

A Linguistic Perspective of a Text

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1. Introduction

Welcome to A text in any literary form is made up of many individual units. A single unit contributes to the wholeness of the text in many ways. M.A.K. Halliday and Hasan (1976) have defined 'text' as a single semantic unit though it may contain many single units in itself that are self-contained and internally related to each other, 'but functioning' as a whole. The best example of this type of text is a novel where the creator has the advantage of many sites to move through yet can retain the coherence with both the linguistic elements and the lexical elements of the language in operation. The moment the text is in contact with the readers it vibrates and becomes a discourse. The material form of the text is important for the rendering of cohesion. The form is feasible for the structural and semantic analysis laying bare many avenues for the readers to tread and finally reach the destination the text guides through. What exactly is textual coherence? A text is made up of many segments, small and large, at the sentence level, paragraph level as well as topic shift level irrespective of the physical size. Text segments give meaning that are interrelated to each other in order to render the conceptual relevance and communicative message of the whole text. This relevance and continuity of the text termed as coherence is achieved by the use of coherence markers. What are the language strategies that aid the author to achieve it in his literary work? Coherence markers that permeate the text can be perceived if only the readers can take up the cues and identify them. The ability to recognize the deployed signals and identify the functional aspects of these signals facilitates the readers to move along with the creator and comprehend the textual message.

2. Rhetorical Structural Theory

RST developed by Mann and Thompson (1988) offers an explanation of the coherence of texts. Why should the coherence relations be traced? Does it have any influence on the investigation of the semantic/communicative interpretation in a text? This theory stressed the importance of grammatical and linguistic structures (Matthiessen and Thompson, 1988). As mentioned above the coherence markers signify both the micro level and macro level coherence of a text.

A linguistic analysis of any text projects the possibility of reader's proximity to the intentionality of the author in creating a text. The text is presented as a string of units with the author's choice of lexicons and linguistic elements. These elements, the lexical and grammatical categories aid the readers to dismantle and construct so as to arrive at the wholeness, pragmatic and semantic interpretation of the text. The syntactical aspects and cohesive markers either implicitly or explicitly explain, describe, elaborate the necessary background for a better comprehension of the content and disambiguate the multiple interpretations possible to reach at the intentional communicative message. Investigating textual cohesion exhibits the semantic relations of the text segments and promotes comprehension. The choice of methodology of coherence analysis can be on the basis of the text size. If it is a novel to cull out the information the discourse segmentation has to be done carefully. For a small text sentence analysis proves fruitful.

2.1 Discourse Segmentation

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A large text like a novel can be segmented in various ways as the readers move forward in the reading process. The plot, incidents, character delineations and dialogues automatically get transformed as discourse segmentation, and wherever there is a shift in topics again the segmentation happens. Here either paragraphs or pages that deal with single topics have to be taken into account. The global coherence that binds the entire novel linking incidents, characters, descriptions, topography and all that connect the discourse universe appear visibly when the reader identifies himself/herself with the text and at this juncture the text becomes a discourse. That which is based on sentences and paragraphs are localized coherence and that which brings in the wholeness of the entire text is the global coherence.

The following words of Schiffrin(1987) are worth quoting here:

“The analysis of discourse markers is part of the more general analysis of discourse coherence-how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meanings and action to make overall sense out of what is said” (Schiffrin,1987:49)

Here is a small paragraph from the novel *Sea of Poppies* that is taken up for local coherence within the discourse universe.

It was with some reluctance that Zachary checked his watch and announced that it was time for him to leave. As they were walking out of the house, M.d’Epinay handed him a letter that was to be delivered to Mr.Benjamin Burnham, in Calcutta.

In the above paragraph the words ‘watch’, ‘time’, ‘leave’, ‘Calcutta’ are a list of semantically associated vocabulary. Similarly the prepositional phrase ‘out of’, the prepositions ‘to’ and ‘in’ signifies space. The cosine between words ‘time’ and ‘leave’ and that between ‘leave’ and ‘from,’ ‘out of’ and ‘to’ are greater. The readers themselves assume the ability to predict the occurrence of such words. Prediction makes comprehension easier. Though the exhibited indicator of purpose of the movement-delivery of the letter mentioned may not be the only purpose yet it is one of the purposes of the journey. So much can be culled out as far as local coherence is concerned. Lexical coherence too serves a purpose in comprehension here.

Having to set at a linguistic analysis there are certain guidelines directed by the rhetorical structural theory to be aware of and to be followed to have an efficacious outcome. As per the Rhetorical structure theory that which highlights structural organization and textual coherence, a minimum meaningful unit, a sentence or a clause, has two spans-a nucleus, the real subject content and another span, the satellite that facilitates to establish the subject content. The coherence markers are employed to specify the two different spans and thereby give an access to the intentional message and are well classified by the researchers.

While analyzing, the author chooses particular linguistic and lexical elements that signal the coherence relations, the relation that binds together the different parts/units of a text and projects a gestalt perception of the text. The relations, as well as the clauses of the text, carry communicative content. The most important relation that is essential in an analysis are the background /presentational relation that marks the motivation, antithesis, background and evidences; the elaboration/subject matter relations signals causes, conditions and purposes. This paper aims to dwell upon some of the relations and coherence markers, both the grammatical and the lexical that signal them, with illustrations.

3. Relation patterns

The coherence relation can be classified as semantic relation and pragmatic relation. Here are some of the common relation patterns that exist in a text that invites investigation- antithesis, contrast, background, circumstances, elaboration, evaluation, interpretation, justification, motivation, non-volitional cause, non-volitional result, purpose, sequence, solution, volitional cause and volitional result.

3.1 Coherence Relations and Grammatical Markers

The grammatical categories have linguistic functions to be performed. These categories not only render semantic interpretation but do help to decipher pragmatically the intentional communicative message. The use of different voice of the verb in English doesn’t attach any semantic value but the validity of the distinct voice is that of focus. Similarly the employment of quantifiers leads to justification focusing the contextual interpretation besides functioning primarily as an aspect of measurement.

That notion took her eyes straying out of the window, in the direction of the bungalow in the Gardens, and she fell on her bed, defeated by the impossibility of **everything**. (Ghosh 211)

In the above example from *Sea of Poppies* of Amitav Ghosh, the quantifier ‘everything’ rejects even a minute ray of hope and she staggers completely defeated. It not only highlights the semantic aspect but justifies the defeat of the lady and the pitiable plight of the character who is immersed in the dejection of a complete damage with no chance of ramification. An insight into the reality of the circumstance is successfully projected by the author’s use of this specific quantifier here. Yet another passage also emphasizes the coherence relation of elaboration exhibited by quantifier ‘enough’. The measurement ‘enough’ relates to a measurement which will hold a park.

The grounds of the estates were extensive enough to provide each mansion with a surrounding park , and these were, if anything, even more varied in design than they enclosed- for the malis who tended the gardens, no less than the owners themselves vied to outdo each other in the fancifulness of their plantings (Ghosh,47)

In the above sentence the quantifier ‘enough’ signals , elaboration in terms of description focusing on the extensiveness of the space to a specific area that can permit a well-designed park .Similarly the most vital structural words, the prepositions also act as a lexical element while adding semantic value to the utterance. Along with meaning, the pragmatic inference changes with the use of different prepositions here.

The car dashed into the lorry

The car dashed against another car.

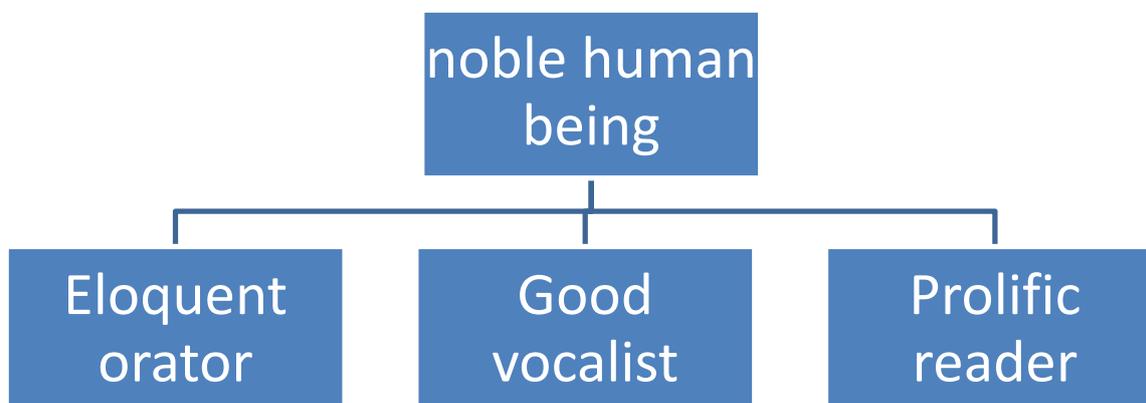
The usage of the preposition ‘into’ renders a direct view to the accident site as it projects the intensity of the accident and the damage that would have effected due to the accident. Its deployment is not to derive at the semantics but to extend the imagination of the readers and take them right to the accident site.

“ A sentence evokes in the listener a particular kind of experiential complex, termed as cognitive representation. The grammatical and lexical subsystem in a sentence seem generally to specify different portions of cognitive representations. Together the grammatical elements of a sentence determine the majority of cognitive representation while the lexical elements together contribute the majority of the content.”(GuptaG.C.2002)

Mind mapping takes place favoring a gestalt view with a visual imagination (Revilla Fajardo 1999, Rivera Lam 2004) and associative thoughts (Rivera Lam, 2004) .The prepositions render accurate interpretation and evaluation of the damage to decide on the contingency medical aid. Here is another example to highlight the cognitive representation triggered with a linguistic marker.

He is an eloquent orator, a good vocalist, prolific reader, and above all basically a noble human being.

The traits of the person talked is mentally mapped in a horizontal position one after the other and after the third characteristic trait the fourth one comes in the top vertically that makes him reach a higher altitude in the assessment by the marker ‘above’The mental mapping can be traced from the following diagram.



3.2 Relation and lexical markers

Like the grammatical categories the lexical categories also act as coherence markers. **Verbs** signal elaboration, evaluation, justification, assessment and so many other relations. The classification of verbs made by Van Valin (2005) in defining the lexical representation and the semantic role sheds light to look into the semantic and the pragmatic coherence. Verbs which have aspectual feature fit into the temporal framework and need to be analyzed with regard to the duration of action.

She ran.

She ran fast.

She ran to her school

She ran to catch the bus

She ran from her school to her house

She ran behind her friend

She ran after two o' clock

She ran in the afternoon

She has run in a marathon race.

She is running towards the park.

In all the above sentences besides marking the time of event, the duration of the action of running is expressed differently and each sentence gives a distinct meaning if the temporal aspect of these sentences is taken into consideration. To look into the temporal aspect, the taxonomy of the verbs has to be comprehended. In English Vendler's (1957) taxonomy of verb is worth consulting at this stage. He has given four types namely, 'states', 'achievement', 'accomplishment' and 'activities'. Another type namely semelfactive (Smith1997) can be added in this list. These set of verbs are characterized in terms of four features and the following table adapted from Van Valin (2005) explains the features.

The four features are [+/- static],[+/- dynamic],[+/-telic],[+/-punctual].

State	[+static] [-dynamic] [-telic] [-punctual]
Activity	[-static] [+dynamic] [-telic] [-punctual]
Achievement	[-static] [-dynamic] [+telic] [+punctual]
Semelfactive	[-static] [+/-dynamic] [-telic] [+punctual]
Accomplishment	[-static] [-dynamic] [+telic] [-punctual]
Active Accomplishment	[-static] [+dynamic] [+telic] [-punctual]

The first feature static talks about something taking place/not-taking place. The next one, dynamic involves action/no action. Hence it will be [-static].Telic is that which is related to a state of affair that has an inherent end point or not. Punctual is that which indicates events with internal duration in the discourse. In the sentence 'She ran from her school to her house' the destination 'school' along with origin of movement predicts the time taken for the action and the completion of it and the participants in the discourse share the knowledge of the distance between the 'school' and the house. The concept of space is blended with the concept of time to evaluate the time taken for the travel. The verb 'ran' here is an active accomplishment and so is it in all sentences.

She ran behind her friend

Though the sentence gives both the facts about time and space they are not interlinked as in the previous sentence. The verbs also play a very significant role in the aspectual reference and inherently indicate the time consumption. Finite verbs like 'enter', 'scrutinize', 'examined', 'wrote', 'winked', 'closed', 'opened' etc measures the time required for the activity depending on the complement it takes.

Sometimes the temporal aspect is decided by the complement the verb takes.

She *entered* the dining hall

She will come out after *writing* her *examination*.

Will come after *supervising* (time of coming can be evaluated)

The time of her coming out can be evaluated as maximum three hours with the cue 'examination'. In all the above examples the verbs 'entered', 'writing' and 'supervising' doesn't determine the duration of the action. The time adverb 'after' tells about the time of action of coming out but not the duration. If analyzed keenly the verb 'enter' in sentence marks the time as it falls under active achievement with the destination mentioned as dining hall. In the next sentence 'writing' itself cannot explicitly limit the time but 'examination' and 'supervising' are the cue words that specify the standard time limit. The lexical markers make the pragmatic evaluation/inference possible here.

The noun 'lady' in the following example talks about the cause /justification relation .It also falls in the boundary of concession.

Why don't you send the assistant now to get it done though it is midnight?

Mmm... The lady?

The indirect answer to the question tells the readers that the answer is negative but the pragmatic inference also involves socio cultural implications. Taxonomy of the coherence markers and the respective relations they mark will be of use for the analysis.

3.3 Relation pattern and the markers

Elaboration, evaluation contrast and justification- Lexical and grammatical signifiers:

The drumbeat of his heart reassured her and she quickly withdrew her hand, preparing to dart back into poppies if his eyes showed any sign of coming open. But they remained shut and his body lay so peacefully inert that she felt no fear in examining him more closely.(Ghosh,28)

In the above passage there are complex relations stringed together. The "drumbeat" sound decides the activity of withdrawing the hands of the person listening to it and the adverb signals not the manner of the activity but the decision making. The cohesive marker 'but' not only ties the two separate sentences semantically but it also marks the antithesis nature of the event. The sound of the drumbeat is a lexical signal for further action and another lexical choice 'reassured' and 'inert' helps the person evaluate the situation and decide her movement. The cohesive 'but' makes her evaluation wrong and now the situation demands her moving towards the dead body and not away into the poppies. The adverb peacefully modifies the verb lay as well as the adjective inert.

She cleverly planned to postpone her trip to native place

She planned cleverly to postpone the trip

The position of the adverb changes the semantics of the sentence. In the first example the adverb qualifies the decision to execute a plan to postpone the trip as clever move and in the second example the manner of execution is highlighted as a clever move.

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old and ox and sheep and ass with the edge of the sword(Ghosh,141)

In the above sentence the quantifier 'all' signals , elaboration in terms of description focusing on the kind of living beings in the place.

It fell to Ram the student to ask a question to the master that was foremost in every mind.

The act of raising a question by an individual is justified because of a valid reason and is signaled by the use of the quantifier 'every'. Look at the following passage:

The vast oceans of the world are dark, deep and mysterious places where eyesight counts for little as soon as soon as you venture very far beneath the surface.

For humans who live in a world dominated by visual stimuli, to exist in such condition would be impossible. But for whales and dolphins that live in the ocean or, in case of few species, muddy rivers and estuaries, the darkness is unimportant. What is crucial to them is sound.(PeterEvans,1995)

In the first paragraph the nucleus and the satellite are given. In the next paragraph the justification of the impossibility of human existence under deep sea is achieved with linguistic markers 'for', 'who', 'to' and

'by'. The contrast condition for animals are marked by 'but' and the justification comes in the final sentence with the use of 'what...is' structure. Now examine another text for coherence.

The production of stage play involves as well as the words of the author, the physical presence of the actors, their voices and gestures as orchestrated by the director, spectacle in the form of lighting and the "set" and possibly music.(David Lodge,1996)

In the above passage the words 'stage play ' can be taken as the key words and words 'actors', 'voice', 'gestures', 'director', 'spectacle', 'set' and 'lighting' are directly associated with the key words. The pair 'music' and orchestrated are also related directly. The local coherence of the small text presented here is due to the employment of associated words. The linguistic coherence markers 'as well as' and 'as' also add to indicate the relation of elaboration.

4. Conclusion

Thus the coherence markers play a very significant role in analyzing a text with linguistic orientation to make sure there are little or perhaps no lacunae between the textual messages at all levels (pragmatic, communicative, connotative) and the readers. The aesthetic exploration of lexical and linguistic elements in a text renders an analytical outlook that takes the readers closer to the discourse universe. Coherence markers, grammatical and lexical bind the text, (Louwarse and Mitchell, 2003), and the pragmatic markers (Fleischman and Yaguello 2004) help to unwind the text. Reading with an awareness of the functions of these coherence markers make reading effective and profitable and the comprehension easier.

5. Acknowledgements

Peter Evans, *Focus*, April 1995 from Jakeman Vanessa and Clare McDowell

David Lodge, *The Practice of Writing*, Secker and Warburg, 1996 from Jakeman Vanessa and Clare McDowell

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