dinner again." The full meaning is understood from context, so the clause is replaced with a shorter version.

Example: *It was cold, but not as cold as last year.*

Here, "not as cold as last year" is a clausal substitution for "It was not as cold as it had been last year." The reader can infer the full meaning from the partial clause.

Clausal substitution works by summarizing entire clauses and referring to them with minimal language. In "*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*" this method is used to maintain the rhythm of the text while ensuring that the reader can easily follow the flow of ideas. Using substitution in the stories includes some functions as well. The first is to maintain flow and pacing, where substitution helps keep the narrative moving without getting bogged down in repetition. By using nominal, verbal, and clausal substitutions, O. Henry is able to present recurring actions or references to characters without restating them in full, which creates a more engaging and fluid reading experience. The next case is to enhance cohesion. Substitutions create cohesion by connecting different parts of the text. Since each substitution refers back to something already mentioned, the reader is able to easily follow the chain of events or ideas. This helps tie sentences and paragraphs together into a coherent whole, making the story feel more unified. One of the most effective uses of substitution is avoiding redundancy. Instead of repeating the same nouns, verbs, or clauses, O. Henry uses substitutions to keep the text concise. This allows him to focus on the plot and characters' emotions without overloading the reader with unnecessary repetition. The last is keeping attention on key themes. Substitution allows O. Henry to reinforce key themes such as tradition and generosity without having to overexplain. For example, using verbal substitution ("do the same") in reference to the old man's annual act of generosity keeps the focus on the tradition without restating the action in full.

In the story "*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*" substitution types contribute to the overall cohesion and readability of the story. These substitution techniques allow O. Henry to condense his language while still conveying essential details, enhancing the story's flow and ensuring that the reader remains focused on the evolving dynamic between the characters. Substitution helps avoid redundancy, maintain pacing, and build a cohesive narrative that reflects the central themes of tradition, charity, and human connection.

In conclusion we can say that ellipsis and substitution are vital grammatical cohesion devices that contribute to the unity and coherence of short stories. Through the omission and replacement of words, writers create smooth connections between sentences and ideas, enhancing the overall flow

of the narrative. The analysis of these devices in literary discourse highlights their role in achieving clarity, avoiding repetition, and maintaining reader engagement. Understanding the function of ellipsis and substitution not only deepens our appreciation of literary texts but also offers valuable insights for improving writing skills and discourse competence.

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