



Grammatical Cohesion: An Analysis of Reference in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' of Edgar Allan Poe

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Abstract

This study investigates how grammatical cohesion, particularly reference, is used to build meaning and narrative depth in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The aim is to examine what types of reference are used and how they contribute to the story's overall cohesion and psychological atmosphere. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis applies Halliday and Hasan's model of reference, which includes personal, demonstrative, and comparative forms. The findings show that personal references, such as "I," "my," and "he", are used extensively, shaping the story's intense first-person perspective and reflecting the narrator's obsessive mindset. Demonstrative references like "that eye" or "this work" highlight specific objects of fixation and carry symbolic meaning. Although less common, comparative references help express the narrator's inflated sense of control and precision. Overall, the study finds that reference in Poe's story does more than link sentences, it acts as a powerful stylistic tool that reveals character psychology and intensifies the narrative's suspense.

Keywords: *grammatical cohesion, reference, stylistics, narrative, Edgar Allan Poe*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana kohesi gramatikal, khususnya referensi, digunakan untuk membangun makna dan kedalaman cerita dalam cerpen *The Tell-Tale Heart* karya Edgar Allan Poe. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis referensi yang muncul serta menganalisis bagaimana penggunaannya mendukung koherensi narasi dan suasana psikologis cerita. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, analisis mengacu pada teori Halliday dan Hasan yang mengelompokkan referensi menjadi bentuk personal, demonstratif, dan komparatif. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa referensi personal seperti "I," "my," dan "he" muncul secara dominan, menciptakan sudut pandang orang pertama yang intens sekaligus mencerminkan obsesi tokoh utama. Referensi demonstratif seperti "that eye" dan "this work" menyoroti objek-objek yang menjadi pusat perhatian narator dan membawa makna simbolis. Meskipun jarang digunakan, referensi komparatif memperkuat gambaran narator sebagai sosok yang merasa unggul dan teliti. Secara keseluruhan, referensi dalam cerita ini bukan hanya berfungsi sebagai penghubung antar kalimat, melainkan menjadi alat stilistika yang memperlihatkan kondisi batin tokoh dan memperkuat ketegangan cerita.

Kata kunci: *kohesi gramatikal, referensi, stilistika, narasi, Edgar Allan Poe*

Introduction

In recent years, most studies on grammatical cohesion have focused on non-literary texts like news reports, political speeches, or student essays. While these texts are valuable for research, the way cohesion works in literature is often more intricate. In stories, cohesive devices don't just connect words and sentences, they help set the mood, shape the characters, and draw readers into the emotional world of the narrative. Today, with online archives such as Project Gutenberg, classic works of literature are easier than ever to access and revisit. Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, for instance, remains a favorite in literature and linguistics classrooms worldwide. Its gripping psychological voice and carefully chosen language make it an ideal text for exploring how grammar can be used for more than just clarity, it can create tension, atmosphere, and an intimate look into a character's mind. This is especially true in Gothic fiction, where references, whether personal, demonstrative, or comparative, can subtly guide how readers experience reality inside the story, heighten suspense, and reflect a narrator's unstable state of mind. This study steps into that space, combining linguistic and stylistic analysis to better understand how Poe's use of reference enriches both the structure and the psychological depth of his storytelling.

Every piece of writing, especially fiction, is built not only on imagination but also on the structure of language. One essential way language brings a story to life is through cohesion: the way words, ideas, and events are linked to form a meaningful whole. Halliday and Hasan (1976) emphasized the importance of cohesive devices, especially grammatical ones like reference, which help readers follow who or what is being talked about throughout a text. Reference includes personal pronouns like *I* or *he*, demonstratives like *this* or *that*, and comparatives like *more* or *better*, each playing a role in maintaining unity and clarity. In literary works, especially those told in the first person, reference becomes more than just a grammatical tool, it reveals character, mood, and even the narrator's state of mind. According to Tanskanen (2006), repeated use of personal pronouns can show how centered a narrative is around a character's internal world. Hoey (2001) further explains that patterns of reference often help build narrative structure and tone, guiding the reader through not just what happens, but how it's emotionally experienced.

Previous studies on cohesion have mostly examined non-literary texts. For example, Liu and Braine (2005) investigated cohesion in student essays and found that learners often relied heavily on certain cohesive devices, especially personal references, but struggled to use them effectively, which reduced the clarity of their writing. Similarly, Xiao (2010) analyzed cohesion in news reports and observed that cohesive ties, particularly demonstratives, were used to maintain factual flow and objectivity, yet offered little insight into style or psychological depth. Other studies, such as Tanskanen (2006), have emphasized that cohesion functions differently depending on the type of discourse, showing that non-literary texts tend to prioritize clarity and information flow rather than mood or narrative perspective. While these studies demonstrate how cohesion operates in academic and journalistic writing, there has been relatively little attention to how grammatical cohesion works in short literary fiction, especially in Gothic literature. Unlike essays or news texts, Gothic stories rely heavily on mood, voice, and psychological tension, where references may do more

than tie sentences together—they can reveal obsession, build suspense, and shape readers' perceptions of reality. This gap highlights the need for research that connects linguistic cohesion with literary style, and it is this space that the present study seeks to fill.

Cohesion has been a central topic in linguistics since Halliday and Hasan (1976) first introduced their framework, which classifies reference into personal, demonstrative, and comparative types. These categories have become the foundation for understanding how writers guide readers through a text. Later works, such as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Martin (1992), expand on this idea, showing that cohesive ties do more than just link sentences, they also help readers follow participants, events, and perspectives in a way that shapes meaning. From a discourse point of view, Hoey (2001) explores how patterns of reference influence the structure of a text, while Tanskanen (2006) highlights how cohesion adapts to different contexts and situations. These studies remind us that cohesion is not just a mechanical process, it depends on how the writer wants the reader to track people, places, and ideas. In the field of stylistics, scholars such as Leech and Short (2007), Toolan (1998), Wales (2014), and Pope (2012) have shown how reference choices affect narrative voice and point of view. In first-person stories, for example, pronouns and deictic expressions can reveal a narrator's personality, attitude, and even reliability. This makes reference a powerful stylistic tool, especially in stories where the narrator's mind is central to the plot. While cohesion theory is well established, most studies focus either on non-literary texts or on general patterns in fiction. Few have taken a close, detailed look at how reference works in a Gothic, first-person monologue like Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, where pronouns and demonstratives are central to creating paranoia and unreliability. Some stylistic studies note how reference can influence point of view, but they rarely combine counting how often each type of reference appears with interpreting what those choices mean for mood, character, and tension. In particular, personal references are often discussed, but demonstratives like *that eye* or *this work*, and comparatives like *never before*, are rarely examined for their stylistic power. This study aims to fill that gap by applying Halliday and Hasan's categories to a single, iconic Gothic text, combining quantitative data on reference frequency with close reading of key examples. In doing so, it shows how reference patterns not only hold the text together, but also pull readers deep into the narrator's obsessive and unstable mind.

This study looks at how reference is used in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*, a gripping monologue delivered by a narrator who insists on his sanity while revealing the dark depths of his mind. Through close analysis, this research aims to uncover what types of reference are used and how they contribute not only to the flow of the story but also to the portrayal of the narrator's mental state. The goal is to show that reference can do more than link sentences, it can shape atmosphere, perspective, and the emotional force of a narrative. With these points in mind, this study looks closely at how reference, as part of grammatical cohesion, works in Edgar

Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The main question it seeks to answer is: *What kinds of reference appear in the story, and how do they shape both its structure and its psychological impact?* The purpose is not only to identify and count personal, demonstrative, and comparative references using Halliday and Hasan's framework, but also to explore what these choices reveal about the narrator's mind, how they build suspense, and how they hold the story together. In doing so, this research aims to show that in literature, especially in Gothic fiction, reference is far more than a grammatical tool. It can be a powerful stylistic choice that pulls readers into a character's thoughts, heightens the tension, and shapes how the story is experienced.

Method

This research used a qualitative descriptive approach, chosen because it allows for a detailed look at how language features work within a specific text. The focus was on describing and interpreting the use of reference as part of grammatical cohesion in Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The main source of data was the complete text of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, obtained from Project Gutenberg. Since this study analyzed an existing literary work, there were no human participants involved. Data collection began with several careful readings of the story to understand its plot, structure, and distinctive narrative voice. The text was then broken down into smaller unit, sentences and clauses, so that every instance of reference could be located and marked. Each identified reference was sorted into one of three categories, personal, demonstrative, or comparative, following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework. The total number of occurrences for each type was counted to see which was most frequent. Beyond counting, key examples were selected for closer examination, looking at how they not only link parts of the text but also create atmosphere and reveal the narrator's state of mind. The findings were presented in two parts. First, a table was used to show the frequency and percentage of each reference type, giving a clear picture of how often they occurred. Second, the study provided detailed explanations of selected examples, connecting them to relevant linguistic and stylistic theories. This blend of numbers and interpretation offered both a structured overview and deeper insights into how reference shapes the story.

Result and Discussion

The analysis of *The Tell-Tale Heart* revealed that reference as a grammatical cohesive device plays a critical role in shaping both the structure and tone of the narrative. Using the framework proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), three main types of reference were identified: personal, demonstrative, and comparative. A total

of 92 instances of reference were found in the text, with personal reference making up the majority of the cases.

The table below summarizes the distribution:

Table 1. Frequency and Distribution of Reference Types in *The Tell-Tale Heart*

Reference Type	Frequency	Percentage
Personal	71	77%
Demonstrative	18	20%
Comparative	3	3%
Total	92	100%

As shown in Table 1, personal references are overwhelmingly dominant, with 71 occurrences, accounting for 77% of all reference types found in the story. These include pronouns such as *I*, *my*, *me*, and *he*, which contribute significantly to narrative cohesion and help establish the story’s deeply subjective point of view. Demonstrative references, such as *that eye* and *this work*, appeared 18 times (20%), often highlighting objects or actions that hold symbolic or emotional weight for the narrator. Meanwhile, only three comparative references (3%) were identified, but they served important stylistic functions, portraying the narrator’s sense of superiority, precision, or obsession.

This distribution reflects Poe’s intentional use of reference not only to link ideas within the text but also to support the psychological depth and narrative intensity. The frequency of first-person pronouns, in particular, reinforces the inner monologue and unreliable narration that are central to the story’s Gothic tone. In *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Edgar Allan Poe doesn’t just tell a story — he constructs a deeply psychological narrative using language that’s tightly woven together through cohesive devices, especially reference. This analysis highlights how personal, demonstrative, and comparative references are used not only to maintain grammatical cohesion but also to build tension, reveal character, and create meaning far beyond the sentence level.

1. **Personal reference** is by far the most dominant. Words like *I*, *me*, and *my* appear repeatedly, reinforcing the first-person point of view and immersing us in the mind of the narrator. One early line sets the tone clearly:

Data 1

“I have been ill, very ill. But why do you say that I am mad?”

In this line, the pronoun *I* is a personal reference as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), pointing directly to the narrator. In first-person narratives, personal references like *I*, *my*, and *me* are more than just grammatical markers, they anchor the entire story around the speaker (Tanskanen, 2006). Here, the repetition of *I* works on two levels. Grammatically, it keeps the reader focused on the narrator as the main participant. Stylistically, it becomes a statement of identity, a way for the narrator to defend himself against accusations of madness. The defensive tone, reinforced by the rhetorical question, invites the reader into his private thoughts, but also hints at instability. As Szmrecsanyi (2006) observes, frequent use of personal pronouns can intensify subjectivity, and in Gothic fiction, this often reflects obsession or paranoia. Poe uses this device to blur the line between truth and delusion, making the reader both witness and judge of the narrator's mental state.

Data 2

"He had never hurt me. I did not want his money."

The personal references **he**, **me**, **I**, and **his** (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) are simple pronouns, yet in this passage they do much more than connect the sentences. By saying **he** had never hurt **me**, the narrator points out that there was no real reason for anger, while **I** and **me** keep the focus tightly on himself, as though his perspective is the only one that matters. Mentioning **his** money dismisses greed as a motive, allowing the narrator to present himself as reasonable. But instead of making him sound logical, this repeated use of personal reference shows how desperate he is to justify his actions. As Tanskanen (2006) explains, such references often highlight the speaker's strong presence in the text, and here that presence feels overwhelming. The reader can sense that the story is less about the old man and more about the narrator's need to defend himself, revealing an obsession not only with the eye, but also with how he is seen and understood.

Data 3

"I smiled as I felt that success was near."

The repetition of the pronoun **I** in this sentence is a clear example of personal reference (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Grammatically, it keeps the narrator at the center of the action, but stylistically, it draws us deeper into his self-focused perspective. The smile and the feeling of "success" give the impression of calmness and confidence, yet in the context of Poe's Gothic narrative, this confidence becomes unsettling. What seems like control is actually a sign of obsession, as the narrator interprets his actions as precise and triumphant. Szmrecsanyi (2006) notes that repeated personal pronouns can

lock the discourse around a single speaker, and in Gothic fiction this often signals isolation or delusion. Here, Poe uses **I** not just to identify the speaker but to reveal his fragile mental state—his belief in control only highlights how unstable he truly is.

2. **Demonstrative reference**, Poe uses words like *this*, *that*, and *those* to highlight specific elements the narrator fixates on. Take, for instance:

Data 1

“I lifted the cloth... so that a single, thin, small light fell across **that** eye.”

In the sentence “*I lifted the cloth... so that a single, thin, small light fell across that eye*,” the phrase “*that eye*” is a demonstrative reference (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) that points back to the old man’s eye while avoiding repetition. Yet, the choice of *that* is not neutral—it carries emphasis and judgment, turning the eye into something marked and dreadful rather than ordinary (Martin, 1992). This subtle grammatical choice reflects the narrator’s obsession, as the eye becomes the central object of fear and disgust, heightened further by the imagery of the “single, thin, small light” that isolates it in the reader’s imagination. As Hoey (2001) explains, cohesive devices often guide how readers experience a text emotionally, and here the demonstrative not only maintains cohesion but also shapes atmosphere and reveals the narrator’s unstable psychology, making the eye a symbol of terror within the Gothic mood of the story.

Data 2

“I finished **this** work.”

Calling the act of murder *this work* shows a kind of emotional detachment. He frames a brutal act as a task completed. According to Martin (1992), demonstratives can serve not just as pointers, but as ways to emotionally frame information, to highlight trauma or guilt while distancing the speaker from it. This is what Poe achieves: the narrator tells us just enough to feel his horror, but always keeps us at arm’s length.

Data 3

“**Those** sounds, yes, I heard them. They were the beating of his heart.”

In this case, *those* transforms the narrator’s internal guilt into something external, something he believes is actually happening. As Halliday and Hasan (1976) explain, demonstratives can anchor the reader’s attention, but in Poe’s hands, they become instruments of madness, turning hallucinations into shared reality.

3. **Comparative reference** appears less frequently, but when it does, it carries strong stylistic weight. Consider:

Data 1

“**Never before** had I felt so strongly my own power; I was now sure of success.”

The phrase **Never before** is a **comparative reference** (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) because it sets the narrator’s current feeling of power against all his previous experiences, showing that this moment feels different and unmatched. Grammatically, it creates contrast with the past, but stylistically, it does much more. By using **Never before**, the narrator elevates his sense of control, making it sound exceptional and absolute. This echoes Szmrecsanyi’s (2006) point that comparatives often highlight intensity or superiority, and in Gothic narratives they can reveal obsession or delusion. Here, the narrator frames his confidence as something stronger than ever, which not only builds suspense but also exposes his distorted state of mind. What looks like a simple grammatical comparison becomes a powerful stylistic tool that deepens our sense of his arrogance and unstable psychology.

Data 2

“The hands of a clock move **more quickly than** did my hand.”

The phrase *more quickly than* works here as a **comparative reference** (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), setting the narrator’s movement against the natural rhythm of a clock. On the surface, it shows how carefully and deliberately he acted, moving even slower than time itself. But instead of reassuring the reader, this precision feels unnerving. Comparatives, as Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) point out, are often used to create contrast, and in this case the contrast lies between the narrator’s outward calmness and his inner turmoil. Poe turns

what seems like patience into something sinister: the more methodical the action, the more disturbing it becomes. This comparison, then, is not just about speed, it reveals the obsessive control of a character whose careful movements mask a mind in chaos.

In summary, Poe doesn't just use reference to tie his sentences together, he uses it to reveal obsession, guilt, and madness. Personal reference brings us uncomfortably close to the narrator's unstable mind. Demonstrative reference isolates the things that haunt him. Comparative reference paints his actions as precise and superior, even as he spirals into delusion. These patterns confirm what scholars like Tanskanen (2006), Szmrecsanyi (2006), Halliday & Hasan (1976), Martin (1992), and Hoey (2001) have argued: that reference is not merely functional, but also psychological, rhetorical, and deeply tied to how a story is experienced.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that reference, as a key element of grammatical cohesion, plays an essential role not only in structuring Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* but also in deepening the psychological impact of the narrative. Through a detailed stylistic analysis, it was found that personal reference overwhelmingly dominates the text, reflecting the narrator's intense inward focus and unstable mental state. Demonstrative and comparative references, though less frequent, serve specific narrative functions that enhance thematic emphasis and character portrayal. The findings confirm that cohesive devices like reference are not merely linguistic tools for linking ideas but can be powerful stylistic strategies for constructing meaning, mood, and character psychology in literary texts. This insight contributes to the ongoing dialogue between linguistics and literature, offering a clearer understanding of how grammar functions as a tool for literary artistry.

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