The Role of Cohesion in Text Creation

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the role of cohesion in persuading listeners through answering the following questions; what types of grammatical cohesive relations are displayed and what is their frequency of occurrence in the sampled text? and how does cohesion contribute to the creation and understanding of a text? A program for corpus analysis called (AntConc Tutorial (Ver. 3.2.4) developed by Laurence Anthony (Anthony, L., 2004) is used for analyzing the sample of this study which will be the speech of the Singaporean prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, on the COVID-19 'New Normal', on 31 May 2021 (Appendix A). The study devotes attention to the speech of the Singaporean prime minister on this occasion due to the importance of this event which occupied the world. This paper depends on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of cohesive devices to analyze data.

Keywords

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Introduction

Some researchers hold that cohesion and coherence are on the textual level and that this level represents the underlying structure of the surface structure achieved through the use of grammatical elements. The relations between the sentences, at this level, play a major role in the achievement of coherence. Cohesion can be established by various means which include reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical relationships (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

Textuality stands primarily on Cohesion which represents its most important principle and criterion. It is the process of joining words to build a well-formed and meaningful unit. The interpretation of a specific textual unit or element (a word in a sentence) relies on or is connected to the interpretation of another word in another sentence. In this sense, cohesion relates to the "semantic ties" within a text.

Despite the various types of text (literary/expressive, scientific/informative, and so on), it has a crucial role in getting the meaning across to others (Richardson, 2007). To write in a good way one must take into consideration some devices that enhance his ability to write clearly and understandably. For a long time, Cohesion and coherence have been recognized as being two important textual features of good writing (Halliday & Hasan, 2014).

It is believed by some researchers (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) that cohesion and coherence are on the textual level and that this level represents the underlying structure of the surface structure achieved through the use of grammatical elements. The relations between the sentences, at this level, play a major role in the achievement of coherence. Cohesion can be established by various means. These means include reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical relationships.

According to (Halliday, 1978), for series of sentences to be called text is displayed through the concept of texture. It is clear that all languages have texts and so do certain linguistic features that create texture. Therefore, it can be concluded that any texture is made up of two different levels: the sentential and textual. Also, it should be reminded that the fundamental building blocks that construct texts are four independent components on the two aforementioned levels. The sentential level, on the one hand, is grammatical features of syntax at the surface level representing semantics at the deep structure. On the sentential level are syntax and semantics. Syntactic component involves types of phrasing, types of clause constructions, and types of passive structures, clausal combinations, and word order within a sentence. The semantic component involves the senses and mappings from word meanings to sentential meanings.

1. Research Questions

What types of grammatical cohesive relations are displayed and what is their frequency of occurrence in this text?

How does cohesion contribute to the creation and understanding of a text?

2. Literature Review

In their article "Grammatical Cohesion in Abstracts", Klimova and Hubackova (2014) address the issue of grammatical cohesion in the English-written abstracts of British origin. They examine the grammatical organic means of cohesion, i.e. discourse connectives, specifically, only discourse adverbials, which connect sentences to establish a logical sequence of the whole

discourse. Depending on Halliday & Hasan (1976), they try to define cohesion and discourse connectives, then they employ a sample of abstracts from the field of tourism to analyze the discourse connectives. The finding of their article stated that the most frequent semantic conjuncts or discourse connectives are: listing, contrastive, resultative, and appositional respectively. Therefore, they are important for teachers who are involved in the teaching of academic discourse as well as textbook writers because they might not only enhance students' writing skills but also develop their thinking skills.

Cain, Patson, and Andrews (2005) conducted two studies investigating the use of conjunctions by young readers and their impact on the understanding of semantic relations. Again Halliday & Hasan (1976) is employed in this study. In Study One, different types of conjunction were deleted from two narrative cloze tasks, then 145 eight- to ten-year-olds were asked to complete one of them. Performance for additive conjunctions was not affected by age in this study, but older children were more likely to select the target conjunction than were younger children for temporal, causal, and adversative terms.

In Study Two, 35 eight- and nine-year-old good and poor comprehenders completed the three-choice cloze task. The poor comprehenders were less likely to select the target terms in general. Sentence-level comprehension skills did not account for their poor performance. The results indicate that understanding of the semantic relations expressed by conjunctions is still developing long after these terms are used correctly.

3. Theoretical Frame Work

Cohesion and coherence are two inseparable concepts that are needed in any text to be accurately interpretable. Cohesion represents the micro-level of the text whereas coherence is the macro level of it (De Haas, Algera, Van Tuijl, & Meulman, 2000). Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that holds a text together and makes it meaningful (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohesion _(linguistics)#Grammatical_cohesion).
Halliday and Hasan (1976) laid down the foundations of text linguistics. They defined it as "the set of linguistic means we have available for creating texture", i.e., the property of a text of being interpretable as one unit rather than unconnected sentences. The interpretation of some element of any text is not independent but rather based on another one. This is where cohesion occurs; one element presupposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively interpreted except by referring to it.

As proposed by M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976), there are two main types of cohesion: grammatical and lexical. The former bases on structural content, whereas the latter bases on lexical content and background knowledge. They identify five categories of cohesive devices: reference, ellipsis,   substitution,   conjunction,   and   lexical cohesion.(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cohesion(linguistics)#Grammatical cohesion)

These types are based on the central notion of presupposition, that is one element presupposes another which is located before (anaphoric) or after (cataphoric) the text or in the context of a situation (exophora) which helps to interpret any text. The notion of presupposition is composed of three levels: the semantic level (as in the case of reference), the lexicogrammatical level (as in the case of ellipsis and substitution), and the grammatical level (as in the case of conjunctions).

According to M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976), there are two main types of cohesion: grammatical and lexical. Under these two main types, there are many categories and subcategories as shown in table (1). However, the scope of this study will be limited to the fourth category of cohesive devices which is conjunctions as shown in table (2).

Table 1: Halliday and Hasan's Taxonomy of Cohesion

semantic level	reference	Personal	subsumes personal and possessive pronouns	
		demonstrative	"this" and "that" make reference to extended text	
		comparative	reference is made to a certain standard by which one thing is said to be superior, inferior, or equal	
lexicogrammatical level	ellipsis	Nominal Ellipsis	presupposes the head noun	
		verbal ellipsis	Presuppose either the lexical verb or the operator	
		clausal ellipsis	Presupposes the entire preceding clause	
	substitution	Nominal substitutes	"one" and "thing"	"presuppose a countable noun and function as heads of the nominal group
			same	presupposes the entire nominal group
		Verbal substitute	do	presupposes the lexical verb and functions as the head of the verbal group
		Clausal substitutes	"so" and "not"	presuppose an entire clause.
grammatical level	conjunction	Additives	and, and also, nor, or, or else, furthermore, by the way, in other words, likewise, on the other hand, thus	
		adversatives	yet, though, only, but, however, at least, in fact, rather, on the contrary, I mean, in any case	
		Causal	so, then, therefore, because (of that), otherwise, thus, hence, as a result (of that), consequently	
		Temporal	next, (and) then, sequentially, afterwards, after that, before that, first ... then, at first, formerly ... final, at once, soon, to sum up, in conclusion	
	lexical cohesion	reiteration	Repetition, synonymy or near synonymy and general term	the lexical recurrence of an item
		collocation	lexical items are interpreted concerning the existence of other lexical items because of:	a) their belonging to an ordered series. b) their relevance to the topic. c) their oppositeness

Table 2: Grammatical Cohesion (Conjunctions)

Grammatical Cohesion (Conjunctions)			
Main Level	**Main Area**	**Sub-areas**	**Words**
Grammatical Level	**Conjunction**	Additives conjunction	and, and also, nor, or, or else, furthermore, by the way, in other words, likewise, on the other hand, thus
		Adversatives conjunction	yet, though, only, but, however, at least, in fact, rather, on the contrary, I mean, in any case
		Causal conjunction	so, then, therefore, because (of that), otherwise, thus, hence, as a result (of that), consequently
		Temporal conjunction	next, (and) then, sequentially, afterwards, after that, before that, first ... then, at first, formerly ... final, at once, soon, to sum up, in conclusion

4. Methodology

4.1 Instrument

A program for corpus analysis called (AntConc Tutorial (Ver. 3.2.4)) developed by Laurence Anthony (Anthony, L., 2004) is used for analyzing the speech of Singaporean prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, on the COVID-19 'New Normal', on 31 May 2021 (See **Error! Reference source not found.**). It is used to investigate the types of grammatical cohesive relations (additive, adversative, causal, and temporal) and which one is predominant.

4.2 Setting

The speech to be analyzed in this study was conducted by Lee Hsien Loong, the prime minister of Singapore. It was produced on the COVID-19 'New Normal', held on 31 May 2021. This discourse was chosen because of the importance of the event of COVID-19 and the hard attempts of states to defeat the suspicious rumors about the infertility of the vaccine. Moreover, the importance of cohesion appeared clearly when the speaker used the English language which is not the mother tongue of the Singaporeans.

The speech was delivered from the Prime Minister's office in the capital, Singapore. He was talking about the spread of infections of COVID-19 calling the Singaporean people to support the government to reduce infections through cooperation. Singapore has at least four different languages: English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Despite the fact that Malay is the official language, English is the most used; therefore, the prime minister lied on the English language as being understood by almost the whole community.

4.3 Data Analysis

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One of the aims of this study is to investigate the types of grammatical cohesive relations that are displayed and of which is predominant in the Singaporean prime minister's speech? The present study analyzes the data adopting Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of cohesive devices, for more specific, grammatical cohesive ones and for further specific, conjunctions that fall into four categories as explained below.

4.3.1 Conjunction

The main cohesive category 'conjunction' involves the use of formal markers to relate sentences, clauses, and paragraphs to each other. All four categories may express either the external or the internal type of conjunctive relation.

4.3.1.1 Additive Conjunction

Halliday and Hasan grouped the words (and, and also, nor, or, or else, furthermore, by the way, in other words, likewise, on the other hand, and thus) under the heading 'Additive'. They believe that these words are all used cohesively, as conjunctions. They often seem to have the sense of additional things to be said.

4.3.1.2 Adversative Conjunction

As proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), they state that adversative conjunction reveals a basic meaning of 'contrary to expectation'. These conjunctions are like (yet, though, only, but, however, at least, in fact, rather, on the contrary, I mean, in any case).

4.3.1.3 Causal Conjunction

They are like (so, then, therefore, because (of that), otherwise, thus, hence, as a result (of that), consequently, for this purpose and this reason). Halliday and Hasan explore that they are of two kinds; simple such as 'so' and 'thus' and complex (prepositional phrase) such as 'for this purpose' and 'for this reason'. In addition, they serve for result, reason, and purpose.

4.3.1.4 Temporal Conjunction

According to Halliday and Hasan, the relation between the theses of two successive sentences may be that one is after the other. This temporal relation is expressed by words such as (next, (and) then, sequentially, afterwards, after that, before that, first ... then, at first, formerly ... final, at once, soon, to sum up, in conclusion). Halliday and Hasan believe that the temporal relation may be made more specific by the presence of an additional component in the meaning, as well as that of succession in time. So, for example, we may have 'then + immediately' (at once, thereupon, on which); 'then +after an interval' (soon, presently, later, after a time); 'then + repetition' (next time, on other occasion); 'then + a specific time interval' (next day, five minutes later) and so on.

5.Findings and Discussion

5.1 The First Research Question

To answer the first research question; What types of grammatical cohesive relations are displayed and what is their frequency of occurrence in this text? the following four tables (3-6) describe the frequency of occurrence of each of the four types of conjunctions (additives conjunctions, adversatives conjunctions, causal conjunctions, and temporal conjunction) as main categories of grammatical cohesion.

As shown in Table 3, 'and' and 'or' are the only conjunctions being used among all the other eleven conjunctions in the speech undertaken.

Table 3: Additives Conjunctions

Additives Conjunctions										
and	And also	Nor	or	or else	Further(more)	by the way	in other words	likewise	on the other hand	thus
109	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4 which reflexes the results of the adversative conjunctions shows that six out of eleven conjunctions are used. They are 'yet', 'only', 'but', 'however', 'at least', and 'rather'. Among them 'but' is the most used, whereas 'yet' 'however and 'rather' are equally used. 'at least' comes second while other types are not used.

Table 4: Adversatives Conjunctions

Adversatives Conjunctions										
yet	though	only	but	however	At least	in fact	rather	on the contrary	I mean	in any case
1	0	3	9	1	6	0	1	0	0	0

Table 5 exposes the frequency of occurrence of the nine causal conjunctions. Six of them are used. The use of 'then', and 'because (of that)' are the same, three times each. The use of 'therefore', and 'so' are the same, five times each. The use of 'thus', and 'hence' is the same, one time each. Others are not used at all.

Table 5: Causal Conjunctions

Causal Conjunctions								
Then	therefore	Because (of that)	otherwise	so	thus	hence	as a result (of that)	consequently

3	5	3	0	5	1	1	0	0

The use of temporal conjunctions is shown in
Table **6**. It states that 'and (then)', 'next', 'soon' and 'after that' are the only conjunctions to be used out of thirteen. 'and (then)' is mentioned three times, 'next' was mentioned four times, whereas 'soon' and 'after that' were respectively mentioned five times and twice. The rest are not used at all.
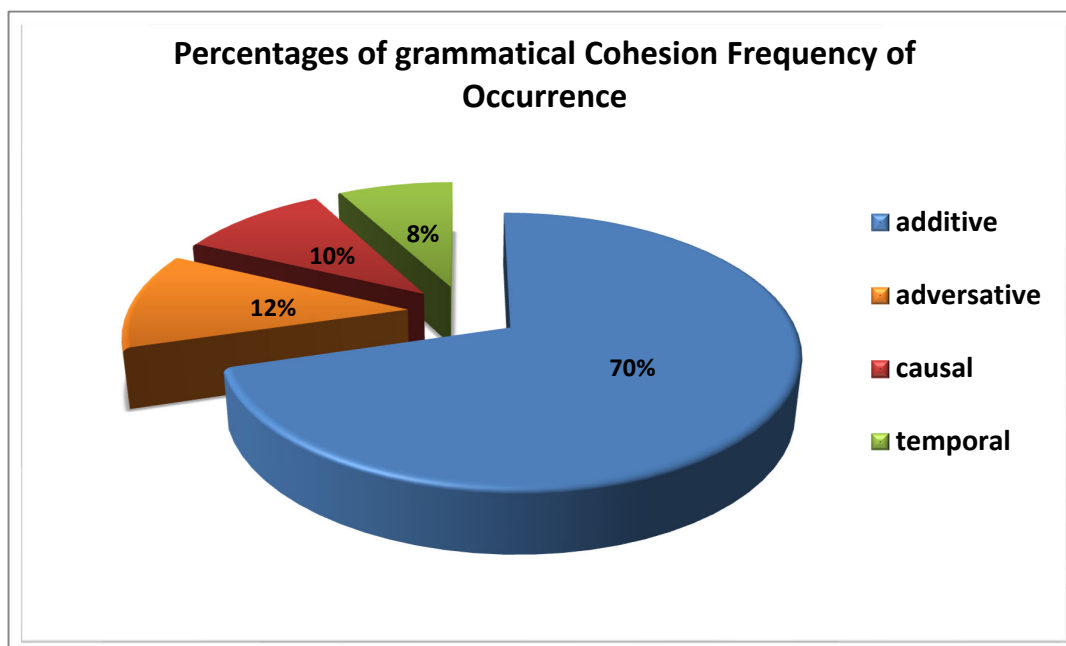
Table 6: Temporal Conjunctions

Temporal Conjunctions												
(and) then	next	before that	first ... then	at first	formerly ... final	at once	Soon	to sum up	in conclusion	sequentially	afterwards	after that
3	4	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	2

Percentages of each main type of the four types of conjunctions for grammatical cohesion are presented in Table 7. Respectively, 70%, 12%, 10%, and 8% are the results of the frequency of occurrence of the four main types of conjunctions; additive, adversative, causal and temporal conjunctions.

Table 7: Percentages of grammatical Cohesion Frequency of Occurrence

Percentages of grammatical Cohesion Frequency of Occurrence			
Additives conjunction	Adversatives conjunction	Causal conjunction	Temporal conjunction
70%	12%	10%	8%

Following Figure 7 it is clear, on the one hand, that the percentage of occurrence for the last three types of conjunctions; adversative (12%), causal (10%), and temporal (8%) are not so much different. On the other hand, there is a great difference when any of these three types is compared to the first type, additive (70%). Despite that additive conjunctions have got the highest percentage of occurrence, it is the least in terms of the number of expressions used. This means that the 70% of occurrence for additive conjunctions is restricted to the use of 'and', and 'or' only. Looking at 12% of occurrence for the adversative conjunctions, it can be seen that this percentage is distributed among six expressions and so on.

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Figure 7: Percentages of grammatical Cohesion (Conjunctions) Frequency of Occurrence

5.2   The Second Research Question

To answer the second research question; How does cohesion contribute to the creation and understanding of a text? Separate sentences could not establish a sensible text unless some connectives join related sentences to complete the idea of a text which is targeted to transfer. A conjunction is one of the devices used for this purpose through which the reader is caused to look back to the first clause in a pair of joined clauses to make sense of the second clause (Jones, 2012). It also serves for making any text easily understandable by avoiding some kind of repetition that leads the reader or listener to be lost. For example; "We went on Heightened Alert to reduce social interaction and new infections" in the first paragraph, the use of the additive conjunction 'and' helps the speaker not to repeat the whole previous structure "We went on Heightened Alert to reduce ". Thus the speaker will transfer his idea and at the same time, the listener could get the exact meaning both easily and accurately without being lost in the length of the sentence. This semantic relationship among the words, however, is probably still not enough for you to make sense of this list as a text as long as you are relying only on features that are intrinsic to the language. The reason for this is that there are no grammatical elements that join these words together (Dey, 2001).

Using conjunctions in the discourse under analysis is a technique usually used by speakers to join sentences and avoid repetition. Admittedly, joining sentences together makes one sentence longer than the original two ones, but it is also admitted that joining two or more sentences help avoiding repetition and this makes the new sentence relatively seems shorter and consequently be easier to understand. Because the English language is not the Singaporean mother tongue, this technique is of great benefit. So the prime minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, aimed to make his speech easier for the listeners to trace and get the idea behind it, and as a result the speech will be more satisfactory.

Conclusion

Having various kinds of connective tools of which is conjunctions makes it easier to perform social actions. Conducting well-formed discourse can often exert certain power over people to persuade them of the matter you are trying to transfer to them (Jones, 2012).

A text or discourse is not just a set of sentences that are randomly related to different topics. Rather, any sensible text tends to be about the same things; that is, the text will have a quality of unity. This is the property of cohesion that can be achieved through various means; reference, conjunction, and semantic word relations (Morris & Hirst, 1991).

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that some CDs were more preferred than some others for a variety of reasons. It is also clear that simple conjunctions such as 'and' are widely used. One of the reasons behind that was the nature of the language since it is the second language not the mother tongue of the prime minister. Thus he tends to use simple conjunctions, that is the minimal amount of knowledge and necessary discourse in which such structures are used. Also, it could be related to the fact that second language users cannot use syntactic and lexical tools to enable them to produce competent text or speech (Ghasemi, 2013).

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Appendices

Transcript of a speech by PM Lee Hsien Loong on the COVID-19 'New Normal', on 31 May 2021

My fellow Singaporeans

For the last three weeks, we have been on Heightened Alert. We had discovered new clusters of COVID-19 infections. One cluster at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, and then another at Changi Airport. More cases soon followed. We also started seeing unlinked cases, implying community spread. So we had to step back from Phase 3. We went on Heightened Alert to reduce social interaction and new infections. Everyone has responded, to cooperate on the measures we had to take. Offices, malls, and the streets are all visibly quieter.

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Because of your support, the number of daily cases has come down. Barring another super-spreader or big cluster, we should be on track to bring this outbreak under control. We will know for sure in another week or so. Meanwhile, I count on everyone to keep up our efforts and stay vigilant. Please continue to stay home, work from home if possible, and go out only if you must. Most importantly, if you feel unwell, see a doctor immediately – even if you have been vaccinated. If our situation continues to improve, and the number of community cases falls further, we should be able to relax the restrictions after 13 June.

1 Test, Trace and Vaccinate

Compared to a year ago, when we had our first big outbreak, we are in a much better position today. We have built up our testing and contact tracing capabilities. Crucially, our vaccination programme is well advanced. With stronger defences in place, we have not had to impose a full circuit breaker.

Unfortunately, we are also fighting new, more infectious variants of the COVID-19 virus. The B.1.1.7 variant, which was first detected in the UK, has become widespread in the US and many other countries. We are now dealing with the B.1.617.2 variant, which was first detected in India and is now in over 50 countries. More variants will inevitably emerge, and we will have to deal with them too.

What does a more infectious virus mean for our fight against COVID-19? It implies that we must continually adjust our strategies, and raise our game to keep COVID-19 under control. Specifically, there are three things that we have to do more of, and do faster, testing, contact tracing, and vaccination. Let me briefly explain. The Multi-Ministry Taskforce (MTF) will provide details later on.

First, we must test faster, and more liberally and extensively. This will enable us to detect COVID-19 cases more quickly. So that we can isolate them and ringfence their contacts promptly, before the virus spreads further.

Many different types of COVID-19 tests have become available, for example, antigen rapid tests (ART), saliva tests, breathalysers, wastewater surveillance, even sniffer dogs. We have been using some of these, and evaluating others, for some time. Each of these new tests is suited to different use cases.

For example, ARTs produce results much faster than the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests that we have mostly relied on. ARTs are also cheaper and easier to administer. However, they are less sensitive than PCR tests. They may miss some cases that are actually COVID-19 positive. ARTs are therefore invaluable as a quick check. If you visit a GP or polyclinic now with an acute respiratory infection, you will be given an ART, in addition to a PCR test. Within 30 minutes the ART will show whether you are likely to have COVID-19. If the result is positive,

you can immediately be isolated and the PCR test will confirm your diagnosis later, which may take a day or two. That way we reduce your chances of infecting others, if you are already ill but don't realise it.

Other tests are coming on stream. Breathalyzer tests, which take just one minute, have been set up at the Causeway and the Airport. They can be deployed to many other places too and soon you will be able to purchase DIY tests over the counter at pharmacies. They are simple to use, and not so uncomfortable. You can administer these on your own. If you are worried that you may have COVID-19 and want to put your mind at ease. Or if you are a frontline worker, and want to test yourself frequently or even daily.

These alternatives to PCR tests help us detect and isolate persons quickly when they are most infectious. This will be a big help in slowing down the spread of COVID-19.

As the virus mutates to become more transmissible, we must respond by testing more widely. We already do Rostered Routine Testing (RRT) in a number of higher risk settings: migrant worker dormitories, construction worksites, shipyards, air and sea ports, hospitals and nursing homes. With faster, cheaper tests, we can do routine testing at more workplaces, like offices, restaurants and shopping malls. We can also routinely test individuals whose occupations involve close contact with many people, and could result in superspreading events, like taxi drivers and bus captains, physiotherapists, masseurs, stage performers, sports and fitness instructors and educators could all be tested regularly.

This will reassure their customers, patients and students, and enable them to work safely even with COVID-19 in circulation.

In short, we are shifting our approach to testing. Henceforth we will not only test to identify infections when a new case pops up. We will also routinely and regularly test people who appear well, in normal work or social or community settings, to make them, and these places safe. Extensive testing will give us confidence to resume larger scale events or gatherings. E.g. we can deploy fast and easy tests before a religious service, a football game, a concert, or a wedding reception and participants can be assured that the event is COVID-19 safe. Therefore, you should expect routine, large-scale, fast and simple testing to be part of our new normal.

Second, we will contact trace faster and more widely. Our contract tracing operations have vastly improved. The contact tracers are working faster and better, because they have more experience and skills, and better tools. TraceTogether helps them identify and quarantine close contacts of an infected case within hours rather than days. With SafeEntry, they can identify thousands of people who had visited the same places as infected cases, and inform these potential contacts to come forward for a free COVID-19 test. This is what we did for White Sands, JEM and Westgate, and now NTUC Foodfare in Anchorvale. Because of Singaporeans' self-discipline, public spirit and support of TraceTogether and SafeEntry, we are contact tracing faster and more comprehensively. We can improve our contact tracing further by casting the net wider.

Our experience has shown that if a close contact is infected, he is quite likely to infect others who stay with him in the same household. Therefore, in future, when we identify a close contact of an infected case. We will not only isolate him – the first-degree contact – and test him for COVID-19. We will also notify his household members to isolate themselves immediately, without waiting to see whether the first-degree contact tests positive. If later the first-degree contact tests negative, we can safely release his household members from isolation. But if later the first-degree contact tests positive, we will have saved precious time by isolating his household members earlier. This more aggressive approach will help us to shut down clusters more quickly, to lead to fewer cases.

Third, we will vaccinate more people, and faster. We have made good progress since vaccinations started in December. Our healthcare and frontline workers, and the majority of those 45 and above, have already received at least their first dose. These are the ones more at risk from COVID-19. Now, vaccination of those aged 40 to 44 is under way.

The MTF recently announced that we would speed up vaccinations in the next two months, and prioritise first dose vaccinations. This is in progress. We want to protect as many Singaporeans as possible, and as soon as we can, especially with the new COVID-19 variants. This approach will quickly provide the maximum number of people with good protection, instead of a good number of people with maximum protection.

We are vaccinating as many people as our supplies allow. Our 40 vaccination centres island-wide are running smoothly. The constraint is vaccine supply. This is why we have been working very hard to confirm and speed up deliveries of vaccines from our suppliers.

I am happy to report that since the last update by the MTF, we have received further confirmation of faster vaccine deliveries over the next two months. With the latest supply schedule, we can further boost our vaccination programme. We can offer the vaccine to everyone, even sooner than we expected.

The next group to be vaccinated will be students. In this latest outbreak, we have seen more cases of children getting infected, in schools and tuition centres. The children were not seriously ill, but parents are naturally worried. Therefore, we will take full advantage of the June holidays to vaccinate students. Bookings will open tomorrow. We will give priority to the graduating cohorts for 'O', 'N', and 'A' Levels, as well as special needs students. Then the other students 12 years and above will take their turn, including students in our Institutes of Higher Learning.

After the students, we will vaccinate the final remaining group, young adults 39 years and younger. This should start around mid-June. This group is quite large. Therefore, we will give the Singaporeans among them a two-week priority window to book your appointments first, before we open up to the rest who want to be vaccinated.

Finally, I want to make a special pitch to our elderly. Your response has been excellent. Nearly three quarters (73%) of our elderly – 760,000 senior citizens aged 60 and above – have had at least one jab or booked a slot already. But 280,000 of you have still not yet booked appointments. Please come forward to get jabbed as soon as possible. Most people of your age have already been vaccinated, including many of your friends and neighbours. The President and I have been vaccinated too, and so have all my Cabinet colleagues. The vaccines are safe, and they will keep you safe.

We will make the process even more convenient for you. If you are above 60, you can now walk into any Vaccination Centre, and get vaccinated on the spot. No need to register, no need to book in advance, just turn up at a Vaccination Centre, and you will be jabbed. If you are not mobile, or are unable to make your way to the Vaccination Centre, contact the Silver Generation Office, a doctor and nurse will visit you at your home to give you the vaccination. For those with elderly parents or relatives, please encourage and persuade your old folks to get vaccinated.

Today, nearly 4 in 10 residents have had at least one dose of the vaccine. Our next target is to get two-thirds of residents vaccinated with at least the first dose. With our accelerated vaccination programme, we should be able to do this by early July, provided supplies come in as planned. And everyone who is eligible for a vaccination and wants one should be able to get at least their first jab by National Day. Whether you are old or young, please come forward to be vaccinated once it is your turn. With the more infectious virus strains, we need as many people as possible to be vaccinated, in order to reach herd immunity, or get close to it. This is the way to make everyone safe and resume more normal activities.

2   The New Normal

Even as we tackle our COVID-19 situation, the pandemic rages on around us. Many countries are still not able to bring it under control, fully, much less eliminate it. India has suffered a huge surge of new cases, although their numbers are now coming down. In Southeast Asia, many countries have not started vaccinations in a big way, and may see more spikes in the next few months. Singaporean cases have been rising. As well as other places that have kept COVID-19 well under control, like Taiwan, Australia and Vietnam, Singapore has recently experienced outbreaks.

One day this global pandemic will subside but I do not expect COVID-19 to disappear. It will remain with humankind, and become endemic. The virus will continue to circulate in pockets of the global population for years to come.

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This also means we will see small outbreaks of the disease from time to time in Singapore as well.

In this new normal, we will have to learn to carry on with our lives even with the virus in our midst. Our aim must be to keep the community as a whole safe, while accepting that some people may get infected every now and then. Just as we do with the common flu or dengue fever, which we now manage through public health measures and personal precautions. And in the case of the flu, with regular vaccinations too. COVID-19 vaccinations will not entirely prevent you from getting COVID-19 but vaccination makes this much less likely. And if you do get sick, despite being vaccinated, you are also much less likely to become very ill.

Living with endemic COVID-19 also means we do not completely close our borders. We need food, essential supplies, workers, business and other travellers to keep on flowing. We must stay connected to the world, with effective safeguards and border restrictions to keep ourselves safe. We will not be able to prevent some infected persons from slipping through from time to time. But as long as our population is mostly vaccinated, we should be able to trace, isolate, and treat the cases that pop up, and prevent a severe and disastrous outbreak.

Singapore's priority is to get through this pandemic and position ourselves strongly for the future, even as the virus continues to rage around us. If we stay united and continue to work together, we will be able to progressively open up, and achieve our aim.

In the new normal, COVID-19 will not dominate our lives. Our people will be mostly vaccinated, and possibly taking booster shots every year. We will get tested often, but it will be fast and easy. We will go to work or school, meet friends and family, participate in religious services, and enjoy entertainment and sports events. We will re-open our borders safely. Visitors will again come to Singapore. Singaporeans will travel again to countries where the disease is well under control, especially if we have been vaccinated. And eventually we will even go about without masks again, at least outdoors. Right now, we are some ways off from this happy state, but we are heading in the right direction.

In this new normal, the countries which are united, disciplined and put in place sensible safeguards, will be able to re-open their economies, re-connect to the rest of the world, grow and prosper. Singapore will be among these countries. More confident and resilient than before, and toughened by what we have overcome together, and experience together as one nation.

3   Conclusion

I have outlined our strategy for the next phase of the fight against COVID-19. To keep our people safe, while re-opening progressively. We have to test, we have to trace, we have to vaccinate and we have to do all three of these more quickly, and more extensively.

The Heightened Alert has two more weeks to go. I thank Singaporeans for your forbearance, cooperation and support. Each individual effort counts. Our collective discipline and social responsibility have served us well, and taken us thus far.

Let us go the distance together as one people, so that we can look forward to a new normal, and emerge as a stronger and more united Singapore.

Thank you.

Book reviews