

### Basic notions

1. Here are six language samples that appear to be alike in some ways and different in others:<sup>1</sup>

[1] SLOW  
CHILDREN  
AT PLAY

[2] The King was in the counting house, counting all his money;  
The Queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey;  
The Maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes;  
Along came a blackbird and pecked off her nose.

[3] Twenty-year-old Willie B. is a diehard TV addict. He hates news and talk shows, but he loves football and gets so excited over food commercials that he sometimes charges at the set, waving a fist. Says a friend: "He's like a little child."  
Willie B. is a 450-lb gorilla at the Atlanta Zoo. In December a Tennessee TV dealer heard about Willie B.'s lonely life as the zoo's only gorilla and gave him a TV set.

[4] A great black and yellow V-2 rocket 46 feet long stood in a New Mexico desert. Empty it weighed five tons. For fuel it carried eight tons of alcohol and liquid oxygen.

Everything was ready. Scientists and generals withdrew to some distance and crouched behind earth mounds. Two red flares rose as a signal to fire the rocket.

With a great roar and burst of flame the giant rocket rose slowly and then faster and faster. Behind it trailed sixty feet of yellow flame. Soon the flame looked like a yellow star. In a few seconds it was too high to be seen, but radar tracked it as it sped upward to 3,000 mph.

A few minutes after it was fired, the pilot of a watching plane saw it return at a speed of 2,400 mph and plunge into earth forty miles from the starting point.

- [5] HEFFALUMP: (*gloatingly*): Ho-ho!  
 PIGLET (*carelessly*): Tra-la-la, tra-la-la.  
 HEFFALUMP (*surprised, and not quite so sure of himself*): Ho-ho!  
 PIGLET (*more carelessly still*): Tiddle-um-tum, tiddle-um-tum.  
 HEFFALUMP (*beginning to say 'Ho-ho' and turning it awkwardly into a cough*): H'r'm! What's all this?  
 PIGLET (*surprised*): Hallo! This is a trap I've made, and I'm waiting for the Heffalump to fall into it.  
 HEFFALUMP (*greatly disappointed*): Oh! (*After a long silence*): Are you sure?  
 PIGLET: Yes.  
 HEFFALUMP: Oh! (*nervously*): I – I thought it was a trap I'd made to catch piglets.  
 PIGLET (*surprised*): Oh. no!  
 HEFFALUMP: Oh! (*apologetically*): I – I must have got it 'wrong, then.  
 PIGLET: I'm afraid so. (*politely*): I'm sorry. (*He goes on humming.*)  
 HEFFALUMP: Well – well – I – well. I suppose I'd better be getting back?  
 PIGLET (*looking up carelessly*): Must you? Well, if you see Christopher Robin anywhere, you might tell him I want him.  
 HEFFALUMP (*eager to please*): Certainly! Certainly! (*He hurries off*).

# [6] GHOSTS

Those houses haunt in which we leave  
 Something undone. It is not those  
 Great words or silences of love

That spread their echoes through a place  
 And fill the locked-up unbreathed gloom.  
 Ghosts do not haunt with any face

That we have known; they only come  
 With arrogance to thrust at us  
 Our own omissions in a room.

The words we would not speak they use,  
 The deeds we dared not act they flaunt,  
 Our nervous silences they bruise;

It is our helplessness they choose  
 And our refusals that they haunt.

2. These are all instances of English TEXTS being used in DISCOURSE. The different ways these texts can be used indicates that they belong to different TEXT TYPES: [1] road sign, [2] nursery rhyme, [3] news article, [4] science textbook, [5] conversation between two participants taking turns, and [6] poem. It seems reasonable to require that a science of texts should be able to describe or explain both the shared features and the distinctions among these texts or text types. We ought to find out what standards texts must fulfil, how they might be produced or received, what people are using them for in a given setting of occurrence, and so forth. The words and sentences on the page are reliable clues, but they cannot be the total picture. The more pressing question is how the texts FUNCTION in HUMAN INTERACTION.

3. A TEXT will be defined as a COMMUNICATIVE OCCURRENCE which meets seven standards of TEXTUALITY. If any of these standards is not considered to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative. Hence, non-communicative texts are treated as non-texts (cf. III.8). We shall outline the seven standards informally in this chapter and then devote individual chapters to them later on.

4. The first standard will be called COHESION and concerns the ways in which the components of the SURFACE TEXT, i.e. the actual words we hear or see,<sup>2</sup> are *mutually connected within a sequence*. The surface components **depend** upon each other according to grammatical forms and conventions, such that cohesion rests upon GRAMMATICAL DEPENDENCIES. As linguists have often pointed out, surface sequences of English cannot be radically rearranged without causing disturbances. We would not, for instance, get very far by converting sample [1] into this order:

[1]a Children play slow at

and requesting the traffic authorities to use it on road signs. The series is so disjointed that drivers could hardly tell what goes with what. Obviously, the grammatical dependencies in the surface text are major signals for sorting out meanings and uses. All of the functions which can be used to signal relations among surface elements are included under our notion of COHESION.<sup>3</sup>

5. Notice that our original sample

[1] SLOW  
CHILDREN  
AT PLAY

might be divided up into various dependencies. Someone might conceivably construe it as a notice about 'slow children' who are 'at play',<sup>4</sup> so that unflattering conclusions could be drawn about the children's intelligence or physical fitness. But the more likely reaction would be to divide the text into 'slow' and 'children at play', and suppose that drivers should reduce speed to avoid endangering the playing children. A science of texts should explain how AMBIGUITIES like this one are possible on the surface, but also how people preclude or resolve most ambiguities without difficulty. The surface is, as we see, not decisive by itself; there must be INTERACTION between cohesion and the other standards of textuality to make communication efficient (cf. III.4).

6. The second standard will be called COHERENCE and concerns the ways in which the components of the TEXTUAL WORLD, i.e. the configuration of CONCEPTS and RELATIONS which *underlie* the surface text, are *mutually accessible* and *relevant*.<sup>5</sup> A CONCEPT is definable as a configuration of knowledge (cognitive content) which can be recovered or activated with more or less unity and consistency in the mind (cf. V.4ff.). RELATIONS are the LINKS between concepts which appear together in a textual world: each link would bear a designation of the concept it connects to. For example, in 'children at play', 'children' is an *object* concept and 'play' an *action* concept, and the relation "agent-of" obtains, because the children are the agents of the action (cf. V.26(b)). Sometimes, though not always, the relations are not made EXPLICIT in the text, that is, they are not ACTIVATED directly by expressions of the surface (cf. V.4). People will supply as many relations as are needed to make sense out of the text as it stands. In the road sign [1], 'slow' makes better sense as the "quantity of motion" which a text receiver should assume than as an "attribute" of the children themselves.

7. Coherence can be illustrated particularly well by a group of relations subsumed under CAUSALITY.<sup>6</sup> These relations concern the ways in which one situation or event affects the conditions for some other one. In a sample such as:



[7] Jack fell down and broke his crown.

the event of 'falling down' is the CAUSE of the event of 'breaking', since it created the *necessary* conditions for the latter. A weaker type of causality applies to this sample:

[8] The Queen of Hearts, she made some tarts, all on a summer day.

The Knave of Hearts, he stole those tarts, and took them quite away.

Here, the Queen's action created the *sufficient, but not necessary* conditions for the Knave's action (made it possible, but not obligatory); this relation can be termed ENABLEMENT.

8. These conceptual relations do not cover all kinds of causality. In a sample such as:

[9] Jack shall have but a penny a day  
Because he can't work any faster

the low pay is not actually *caused* or *enabled* by the slow working, but is nonetheless a reasonable and predictable outcome. The term REASON can be used for the relation where an action follows as a rational response to some previous event. In contrast, Jack's 'breaking his crown' was independently necessary (we could not ask: "What made him feel like doing that?") (cf. Wilks 1977b: 235f.).

9. Cause, enablement, and reason cannot capture the relation at stake here:

[10] Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard to get her poor dog a bone.

Mother Hubbard's first action does enable the second, but there is an important difference between samples [8] and [10]: the agent's PLAN is involved in [10], while the Queen did not do her baking for the sake of allowing a theft. The term PURPOSE can be used for an event or situation which is planned to become possible via a previous event or situation.

10. Another way of looking at events or situations is their arrangement in TIME. Cause, enablement, and reason have forward directionality, that is, the earlier event or situation causes, enables, or provides the reason for the later one. Purpose has backward directionality, that is, the later event or situation is the purpose for the earlier one. Time relations can

be very intricate, depending on the organization of the particular events or situations mentioned. Where sample [10] goes on to say:

[11] When she got there, the cupboard was bare.

our knowledge of the world tells us that the 'getting there' action was later than that of 'going to the cupboard' (being the terminal boundary of the latter), but happened at the same time as the situation of the 'cupboard being bare'. The relation of TEMPORAL PROXIMITY can be specified in many ways, according to the boundaries of events.<sup>7</sup>

11. We reserve the discussion of other coherence relations for section V.25ff. We would only point out here that we have already moved somewhat beyond the text as it is actually made manifest in sound or print. Coherence is clearly not a mere feature of texts, but rather the outcome of cognitive processes among text users. The simple juxtaposition of events and situations in a text will activate operations which recover or create coherence relations. We can notice that effect in this sample:

[2] The King was in the counting house, counting all his money;  
The Queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey;  
The Maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes;

In the explicit text, there is a set of ACTIONS ('counting', 'eating', 'hanging out'); the only relations presented are the LOCATION, the AGENT, and the AFFECTED ENTITY of each action (on these terms, cf. V.26ff.). Yet simply by virtue of the textual configuration, a text receiver is likely to assume that the action is in each case the PURPOSE of being at that location; that the locations are PROXIMATE to each other, probably in or near the royal palace; and even that the actions are proximate in TIME. One might well go on to assume that the actions are intended to signal the ATTRIBUTES of the agents (e.g. the King being avaricious, the Queen gluttonous, the Maid industrious). The adding of one's own knowledge to bring a textual world together is called INFERENCING (cf. V.32ff.).

12. Coherence already illustrates the nature of a science of texts as human activities. A text does not make sense by itself, but rather by the interaction of TEXT-PRESENTED KNOWLEDGE with people's STORED KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD (cf. Petöfi

1974; IX.24-40). It follows that text linguists must co-operate with cognitive psychologists to explore even such a basic matter as the sense<sup>8</sup> of a text. We also see that theories and methods will have to be **PROBABILISTIC** rather than **DETERMINISTIC**, that is, they will state what is *usually* the case rather than *always*. Different users might set up slightly different senses; yet there will be a common core of probable operations and content consistently found among most users, so that the notion "sense of a text" is not unduly unstable (cf. V.1).

13. Cohesion and coherence are **text-centred** notions, designating operations directed at the text materials. In addition, we shall require **user-centred** notions which are brought to bear on the activity of textual communication at large, both by producers and by receivers. The third standard of textuality could then be called **INTENTIONALITY**, concerning the text **producer's** attitude that the set of occurrences should constitute a cohesive and coherent text instrumental in fulfilling the producer's intentions, e.g. to distribute knowledge or to attain a **GOAL** specified in a **PLAN**.<sup>9</sup> To some degree, cohesion and coherence could themselves be regarded as operational goals without whose attainment other discourse goals may be blocked. However, text users normally exercise **TOLERANCE** towards products whose conditions of occurrence make it hard to uphold cohesion and coherence altogether (cf. VI.2ff.), notably in casual conversation. A hybrid structure such as this (documented in Coulthard 1977: 72):

[12] Well where do – which part of town do you live?

did not disturb communication because it still served the superior goal of finding out someone's address, although the subordinate goal of maintaining cohesion did not fully succeed. But if a text producer intended to defy cohesion and coherence, communication would be slowed down for negotiation (cf. IX.15ff.) and could break down altogether.

14. The fourth standard of textuality would be **ACCEPTABILITY**, concerning the text **receiver's** attitude that the set of occurrences should constitute a cohesive and coherent text having some use or relevance for the receiver, e.g. to acquire knowledge or provide co-operation in a plan.<sup>10</sup> This attitude is responsive to such factors as text type, social or cultural setting, and the desirability of goals. Here also, we could view



the maintenance of cohesion and coherence by the text receiver as a goal of its own, such that material would be supplied or disturbances **tolerated** as required. The operation of INFERENCING mentioned in I.11 strikingly illustrates how receivers support coherence by making their own contributions to the sense of the text.

15. If acceptability is restricted, communication can be diverted. It is accordingly taken as a signal of non-cooperation if a text receiver raises questions about acceptability when the text producer's intentionality is obviously in effect (Dickens 1947: 774):<sup>11</sup>

[13] "What we require, sir, is a probe of this here."

"Probate, my dear sir, probate," said Pell.

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Weller sharply, "probe and probe it is very much the same; if you don't understand what I mean, sir, I daresay I can find them as does."

"No offence, I hope, Mr. Weller," said Pell meekly.

16. Text producers often speculate on the receivers' attitude of acceptability and present texts that require important contributions in order to make sense. The Bell Telephone Company warns people:

[14] Call us before you dig. You may not be able to afterwards.

People are left to infer that digging without asking might lead to cutting off a ground cable and hence to losing the wiring needed in order to call; or even, to sustaining bodily injury and being incapacitated. It is intriguing that [14] is more **effective** than a version would be that made everything more **explicit** (in the sense of I.6), such as:

[14]a Call us before you dig. There might be an underground cable. If you break the cable, you won't have phone service, and you may get a severe electric shock. Then you won't be able to call us.

Apparently, text receivers are readily persuaded by content they must supply on their own: it is as if they were making the assertion themselves (cf. VII.28, 42; VIII.20). Sample [14] is more **informative** than sample [14]a – a factor which constitutes the next standard of textuality.

17. The fifth standard of textuality is called **INFORMATIVITY** and concerns the extent to which the occurrences of the



presented text are expected vs. unexpected or known vs. unknown/certain.<sup>12</sup> In sample [14], the assertion that 'you' will not 'be able to call' is much more unexpected than it is in [14]a. The processing of highly informative occurrences is more demanding than otherwise, but correspondingly more interesting as well. Caution must be exercised lest the receivers' processing become overloaded to the point of endangering communication.

18. Every text is at least somewhat informative: no matter how predictable form and content may be, there will always be a few variable occurrences that cannot be entirely foreseen. Particularly low informativity is likely to be disturbing, causing boredom or even rejection of the text. The opening stretch of a science textbook runs like this:<sup>13</sup>

[15] The sea is water

The fact asserted here is so well known to everyone that there seems to be no point in saying it here. The stretch of text is clearly cohesive and coherent, and undoubtedly intended to be acceptable as such. But it is nonetheless a marginal text because it is so uninformative. Not until we look at the continuation does the text's status seem more sound:

[15]a The sea is water only in the sense that water is the dominant substance present. Actually, it is a solution of gases and salts in addition to vast numbers of living organisms . . .

The assertion of the obvious fact in [15] functions as a starting point for asserting something more informative. The surface cue 'actually' signals that the well-known "substance-of" relation (cf. V.26(1)) is not strictly accurate. The ensuing correction of a common view is less expected, so that the informativity of the whole passage is *upgraded* (cf. VII.16).

19. The sixth standard of textuality can be designated SITUATIONALITY and concerns the factors which make a text RELEVANT to a SITUATION of occurrence.<sup>14</sup> We saw in I.5 that one might treat the road sign

[1] SLOW  
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in different ways, but that the most probable intended use was obvious. The ease with which people can decide such an issue

is due to the influence of the situation where the text is presented. In the case of sample [1], the sign is placed in a location where a certain class of receivers, namely motorists, are likely to be asked for a particular action. It is far more reasonable to assume that 'slow' is a request to reduce speed rather than an announcement of the children's mental or physical capacities. Pedestrians can tell that the text is not relevant for themselves because their speeds would not endanger anyone. In this manner, the sense and use of the text are decided via the situation.

20. Situationality even affects the means of cohesion. On the one hand, a text version such as:

[1]b Motorists should proceed slowly, because children are playing in the vicinity and might run out into the street. Vehicles can stop more readily if they are moving slowly.

would remove every possible doubt about sense, use, and group of intended receivers. On the other hand, it would not be appropriate to a situation where receivers have only limited time and attention to devote to signs among the other occurrences of moving traffic. That consideration forces the text producer toward a maximum of economy; situationality works so strongly that the minimal version [1] is more **appropriate** than the clearer [1]b (cf. I.23).

21. The seventh standard of textuality is to be called INTER-TEXTUALITY and concerns the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts.<sup>15</sup> A driver who has seen road sign [1] is likely to see another sign further down the road, such as:

[16] RESUME SPEED

One cannot 'resume' something unless one was doing it at an earlier time and then stopped it for some reason. The 'speed' at stake here can only be the one maintained until [1] was encountered and a reduction was made. Clearly, the sense and relevance of [16] depend upon knowing about [1] and applying the content to the evolving situation.

22. Intertextuality is, in a general fashion, responsible for the evolution of TEXT TYPES as classes of texts with typical patterns of characteristics (cf. IX.1ff.). Within a particular

type, reliance on intertextuality may be more or less prominent. In types like parodies, critical reviews, rebuttals, or reports, the text producer must consult the prior text continually, and text receivers will usually need some familiarity with the latter. An advertisement appeared in magazines some years ago showing a petulant young man saying to someone outside the picture:

[17] As long as you're up, get me a Grant's.

A professor working on a research project cut the text out of a magazine, altered it slightly, and displayed it on his office door as:

[17]*a* As long as you're up, get me a Grant.

In the original setting, [17] was a request to be given a beverage of a particular brand. In the new setting, [17]*a* seems to be pointless: research grants are awarded only after extensive preparation and certainly can't be gotten while casually walking across a room. The discrepancy is resolvable via one's knowledge of the originally presented text and its intention, while the unexpectedness of the new version renders it informative and interesting (cf. I.17). This interest effect offsets the lack of immediate situational relevance and the non-serious intention of the new text presenter.

23. We have now glanced at all seven standards of textuality: cohesion (I.4–5), coherence (I.6–12), intentionality (I.13), acceptability (I.14–16), informativity (I.17–18), situationality (I.19–20), and intertextuality (I.21–2). These standards function as CONSTITUTIVE PRINCIPLES (after Searle 1969: 33f.) of textual communication: they define and create the form of behaviour identifiable as textual communicating, and if they are defied, that form of behaviour will break down. There must also exist REGULATIVE PRINCIPLES (again following Searle) that control textual communication rather than define it. We envision at least three regulative principles. The EFFICIENCY of a text depends on its use in communicating with a minimum expenditure of effort by the participants. The EFFECTIVENESS of a text depends on its leaving a strong impression and creating favourable conditions for attaining a goal. The APPROPRIATENESS of a text is the agreement between its setting and the ways in which the standards of textuality are upheld.<sup>16</sup>



24. It will be our task in this book to pursue both the constitutive and the regulative principles of textual communication. We shall present some topics loosely grouped under each of the seven standards in turn. At the same time, we shall be concerned with illustrating how the constitution and use of texts are controlled by the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, and appropriateness. Not surprisingly, our discussion will lead us into some domains outside the confines of usual linguistics, simply because of the different concerns we raise. In particular, we shall be obliged to rely on considerable research in other disciplines, notably COGNITIVE SCIENCE, a new field at the crossroads of linguistics, psychology, and computer science (cf. X.3 and, on artificial intelligence, X.26ff.). The standards of textuality alone entail, as we have seen, factors of cognition, planning, and social environment merely to distinguish what constitutes a text. Still, it is perhaps not unduly optimistic to hope that the broad outlines we shall undertake to sketch are gradually being filled in by the concerted interaction of researchers sharing a commitment to the study of language use as a crucial human activity.

## Notes

- 1 Samples [1] and [2] are public domain. Sample [3] is taken from *TIME* magazine, 22 Jan. 1979. Sample [4] is a selection from Booklet D of McCall & Crabbs (1961); after being used in diverse studies (see note 10 to Chapter V), it formed the basis for a specifically text-linguistic inquiry (see Beaugrande 1980a, 1980c, 1981b). Simmons and Chester (1979) was in turn inspired by the latter's studies. Sample [5] is taken from A. A. Milne's *House at Pooh Corner* (1928: 44f.) Sample [6] is from Elisabeth Jennings' *Poems 1967* (1967: 55). These samples are all treated in the course of the book: [1] in I.4-6 and 19-21; [2] in I.11; [3] in VII.21-8 and 42; [4] in III.26, IV.7-10, 24, 29, V.29-39, and IX.25-39; [5] in VI.29-31; and [6] in VII.29-42.
- 2 The "surface" is not of course the *raw material* of sounds or printed marks; it already presupposes that language expressions are presented and identified. How this identification is actually done is of course a valid issue for the procedural approach, even though we cannot treat it here. See Selfridge & Neisser (1960); Sperling (1960); Neisser (1967); Crowder & Morton (1969); Woods et al. (1976); Rumelhart (1977a); and Walker (ed.) (1978).
- 3 The term "cohesion" was made current by Halliday and later by his wife Hasan (cf. Halliday 1964; Hasan 1968; Halliday & Hasan 1976). Compare