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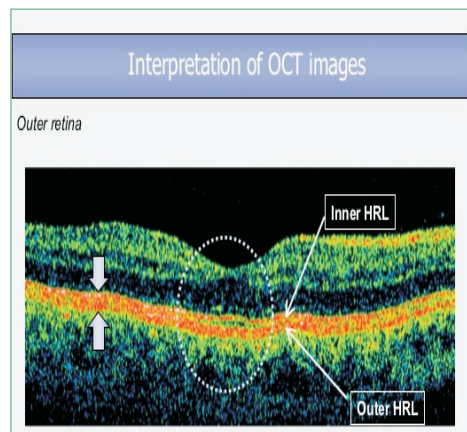
DIFFICULTIES OF INTERPRETING COHERENCE IN DIALOGUES/TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Coherence is the state of cohering. A logical, orderly and consistent relation of parts (of a paragraph). It refers to the relation between an element in the text and an element either inside it or outside. Coherence has implicit semantic connections between and



across sentences, utterances, paragraphs or even chapters. Coherence in short, is a relation determined by the situation, connecting with the interpretative contexts of texts.

KEYWORDS :across sentences, Dialogues/Texts, Interpreting Coherence.

INTRODUCTION

Eija Ventola in her paper "Semiotic Spanning At Conferences : Cohesion and Coherence in and Across Conference Papers and Their Discussions (1) says, " Coherence can very briefly be said to be about the relationship the text has to its context of situation. " she opines that if one has difficulty in really appreciating the meaning of a passage, then it means breaches in contextual coherence have crept up.

Haliday and Hassan [1976: 23] elucidate further on coherence. They say that, "Texture involves more than the presence of semantic relations of the kind we refer to as cohesive, the dependence of an element on another for its interpretation. It involves also some degree of coherence in the actual meanings expressed, not only or even mainly in the content but in the total selection from the semantic resources of the language. This includes the various interpersonal [social-expressive-connotative] components such as, the moods, modalities, intensities and other forms of the speaker's intrusion into the speech situation. A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards, it is

coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive.

Hence contextual coherence in the communicative activities explains how the parts of a text which lexicogrammatically may be different, can in fact be seen to be 'connected'. In order for our coherence to be perfect, we have to also concentrate on interpersonal components of the text and not just [the semantic and linguistic elements] the content.

Non verbal behavior may also come under this category. Observing non-verbal actions/behavior may enhance our coherence of a given situation. But most important of all a text may fail to be coherent if there is no continuity of meaning in relation to the situation. In order to make a correct assessment of whether an extract, a paragraph, is coherent or not, we have to take into account the relevant contextual features of that extract or paragraph. An amusing but incoherent sequence is presented here, from an office conversation.

Boss: This deal is crucial for us. In fact our company's fortune depends on it. You have to see it through.

Employee: When did your pet die, Sir?

Here the employee is completely incoherent of the seriousness of the situation and his responsibility, as evidenced from his reply to the boss. Similarly many of us may discard some of the mathematical questions as incoherent or non-sensical in a class room situation, but what to make of such absurd questions as, "There are two-hundred sheep and fifty goats in your stable, how old is your mother in law doing?"

Coherence is about connectivity among the sentences and clauses of a paragraph. By 'connected' we mean the flowing of one sentence into another naturally and logically which makes it coherent and easy to grasp. The 'flowing' of sentences into one another should seem natural and not superficial. W. Bublitz in "Tropica Coherence in Spoken Discourse-Studia Anglica Posnaniensia" [1989: 22: 31-51] states that for the ascription of coherence to an utterance, to be confirmed, has to match with subsequent data from the same speaker. In simpler words, confirmation of the information given previously, is to be found in the subsequent sentences, one after another. Turns have to be integrated firmly in order to achieve coherence. An integrated or internal understanding should stick between the sentences like a glue working efficiently to make them stronger in combination.

When contextual coherence is added to a given turn/dialogue/paragraph, the text becomes clearer and vagueness disappears. This way coherence becomes more accomplished. "Beware of Dogs" this sign board perhaps needs no context and is certainly not vague but look at this headline, "The left will never be right." A political leader said.

Obviously this statement is demanding on the coherence of its interpreter.

The way in which a message gets interpreted is also important. That is to say, how the listener interprets a statement is crucial for the correct understanding of a given statement. For this apart from the contextual information, previous knowledge of the reader/interpreter, his assumptions and non verbal behavior of the speaker affects his interpretation of the situation given in the statement. The coherence of a statement like, "I hear cricket everywhere." Depends on whether isotopy (a repetition of a basic meaning trait (seme); such repetition, establishing some level of familiarity within the story, allows for a uniform reading/interpretation of it) of sports or insect is being used. But if we have to take into account the context, things can become clearer. Naturally, if the sentence is being spoken in a dark jungle, then perceptibly the reference is to the leaping insect, who makes irritating continuous sounds. If it is spoken in a sports ground, or say, near a TV set [that is telecasting the game] then it's not difficult

to guess, what is being expressed, is related to a kind of very popular sports.

Coherence can go wrong because of the wrong and hasty assumption of the interpreter. A man who overhears his friend hurrying home, because of illness of Rosy, may assume that she must be his wife. But the interpreter is later surprised to hear Rosy stealing food from neighbors, as it turns out later Rosy is the name of his friend's pet cat. Interpreting a given statement can be a tricky business in certain situations like this one. People are conditioned to interpret a certain word or sentence as per the common general understanding or a set notion that their mind has accepted. This leads to misinterpretation. Hence as soon as one hears his or her friend hurrying home for someone's illness, it is generally assumed that it must be a family member. But later on it's discovered that the situation was totally different. Given the scenario, it is not easy for us to accept that somebody can be so thoughtful so as to get home early only to take care of his or her pet.

Coherence is all about making sense of the text. Now it is an open ended process. An interpreter is entitled to make his or her own meaning out of a given utterance. One is free to make his or her own sense of the same text, that might be entirely different from each other. This [interpreting the text] he or she does depending on his /her previous knowledge, his /her personal assumptions or his/her special understanding of the passage. For achieving perfect coherence, one that is intended by the speaker, the listener or interpreter should take into account all the relevant factors into account and should not rely only on a literal interpretation of a given statement, utterance or text, before reaching the final and intended coherence.

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