Module: Discourse Analysis   level: Master1   Semester2
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Lecture Three: Text Linguistics

Instead of looking at the grammar of sentences, there is a shift of interest towards the grammar of texts. The term text here is not limited to the written form of language but rather to both written and spoken ones (discourse). First, we need to find an answer to the following question: "what ties a text together?" or what makes a text a text? When people communicate, they do not produce separate sentences. Chuncks of language are produced. Each element in these texts relates to other elements in that text. The latter is also closely related to the context.

1-Definition of text linguistics: according to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia "Text linguistics is a branch of linguistics that deals with texts as communication systems. Its original aims lay in uncovering and describing text grammars." In addition to dealing with text grammars in it old view, text linguistics also concerns itself with the context of the text and both the speaker/writer and the addressee. In other words, texts linguistics is an application of discourse analysis that looks at the text in its broader sense rather than looking at the word or sentence level.

2-Why is text linguistics significant? People need to communicate with others on a daily basis. As they communicate, they produce texts not just words, separate sentences, or fragments. As less attention was given to text as a means of communication, a call for the shift of interest from sentence as a self-contained unit to the study of text in its broader sense was mandatory. The latter is maintained through taking into consideration the communicative settings in which it takes place.

3-Different Definitions of the Term Text

A text is an extended structure of syntactic units [i. e. text as super-sentence] such as words, groups, and clauses and textual units that is marked by both <u>coherence</u> among the elements and completion ... [Whereas] a non-text consists of random sequences of linguistic units such as sentences, paragraphs, or sections in any temporal and/or spatial extension." (Werlich, 1976: 23)

"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: 63)

"[A 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 <u>clause</u> 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: 1–2)

"A text is made up of sentences, but there exist separate principles of text-construction, beyond the rules for making sentences." (Fowler, 1991: 59)

"[Text is] a set of mutually relevant communicative functions, structured in such a way as to achieve an overall <u>rhetorical</u> purpose." (Hatim and Mason, 1990)

Text linguists have not yet agreed upon a fixed definition of the term text, neither they have had the same viewpoints regarding what constitutes a text.

4- Textuality

Text linguistics is the study of how texts function in human interaction. Beaugrande and Dressler define a text as a "communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality" – cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality, without any of which the text will not be communicative. Non-communicative texts are treated as non-texts.

4.1. Cohesion

Surface texts are the exact words that people see or hear. Cohesion concerns the ways in which the components of the surface text are connected within a sequence. Grammatical forms and conventions are adhered to by surface components and therefore cohesion rests upon grammatical dependencies. The grammatical dependencies in surface texts are major signals for sorting out meanings and uses. Cohesion encompasses all of the functions that can be used to signal relations among surface elements.

SLOW

CARS

HELD UP

Such a text can be divided up into various dependencies. Someone might construe it as a notice about "slow cars" that are "held up", so that conclusions could be drawn about the need to drive fast to avoid being held up. However, it is more likely for one to divide the text into "slow" and "cars held up', so that drivers will drive slowly to avoid accidents or take alternative routes to avoid being caught in the slow traffic. A science of text should explain how ambiguities such as these are possible, as well as how they are precluded or resolved without much difficulty. For efficient communication to take place there must be interaction between cohesion and other standards of textuality because the surface alone is not decisive.

4.2. Coherence

Coherence concerns the ways in which concepts and relations, which underlie the surface text, are linked, relevant and used, to achieve efficient communication.

- A concept is a cognitive content which can be retrieved or triggered with a high degree of consistency in the mind

- Relations are the links between concepts within a text, with each link identified with the concept that it connects to

Surface texts may not always express relations explicitly therefore people supply as many relations as are needed to make sense out of any particular text. In the example of the road sign "SLOW CARS HELD UP', "cars" is an object concept and "held up" an action concept, and the

"cars" are the link to "held up'. Therefore, "slow" is more likely to be interpreted as a motion than as the speed at which cars are travelling. Types of relations include:

4.3.Intentionality

Intentionality concerns the text producer's attitude and intentions as the text producer uses cohesion and coherence to attain a goal specified in a plan. Without cohesion and coherence, intended goals may not be achieved due to a breakdown of communication. However, depending on the conditions and situations in which the text is used, the goal may still be attained even when cohesion and coherence are not upheld.

"'Want I carry you on my back?'"

Even though cohesion is not maintained in this example, the text producer still succeeds in achieving the goal of finding out if the text receiver wanted a piggyback.

4.4.Acceptability

Acceptability concerns the text receiver's attitude that the text should constitute useful or relevant details or information worth accepting. Text type, the desirability of goals and the political and sociocultural setting, as well as cohesion and coherence, are important in influencing the acceptability of a text.

Text producers often speculate on the receiver's attitude of acceptability and present texts that maximize the probability that the receivers will respond as desired by the producers. For example, texts that are open to a wide range of interpretations, such as "Call us before you dig. You may not be able to afterwards" require more inferences about the related consequences. This is more effective than an explicit version of the message that informs receivers the full consequences of digging without calling, because receivers are left with great uncertainty as to the consequences that could result; this plays to people's risk aversion.

4.5.Informativity

Informativity concerns the extent to which the contents of a text are already known or expected as compared to unknown or unexpected. No matter how expected or predictable content may be, a text will always be informative at least to a certain degree due to unforeseen variability. The processing of highly informative text demands greater cognitive ability but at the same time is more interesting. The level of informativity should not exceed a point such that the text becomes too complicated and communication is endangered. Conversely, the level of informativity should also not be so low that it results in boredom and the rejection of the text.

4.6.Situationality

Situationality concerns the factors which make a text relevant to a situation of occurrence. The situation in which a text is exchanged influences the comprehension of the text. There may be different interpretations with the road sign

SLOW

CARS

HELD UP

However, the most likely interpretation of the text is obvious because the situation in which the text is presented provides the context which influences how text receivers interpret the text. The group of receivers (motorists) who are required to provide a particular action will find it more reasonable to assume that "slow" requires them to slow down rather than referring to the speed of the cars that are ahead. Pedestrians can tell easily that the text is not directed towards them because varying their speeds is inconsequential and irrelevant to the situation. In this way, the situation decides the sense and use of the text.

Situationality can affect the means of cohesion; less cohesive text may be more appropriate than more cohesive text depending on the situation. If the road sign was "Motorists should reduce their speed and proceed slowly because the vehicles ahead are held up by road works, therefore proceeding at too high a speed may result in an accident', every possible doubt of intended receivers and intention would be removed. However, motorists only have a very short amount of time and attention to focus on and react to road signs. Therefore, in such a case, economical use of text is much more effective and appropriate than a fully cohesive text.

4.7.Intertextuality

Intertextuality concerns the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered text. If a text receiver does not have prior knowledge of a relevant text, communication may break down because the understanding of the current text is obscured. Texts such as parodies, rebuttals, forums and classes in school, the text producer has to refer to prior texts while the text receivers have to have knowledge of the prior texts for communication to be efficient or even occur. In other text types such as puns, for example "Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana', there is no need to refer to any other text.

5. Main contributors

Robert-Alain de Beaugrande

Robert-Alain de Beaugrande was a text linguist and a discourse analyst, one of the leading figures of the Continental tradition in the discipline. He was one of the developers of the Vienna School of Textlinguistik (Department of Linguistics at the University of Vienna), and published the seminal *Introduction to Text Linguistics* in 1981, with Wolfgang U. Dressler. He was also a major figure in the consolidation of critical discourse analysis.

6. Significance in language learning

Text linguistics encourages and pushes students to reading by creating interest in texts or novels. Enriches learners' knowledge literature and on different types of publications. Learners' writing skills get enhanced because of using specialized lexis and getting familiar with specified text structures.

References:

- De Beaugrande, R., & Dressler, W. U. (1981) *Introduction to text linguistics* / Robert-Alain De Beaugrande, Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler. London; New York : Longman, 1981.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Text_linguistics