An Evaluation of the Macrostructural Features of Rıfat Ilgaz's Short Story Şeker Kutusu (In Terms of Cohesion)

Ayşe YILMAZ
International Burch University, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mustafa ARSLAN
Prof. Dr., International Burch University, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract: Rıfat Ilgaz's literary approach occupies a distinctive position in Turkish literature, particularly due to his integration of social critique with the details of everyday life. This study examines Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu through the lens of text linguistics, with a specific focus on the dimension of cohesion. The aim of the study is to investigate the structural integrity of Şeker Kutusu from a text-linguistic perspective and to reveal the functioning of cohesive devices within the narrative. A qualitative research methodology was employed, and patterns of meaning within the narrative were identified through textual analysis. The data obtained were evaluated using content analysis. The findings indicate that as the candy box is passed from hand to hand, its symbolic meaning transforms, prompting a critical reflection on concepts such as status, belonging, and sincerity. The story offers a satirical perspective on a social structure in which gifts are instrumentalized and relationships become superficial. In this respect, the study contributes both to textual analysis and to the understanding of how literary texts can serve as sources for sociocultural interpretation.

Keywords: Cohesion, Holiday, Rıfat Ilgaz, Şeker Kutusu

Introduction

Written texts are not merely the result of letters coming together to form meaningful units; they also function as cultural phenomena, serving as carriers of spoken language and constructors of meaning. Since the twentieth century, written texts have transcended their role as mere tools of communication and have become subjects of multifaceted scholarly inquiry. Within this framework, the concept of "textuality," which focuses on the structural, semantic, and functional features of texts, has emerged and been adopted as a foundational approach in textual analysis.

Text linguistics, in line with this approach, argues that meaning is constructed not only at the sentence level but also through larger textual structures. According to Yılmaz (2021), one of the founding figures of text linguistics, the American scholar laid the theoretical groundwork for the field by emphasizing textual structures beyond linguistic units. Researchers such as Hartmann, Weinrich, Petöfi, Van Dijk, De Beaugrande, and Dressler have also made significant contributions to the development of text linguistics. In this context, Aksan (2006) states that utterances, either individually or in combination, constitute the text, and that this process is governed by grammatical and logical connections.

However, textual analyses conducted in Turkish often remain at a theoretical level, and studies that systematically examine original literary texts—particularly in terms of cohesion—are quite limited. Therefore, applying cohesion theory to literary texts holds the potential to contribute meaningfully both to the field of text linguistics and to literary studies.

Within the framework of socialist realist literature, Rıfat Ilgaz describes his artistic approach as follows: "Since the 1940s, I have maintained a particular artistic understanding: socialist realism. My sense of humor is also tied to this. Even when I speak of myself, I prioritize my surroundings. I am always concerned with my environment. I want to understand the people around me—their contradictions, life struggles, hopes, and plans—and I try to reflect these…" (as cited in Cuylan, 2022, p. 44).

Reflecting this perspective, Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu constructs a multilayered narrative around an object considered ordinary in daily life. As the candy box circulates among different individuals, its meaning transforms, and the relationships between characters are reshaped within varying social contexts. This multilayered structure is noteworthy not only in terms of content but also in the patterned use of cohesive elements at both formal and semantic levels. Therefore, analyzing this story through the lens of cohesion will not only reveal the deeper narrative structure of Ilgaz's work but also offer original contributions to the field of text linguistics.

Methodology

Research Design

This study aims to analyze the cohesive elements in Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu within the framework of text linguistics. The theoretical foundation of the research is based on the cohesion theory developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Within this context, linguistic structures such as repetition, reference elements, conjunctions, and semantic relations found in the story are examined in terms of their functions within the textual integrity and their contributions to the coherence perceived by the reader. Additionally, the study reveals how these cohesive elements structure the internal narrative and how these linguistic patterns are reflected in Rıfat Ilgaz's storytelling.

A qualitative research method was adopted, and the analysis process was grounded in in-depth interpretation rather than descriptive observation. During the data collection phase, the story Şeker Kutusu was structurally segmented according to linguistic cohesion elements; these elements were categorized using content analysis techniques and systematically classified. The resulting data were evaluated through thematic analysis, thereby uncovering the linguistic patterns that contribute to meaning construction throughout the narrative. In this study, the cohesive devices present in the story (e.g., repetitions, references) were treated as independent variables, while the narrative's semantic unity was considered the dependent variable. Within this framework, the study demonstrates how the linguistic network woven into the deep structure of the text shapes the intellectual and emotional flow of the story.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study consists of short stories shaped by the influence of the socialist realist movement in Turkish literature after the 1940s. This period is particularly notable for literary works that address individual-society relations, class differences, and everyday life with a simple yet profound narrative style. Within this framework, Rıfat Ilgaz's works stand out as significant texts that reflect the spirit of the era both in terms of content and form. His stories offer a unique narrative universe, not only through the direct connection he establishes with the public via his efforts to simplify language, but also through the social issues he addresses.

The sample of the study is limited to Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu. This text is one of the most striking examples in which the author skillfully employs linguistic cohesion elements and constructs a strong narrative structure. The sample selection was carried out using the purposive sampling method, which is frequently employed in qualitative research. In line with this method, a story was selected that aligns with the aim of the study, demonstrates clear linguistic and semantic structures, contains a variety of cohesive devices, and has a high potential to represent Rıfat Ilgaz's overall narrative aesthetics. Şeker Kutusu is considered a valuable material for analysis due to its clear narrative framework that allows for structural examination and its expressive portrayal of the author's socialist sensitivity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection method employed in this study is document analysis. "Document analysis is a systematic method used to examine and evaluate all types of documents, both printed and electronic" (Kıral, 2020, p. 173). Within the scope of the study, Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu was analyzed based on the cohesion theory developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Accordingly, the story was treated as the primary data source, and linguistic elements such as repetitions, references, conjunctions, and intra-textual semantic relations were systematically identified using a structured analysis framework. This method enabled the detailed identification of linguistic components that ensure the internal consistency of the narrative and contributed to the reliability and validity of the study.

During the textual analysis process, macrostructural elements were also considered, allowing for a multilayered evaluation. In this context, the story was assessed according to eleven core criteria: functional structure, the relationship between the title and the text, central theme, thematic vocabulary, sentences reflecting the main idea, content mapping, expressions indicating topic transitions, narrative style, concluding judgments, and post-textual reflections. Şeker Kutusu was analyzed not only as a fictional narrative but also as a text with strong meaning patterns, shaped by its social sensitivity and linguistic craftsmanship.

The data analysis was conducted using the content analysis approach, one of the qualitative research methods. The analyses performed on Şeker Kutusu focused on the thematic classification of cohesive elements within the text and the interpretation of their functions in the semantic dimension. Each cohesive device was evaluated based on its position in the text, functional significance, and contribution to the overall structure.

Findings and Interpretations

Function

When evaluated from a functional perspective in terms of cohesive elements, the short story Şeker Kutusu reveals its communicative and critical impact on the reader more clearly. The story not only presents a sequence of events but also aims to instill a critical viewpoint in the reader. According to Günay (2013), authors seek to create a specific effect through their works and always carry a particular intention, even as they push the reader toward a sense of imbalance.

The narrative function of the story emerges through the plot initiated by the main character Ali Yılmaz's purchase of the candy box, and through the dialogues between characters, which convey holiday traditions, social relationships, and the symbolic meaning of the gift. The connections between events enhance the comprehensibility of the narrative, while the author presents the communicative dimension of the text within a reflective framework focused on social critique and interpersonal relations.

Aesthetic Function: The emotional states of the characters, the natural flow of dialogues, and the vividness of descriptions contribute to the aesthetic strength of the story. The symbolic meaning of the mirror inside the box stands out as a significant element that emphasizes how individuals perceive themselves and their social status. Critical Function: The candy box, emphasized throughout the story as a holiday gift, is approached with a critical lens regarding how society and individuals interpret objects as indicators of status. Its circulation from person to person reveals that gift-giving is often driven more by social expectations than genuine sincerity. Ilgaz's critical stance may be interpreted in various ways depending on the reader's past experiences, level of attention, and social perception. In this context, Şeker Kutusu offers a narrative that critiques not only individuals but also societal values and class distinctions through its cohesive elements.

Title

In the story, the title Şeker Kutusu (Candy Box) goes beyond representing a mere object and evokes a range of significant themes such as insincerity in relationships, social values, status, superficial expectations, and individual quests. This title establishes a strong cohesion between the story's central theme of social critique and the characters' personal expectations. The gift-giving practices depicted in the narrative highlight imbalances and superficial values within the social structure, and the title reinforces this thematic focus. In this context, Şeker Kutusu serves as a powerful focal point, providing both aesthetic and semantic cohesion in alignment with the story's main theme.

Topic

As one of the key components of textual cohesion, the topic in Şeker Kutusu presents a structurally strong narrative foundation. The story begins with Ali Yılmaz purchasing a candy box as a holiday gift for his fiancée, Sevgi. At first, the gift appears to be a simple gesture fulfilling a festive tradition; however, the story delves deeply into how the box becomes a significant and symbolic object within society. As the box passes from one person to another, the narrative exposes the superficial and self-serving aspects of interpersonal relationships and the broader social structure.

Keywords

In Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu, keywords—one of the essential elements of textual cohesion—effectively reflect the central theme and key points of the narrative. The identified keywords such as "Ali, Sevgi, holiday, candy, box, visit, gift" summarize the core subject matter and facilitate a clearer understanding of the main components of the story.

These keywords are directly related to the themes addressed in the narrative. The events surrounding Ali Yılmaz's act of giving a gift to his fiancée Sevgi, and the subsequent holiday visits during which the candy box changes hands, revolve around these terms. By deepening the meaning of the text, these keywords contribute to both the structural

integrity of the story and the author's intended messages, thereby reinforcing cohesion and consistency throughout the narrative.

Main Idea Sentence

The central idea of the story is that the circulation of the candy box reveals how gift-giving is not necessarily a sincere act, but rather one driven by social expectations. In this context, the sentence "Even if it's from your stepsister, eat it like it's your own!" can be considered representative of the main idea. This line encapsulates the story's critique of superficial values and the transactional nature of human relationships.

While highlighting the selfish and opportunistic tendencies of certain individuals, the author uses the phrase "eat it like it's your own!" to create irony, echoing the proverb "free vinegar is sweeter than honey." People tend to accept things not for their intrinsic value, but simply because they are free—avoiding deeper, more meaningful connections. This dynamic offers a pointed critique of the superficial and self-serving nature of interpersonal relationships depicted in the story.

Content Schema

The story consists of a total of 1,271 words and 133 sentences. Structurally, it can be divided into three main sections:

First Section (Sentences 12–23): This part focuses on Ali Yılmaz purchasing a candy box and flowers for his fiancée, Sevgi. It also covers his efforts to gather courage and prepare himself to present the holiday gifts.

Second Section (Sentences 24–39): In this segment, Ali Yılmaz finally musters the courage to visit Sevgi's home, presents his gifts, and experiences a range of emotions during the visit. The sentences demonstrate coherence in meaning, time, topic, emotion, and expression. The sequence of events—especially in sentences 24 through 27, which describe his arrival at the door and entry into the house—is conveyed with effective narrative flow.

Third Section (Sentences 35–39): The sentence "He didn't stay long; as he walked out the door, he breathed a sigh of relief" reflects Ali Yılmaz's sense of release after fulfilling his duty and completing the holiday visit. Expressions such as "breathing a sigh of relief," "a burden lifted," and "task completed" are semantically linked and reinforce textual cohesion. Cohesion Elements: Temporal Conjunctions: now, then. Emotionally Charged Verbs: gave, received, thought. These cohesive devices contribute to the narrative's internal consistency and emotional resonance.

Fourth Section (Sentences 40–60): This section begins with Sevgi delivering the candy box to Melahat Hanım, marking the start of the gift's circulation. The narrative highlights how individuals behave in accordance with their social roles within the framework of societal courtesy and traditional hierarchy. Respect-based communication directed toward higher-status individuals becomes prominent. Cohesion Elements: Lexical repetition (holiday, box, hand-kissing), causal conjunctions (because, but). Cohesion Level: A chain-like narrative structure emerges, centered around the candy box.

Subsequent Sections (Sentences 61–88): The candy box passes from Melahat Hanım to Hadiye Hanım, and then to Naciye Hanım. Through this transfer, the story reveals the underlying class structure and social networks. Discourse Focus: Social interests, bureaucratic expectations, and artificial emotions come to the forefront. Cohesive Devices: Referential chains (he, this, box), repeated actions (to deliver, to give, to receive).

Sentences 89–104: The candy box reaches Şenol, where it becomes associated with themes of sports and career aspirations. Cohesion Elements: Pronoun repetition (he, this, you), comparative structures.

Final Section (Sentences 117–133): The candy box returns to its point of origin and is opened by Ali Yılmaz. The story concludes with an ironic reflection on social relationships, class transitions, and the collapse of expectations—all conveyed through the circulation of a single object.

Indicators of Topic Shift – Sentences

Sentence 1: "Bring them down!" he said. "Bring down all the boxes you have!" This is the opening sentence of the story, where the narrative begins with Ali Yılmaz preparing the candy box.

Sentence 12: "He went to the bar across the street and downed two quick vodkas." Marks the transition from the act of purchasing the gift to a phase of internal preparation and gaining courage.

Sentence 24: "He touched the doorbell at Sevgi's house… The house was packed with guests, and a wave of fatigue washed over him." Indicates a shift from the gift-buying scene to Sevgi's home; both the physical setting and narrative focus change.

Sentence 40: "Sevgi could never skip kissing Melahat Hanım's hand during the holidays." The focus moves from Ali Yılmaz to Sevgi's storyline; the narrator's perspective and central character shift.

Sentence 52: "Melahat Hanım caught her right at the doorstep…" With Sevgi handing over the box to Melahat Hanım, both character and location change again.

Sentence 58: "She was heading to Inspector Cemal Bey's house." The narrative transitions from Melahat Hanım to a new character (Cemal Bey) and a different social setting.

Sentence 76: "Naciye Hanım was her stepsister, living just around the corner." The candy box moves from Hadiye Hanım to Naciye Hanım, signaling another shift in character and location.

Sentence 89: "Şenol came home exhausted from training, completely worn out." A new character (Şenol) is introduced, and the theme of youth and football becomes prominent.

Sentence 104: "As the young footballer stepped out, Sevim, daughter of a city council member, grabbed the box…" The candy box passes to Sevim; a shift in character and intention begins.

Sentence 110: "His aunt opened the door." Sevim attempts to return the box to Ali, but his aunt answers instead; tension in the narrative increases.

Sentence 117: "Around midnight, Ali Yılmaz returned home like a cloud." The narrative returns to its original character, Ali Yılmaz, and the cyclical structure begins to close. This sequence of topic shifts reflects the story's layered narrative and its exploration of social roles, expectations, and symbolic exchange through the journey of a single object.

Style

Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu is written in a plain, clear, and occasionally ironic narrative style. From the perspective of text linguistics, the stylistic structure demonstrates strong coherence in line with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion theory. The story is constructed from a third-person narrator's point of view, which allows for smooth transitions between events and characters without distracting the reader.

The narrative style stands out for its natural presentation of intertwined events, its multilayered storytelling revolving around the circulation of the candy box, and its seamless character transitions. Dialogues are among the most prominent stylistic elements, reflecting the characters' social positions, intentions, and emotional states. The use of everyday language, local expressions, and direct speech patterns reinforces the story's realism while also supporting textual cohesion. For example, expressions like "Let the elegance stay hidden!", "I'll take this to our chairman!", and "Fancy box!" serve as indicators of the characters' class positions and social relationships.

The integration of colloquial speech and irony into the narrative shifts the tone away from a didactic structure toward a more observational and critical style. The language used by the characters and the repetition of certain phrases deepen the meaning throughout the text. As the box circulates among various characters, the meaning attributed to it changes, and this transformation is reflected through linguistic variation. The narrator's occasional use of internal monologue—such as Ali Yılmaz's thought "The holiday duty is done."—reveals the emotional dimensions of the characters and allows the reader to form a deeper connection with the text.

Additionally, the descriptive passages and object-centered narration—especially the details about the box's appearance and contents—demonstrate that the box functions not only as a physical item but also as a symbol with social significance. In this regard, Şeker Kutusu presents a multilayered structure that critiques not only personal emotions but also class distinctions, superficial relationships, and social decay through its stylistic choices.

Summary

Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu presents a socially realist narrative that satirically critiques opportunism, superficiality, and the lack of sincerity in human relationships. The story begins with a young man named Ali Yılmaz, who prepares an ornate and eye-catching candy box as a holiday gift for his fiancée, Sevgi. Though the gift is lavishly prepared with a touch of shyness, it soon begins to circulate among various characters. Sevgi delivers the box to her former teacher Melahat Hanım; Melahat passes it on to an inspector she hopes to impress; the inspector's mother, Hadiye Hanım, takes it to her sister; and finally, the box ends up with a young footballer named Şenol, who offers it to his club president in hopes of gaining favor. Eventually, the box makes its way back to its original owner, Ali Yılmaz.

Each stop along the box's journey represents a different social stratum and individual expectation. The cyclical structure reveals how gift-giving becomes less about genuine sentiment and more about social gain and status. Through this object-centered narrative, the story reconstructs personal value systems in a critical light. The box's return to Ali Yılmaz at the end adds an ironic twist, prompting reflection on the characters' behaviors. Its loss of symbolic meaning and reduction to mere material value exposes the moral decay in interpersonal relationships. In this way, Şeker Kutusu, with its simple yet multilayered structure, offers a critical perspective on social communication rooted in self-interest, class distinctions, and the hollowing out of traditional etiquette.

Closing Sentence

The final sentence of the analyzed text, conveyed through Ali Yılmaz's dialogue with his mother—"Eat it!" she said. "Even if it's from your stepsister, it's candy… Eat it like it's your own!"—serves as a key closing statement that encapsulates the story's central themes and establishes a narrative bridge to its beginning. Through the journey of an ordinary gift box passed from hand to hand, the author makes visible the contradictions between social class distinctions, self-interest, and the tension between sincerity and formalism. In the final line, the reader is prompted to reflect on the individual's awareness within this social cycle.

Ali Yılmaz's ironic and superior gaze toward the object that ultimately returns to him reveals the impact of the behaviors and social interactions depicted throughout the story. Meanwhile, his mother's words illustrate how family ties and notions of belonging are pragmatically redefined. In this way, the author not only completes the symbolic journey of the candy box but also invites the reader to question the extent to which social values have undergone transformation.

Theme

The central theme of the analyzed text can be defined as "the replacement of sincerity by ostentation, and the dominance of form over substance in human relationships." This theme reveals a situation in which genuine interpersonal communication gradually weakens, while social values are instrumentalized for the sake of superficial appearances. In the story, the circulation of an ordinary gift box becomes a powerful narrative device that represents the attitudes of various social groups and the self-serving nature of their relationships.

This theme not only exposes a world where individuals maintain their connections by relying on artificial grace and etiquette, but also invites the reader to question the superficiality of modern life and the instrumental rationality that underlies it. The candy box, carefully and emotionally prepared by Ali Yılmaz, is repeatedly passed from person to person for personal gain, reflecting not only an individual disappointment but also a deeper social critique of how human values are commodified.

While developing this theme, the author encourages the reader to ask not only "to whom the gift is delivered," but also "why it is delivered" and "what it becomes." Thus, although the narrative appears to revolve around a holiday visit, it actually offers a space for behavioral and value-based reflection through themes such as sincerity, belonging, self-interest, status, and individual responsibility. In this respect, Şeker Kutusu prompts the reader to question not only personal attitudes but also the broader issue of how sincerity and genuine connection in society are increasingly replaced by formalized politeness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu stands out not only for its narrative structure but also for its functional use of linguistic cohesion elements. Repetitions, transitional markers, pronouns, conjunctions, and dialogue structures employed throughout the story contribute to the overall coherence of the narrative and facilitate the reader's

comprehension. The author's mastery of language and text organization ensures a natural flow of events while revealing the multilayered nature of relationships between characters.

The story follows a cyclical narrative form: the candy box initially purchased by Ali Yılmaz passes through the hands of several characters and ultimately returns to him. This circular structure provides a consistent framework in terms of content schema and strengthens cohesion among events, characters, and settings. Each new character introduced in the narrative projects their own intentions, expectations, or ambitions onto the box, thereby expanding the story's social dimensions. This demonstrates the skillful placement of topic-shift indicators and helps the reader maintain thematic continuity throughout the text.

The transformation of the box from a "gift" into a tool of personal gain defines the story's central theme. Beneath the surface-level events lies a deeper social critique. Each character's interaction with the box reflects their value system, perception of social status, and the nature of their communication with others. In this respect, the story transcends a mere sequence of events and becomes a reflection on individual and societal values.

Dialogues, repetitions, and internal monologues are among the strongest cohesion elements in the text. Phrases such as "Let the elegance stay hidden!", "I'll take this to our chairman!", and "Auntie, where's my brother Ali?" not only reflect the characters' speech styles but also reinforce narrative continuity through textual repetition. These linguistic features subtly convey the characters' social class, status, and intentions to the reader.

The final sentence of the story—"Eat it!" she said. "Even if it's from your stepsister, it's candy… Eat it like it's your own!"—serves as a simple yet multilayered conclusion. It not only refers back to the beginning of the narrative, completing a structural cycle, but also ironically emphasizes the transformation in the symbolic meaning of the candy box. Rather than delivering a direct message, this line reveals—through the characters' words—how social values have become superficial and sincerity has been replaced by formalism. In doing so, the closing sentence fulfills a powerful function: it completes the narrative context, deepens the meaning, and fosters critical awareness in the reader.

Şeker Kutusu presents a cohesive and well-structured textual integrity while exploring themes such as social disintegration, status anxiety, formalism, and the loss of sincerity through the act of gift-giving. In this respect, it can be said that Rıfat Ilgaz establishes a narrative style attentive not only to aesthetic construction but also to intertextuality, cultural context, and communicative function.

Recommendations

Rıfat Ilgaz's short story Şeker Kutusu is well-suited for inclusion in secondary and university-level curricula within the context of values education, due to its exploration of themes such as social disintegration, superficiality, the erosion of sincerity, and the instrumentalization of values. By centering on the tension between ostentation and authenticity, the story enables ethical reflection within the individual–society framework.

Ilgaz's plain yet ironic style can serve as a literary model for narrative analysis, dialogue writing, and character study. In particular, the object-centered cyclical structure offers a rich example for educators seeking to teach narrative techniques. The transitions created through the circulation of the candy box and the meanings attributed to it by each character lend themselves well to intertextual reading and multilayered analytical activities.

Themes such as formalism, self-interest, hollowed-out etiquette, and the pursuit of social status—prominent throughout the story—draw attention to the growing problem of superficiality in contemporary society. In this regard, the story can be used as a discussion basis for workshops, seminars, or student projects focused on values such as sincerity, sharing, social responsibility, and belonging. Especially for young individuals, the story offers an instructive and thought-provoking opportunity to develop a critical perspective on visibility and self-serving behavior in social relationships.

Şeker Kutusu may also serve as a valuable source for academic studies in Turkish literature, particularly in areas such as character analysis, critique of social structures, and symbolic object usage. Each scene in which the box changes hands reflects different social classes and value systems, making the story suitable for sociological readings. When the characters' language is examined alongside their social positions, the narrative can be analyzed within the framework of language–society relations. The story could be adapted into visual formats such as television series, short films, or theater productions to reach broader audiences. Especially the cyclical structure woven around the box's journey provides a rich narrative foundation for visual storytelling—making it a meaningful tool for both disseminating the story's message and preserving its literary legacy for future generations.

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Corresponding Author Contact Information:

Author Name: Ayşe YILMAZ

Department: Department of Turkish Language and Literature Teaching

Faculty: Faculty of Education and Human Sciences

University, Country:International Burch University, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Email: ayse.yilmaz@stu.ibu.edu.ba