

Holding the Message together: Cohesion and Coherence in Online Daters' Self-Description Texts

Egwuchukwu Margaret Ifensor
School of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic Oko,
Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

A dating profile asks a writer to do something oddly demanding in just a few sentences: come across as coherent, likeable, and consistent, all at once, with almost no room to spare. This paper looks at how online daters manage that, examining the cohesive devices and coherence strategies holding their self-description texts together as single, readable messages. Working from Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion, set within Halliday's (1994) wider Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, the analysis covers self-description texts from twenty-five purposively sampled daters across OkCupid, Bumble, Tinder, HER, and Facebook Dating. Each text was checked for grammatical cohesive devices, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesive devices, repetition and collocation, and the relative frequency of each device type was calculated across the corpus. Collocation came out on top, accounting for 36% of all cohesive ties identified. Conjunction followed at 26.3%, reference at 24.8%, ellipsis at 6.8%, repetition at 3.8%, and substitution at 2.3%. Looking more closely at individual profiles shows daters combining these devices with real strategy. Collocated phrases like "looking for" and "swipe left" carry meanings specific to the dating-app register. Conjunctions set up logical and conditional relationships between what a dater expects and what they offer. Anaphoric reference keeps a single, coherent persona running across successive clauses. This is not grammatical correctness pursued for its own sake. Cohesion in online dating profiles works as an active resource, something daters use, whether they realise it or not, to build interpretable, unified self-presentations under conditions of extreme brevity. The paper closes by considering what this means for the broader study of digital self-presentation and computer-mediated register.

Keywords: Cohesion, Coherence, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Online Dating, Self-Presentation, Cohesive Devices

Introduction

Writing needs cohesion to read as one message rather than a pile of disconnected clauses, whatever its length. That need shows up especially clearly in the online dating profile. Here a dater has to build a coherent self-image in a handful of sentences, usually written quickly and read even faster by whoever is scrolling past. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as the semantic relations that hold a text together and mark it as a text rather than a random string of sentences. Coherence is related but distinct: it is the reader's sense that the whole thing hangs together and makes sense. Theme and Rheme organise a clause as a message. Cohesion and coherence work one level up from that, across clauses and sentences, tying the self-description into a single readable act of self-presentation.

Online dating self-descriptions are an unusually good site for cohesion research precisely because

they are short, informally written, and composed in a register that mixes standard grammar with app-specific shorthand, ellipsis, and slang. A dater trying to convey warmth, humour, caution, or availability in two or three sentences simply does not have the extended cohesive apparatus a longer text affords: no paragraph-level thematic progression, no room for extended lexical chains. Cohesion in this genre gets compressed into a small number of devices that then have to work harder. Understanding which devices daters actually lean on, and how those devices combine to produce coherence, says something about the linguistic economy of self-presentation under real length pressure.

Given how much a dating profile's success rides on cohesion, the linguistic research on this dimension of self-description texts is thin. SFL-informed cohesion studies have looked at student academic writing (Alshalan, 2019; Kuncahya, 2015), newspaper editorials (Hamid, 2019), and multimodal school textbooks (Fitriana & Wirza, 2020). None has systematically taken on the online dating profile. That gap matters, because the genre combines brevity, high persuasive stakes, and an informal register in a way few studied genres do, and those conditions could plausibly change how cohesive devices get chosen and combined compared with academic writing or journalism.

This paper takes up that gap: in what ways do online daters use cohesion and coherence in their profiles? Twenty-five purposively sampled self-description texts were analysed for the presence and relative frequency of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) grammatical and lexical cohesive devices, with representative profiles examined closely to show how these devices combine to produce coherent, persuasive self-presentations. Even recent, interview-based work on dating-profile construction, Zhang et al. (2025) is a good example, stays at the level of content strategy, image selection, and information concealment, without descending to grammatical cohesion. So this dimension of the literature is still almost entirely unexamined. That is exactly the gap a grammatically grounded account like this one can fill.

Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim is to describe the cohesive resources online daters draw on when writing self-description texts. More specifically, the study set out to identify which grammatical devices (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction) and lexical devices (repetition, collocation) recur in the sampled texts, establish through simple frequency counts which of these devices predominates, and interpret what the resulting pattern reveals about how daters build coherent self-presentation under severe length constraint.

Research Question

One question drives the analysis that follows: in what ways do online daters use cohesion and coherence in their profiles?

Significance of the Study

This study should matter to a few different audiences. For linguists, it extends cohesion research, long tied to academic and journalistic registers, into an under-examined digital genre defined by brevity and informality, testing Halliday and Hasan's (1976) categories under conditions quite different from those the framework was originally built for. Daters themselves might find the findings useful in a more practical way: knowing which cohesive devices most effectively hold a short self-description together could help someone write a profile that reads as coherent and intentional rather than thrown together. For researchers of computer-mediated communication, the study offers a grammatically grounded complement to the psychological and content-based analyses that already exist, one that shows a profile's perceived coherence is not only about what gets said but about how successive statements are grammatically and lexically bound together. And more broadly, it says something about how cohesion operates in short, high-stakes digital genres generally, which matters more and more as everyday communication keeps moving into character-limited, space-constrained platforms.

Literature Review

The Concept of Cohesion and Coherence

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as a semantic concept: the relations of meaning within a text that make it a text rather than an unrelated set of sentences. Cohesion is what allows a reader to resolve elements that are not fully specified on their own, a pronoun, an ellipted phrase, by pointing back to something else already in the text. It is closely related to coherence but not the same thing. Cohesion is the explicit grammatical and lexical tie within a text; coherence is the reader's overall sense that the text makes sense as a unified whole (Gutwinski, as cited in Urmila, 2021). Knapp and Watkins (2005) put it more practically: cohesive devices are the resources available to link information in writing and help a text flow and hold together. That description fits the dating profile well, since holding together quickly and economically is exactly what this genre demands.

Types of Cohesive Devices

Halliday and Hasan (1976) split cohesion into two kinds. Grammatical cohesion covers reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Lexical cohesion covers repetition and collocation. Reference is the relation between a word and something it points to elsewhere in the text or in the immediate context, and it includes personal reference (pronouns), demonstrative reference, and comparative reference (Wales, 1989). Substitution swaps one item for another to avoid repeating it. Ellipsis omits an item the context lets a reader recover on their own. Conjunction sets up logical relations, addition, contrast, causality, condition, between clauses. Lexical cohesion works differently, through meaning relations between content words. Repetition is where the same word recurs to reinforce a point. Collocation is where words that habitually turn up together, "looking for," "swipe left," create semantic unity without needing any formal grammatical link at all (Sitanggang, 2018; Hasnain & Hashmi, n.d.).

Empirical Applications of Cohesion Analysis

A handful of studies show what cohesion analysis can do across genres. Hamid (2019), examining theme and cohesion in Malaysian editorials, found a letter supporting a position more cohesive than a letter opposing it, thanks to more textual Theme and conjunctive linkage. That is evidence that cohesive density can itself mark persuasive stance. Fitriana and Wirza (2020) analysed multimodal texts in an Indonesian EFL textbook and found verbal and visual elements combining cohesively to support comprehension, showing cohesion analysis can extend productively beyond purely verbal texts. Yolanda et al. (2017) found cohesive ties between verbal text and visual narrative in children's picture books supporting a unified reading experience, another case of cohesion working across modalities rather than within just one. Alshalan (2019), looking at the academic writing of Saudi female EFL undergraduates, found appropriate cohesive-device use correlating with perceived writing quality. That suggests cohesive competence is bound up with a text's overall communicative success, which is directly relevant to the persuasive stakes of a dating profile.

None of this work turns to the online dating profile specifically, even though the genre shares key features, extreme brevity, high persuasive stakes, an informal and often non-standard register, with genres where cohesion has already been shown to matter a great deal for perceived quality and persuasive success. Cantos-Delgado and Maíz-Arévalo (2023) come closer. Examining humour construction in UK and Spanish dating profiles, they found humour-oriented self-descriptions leaning heavily on culturally specific collocations and conjunctive framing to land their comic and self-presentational effect. That anticipates this paper's own finding that collocation dominates as a cohesive resource in this genre. What follows extends cohesion analysis to the genre more systematically, using the same Halliday and Hasan (1976) apparatus that has already proved productive in editorials, textbooks, and academic writing.

Cohesion in Informal and Computer-Mediated Registers

A smaller strand of research looks specifically at cohesion in informal or computer-mediated registers, which share the dating profile's tendency toward abbreviation, non-standard

punctuation, and register-specific shorthand. Kaur (2018), reviewing how coherence and cohesion generally operate in English, observed that informal registers often achieve coherence through pragmatic and contextual inference as much as through explicit grammatical marking. That point bears directly on a text like Debby's, where an ellipted final word ("FRIEN...") depends on the reader's ability to infer rather than on any explicit grammatical completion. Jochimsen (2008), examining coherence and textual function in a work of literary fiction, made a similar observation: texts can achieve strong coherence even where individual cohesive ties are sparse, provided the reader has enough shared contextual and generic knowledge to fill the gaps. That transfers directly to the dating profile, where readers bring extensive prior knowledge of platform conventions, what "swipe left" means, for instance, to even a minimally cohesive text. Taken together, these observations suggest cohesion analysis of digital, informal genres needs to attend not just to the explicit devices Halliday and Hasan (1976) catalogued, but to the register-specific inferential work readers of these genres are primed to do.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Cohesion in English framework, situated within Halliday's (1994) broader account of the textual metafunction. Cohesion here is a resource for creating texture, the property that separates a text from a random sequence of sentences, achieved through the grammatical devices of reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, and the lexical devices of repetition and collocation. Coherence is the emergent, reader-oriented property that results when cohesive devices, combined with shared contextual and cultural knowledge, let a text be read as a unified whole. This framework supplies the analytic categories used to identify and classify cohesive ties in the sampled self-description texts.

Methodology

To answer the research question, I adopted a qualitative document-analysis design.

This suited the task better than a survey or an experiment would have, since it allowed close, line-by-line inspection of text that occurred naturally rather than data produced under artificial conditions. The corpus was drawn from five free online dating platforms, OkCupid, Bumble, Tinder, HER, and Facebook Dating, twenty-five self-description texts in total, five per platform, selected purposively. Selection favoured breadth over uniformity: the twenty-five daters range in age from 18 to 35, include both heterosexual and LGBTQI+ orientations, and include both Black and White racial identities, so the cohesive patterns reported below could not be dismissed as an artefact of a narrow, homogeneous sample.

Every text analysed was already visible to the public at the point of collection. No gated, private, or authentication-restricted content was touched. Pseudonyms replace every identifying username encountered during collection. I coded clause by clause and sentence by sentence through each self-description text, checking for any of the six cohesive-device categories Halliday and Hasan (1976) set out: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, repetition, collocation. Every instance found was logged, and the resulting counts were converted into percentages across the full twenty-five-text corpus, giving the frequency profile in Table 1 below. Where a borderline case came up, most often distinguishing a fixed collocation from ordinary lexical repetition, or identifying an exophoric reference to a platform convention like "swipe left,"

I checked the coding decision against Halliday and Hasan's (1976) own worked examples rather than settling it by intuition. Full illustrative texts are reproduced in the next section so the origin of each tallied instance stays traceable.

Ethical Considerations

The self-description texts examined here were, at the point of collection, openly viewable by any visitor to the relevant platform. No account creation, matching, or authenticated interaction of any kind was needed to see them, and no private message or restricted profile content was accessed. Every username in this article has been replaced with a pseudonym, and no text is reported alongside a detail, a precise location, a full username, that would let a specific dater be traced. Because the research analyses text that was already public and does not involve

interviewing, surveying, or otherwise intervening with living participants, it falls outside the categories of research that typically require prospective institutional ethics review. The analysis instead follows the norms generally accepted for linguistic research on publicly accessible digital text. Any journal or reviewer working from a stricter data-ethics policy for social-media-derived corpora should be consulted directly about their specific requirements before submission.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The eight profiles below illustrate the range of cohesive strategies identified across the corpus.

Profile 1 (Alvin)

Alvin's text reads: "Cool calm and a little bit of good and bad guy. I like female with great sense of humour and female smells nice, the app says ladies should text first so I see no reason why you should match with person and refuse to text, trust me I hold hold convo and I am that sweetheart you looking for." Part of the cohesion here comes from repetition ("hold hold"), which reads as a typographical slip but still ends up emphasising how much holding a conversation matters to him. The collocation "looking for," a fixed phrase conventionally paired to mean searching, does real work too, communicating his search for a compatible partner economically. Conjunctions ("and," used four times, "so," once) link units of equal and unequal syntactic weight respectively, and the result is a text that reads as one continuous line of reasoning rather than a list of disconnected statements. Anaphoric personal reference, "I," "me," consistently points back to Alvin, keeping a stable referential centre running through the whole thing.

The present-tense sequence holds steady throughout too, which gives the self-description an active, immediate feel. Put together, these devices build a coherent picture of Alvin as available, self-aware, and a little self-deprecating.

Profile 2 (Jonas)

Jonas writes: "My free time, I enjoy playing video games, gyms, reading and hanging out in quiet places. I'm also a big fan of Pop/Action TV shows/Watching football." Cohesion here comes mainly from anaphoric reference ("my," "I"), tying every clause back to Jonas as the referential anchor, and from the conjunction "and," which coordinates the list of activities into one grammatical and semantic unit rather than a loose inventory. Present-tense logical sequence holds throughout, giving the text a tone of settled, ongoing routine rather than a one-off description. Given how short the text is, these devices work economically, binding Jonas's stated interests into a single coherent portrait of how he spends his free time, and, implicitly, of how little room dating actually occupies within it.

Profile 3 (Debby)

Debby's text, "If you're looking for who to invite to your house, please swipe LEFT. Because that's all I'm getting here. You have to lay a foundation (FRIENDSHIP) before BUILDING. I really believe and also appreciate FRIEN...", draws on the cohesive apparatus more richly than the two preceding profiles. Collocation ("looking for," "swipe left") communicates, in app-specific shorthand, both the unwanted advance she is anticipating and the rejecting action she wants the reader to take. Conjunctions "because" and "and" join clauses of unequal and equal syntactic importance respectively, letting Debby build a causal explanation for her stance instead of just asserting it. The most striking device here is the ellipsis in the truncated final word, "FRIEN...": not a grammatical gap recoverable from an earlier clause, but something closer to iconic, an identity too expansive to be fully stated in the space available. Exophoric reference ("you," "your house") points outward to the addressed reader rather than to anything inside the text itself, pulling the reader directly into the meaning being built. Together, these devices produce a text that is simultaneously a warning, an explanation, and a small statement of personal philosophy.

Profile 4 (Nennyi)

Nennyi's text, "I am the shy type. Why is everyone looking for someone that can hold a conversation," uses collocation ("looking for") to frame a generalised social expectation, and the

subordinating conjunction "that" to attach a relative clause specifying the kind of person being sought. Anaphoric reference, the first-person pronoun, ties the text back to Nennyi as its subject even as the second sentence shifts attention to a generalised "everyone." Together these devices produce a coherent, if plaintive, self-portrait: someone shy, puzzled by a social expectation she does not feel equipped to meet.

Profile 5 (David)

David's full self-description reads: "As long as you're not a bore and have a good sense of humour, we are good. Don't be too conceited, we're all just trying to know ourselves and create meaningful relationships. Please no boring penpals." The opening sentence uses the collocated conditional expression "as long as" together with the descriptive collocation "good sense of humour" to establish, in one breath, both a condition and a desired trait. The conjunctions "and" and "as long as" join clauses of equal and unequal rank respectively, producing the tightly linked conditional logic, if X and Y, then Z, that gives the opening its persuasive, almost contractual structure despite the casual tone. The two sentences that follow extend the same cohesive pattern rather than introducing a new one. "We're all just trying to know ourselves and create meaningful relationships" keeps the collaborative "we" established in sentence one and adds the additive conjunction "and" to link two parallel goals. The closing imperative, "Please no boring penpals," drops the subject entirely, an ellipsis recoverable only because the whole text has already established "you," the reader, as its addressee. Read as a whole, David's text is held together less by variety of device than by sustained repetition of the same few: a conditional frame stated once and then restated as a direct request, and a "we" that never breaks character.

Profile 6 (Tricia)

Tricia's text, "Am simply and fun to be with. Go straight to the point. If the vibe no pure am on my way out," uses collocation ("go straight to the point," "on my way out") to communicate, in idiomatic terms, a demand for directness and a threat of withdrawal at once. The conditional connective "if," grammatically non-standard in its surrounding clause, still performs the same cohesive function a standard conditional conjunction would, linking a hypothetical circumstance, an impure "vibe," to a consequence, departure. Ellipsis of the subject pronoun in the imperative "Go straight to the point" is recoverable from the surrounding first- and second-person context, letting the directive read as an instruction addressed to the reader without an explicit "you" ever appearing. These devices combine into a text that is cohesive despite departing from standard written English, a reminder that cohesion in this genre gets achieved through register-appropriate choices, not necessarily prescriptively "correct" ones.

Profile 7 (Osawe)

Osawe's text, "Don't waste words on what you don't want. I'm a sapiosexual being. Don't swipe right if you're the type that acts like she needs a police report before you reply to a message. Flee from this profile if you're into any kind of hook whatsoever," is cohesively dense relative to its length. Collocation ("waste words," "swipe right," "police report," "any kind of") does substantial work signalling register-specific and culturally loaded meanings without needing lengthy explanation. Conditional conjunction ("if," used twice) links each disqualifying behaviour to its consequence, not swiping right, fleeing the profile, producing a text organised almost entirely around a series of if-then relationships. Exophoric reference, the repeated second-person "you," directly implicates the reader as the addressee of each warning, while cataphoric reference ("she," pointing forward to an implied, generalised category of overly cautious respondent) requires the reader to construct a mental referent that is never explicitly named elsewhere in the text. The dense combination of conditional conjunction and collocation gives Osawe's text a cohesive structure well suited to its evident purpose: filtering out undesired categories of respondent as efficiently as possible.

Profile 8 (Juliana)

Juliana's text, "I am open to something serious. I am also open to something casual.

Whatever happens, happens," combines substitution and repetition in a way none of the profiles above do. The noun phrase "something serious" is echoed by the parallel "something casual," a partial lexical repetition that sets up structural parallelism between two contrasting possibilities. The additive conjunction "also" signals that the second statement extends the first rather than contradicting it, and the final sentence, "Whatever happens, happens," repeats the verb "happens" to close the text off as a self-referential unit that resists further elaboration. The rhetorical effect here is quite different from the conjunction-heavy cohesion of Debby's or Osawe's texts. Rather than building a chain of conditions and consequences, Juliana's text uses parallelism and repetition to communicate openness and a deliberate absence of firm conditions.

Cross-Profile Patterns

Across the corpus, the six cohesive device categories combine in patterns that track each profile's specific communicative goal. Where the goal is straightforward self-description, Jonas's profile is the clearest case: cohesion runs mainly on anaphoric reference and simple coordination. Where the goal includes filtering or warning, as in Debby's, cohesion runs on a denser combination of collocation, conjunction, and exophoric reference, since filtering means establishing conditions and addressing the reader directly rather than just listing personal facts. Cohesive device choice, in other words, is not random. It tracks the communicative function a given stretch of text is being asked to perform, which echoes a finding from the companion study of Theme and Rheme in this same corpus: that thematic variety correlates with more rhetorically layered self-presentation.

Cohesion across the Textual and Visual Components

This study focuses on the verbal text, but cohesion in the broader profile does not actually stop at the edge of the self-description. Several daters in the corpus chose profile photographs whose visual content echoes the lexical and collocational choices in their text, someone describing leisure-oriented interests, for instance, also appearing in a photograph taken during that same activity. This cross-modal echoing works much like lexical cohesion within a single text, creating a semantic tie between the visual and verbal components that reinforces the coherence of the overall self-presentation, even though it sits outside Halliday and Hasan's (1976) originally verbal-text-focused framework. A companion study examining the synchronisation of textual and visual components across this same corpus develops this observation more fully.

Discussion of Findings

The research question asked in what ways online daters use cohesion and coherence in their profiles. Table 1 answers that quantitatively. Collocation is the most frequently used cohesive device, accounting for 36% of all cohesive ties identified. Conjunction follows at 26.3%, reference at 24.8%, ellipsis at 6.8%, repetition at 3.8%, and substitution at 2.3%. Read against Halliday and Hasan's (1976) distinction between grammatical and lexical cohesion, this distribution suggests online daters lean most heavily on fixed, conventionalised phrases, "looking for," "swipe left," "good sense of humour," that carry recognisable, register-specific meaning within the online dating community. It is worth pausing on collocation outranking reference, since reference is often assumed to be the primary cohesive resource in short personal texts. Its comparatively lower showing here (24.8%) suggests daters lean on shared cultural and platform-specific vocabulary just as much as they lean on grammatical anaphora to hold a text together.

Cohesive Device	Frequency
Collocation (Lexical)	36.0%
Conjunction (Grammatical)	26.3%
Reference (Grammatical)	24.8%
Ellipsis (Grammatical)	6.8%
Repetition (Lexical)	3.8%
Substitution (Grammatical)	2.3%

Table 1. Distribution of cohesive devices across the sampled self-description texts (N = 25 profiles).

Conjunction's substantial share (26.3%) suggests online daters frequently set up explicit logical relationships, addition, causality, condition, between statements rather than simply juxtaposing unconnected facts. That matters because it shows self-description texts, brief as they are, often getting structured argumentatively. A dater does not just list traits; they frame them as conditions, consequences, or qualifications, and David's and Debby's conditional and causal conjunction are the clearest examples of that. Ellipsis (6.8%), repetition (3.8%), and substitution (2.3%) show up far less often, which suggests these devices, while present, get used sparingly and for specific rhetorical effect, Debby's ellipsis suggesting an identity too expansive to state fully is a good example, rather than as routine cohesive scaffolding.

This lines up with Hamid's (2019) observation that cohesive density can mark persuasive stance, and with Alshalan's (2019) finding that appropriate cohesive-device use correlates with perceived text quality. In the present corpus, the profiles combining the greatest variety of cohesive devices, Debby's and David's among them, also read as the most rhetorically deliberate and persuasively structured. That suggests cohesive variety itself, not just cohesive presence, may mark communicative sophistication in this genre. The findings also extend Fitriana and Wirza's (2020) and Yolanda et al.'s (2017) observations about cross-modal cohesion, since in this genre cohesion operates not only within the self-description text but, as noted above, across the textual and visual components of the profile as a whole.

Overall, online daters use cohesive devices and coherence strategies to present a unified, interpretable narrative of themselves within tight generic constraints. These strategies help establish a sense of personal identity, highlight desired characteristics, and connect the separate statements within a profile into one coherent message. Its persuasive success depends as much on how its parts are tied together as on what those parts individually assert.

A further point concerns the relationship between cohesive density and text length.

Longer texts in the corpus, Alvin's and Debby's among them, carry a greater absolute number of cohesive ties than the shortest texts, Nennyi's two-clause profile especially, but not necessarily a proportionally higher density. Even minimal self-description texts, in other words, are built on an underlying, if compressed, cohesive structure. Brevity in this genre does not relax cohesive demands. If anything, the shortest texts seem to rely on fewer devices each doing comparatively more interpretive work, since there is less surrounding text available to establish redundancy or reinforce meaning through repetition.

It is also worth asking how cohesion in this genre interacts with the specific register of online dating platforms. Kaur's (2018) observation that informal registers often achieve coherence through pragmatic and contextual inference holds up strongly in this corpus: expressions like "swipe left," "swipe right," and "hookup" only achieve cohesive and coherent function because readers bring extensive shared knowledge of platform mechanics and dating-culture vocabulary to the text. Someone unfamiliar with these platforms would likely find several of the profiles analysed above considerably less coherent than a regular user would, since much of the semantic work depends on collocations anchored in a specific digital subculture rather than in general English usage. Coherence, in this genre, is not a purely text-internal property; it depends heavily on the reader's membership in the interpretive community the text was written for, a dependency far less pronounced in the general-audience genres, newspaper editorials, academic writing, where the cohesion literature has traditionally developed.

Limitations of the Study

A few limitations qualify these findings. Twenty-five profiles are enough to illustrate a range of cohesive strategies but not enough to support strong generalisations about cohesive-device frequency across the full population of online daters. Purposive sampling, while good for identifying rich illustrative cases, offers no guarantee that the frequency pattern reported here holds for daters outside the five platforms and demographic range sampled. Classifying cohesive devices, especially the boundary between collocation and simple lexical repetition, or between

endophoric and exophoric reference, keeps an interpretive element that a different analyst might resolve somewhat differently in particular cases. The study is also limited to English-language profiles from platforms accessible in a Nigerian context, and how far the patterns identified here generalise to other languages, cultures, or platform designs remains an open question. Larger samples, multiple independent coders, and, where feasible, inter-rater reliability measures would help future studies establish how robust these frequency patterns really are.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper asked how online daters use cohesion and coherence in their profiles.

Working from Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion, the analysis of twenty-five purposively sampled profiles found collocation, conjunction, and reference together accounting for the great majority of cohesive ties in the corpus, with ellipsis, repetition, and substitution playing smaller but rhetorically significant supporting roles. Cohesion analysis, already productive with editorials, textbooks, and academic writing, extends usefully to the online dating profile too. It reveals that even very short, informally composed texts rely on a structured, patterned deployment of cohesive resources to achieve coherence and persuasive effect.

Three recommendations follow from this. Future linguistic analyses of online dating profiles should attend explicitly to cohesive device selection, since the combination of devices used seems to track the specific communicative function, description, filtering, persuasion, a given profile is designed to perform. Daters themselves might benefit from knowing that fixed, register-specific collocations carry strong interpretive weight within the dating-app community and can be used deliberately to signal familiarity with platform norms. Future research could test whether cohesive device frequency and variety correlate with measurable outcomes, match rates, perceived trustworthiness, and whether cohesive strategies differ systematically across platforms with different affordances, character limits, prompt-based structures. Comparative research across languages and cultures would be worth doing too, testing whether the patterns identified here, collocation's prominence especially, are specific to the English-language, internationally accessible platforms examined in this study or reflect a broader tendency in short persuasive self-description generally. Finally, since coherence in this genre depends so heavily on shared subcultural knowledge, future studies might usefully look at how newcomers to online dating platforms pick up the register-specific collocational competence established users seem to rely on so heavily. That kind of inquiry would say something about how digital communities more broadly develop and pass on the specialised linguistic conventions that make their characteristic genres cohesive and interpretable to insiders.

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