

Lexical Cohesion and Meronymy in Selected Movie Dialogue: A Discourse Analysis of *World War Z* (2013)

Kornelius Ferento Bhetu

pb221210054@upbatam.ac.id

Robby Satria

robby@puterabatam.ac.id

Universitas Putera Batam

ABSTRACT

This study examines lexical cohesion with particular attention to meronymy in selected dialogue excerpts from the film *World War Z* (2013). The revision narrows the analytical scope to lexical-semantic relations so that the research objectives, data selection, and reported findings are methodologically consistent. Using a qualitative descriptive discourse-analysis approach, the article analyzes eight reported excerpts: four illustrating repetition, near-synonymy, a superordinate-specific relation, and associative collocation, and four illustrating part-whole relations involving body parts, spatial components, object components, and group members. The analysis follows Halliday and Hasan's account of lexical cohesion while treating meronymy as a complementary lexical-semantic relation informed by Cruse and Saeed. The findings show that lexical relations connect meanings across adjacent turns by maintaining topic continuity, specifying categories, and associating crisis-related concepts. Meronymy contributes more specifically by linking salient parts to larger entities, allowing speakers to refer economically to bodies, locations, objects, and groups while preserving contextual continuity. The study contributes a focused account of how part-whole semantics can support cohesion in cinematic dialogue and clarifies the distinction between canonical lexical-cohesion categories and meronymic relations.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis; Lexical Cohesion; Meronymy; Movie Dialogue; Lexical Semantics

INTRODUCTION

Discourse is meaningful because linguistic elements are connected across clauses, sentences, and turns rather than interpreted as isolated units. Cohesion is one of the principal resources that creates this continuity. Halliday and Hasan (1976) distinguish grammatical cohesion from lexical cohesion, with lexical cohesion arising from relationships among lexical items. In spoken interaction, such lexical links help interlocutors maintain a topic, recover referents, elaborate information, and interpret connections among ideas. In film dialogue, these functions are particularly visible because spoken language is compressed by narrative time and interacts with action, setting, sound, and visual information.

Lexical cohesion can be realized through several semantic patterns. Within Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, reiteration includes repetition, synonymy or near-synonymy, superordinate relations, and general words, while collocation connects items that regularly or contextually occur within related semantic environments. Later lexical-semantic work provides additional relations that are useful for discourse analysis. One of these is meronymy, the relation between a part and the whole to which it belongs, such as eye-body, engine-plane, or member-team (Cruse, 2004; Saeed, 2022). Although meronymy is not treated as a separate canonical category in Halliday and Hasan's original taxonomy, it can create a cohesive semantic chain when a discourse moves between a whole entity and one of its salient parts.

Recent studies demonstrate that lexical cohesion operates across varied discourse types. Dewi (2023) identified repetition, synonymy, and meronymy in song lyrics and showed how recurrent lexical relations supported textual unity. Murniwati and Johan (2024) reported repetition, synonymy, meronymy, and collocation in a speech corpus and emphasized their contribution to semantic connection. Maftuha et al. (2024), examining a political speech, found that repetition was especially prominent in maintaining continuity. In narrative data, Daviria and Hamidah (2025) documented multiple forms of lexical cohesion in a novel, while Setiawan and Simatupang (2024) identified repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and collocation in the dialogue of *Zootopia*. Together, these studies confirm the usefulness of lexical relations as an analytical lens, but most emphasize category identification and frequency rather than the local discourse function of part-whole relations.

Movie dialogue offers a productive context for this issue because its verbal component is designed to work with visual and narrative information. Bateman and Schmidt (2012) argue that film meaning is inherently multimodal, while recent work on film discourse has continued to emphasize cohesion as part of the organization of cinematic meaning (Prasolova, 2024). In crisis-oriented films, dialogue is often brief, directive, and information-dense. Speakers frequently refer to bodies, locations, vehicles, groups, and components whose relationships are inferable from context. Part-whole semantics can therefore become especially relevant because mentioning a salient part may be sufficient to activate the larger entity in the audience's interpretation.

The original scope of this study combined grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion, meronymy, and broader discourse functions. To improve conceptual and methodological consistency, the present article focuses specifically on lexical cohesion and meronymy in selected dialogue excerpts from *World War Z* (2013). The study addresses two questions: what lexical cohesive relations are represented in the selected excerpts, and how do meronymic part-whole relations contribute to continuity of meaning in those excerpts? By treating meronymy as a complementary lexical-semantic relation rather than conflating it with every type

of cohesion, the study aims to provide a more precise account of cohesion in selected cinematic dialogue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Studies

Several recent studies provide an empirical basis for the present analysis. Dewi (2023) examined lexical and grammatical cohesion in song lyrics and reported repetition, synonymy, and meronymy among the lexical patterns. The study is relevant because it demonstrates that part-whole relations can be identified alongside more familiar cohesive categories in a compact creative text. However, song lyrics differ from film dialogue in interactional structure because lyrics do not ordinarily consist of alternating turns between characters.

Murniwati and Johan (2024) analyzed lexical cohesion in speech data and identified repetition, synonymy, meronymy, and collocation. Their findings reinforce the view that cohesion is produced through semantic relationships rather than repetition alone. Maftuha et al. (2024) similarly applied Halliday and Hasan's framework to a political speech and found repetition to be the dominant category. These speech-based studies are useful for spoken discourse, but their monologic data differ from the turn-by-turn organization of movie dialogue.

Closer to the present context, Setiawan and Simatupang (2024) analyzed lexical cohesion in *Zootopia* and reported multiple lexical categories, including meronymy. Their study demonstrates that film dialogue can be treated systematically as a source of lexical-cohesion data. The present article builds on this direction but shifts the emphasis from frequency to the discourse function of selected relations, particularly meronymy. Daviria and Hamidah (2025) further show that lexical categories can be systematically differentiated in narrative discourse when operational definitions are clearly stated. These studies collectively indicate a need for precise category definitions and transparent sampling when claims are made about lexical cohesion.

Lexical Cohesion and Meronymy

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as a semantic relation in which the interpretation of one element depends on another element in the text. Their lexical-cohesion framework groups relations broadly into reiteration and collocation. Reiteration includes direct repetition and semantic restatement through related lexical items. For the present analysis, four patterns are distinguished operationally. Repetition occurs when the same lexical item recurs across adjacent turns. Near-synonymy occurs when two lexical items have sufficiently overlapping contextual meanings to maintain the same topic without being strictly interchangeable in every environment. A superordinate-specific relation connects a general class term with a more specific member or instance. Associative collocation refers here to lexical

items that form a recognizable semantic field within the local crisis context, without claiming a statistically measured collocational strength.

Meronymy is treated separately because it describes a specific part-whole semantic relation. Cruse (2004) discusses part-whole relations as an important component of lexical meaning, while Saeed (2022) situates such relations within the broader organization of lexical semantics. Meronymic relations can involve body parts and bodies, components and objects, spatial sections and larger places, or members and collections. In discourse, the relation becomes cohesive when reference to a part activates or elaborates a whole already relevant to the interaction, or when the whole provides the interpretive frame for the part.

This distinction is important methodologically. Repetition, near-synonymy, superordinate relations, and collocation can be analyzed within a cohesion framework, while meronymy provides a more specific semantic account of how certain lexical pairs are structurally related. Treating these levels explicitly avoids classifying every semantic association as the same type of cohesion and makes the analytic decisions more inspectable.

Movie Dialogue as Discourse

Movie dialogue is scripted, but it is designed to simulate purposeful spoken interaction within a narrative. Its interpretation depends on speakers, turn sequence, setting, visual cues, and ongoing plot information. Bateman and Schmidt (2012) emphasize that film discourse combines multiple semiotic resources, so verbal meaning operates as one component of a larger multimodal system. Consequently, a lexical item may be cohesive not only because of a relation to another word but also because the surrounding scene makes the relevant entity or situation salient.

Prasolova (2024) notes that cohesion remains an important issue in the study of film discourse and related cinematic texts. For lexical analysis, movie dialogue is valuable because recurring themes and objects generate semantic chains across scenes. In a crisis narrative such as *World War Z*, concepts associated with danger, safety, infection, survival, movement, bodies, vehicles, and groups can provide a dense semantic environment. The present study does not attempt to generalize to the entire film corpus; instead, it examines a limited set of reported excerpts to show how identifiable lexical relations operate locally.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study uses a qualitative descriptive discourse-analysis design. The analysis is limited to eight dialogue excerpts reported from *World War Z* (2013). Four excerpts represent lexical cohesive relations and four represent meronymic relations. The sample is therefore illustrative rather than exhaustive: it is used to examine how the

identified lexical relations function in context, not to calculate the frequency or dominance of a category across the entire film. The unit of analysis is a short exchange containing at least two lexically related items whose semantic relationship can be interpreted from the adjacent turns and immediate narrative context.

Instrument and Procedure

The film *World War Z* (Forster, 2013) is the primary data source. The reported dialogue excerpts were checked against the audiovisual context so that the lexical relation could be interpreted with reference to the relevant speakers and situation. The timestamps are retained as approximate locators rather than treated as analytical measurements because timing can vary slightly across commercial releases. The article therefore avoids claiming that the timecodes constitute exact transcription coordinates.

A coding matrix was used to present the analysis transparently. For each excerpt, the matrix records the data code, approximate locator, focal lexical item or lexical set, analytical category, and the semantic relationship that motivates the classification. The revised procedure excludes grammatical cohesion categories such as reference, conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis because they fall outside the narrowed research questions. It also excludes the former general section on social roles and power because those topics require a different discourse framework.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, each reported excerpt was reread to identify the focal lexical items. Second, the relation was classified using explicit operational criteria: identical recurrence for repetition, contextual semantic overlap for near-synonymy, general-to-specific categorization for the superordinate-specific relation, and local semantic-field association for collocation. Third, part-whole pairs were analyzed as meronymic relations using lexical-semantic criteria from Cruse (2004) and Saeed (2022). Fourth, each classification was interpreted in terms of its local cohesive function, particularly whether it maintained a topic, specified a category, connected related crisis concepts, or linked a salient part to a larger whole.

Because the present article analyzes a small illustrative sample and does not report independent second-coder statistics, its claims are deliberately limited to the eight excerpts shown. The coding table is included to make the decision rules visible and to allow readers to inspect how each category was assigned. This limitation also informs the conclusion and recommendations for future research.

Table 1
Analytical Sample and Coding Categories

Code	Approx. locator	Focal lexical relation	Analytical category
LC1	00:21:40	safe - safe	Repetition
LC2	00:44:50	infection - disease	Near-synonymy
LC3	00:27:10	cities - New York/Seoul/London	Superordinate-specific relation
LC4	01:01:30	cure - protect/protection - survivors	Associative collocation
M1	00:38:20	eyes - body	Body-part meronymy
M2	00:24:50	gate - airport	Spatial part-whole meronymy
M3	00:52:10	engine - plane	Component-object meronymy
M4	00:52:10	members - team	Member-collection meronymy

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Cohesion in Selected Dialogues

The first four excerpts illustrate different ways in which lexical choices connect adjacent turns. Because the dataset is illustrative, the analysis does not describe any category as the most frequent in the film. Instead, each example is examined for the type of semantic continuity it creates.

Data LC1: Repetition

Gerry: “We have to move fast. This city is not safe.”

Officer: “People know it’s not safe, but many of them refuse to leave.”

(World War Z, 2013, approx. 00:21:40)

The adjective *safe* is repeated across the two turns. The second speaker takes up the same lexical item rather than replacing it, creating an explicit cohesive link between the warning and the response. The repeated word also keeps the exchange centered on the immediate issue of security. In Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) terms, this is straightforward reiteration through repetition. Its discourse function is not merely emphasis: the recurrence makes the second turn interpretable as a direct continuation of the first speaker’s assessment.

Data LC2: Near-Synonymy

Doctor: “This infection is spreading rapidly.”

Gerry: “If the disease keeps spreading, there will be no chance to stop it.”

(World War Z, 2013, approx. 00:44:50)

The words infection and disease are semantically close in this context, but the revised analysis treats them as near-synonyms rather than absolute synonyms. Infection can denote the process or condition caused by an infectious agent, whereas disease is a broader term for a pathological condition. Within the exchange, however, both lexical items point to the same unfolding health threat. Their contextual overlap enables lexical variation while maintaining topic continuity. This more cautious classification avoids assuming complete interchangeability and makes the semantic basis of the cohesive relation explicit.

Data LC3: Superordinate-Specific Relation

UN Officer: “We lost many cities. New York, Seoul, and London are already gone.”

Gerry: “If these cities fall, the whole world is at risk.”
(*World War Z*, 2013, approx. 00:27:10)

The general noun cities provides the category under which New York, Seoul, and London are interpreted as specific instances. The revised article therefore avoids calling the relation simple hyponymy, because proper place names function here as instances of the superordinate category rather than ordinary lexical hyponyms. The general-specific pattern contributes to cohesion by moving from a category to concrete examples and then back to the category in the following turn. It also allows the discourse to expand from local examples to the broader implication expressed by the phrase whole world.

Data LC4: Associative Collocation

Scientist: “We need a cure, or at least something that can protect people.”

Gerry: “Without protection, there will be no survivors.”
(*World War Z*, 2013, approx. 01:01:30)

The lexical items cure, protect, protection, and survivors belong to a locally coherent semantic field associated with health threat and survival. The relation is described as associative collocation in the broad Hallidayan sense rather than as statistically demonstrated collocation, because no corpus-based co-occurrence measure is used. The pair protect-protection additionally shows morphological relatedness. Together, the lexical set connects the need for medical or preventive action with its intended outcome, allowing the second turn to develop the same crisis frame without repeating every word from the first turn.

These four excerpts are consistent with previous research showing that repetition and other semantic relations can sustain continuity across discourse. Dewi (2023), Murniwati and Johan (2024), and Maftuha et al. (2024) all report repetition and related lexical mechanisms in different discourse types. The present analysis differs in two respects. First, it does not infer dominance from a small sample. Second, it uses narrower operational labels, such as near-synonymy and superordinate-

specific relation, when the semantic evidence does not justify stronger categorical claims. This improves the interpretive precision of the analysis.

Meronymy as a Cohesive Relation

The next four excerpts show part-whole relations. In each case, a lexical item referring to a part is interpreted through a larger entity that is explicitly mentioned or readily activated in the same exchange. The cohesive contribution of meronymy therefore lies in the semantic dependency between a salient component and its whole.

Data M1: Body-Part Meronymy

Doctor: “Look at his eyes. They changed completely.”

Gerry: “If the eyes have changed, then his whole body may already be infected.”

(World War Z, 2013, approx. 00:38:20)

Eyes are physical parts of the body, so the relation is a prototypical body-part meronymy. The second turn explicitly moves from the observed part to the whole body. This semantic progression makes the local inference possible: a change visible in one body part is treated as evidence relevant to the condition of the larger organism. The cohesive link is therefore both referentially economical and interpretively useful, because the specific observation and the broader assessment remain semantically connected.

Data M2: Spatial Part-Whole Meronymy

Officer: “The airport gate is blocked.”

Gerry: “If the gate is blocked, then the whole airport is no longer safe.”

(World War Z, 2013, approx. 00:24:50)

The gate is interpreted as a spatial or functional component of the airport. By shifting from gate to airport, the second turn expands the scope of the problem from one access point to the larger location. The lexical pair creates cohesion because the whole provides the conceptual frame within which the part is meaningful. In a crisis exchange, this kind of meronymic progression also supports efficient reasoning: a problem at a strategically important part can motivate a judgment about the usability or safety of the whole location.

Data M3: Component-Object Meronymy

Soldier: “We lost the engine.”

Pilot: “Without the engine, the whole plane is useless.”

(World War Z, 2013, approx. 00:52:10)

Engine and plane form a component-object relation. The engine is not simply associated with a plane; it is a functional component whose status directly affects the larger object. The explicit move from the component to the whole produces a compact cohesive chain and supports a causal interpretation. Compared with a loose lexical association, meronymy explains why the relation is especially strong: the discourse connects an internal component to the operational condition of the entity that contains it.

Data M4: Member-Collection Meronymy

UN Officer: “Several members of the team are gone.”

Gerry: “If the team loses its members, the mission becomes harder.”

(World War Z, 2013, approx. 00:52:10)

Members and team represent a member-collection relation. Individual members constitute the larger group, and the second turn explicitly links the loss of individuals to the condition and capacity of the collective. The relation is cohesive because both lexical items refer to different levels of the same organizational structure. This example also shows that meronymy is not restricted to physical objects; part-whole organization can be conceptual and social when individuals form a recognized collection.

Across the four meronymic examples, the part-whole relation performs a consistent local function: it allows a speaker to move between a specific salient element and the larger entity that gives that element significance. This supports Saeed’s (2022) account of lexical meaning as structured through semantic relations and complements the discourse-oriented concept of cohesion. The examples also extend observations in Murniwati and Johan (2024) and Setiawan and Simatupang (2024), both of whom include meronymy among lexical relations identified in spoken or film-related data. Rather than treating meronymy only as a countable category, the present analysis shows how the relation can organize inference from part to whole within adjacent turns.

Implications for Movie Dialogue

The findings support the view that movie dialogue can be analyzed as purposeful discourse while remaining sensitive to its cinematic context. Lexical cohesion helps connect successive turns, but the function of a lexical relation depends on the scene and the semantic task performed by the speakers. Repetition can foreground a shared assessment, near-synonymy can maintain a topic while varying vocabulary, a superordinate-specific relation can move between categories and concrete instances, and associative collocation can sustain a semantic field. Meronymy adds a different type of structure by linking levels within the same entity or system.

This distinction has a theoretical benefit. Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) categories describe how lexical choices create texture, whereas lexical semantics explains

more precisely why some word pairs are related. Combining the two perspectives carefully, rather than collapsing them, makes it possible to describe both discourse function and semantic structure. In the selected *World War Z* excerpts, meronymy is especially useful because the crisis context repeatedly foregrounds bodies, locations, equipment, and groups, all of which are naturally organized through part-whole relations.

At the same time, the analysis should not be generalized beyond the available data. Setiawan and Simatupang (2024), for example, report a much larger set of lexical-cohesion instances from *Zootopia* and are therefore able to make frequency-based claims. The present study does not have that design. Its contribution is analytical rather than quantitative: it clarifies category boundaries and demonstrates the local cohesive function of selected lexical and meronymic relations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined lexical cohesion and meronymy in eight selected dialogue excerpts from *World War Z* (2013). The revised scope distinguishes lexical cohesion from grammatical cohesion and treats meronymy as a complementary lexical-semantic relation. The lexical-cohesion examples show how repetition, near-synonymy, a superordinate-specific relation, and associative collocation maintain continuity by repeating a key evaluation, preserving a topic through semantic overlap, connecting a category with specific instances, and sustaining a crisis-related semantic field.

The meronymic examples show four part-whole patterns: eyes-body, gate-airport, engine-plane, and members-team. In each case, cohesion is strengthened because the part and whole are interpreted within the same conceptual structure. The relation allows dialogue to move economically between a salient detail and the larger entity to which it belongs. This makes meronymy useful for explaining how selected cinematic exchanges connect specific information to broader situational meaning.

The study is limited by its small illustrative sample and by the use of approximate time locators rather than a fully published, line-numbered film transcript. It also does not report independent inter-coder reliability, so the classification remains interpretive. Future research should construct a complete, reproducible dialogue corpus, provide exact source and transcription details, use independent coding or agreement procedures, and compare meronymic patterns across film genres. Within these limits, the study provides a more methodologically consistent account of how lexical relations and part-whole semantics contribute to cohesion in selected movie dialogue.

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