## TEXT LINGUISTICS: RELEVANT LINGUISTICS?
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## 1.    INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper gives a good indication of what I aim to do: I wish to put forward the notion that the linguistic sub-discipline of *text linguistics* is a kind of umbrella discipline which makes the study of the different disciplines of linguistics more relevant. By this I mean that knowledge of text linguistics should benefit students also when studying **syn-tax**, **semantics**, **pragmatics**. **sociolinguistics**, and so forth, because, as I will argue, this knowledge will enhance the value of these disciplines.

I aim to do this in the following way: firstly, indicating what text linguistics actually entails and, secondly, then showing how the different traditional linguistic disciplines can be studied in the light of a new perspective.

## 2.    WHAT IS TEXT LINGUISTICS?

### 2.1    From 'sentence' to 'text'

A look at the development of linguistic theory in this century shows a slow shift away from a *sentential* perspective (as expressed primarily by Chomsky and his many followers) to a more *textual* or *discoursal* approach (Van Dijk, De Beaugrande & Dressler, Tannen). One of the main reasons for this shift was the limitations that the study of sentences held for linguistic study, expressed as follows by Givon (1979 - cf. Carstens 1997:17): "... it has become obvious to a growing number of linguists that the study of the syntax of isolated sentences, extracted without natural context from the purposeful constructions of speakers is a methodology that has outlived it usefulness".  Werlich -- in an earlier comment (1976:14) -- supported this notion when stating that "sentence grammars do not tell the learner [of a foreign language - WAMC] the whole story about communication by means of language".

Combined with the need to take into consideration the **context** in which a text is produced - as for example expressed by Gary (1976:1):"there are certain types of sentences which we cannot make sense of, either syntactically or semantically, without examining them with respect to a discourse context" - it seems logical that a textual perspective was developed in order to explain some of the phenomena (e.g. deixis, anaphora, definiteness and indefiniteness, modality, etc.) that could not be researched properly from a sentential perspective.  Brown & Yule (1983:25-26) later added: "... in recent years the idea that a linguistic string (a sentence) can be fully analysed without taking 'context' into account has been seriously questioned.  If the sentence-grammarian wishes to make claims about the 'acceptability' of a sentence in determining whether the strings produced by his gram-

mar are correct sentences of the language, he is implicitly appealing to contextual considerations.  After all, what do we do when we are asked whether a particular string is 'acceptable'?  Do we not immediately, and quiet naturally, set about constructing some circumstances (i.e. a 'context') in which the sentence could be acceptably used?"

## 2.2  The 'text' as linguistic unit

The study of text linguistics as such is regarded as an important contribution to the study of linguistics - especially of the study of the *variety* of texts that are possible in language. What exactly is studied when a text linguistics approach is followed? is the next logical question to ask.

Different approaches to the study of texts from a linguistic perspective have been put forward  - e.g. *text grammar* (Van Dijk 1972) vs. *text linguistics* (De Beaugrande & Dressler 1981) vs. *discourse analysis* (Brown & Yule 1983, Schiffrin 1994), and this has given rise to the perception that it is difficult to use only one approach when studying texts. In this regard it is important to distinguish between these terms at the outset:

- A **text grammar** (cf. Van Dijk 1972) aims to establish a model with which the grammatical structures of texts can be described (quite similar to Chomsky's transformational approach).
- In contrast **text linguistics** (cf. De Beaugrande & Dressler 1981, Carstens 1997) is "... devoted to describing how texts are created and understood" (Donnelly 1994:18) and in so doing studies the "... defining properties of texts - what constitutes their textuality or texture..." (Crystal 1992:387).
- **Discourse analysis** (cf. Renkema 1993, Schiffrin 1994) traditionally entails the analysis of chiefly written texts - especially the "... analysis of utterances as social inter-action" (Schiffrin 1994:419).  However, it seems that it is very difficult to define "discourse" precisely - Schiffrin (1994:42) for example says that discourse analysis "... is one of the most vast, but also least defined, areas in linguistics".

Generally speaking, it appears as if the approach put forward by De Beaugrande & Dressler (in their well-known *Introduction to text linguistics* (1981)) is favoured by many linguists when they claim to be text linguists as such.  According to these authors (1981:3) a text "... will be defined as a communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality".   The seven standards (renamed as 'principles' by De Beaugrande in 1995) referred to are **cohesion**, **coherence**, **intentionality**, **acceptability**, **informativity**, **contextuality** and **intertextuality**.

These principles can be described as follows:

- *Cohesion*:  Cohesion describes the ways in which **components** of the sentences of a text, i.e. the *words* we actually hear and use, are *mutually connected* (grammatically and lexically).  According to Halliday and Hasan (1976:11), cohesion exists "where the

interpretation of any item in the discourse requires making reference to some other item in the discourse".   De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981:3) comment in this regard that the "... *surface components* depend upon each other according to *grammatical* forms and conventions, such that cohesion rests upon grammatical dependencies". This means that the **syntactic knowledge** of a language user plays an important part in constructing these relations.   Jackson (1990:252) refers to the fact that a "... *bond* is formed between one sentence and another because the interpretation of a sentence either depends on or is informed by some item in a previous - usually the previous - sentence".   Halliday and Hasan (1976:8) argue that this bond is of a **semantic** nature: "Cohesion is a *semantic relation* between one element and another in the text and some other element that is crucial to the interpretation of it.  This other element is also to be found in the text; but its location in the text is in no way determined by the grammatical structure.  The two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, may be structurally related to each other, or they may be not; it makes no difference to the meaning of the cohesive relation".

- Halliday and Hasan in *Cohesion in English* (1976:13) - generally accepted as the standard work on cohesion - describe it by saying that the "concept of cohesion accounts for the essential *semantic relations* whereby any passage of speech or writing is enabled to function as text" and that this concept is systematized by means of five distinct different categories "which provide a practical means for describing and analysing texts.   Each of these categories is represented in the text by particular *features* - repetitions, omissions, occurrences of certain words and constructions - which have in common the property of signalling that the interpretation of the passage in question depends on something else.   If that 'something else' is verbally explicit, then there is cohesion."   The above mentioned categories are: *reference*, *substitution*, *ellipse*, *conjunction* and *lexical cohesion*.

  - ♦ **Reference** as cohesive device has to do with the introduction of a new item in the text and the subsequent referral to that same item by means of a another item, usually a shorter form (popularly referred to as a 'pro-form'). *Pronouns*, *demonstratives*, *comparatives*, a variety of lexical constructions, even *adverbs* and *adjectives* are used for this function.   The effect of reference lies in the retrieval of information (referential meaning) from somewhere else in the sentence or in a neighbouring sentence by using one of the grammatical devices mentioned above.   "Cohesion itself lies in the continuity of reference whereby the same thing enters into the discourse a second (and more) time(s)" (Halliday & Hasan 1976:31).

  - ♦ In the case of **substitution** a substitute is basically used "in the place" of another word or phrase to prevent repetition of the same word or phrase.  This also enables the text to be shortened.  Different types of substitution can be distinguished, e.g. nominal substitution, verbal substitution and clausal substitution.

  - ♦ In the process of **ellipsis** elements in sentences are physically deleted/omitted because the writer believes that the reader will insert the missing elements on his or her own as the sentence is used (Donnelly 1994:103).  In this case the

pressure is on the reader or listener to make the cohesive link. As in the case of substitution different types of ellipsis can be distinguished, e.g. nominal ellipsis, verbal ellipsis and clausal ellipsis.

- ◆ In the case of **conjunction,** mainly conjunctions and adverbs are used to connect propositions in neighbouring sentences according to certain semantic relations (e.g. additive, adversative, causal and temporal) between the propositions. The conjunctive elements serve to "... reinforce and highlight the relationship between other elements of the text" (Donnelly 1994:105). The specific choice of the conjunctive marker "provides the reader with clues as to how the writer perceives the statement to be related", i.e. how he or she thinks the reader should understand the text.
- ◆ Lastly, **lexical cohesion** refers to semantic relations (such as synonymy, antonymy, collocation) created by specific lexical items. Knowledge of semantic structures is necessary in order to understand this type of cohesion.

- *Coherence* is probably the main component of any form of textual study because if a text is not fully *understood* a 'good' text was not produced. It is the aim and task of text linguistics research to try to determine what makes one text 'acceptable' and another one 'unacceptable'. It is fairly difficult to establish what precisely makes a text 'coherent'. However, to my mind, the description put forward by Neubert and Shreve (1992:94) provides a very useful definition: "A coherent text has an *underlying logical structure* that acts to guide the reader through the text" so that "it 'sticks together' as a unit" (Hatch 1992:209) and creates the "feeling that a text hangs together, that it makes sense, and is not just a jumble of sentences" (McCarthy 1991:26).
- *Intentionality* and *acceptability* are generally regarded as a 'pair' of principles. In any text there is a producer who has the intention to produce a sound piece of information to a receptor. The receptor, on his or her part needs to be willing to accept the proffered text as a communicative text. In order to do this both producer and addressee have to adhere to the pragmatic cooperative principle which states that one has to make the maximum effort to enable a piece of intended communication to be a success. Knowledge of **pragmatic** principles therefore makes this aspect of textuality 'work' or not.
- *Informativity* broadly has to do with the way in which parts of the text have communicative value. For example: a definite expression like *the man with the golden gun* has more communicative value than a pronoun like *him/his*. Knowledge of informativity systems (as put forward by the Functional Sentence Perspective with the aid of the concept of "Communicative Dynamism") as well as knowledge of the informativity value of **syntactic** expressions are essential here.
- *Contextuality* focuses on the very important role the **context** plays in any form of communication. Trask (1995:68) is quite emphatic in this regard when he states that "*Every text* - that is everything that is said and written - *unfolds in some context of use*". This in effect means that in every situation in which language is used, the quality and effect of the communication is determined by the contextual knowledge shared by

the participants. This aspect of language use is studied in the disciplines of pragmatics and sociolinguistics. **Pragmatics** focuses on what the participants in a discourse intend to accomplish through the use of the language (what *speech act* is performed in a given setting) and **sociolinguistics** aims to determine the role knowledge of the participants (as *human beings* and in the *environment* they function as such) plays in the success of a communicative occurrence.

- *Intertextuality* is the least linguistic principle of all the principles of textuality. This principle usually has to do with the study of literature and it literally means that the formation and understanding of one text will be influenced by the structure of another text similar to it. If for example you read a poem it will be reasonable to expect of you to understand that poem if you have read others poems in the past. This is why a newspaper is accepted as a newspaper because of past experience with the genre of newspapers, etc.

At this stage you probably might say: yes, I am aware of the aspects that your have been talking about. You might also even ask: what precisely is your point? I will try to answer this question in the next section.

## 3. TEXT LINGUISTICS AND THE LINGUISTIC SUB-DISCIPLINES

When studying these standards/principles it becomes clear that a very broad knowledge base of (general and applied) linguistics is involved in the description of texts. The study of *cohesion*, for example, entails for certain knowledge of syntax, semantics (and on some levels even morphology and phonology) whilst *intentionality* and *acceptability* cannot be studied without serious knowledge of pragmatics. Intentionality involves knowledge of information systems - as supplied by the functional approach to language in the form of FSP. *Contextuality* is very much dependent on knowledge of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, while *intertextuality* has to do with the experience of previous texts (literary and non-literary). *Coherence* can be regarded as the umbrella-term for all these aspects while a certain amount of psycholinguistics is also needed in order to understand the communicative value of a text.

To put it in more bluntly: if you make a diagram with the principles of textuality on the one end, and the different linguistic sub-disciplines on the other side, you ought to see the picture more clearly:

**Cohesion (by means of *reference*, *substitution*, *ellipsis*, *conjunction* and *lexical cohesion*)**
                                             *Syntax*
                                             *Semantics*
                                             Morphology
                                             Phonology
                                             *Normative grammar*

**Coherence**
                                             *Semantics*
                                             *Cognitive linguistics*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Intentionality** | *Pragmatics* |
| **Acceptability** | *Pragmatics* |
| **Informativity** | *Semantics* (information systems) |
| | *Syntax* |
| **Contextuality** | *Pragmatics* |
| | *Sociolinguistics* |
| **Intertextuality** | *Literary theory* |

***The premise of this paper is that as all those types of knowledge are involved in the understanding and production of a text, it can be argued that text linguistics can claim to be the most relevant way of studying linguistics.***

◊ Consider for example the traditional way of studying **syntax** in isolation: normally any syllabus of a course on syntax contains a study of the different parts of speech and the way these parts of speech are used in sentences. I argue that syntax will be better studied in the context of a larger chunk of language than the isolated and sometimes fabricated context of a single sentence. If you can rather use the syntactic knowledge you have of the different parts of speech (e.g. nouns, pronouns, adverbs, conjunctions, etc.) to construct well-formed texts it should make the syntactic knowledge just that little bit more useful.

◊ In the same way I can argue about **semantics**: we traditionally study synonyms (sameness) and antonymy (contrastiveness) in a course on semantics but what about the use of this type of knowledge? Why is it necessary to know that there are relations like synonymy or even antonymy in any language? Again I argue that knowledge of these relations can be put to good use in the construction of a text. Semantics is certainly not only a word phenomenon but also plays a big part in communication from a broader perspective.

I could continue in this way to prove my point again and again, namely that the usefulness of the different linguistic sub-disciplines will become more apparent when looking at these disciplines from a text linguistics perspective. It also means that an interdisciplinary approach to the study of language (and linguistics) will probably be more justified than the study of isolated disciplines.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper I tried to prove a relatively simple point: namely that knowledge of the different linguistic sub-disciplines can be put to more use if viewed from a text linguistics viewpoint - in which the principles of textuality play an integral part to improve the understanding of language as such.

Text linguistics certainly does **not** claim to solve all the problems regarding the study of language, but it does claim that it can help considerably to solve many problems that have

to do with the way language is used to communicate.  It therefore very much seems to be the most relevant component of linguistics, and not just merely another way of studying linguistics.

I do trust that with this paper I have succeeded in changing your views about the value of a *textual* (by implication text linguistics) rather than a *sentential* perspective to the study of language.

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