

## Introduction to the Study of Texts

### Definitions:

Since the emergence of text linguistics as a field of study that refers to the study of text as a product (text grammar) or as a process (theory of text), many researchers indulged themselves in a meaningful inquiry to grasp the essence of the word “**TEXT**”. Among the founded definitions we mention:

*“In a general understanding, text is defined as a contextually coherent sequence of several phrases”*

(Glück & Rödel, 2016, p. 707).

*“the word text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole”*

(Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 1)

*“A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of situation, and therefore consistent in register; and it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive.”*

(Halliday & Hasan, 1976 p. 23)

*“In common usage, as in the non-specialized scientific disciplines, the term is mostly used to refer to linguistic utterances. In this restrictive sense, a text is the physical manifestation (written or oral) of a message sent by an issuer to one or more recipients so that it can be subjected to interpretation and then understood”.*

(Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, p.1)

*“Texts are seen as language units which have a definable communicative function, characterized by such principles as COHESION, COHERENCE and informativeness, which can be used to provide a FORMAL definition of what constitutes their identifying textuality or texture”.*

(Crystal 2006, dictionary entry TEXT)

*“Texts indeed appear to be something more than mere sequences of sentences, and the comprehension and formation of texts seem to be governed by a specific competence of the speaker: textual competence. (This competence is distinct from sentence competence by which the ideal speaker-listener formulates and comprehends grammatically correct sentences)”.*

(Dressler, 1977, p. 18)

Based on the above, it is deducible that a text is the manifestation of a written or spoken utterances characterized with specific characteristics that form one understandable unit designated for communication, analysis and interpretation.

### **Key Criteria for Textuality:**

Criteria for textuality refers to the characteristics that defines a text. Beaugrande & Dressler (1981) presented seven standards of textuality to be considered:

- 1. Cohesion** is the way in which linguistic items of which texts are constituted are meaningfully interconnected in sequences. Cohesion may be of four types: reference, 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 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 neighboring 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, p.31).
- **Ellipsis** means 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. In this case the pressure is on the reader or listener to make the cohesive link (e.g., Have some more).
- **Conjunction**, mainly conjunctions and adverbs are used to connect propositions in neighboring 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.

- **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.
2. **Coherence:** “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, p. 26).
  3. **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.
  4. **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.
  5. **Contextuality** focuses on the very important role the context plays in any form of communication. Trask (1995) 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” (p. 68). 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.
  6. **Intertextuality** is the last 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.

## **Regulative Principles of Textual Communication**

### **1. Efficiency**

A text is efficient if it is able to achieve in an economical manner the goals for which it was realized, that is to say in a manner that requires the recipient to make the least interpretative effort possible. An efficient text will consist of a well-known code, will have features of linguistic explicitness, will be full of elements that contribute to its linguistic and thematic unity, and will not introduce too much new information.

(Beaugrande & Dressler, 2017, p.55)

### **2. Effectiveness**

An effective text is one that completes its task forcefully and energetically. For example, an informative text may ensure its effectiveness through graphical devices and structural or expressive elements and content (e.g. the use of special characters or the use of a transgressive style) that make it especially easy to remember the information it conveys.

(ibid)

### **3. Appropriateness**

The principle of appropriateness attempts to balance off the two above principles by seeking an accord between the text setting and standards of textuality i.e. appropriateness is the characteristic of texts whose general approach is appropriate to the content that they aim to convey.

(Beaugrande & Dressler, 2017, p.56)