



THE EFFECT OF AWARENESS CONCERNING COHESION ELEMENTS ON READING SKILLS OF FRENCH LEARNERS

Canan Aydınbek

French Language Teaching Department, Anadolu University, Turkey

caydinbek@anadolu.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of awareness about anaphora and conjunctions on reading skills of French learners studying at Anadolu University, French Language Teaching Department. The participants are 9 sophomores taking Advanced Reading-Writing course. Their level is intermediate (B1). The pretest-posttest model was applied and the scores before and after the application were compared. The duration of the study was 4 weeks, 3 hours per week. Moreover, in order to determine reading difficulties of the learners and to clarify their views on the benefits of the application, they were given a questionnaire. According to the comparison of pretest-posttest results, pretest results were found higher. This means the application had no considerable effect on the understanding of the text. The results of the questionnaire indicated on the other hand, that the most problematic subjects are vocabulary, idioms and proverbs, and the textual cohesion doesn't cause problems. According to 66% of the participants, the awareness of co-referential items help understand the text. 88.8% of them stated that they found the application beneficial. As a result, the applicants think that learning cohesion items help them comprehend the text.

Keywords: Teaching Reading skills, cohesion, reading difficulties, French language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Until a few decades, linguistic research considered the sentence to be the biggest unit. However, since we accept the language as a communication tool, it emerged that we should consider its social and pragmatic aspects as well. Because traditional linguistic analysis explaining functional and syntactic operation of words in a sentence were not sufficient in understanding and explaining a lot of communication phenomena. In order to examine various semantic and pragmatic phenomena playing important roles in communication process, discourse analysis methods and text linguistics emerged. According to J.M. Adam, "text linguistic could be defined as a sub-category of discourse practices analysis which is a broader field" (Adam 1999:39).¹ Today, it is accepted by everyone that the language should be considered beyond sentence level in order to be able to explain its operation in communication process. Text linguistic is an approach, which studies the relations in sentence and between sentences and tries to make explanations.

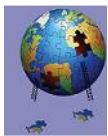
What Is a Text?

Discourse and text are two terms, which are confused very often. French school makes distinction in discourse analysis between text and discourse. According to Maingueneau, text and discourse are like two adjunct faces of the same object. "When we say discourse, we articulate an utterance to a specific enunciation situation, when we say text we emphasize not only the sentence series that provide the union of it, but also everything that makes a whole" (Maingueneau 1996: 82).

It is now accepted by everyone that a random concatenation of words and clauses do not make a text. To form a text, clauses should be related with each other both meaningfully and formally. As Halliday and Hasan mentioned, "a text does not CONSIST OF sentences; it is REALISED BY, or encoded in, sentences" (Halliday, Hasan, 1976:1).

The meaning of a text emerges with the agency of a structure regulating relations between sentences and this meaning is completely different from the meanings of each isolated sentence. The total of meaning of each sentence does not provide the meaning of the text as well. The total meaning emerges

¹The citations are translated from French by us.



by regulating sentences in a special way, and connecting them on both semantic and formal level. The total structure forming the text has a different meaning than the total of the pieces.

The term text reminds us of a structure, which is self-sufficient, closed, complete and holistic, and text could be interpreted out of the original context, as well. The text has a real and significant recipient. The recipient of discourse is potential, and discourse examines an utterance by considering the conditions of production, in relation to it. Text is formulized as: Text = Utterance – Conditions of Production. However, both text and discourse are verbal productions. These terms and their definitions differ according to the viewpoint adopted by the researcher (Özçelebi, 2008).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) discriminated the concepts of text and texture. These writers define text as: “any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole” (1976: 1). The texture, on the other hand, defines the characteristics of ‘being a text’. “A text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. It derives its texture from the fact that it functions as a unity with respect to its environment” (Halliday, Hasan 1976: 2)

Cohesion

Cohesion defines meaning relations in a text. “Cohesion occurs where the INTERPRETATION of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. Since the speaker or writer uses cohesion to signal texture, the listener or reader has to react to it in order to interpret it” (Halliday, Hasan 1976:4). In other words, if another element should be considered in order to interpret an element in a text, and if these two elements refer to the same thing, then they are co-referential. It could be claimed that X and Y elements have cohesive relation. Halliday and Hasan distinguish two categories of cohesion: grammatical (reference, substitution, ellipsis) and lexical cohesion. “Some forms of cohesion are realised through the grammar and others through the vocabulary” (Halliday, Hasan 1976: 6), and conjunctions are placed somewhere in between.

Teaching Reading Skills

A native speaker could decide whether a passage is a text or not by using his language competence. It is obvious that a speaker, as in sentence level, has a trans-sentential textual competence that helps him understand and produce infinite numbers of texts (Van Dijk 1973). However, a foreign language learner does not have sufficient language competence to decide whether a passage is a coherent and cohesive text. He/she could transfer from his/her mother tongue the elements of coherence and cohesion, but structural differences between two languages could cause various errors. In this case, it could be considered to close this gap using explicit knowledge about the rules of the target language system. Therefore “there is a need for a text linguistics to define the rules for sentences to come together and be organized, and a discourse linguistics to define the rules for sentences used in context so that they actualize the communication conditions” (Gülmez 1989: 62).

Activities held in reading classes mainly focus on instruction of grammar, syntax and vocabulary. As it's mentioned above, the meaning of a text is completely different from the meaning of each sentence, it is inevitable to consider the structure making up the text, in other words the items of texture. We think that the reading activities focusing systematically not only on the components of a text, but also on its structure would contribute to foreign language learning/teaching process. According to some research, function words- conjunctions or logical articulators- playing an important role in the organization of utterances, by forming consistency in the text cause difficulty for language learning students because the context cannot help determine the meanings of these conjunctions (Cooper 1984, Cornaire 1999:67-68).



According to Sim and Benoussan, reading tests should consist of understanding “coherency relation between the items of a text, as well as understanding each forming item separately” (Sim, Benoussan 1978, Geva 1986:86). Thus, we need to help our students to define different coherency and cohesion items forming the skeleton of different text types.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of explicit knowledge of textual cohesion on reading skills of learners. Because of time constraints, only repeated information types and conjunctions are covered in the study. Thematic processing was not considered. This study is conducted to answer the following questions:

- 1- Do informing French language learners about repeated information types and conjunctions improve their reading skills?
- 2- What are the difficulties that they have while they read a text?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of this study are sophomore students taking reading course at Anadolu University, Faculty of Pedagogy, French Language Teaching Department. Their level is B1/B2. 9 students are given a questionnaire, 7 of them were present during the application.

Tools

In order to determine whether there is improvement in students' reading skills, single group pretest-posttest model was applied. Two texts on B1 level were prepared for pre-test. First one was followed by 10 true-false questions and the second text was followed by a fill-in-the-blank activity. The application took four weeks, a total of 12 hours. First two weeks, textual cohesion items (anaphora, cataphora, co-reference) were taught, it's followed by related activities. Last two weeks are allocated to activities in order to examine their values and functions. At the end of the application, the students were asked to complete again the pretest and they were given a questionnaire in order to confirm the results of the test as well as to determine the difficulties faced by learners during reading texts.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference between pre-test and post-test results, means of the points were compared. At the end of the study a ten-question, likert type questionnaire was administered to determine the difficulties of reading skill. Pretest-posttest results and questionnaire results were analyzed descriptively, and means and percentages were calculated. At the first part of the questionnaire, the students were asked to indicate the level of reading difficulties from 1 to 5 in a scale. There were 9 items and a completion item in this part. At this part of the questionnaire, percentage and frequency analysis were computed. At the second part, there were ten items related to the difficulties they face and the strategies the students use while reading, yes/no questions related to the students' thoughts about the benefits of the study, and then a part asking students to express themselves freely.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the pretest-posttest results and the means. The first text was analyzed over 10 points, and the second text was analyzed over 8 points.



Table 1. The Scores of the Pretest and Post-test.

Participant Number	Text1.		Text2.	
	Pretest	Post-test	Pretest	Post-test
1	9	7	5	3
2	8	7	6	3
3	6	3	2	4
4	8	5	2	3
5	9	8	4	3
6	7	8	2	4
7	9	9	3	4
Mean	8	6.71	3.42	3.42

As seen in the table above, the means of the pre-test results for the first text is higher than the post-test results. As for the second text the means are the same for both the pre-test and the post-test. To be able to claim that the application has an effect on understanding of the text, the post-test results should be higher. At this case, the application did not make any difference on the success. One of the possible causes of this could be that students thought that they already learned the text item 4 weeks ago, and they did not pay enough attention to the test. Another reason might be that the test is exactly on the same level of the students, so they were not challenged by it. If a B2 level, which is the level that the students were aimed to reach, test had been chosen, the results would have been different.

The results related to the level of difficulty faced during reading course consisting of the first part of the questionnaire are represented in table 2. Total scores are calculated giving 1 point to the easiest subject, 5 points to the most difficult subject.

Table 2. The Difficulty Level of the Areas and the Frequency.

Condition	1(easiest)		2		3		4		5(most difficult)		Total Score
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1-Vocabulary		-	-	-	4	44.4	2	22.2	3	33.3	35
2-Grammar	-	-	2	22.2	3	33.3	2	22.2	2	22.2	31
3-Syntactic Structures	1	11.1	4	44.4	-	-	1	11.1	3	33.3	28
4-Cohesive items	1	11.1	4	44.4	4	44.4	-	-	-	-	21
5-Proverbs and idioms	-	-	1	11.1	2	22.2	3	33.3	3	33.3	35
6-Extralinguistic Referential Expressions	-	-	1	11.1	4	44.4	3	33.3	1	11.1	30
7-French Culture	1	11.1	2	22.2	2	22.2	4	44.4	-	-	27
8-Language Levels	-	-	3	33.3	4	44.4	2	22.2	-	-	34
9-Topic	1	11.1	2	22.2	4	44.4	1	11.1	1	11.1	26

As seen in the table above, the most difficult language areas for the students are vocabulary, proverbs and sayings. Textual cohesion items are on the last line of the order, so it is the least difficult language area for the students. The competency in reading in French transferred from their mother tongue might



be easing the process for the students. Another possible reason might be that students are not aware of the role that textual cohesion items play in the understanding of the text.

Paradoxically, 8 out of 9 students answered the question we asked at the end of the questionnaire positively and expressed that finding repeated items, and knowing the meaning and function of conjunctions help understand the text as a whole. One participant stated that having too many repeated items in the text sometimes make it difficult to understand the text.

Table 3. The Results of the Questionnaire Related to Items Facilitating the Comprehension of a Text.

Proposal	Completely Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Completely Disagree		Total Score
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1	3	33.3	6	66.6	-		-	-	-	-	12 p.
2	2	22.2	5	55.5	1	11.1	-	-	1	11.1	7 p.
3	2	22.2	3	33.3	3	33.3	-	-	1	11.1	5 p.
4	1	11.1	4	44.4	4	44.4	-	-	-	-	6 p.
5	-		-		6	66.6	2	22.2	1	11.1	-3 p.
6	2	22.2	5	55.5	1	11.1	1	11.1	-	-	8 p.
7	1	11.1	4	44.4	3	33.3	1	11.1	-	-	5 p.
8	3	33.3	3	33.3	2	22.2	1	11.1	-	-	8 p.
9	2	22.2	5	55.5	1	11.1	1	11.1	-	-	8 p.
10	3	33.3	3	33.3	-	-	3	33.3	-	-	6 p.
Total	19		38		21		9		3		

CONCLUSION

Since number of the participants was less, the results are not sufficient enough to generalize it out of the students in the French Department; however, allocating enough time for each student was an advantage. The main aim of this study is to provide information for an extensive study to be held longer and with a bigger number of participants. Although the post-test results were lower or the same with the pre-test results, students stated that learning repeated items and conjunctions help reading-understanding of a text. We believe that researching the effects of learning cohesive items on both reading and writing activities will provide precious information and clues for foreign language teaching, especially teaching reading skills. This study could be repeated with different text types and with at different levels.

REFERENCES

- Adam, J.-M. (1999). *Linguistique Textuelle, des Genres de Discours aux Textes*. Paris : Nathan.
- Cornaire, C. (1999). *Le Point sur la Lecture*. Paris : CLE International.
- Favart, M. et L. Chanquoy (2007). Les Marques de Cohésion Comme Outils Privilégiés de la Textualisation : une Comparaison Entre Elèves de CM2 et Adultes Experts, *Langue Française*, 155, 51-68.
- Gülmez, G. (1989). Metin Dilbilgisi ve Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Metinsel Tutarlılık. *Anadolu Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2 (2), 61-87.
- Halliday, M.A.K. and R. Hasan (1976). *Cohesion in English*, New York : Longman.
- Maingueneau, D. (1996). *Les Termes Clés de l'Analyse du Discours*. Paris : Seuil



Maingueneau, D. (2002). Article "texte", *Dictionnaire d'analyse du discours*. P. Charaudeau et D. Maingueneau (sous la dir.). Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 570-572.

Moirand, S. (1990). *Une Grammaire des Textes et des Dialogues*. Paris : Hachette.

Özçelebi, H. (2008). *Grammaire Textuelle et Analyse du Discours : Méthodes de Lecture Pour les Textes Non-littéraires dans l'Enseignement du FLE*. Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Fransız Dili Eğitimi A.B.D., Yayınlanmış Doktora Tezi.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1973). *Grammaire Textuelle et Structures Narratives. Sémiotique Narrative et Textuelle*, Paris : Larousse, 177-207.

