THE CONCEPTS OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL COHERENCE

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Coherence is a key concept of text linguistics. Most definitions of "text" include coherence as a necessary feature, which is the formal linguistic realization of semantic and pragmatic relations between clauses and sentences in a text. Scientifically speaking, coherence is a sequence of linguistic signs which display a "continuity of senses" existing across the boundaries of the largest grammatical unit, the clause existing across or sentence. Although the continuity of senses is grounded on organizing features of the text surface, or cohesion, text coherence is itself not a feature of the text surface, but the result of cognitive processes [De Beaugrande & Dressler 1981; Graesser et al. 1997].

Many approaches to text coherence distinguish between local and global aspects of coherence at the two different levels of textual organization.

One level of coherence, called the text microstructure, connect explicit text propositions by argument overlap and other conceptual criteria. Two propositions are linked by argument overlap if they share common argument. Sometimes bridging inferences are needed to match arguments of propositions. The process of constructing this bridging inference takes extra processing time to complete. Although argument inference takes extra processing time to complete. Although argument overlap has been found to be an important criterion for establishing local coherence in many psychological experiments, argument overlap is not the only criterion for connecting propositions at the level of the microstructure. Local connections are also established by virtue of the situation described by a text. For example, propositions may be connected by relations that convey temporality (A occurred before B), causality (A caused or enabled B), and other dimensions of the micro world. Local connections are established by various types of functional relations between propositions, such as comparison, contrast, generalization, example, and explanation. These relations together with argument overlap, provide local text coherence at the microstructure.

A second level of coherence consists of text macrostructure, which interrelates larger segments of text by virtue of world knowledge and genre schemata. The global schemata at the macrostructure text have been vigorously investigated by cognitive psychologists because they are an important key to solving the problem of text coherence. Indeed, text microstructure is hardly sufficient for establishing coherence

between propositions. Some global schemata consist of natural packages of generic world knowledge, such as person stereotypes, object concepts and scripts. Another class of global schemata is associated with particular text genres, the four basic genres being descriptive, narrative, expository and persuasive. However, there are various subclasses within these broad categories, and some texts are hybrids of multiple genres.

At the most abstract level all propositions in a text are summed up in one macro-proposition. Thus, coherence accounts for the organization of local senses in the text to arrive at a global sense [van Dijk 1977; 1980; van Dijk & Kintsch 1983]. Once the global level of the text is attained by a representation, coherence not only refers to relations between parts, but appears as a factor assigning unity to the text as a whole. The result is that the text appears as a unified entity, functioning as a whole.

Aiming at the unity of the text and thus at a global representation, coherence provides a top-down framework for the organization of textual semantics, which is not part of the text itself, but of the writer's and reader's world knowledge, including their social and communicative competences. In other words, global coherence provides a link between the text and the macro-social context of its production and reception.

Accordingly, coherence relations can be regarded as cognitive mechanisms, typically text-type or genre-specific, which speakers/writers draw upon to organise their texts and which readers are expected to recognize in the interpretative process. They express primarily logical meanings with respect to the ideational plane of discourse.

Local and global coherence relations can be signalled explicitly by discourse markers, e.g. connectives or pragmatic particles, which serve guides to interpretation. However, discourse markers cannot be relied as direct indicators of coherence relations. In most cases coherence relations are implicit and the establishment of coherence relations relies upon the discourse processing experience of the reader (degree of familiarity with the text-type or genre) and their life and general background knowledge, since different inferences result in different ways in which propositions and text units can be related [Blakemore 2004; Taboada 2006; 2009].

Thus, it is extremely important to investigate the local and global coherence relations for the purposes of text analysis, and language learning practices.