# Textual Structure in English and How the Nepali Learners Handle it

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## 1. Introduction

Bloomfield defines sentence as an independent linguistic entity which is not included in some larger linguistics form. Text sentences are not recognised as having grammatical construction. In other words, sentences are regarded as grammatically independent segments of texts. According to traditional grammar, sentences are the maximal units of grammatical description. Lyons (1977:30) distinguishes two types of sentences--system sentence and text sentence. System sentences are theoretical constructs that satisfy the notion of grammaticality. The Chomskyan sentence-generating grammar generates the system sentences. Text sentences do not fit the Bloomfieldian definition of a sentence. They are grammatically non-independent segments of text. They need context-dependent signals to become meaningful. It is not possible to find various prosodic and paralinguistic signals in the graphic medium to show the end of a text sentence. However, the native speakers can identify the text sentences by considering not only their prosodic and paralinguistic punctuation, but also their grammatical structure.

We have said earlier that text sentences are derived by contextualizing system sentences. System sentences, when they are contextulized, enter into inter-sentential relations. Here we come to the concept of a text. In the following paragraphs we are going to define text and analyse the various linguistic signals that go to the making of a text in English. Other languages could have similar or little different text forming resources than those we find in English, but we can easily hypothesize that every language has various text forming resources, and every language must have the distinction between system sentence and text sentence. It is the system sentences, as far as my knowledge goes, that are generated by the rules given by the Nepali grammars as well. But the grammars are mostly silent about the context sentences. In other words, the grammatically non-independent segments of text are not recognized by the Nepali grammars to date. However, it must be pointed out here that we are not talking about grammar when we talk about text, or discourse structure, even though we are using various grammatical units as the linguistic signals that go the making of a text. So the study of a text per se is not the study of grammar.

## 2. What is a Text

According to Van Dijk (1977:3), a text is regarded as an abstract theoretical construct underlying what is usually called discourse. A text is realized by reconstructing utterances in terms of a larger unit, and that larger unit is text. When utterances are given the textual structure they can be accepted as discourses of the language. Discourse can be related to communicative action. However, our concern in this paper is not so much the study of discourse as the analysis of textual structure in English.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976:3), "Text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole." A native speaker should know by rule whether his own language constitutes a text or not. A text can have various forms as well as various genres. Spoken text may very well have the same kinds of textual features as a written text. In the written medium forms of writing such as prose narratives, expository essays, verse, monologues etc can have a text. It is misleading to define a text by its size. Similarly, a text is not a grammatical unit like a clause or a sentence, nor is a text a bigger or extended form of a sentence. In other words, a text is a semantic unit.

A text must have a texture. A texture is provided by various linguistic signals that function as the text forming resources of the language. Successive sentences show some kind of relationship through various linguistic signals. We are going to examine some of the signals and how they provide texture to the text in the following pages.

## 3. Organisation of Text

Textual structure in English will be examined under the following labels:

Information Structure
Thematic Structure, and
Cohesion.

### Information Structure

The speaker decides how much of the content he is talking about his hearer can take in at one time. So the speaker will organise his discourse in various information blocks. The information focus is marked as the location of the tonic. The focal point is supposed to be not derivable from the preceding discourse. In the discourse the speaker organises his message structure in this way. The theme is something that is given in the preceding discourse which will be known as 'given'. But the speaker will always give a new information. So the other, terms for theme and focus are 'given' and 'new'. The focus of his new information will be the rheme-part of a clause, not the theme part. The focus of new information is marked phonologically by the

placement of the tonic stress. But there can be more than one tone
groups. If the utterance is not marked the above explanation about the
phonological placement of the focus of new information will hold good.
But, if the information is marked then the focus of the new information
may not necessarily be the end of a clause. It could be anywhere in the
utterance. For example:

i. Malcolm is in the country//He's coming to see us on <u>Friday</u>

(unmarked)

ii. //He's coming to the <u>Jones</u> on Friday//...not us (marked)

iii. Isn't it lovely?//<u>Malcolm</u>'s coming to see us on Friday//

(marked)

The information structure is realized by tonality, i.e., by the distri-
bution of the text into tone groups. One information unit comprises
one tone group. So the clause <u>John saw the play yesterday</u> (Halliday
1967:201) can have the following various options as information blocks:

//John saw the play yesterday// - unmarked

//John// saw the play yesterday// - marked

//John// saw the play// yesterday// - marked

//John saw the play yesterday but said nothing about it//

//John// saw the play yesterday and is seeing it again today//

The new information blocks in the above examples are realized as the
location of tonic. In organizing the information blocks like this the
speaker has to decide how much information is signalled by a single
intonation contour. Grimes (1975:274) calls this phenomenon of organiz-
ing information blocks INFORMATION INJECTION. The telegraphic style has
the highest rate of information injection. In such style the apparatus
of cohesion is squeezed to the minimum units. Similarly, politicians
speak short information blocks: MY FRIENDS/ I COME here this evening/
to TELL you/ that we are ALL/ FACED/ with a GRAVE DECISION./ We MUST/
ELECT/ the BEST/ most HIGHLY QUALIFIED/ CANDIDATE/ from among our RANKS.
(op. cit: 276).

The ratio between an information block and a clause is not exactly 1:1
but roughly one clause contains one information block. However, this
ratio will depend on whether the information block is marked or not,
and how much the apparatus of cohesion is squeezed to accommodate a
higher degree of information.

The given information is regarded as anaphoric to the previous dis-
course. So it is optional. But the new information is obligatory.
According to Clark and Clark (1977:246), if the terms, 'subject', and
'predicate' and 'frame' and 'insert' imply speaker-oriented meanings
then 'given' and 'new' imply listener oriented meanings. If the infor-
mation focus is unmarked 'given' and 'new' information will come in that

order. In monologues the above order is prominent; but in dialogues this order should be altered.

> Sue: Who gave you that beautiful flute?
>
> Dane: Hilary did.

HILARY is a wanted fact, which is pronounced with heavy stress and is a new information. Given and new information units signal the adjustments that the speakers must make to what has already been said and what is to come.

## Thematic Organisation

The origin of thematization is not information unit but the clause. It assigns the clause a structure in terms of theme and rheme. The theme is that what comes at the beginning of the clause. Though theme and given information sound to have the synonymous meaning in the previous discussion itshould however be pointed out that they are two independent options. Given means what you were talking about; new means what I am talking about now (Halliday. 1967:206).

Themes can be either marked or unmarked. This depends on the mood system as well. For instance, the unmarked theme is the subject in a declarative clause, the verb in imperative clause and auxiliary or wh-word in interrogative clauses. If the first element of the sentence is none of these the theme is unmarked. Examples:

unmarked                             marked

I shall give most of them to Mary- Most of them I shall give to Mary.

Read those papers on the table, will you? - Those papers on the table, read them, will you?

What was that sound I just heard?- That sound I just heard - what was that?

Certain words are used to draw attention to the theme:

> As for me, I am leaving shortly anyway (unmarked theme)
>
> Now about those papers, I want you to burn them (marked)
>
> As far as the rest are concerned, you can put your mind at rest (marked)

Various transformations are possible of a thematic structure, such as passivization, fronting, clefting etc. Some examples:

> Clefting: It's he that will not be hard to persuade of its truth.
>
> Pseudo-clefting: What will not be hard is to persuade him of its truth. Where John's car is in Bill's garage.

Passivization: He was supplied with warm clothing.

In the above examples clefting is an example of identifying clause. Identifying clauses are used for highlighting a theme or of relating it to the rest of the clause. The identifying clauses are structured into two parts, one of which is nominalized and connected with verb be. The identifying clauses in the theme position have emphatic function.

To sum up, theme signals the starting point of a new message, and the theme is usually selected from given information. So theme is supposed to be anaphorically related to the previous discourse, and by the same token, it lends cognitive coherence to the discourse as a whole.

## 4. Cohesion

Cohesion lends cognitive coherence to the text as well. A text acquires texture through various linguistic signals, or lexicogrammatical units. Such units enter into meaningful relationships by hanging together and lend the text a texture. Without a texture random strings of sentences would not make any meaning. In order for the set of sentences to be meaningful there must exist linguistic cohesion between the lexicogrammatical units. There are five main linguistic devices which are used to achieve such cohesion. They are reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical organisation.

The structure of a text is not a simple linear structure. It is more complex than the structure of a clause. The units in a text should hang together from a semantic point of view. Cohesion is thus 'the set of possibilities that exist in the language for making text hang together the potential that the speaker or writer has at his disposal.' (Halliday and Hasan 1976:18). Cohesion is not a structural relation. So it is not restricted by sentence boundaries.

Though it is not possible to list all the lexicogrammatical units, or the formal markers of cohesion in this paper, a short description with examples of the cohesive units in English has been presented below:

| Type of cohesive relation (represented in linguistic system) | Semantic | Lexicogrammatical |
|---|---|---|
| Conjunction | additive, adversative, casual and temporal relations; external and internal | discourse adjuncts: adverbial groups, prepositional groups |
| Reference | identification: by speech role by proximity by specificity reference point | personals demonstratives definite articles comparatives |

| Substitution | identity of potential reference in context of non-identity of actual reference (The semantic function is performed by such signals as one/ones, the same, do, be, have, likewise, be so, not etc.) | verbal, nominal or clausal substitute, verbal, nominal or clausal ellipsis |

## Text, Context, Register and Discourse

All the above listed cohesive markers are used to organise the texture of a text. A text is a social event (Hasan 1978:229). The unfolding of this social event is linguistic. Text, according to Hasan, is a bridge between the verbal symbolic system and the culture. This means to say that there is a very close link between text and social context. Halliday and Hasan (1976) who have popularized the concept of register argue that the context of situation is difficult to handle except through such category as text genre or register. Three variables labelled as field, tenor and mode of discourse constitute the contextual construct. The variables and the values of the variables can be summed up in the following manner. (op. cit.:231)-

| variables | values of the variables |
|---|---|
| field... | professional consultation: medical; application for appointment |
| tenor... | client: patient-applicant, agent for consultant: receptionist; maximum social distance... |
| mode... | aural channel: visual contact: telephone conversation; spoken medium... |

We do not have space here to discuss the concept of register in detail. However, the concept of register brings us closer to the concept of discourse. In other words, text is one way of looking beyond the limit of the sentence. The concept of textual structure and register analysis has, as popularized by Halliday and Hasan (1976), and Crystal and Davy (1969) has one obvious limitation. A register analysis is made by the collection of formal objects. But such analysis does not describe the communicative function of language, as popularized by Hymes, Labov and others.

Widdowson (1979:96) makes distinction between cohesion and coherence. A text may have cohesion but it may not be coherent. Similarly, a coherent text may be cohesive but will nonetheless perform the communicative function, which is a very important function of language. Widdowson cites the following examples, two pieces of a dialogue:

A: Can you go to Edinburgh tomorrow?

B. Yes I can.

A. Can you go to Edinburgh tomorrow?

B. B.E.A. pilots are on strike.

The first has cohesion. The response of B is linked with A's question. This cohesion is performed by means of ellipsis which is one of the cohesive markers in Halliday's system. But the second dialogue is not coehsive, but it is coherent, because the reply is linked with question indirectly. But such connection is shown by means of the formal proper- ties of linguistic elements such as the formal markers of cohesion. To sum up, if a text is a social event, it should perform communicative function. To perform communicative function a text has to look beyond the label known as register to the performance of communicative function. A text can perform the communicative function at the level of discourse.

However, a text is useful in certain areas. Text is a controlled literary composition with a beginning, end and interal coherence. (Lyons 1976:631). If we judge our everyday conversations we find that they are not made up like this. So, even though the notion of text is useful in literary stylistics, it is not generalizable to the basic kind of language behaviour. But the propounders of text linguistics say that the native speakers are sensitive to the distinction between what is text and what is not. Apart from that every language has various text forming resources which are utilized by the native speakers to contex- tualize the system sentences. So the generalizability of text as a basic linguistic behaviour cannot be ruled out.

## 5. Textual Structure of the Nepali Users of English

Before proceeding on to discuss the properties of the non-native user's text, we present an instance of a text produced by an educated Nepali user of English:

The people of the eastern region show very high regards to the people who have done various social works in the region. In the development of the society it is necessary to have some public-spirited persons. This country has produced many good social workers in the past who have devoted their whole lives in the service of the society. The eastern region has been benefitted from the social services rendered by many public-spirited persons at dif- ferent times in the past.

Though every country produces many persons who work with a great deal of enthusiasm and altruistic feeling, Nepali society has not produced many such workers. So we cannot but be surprised if somebody makes a complaint that the eastern region of Nepal has not produced many social workers

... Social workers are always produced in whatever circumstances it may be...

The most important feature of the writing of the non-native users of English lies in the use of the thematic structure. In this sample the writer does not seem to relate to the topic in the same way as a native speaker would. Theme does not seem to relate to the on-going topic in the text he produces. However, the text employs its own communicative strategies for organising the discourse. The text does not strictly follow the principles of what is known as the theme, rheme, new information and focus in the Hallidayian system of textual analysis. But in the text produced by the native speakers we can notice a tendency to continue the theme:

> Brazil shares with Jamaica a common black heritage: in each case most of the country's slaves came from the coast of West Africa. In Brazil the slaves worked on the plantations of Bahia or in the gold mines of Minas Gerais. In Belo Horizonte, the modern capital of Minas Gerais, sits a plain two-story colonial house that goes by the name of Quilombo - after the free communities created by slaves who escaped from their Portuguese masters. This new Quilombo is a haven not for rebellious mine workers but for Brazil's consummate popular musician - Milton Nascimento.

The native speakers seem to prefer the maintenance of topic and an active agency. We can see the phenomenon well exemplified in this short text also. In the text 'Brazil', as the main theme, is introduced in the first sentence which is maintained in the following sentences through a linking device - a theme and rheme given and new structure as discussed earlier. Belo Horizonte is the sub-theme which is maintained by the anaphoric reference, 'this' in the theme structure of the last sentence. Similarly, we can see the active agency in this structure. In Belog Horizonte, the modern capital of Minas Gerais, sits a plain two-storey colonial house that goes by the name of Quilombo. (Italics mine, to show that the writer avoids the use of passive such as 'is located', 'that is called' respectively). Similarly, 'So John killed Bill' will be preferred to 'Bill was killed by John'; 'The Prime Minister stepped off the plane. The wind immediately buffeted her' will be preferred to 'She was ... wind'. The Nepali writers of English text do not necessarily seem to prefer these options as illustrated in the above text of the non-native user.

The initial sentence is chosen as the perspective of the entire paragraph, or, the first sentence is the most powerful switching device in the writings of native speakers, but in the above non-native user's text the organising principle is the topic and lexical cohesion. In another instance of a Nepali learner's English text, the initial sentence is the perspective of the entire paragraph, too but the texture of the text still depends more on the topic and lexical collocation. However,

the learner has developed her own communicative strategies such as organising the text round the main topic as closely as possible. Following is the extract:

> Kathmandu is facing the highly growing traffic problem.
> The city roads are full of vehicle and crowded by people.
> It is very hard to cross the road specially for the school
> children and old people. The way of driving is very bad.
> The man who have a stearing in his hand, don't care of the
> traffic rules so that very cases of accidents happens.

Another feature of the writing of the non-native users of a language is that there will be a very high degree of information injection in their texts. In our corpus of texts also we can find the same phenomenon. However, this might be a controversial topic because as we have noted earlier that certain forms of texts have higher degree of information injection than others. But talking about the tendency we can say that the native speakers seem to speak or write in large, well-organised information blocks. However, this is related to culture and various social contexts as well.

## 6. Conclusion

We have said earlier that every genre has its own text and discourse structure. Conversation has its own discourse structure, too. The structure of every genre of discourse in every language is derived from the text forming resources of the culture. So the analysis of text should depend on the cultural context of a text. Text analysis should not mean the interpretation but the explanation of the text. So the linguistic analysis of a text is not the evaluation but the explanation of the text. Such explanation of the non-native speakers' texts should be based upon the study of the communicative strategies adopted by the producers of the text. They tend not to follow the native speaker's strategies of the communication because those strategies may not necessarily help them in producing communicative texts. However, this is an entirely different area of study, but an important point to be borne in mind by those who analyse the texts produced by the Nepali users of English, or, for that matter, by the non-native users of a foreign language.

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