

## REVIEWS

**Schmied, J., Haase, C. and Povolná, R. (eds) (2007) *Complexity and Coherence: Approaches to Linguistic Research and Language Teaching. Research in English and Applied Linguistics. REAL Studies 3.* Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 207pp.**

The volume *Complexity and Coherence: Approaches to Linguistic Research and Language Teaching* edited by Schmied, Haase and Povolná (2007) resulted from a mutual project carried out by the English departments at Chemnitz University of Technology and the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University. The project took place between 2005 and 2006. The aim of the project was to research into complexity and coherence, both of which are indispensable for a well-written and well-presented text. Some of the articles deal with topics related to ELT methodology, e.g. teaching students to find the right balance between complexity and coherence in their writing. The rest of the articles in the volume deal with various aspects of coherence and complexity in different genres, both spoken and written.

In their introduction to the volume, the editors stress that both of the terms, i.e. complexity and coherence, can be understood in a variety of ways. They do not, however, aim to unify the definitions. Instead, they lay emphasis on a dynamic approach to both concepts trying to show a “wide mosaic” (p. 8) of possible interpretations. In terms of complexity, Schmied, Haase and Povolná differentiate between structural and processing complexity. And as far as coherence is concerned, they distinguish between cohesive elements and the contextualization of a message by its recipients. What is more important, though, is a synergetic approach towards the two types of complexity and coherence. According to Schmied, Haase and Povolná, the key towards successful reading, learning and teaching lies in finding “a delicate balance between structural complexity and processing complexity [which] can be supported by cohesive devices that enable the recipient to construct coherence in the respective contexts, including previous knowledge as well as semiotic clues and technical frames” (pp. 8-9).

A series of articles on various issues of complexity in English language teaching begins with a contribution by Schmied. The author explores the way such hypertext learning systems as *Chemnitz InterNet Grammar* and *Chemnitz English TWiki* can be used to guide students through different stages of working

with academic texts. Special attention is paid to such stages as comprehending information, evaluating sources and editing academic texts. Schmied argues that in order to achieve coherence in a broad sense of the term, it is important to balance the interrelationship between structural complexity and processing complexity. Both of the hypertext systems help students learn to recognize and balance the two types of complexity.

The topic of useful tools for linguistic research and classroom use is expanded further in the article by Weisser. The author presents the *Text Feature Analyser*, a programme for comparing the level of complexity of various texts. A high degree of customizability allows the programme to be used in a variety of ways (e.g. for a comparative analysis of different genres, for an analysis of over-used or under-used features in a piece of writing by a student).

The succeeding contribution by Frenzel and May offers a summary of possible problems that can arise during a course of *English for Academic Purposes* designed for students with different levels of language competence skills. The authors emphasize that there is a great need for more undergraduate courses on academic skills since students have difficulties not only with the proper level of complexity and coherence, but also with such pre-requisite skills as critical approach towards sources, ability to extract relevant information or give and accept feedback.

In his article on the perception of foreign accents in English, Ondráček concentrates on both Czech and German students of English. The findings of the research show that it is mostly flat intonation, wrong word stress and a wrong pronunciation of the sound /th/ that obstruct general intelligibility. The aim of the project is to find out what features of English pronunciation are most important for the future teachers of English and redefine the emphasis on those features in the educational programme for primary schools.

Another project that is run by the Department of English at the Faculty of Education is described by Hanušová and Najvar. The project explores the importance of the age factor on the ability to learn foreign languages. Hanušová and Najvar compare the score prospective students in the past few years received at the entrance exam for the department with the age these students started learning English. The authors come to the conclusion that the age factor should not be overestimated as the quality of instruction is often more important than the students' age.

A contribution by Haase is of a purely linguistic nature. It deals with complexity issues of causative verbs. After discussing several theories on the topic, the author suggests a preliminary method for the analysis of causatives paying special attention to their transitivity, inchoativity and other relevant features.

The rest of the linguistic contributions deal with the issue of coherence in various genres. Povolná investigates closely the role of interactive discourse items (e.g. *you know*, *I mean*) in the following three genres of spoken discourse: private face-to-face conversation, telephone conversation, public radio discussion. To prove that interactive D-items contribute to establishing coherence in spoken discourse, the author contrasts the frequency of speaker-oriented and hearer-oriented D-items in the three above-mentioned genres. In addition, Povolná analyses the frequency of different types of reactions to speaker and hearer-oriented D-items and compares the occurrence of possible functions of speaker and hearer-oriented D-items. The study shows that a private face-to-face conversation, which is a very impromptu type of discourse, is likely to have a higher occurrence of interactive D-items than a public radio discussion. The author emphasizes that in her study coherence is understood as an act of interpretation and, ultimately, the result of negotiation of meaning. In spoken discourse D-items play an important role in the process of negotiating meaning.

In line with Povolná, Dontcheva-Navratilova also stresses that coherence is not inherent in a text. Her article presents an analysis of UNESCO resolutions and exemplifies the strategies used in resolutions for establishing coherence. As it can be expected, in a highly formalized context of written legal documents, resolutions consist of “a standardised pattern of information processing and explicit signals to guide the reader towards the intended interpretation of the text” (p. 142). With the help of transitive verbal elements resolutions display “a pattern of thematic progression with a constant theme and the sematic homogeneity of the thematic, transition and rhematic layers” (ibid.). Another coherent strategy widely-used in resolutions is lexico-grammatical parallelisms. It is standardised patterns that help readers find the information they search for without the need to read the whole text.

A different type of formal written genre, company annual reports, is analysed in the article by Vogel. The author highlights the importance of the lexical level of coherence. It is lexical repetition that makes the message unambiguous and the use of synonymy is therefore scarce in company annual reports. On the grammatical level, coherence is established with the help of articles. The summative nature of company annual reports accounts for a low frequency of discourse markers. Due to their highly specialized nature, company annual reports are coherent for the target audience, but not for lay people who have no experience in the field.

The succeeding contribution by Hůlková provides a summary of various approaches towards cohesion and coherence as well as overlapping areas between coherence and pragmatics. In her study, she concentrates on the role of connective adjuncts in academic texts and the extent to which connective adjuncts help to

achieve coherence. Mentioning that coherence can be achieved without cohesive devices, Hůlková acknowledges the fact that even though connective adjuncts do contribute to coherence, sometimes the information is inherent in the semantic content of the message. In the latter cases connective adjuncts are redundant as coherence is accomplished with other means.

Miššíková's article is devoted to a stylistic analysis of foregrounding and openness in a short story *In Defence of the Underground* by D. Lessing. The messages the novelist encodes into foregrounded parts, various kinds of deviations, parallel structures need to be deciphered by readers. According to Miššíková, a semantic analysis would not reveal the substantial meaning of the text. It is a stylistic analysis that helps to understand the cultural references hidden in the text.

The volume is complemented by a comprehensive bibliography list on linguistic complexity, which was prepared by Haase and Kirste. The collaboration between the universities produced an interesting volume on a variety of topics, from methodology through linguistic research to literary stylistic analysis. The value of the volume lies in the fact that the editors and contributors managed to show different aspects of the two terms and tried to find overlapping areas between complexity and coherence.

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