

TEXT STRUCTURE

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1. Introduction

Texts are expected to have structure and the study of that structure is a central concern in text and discourse linguistics. Texts are semantic units and their structure is therefore a matter of organization of the content material included in them. At the same time, text structure is also a matter of form, since texts manifest linguistic signals of various kinds whose purpose is to facilitate the text receiver's task of interpretation, i.e. the task of building a text world around a given text. And even shape can be used to disclose the structure of a given text. Hence, the visual form of, say, a poem, instruction manual or horoscope conveys text-structural meaning, and the way international news readers structure the different news items prosodically gives the news shape and thus helps hearers process them.

Text structure goes hand-in-hand with another central notion, i.e. text strategy (cf. e.g. Enkvist 1987). Text strategy refers to the totality of the recursive choices which language users make from a set of alternatives available to them in a given context, in view of a communicative goal. Text strategies can thus be of many kinds, and text producers make use of shared linguistic cues to indicate their choice of strategy. Such cues facilitate the receiver's task of interpretation by signalling the structure of the final product of that process, i.e. the text. If the structure of a text is signalled according to norms prevailing in the given culture, the text receiver can

concentrate on its content, rather than the way the selected content is organized in the text.

Text structure is a static notion, implying that texts are ready-made objects which serve as instructions to text receivers to decode them. Yet research in text processing and comprehension compels us to see texts as the outcome of a dynamic process, emerging through negotiation and being subject to interpretation.

Even if we agree that texts have structure, what exactly constitutes text structure is not a straightforward issue. In what follows, I will start with a discussion of general aspects of text structure which have important methodological implications. Text structure will then be approached from the perspective of five different dimensions, zooming out from text and discourse to cognition, interaction, and finally, society at large. The present entry will be rounded off by an overview of acquisitional and diachronic aspects of text structure, followed by a consideration of future avenues.

2. Methodological aspects

This section offers a background for the subsequent discussion of text structure. I will touch upon general issues concerning text structure and pay special attention to methodological aspects. The focus will be on text and discourse linguistic methods. For a recent introduction to text and discourse linguistics, see Georgakopoulou & Goutsos (1997).

Much of text structure is assumed to be hierarchic in character. Yet, whatever hierarchies we have in mind must be linearized when we produce texts, and these hierarchies emerge from texts we encounter in a linear form. Shared linguistic signals of text structure thus help us process texts, by providing the text producer with a possibility of indicating a chosen text strategy which lies behind the textual surface and by giving the text receiver cues to that strategy, manifested through the organization of a given text. The devices used to signal text structure can be lexicogrammatical and/or prosodic or typographical.

A text manifests structure of various kinds. We can approach text structure using methods of text and discourse linguistics, trying to detect the flow of information in the text, its chains of linguistic markers which create coherence and serve to signal text segmentation, and finally, distinguishing signals of a backbone of the text from those indicating less prominent material (see e.g. Daneš 1974; Labov 1972; Longacre

1983; Virtanen 1992). In spontaneous conversation we can focus on signals of turn-taking and identify adjacency pairs and other routines which help speakers structure and hence make sense of what people are saying (see e.g. Aijmer 1996; Sacks et al. 1974). In writing we can to some extent use shape to uncover structure: witness, for instance, the visual impact of news stories, personal and professional letters, poems, or instructive texts such as recipes. Also, the patterning of lines in narrative discloses cultural traditions of transforming human experience (Hymes 1996).

We can investigate text structure starting from linguistic signals and proceeding in a bottom-up fashion in order to find out about the kinds of jobs these signals do in a text. Hence, syntactic structures not explained by sentence-grammar often provide a point of departure for a study of their textual motivations. Alternatively, we can investigate text structure using a top-down method and hence proceed from the global organization to its signals at clause-level. For instance, investigations of topic shifts in speech and writing may profitably follow this method, starting out from a broad notion of discourse topic (cf. Brown & Yule 1983) and subsequently proceeding to examine linguistic cues in use to indicate topic shifts in a given text. Studies very often combine the two methods.

Text structure can be examined at a local or global level in a text. Cognitively, we seem to be able to keep global structures somehow semi-active in mind while focusing on an activated local portion of text (cf. e.g. Chafe 1994). Signals needed to (re)activate global structures seem to vary from those in use at the micro-level of the text, which suggests that different capacities of memory are involved in processing local-level and global-level structure. We possess some kind of episodic memory, in which elements of text structure are kept available while the very limited working or short-term memory is busy processing local-level structure (cf. van Dijk & Kintsch 1983). The relevant context needed for interpretation varies from local to global according to the amount of information available at each stage of a text (see the discussion in Brown & Yule 1983; Hanks 1989).

We can also approach text structure using methods from corpus studies. A good example is Biber's (1988) study, in which one of the strong dimensions emerging throughout the analysis is concerned with text structure. Thus, some of the data used for the analysis manifest signals of narrative organization while other texts are clearly non-narrative. This is a basic choice in text structuring and also one which linguists representing very different backgrounds and ordinary speakers of language seem to be very much aware of. Finally, it seems likely that lexical bonding of the kind Hoey

(1991, 1995) advocates can in due course be operationalized by computational linguists to write programs which detect lexical patterns or pools of topics in huge textbanks, thus providing us not only with a practical tool for searching information but also with new vistas to textual and intertextual structure. Lexical bonds of various kinds serve as a clue to the main gist of a text, which is important for readability, and they can be used to detect intertextual patterns across texts having a shared discourse topic.

3. From text and discourse to cognitive, interpersonal and social concerns

Investigating text structure has been the main concern of text linguistics and discourse analysis from the very beginning. Building on Enkvist's (1984) four models of text analysis, which reflect the development of the field through time, I will outline five different dimensions that we can focus on to explore text structure. These dimensions reflect the change in the perspective from which texts are viewed, from a static, product-oriented one to a more dynamic, processual one. Furthermore, they reflect a widening of the perspective from the linguistic to the cognitive, interactional, and finally social at large. We can thus distinguish a structural, content, cognitive, *interpersonal*, and social dimension of text structure. It is, however, important to emphasize that the different dimensions can all be present in the analysis of authentic texts. As illustration, I will in each case pinpoint a corresponding development of ideas within applied linguistics using writing as a showcase.

3.1. The structural dimension

The focus of the first dimension is on ways of going beyond sentences in a text. Central issues include information structure and intersentential links such as ellipsis, anaphora and connectors.

To start with, information structure forms a bridge between sentence grammar and the text. Text structure is thus investigated in the way information can be packaged in clauses and sentences, and figuring out alternative routes available to language users to let information progress from one sentence to another and one paragraph to another (cf. e.g. Daneš 1974). Information dynamics is closely connected to linearization, and word order in clauses and sentences cannot therefore be regarded as simply a sentence-grammatical phenomenon. Language users repeatedly start clauses with given or old information in much of their speech and

writing, and at other times, with what can be termed ‘crucial’ information (Enkvist 1987). In spontaneous speech the situational context occasionally justifies messages which only include crucial information.

Secondly, the structural, sentence-based dimension of text implies a static view where the textual surface is investigated in terms of intersentential links of various kinds (cf. e.g. Halliday & Hasan 1976). Explicit, formal signals of text structure are examined, such as anaphora and connectors — or metatextual elements more generally. Some signals are, however, implicit. Hence, ellipsis is a central issue in an approach of this kind. In particular, question-answer sequences in spoken interaction are studied because they manifest semantic links based on recoverability of ellipsed material in the reply. An alternative to ellipsis as an explanation to the form of such sequences is to ignore what can be assumed to be missing from a well-formed answer and rather focus on what is present in the message. In other words, text producers may simply choose to only include information which they regard as crucial in a given context.

Some of the main references to approaches focusing on this dimension of text structure include Daneš (1974), Enkvist (1975), Halliday & Hasan (1976), Källgren (1979) and Werlich (1976). The study of text structure is expected to lead to the establishment of a text grammar.

Focus on the structural dimension of text structure has given us pedagogical applications of various kinds. Hence, expository writing, closely connected with an educational culture, can be made more reader-oriented through the use of formal connectors and other metatextual items, clear signalling of intersentential ties in the form of referring elements, and careful planning of information progression in the text. Furthermore, paragraph structure, including topic sentences, is emphasized in writing instruction.

3.2. The content dimension

The second dimension focuses on the content of a text, although both the structural and the content dimensions relate to the idea that a text is a semantic unit. The difference is that from the point of view of the content dimension, texts are analysed in terms of propositions or macrostructural abstractions, rather than in terms of clauses and sentences.

Text structure is here examined in terms of global, content-based organisational

patterns. Thus, texts of many different kinds are found to build on a problem-solution pattern, which can be used recursively. The method of summarizing texts is used to arrive at macrostructures and macropropositions.

An obvious device to structure texts is provided by text strategies of various kinds, which function at global and local levels in texts. Typical examples include the temporal, locative, and topic/participant-oriented text strategies, which are characteristic of narrative and descriptive texts. Text strategies are signalled on the textual surface through a chain of linguistic markers, which bind units of text to a coherent whole and indicate boundaries in the text.

Text producers are expected to signal text structure through linguistic signals which indicate the recursive choices that they have made in view of a communicative goal and which are subsumed under the umbrella term 'text strategy'. In other words, texts are studied as the outcome of a process, which involves goal-oriented elimination of alternatives. Since several structural patterns are closely connected to a particular text type, typically narrative, text structure is primarily studied in terms of intertextual conventions.

Finally, grounding strategies are studied for instance in terms of degrees of transitivity used to code events and actions in a narrative (Hopper & Thompson 1980). The focus is on linguistic signals conveying the relative foregroundedness or backgroundedness of textual units of various sizes.

Work on the content dimension of text structure includes de Beaugrande & Dressler (1981), van Dijk (1980), Enkvist (1987), Grimes (1975), Givón (1983), Hoey (1983), Mann & Thompson (1988) and Longacre (1983).

In applied linguistics, general awareness of the influence of text type on text structure is raised and the teaching of writing is connected to organization of content in terms of patterns characteristic of prototypical types of text.

3.3. The cognitive dimension

The interest in text-strategic choices suggests the existence of a human being who is consciously or automatically making such choices. The third dimension of text structure is, accordingly, a cognitive one in which the focus is on text production and text comprehension.

Text processing is studied by varying information structure, anaphoric references, and other text structural phenomena such as iconic vs non-iconic ordering

of textual elements. Focus on cognition implies for instance that anaphora cannot be properly accounted for in terms of 'looking back' in a text; instead, the central concern of studies of anaphora is with accessibility of referents in a given context. Memory constraints are of primary interest and text structure is seen in terms of shared frames, scripts, and schemata, which facilitate text processing (for an overview, see Brown & Yule 1983). Interpretability of texts is regarded as a process of building a text(ual) world around a text. The process is assumed to involve activation of frames, scripts and schemata (cf. e.g. Enkvist 1989). Finally, grounding is studied in terms of salience, which highlights its context-sensitivity (for an overview, see Wårvik 1987).

Some of the main references in which this dimension is highlighted include de Beaugrande (1980), Brown (1995), Chafe (1980, 1994) and van Dijk & Kintsch (1983).

The cognitive dimension of text structure is manifested in pedagogical applications such as process writing. Writing is seen as a cognitive process which helps people to think in ways that are not possible otherwise. Writers are expected to be responsible for their readers and thus help them process texts by revealing its structure through shared linguistic markers.

3.4. The interactional dimension

The fourth dimension of text structure is related to an interactional view of communication. In other words, people are seen as active participants in a given situational context, negotiating for meaning and creating that context through the linguistic choices they make.

The focus of the interactional framework does not lie in a cognitive analysis of assumptions that language users make of other people's consciousnesses and stages of activation. Instead, text structure is a matter of building coherence jointly in a given situational context. To refer to Halliday's (1978) metafunctions of language, we can say that the textual metafunction is interpreted in relation to the interpersonal metafunction, as subject to this.

Focus on this dimension implies a clear contrast to earlier approaches which advocate a conduit view of communication, i.e. a model according to which language users communicate by sending messages to one another in an orderly manner through a channel of communication, which can be spoken or written. Instead, communication is seen as a joint venture.

Text structure is studied in terms of mechanisms of turn-taking, the use of particular speech acts in a given situational context, and coherence in a wide sense, connected to contextual and cultural expectations. The focus is also on politeness strategies and on degrees of involvement or affect, and investigations accordingly turn more to spoken than to written interaction. The status of discourse-pragmatic particles shifts from the optional or peripheral to a central area of investigation in spontaneous conversation (see e.g. Fernandez 1994; Östman 1982). Finally, since the focus is on spontaneous face-to-face communication, information structure is seen as primary and syntactic well-formedness as secondary when choices need to be made on-line.

Linguists working on this dimension of text structure are aware of the need to study the structure of spontaneous speech in its own right, as separate from the established structures found in well-formed written language. This need suggests an approach in which text structure is sought without recourse to predetermined categories. Rather, texts are structured in terms of adjacency pairs such as greeting-greeting or question-answer sequences. Also, functional categories such as exchanges, moves and acts are set up for analysis of classroom discourse.

Some of the main references to studies focusing on the interactional dimension of text structure include Brown & Levinson (1987), Chafe (1982), Halliday & Hasan (1985), Roulet et al. (1985), Sacks et al. (1974), Schiffrin (1987) and Sinclair & Coulthard (1975).

Pedagogical applications include writing instructions in which the focus is on interpersonal styles affecting text structure. Hence, writers from different cultural backgrounds seem to, for instance, weigh the choices of rational or affective styles of persuasion differently, and give the notion of politeness different interpretations, and hence make use of different linguistic expressions of politeness. They also manifest varying degrees of writer vs reader responsibility. Since in this view, text structure is affected by interpersonal styles which are, in turn, affected by culture-based factors, a major area of pedagogical application of the interpersonal approach is what is variably termed contrastive text linguistics, contrastive pragmatics or contrastive rhetoric.

3.5. The social dimension

In the pedagogical applications focusing on the interactional dimension presented above, good writers are seen as people who can adapt their texts to relevant cultural expectations. What is also conspicuous is that good writers are seen as people having

power. Power, however, is related to social concerns at large, which suggests a fifth dimension of text structure.

The fifth dimension focuses on the effects of text structure on people in society. Manipulation through discourse is a central concern. It is also important to study the process of exclusion or inclusion of individuals or groups of people through texts, for instance, in administrative settings. Another major issue is access to information.

This dimension also focuses on ways in which texts create culture, and establish or reinforce ideologies in a society. Ideologies are conveyed and construed through language. For some linguists, focus on language and ideology therefore suggests a political goal for text analysis.

Different voices found in texts relate to intertextual concerns (Bakhtin 1984), cultural differences and expectations raised by them. In other words, text structure is no longer a matter of the textual surface only, or an issue of selecting and organizing content in expected or unexpected ways, a matter of making assumptions of one's interlocutors' consciousnesses or attempts to negotiate with them for shared meaning; text structure is a much wider issue related to cultures and societies at large.

This dimension is apparent in works such as de Beaugrande (1997), van Dijk (1997), Fairclough (1992), Hymes (1996), Mills (1997), Verschueren (1985) and Wodak (1996). Several of the articles in Hymes (1996) highlight the fundamental character of the subtle patterns of narrative in the shaping of human experience globally and in particular socio-cultural contexts.

Cultural differences in writing are interpreted as reflections of different educational ideologies, which remain in the foreground since power is connected with the successful use of language. Textual organization in use in minority cultures is also given some attention. There is an increasing awareness of the existence of a rhetoric which is only available to people through education and which has a decisive effect on accessing information in society and construing meaning and ideologies in that society and in the world at large.

4. Acquisitional aspects

Linguists interested in acquisitional aspects of text structure have paid much attention to narrative. Investigations of the use of various linguistic signals of the narrative schema and the ordering and patterning of content elements in a story by children of different ages give valuable insights into the development of the textual function of

language. Acquisition of the narrative schema starts early in life but the development of its signals from a mere *and* meaning ‘I have more to say’ to a temporal link (*and*) *then* and further to more complicated linguistic markers takes a very long time. Furthermore, studies of iconicity in text structure suggest basic patterns which are taken for granted unless people actively choose to go against them. In other words, the narrative schema can be left implicit at a point when speakers have learnt it and share it, and explicit signals of other aspects of text structure or deviations from the expected schema will be used instead. For acquisitional studies of text structure, see e.g. Clancy (1980), Hymes (1996).

In contrast to the acquisition of spontaneous speech, there exist types of text whose structure is learnt through reading and writing. These structures are thus closely connected to the educational culture prevalent in a particular society and they will therefore be constantly accommodated to changes in that culture. Students who are fluent in informal speech and narrative organization of text may find writing expository and argumentative texts challenging, and the way and the extent to which these structures are taught reflect the educational ideology of a culture. Further, mastering expository and argumentative structures in a foreign language necessitates awareness of differences in cultural patterns. For discussions of written EFL argument, see e.g. Connor (1996), Granger (1998), Mauranen (1993).

5. Diachronic aspects

The historical development of a type of text or a genre can be studied in terms of changes in its prototypical structure. Signals of text structure characteristic of a particular type of text can disappear, sometimes leaving traces in newer texts, or they can become more explicit and specialized in text-structuring functions of various kinds (see e.g. Wårvik 1987 for a discussion of the development of grounding markers in English narrative). Similarly, genres can adopt text-structuring patterns from various types of text and manifest changes in these patterns through time. Hence, literary genres exhibit interesting developments in the structures they use and deviate from (see e.g. Björklund 1993; Björklund & Virtanen 1991). The study of the way historians in the past have written about events of interest also displays genre-specific narrative structures which are no longer in use (see White 1980).

Another good example of the historical development of a genre is provided by news reports. A narrative organization of content material in news texts has gradually

given way to fragmented structures of a non-narrative kind, better suited for the modern consumer of these texts. Furthermore, the written media now manifest television-like structures in ways that have not always been with us. Hence, what you quote and how often differs from period to period and forms a central area of inquiry because issues such as what form and where in the text you quote people affect the structure of the text. For discussions of the structure of news texts, see e.g. Byrman (1998), van Dijk (1987), Verschueren (1985).

6. Future avenues

The prototypical structure of texts representing different types and genres has been a central concern of text and discourse linguists working within the different frameworks broadly outlined in Section 3 above. The prototypical structure is worth investigating also because deviation from such a structure in itself implies the very existence of a shared prototype within a culture. In other words, to detect deviating structures people need to take recourse to prototypes which these structures are deviations from. Although text structure has thus been dealt with extensively in the relevant literature, it is far from being a topic which has been exhausted by students of language. Text types and genres develop and hence change their prototypical structure, in accordance with the needs of the speakers of a community who make use of them and create them for heuristic and ideological purposes. Text-structural developments within a type of text or a genre and the cognitive, contextual and cultural motivations for such developments constitute an essential part of the research agenda for those interested in what we do with language in a situational and socio-cultural context. Further, new genres emerge, such as those now taking form through computer-mediated communication, and the emerging linguistic conventions of new genres and their prototypical structure are waiting for thorough exploration.

An area of inquiry which might profitably be given more attention is the application of models for analysis of text structure to historical data. An attempt in this direction is Östman & Wårvik (1994).

Computer applications for studies of text structure are making interesting progress. Several programs now attempt to cope with discourse aspects such as anaphora resolution, cross-paragraph linking, and interactional and stylistic features (cf. e.g. Hovy 1987). This widening of the scope of computational linguistics offers new insights to text structure and promises useful applications for instance in the field of

machine translation. Finally, we also need to study the structure of hypertext. In other words, we need to account for the process in which a reader makes structural choices among the navigational possibilities presented for instance by the World Wide Web.

7. Conclusion

The present entry has focused on text structure as dealt with in the relevant discourse-pragmatic literature. But the study of text structure did not begin with the dawn of text linguistics and discourse analysis. Linguistic stylistics has long been concerned with the analysis of textual form. And classical rhetoric has always provided us with good advice concerning ways of selecting and organizing content material for a given communicative purpose, with the emphasis on persuasive strategies.

The above presentation has broadly followed the development of the field of text and discourse linguistics through time. It is, however, still possible to find adherents of all of the five approaches because they have different goals and hence different applications. Also, all five dimensions are important for a full understanding of text structure.

The line of development concerning the analysis of text structure has proceeded from a static, product-oriented view to a dynamic, processual view of text and discourse. It has also proceeded from a view in which the focus has been on the use of language by individual speakers in a given context who make assumptions about other people's consciousnesses, to texts used by groups of people representing and forming cultures through language. Both perspectives are obviously needed in the study of text structure. In a way, the development has been away from texts themselves to their use in communication, with an ever-expanding context to be taken into account. It is at present difficult to predict whether the study of text structure will continue to encompass the extended cultural context even in the future or whether it will adopt an opposite direction and rather zoom in on texts again. Whatever the focus, the investigation of text structure will be enriched by the different avenues we have taken during the past years. Finally, the present emphasis on cross-cultural differences in text structure will have important consequences for the social relevance of linguistic inquiry, and text structure will definitely remain a cross-disciplinary issue.

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