The nature of texts

including text samples, text types, criteria of textuality

compiled by

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From the following sources


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


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

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Textual Structure (Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language) (required)

Introduction to text linguistics, table of contents (optional)

Summary of criteria (or standards) of textuality (optional)

Characteristics of Effective Instructional Presentation (required, esp. for school media specialists)

Crombie, Winifred. Semantic relations between propositions (optional)

This reading makes the connection between the entity-relationship approach and the structure of texts very explicit.
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, I 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 definites, 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 waited 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.

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. Thordycke, 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.

![Conceptual structure diagram](image-url)
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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; Petőfi’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


IV. Cohesion


V. Coherence

VI. Intentionality and acceptability


VII. Informativity


VIII. Situationality


IX. Intertextuality


X. Research and schooling

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 from the perspective of learning and instruction. The following table offers another look at criteria of textuality.

**Characteristics of Effective Instructional Presentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>The quality of the content presentation. Includes presence/absence/dominance of criterial information and amount, level, and organization of information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>The relationships expressed or implied in the content presentation. Synonymy is the most important relational aspect of databases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image-of-the-Other</td>
<td>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.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
