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Textual Coherence and the Reader's Attitude

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Articles

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and the Reader's Attitude*

I do not intend to define the concept of "a coherent text."
Nevertheless, since the problem I wish to discuss at least requires
the most general understanding of the range of the term's meaning
I must sketch in the least pretentious manner the sense of the
term as I use it here.

A coherent text is supported by three "unities."

It is a text formulated by one person. But saying this I do
not claim that it must be formulated by a biological individual.
Rather this unity results from the ability to identify all the "I's"
in the textual modal frame. [1]

It is a text directed to one reader. That reader does not have
to be one person, it is rather one type of knowledge. As we
shall see, more than just linguistic knowledge is required. Thus,
this reader can be a small group of specialists; or a large one,
such as an entire generation using the same language; or even
larger, such as an entire nation.

Finally, the unity most difficult to formulate: it is a text built
so that the meaning of all the sentences it contains, in the end

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[1] The term "modal framework" is taken from A. Wierzbicka. It is close
in meaning to B. Russel's propositional attitude and refers to the fact that
each sentence implicitly contains the speaker's attitude to the statement, which
could be formulated "You should know that," "I want you to know," "I feel
that"; cf. A. Wierzbicka, *Dociekania semantyczne (Semantic Inquiries)*, Wrocław
1969.

produce a description of one object, a story about one object, or an argument supporting one thesis. This can be as complicated as you wish — the appearance of a microbe or the relationships within a modern society; the life story of a moth or the history of the world; an argument proving that the sum of a triangle's angles is 180° or that the statement that what is good is beautiful and vice versa is false. Clearly, this formula is far from being unequivocal; however, I think that it can be a plane for initial mutual understanding.

The object of my observations will be multi-sentence, written texts[2] belonging to narrative or expository writing, texts that their authors usually intended to be coherent. The mechanisms of coherence in spoken texts need special documentation (recording of voices and films illustrating situations and human behavior in communicating with one another) and analysis of intonation and paralinguistic resources. At present I have neither the documentation nor the analysis.

It is not always so simple to grasp uniformly the coherence of a multiple-sentence text. The experiences of the reader of both the newest and earlier literature include situations in which we say that we do not understand a text because we are unable to detect a relation between the successive sentences. We are unable to see how the sentences cocreate one object. Grasping the coherence of a text is one of the conditions for understanding a text, a necessary though not sufficient condition.

I accept as undoubted the premises I. Bellert introduced in her paper presented at the international semiotic seminar in Warsaw in August 1968: 1) the author constructing a text assumes that the reader understands the language and knows its grammatical rules; the reader usually assumes the text is coherent and formulated

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[2] By multi-sentence texts one usually means texts divided by periods. I am, however, convinced that the significance of textual coherence cannot be measured only by describing the relationships between such units, usually known as sentences, understood as a sequence of words from period to period. Even within such a simple construction as a subject and predicate, there may be or may not be coherence. Many analyses, especially of conjunctions, show that the location of a period can be misleading as regards coherence. Nevertheless, in speaking of coherence of multi-sentence text, I have taken such texts with this form into account. I have mentioned this inconsistency without attempting to explain it.

in accordance with the well-defined rules of a language; 2) grasping the coherence of a text besides a common language also requires a certain knowledge of the world not encompassed by knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

The character and level of knowledge required to grasp the coherence of different texts can vary greatly. Here I consider the problem of ordering the degrees of difficulty in detecting the coherence mechanisms in various texts to be the essential one. If it is possible, ordering the degrees of difficulty could be crucial in pedagogy, social and academic. I would like to define the conditions a reader must meet in order to grasp the coherence mechanisms in various types of texts.

The problem of textual coherence, the character of the coherence mechanisms both used and avoided is one of undoubted importance for descriptive and historical poetics. My reflections, which must touch upon this problem, are conducted from another point of view, from that of the sociology of the reader.

In order to detect at least the most essential questions connected with the coherence of multiple-sentence texts, it would be necessary to analyze selected texts in their entirety. At present, however, such analyses are not possible both because of their length and the sea of problems that would have to be considered in even the most tentative, exploratory ones such as the one we propose.

Texts are usually divided into parts. Authors divide them into books, chapters, paragraphs, strophes. We will conduct our analysis within the confines of two paragraphs, or even more frequently within those of one paragraph.

We can assume in advance that the coherence will be most easily grasped in texts intended for a very broad audience, such as the readers of the daily press, or for non-adult readers. We will attempt then to show the most common schemes of textual coherence, analyzing the text of a news-agency report and a text from a textbook intended for fifteen-year-olds. In analyzing the agency report we will use the method proposed by Mathesius.[3]

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[3] V. Mathesius, "O tak zwanym aktualnym rozczłonkowaniu zdania" (On the So-called Functional Sentence Perspective), [in:] *O spójności tekstu*, ed. by M. R. Mayenowa, Wrocław 1971 (further OSP).

We quote the text of the Polish Press Agency report of 24 July 1969 that *Trybuna Ludu* titled "Meeting of the Leaders of the USSR and CSSR in Warsaw."

On the 23rd a friendly meeting of the party and state leaders of the Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, who were participating in the 25th anniversary celebration of People's Poland, took place in Warsaw.

Participating in the meeting were the General-Secretary of the CC of the CPSU Leonid Brezhnev, the President of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Nikolai Podgorny, the President of the CSSR Ludvik Svoboda and the First Secretary of the CC of the KPC Gustav Husak.

The participants in the meeting exchanged views on the current problems in the further development of friendly relations between the CPSU and the KPC and between the Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The conversations of the Soviet and Czechoslovakian leaders were conducted in an atmosphere of sincerity and fraternal friendship.   .

The first sentence verbalizes the situation for all of the following sentences of the three small paragraphs. Specifically, it establishes that a meeting of the party and state leaders of the USSR and CSSR took place. The second sentence picks up the information about the meeting as a known action and details the names of the participants, and it repeats the word "meeting." The third sentence turns to the formula "the participants in the meeting," which is a paraphrase of the formula in the second sentence "participating in the meeting" and which the reader can replace with the names. The third sentence also introduces new information about the exchange of views on the problems in the further development in friendly relations. The last sentence repeats the information about the exchange of views and adds to it new information about the atmosphere in which the meeting was held. The repetition contained in the final sentence is not a formal repetition. The final sentence substitutes the word "conversations" for "exchanged views." Everyone who knows the language sufficiently well, every Pole who completed elementary school, possesses the vocabulary to recognize the expression "exchanged views" as a synonym for "conversations."

The text then is built as a series of sentences, each of which repeats part of the information introduced by the previous sentence and adds new information to it. The repetition of the information is either an exact repetition of words previously used or a simple

transformation of previously used expressions, or substitution of a synonym. To establish that the information introduced is repeated, only one, at most, analytic operation must be made. I regard paraphrase as such an operation: "exchange of views" = "conversation"; "participating in the meeting" = "the participants in the meeting," etc.

We will now quote another fragment intended for a definite reader. The text is taken from a history textbook for the first-year class of a general secondary school.[4] The section is titled "Egyptian Agriculture."

> The chief occupation of the Egyptian people was cultivating the land. Farmers constituted the majority of the society. But the land they worked did not belong to them. Initially, the owner of all the land in the state was the king. Each year the farmers paid rent for the right to work the royal lands. The king also rewarded the secular court dignitaries, priests, and warriors with large grants of land. The farmers working on these lands, besides paying the taxes due the king, also paid tribute to their landlord.

> The Egyptian farmer worked very hard. In order to protect the agricultural land from the desert from which the land had been taken he had to lug thousands of buckets of water to the higher fields. In the subequatorial heat he ploughed the soil with a wooden plough. The royal administrators' orders also dragged him to maintenance work; cleaning canals and reinforcing dams. During the months when the Nile flooded, on the other hand, the farmers were driven to other work, such as building roads, royal palaces, temples.

In Polish the word "farmers," appearing at the beginning of the second sentence, means "people who cultivate the land." In fact, not only the relationship between the expression "work the land" in the first sentence and the word "farmers" in the second establishes the connection between these two sentences; the entire second sentence is an explication of the first. Saying that something is the chief occupation of the people means at least in part that the majority of the people does precisely that something. The manner in which the third sentence is joined to the previous ones is interesting. The point is not only that the phrase "working the land" in the third sentence is a transformation of "cultivating the land" of the first sentence, and semantically a part of the meaning of the word "farmer" in the second sentence, or that the double

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[4] J. Dowiat, *Historia. Podręcznik dla kl. I liceów ogólnokształcących*, Warszawa 1962.

repetition of the personal pronoun (they, them) refers to the farmers of the previous sentence, but what the conjunction "but" beginning the third sentence provides. Following Jadwiga Wajszczuk's suggestion, I believe that this conjunction is an abbreviation for a text such as "Given the first two sentences, you might think that the land belonged to the farmers. You should not think it belonged to them. You should know it did not." In this manner, the third sentence is joined to the previous text.[5]

It is a simple matter to show how the following sentences of the paragraph are joined together and how the joining results from elementary knowledge of the language and the ability to paraphrase, "the lord of the lands was the king," "royal lands," etc.

The situation is somewhat different in the second paragraph, which is based primarily on elementary knowledge of the actual living conditions. The paragraph constitutes a coherent whole, for all of the sentences after the first one detail the farmers' work, which can be considered hard. The coherence created by the purely linguistic dimensions (the hidden subject "farmer" represented by the verb endings in the second and third sentences and the pronoun of the fourth) is not sufficient to make the paragraph coherent.

According to I. Bellert's thesis which we have adopted, if the activities described in the second, third, fourth, and fifth sentences of the second paragraph were completely unknown to the reader, the reader expecting the text in hand to be coherent could acknowledge *a priori* that the activities described are hard work. If the reader knew the activities described, however, and if by chance he knew that they were easy, he would have to acknowledge the paragraph as incoherent. Imagine that after the first sentence the text continued "in the evening hours when the sun's heat abated, the farmers played football in the cool evening air." Then, despite the repetition of "farmers," the text would cease to be coherent. The relationships between the second, third, fourth, etc., sentences and the first sentence of the paragraph is not explicit in any part of the text, and could be expressed by phrases such as "namely," "for example," even a colon would suffice.

[5] Cf. J. Wajszczuk, "Przeciwstawienie jako struktura właściwa szerokim kontekstom" (An Opposition as a Structure Proper to Broad Contexts), [in:] OSP.

If we undertook a detailed analysis of the words in the second paragraph of our textbook, we would find indicators in the semantics of the individual words that would lead us to think that the labors enumerated are regarded by the author as hard. The phrases "taken from the desert" means "taken by force," not necessarily with effort, but frequently with effort. All the more so since the taking is from the desert. The word "lug" speaks of moving from place to place with effort. One does not say a person lugs a fly; he lugs a heavy load. But the semantic equivalents of the word "heavy," "hard work" do not appear in all of the sentences of the text. They are only an addition.

Analysis shows that a text does not have to use all the resources for achieving coherence. Our paragraph could easily exploit explicit methods of indicating the connections between the first sentence and each successive sentence. It did not do this in the proper belief that the reader's elementary knowledge of the world would permit him to fill in the gaps. Our text could substitute the phrase "desert partially changed into fertile fields" for "taken from the desert" or "carry" for "lug" and one could still expect easy comprehension of the coherence of the paragraph under analysis.

Now we move to texts addressed to adult readers who have at least an average education. We will discuss a special type of text, an essay:

Lascaux does not appear on any official map. One could say that it does not exist in the same sense as London or Radom do. One would have to ask in the Paris museum of man to find out where it actually is.

I went there in early spring. The valley of the Vezere was just awakening in its fresh, unfinished greenery. Fragments of the landscape seen from the window of my bus suggested a canvas by Bissière. A web of sensitive green.

Montignac. A village where there is nothing more to see than a memorial tablet honoring a deserving midwife.

"Ici vécu Madame..."[6]

The first paragraph does not differ from the previously analyzed ones as regards coherence mechanisms. The first two sentences of the second paragraph are coherent if we make an addition, inserting between the second and third sentences "the road ran through the valley of the Vezere." If our knowledge of the world

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[6] Z. Herbert, *Barbarzyńca w ogrodzie* (*The Barbarian in the Garden*), Warszawa 1962.

does not contradict this statement, then this addition is relatively simple. The next sentence, "Fragments of the landscape" is joined to the previous one in two directions. The fresh, unfinished greenery mentioned previously is a part of the "fragments of the landscape." But it is not so simple to place an equivalence sign between these two phrases. The explication of the meaning "fresh, unfinished greenery" does not necessarily contain anything of the meaning of the "fragments of the landscape." Whether we relate the phrase "fragments of the landscape" to greenery or to "the valley of the Vezere," the phrases have different levels of generality. If someone demanded an explanation of what "landscape" means, we would say that landscape is a part of the outside world not enclosed by a structure, a part that a person can encompass at a glance. "Landscape" can be opposed to what we see in a house or courtyard. "Greenery" seen from the bus window = "plants," can be opposed to buildings, people, animals. "Landscape" is, thus, a different degree of generalization than "greenery." The connection between the two phrases is that one can be an interpretation of the other. "I see greenery" can be replaced by "I see a plant landscape."

Proceeding in the other direction, not backwards but forwards through the text, we learn something about the writer's situation. The writer is in a bus and sees fragments of the valley of the Vezere. The continuation of the text requires reconstruction of such a situation: "the route to Lascaux runs through the village Montignac"; the bus stops, he gets off, and notices the only interesting trait of the village, a memorial tablet honoring a midwife; all this must be added to make the text explicitly coherent. The last sentence of the second paragraph can be treated as a coherent section of the text only if the reader knows the description of pictures that frequently use such metaphorical formulas as "A web of sensitive green." Only such stylistic experience allows one to relate the elliptic and metaphorical formula to the phrase "a canvas by Bissière" in the previous sentence and thus to the fragments of the landscape seen from the bus window on the way to Lascaux.

If we do not know Brissière's canvas, we are prepared to conclude from the text whose coherence we have assumed that

he painted landscapes. Relating the phrase "the web of sensitive green" to Brissière's canvas, however, requires a particular cultural baggage, in particular a knowledge of the styles for describing art works. That knowledge could be replaced in part by knowledge of the reality; of Brissière's paintings. In either case we must go beyond a basic knowledge of the language or elementary knowledge of the situation under analysis. The entire text consciously erases the link between the individual sentences, eliminates repetition of words that could appear as simple repetitions on the surface or as semantic ones, such as "drive" and "road." It counts on the reader's energy and ability.

Now another fragment from an essay:

Richard III foretells *Hamlet. Richard II* is a tragedy of comprehension. The king whose crown is knocked from his head for a moment before being thrown into the abyss achieves the greatness of King Lear. For *King Lear* like *Hamlet* is also the tragedy of Shakespeare's contemporary, the political tragedy of Renaissance humanism. A tragedy in which the world has its illusions removed. King Lear slowly descends the great stairs, one step at a time, to total comprehension of the cruelty of the world he had ruled but did not know, to drink the cup of bitterness dry. Richard II is brutally, sharply pushed into the abyss. But the foundation of the entire feudal world collapsed with him. Not just Richard was dethroned. The sun also ceased to orbit around the earth.

Note the basic asyndetic character of the short sentences in the text. In only two cases do conjunctions appear that could indicate the relationships between the sentences (for, but). How can a relationship between the first and second sentences be established? Knowledge of the entire chapter, to which the paragraph belongs (it appears on the tenth page of the chapter) does not aid in finding these connections. The first sentence seems to be a reminder and a summation of what has been said about Richard III, and it is not directly connected to the sentence about Richard II. Certainly, the sentence can be understood as a part of a whole about Shakespeare's histories. The second is connected to the third only by the equivalence "the king" = Richard II, but the sentence does not develop the predicate of the previous one. The "for" beginning the fourth sentence is enigmatic; it requires some addition to the text which is not implied unequivocally. The connection between the sentence beginning with "for" and the previous one, which is made evident in a formally comprehensible manner, is

the same as the relation between the second and third sentences: "... achieves the greatness of King Lear. For *King Lear* [the work, whose hero is King Lear] like *Hamlet*..."; but this sentence does not develop anything said previously about King Lear in any obvious manner. We cannot say what the relationship is between the phrase "the greatness of King Lear" and the expression "tragedy of Shakespeare's contemporary" or "the political tragedy of Renaissance humanism," or "the tragedy in which the world has its illusions removed." The last phrase can be interpreted as follows: "the world that has its illusions removed" = "the world as it is," "the world comprehended"; in this manner it can be indirectly connected with the sentence "*Richard II* is a tragedy of comprehension." The sentence beginning "King Lear slowly" expands the previous one and makes it concrete. It contains new information about the slowness of comprehension, which takes place in King Lear. Thus, the next sentence is connected with it by opposition (in this regard). The conjunction "but" at the beginning of the following sentence requires that the order of sentences be changed: "Perhaps you think that only Richard was dethroned. You should know that the sun ceased to orbit around the earth, that together with him the foundation of the feudal world collapsed." Yet such reordering that fills out the meaning of the conjunction "but" is possible only if the reader knows – or the text being analyzed has informed him – that the thesis that the sun orbits the earth is in some way connected with the existence of the feudal order.

The essay presented here requires great effort on the reader's part. The coherence mechanisms develop, at least in part, not in the natural order of reading but backwards – from the end to the beginning. The reader must complete a series of operations in order to establish the connections between the sentences, and these operations do not fall within the realm of simple linguistic knowledge. They require a particular cultural baggage that enables the reader to connect the sun's orbit with the feudal order.

The sentence sequence can be such that it misleads the reader:

Cleopatra can remain with Anthony. But Cleopatra loves Anthony, who is one of the pillars of the world, who is an unvanquished leader. Anthony who has lost, and been defeated is not Anthony.

Before we read the third sentence we cannot understand the connection between the first and the second. Only in the third sentence do we learn that the second should read: "But Cleopatra loves only the Anthony who is one of the pillars," or more explicitly: "But Cleopatra will not remain with Anthony, because she loves only the Anthony who is..."

The are an infinite number of examples of essay texts that avoid explicit coherence mechanisms. We cite just one more:

The world is small, for you cannot run away from it. The world is small, for an accident, an obliging hand, a quick blow suffice to become number one. There are three who have divided the world among themselves. The fourth wanted to resist them; he has already humbled himself. He gives a banquet, invites the triumvirate to his galley. They drink. First Lepidus becomes drunk. He collapses on the deck. The servant throws him over his shoulder and carries away a pillar of the world.[7]

Let us characterize how the coherence ᵕ mechanisms in our example are camouflaged. The successive "fors" in the text have exactly the same function as the one analyzed by A. Wierzbicka.[8] The full meaning of these "fors" can be expressed by the following; "I can say the world is small, for I know that you cannot run away from it. I can say the world is small, for you can conquer it. I can say the world is small for I know that... suffices to become number one." From the sentence "there are three" to the phrase "invites the triumvirate" the text is a puzzle unconnected to the previous sentences about the world. If the reader knows the history of Anthony's time, he can foresee the solution. The pillar of the world thrown over the servant's shoulder, Lepidus, appears in a construction similar to the syllable that eats books.[9] "Pillar of the world" can only be used as a quotation here. And what is the connection between the sentences about the world and the history of the banquet on Pompei's galley?

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[7] The ambiguity of the word "world" in the fragment under analysis is a separate problem, also one of coherence, that I am leaving aside for the moment.

[8] Cf. A. Wierzbicka, "Metatekst w tekście" (Metatext in Text), [in:] OSP.

[9] I am referring here to the early, probably Medieval, example of logicians who warned against treating expressions from the language of things and expressions from metalanguage (expressions of normal supposition and material supposition) on the same level.

So far a perceptive reader can see the elimination of Lepidus
as a concrete example, supporting the logic of the third sentence
(Lepidus' quick reaction to the wine consumed is an accident).
Uncovering the full connection between the sentences about the
world and the report of concrete events is left to the reader's
energy, historical and literary knowledge. The sentences establish
a general truth. One must sort through those about particular
events and persons to make declarative sentences. X wanted to,
but did not run away from the world; Y conquered the world;
Z became number one with the aid of a quick blow...

Camouflaging the coherence mechanisms is a principle of the
essay, which in many respects is close to poetic language. But
we are not concerned with that aspect of the problem. We would
like to use the analyses given so far for two purposes.

1. We would like to summarize these analyses as follows.

Coherence mechanisms have a varying character; they are more
or less apparent on the surface, more or less hidden.

They can require more or less activity from the reader.

They can demand varied types of knowledge to complete the
gaps and expose the coherence.

The degree of effort required to comprehend the text as a coherent
whole can be measured, and the character of the knowledge required
can be defined.

I regard elementary language knowledge as the most common.
The least common is knowledge of art works that are not the
direct object of the text, of philosophical systems, and stylistic
forms in which those works are expressed.

I would grade the energy required in comprehending a text
according to two criteria. The energy decreases as the text introduces
explicit, surface coherence mechanisms, correctly orienting the reader
in the given text's semantic relations. The energy decreases as the
reader has to perform fewer operations to expose the coherence
mechanisms. By these operations I mean explication of the meaning
of words, filling in missing elements of the text, verbalizing presupposi-
tions, restructuring the sentence order, etc.

2. The second item that I would like to discuss is connected
with restructuring the sentence order.

No lengthy text can be built as a chain of sentences even

approximately connected by equivalences between its datum and novum. The simplest texts outline a basic situation which the succeeding sentences develop, introducing freely and without reservation new elements that fit into the outlined situation in accord with our knowledge of the world. Imagine someone building this text:

In July of last year one beautiful afternoon, I drove to village X in an open car. The Linden trees gave off a particularly powerful scent after the rain.

We have no difficulty reconstructing the text's coherence by interpolating the information: "The road on which I was driving was lined with Linden trees," or similar information placing Linden trees near the road. The ease of the addition here is connected with popular knowledge of the reality of the geographical area, culture, etc., and it frequently establishes the feeling of community and understanding among people.

Imagine such a text:

One July afternoon in a country garden, the buzzing of bees broke the silence. A breeze bent the grass, mixing the shades of green. The birds fell silent. Zinias stood straight in the fiery varied colors of red.

The coherence of this text, like that of the one about the Egyptian farmers, does not depend on a chain of partial repetition of information. The coherence of the description inheres in the object named in the first sentence. Imagine the same text, but with the first sentence now last. Or imagine it without the first sentence, which is the guarantor of the coherence of the other sentences, since it presents the whole, whose parts the following sentences describe.

The first case, in which the integrating sentence describing the global situation is at the beginning, is the least demanding on the reader. The second case is the most provocative to the reader. The third case, when there is no integrating sentence, is the most difficult. The reader himself must create the superposed object whose parts are presented in the sequence of sentences. [10]

Imagine such a text:

Just any moment now.

She does not carry a scythe; she does not grin showing her yellow teeth; she does not rattle her bleached bones at the door. She is inside; she grows

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[10] Here I am following A. Wierzbicka, "O spójności tekstu" (On Textual Coherence), [in:] *Prace z poetyki*, Wrocław 1968. The third case is one in which the "pastoral scene" must be deduced.

inside me like a child in its mother, she fills me and passes beyond me; she
is I.

How well you look today, Mikhal Evgrafovich, my congratulations.

In the next room, the salon, the cavalrymen flirt with their hips. On the
piano they are playing a song: Hey, ho, where were you, on Fontanka drinking
vodka, drinking vodka, drinking vodka, drinking vodka, drinking vodka. [11]

Ignoring the fact that we have the beginning of a novel
before us, let us treat the text as a written one and apply the
same method of interpreting it as a coherent text we applied
to the history-textbook example.

Imagine we know neither the author nor the circumstances in
which it was written, nor the function it was to serve. Can we
perform the permissible transformations and interpolations to inter-
pret it as a coherent text? And if so, how?

Proceeding from the beginning, the sentences constituting the
second paragraph are the simplest. The pronoun "she" can be
replaced by the word "death." The basis of this substitution is
the widely known fact that death carries a scythe, grins showing
its yellow teeth and rattles its bleached bones. This knowledge
is documented in folklore, church art, and popular sayings and
emblems.

Now let us rewrite the text substituting for the pronoun the
only word which we could identify on the basis of the predicates.

"Just any moment now."

"Death does not carry a scythe;... Death grows inside" etc.

The effort to restructure our text into a coherent one leads
to another addition in the first sentence. "Just any moment now
death will come" or "Just any moment now I will die."

The next paragraph beginning with the words "How well"
brings us up short. Who is speaking? Is it the same person
who said, "Just any moment now"? What is the relationship
between this sentence and the previous and following ones? The
polite formula in this sentence cannot be interpreted as a fragment
of a coherent text in which someone relates the approach of

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[11] W. Woroszylski, *Sny pod śniegiem* (*Dreams under Snow*), Warszawa
1963. The quotation is the beginning of the novel. I realize the title of the
novel is an interesting aspect of the beginning of it for my problem. I will,
however, avoid this issue.

his own death. We cannot conclude that the same person ut-
tered both paragraphs. We cannot show any repetition of previous
information supplemented with new information in our polite
formula. We cannot disclose the textual coherence. The text in
this form, even with the best of intentions and even some know-
ledge on the part of the reader, is incoherent. No solid whole
can be woven from the immediately written meanings.

Suppose we know that it is the beginning of a letter from
a person whom we left not long ago in good health and spirits.
The incoherent letter would frighten us. We would treat the text
as an index unintentionally informing us of the writer's condition.

This information, unintentionally conveyed to us by the author
through our interpretation of the text, could be very important
to us. But it would be indirect information, neither fulfilling the
direct intent to communicate nor constituting the proper subject
of the message as intended by the writer. The text does not
contain the intended information: "I feel that I am dying, and I
am incapable of writing a coherent text." It contains only the
first part of our information. The text allowed us to formulate
an hypothesis about the condition and psychological state of the
writer. The basis for such an hypothesis was only partially provided
by our transformation of the first two paragraphs; the basis was
above all our observation of the text's structure, its deviation,
its incoherence.

The first sentence of the text is deviant, if we wish to treat
it as the first sentence that is supposed to inform us about some
state of which we can neither know nor guess anything. The
first sentence is deviant because it is elliptic. The continuation,
as we know, is incoherent. The basis of our fright is primarily
then our observation of the structure itself and our knowledge
of what can cause psychological states that make us incapable
of creating coherent texts.

It is not necessarily so, and perhaps in our case this is not
so that the immediate content of the sentences has no meaning
in reconstructing the speaker's condition and state. But the structure
itself is at least equally important. Perhaps among all the possible
interpretations of the speaker's condition, we would not select
the one explicitly expressed: death is in me. Perhaps we would

choose another, one indicating mental instability. The third and
fourth paragraphs could lead us in this direction, especially if
we used not academic knowledge, but common sense, which assumes
that in a dying person there is no ability to construct such
lengthy sentences.

Now suppose the text is the beginning of a novel, a fragment
of a text whose coherence is assumed *a priori* and in which
all of the information is intentional. It is intended not by its
hypothetical hero Mikhal Evgrafovich but by its author, who writes
the words of the hero, including the information that from the hero's
point of view could not be intended. The text has been placed
in quotation marks. [12] Within quotation marks, the text becomes
an iconic sign, a portrait of something which we must discover.
If the semantic structure of the text was revealed explicitly, the
iconic sign (the part of the text in quotation marks) would have
been preceded by an explanatory sentence and a colon. The text
would read: "through the consciousness of a dying man passed
the following thoughts; 'Just any moment now...'" This version
would not free the reader who wishes to extract the maximum
amount of information from the text in quotation marks, from
making his own efforts at interpretation, but it would facilitate
his first, most difficult step and provide him with guidance in
understanding the incoherent fragment of text in quotation marks.
Such an explicit version of the text provides the essential framework
of the situation into which the text in quotation marks leads
us. Such explicit versions are natural introductions to cues for
the heroes of classical novels, whose texts include a series of
fragments in quotation marks.

All of the indirect information in the text within quotation
marks belongs to the literary text, and the information is in-
tended by the author. But it is not intended from the point of view of
the fictional hero or narrator. The reader must uncover it using

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[12] Words in quotation marks are discussed in my articles "Les Expressions
guillemetées," [in:] *To Honor Roman Jakobson*, Mouton, 1968, and "O różnicy
między pojęciem znaczenia a informacją" (On the Difference between the Conception
of Meaning and Information) in the book to honor Prof. Czeżowski, Warszawa
1969.

his knowledge. [13] The shape which the reader gives the information, can lead to the creation of a coherent text, one completely different from the initial text.

Before turning to the knowledge that can be formulated on the basis of the beginning of the novel quoted above, we should ask what is needed to formulate the essential introductory sentence: "through the consciousness... thoughts." It might seem that it was elementary knowledge, derived from psychology or from life itself, that the ability to formulate coherent texts during a fatal illness disintegrates. Yet we saw above that this elementary knowledge could lead to another version explaining the quoted text. Moreover, life itself should warn us against such introductory sentences as the one we have proposed, which the remainder of the text conforms. In order to begin with this introductory statement, we must adopt the convention that there is an apparatus registering conscious thought, and it is a convention to which art has accustomed us. Life does not provide such experiences.

Thus it is not experience from life but linguistic-reading experience which moves to the fore. The reader of novels is accustomed to receiving signals indicating that the sentences he would have to treat as deviant if he wished to assign them the function of conveying information about an objective world should be understood as a signal forcing him to interpret those sentences as the thoughts of the speaker.

A. Wierzbicka's article mentioned above discusses the linguistic means that clearly indicate the presence of fragments of a text containing information to which the new information refers. These linguistic devices cannot appear at the beginning of a text. If we read, "Again the rabbit blinked," we should find earlier in the text information that the rabbit blinked. If, however, a contemporary novel deviates and begins with a phrase containing "again," usually it is a signal that the repetition of the event occurs in someone's consciousness.

The contemporary novel has accustomed us to such deviant

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[13] I will not discuss how knowledge from daily life is intertwined with imagination. We rather imagine than know what happens in the mind of a dying man.

beginnings that in themselves signal to us the direction for our inquiries into the introduction of the phrase in quotation marks.

From the point of view of the contents of the sentences enclosed in quotation marks, the text is incoherent. As a quoted expression, it constitutes a specific entity, which some would like to compare to the unity of a material object. The information surrounding the text is a metalinguistic information. Among other things, it says that the verbalized thoughts of a dying man have this form.

What information does our text in quotation marks provide or what assumptions based on it are we willing to make? Someone is dying and senses his approaching death. Perhaps he is Mikhaj Evgrafovich or he heard or remembers he was called that. He is a Russian or lives within the Russian cultural sphere. Probably he is a nobleman or bureaucrat. The action probably takes place in a city in Czarist Russia. In the salon there are guests; some of whom are cavalrymen. He imagines how they are behaving, how they are flirting with the women. The games are shallow. He looks down on those enjoying themselves in the salon. The trivial melody irritates him. He has not enough strength or desire to formulate his perceptions. Perhaps, the duplicity of the polite formula angers him.

Further, if the text is the beginning of a novel, a contemporary one, perhaps the author wanted us to experience the duplicity and shallowness of the polite formula in relation to the hero's actual condition.

The first sentence-information complex easily becomes coherent, just like the Egyptian farmer text. We are dealing with sentences, symbols of situations, judgments. The text, however, is a result of our activity. The author gave us another, different text.

To locate a starting point in this series of sentences for constructing a coherent text, we must recognize the series as a whole in the sense that it expresses one consciousness during one time period. This recognition is equivalent to enclosing the sentences in quotation marks and preceding them with an introductory statement saying they belong to one definite consciousness.

One can imagine a text in quotation marks whose immediate layer of meaning is coherent. There are many such texts in

19th-century novels and also in great novels of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the text must implicitly contain information that it is the work of one consciousness in one time period, and a sensitive reader must know how to add an introductory sentence with a colon.

Today it is a truism that a first-degree "translation" of an incoherent text into a coherent one does not contain the same information as the original. In producing the explicitly formulated information we lose something essential, primarily the information that a direct model of the processes of consciousness has such a form. Any yet whenever we encounter a text that we want to treat as an iconic sign of some reality, we make such a first-degree translation, at least in part, if we comprehend the text. Such translations are an integral part of comprehension. The basic step is the formulation of an introductory sentence. Literature that does without such sentences creates serious difficulties for the reader, for it requires from him deep knowledge of literary conventions.

A coherent text is the product of the reader's intellectual activity focused on the information object as the result of a completed cognitive process. The information object is cleansed of the very model of the cognitive process. The more a text attempts to model the cognitive process, the less coherent it is.

Transl. by *Jan Patrick Lee*