# Linking within the Project

Extended pieces of writing, such as long essays or reports, make use of a range of structuring devices to help link ideas and ‘tie’ the text together. These include:

1. Headings and sub-headings
2. A numbering system
3. Lists
4. Expressions which link back to previous sections/paragraphs
5. Expressions which link forward to following sections/paragraphs
6. Cross-references to particular sections

**TASK: Below is a section from a Master’s thesis. Find all the devices which help to structure this text.**

**4.1.2. Extended patterns**

As I signalled before, what cannot be inferred from the short *Portnoy’s Complaint* extract in Example [17] is that it contains elements which correspond to certain themes that run through the whole of the novel. This is not in itself humorous – in fact it is usual for literature in general, as thematic recurrence is a desirable quality of literary texts (there are numerous examples of this, like the recurrence of fire in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* or epiphany in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*). The difference is, I would argue, in the intensity with which this recurrence takes place (see Larkin Galiñanes 2000 for a discussion of strong implicature in humorous literature and weak implicature in ‘high’ literature, and Section 5.3.2. in this thesis). *Portnoy’s Complaint*, for example, is very transparent about repeating the following subjects:

(a) *Being Jewish*: for example traditions, expectations, stereotypes, ways of relating to non-Jews;

(b) *Dysfunctional family*: for example Alex criticising/mocking/impersonating his family members, family members acting obsessively and ludicrously;

(c) *Food*: for example family meals, appropriate/inappropriate food, father’s digestive problems.

It would be difficult in this space to give a comprehensive account of the number of times themes (a), (b), and (c) appear in the novel, so instead I suggest an analysis of one extract from the beginning of the book, which contains references to each of them. It is an exchange between Alex’s mother and Alex, the first person narrator:

[18]

‘[…] Alex, answer me something. You’re so smart, you know all the answers now, answer me this: how do you think Melvin Weiner gave himself colitis? Why has that child spent half his life in hospitals?’

‘Because he eats *chazerai*.’

‘Don’t you dare make fun of me!’

‘All right,’ I scream, ‘how *did* he get colitis?’

‘Because he eats *chazerai*! But it’s not a joke! […] ‘

(Roth 2005: 24)

There are clear references to *Being Jewish* here – Melvin Weiner is a Jewish name, and ‘chazerai’ is Yiddish for ‘junk food’. As for *Dysfunctional Family,* Alex’s mother’s repetitive sentence structures (e.g. ‘You’re so smart, you know all the answers now’) and her preference for questions and exclamations signal an overbearing, oppressive personality. Similarly, Alex’s outburst ‘‘All right,’ I scream, ‘how *did* he get colitis?’’shows his agitation – the way his speech is reported can help us imagine him shouting at his mother. This is quite a heated conversation to be had over an everyday subject. That is because the subject (*Food*) is far from trivial for Alex’s mother. ‘It’s not a joke!’ for her, but it is for the reader of *Portnoy’s Complaint.*

When we compare the two *Portnoy’s Complaint* extracts, it turns out that even though they are both relatively short, they contain references to the same humorous themes. Alex’s father being obsessive about Jewish food is similar to Alex’s mother being agitated about food which, even if it is not Jewish, appears in a Jewish context. They are variations on the same subject and are parts of a pattern which will be easily recognised by the reader familiar with the novel. The patterns of extended repetition and variation are a prominent feature of humorous narratives and will be discussed in more detail after a brief overview of local forms of the technique.