Analyzing Text for Comprehension

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Introduction

Students find it difficult to comprehend a written text. Teachers can help students understand the underlying structures that constitute a well formed text. 'Text analysis' is the approach of analyzing text by looking at the linguistic features. The two major concepts of textual analysis are coherence (interprets context of the situation) and cohesion (elements used to bind the text). If teachers can demonstrate links in the use of grammatical references, like the personal references, demonstrative references and conjunctions as well as unravel the lexical elements in the form of synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, meronyms and the use of collocations; the students would be adequately armed to understand the meaning of the text. The textual analysis of the passage (Appendix 1) is given below, taking into consideration the cohesive devices that bind the text.

2.0   Cohesive links
Links that bind a text and give it a texture are termed as cohesive links (Brown and Yule, 1983:191). They are in the form of Reference, Ellipsis and Substitution, Conjunction and Lexical Cohesion as stated below for the chosen text.

2.1 Reference
Items that indicate from where the information is to be retrieved in a text are known as References. They are of the following types:

2.1.1   Exophoric reference
The reference where the interpretation lies outside the text is termed as exophoric reference (Brown and Yule, 1983:192; McCarthy, 1991:4). 'The shrines at Kamakura' in line 2, suggest the location and the type of place. Furthermore we have two English names 'Jack and Ruth' in line 3, and they are in the vicinity of the 'shrines' as is the 'fortune –teller', mentioned in line 1 of the passage.

Line 15 refers to "Lonely American soldiers on leave" and 'died in Korea' in line 16, alludes to war in the past. In line 21, 'they' allude to plural number, suggesting that many people earn their living by telling fortune in that part of the world. Naming one of the birds 'Joe' in line 13 suggests the fortune-teller's familiarity with foreigners on which they depend.

2.1.2 Endophoric reference

Endophoric references refer to the cohesive links present in the text (Brown and Yule, 1983:192). They are as follows:

A. Personal reference

It is a means of referring to relevant persons and object Halliday and Hasan (1976:43). These references can be **cataphoric** or **anaphoric**. A cataphoric reference looks forward in the text for interpretation and an anaphoric reference looks backwards (McCarthy, 1991:41, 36). The personal references in the first paragraph refer to the 'fortune-teller' mentioned in line1 and which cataphorically refer to "an emaciated elderly man" in line 2. There are two immediate anaphoric references in the possessive 'his' in line 1 and the object pronoun 'him' in line 3. The use of 'The' in line 4 is a cohesive device as it refers to the fortune-teller in line 1. This sets up a chain of cohesive devices again with 'his' in line 4 and 'the' in line 10. 'He' in line 10 refers to the old man anaphorically and 'the' in line 11 acts as a cohesive device referring to the old man again. The first paragraph has personal reference to the fortune-teller and other cohesive occurrences are in the form of possessive and personal pronouns like- his concession, his pockets, he held.

Line 17 has references to the 'black-and-yellow birds' introduced in the first paragraph itself. The determiner 'any' in line 6 refers to one amongst the three 'black-and-yellow birds'. "Bird" in line 6 is used in the generic sense but refers anaphorically to 'any bird' in the same line. The use of pure verbs without inflections like 'give', 'fly', 'ring' and 'bring' suggest the discourse of instructions given to the customers by the fortune teller. There is also reference to giving proper names to birds. 'One of the birds', refers to the bird named 'Joe' cataphorically, this is evident due to the fact that the fortune-teller is chanting his name after he dropped the money in the chest. 'The tiny black-and-yellow bird'' in line 17 anaphorically refers to 'Joe' and the chain of the personal references e.g. 'its head', 'its beady eye', 'its perch', 'its beak' and 'it fluttered' running throughout the last paragraph is a strong cohesive device.
'The bird' in line 19 is also an anaphoric reference to 'Joe'.
The pronoun 'she' in line ten and eleven anaphorically refers to Ruth. Similarly first person pronoun 'I' and possessive 'my' in line 10 refer again to Ruth anaphorically.

Hence we have a fortune-teller, who is using a bird for the purpose and Ruth is interested in knowing her fortune

B. Demonstrative reference

Demonstrative reference according to Halliday and Hasan, (1976:57) is identifying the referent by locating it on the scale of proximity. In line 14 'that act of fortune telling' refers to practices in the past. 'Here' line 21 refers to the practice of fortune telling in that part of the world, in recent times.

2.2 Ellipses

Ellipses according to Cook, (1989:20) is omitting part of sentences on the assumption that the earlier sentence or the context will make the meaning clear.

Line 2 demonstrates anaphoric elision of the noun 'elderly man'

Line 6 is marked with anaphoric ellipses where the noun and auxiliary, 'bird will' is elided. This pattern is repeated in line 7.

E.g. Fly to temple door, ring bell, enter temple, get fortune and bring back

In line 15 'the words' are anaphorically elided in 'telling their tale'

Similar examples are on line 15 and 16 where the noun 'Americam soldier' is elided,

E.g. Back at home, dead perhaps in Korea.

Similarly 'the bird' is elided anaphorically in line 19 e.g. 'emerged carrying'.

2.3 Substitution

Substitution is the replacement of one item by another Halliday and Hasan, (1976:88)

In line 1and 2 'who' is substituted for the fortune teller and similarly in line 8 'same' is a cataphoric substitution for 'fortune'

2.4 Conjunction

Conjunction as Cook (1989:21) states, are words and phrases which explicitly draw attention to the type of relationship that exists between one sentence or clause or another as shown below:

A.   Additive: additive comparisons e.g. 'and' (marker of speaker continuation, Schiffrin, 1987:141) is generally used to add meaning and secure the flow of the passage e.g.
1. man who smiled **and** beckoned (Line 2) , Jack **and** Ruth (Line 2)
2. "get fortune on folded paper **and** bring back same(line 6)
3. 'took it in its beak **and** dropped it in a money chest' Line 12
4. bird cocked its head **and** its beady eye 17
5. that led **and** the bell tinkled 18
6. disappeared inside the temple **and** emerged19
7. fluttered back to its perch **and** Ruth… 20

B. Adversative: adversative comparisons e.g. "but" (marker of contrast, Schiffrin, 1987:152) is used to bring out contrast.
1. 'Yes', she said, "**but** let me pay…" line 10
2. The act………..**But** the words were new…line 14

2.5 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion is the cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:57). It describes ways in which lexical items are bound together as shown below:

2.5.1 Reiteration

Reiteration means restating an item in a later part of the discourse by direct repetition or else reasserting its meaning by exploiting lexical relations (McCarthy, 1991:65) as seen below in the classification of the verbs:

Verbs involving movements of a trained bird	Verbs involving sounds in the temple	Verbs handling money	Verbs involving Greeting/familiarity
Perch Flutter Fly Drop Bring back Disappear Emerge	Ring, Tinkle Chant	Pay, Hand Hold Give	Smile Beckon

- **Synonymy**
  Two lexical items are in synonymy when their experiential meaning is the same (Halliday and Hasan, 1989:80). The author has used the following synonyms to bind the text.
  1. shrine –temple
  2. miniature-tiny
  3. cash box-money chest
  4. handed- give
  5. elderly-old

- **Antonymy**
  The antonyms are lexical items having oppositeness of experiential meaning (Halliday and Hasan, 1989:80). In this passage the antonyms bind the text and show the movement of the bird entering the temple and returning back.
  1. Old-new
  2. drop-bring back
  3. took-dropped
  4. front-back
  5. disappeared-emerged
  6. written- read

- **Repetition**
The word 'bird', 'fluttered', 'telling' and 'perch' have been repeated twice in the text for gentle emphasis and to bind the text.

- **Hyponymy**
Hyponymy is a relation that holds between a general class (superordinate) and its sub classes (hyponym), (Halliday and Hasan, 1989:80) as shown below:

> **Fortune** - fortune teller, miniature red temple, bi rds, written expressions.
> **Man**-   fortune teller, soldier
> **Shrine**-   temple

- **Meronymy**

They are the contributing parts of the whole (Halliday and Hasan, 1989:80) indicating lexical relationship.

      Bird- beak, head, eye   **Temple**- steps, bell

2.5.2 Collocation

According to Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992:20), collocations describe specific lexical items and the frequency with which these items occur with other lexical items. The following categories of collocations were observed in this text.

- **Lexical**

Elderly man, smiled and beckoned, three small black-and-yellow birds, written explanation, tiny steps, bell tinkled, folded bit of paper, cash box, money chest etc.

- **Grammatical**

Bring back, bound to, come on, on leave, at home

3.0 Conclusion

The analysis of the text shown above demonstrates that the awareness of how linguistic devices bind the text, help students comprehend the text. Analyzing lexical elements used gives the idea of what the topic is and the type of registers employed. When students understand what goes into writing their confidence is enhanced. It also helps to develop their communicative competence, their interpretive and inferential skills. Along with this if coherence- context of situation is taken into consideration, it can go a long way in making students understand the meaning of any well formed text.

References

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Appendix 1

1   There was a fortune-teller who had his concession on the path leading to

2   one of the shrines at Kamakura, an emaciated elderly man who smiled and

3   beckoned to Jack and Ruth. On a stand near him was a miniature red-lacquer

4   temple with three small black-and- yellow birds perched in front of it. The fortune

5   teller whipped from his pocket a type written explanation.

6   *"Give any bird a fifty-yen folded note,"* Jack read. *"Bird will drop it in the*

7   *cash- box, fly to temple door, ring bell, enter temple, get fortune on folded paper*

8   *and bring back same*."

9   "It might be worth fifty yen," Jack said.

10   "Yes," she said, "but let me pay for it. I want it to be my fortune."

11   She handed the old man a folded note. He held it in front of one of the

12   birds, which took it in its beak and dropped it in a tiny money-chest.

13   "Come on, Joe," the old man chanted, "come on, Joe."

14   That act of fortune telling must have dated back to temple necromancy, but

15   the words were new, telling their tale of lonely American soldiers on leave, back at

16   home now, or dead perhaps in Korea.

17   The tiny black-and-yellow bird cocked its head and its beady eye was

18   remarkably intelligent. It fluttered from its perch to tiny steps that led and the bell

19   tinkled. Then the bird disappeared inside the temple and emerged carrying a folded

20   bit of paper. It fluttered back to its perch, and Ruth took the paper from its beak.

21 "Don't be afraid to read it," Jack said. "They are bound to have only good fortunes

22 here."

The passage attached is from Stopover: Tokyo by John P. Marquand (1906) taken from the Readers' Digest