



DBB 307 TEXTUAL STUDIES IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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INTRODUCTION:

The notion of text

- ▶ **Text** is one of the main elements that play a significant role in communication. People communicate in language by means of texts. We speak text, we read text, we listen to text, we write text and we even translate text.
- ▶ **Text** is the basis for any discipline such as law, religion, medicine, science, politics, etc. Each of these is manifested in its own language, i.e. it has its special terminologies. A text is above all a **multidimensional unit** and as such is not liable to a simple unifying definition. The sum of parameters used to define text differs from linguist to linguist so that the list of definitions could be very long.
- ▶ The following selected definitions shall be considered:

- **Texts** are used as **tools** and, at the same time, **they reveal the tool-user**. They **communicate something and about someone**.

Neubert (1992)

- A **text** is an **extended structure of syntactic units such as words, groups, clauses and textual units** that is marked by both coherence among the elements and completion.

Werlich (1976)

- A **naturally occurring manifestation of language**, i.e. as a **communicative language event in a context**. The SURFACE TEXT is the set of expressions actually used; these expressions make some knowledge **EXPLICIT**, while other knowledge remains **IMPLICIT**, though still applied during processing.

Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)

- ▶ A **text** is the term used in linguistics to refer to **any passage- spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole** [...]. A text is a **unit of language in use**. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size [...]. A text is best regarded as a SEMANTIC unit; a unit not of form but of meaning.

Halliday and Hasan (1976)

- ▶ A **text is made up of sentences**, but there exist separate principles of text-construction, beyond the rules for making sentences.

Fowler (1991)

- ▶ “a set of **mutually relevant communicative functions**, structured in such a way as to achieve an overall rhetorical purpose”.

Hatim and Mason (1990)

- ▶ A **text** is defined here as '**the verbal record of a communicative event**'; it is an instance of **language in use** rather than language as an abstract system of meanings and relations.

Brown and Yule (1983)

- ▶ Although nearly all text linguists are in agreement that the notion '**text**' is the natural domain of language, **they vary in their views on what constitutes a text**. This variance is mainly due to the fact that different linguists have observed this notion from different angles depending on the approaches adopted.
- ▶ A **text**, then, has features of organization which distinguish it from non-text, that is, from a random collection of sentences and paragraphs.
- ▶ The **features of text organization** are **language and culture specific**. Each linguistic community has preferred ways of organizing its various types of discourse.

Features of text organization

- ▶ Any text, in any language, exhibits certain linguistic features which allow us to identify it as a text.
- ▶ First, there are connections which are established through the arrangement of information within each clause and the way this relates to the arrangement of information in preceding and following clauses and sentences; these contribute mainly to topic development and maintenance through **thematic** and **information structures**.
- ▶ Second, there are surface connections which establish interrelationships between persons and events; these allow us to trace participants in a text and to interpret the way in which different parts of the text relate to each other (**cohesion**).

- ▶ Finally, there are underlying semantic connections which allow us to 'make sense' of a text as a unit of meaning; these are dealt with under the heading of **coherence** and **implicature**.
- ▶ Another important feature of text organization derives from the overlapping notions of **genre** and **text type**.
- ▶ Texts have been classified in **two main ways**:
- ▶ The first and more straightforward classification is **based on the contexts** in which texts occur and results in institutionalized labels such as 'journal article', 'science textbook', 'newspaper editorial', or 'travel brochure'.
- ▶ The second is a more subjective, less institutionalized classification which does not normally apply to a whole text but rather to parts of it. Typical labels used in this type of classification include 'narration', 'exposition', 'argumentation', and 'instruction'.

The notion of context

- ▶ According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (fourth edition), the term '**context**', in its simple form, refers to **what comes before and after a word, phrase, statement, etc.**, helping to fix the meaning; or circumstances in which an event occurs. Also, **context is the situation in which something happens and that helps you to understand it.**
- ▶ We may sometimes be able to make inferences about the context of situation from certain words in texts. **These texts, short or long, spoken or written, will carry with them indications of their contexts.**
- ▶ **Co-text:** The words surrounding a particular word or passage within a text that provide context and help to determine meaning.

Halliday and Hasan's approach to text

- ▶ A very comprehensive study of text is displayed in Halliday and Hasan's (1976) treatment of features of English texts, and Halliday, in Halliday and Hasan (1985). In their work ***Cohesion in English***, Halliday and Hasan (1976) define the notion 'text' by saying:
- ▶ Text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole [...]. A text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size. A text is sometimes envisaged to be some kind of super-sentence, a grammatical unit that is larger than a sentence but is related to a sentence in the same way that a sentence is related to a clause, a clause to a group and so on [...]. A text is best regarded as a SEMANTIC unit; a unit not of form but of meaning.
- ▶ **For Halliday and Hasan, a text is a semantic unit.** Halliday stresses the importance of language as an instrument of social interaction among the members of any speech community. He believes that text cannot be approached without its situational context in which it is embedded.

- ▶ The phonological, lexical, and syntactic structures should be analytically studied as being functionally contributing to the explication of the text's semantic significance. In this context, Halliday brings in yet another notion, that is, text is both **“a product and a process”**.
- ▶ Halliday believes that text is not only a semantic unit but also an instance of **social interaction**. Halliday merges semiotic with both sociology and linguistics. Accordingly, text is a sign representation of a socio-cultural event embedded in a context of situation. Text and context are so intimately related that neither concept can be comprehended in the absence of the other.

- ▶ The model outlined by **Halliday and Hasan in *Cohesion in English* (1976)**.
- ▶ Halliday and Hasan identify five main cohesive devices in English: **reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion**.
- ▶ -Reference
- ▶ -Substitution and ellipsis
- ▶ -Conjunction
- ▶ -Lexical cohesion

Text context of situation

► 1. Field of discourse:

Field of discourse refers to **“what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component?”**

► 2. Tenor of discourse:

According to Halliday and Hasan, tenor of discourse refers to **“who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue.»**

Tenor of discourse indicates the relationship between discourse participants (e.g. speaker/writer and hearer/reader) as manifested in language use. Participants' relationship varies from one group to another. It may be that of a patient and a doctor, a mother and her child, a teacher and a student, etc.

► 3. Mode of discourse

- Mode of discourse is a term that refers to “what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel **(is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?)** and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like” (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 12).

Beaugrande and Dressler's approach to text

- ▶ Beaugrande is trying to assert some essential distinctions between text and sentence as a start point. The following quotation represents some of these distinctions:
- ▶ **The text is an ACTUAL SYSTEM**, while **sentences are elements of VIRTUAL SYSTEM** [...]. The sentence is a purely grammatical entity to be defined only on the level of SYNTAX. The text, [on the other hand], must be defined according to the complete standards of TEXTUALITY [...]. A text must be relevant to a SITUATION of OCCURRENCE, in which a constellation of STRATEGIES, EXPECTATIONS, and KNOWLEDGE is active. A text cannot be fully treated as a configuration of morphemes and symbols. It is a manifestation of a human ACTION in which a person INTENDS to create a text and INSTRUCT the text receivers to build relationships of various kinds [...]. Texts also serve to MONITOR, MANAGE, or CHANGE a SITUATION. [Whereas] the sentence is not action, and hence has a limited role in human situations; it is used to instruct people about building syntactic relationships. A text is a PROGRESSION between STATES...the knowledge state, emotional state, social state, etc. of text users are subject to CHANGE by means of the text. SOCIAL CONVENTIONS apply more directly to texts than to sentences. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS are more relevant to texts than to sentences. (1980: 12-14)

- ▶ Beaugrande differentiates between the two notions- **text and sentence**- as follows:
- ▶ A sentence is either '**grammatical**' or '**ungrammatical**' in the sense that it conforms to the traditional forms of grammar or departs from them. A text, on the other hand, is either '**acceptable**' or '**non-acceptable**' according to a complex gradation.
- ▶ A sentence cannot survive outside its pertinent socio-cultural neighbourhood.
- ▶ A text cannot be considered a text unless it seven standards. They believe that these standards of textuality enable text analysis to be applicable to a wide variety of areas of practical concern: the textuality of the text depends on the communicative features it contains. These are **cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality**.

The evolution of text linguistics

- ▶ Historical background of text linguistics:
- ▶ Rhetoric
- ▶ Stylistics
- ▶ literary studies
- ▶ Anthropology
- ▶ Tagmemics
- ▶ sociology
- ▶ discourse analysis
- ▶ functional sentence perspective

Examples of different text types

► [1] news article

Twenty-year-old Willie B. is a diehard TV addict. He hates news and talk shows, but he loves football and gets so excited over food commercials that he sometimes charges at the set, waving a fist. Says a friend: "He's like a little child."

► [2] science textbook

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.

► **[3] conversation between two participants taking turns**

- PIGLET (*surprised*): Hallo! This is a trap I've made, and I'm waiting for the Heffalump to fall into it.
HEFFALUMP (*greatly disappointed*): Oh! (*After a long silence*): Are you sure?
PIGLET: Yes.
HEFFALUMP: Oh! (*nervously*): I—I thought it was a trap I'd made to catch piglets.
PIGLET (*surprised*): Oh. no!
HEFFALUMP: Oh! (*apologetically*): I—I must have got it wrong, then.
PIGLET: I'm afraid so. (*politely*): I'm sorry. (*He goes on humming.*)
HEFFALUMP: Well —Well—I— Well. I suppose I'd better be getting back?
PIGLET (*looking up carelessly*): Must you? Well, if you see Christopher Robin anywhere, you might tell him I want him.
HEFFALUMP (*eager to please*): Certainly! Certainly! (*He hurries off.*)

► **[4] poem**

► **GHOSTS**

Those houses haunt in which we leave
Something undone. It is not those
Great words or silences of love
That spread their echoes through a place
And fill the locked-up unbreathed gloom.
Ghosts do not haunt with any face
That we have known; they only come
With arrogance to thrust at us
Our own omissions in a room.
The words we would not speak they use,
The deeds we dared not act they flaunt,
Our nervous silences they bruise;
It is our helplessness they choose
And our refusals that they haunt.

- ▶ These are all instances of English TEXTS being used in DISCOURSE.