

**TEXT BASED LANGUAGE AND LITERACY  
EDUCATION**

**PROGRAMMING AND METHODOLOGY**

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# EXPLORING TEXT

## What's in this chapter

This chapter focuses on the concept of text and how it has been applied in language and literacy programs and methodology. The chapter:

- ~ explores what makes a stretch of language a text
- ~ examines spoken and written language
- ~ examines how texts relate to the concept of *genre*
- ~ discusses the interrelatedness of texts and genres
- ~ places texts within a social theory of language

## Pre-reading questions

- ~ How do you define a text?
- ~ How do you define a genre?
- ~ Has a text-based approach to language education been adopted in your sector of education?
- ~ What knowledge about texts and language do you think teachers need to effectively implement a text-based approach?
- ~ What knowledge about texts do you think students need to have?
- ~ How can knowledge about texts provide students with the confidence to use language to achieve educational goals?
- ~ How can knowledge about texts prepare students to use language in contexts beyond the education context?

## When language is a text

This book is about using texts as a basis for developing language and literacy programs and using knowledge of texts in the classroom. Text-based approaches have been adopted in all sectors of education over the past two decades and in that time there has been some variation in terminology.

So, as a first step, in exploring language and text-based approaches to language and literacy education, this chapter will focus on the concept of *text*. It will take three perspectives on texts – it will look inside texts to explore the devices that bind elements of texts together, it will then turn to the external contexts in which texts are produced and, finally, it will describe the central place of texts in a social model of language concerned with the way we use language to achieve social purposes. It will also address the concept of *genre* as it has been developed within the field of systemic functional linguistics and the use of this concept in education. In addition, it will focus on the interrelatedness of texts, including multimodal texts. This exploration involves using terminology that may be new, but terms will be explained as they are introduced and they can also be found in the glossary at Appendix A.

## Recognising a text

If a speaker of English hears or reads a passage of the language which is more than one sentence in length, he can normally decide without difficulty whether it forms a unified whole or is just a collection of unrelated sentences.

Halliday and Hasan 1976: 1

Following on from this quote, perhaps the idea of when language becomes text can best be illustrated by firstly looking inside the following example of extended language (adapted from [www.tooter4kids.com](http://www.tooter4kids.com) - 1.1.12) where things are amiss.

### The life cycle of frogs

Frogs lay their eggs in water or wet places because a floating clump of eggs is called *frog spawn*. Consequently the large and slippery mass of eggs is too big to be eaten, in brief this is nature's way of protecting them. Previously smaller clumps of eggs will be eaten by the creatures living near, or in the pond. Finally the egg begins as a single cell. Several thousand are laid at once and meanwhile become surrounded by a jellylike covering, which protects the egg. The female may or may not stay with the eggs before she has laid them, so the egg slowly develops. In other words only a few develop into adults and as a result ducks, fish, insects and other water creatures eat the eggs.

The single cell in the egg eventually splits into two. This then split into four cells, and so on. Eventually, there are many cells in an egg. The mass of cells in the egg become an embryo. Organs and gills begin to form and, in the meantime, an embryo lives off his internal yolk. These supplies her with nutrients for 21 days. Then after his 21-day development period, the embryo leaves his jelly shell, and attaches himself to a weed in a water. This quickly becomes a tadpole, a baby frog. The tadpoles grow until she are big enough to break free into the water. This can take from 3 days to 3 weeks, depending on what species of frog she will become. The tadpole lives in the water. They is extremely vulnerable and must rely on they camouflage for protection.

After about five weeks, the tadpole begins to change. It starts to grow hind lips, which are soon followed with forelegs. Behind its door bulges appear where the front paws are growing. The lives becomes smaller. Lungs begin to develop, preparing the frog for its life on Mars. Now and then, the tadpoles wiggle to the surface to breathe in water. The tails become larger and make it possible for the tadpole to run around and eat plants and decaying animal matter. Over time, the tadpole becomes even more fishlike. Eleven weeks after the egg was caught, a fully developed frog with lungs, legs, and no car emerges from the water. This frog will live mostly on land, with occasional swims. The tiny frogs begin to eat breakfast and lunch. Eventually, they will find spouses. The female fertilises the eggs, the male hatches them, and the whole process begins again.

By recognising what is amiss in the three paragraphs of this text, as set out in the following table, we can begin to define what makes a text.

Paragraph 1	
<p>In Paragraph 1 the conjunctions do not logically link the different pieces of information together, as can be seen when the conjunctions are corrected.</p>	<p>Frogs lay their eggs in water or wet places <del>because and</del> a floating clump of eggs is called <i>frog spawn</i>. <del>Consequently</del> <b>As</b> the large and slippery mass of eggs is too big to be eaten, <del>in brief</del> this is nature's way of protecting them. <del>Previously</del> <b>However</b> smaller clumps of eggs will be eaten by the creatures living near, or in the pond. <del>Finally</del> <b>Initially</b> the egg begins as a single cell. Several thousand are laid at once and <del>meanwhile</del> become surrounded by a jellylike covering, which protects the egg. The female may or may not stay with the eggs <del>before after</del> she has laid them. <del>so</del> The egg slowly develops <del>in other words but</del> only a few develop into adults and <del>as a result</del> <b>because</b> ducks, fish, insects and other water creatures eat the eggs.</p>

<p><b>Paragraph 2</b></p> <p>In Paragraph 2 the pronoun referencing system does not keep track of the people and things presented in the text, as can be seen when the pronouns, articles, as well as possessive and demonstrative adjectives, are corrected.</p>	<p>The single cell in the egg eventually splits into two. <del>This</del> These then split into four cells, and so on. Eventually, there are many cells in <del>an</del> the egg. The mass of cells in the egg become an embryo. Organs and gills begin to form and, in the meantime, <del>an</del> the embryo lives off <del>his</del> its internal yolk. <del>These</del> This supplies <del>her</del> it with nutrients for 21 days. Then after <del>his</del> this 21-day development period, the embryo leaves <del>his</del> its jelly shell, and attaches <del>himself</del> itself to a weed in <del>a</del> the water. This quickly becomes a tadpole, a baby frog. The tadpoles grow until <del>she</del> they are big enough to break free into the water. This can take from 3 days to 3 weeks, depending on what species of frog <del>she</del> they will become. The tadpole lives in the water. <del>They</del> It is extremely vulnerable and must rely on <del>they</del> its camouflage for protection.</p>
<p><b>Paragraph 3</b></p> <p>In Paragraph 3 the nouns and verbs are not meaningfully related to the overall topic, as can be seen when they are corrected.</p>	<p>After about five weeks, the tadpole begins to change. It starts to grow hind <del>lips</del> legs, which are soon followed with forelegs. Behind its <del>door</del> head bulges appear where the front <del>paws</del> legs are growing. The <del>lives</del> tail becomes smaller. Lungs begin to develop, preparing the frog for its life on <del>Mars</del> land. Now and then, the tadpoles wiggle to the surface to breathe in <del>water</del> air. The <del>tails</del> legs become larger and make it possible for the tadpole to <del>run</del> swim around and eat plants and decaying animal matter. Over time, the tadpole becomes even more <del>fishlike</del> froglike. Eleven weeks after the egg was <del>caught</del> laid, a fully developed frog with lungs, legs, and no <del>ear</del> tail emerges from the water. This frog will live mostly on land, with occasional swims. The tiny frogs begin to eat <del>breakfast</del> insects and <del>lunch</del> worms. Eventually, they will find <del>spouses</del> mates. The female <del>fertilises</del> lays the eggs, the male <del>hatches</del> fertilises them, and the whole process begins again.</p>

## Text cohesion

Correcting the *lifecycle* text highlights three devices used to tie meanings together to make a piece of language a text. These will be explained below, along with two other devices – substitution and ellipsis. These devices all work together to bind words into cohesive whole texts, like mortar between bricks in a building, and they enable the accumulation of meaning as texts progress from their beginning to their end. In other words, the texture of a text relies on ties between items that are separated in the text but connected in meaning.

### Expectations in texts

A text is characterised by coherence; it hangs together. At any point after the beginning, what has gone before provides the environment for what is coming next. This sets up internal expectations; and these are matched up with the expectations ... that the listener or reader brings from the external sources, from the context of situation and of culture.

Halliday and Hasan 1985: 48

## 1 Conjunction

Conjunction logically links parts of texts – words, groups, clauses and sentences – together. The four overall categories of conjunctions add information (*and, also*), show contrast or an adverse position (*yet, but, however*), show cause (*so, because, consequently*) and place events in a temporal relationship to one another (*then, after*). In the first sentence in the life-cycle example, the incorrect relationship set up by the conjunction *because* is a causal one when the two pieces of information should be logically linked through addition – *Frogs lay their eggs in water or wet places because and a floating clump of eggs is called 'frog spawn'.*

## 2 Reference

Reference is used when one element in a text is referred to by another element, with both elements being cointerpreted as the later element presupposes the earlier one. It is the system by which people and things are tracked through a text.

The most obvious example of reference is the use of pronouns to refer back to previously mentioned nouns. In this sentence – *The tadpoles grow until **she** **they** are big enough to break free into the water* – the pronoun – *she* – referring back to the plural noun – *tadpoles* – is incorrect. It interferes with the easy reading and interpretation of the text. Lack of clear references can also lead to ambiguity as in this sentence – *Ilona and Jessica were playing, when she hit her* – where it is not clear whether the words *she* and *her* refer to Ilona or Jessica.

Reference can also work where one element is not identified with another but is compared with another as in the following sentence where *more* presupposes the *biscuits* – *Joe ate all the **biscuits** when he arrived but he bought **more** the next day.*

Another type of reference is the use of definite articles to indicate that an item has already been introduced into a text – *Frogs lay their eggs in water or wet places and **a** floating clump of eggs is called frog spawn. As **the** large and slippery mass of eggs is too big to be eaten, this is nature's way of protecting them.*

Articles and demonstrative adjectives are used to point inside the text, with the item referred to located *on a scale of proximity* from near to far (Halliday and Hasan 1976: 57). The choice of the definite article is neutral, but choices of demonstrative adjectives are determined by number (singular or plural) and nearness (*this* and *that* / *these* and *those*).

## 3 Lexical cohesion

Words drive forward the topic of a text. Words are selected because they relate in some way to the topic and it is possible in cohesive texts to follow chains of words that are related to one another in some way. When we create a text, we are communicating in a particular field and use words that are likely to occur together – which is called *collocation*. The problem with the following sentence, for example, is that the words *door* and *paws* do not relate to the topic of the life cycle of frogs – *Behind its **door** bulges appear where the front **paws** are growing.*

In specialised texts, in particular subject areas, students need to learn a vocabulary that enables them to engage with texts within the field. If they can link chains of words through texts, they can see that lexical items, the words and groups of words, are connected in particular ways. The following table outlines five categories of lexical cohesion, using examples from a speech by Prime Minister, Paul Keating, delivered at the Funeral Service of the Unknown Australian Soldier on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1993.

Lexical relations within texts	
<b>Repetition</b>	Introducing the same word again into a text. <i>This <b>Australia</b> and the <b>Australia</b> he knew are like foreign countries.</i>
<b>Synonym</b>	Introducing a word with a similar meaning into a text <i>It is a legend not of sweeping military <b>victories</b> so much as <b>triumphs</b> against <b>the odds</b>, of courage and ingenuity in <b>adversity</b>.</i>
<b>Antonym</b>	Introducing a word with an opposite meaning into a text <i>He is <b>all of them</b>. And he is <b>one of us</b> ... This Unknown Australian is not interred here to glorify <b>war</b> over <b>peace</b>; or to assert a <b>soldier's</b> character above a <b>civilian's</b>; or one race or one nation or one religion above another; or <b>men</b> above <b>women</b>; or the war in which he fought and died above any other war; or one generation above any that <b>has been</b> or <b>will come</b> later.</i>

<b>Hyponym</b>	Introducing a word that shows a relationship of classes and subclasses <i>We do not know this Australian's name and we never will. We do not know his <b>rank</b> or his <b>battalion</b>.</i>
<b>Meronym</b>	Introducing a word that shows a whole-part relationship <i>If he had <b>children</b> we do not know who they are. His <b>family</b> is lost to us as he was lost to them.</i>

www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/keating.asp - 1.1.12

## 4 Substitution

In texts, one word, or word group, can be replaced by another word or group with the same grammatical function. Substitutions can replace nouns, verbs or clauses as in the following examples:

- ~ Noun replacement: *I haven't got a **hammer** – Well use this **one**.  
I need **nails**. – I'll get you **some**.  
I'll get **some tools and wood**. – I'll get the **same**.*
- ~ Verb replacement: *Can I **use** this hammer? – Everybody else **does**.*
- ~ Clause replacement: ***Are they going to finish the repairs?** – They say **so**.*

## 5 Ellipsis

Put simply ellipsis is something that is left out or left unsaid but is usually understood from a preceding element in the text, as in the following examples:

- ~ Nominal ellipsis occurs when something in a noun or nominal group is omitted: *I'll need four nails and then two more nails.*
- ~ Verbal ellipsis occurs when something in a verb group is omitted: *Have you finished the repairs? – Yes I have ~~finished the repairs~~.*
- ~ Clause ellipsis occurs when something in a clause is omitted: *Who is **going to finish the repairs?** – I am ~~going to finish the repairs~~.  
What are you **going to do?** – ~~I'm going to finish the repairs and I'm going to do the mowing.~~*

The aspects of text cohesion outlined above are just some of the devices that bind words into whole meaningful, purposeful stretches of language and we will look at more devices later in the chapter. However, the ones described so far point to the importance of explicitly focusing on vocabulary in language and literacy programs. This involves providing opportunities for students to learn the words used in the various fields they are studying or working in but also making them aware, through text analysis, of how words are tied together within texts to build cohesion. A study of texts assists students to focus on word meanings, the different forms which words can take in texts, how words behave grammatically within texts, how words relate to other words and how words relate to different registers used within different social contexts (Nation 1990: 31).

## Mapping the text

Through signalling the structure and organisation of texts, writers and speakers assist readers and listeners to know where they are heading. These signals also help to organise information and ideas. One way to organise texts, and provide signals within texts, is to use Theme. Theme is what comes first at text, paragraph, sentence and clause levels. It provides a starting point for the flow of information because it points the listener or reader towards the message to come.

In the description of themes set out below, examples are drawn from a factual text – *The effect of*

VET completion on the wages of young people (Hérault, Zakirova and Buddelmeyer 2011).

- ~ The overall structure of a factual text can be signalled at the start of a text where the writer can set up an **overall theme or macrotheme**, outlining what will be in the text.

*This project examines the effects of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education qualifications on the wages of young people in the three years following their last education spell.*

- ~ Each paragraph can then incorporate a **theme or topic sentence** that leads the reader into the information in the paragraph.

*The relative wage premiums associated with course completion are referred to as completion premiums.*

Different types of themes help to develop different types of texts. For example history texts are often developed through themes around time and phases of time. Readers often use this knowledge of macrotheme and topic sentences to skim for information in a text. At the sentence and clause levels, themes support the organisation of the text, with three types of clause themes helping to structure texts in different ways.

1 Themes that draw the reader's attention to the subject matter of texts are called *topical themes*. These themes can be:

- ~ a noun group

***Descriptive statistics** reveal that, for some VET and university courses, completers experience higher wages than non-completers in the few years following the course.*

- ~ a verb group

***Controlling** for attrition only results in marginal changes to the findings from the multivariate analysis.*

- ~ a prepositional phrase

***In the next section** we discuss the existing Australian literature related to completion premiums and returns from education ...*

2 Themes that draw attention to the writer's opinion are called *interpersonal themes*. These themes can:

- ~ comment on the information

***As expected**, the vast majority of early school leavers who enrolled in post-school education did so by enrolling in a VET program ...*

- ~ modify the information

*The approach was found to be problematic when applied to school non-completers, **possibly** due to the small sample size of this group.*

3 Themes that draw attention to the relationship between parts of the text are called *textual themes*. These can be:

- ~ text connectives which show the logical linkages between parts of the text

*Only bachelor's degrees attract consistently significant completion premiums. **By contrast**, all courses, with the exception of unknown certificates, attract substantial and robust enrolling premiums in the first two years following the end of the course.*

- ~ conjunctions which combine clauses into sentences

*The premium is particularly large for males **but** it becomes non-significant by the third year.*

Speakers and writers have other choices in using themes for different purposes:

- ~ They can focus attention on the relationship between clauses by putting dependent clauses

## Answers to Reflection Tasks

### Chapter 1

- 1 It was beyond my understanding. Hearing this, I felt sorry for the **blind man** for a little bit. And then I found myself thinking what a pitiful life this woman must have led. Imagine a *woman* who could never see herself as she was seen in the eyes of her loved one. A *woman* who could go on day after day and never receive the smallest compliment from her beloved. A *woman* whose **husband** could never read the expression on her face, be it misery or something better. Someone who could wear **makeup** or not – what difference to him? She could, if she wanted, wear **green eye-shadow** around one eye, a straight pin in her nostril, yellow slacks, and purple **shoes**, no matter. And then to slip off into death, **the blind man's hand** on her hand, **his blind eyes** streaming tears – I'm imagining now – her last thought maybe this: that he never even knew what she looked like, and she on an express to the grave.
- 2 The blood flows from the capillaries to minute venules, and then **(PS)** to veins, in a network of blood vessels of ever increasing size that parallels in reverse the branching of the arterial system. However **(S)** the walls of the veins are thinner and **(PS)** less elastic than the walls of the arteries. The arteries for the most part are buried deep within the body for protection whereas **(PS)** the venous system has many superficial veins that run close the surface of the skin. Blood from the lower part of the body must flow against the force of gravity and **(PS)** this is accomplished in several ways. The veins themselves contain one-way venous valves which work in pairs. If **(PS)** the blood is flowing in the right direction, then **(PS)** the valves press against the walls of the veins to let the blood flow unobstructed. However **(S)** if **(PS)** the blood is flowing downwards, the valves fall open and press against each other, effectively stopping the backward flow. The movement of the abdominal and leg muscles also 'milks' the blood upwards as **(PS)** they press against the veins.
- 3 themes are all stages of Leonardo' life – each leading to new information  
The sixty-seven years of the turbulent and impassioned life of Leonardo da Vinci / On April 15th 1452 / His father Ser Piero / His early years / But these early years / At the age of fifteen / Students / When he was twenty years old
- 4 *Now rinse your mouth and we'll wait for that to take effect.*  
Social context – dentist surgery / Who – dentist / When – after an anaesthetic injection has been administered / Language – rinse, mouth, take effect  
*The next train on Platform 6 will terminate here.*  
Social context – train station / Who – station attendant / When – before arrival of train / Language – train, platform, terminate  
*Are you ready to order?*  
Social context – restaurant or café / Who – waitperson / When – after customers have looked at menus / Language – order  
*Breathe into the tube while I count to ten.*  
Social context – random breath testing location on side of road / Who – police officer / When – before driver places tube in mouth / Language – breathe, tube, count to ten  
*I'd like to start today with a quote from an eminent scientist concerned with global warming.*  
Social context – lecture or public forum / Who – speaker / When – at start of presentation / Language – start, quote  
*Go to bed – this is the last time I'll tell you.*  
Social context – home / Who – parent / When – after child has avoided going to bed over period of time / Language – go to bed, last time, tell
- 5 I have to write a story about a woman who travels to another planet. - **narrative**  
I have to write about the Australian Coat of Arms – **report**  
I have to write about our excursion to the museum – **recount**  
I need to send an email to tell my friend how to change the oil in her car – **procedure**  
I have to write about the debate over logging old growth forests – **discussion**  
I have to write about a recent film I've seen – **review**
- 6 *Best we forget* is a play on the words of war remembrance – *Lest we forget* – so the placement in Victory Lane is significant. The political intent can be interpreted in a number of ways eg: the society remembers the suffering of the war but not the suffering of homeless people in its midst.