The nature of texts

including text samples, text types, criteria of textuality

compiled by
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From the following sources

Crystal, David. *Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. 1987.
Textual structure, p. 150 is included, the book is on reserve

de Beaugrande, Robert-Alain; Dressler, Wolfgang Ulrich. *Introduction to text linguistics*. London: Longman, 1981. *Table of contents* is included as an overview, the book is on reserve

de Beaugrande, Robert-Alain. *Text, discourse, and process. Towards a multidisciplinary science of texts*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981. (on reserve) Given here as a further reference, on reserve

These materials complement the notes for Lecture 10a. Most parts of this are optional

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Zoom to 150% to read

Textual structure

To call a sequence of sentences a 'text' is to imply that the sentences display some kind of mutual dependence; they are not occurring at random. Sometimes the internal structure of a text is immediately apparent, as in the headings of a restaurant menu; sometimes it has to be carefully demonstrated, as in the network of relationships that enter into a literary work. In all cases, the task of textual analysis is to identify the linguistic features that cause the sentence sequence to 'cohere' – something that happens whenever the interpretation of one feature is dependent upon another elsewhere in the sequence. The ties that bind a text together are often referred to under the heading of *cohesion* (after M. A. K. Halliday & R. Hasan, 1976). Several types of cohesive factor have been recognized:

• *Conjunctive relations* What is about to be said is explicitly related to what has been said before, through such notions as contrast, result, and time:

I left early. *However*, Mark stayed till the end.
Lastly, there's the question of cost.

• *Coreference* Features that cannot be semantically interpreted without referring to some other feature in the text. Two types of relationship are recognized: *anaphoric* relations look backwards for their interpretation, and *cataphoric* relations look forwards:

Several people approached. They seemed angry.
Listen to this: *John's getting married.*

• *Substitution* One feature replaces a previous expression:

I've got a pencil. Do you have *one*?
Will we get there on time? I think *so*.

• *Ellipsis* A piece of structure is omitted, and can be recovered only from the preceding discourse:

Where *did you see the car?* ∧ In the street.

• *Repeated forms* An expression is repeated in whole or in part:

Canon Brown arrived. Canon Brown was cross.

• *Lexical relationships* One lexical item enters into a structural relationship with another (p. 105):

The *flowers* were lovely. He liked the *tulips* best.

• *Comparison* A compared expression is presupposed in the previous discourse:

That house was *bad*. This one's far *worse*.

Cohesive links go a long way towards explaining how the sentences of a text hang together, but they do not tell the whole story. It is possible to invent a sentence sequence that is highly cohesive but nonetheless incoherent (after N. E. Enkvist, 1978, p. 110):

A week has seven *days*. Every *day* I feed my *cat*. *Cats* have four legs. *The cat* is on the *mat*. *Mat* has three letters.

A text plainly has to be *coherent* as well as cohesive, in that the concepts and relationships expressed should be relevant to each other, thus enabling us to make plausible inferences about the underlying meaning.

Two ways of demonstrating cohesion

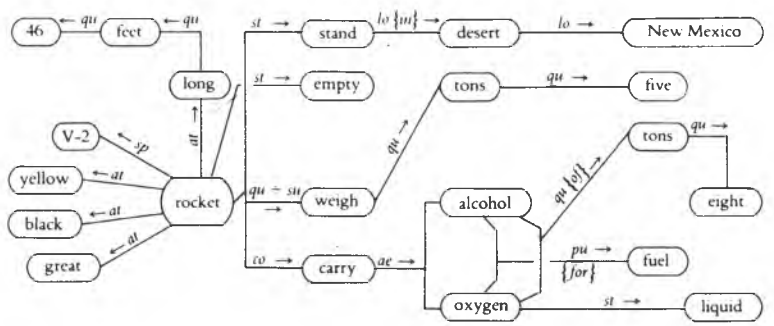
Paragraphs are often highly cohesive entities. The cohesive ties can stand out very clearly if the sentences are shuffled into a random order. It may even be possible to reconstitute the original sequence solely by considering the nature of these ties, as in the following case:

1. However, nobody had seen one for months.
2. He thought he saw a shape in the bushes.
3. Mark had told him about the foxes.
4. John looked out of the window.
5. Could it be a fox?

(The original sequence was 4,2,5,3,1.)

We can use graphological devices to indicate the patterns of cohesion within a text. Here is the closing paragraph of James Joyce's short story 'A Painful Case'. The sequence of pronouns, the anaphoric definite articles, and the repeated phrases are the main cohesive features between the clauses and sentences. Several of course refer back to previous parts of the story, thus making this paragraph, out of context, impossible to understand.

He turned back the way he had come, the **rhythm** of the engine pounding in his ears. He began to doubt the reality of what memory told him. He halted under a tree and allowed **the rhythm** to die away. He could not feel her near him in the DARKNESS nor her *voice* touch his ear. He waited for some minutes *listening*. He could *hear* ***NOTHING***: the NIGHT was ***perfectly silent***. He *listened* again: ***perfectly silent***. He felt that he was ***ALONE***.



Conceptual structure One way of representing the conceptual structure of a text (after R. de Beaugrande & W. Dressler, 1981, p. 100). This 'transition network' summarizes the following paragraph:

A great black and yellow V-2 rocket 46 feet long stood in a New Mexico desert. Empty, it weighed five tons. For fuel it carried eight tons of alcohol and liquid oxygen.

The abbreviations identify the types of semantic links which relate the concepts (following the direction of the arrows):

ae	affected entity
at	attribute of
co	containment of
lo	location of
pu	purpose of
qu	quantity of
sp	specification of
st	state of
su	substance of

Macrostructures

Not all textual analysis starts with small units and works from the 'bottom up' (p. 71); some approaches aim to make very general statements about the macrostructure of a text. In psychology, for example, attempts have been made to analyse narratives into schematic outlines that represent the elements in a story that readers remember. These schemata have been called 'story-grammars' (though this is an unusually broad sense of the term 'grammar', cf. §16).

In one such approach (after P. W. Thorndyke, 1977), simple narratives are analysed into four components: *setting*, *theme*, *plot*, and *resolution*. The setting has three components: the *characters*, a *location*, and a *time*. The theme consists of an *event* and a *goal*. The plot consists of various *episodes*, each with its own *goal* and *outcome*. Using distinctions of this kind, simple stories are analysed into these components, to see whether the same kinds of structure can be found in each (p. 79). Certain similarities do quickly emerge; but when complex narratives are studied, it proves difficult to devise more detailed categories that are capable of generalization, and analysis becomes increasingly arbitrary.

de Beaugrande, Robert-Alain; Dressler, Wolfgang Ulrich.

Introduction to Text Linguistics

London: Longman, 1981.

Many impressions with newer dates, 8. impr. 1996

www.beaugrande.com/introduction_to_text_linguistics.htm has TOC and excerpts

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I Basic notions

Textuality. The seven standards of textuality: cohesion; coherence; intentionality; acceptability; informativity; situationality; intertextuality. Constitutive versus regulative principles: efficiency; effectiveness; appropriateness.

II. The evolution of text linguistics

Historical background of text linguistics: rhetoric; stylistics; literary studies; anthropology; tagmemics; sociology; discourse analysis; functional sentence perspective. Descriptive structural linguistics: system levels; Harris's discourse analysis; Coseriu's work on settings; Harweg's model of substitution; the text as a unit above the sentence. Transformational grammar: proposals of Heidolph and Isenberg; the Konstanz project; Petöfi's text-structure/world-structure theory; van Dijk's text grammars; Mel'cuk's text-meaning model; the evolving notion of transformation.

III. The procedural approach

Pragmatics. Systems and systemization. Description and explanation. Modularity and interaction. Combinatorial explosion. Text as a procedural entity. Processing ease and processing depth. Thresholds of termination. Virtual and actual systems. Cybernetic regulation. Continuity. Stability. Problem solving: depth-first search, breadth-first search, and means-end analysis. Mapping. Procedural attachment. Pattern-matching. Phases of text production: planning; ideation; development; expression; parsing; linearization and adjacency. The phases of text reception: parsing; concept recovery; idea recovery; plan recovery. Reversibility of production and reception. Sources for procedural models: artificial intelligence; cognitive psychology; operation types.

IV. Cohesion

The function of syntax. The surface text in active storage. Closely-knit patterns: phrase, clause, and sentence. Augmented transition networks. Grammatical dependencies. Rules as procedures. Micro-states and macro-states. Hold stack. Re-using patterns: recurrence; partial recurrence; parallelism; paraphrase. Compacting patterns: pro-forms; anaphora and cataphora; ellipsis; trade-off between compactness and clarity. Signalling relations: tense and aspect; updating; junction: conjunction, disjunction, contrajunction, and subordination; modality. Functional sentence perspective. Intonation.

V. Coherence

Meaning versus sense. Non-determinacy, ambiguity, and polyvalence. Continuity of senses. Textual worlds. Concepts and relations. Strength of linkage: determinate, typical, and accidental knowledge. Decomposition. Procedural semantics. Activation. Chunks and global patterns. Spreading activation. Episodic and semantic memory. Economy. Frames, schemas, plans, and scripts. Inheritance. Primary and secondary concepts. Operators. Building a text-world model. Inferencing. The world-knowledge correlate. Reference.

VI. Intentionality and acceptability

Intentionality. Reduced cohesion. Reduced coherence. The notion of intention across the disciplines. Speech act theory. Performatives. Grice's conversational maxims: cooperation, quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The notions of action and discourse action. Plans and goals. Scripts. Interactive planning. Monitoring and mediation. Acceptability. Judging sentences. Relationships between acceptability and grammaticality. Acceptance of plans and goals.

VII. Informativity

Attention. Information theory. The Markov chain. Statistical versus contextual probability. Three orders of informativity. Triviality, defaults, and preferences. Upgrading and downgrading. Discontinuities and discrepancies. Motivation search. Directionality. Strength of linkage. Removal and restoration of stability. Classifying expectations: the real world; facts and beliefs; normal ordering strategies; the organization of language; surface formatting; text types; immediate context. Negation. Definiteness. A newspaper article and a sonnet. Expectations on multiple levels. Motivations of non-expectedness.

VIII. Situationality

Situation models. Mediation and evidence. Monitoring versus managing. Dominances. Noticing. Normal ordering strategies. Frequency. Salience. Negotiation. Exophora. Managing. Plans and scripts. Planboxes and planbox escalation. A trade-off between efficiency and effectiveness. Strategies for monitoring and managing a situation.

IX. Intertextuality

Text types versus linguistic typology. Functional definitions: descriptive, narrative, and argumentative texts; literary and poetic texts; scientific and didactic texts. Using and referring to well-known texts. The organization of conversation. Problems and variables. Monitoring and managing. Reichman's coherence relations. Discourse-world models. Recalling textual content. Effects of the schema. Trace abstraction, construction, and reconstruction. Inferencing and spreading activation. Mental imagery and scenes. Interactions between text-presented knowledge and stored world-knowledge. Textuality in recall experiments.

X. Research and schooling

Cognitive science: the skills of rational human behaviour; language and cognition. Defining intelligence. Texts as vehicles of science. Sociology. Anthropology. Psychiatry and consulting psychology. Reading and readability. Writing. Literary studies: de-automatization; deviation; generative poetics; literary criticism as downgrading. Translation studies: literal and free translating; equivalence of experience; literary translating. Contrastive linguistics. Foreign-language teaching. Semiotics. Computer science and artificial intelligence. Understanding understanding.

Summary of criteria (or standards) of textuality

(de Beaugrande and Dressler), referring to a text's linguistic basis and semantic purpose.

1. **(Grammatical) cohesion** concerns the ways in which the components of the surface text (the actual words) are mutually connected within a sequence.

2. **(Lexical-semantic) coherence** concerns ways in which the components of the textual world (the concepts and relations which underlie the surface text) are mutually accessible and relevant

3. **Intentionality** concerns the text producer's attitude that the utterances constitute a cohesive and coherent text, fulfilling some intention for the producer.

4. **Acceptability** concerns the text receiver's attitude that the utterances constitute a cohesive and coherent text.

5. **Informativity** concerns extent to which substance communicated by text is (un)expected/(un)known/(un)certain.

6. **Situationality** concerns factors which make text relevant to a given situation.

7. **Intertextuality** concerns factors which make utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts.

Related to these standards, from a philosophical perspective, are **Paul Grice's maxims of conversation** based on his cooperative principle:

1. **Quantity**: Give the right amount of information.

   1.1 Make your contribution as informative as is required.

   1.2 Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. **Quality**: Try to make your contribution one that is true.

   2.1 Do not say what you believe to be false.

   2.2 Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. **Relation**: Be relevant. (Leech, 99: 'An utterance is relevant to a speech situation to the extent that it can be interpreted as contributing to the conversational goal(s) of s or h.')

4. **Manner**: Be perspicuous.

   4.1 Avoid obscurity of expression.

   4.2 Avoid ambiguity.

   4.3 Be brief.
   4.4 Be orderly.

The field of instructional design deals with the nature and design of documents and larger systems form the perspective of learning and instruction. The following table offers another look at criteria of textuality.

Characteristics of Effective Instructional Presentation

Category	*Definition*
Referential	The symbol system(s) used to represent content. May be iconic, digital/visual, or digital/auditory. Iconic (i.e., overall graphic design) and digital/visual are the most important referential aspects of databases.
Informational	The quality of the content presentation. Includes presence/absence/dominance of criterial information and amount, level, and organization of information.
Relational	The relationships expressed or implied in the content presentation. Synonymy is the most important relational aspect of databases.
Demand	The expectations of users inherent in the material. Extends from devices for attending and alerting to those for encouraging active engagement and higher-level cognitive processing.
Image-of-the-Other	The ways in which the materials reflect the designers' conception of the user. Summarizes how the other four categories indicate an understanding of users' characteristics and needs.

Adapted by permission from Fleming (1981) ??. Copyright 1981 by Educational Technology Publications, Inc.
From Neuman, Delia. *Designing databases as tools for higher-level learning. Insights from instructional systems design*. Educational Technology Research and Development; 1993. 41(4): 27