ELSEVIER

journal of PRAGMATICS

Book review

Collaborating towards Coherence: Lexical Cohesion in English Discourse
Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen, John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2006, 192 pp., $158

Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen's book targets the relationship between some contextual conditions and lexical cohesion. It aims at developing a comprehensive model for analyzing lexical cohesion in texts with variable nature, and to find out if and how the use of cohesive ties varies depending on the conditions under which the texts have been produced. The study fills two gaps in cohesion research. First, studies comparing cohesion across several types of discourse have been scarce. In contrast, the material used in this study consists of four different groups of texts: face-to-face conversation, prepared speech (radio talk and lectures), electronic (e-mail mailing list) language, and academic writing. Second, many earlier studies have covered only a part of lexical cohesion, or have alternatively become extremely complicated by trying to describe all the possible cohesive relations in a detailed way. The current study optimizes the model of cohesion by accounting for all the different relationships but grouping them into larger categories. The two basic categories are called *reiteration* and *collocation*, defined already in Halliday and Hasan (1976). Reiteration involves repetition of a lexical item, either in identical or modified form, and collocation is an associative meaning relationship between regularly co-occurring lexical items. The latter is more intuitive and dependent on intersubjective understandings, but as the author aims at comprehensiveness, she also ventures into this less explored area. The more specific research questions posed in the book concern the overall classification of lexical relations for the study of cohesion, the differences in the use of different kinds of cohesion, the import of communicative conditions under which the texts were produced, and the role of cohesion in the communication process.

The book has a clear and pedagogical structure. It starts out by defining the aims of the study and distinguishing between the most relevant terms, *cohesion* vs. *coherence*. *Cohesion* refers to the grammatical and lexical elements on the surface of a text which can form connections between parts of the text. *Coherence*, on the other hand, is an outcome of a dialogue between the text and its listener or reader. Some texts are coherent for a particular listener/reader and not for others. Cohesion is one of the ways of signaling coherence. The relationship between the two concepts is explored in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 starts with a thorough discussion of prior models of lexical cohesion, focusing on their underlying similarities. After that the author proposes her own model. The suggested classification of cohesive ties is illustrated with several examples, with special attention paid to the less studied collocation relations. Chapter 4 discusses continua of features characterizing spoken and written discourse and introduces the material of the study. Chapters 5–8 present the analysis separately within each of the four text types, and Chapter 9 summarizes the findings. In regard to the overarching structure, the research questions are explicitly stated at the beginning of the book and adequately addressed one-by-one in the end. The only structural problem is the division of labor between the introduction (particularly section 1.7), Chapter 2 and section 3.2.1, in which several points are repeated, thus halting the otherwise enjoyable flow.

Tanskanen's study is grounded in the belief that the choice of lexis is among the primary means available to speakers and writers for creating continuity in their messages. Focusing on lexical cohesion is challenging in many ways. The author explains her reasons for using *lexical unit* rather than *word* as the basic unit of her analysis. She also states that the analysis of lexicon is still relatively unrefined, lagging behind grammatical description. Most crucially for the current study, lexical relations are very flexible. In situated use they can be endlessly new, always contingent on contextual matters.

The discourse-specific nature of lexical meaning is underlined in the classification of cohesive ties. The classification does not rely on the abstract semantic categories (synonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, antonymy) but uses

the terms *equivalence*, *generalization*, *specification* and *contrast*, respectively. Other types of ties that belong to the category of reiteration are *simple repetition*, *complex repetition* (e.g. when a lexical morpheme is shared), *substitution* (e.g. nouns/pronouns) and *co-specification*. Collocation involves *ordered sets*, such as names of months, *activity-related* and *elaborative collocation*. The author is careful not to make any definitive claims on the latter, as they are subtle, associative, and subject to interpretation by the communicating parties.

When accounting for the context, a three-partite division is used. Linguistic context is defined as language material surrounding the object being investigated. Cognitive context implies mainly cognitive effort, while social context entails communication channel and situation. All these three factors are discussed briefly in each section of the analysis and treated as stable throughout the production of texts. Although the author apparently supports the understanding that text and context have a reflexive relationship (citing Linell, 1998), the analysis does not allow for any dynamics along these lines. Context is reduced to a small number of mostly dichotomous notions such as spoken/written, prepared/spontaneous, involving two or more people. While reductionism may still be customary in some areas of linguistics and partly justifiable for easing comparisons across discourse types, a study that seriously aims at exploring the relationship between texts and contexts, would probably benefit from non-mechanistic treatments of context. It seems particularly important to consider prior research that respects the mutually constructive nature of language use, participant roles and continuously developing contexts. Classic arguments and some pioneering empirical studies can be found in Goodwin and Duranti (1992).

Disregarding the dynamic nature of communication also means that the book deals with lexical units as objects in texts that are spread out in front of us, written down either by the producers themselves or by a language researcher. This definitely goes against the author's own intention to treat texts as dynamic communicative events (p. 5) but no dynamics can be traced in the analysis. The model that the author proposes treats all texts as ready-made products. The cohesive ties and chains are recovered not while they are being used and experienced by the participants, but from the bird's eye view. Sequentiality, which is important in the process of communication and crucially constitutes the dynamics of communicative events, is discarded as irrelevant in the study. The author describes scrambling tests where the sentences of a narrative are randomized, thereby rendering the texts incoherent for the test subjects. But she states that this is about "linearity" and not cohesion (p. 18). However, people who communicate in fact produce the components of the cohesive pairs in a linear order, either in real time or by way of editing written texts. It seems that this is precisely one of the potential places to accommodate the dynamicity of communication into the study of lexical cohesion.

The central theme of the book, collaboration between speakers and hearers or writers and readers would also have profited from the sequentially sensitive and dynamic analysis of the data. As it stands though, the empirical proof of collaboration is restricted to the fact that cohesive lexical ties and chains are formed across speakers and writers (in mailing lists). There is also some theorizing about producers of texts who take into consideration how their potential responders may react (Linell, 1998) but no discussion on how this is actually manifested in the specific cohesive ties. It is merely assumed that the cohesive devices are used to "enhance receiver's ability to keep up with the discourse" (p. 26). The sweeping generalization is that different communicative circumstances are reflected in the frequency and type of the cohesive ties in the texts.

The basic method of the study is juxtaposing some static contextual features with the frequencies of the types of ties. In the two sets of dialogue, face-to-face conversation and mailing list language, the distribution of ties and chains of cohesion are studied across speakers and writers as well as messages. In the monologues, prepared speeches and academic writing, the amount of cohesive ties for each sentence is furthermore used to argue that the ones with average or higher number of ties constitute an adequate summary of the whole text. What this test tells us about collaboration, remains unclear.

The results of the counts are presented in the form of simple summarizing tables and in the end all the texts are positioned on three continua: reiteration, collocation and density (the number of all cohesive pairs in a text (cf. p. 166)). The conclusion is that certain contextual and cohesive features go hand in hand. Contrary to earlier studies (albeit with different models), cohesion turns out not to be more dense in written dialogue. It also turns out to be irrelevant whether the parties had visual contact, or whether the text was produced by a sole speaker or jointly by co-participants. In face-to-face conversations and mailing lists speakers rely heavily on simple repetition, while academic writing favors a more varied cohesive profile, which is nevertheless achieved with a smaller number of pairs. Also, cohesive chains run all through the texts in academic writing, while they indicate topical segments in dialogues. Prepared speeches (two radio talks and two lectures) display features similar to conversations (simple repetition

prevails) as well as academic writing (a large share of generalizations, specifications and co-specifications). The extreme cognitive load of production and interpretation of prepared speeches and the lighter load of especially interpreting academic writing lead to less density and more subtle (collocation) cohesion in the latter.

Spoken dialogue is treated as the foundation of the study, because conversational texts are most clearly created in a collaborative situation (p. 87). A great emphasis is put on the fact that the two dyadic conversations showed more same speaker cohesive ties than the two multi-party conversations. The author concludes that the creation of cohesive relations is unhindered in dyadic dialogue, while in the case of three speakers the communicative situation is more demanding and does not allow for as many cohesive ties (pp. 101, 169). There seems to be at least one alternative and less mechanical explanation for this result. It concerns the types of activities that happened to be carried out during the particular conversations. The short excerpts in the book suggest considerable variation in terms of activities. In the first three-party conversation the speakers are discussing historical topics in which all the participants apparently claim expertise and everybody contributes to the content of the talk. The second three-party conversation seems to involve several spates where the participants are arguing. In contrast, in the two-party conversations the excerpts presented show one speaker telling a story and the other asking questions, or one speaker informing about the weather, the other receiving it, and finally one speaker advising the other about keeping a diary. Obviously, the conversations may have changed character during the course of the whole segments (the length of which is not revealed), but these short excerpts suggest very different participation in the events. It is not surprising that a speaker who tells a story or gives a lengthy instruction gets to provide more cohesive lexical ties within a sustained topic. While in a discussion, the ties are produced across speakers, and the topics may be more volatile. It is, of course, an empirical question whether this actually was the case, but the type of activities and the related participation frameworks are undoubtedly relevant in terms of who chooses to talk, how much, and when the topic gets changed. Supporting the activity-based explanation, mailing list language, which represents dialogic discussion, displays results that are close to the discussive three-party conversation.

The main contribution of this book is to provide an overarching model of cohesion for dealing with many different types of texts. It breaks new ground by arguing for the context-sensitive and discourse-specific treatment of lexical relations in quantitative studies, and opens up a field of study focusing on how lexicon is used collaboratively.

References

Goodwin, Charles, Duranti, Alessandro, 1992. Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Halliday, M.A.K., Hasan, Ruqaiya, 1976. Cohesion in English. Longman, London.
Linell, Per, 1998. Approaching Dialogue: Talk, Interaction and Contexts in Dialogical Perspectives. John Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

Leelo Keevallik got her PhD in 2004 with the dissertation ''From interaction to grammar: Estonian finite verb forms in conversation''. She has been working in the field of interactional linguistics with a focus on pragmatic particles, clause combining, and prosody. She is currently a research associate at Uppsala university, working on embodied actions in everyday settings as well as dance instruction.

Leelo Keevallik
Uppsala University, Department of Modern Languages, Uppsala, Sweden
E-mail address: Leelo.Keevallik@moderna.uu.se.