**Discourse Analysis/ Text Linguistics**

**Prepared by: Shahad Hadi M. Hussain**

**Text linguistics:** is a branch of linguistics concerned with the description and analysis of extended texts (either spoken or written) in communicative contexts. David Crystal notes that text linguistics "overlaps considerably with discourse analysis and some linguists see very little difference between them"

"In recent years, the study of texts has become a defining feature of a branch of linguistics referred to (especially in Europe) as **text linguistics**, and 'text' here has central theoretical status. Texts are seen as language units that have a definable communicative function, characterized by such principles as [cohesion](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-cohesion-composition-1689863), coherence, and informativeness, which can be used to provide a formal definition of what constitutes their *textuality* or *texture*. On the basis of these principles, texts are classified into text types, or [genres](https://www.thoughtco.com/genre-in-literature-1690896), such as road signs, news reports, poems, conversations, etc. . . . Some linguists make a distinction between the notions of 'text,' viewed as a physical product, and 'discourse,' viewed as a dynamic process of expression and interpretation, whose function and mode of operation can be investigated using [psycholinguistic](https://www.thoughtco.com/psycholinguistics-1691700) and [sociolinguistic](https://www.thoughtco.com/sociolinguistics-definition-1692110), as well as linguistic, techniques."

**Text:**If a speaker of English hears or reads a passage of the language which is more than one sentence in length, he can normally decide without difficulty whether it forms a unified whole or is just a collection of unrelated sentences. The word TEXT is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole. We know, as a general rule, whether any specimen of our own language constitutes a TEXT or not. This does not mean there can never be any uncertainty. The distinction between a text and a collection of unrelated sentences is in the last resort a matter of degree, and there may always be instances about which we are uncertain - a point that is probably familiar to most teachers from reading their students’ compositions. But this does not invalidate the general observation that we are sensitive to the distinction between what is text and what is not.

This suggests that there are objective factors involved - there must be certain features which are characteristic of texts and not found otherwise; and so there are. We shall attempt to identify these, in order to establish what are the properties of texts in English, and what it is that distinguishes a text from a disconnected sequence of sentences. As always in linguistic description, we shall be discussing things that the native speaker of the language 'knows' already - but without knowing that he knows them.

A text may be spoken or written, prose or verse, dialogue or monologue. It may be anything from a single proverb to a whole play, from a momentary cry for help to an all-day discussion on a committee.

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: by CONSTITUENCY, the composition of larger units out of smaller ones. But this is misleading. A text is not something that is like a sentence, only bigger; it is something that differs from a sentence in kind.

A text is best regarded as a SEMANTIC unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Thus it is related to a clause or sentence not by size but by REALIZATION, the coding of one symbolic system in another. A text does not CONSIST OF sentences; it is REALIZED BY or encoded in, sentences.

If we understand it in this way, we shall not expect to find the same kind of STRUCTURAL integration among the parts of a text as we find among the parts of a sentence or clause. The unity of a text is a unity of a different kind.

**Texture:**The concept of TEXTURE is entirely appropriate to express the property of 'being a text'. A text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. It derives this texture from the fact that it functions as a unity with respect to its environment.

If a passage of English containing more than one sentence is perceived as a text, there will be certain linguistic features present in that passage which can be identified as contributing to its total passage giving it texture.

Let us start with a simple and trivial example. Suppose we find the following instructions in the cookery book:

[1] Wash and core six cooking apples. Put them into a fireproof dish.

It is clear that *them* in the second sentence refers back to (is ANAPHORIC to) the *six cooking apples* in the first sentence. This ANAPHORIC function of *them* gives cohesion to the two sentences, so that we interpret them as a whole; the two sentences together constitute a text. Or rather, they form part of the same text; there may be more of it to follow.

The texture is provided by the cohesive RELATION that exists between *them* and *six cooking apples*. It is important to make this point because we shall be constantly focusing attention on the items, such as *them*, which typically refer back to something that has gone before, but the cohesion is effected not by the presence of the referring item alone but by the presence of both the referring item and the item that it refers to. In other words, it is not enough that there should be a presupposition; the presupposition must also be satisfied. This accounts for the humorous effect produced by the radio comedian who began his act with the sentence:

[2] So we pushed him under the other one.

This sentence is loaded with presuppositions, located in the words *so*, *him*, *other* and *one*, and, since it was the opening sentence, none of them could be resolved.

What is the MEANING of the cohesive relation between *them* and s*ix cooking apples*? The meaning is that they refer to the same thing. The two items are identical in reference, or COREFERENTIAL. The cohesive agency in this instance, that which provides the texture, is the coreferentiality of *them* and *six cooking apples*.

The signal, or the expression, of this coreferentiality is the presence of the potentially anaphoric item *them* in the second sentence together with a potential target item *six cooking apples* in the first.

Identity of reference is not the only meaning relation that contributes to texture; there are others besides. Nor is the use of a pronoun the only way of expressing identity of reference. We could have had:

[3] Wash and core six cooking apples. Put the apples into a fireproof dish.

Here the item functioning cohesively is *the apples*, which works by repetition of the word *apples* accompanied by *the* as an anaphoric signal. One of the functions of the definite article is to signal identity of reference with something that has gone before. (Since this has sometimes been said to be its only function, we should perhaps point out that it has others as well, which are not cohesive at all; for example none of the instances in (a) or (b) has an anaphoric sense:

[4] a. None but the brave deserve the fair.

b. The pain in my head cannot stifle the pain in my heart.

**Ties:**We need a term to refer to a single instance of cohesion, a term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items. This we shall call a TIE. The relation between *them* and *six cooking apples* in example [1] constitutes a tie.

We can characterize any segment of a text in terms of the number and kinds of ties which it displays. In [1] there is just one tie, of the particular kind which we shall be calling REFERENCE. In example [3], there are actually two ties, of which one is of the 'reference' kind, and consists in the anaphoric relation of *the* to *six cooking apples*, while the other is of a different kind and consists in the REPETITION of the word apples, a repetition which would still have a cohesive effect even if the two were not referring to the same apples.

The concept of a tie makes it possible to analyze a text in terms of its cohesive properties, and give a systematic account of its patterns of texture. Various types of question can be investigated in this way, for example concerning the difference between speech and writing, the relationship between cohesion and the organization of written texts into sentences and paragraphs, and the possible differences among different genres and different authors in the numbers and kinds of tie they typically employ.

**The role of linguistic analysis:**

The linguistic analysis of a text is not an interpretation of that text; it is an explanation. This point emerges clearly, though it is often misunderstood, in the context of stylistics, the linguistic analysis of literary texts.

The linguistic analysis of literature is not an interpretation of what the text means; it is an explanation of why and how it means what it does.

Similarly, to the extent that linguistic analysis is concerned with evaluation, a linguistic analysis of a text is not an evaluation of that text; it is an explanation of how and why it is valued as it is. A linguistic analysis of a literary text aims at explaining the interpretation and evaluation that are put upon that text.

The role of linguistics is to say how and why the text means what it does to the reader or listener, and how and why he evaluates it in a certain way.

This point can be generalized to the study of texts as a whole. The analysis of cohesion, together with other aspects of texture, will not in general add anything new to the interpretation of a text. What it will do is to show why the text is interpreted in a certain way; including why it is ambiguous in interpretation wherever it is so. It will explain the nature of conversational inferences, the meanings that the hearer gets out of the text without the speaker having apparently put them in - presuppositions from the culture, from the shared experience of the participants, and from the situation and the surrounding text. It is the text-forming or 'textual' component of the semantic system that specifically provides the linguistic means through which such presuppositions are made. Similarly, the analysis of cohesion will not tell you that this or that is a good text or a bad text or an effective or ineffective one in the context. But it will tell you something of WHY YOU THINK it is a good text or a bad text, or whatever you do think about it.

**References**

* Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
* Nordquist, Richard. "Definition and Examples of Text Linguistics." ThoughtCo, Jan. 29, 2020, thoughtco.com/text-linguistics-1692462.