The Persuasive Function
of Lexical Cohesion in English:
A Pragmatic Approach to the Study
of Chairmen's Statements [1]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we analyse a particular type of text, Chairmen's Statements presented by public limited companies, from the perspective of pragmatics. We will be looking at a cohesive device, characteristic of this type of texts, namely, the cohesive tie between lexical items of similar instantial meaning, in order to show how this is used for the all-embracing function of persuading the readers of those texts. We will be studying Chairmen's Statements as a *genre* or *text type*, a conceptual framework which will enable us to classify those texts in terms of the communicative intentions serving their overall rhetorical purpose of persuading their readers.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we analyse a particular type of text, Chairmen's Statements presented by public limited companies, from the perspective of pragmatics. We will be looking at a cohesive device, characteristic of this type of texts, namely, the cohesive tie between lexical items of similar instantial meaning, in order to show how this is used for the all-embracing function of persuading the readers of those texts.

We will be studying Chairmen's Statements as a *genre* or *text type,* a conceptual framework which will enable us to classify those texts in terms of the

communicative intentions serving their overall rhetorical purpose of persuading their readers. Persuasion will be regarded here as a *text act*[2], in which a pragmatic focus is likely to subsume a set of mutually relevant intentions and will define the type of text currently evolving.

1.   PRAGMATIC APPROACH

There are two approaches to language description, which can be called the *semantic* and the *pragmatic*. The semantic approach provides an account of how the language contains within itself, within its grammar and lexis, the essential resources for meaning. The pragmatic approach, on the other hand, focuses on how these resources have to be exploited for language users to achieve meaning. On the one hand, then, we have meaning seen in terms of a potential contained within linguistic forms. On the other hand, we have meaning seen in terms of the procedures and contextual conditions that come into play in order for this potential to be realized. These two approaches to language description are complementary, although when it comes to discussing the rules of language use, the semantic truth-functional method has very little to say. Consider the following example:

A: *How are you?*
B: *To hell with you.*

A purely semantic view not only cannot explain what goes on in actual discourse, but it is also inadequate as an explanation of the production of such discourse. What is interesting about a text is not whether it expresses truth or falsity: most texts do not express either, and nobody cares. When we use language, we have other things to worry about than just (or mainly) truths. Hence the truth-functional view of language is inadequate for explaining any type of discourse, precisely because it reduces the language to a piece of formal machinery and the user to a manipulator of built-in truth tables.

When we analyse a text, any type of text, we notice that every linguistic expression contains the potential for a multiplicity of virtual meanings. But which one is realized on the particular occasion of the text is determined by non-linguistic factors of context.

We can distinguish three dimensions in context:

— the communicative dimension
— the pragmatic dimension
— the semiotic dimension.

The communicative dimension is equated to register analysis [3], which may seem too narrow a perspective; that is why we have considered further dimensions: the pragmatic dimension, which deals with the ability to «do things with words», and the semiotic dimension, which regards the communicative items as signs within a system of signs.

Taking this broad perspective that takes into account the three dimensions mentioned, Chairmen's Statements will be examined as a semiotic interaction of linguistic signs. Lexical cohesion will be considered in a new light, because, as Halliday and Hasan (1976: 289) say, «the preceding lexical environment of an item in a text frequently provides a great deal of hidden information that is relevant to the interpretation of the item concerned».

If we assume the dynamic nature of text creation and interpretation, we can see that, through the relationship between registral parameters and meanings, the interpreter of a text can predict what types of meaning the creator of the text is likely to express.

We shall be looking at the way communicative intentions are expressed and perceived in Chairmen's Statements. We will be concentrating specifically on the lexical chains that appear in those texts. These lexical chains consist of lexical items, which are connected by instantial semantic ties, adding positive qualities to their symbolic meaning.

By «indexical» value we understand the function which is attributed to the linguistic sign by the language user when it occurs in context. It is used as an indicator or pointer to those features of the situation or existing knowledge that need to be engaged to realise meaning. This meaning contrasts with «symbolic» meaning, which inheres in the linguistic sign as a stable semantic property.

> «Whereas symbolic meanings inhere in the signs themselves, indexical meanings must be achieved by the language user associating symbols with some relevant aspect of the world outside language, in the situation or in the mind».

> (Widdowson, 1990: 102)

This association of linguistic signs with the external world is carried out through schematic knowledge, which is knowledge required to have access to a given culture. Schematic [4] knowledge is the filter whereby linguistic signs turn into indices in the process of interpretation.

We shall be examining the pragmatic dimension of Chairmen's Statements. In order to do this, we shall be considering the communicative intention of some of the lexical chains that are part of speech acts, as pragmatic action exerted by the addressers on to the addressees.

2.   SPEECH ACT THEORY AND COMMUNICATIVE INTENTIONS

Speech act theory investigated the ability of sentences to perform actions, to effect some communicative purpose over and above the sense conveyed by the sum of the individual lexical items which the sentence comprises.

In speech act theory a text consists of a succession of speech acts. It is true that much of the literature on speech acts relates to the analysis of individual sentences and that what happens when sentences are concatenated has been relatively neglected. Yet, as Ferrara (1980) has shown, the interpretation of speech acts depends crucially on their position and status within sequences. Put simply, the perceived status of an utterance such as «There are thirty people in there» varies according to co-text: on the one hand, as the first member of a pair which continues: «Could you open the window?», it has the status of a subordinate act in sequence aiming to achieve the sub-goal of justification for the main goal in the speaker's plan - having a window open. On the other hand, as a reply to «How many people are in there?», its status would be that of compliance with conditions governig what are known as adjacency pairs in conversation (questions tend to be followed by answers, greetings by greetings, offers by acceptances or rejections, etc...). The interrelationship of speech acts within sequences leads to the notion of the illocutionary structure of a text, determining its progression and supporting its coherence.

The cumulative effect of sequences of speech acts leads to the perception of a text act (Horner 1975), the *predominant* illocutionary force of a series of speech acts.

Ferrara (1985: 140) defines the ultimate goal of text pragmatics as being the study of how entire sequences of speech acts

> «are evaluated on the basis of higher order expectations about the structure of a text, and how they, being themselves coherent microtexts, contribute to the global coherence of a larger text».

Those sequences of speech acts or communicative intentions behave as signs which point to a single overall purpose, the rhetorical purpose of the text. Perceiving this rhetorical purpose depends, of course, on our ability to recognise speech acts in a sequence of discourse.

3.   TEXT, DISCOURSE AND GENRE

As we said before, it is now assumed that a text consists of a succession of speech acts. But these speech acts, individually analyzed, do not need to

coincide with the dominant illocutionary force of the text. From the interaction of the various speech acts throughout a given text there comes the notion of text act.

A text is the linguistic outcome of a discourse (which is the reflection of a text type or genre) in which lexical items have both a linguistic and a communicative meaning. This double function of vocabulary as a vehicle of transmission of conceptual as well as discoursive ideas has shown the virtual meanings of words and how the actual meanings of those words develop in context. The global meaning of a text is

> »discourse-specific and has to be negotiated relative to what may be unique and specific purposes. Word meaning in discourse is regularly instantial. It depends on relations contracted as part of its place as a single item in an abstract lexicon; but that same item can have different values every time it is used in real texts».

> (Carter, R. 1987: 81)

Furthermore, a text, according to Widdowson (1984: 230-232), is a static configuration of linguistic signs that have to be interpreted in a particular way if they are to perform their mediating function. Linguistic signs, as they appear in the abstract system of knowledge of grammar, are symbols. Their meaning, established by convention, is autonomous. On the one hand, they denote a class of objects, events, etc., of the internal and external world. On the other hand, they establish mutual relations with other symbols as terms of the same linguistic system.

In order to perceive the full communicative value of an utterance, we need to appreciate, not only the pragmatic action, but also a semiotic dimension which regulates the interaction of the various discourse elements as signs. The interaction takes place, on the one hand, between various signs within texts and, on the other, between various signs, the producer of these signs and the intended receivers.

Our ability to recognise texts as instances of a type —exposition, argumentation, instruction— depends on our experience of previous instances of the same type, in other words, on our ability to recognise texts as signs.

Within functional linguistics, the concept of *genre* [5] has been proposed as a useful one for helping us to understand the nature of language in use, including the issue of predictability. The term *genre* refers to a purposeful, socially-constructed, communicative event. Genres reflect social events. Most of such events result in texts, that is, pieces of oral or written communication, for example, political speeches, nursery rhymes, casual conversations, and so on. In this paper, we consider annual business reports as a genre; that is, they reflect a particular social occasion different from many other social occasions, and they are realised in a specific type of text.

Genres can also be regarded as «conventionalized sets of texts» which reflect the functions and goals involved in particular occasions as well as the purposes of the participants in them (Kress 1985: 19). The participants in the social events which are reflected in genres are bound to be involved in attitudinally determined expressions of these events. These different modes of expression will be referred to as discourses [6], and, in the case we are considering, Chairmen's Statements would be a type of persuasive discourse.

When writing texts on Business, there are so many interests involved that the language used is very carefully chosen and there is no place for improvisation. It seems as if the writer of this type of text is always aiming at a particular goal, which is that the text has an influence on the receiver, so that the latter will respond in such a way that it will benefit the writer's purpose.

In this paper, we will be referring to a very specific feature of these reports, namely, to how lexical cohesion acquires the pragmatic focus of persuading the shareholders and the general public of the good prospects of the company in question. We shall be examining some components of lexical cohesion and will see how they contribute to producing the persuasive effect that this type of report conveys. We have found semiotic relationships of those signs with other signs in the text, thus reinforcing the rhetorical purpose of the texts. This can be better illustrated with the actual analysis of a Chairman's Statement, more specifically, with the study of the way in which lexical cohesion contributes to persuasion.

4.   ANALYSIS OF CHAIRMEN'S STATEMENTS

We set out to study this type of texts searching for textual and pragmatic aspects which could contribute to proving their persuasive force.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the organisation of a text (texture) is made up of relationships amongst items in the text; some of these relationships are semantic (the others being grammatical). We decided to start by looking into lexical cohesion in order to identify the items which are related to each other by semantic relationships. Lexical cohesion aknowledges the existence of the important text-forming properties of lexis. Lexical cohesion becomes the dominant mode of creating texture.

Seven Chairmen's Statements, extracted from the corresponding Annual Business Reports of seven British public limited companies, were analysed applying Hasan's scheme (1984; with Halliday, 1985).

During the course of the study and whilst in the process of analysing the lexical cohesive elements which take part in the different ties, we detected in all analysed texts, without exception, a series of lexical items which carry positive connotations within the context of business and which participate in

all types of general lexical cohesive ties which appear in the texts (repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy). These items in themselves participate in another lexical cohesive tie, as they have similar instantial meaning. They are so frequent in the analysed texts that we felt that they merited further study.

In the seven Chairmen's Reports examined, the words with the highest number of occurrences in the 614 ties of repetition are:

year.................................. 56 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
business............................. 45 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
company............................. 41 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
market............................... 25 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
increase............................. 24 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
strength (and derivatives)......... 20 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
new .... 19 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
growth (and derivatives) .... 56 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
profit .... 17 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition
acquire (and derivatives).......... 16 occurrences of the total 614 ties of repetition

From this list we can observe that six of the ten most frequently used words have positive connotations in the context of business.

Words such as *success, progress, development, improvements* and *opportunities* also appeared with a significant degree of frequency throughout the seven reports.

It could also be observed, comparing the Chairmen's Statements with other types of text which are contained within the Annual Business Reports, that these lexical items act as signs giving a persuasive intentionality to the Chairmen's Statements which we perceive as a particular feature of them and that differenciates them from other texts.

In order to illustrate this, two conceptual paragraphs have been selected as samples of two different types of 'subgenre'. They both have the very same subject —«Development and Research»—, both have been extracted from the same annual report, «Pilkington plc 1990», but from two different sections: the first paragraph has been extracted from the Chairman's Statement and the second from the Directors' Report. Both sections are signed by the same person, Anthony Pilkington, but each was written with different purposes in mind.

Research and Development

> *Pilkinton's technological leadership* within our core business has made *significant progress* during the year. The policy of concentrating on *enhancing* the technological performance of the basic products, and so *creating added value,* is *succeeding and has resulted in a number of exciting new products.*

In the United Kingdom, the most significant *advance* is Pilkington K glass (an oil-line coated low emissivity glass) which has opened up the prospect of a *revolution* in energy conservation in buildings. This new glass, together with the *Group's pre-eminent position* in the fibres insulation market, puts Pilkington in a *uniquely strong position* to contribute to a more energy efficient future, with the consequent *benefit* of a *major* reduction in enviromental pollution.

Libbey-Owens-Ford, in the United States, who also have an on-line energy saving glass of equivalent performance, have *achieved* another technological *breakthrough* with the new solar control glass for the automotive industry. EZ-KOOL, a green body tinted glass, is *exceptionally* effective in reducing ultra-violet and infra-red transmission, thus enabling automotive designers to increase the surface area of glass without increasing air conditioning load.

It looks certain that Pilkington will *benefit* from the growing demand by end users for body tinted and surface coated glasses, which have been designed to meet specific needs, and that these new products will progressively capture a *greater proportion* of the clear float glass market.

Shareholders will find a more detailed account of last year's performance of the constituent parts of the Group in the «Around the World» review in the Report and Accounts.

Research and Development

Research and development expenditure for the Pilkington Group amounted to £73.3 million, of which £18.5 million was directly funded by customers (1989-£63.9 million and £12.5 million). About a quarter of this expenditure is at the Pilkington Technology Centre at Lathom, Lancashire and the remainder in the Group R & D facilities at other sites in the United Kingdom, in the USA, Germany and Australia.

Group research continues to develop the key enabling technologies which are required to underpin current and future business activities of Pilkington.

Having checked the same phenomenon in the seven annual business reports it is fair, then, to suppose that this is not an accident and that the use of words and phrases with positive connotations is one of the distinctive features of this genre.

In the light of this significant frequency of the co-occurrence of elements with positive connotations in the Chairmen's Statements analysed, we decided to further the study of the meaning of these particular lexical items taking the context of situation into account and interpreting any particular lexical patterning.

Some of these lexical units we are referring to include items such as *success... excellent year... very positive performance...* and others whose conceptual meaning or denotative meaning is positive in itself (as it is accepted as being

generally positive by the vast majority of society). However, most of the lexical items which bring positive values to the Chairmen's Statements (that is, the ones that add positive value to what is being said about the company in question) are able to do so because of their context of situation.

Thus, for example, the word *strength* can have positive or negative connotations, or indeed neither of the two, depending on what goes with it and, at the same time, it is interpreted in one way or another, depending on the type of text it is in, the purpose of the writer in using it, the intended addressee, the interpretation of the reader, etc. Let's look at the phrase

«... *the strength of our market position...*»

Bearing in mind that this example has been taken from a Chairman's Statement where the performance of his own company is being described, and that the intended addressees are the investors, the use of *strength* adds positive value to the whole phrase, since market position by itself has only referential meaning, whereas having a *strong market position* implies that the firm is successful. However, if we found the word *strength* associated with *debt* in the same text , the connotations, the value transferred would be negative.

We will attempt to prove and illustrate now, by way of another example, that these positive items may form independent similarity chains, which describe parallel processes or descriptions. The crucial factor would appear to be that chains interact with each other. This happens «when two or more members of a chain stand in an identical functional relation to two or more members of another chain» (Hasan. 1984:212) giving rise to what she calls cohesive harmony.(Hasan 1984; with Halliday, 1985). Besides, Hoey (1991:14) adds that «What is important here is not the nature of the ties in use but their function».

In the cases we are studying, the chains all add positive values (within the context of business) to the information presented about the companies; their components share a semantic relationship and act as instantial cohesive devises.

It is the combination of these chains that is significant, not their occurrences in isolation; therefore, we will explore these chains and their interconnections in one of the Chairmen's Statements, in search of any lexical patterns, in a similar line with Hoey, which could lead us to prove the hypothesis that they contribute, in a relevant manner, to form the persuasive force of the text.

This is the text of a Chairman's Statement which reviews the results of Wedgwood plc for the financial year to 29th March 1986. It provides information about the profit, sales and shareholders dividends, and a brief view of Research and Development and of Staff.

AGAIN, RECORD RESULTS FROM WEDGWOOD.
THE PATTERN OF GROWTH CONTINUES.

The directors of Wedgwood announce a *further increase* in sales, *profit* and dividends for the year to 29th March 1986.

Profit before taxation was £19.5 million as against £15.1 million in 1984/85, an increase of 29 %.

Earnings per share were 30.6p compared with 21.2p in 1984/85 and 14.6p in the year before that.

As a result of the strengthening of sterling against major foreign currencies sales at £152 million have *progressed* more than appears from the bald figures. Home market sales *increased by* 13 % and sales overseas by 7 %.

There has been an *excellent* start to the current year and the order book remains strong.

The *continuing growth* pattern has encouraged the directors to recommend the payment of a final dividend of 7 pence per share on the share capital as increased by the rights issue. This makes a total of 10 pence for the year compared with 7.25 p last year.

An *outstandingly successful* performance has substantially increased the group's share of the home market and for the second year running *record sales* figures were achieved in Australia, Canada and Japan.

The United States company has retained its *strong position* in what is still by far the most competitive export market.

Holland enjoyed a *record year* and Italy and France have *progressed strongly*. The *prolific manner* in which *new product* ranges have been created by our design team and introduced in world markets, has played an important part in the group's increasing turnover and profitability.

The capital expenditure programme announced at the time of the rights issue is well announced and in addition there have been *further developments* in combining craftsmanship with *modern technology*. Tableware as well as giftware is now being fast fired with considerably savings in energy and other costs.

The company is full of *health* and *vigour*. We have a *highly motivated* and *skilled workforce, a strong* professional management team, *sound* investment in other factories and marketing *strength* at home and overseas which is *without parallel* in our industry. The directors are looking for *further improvement* in trading results in 1986/87.

228 YEARS OF NEW IDEAS, AND MORE ON THE WAY

The following data has been extracted from the results of the analysis of lexical cohesion of the above report:

— The word which has been repeated most is *increase* (7 occurrences), the second is *strong* (6); there are also a couple of occurrences for each of these terms: *record, growth, new, profit,* and *progress*.

— As far as the synonyms and near-synonyms are concerned, all the pairs include only positive items (*increase / progress, excellent / outstanding, development / improvement, health / vigour, new / modern*).

— There are 33 lexical elements (including some repetitions) which in this context acquire positive connotations. It is difficult to believe that all this is an accident.

The use of positive items, their textual and interpersonal functions in this report is so obvious, that we need only look at the underlined elements in the entire report to get an idea of its message and intention.

Our thesis that the chains of positive items contribute greatly to the persuasive force of the text, is demonstrated when we reorganise these terms, grouping them by common semes as follows:

Growth	Record	Newness
further increase	*excellent start*	*new*
increase	*record sales*	*further developments*
(in home and overseas sales, etc.	*outstandingly successful*	*modern technology*
progress	*most important market*	*fast fired (new production process)*
strong	*most competitive market*	*savings in energy and other costs*
continuing growth	*record year*	
prolific manner	*withour parallel*	
health		
vigour		
further improvement		

These three lexical chains take part in the cohesion and contribute to the intended meaning of the text, namely the continuity of growth, record and newness. In fact, this meaning has already been suggested in the three headings of the report:

"AGAIN, RECORD RESULTS FROM WEDGWOOD «
"THE PATTERN OF GROWTH CONTINUES «
"228 YEARS OF NEW IDEAS, AND MORE ON THE WAY «

It all seems the result of careful planning rather than merely accidental. The cohesive relation between the lexical chains of positive items and these three headings contributes to the texture of the report and corresponds to the writer's intention of communicating the idea of Wedgwood being both a strong and growing company and one with new ideas, and that it will continue this way. Therefore, the message of progress and buoyancy has been mainly achieved by the use of these cohesive lexical items which trasfer positive values.

CONCLUSION

Our thesis is that these lexical items are not only relevant to the texture of Chairmen's Reports, but that they transfer positive values to the information about the companies whose performance is the subject matter of the reports. In this type of discourse the chains of *positive items* have a very relevant interpersonal and textual function. The coincidence in the use of positive items and their high frequency in the discourse of English Business Reports is not accidental; it corresponds to a rhetorical strategy for persuasion. In the case of the Chairmen's Statements, the addresser (the Chairman) tries to convince the addressee (the shareholders of the company), that their money is in good hands, that it has been well invested, that the prospects are good, and therefore, in spite of any possible difficulties, that it should be kept there.

The discourse of the report includes several items with positive connotations in the context of business; these items transfer positive values to the meaning of the text, they convey a particular illocutionary force, or underlying force, to the addressee, that the company is doing well. The addressee believes his money is well invested (perlocutionary act), thus achieving the addresser's goal.

To express the same conclusion in more general terms we can say that the relationships that form the lexical cohesive ties established could be interpreted not only as denotative relations, but as connotative as well; that is, introducing the so called semiotic dimension of context. And lexical cohesion has been determinant in the way in which this semiotic interaction takes place in Chairmen's Statements, namely, through the semiotic interplay of linguistic signs that generate semiotic relationships which give this type of text a persuasive intentionality which we perceive as a particular feature of Chairmen's Statements and that differenciates it from other texts.

NOTES

[1] The Chairman's Statement is the usual introduction of Annual Business Reports. These are the reports which contain the independently audited financial statements of a company and which must be produced by all publicly quoted companies and sent to their shareholders, following the completion of each financial year. This publication, which is required to be produced by law, is primarily aimed at providing information for the institutional investor, as well as for the private shareholder and the general public at large.

[2] Other terms currently used are «global act», «pragmatic focus».

[3] Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990) equate «register analysis» with the study of the communicative dimension of discourse, in their book *Discourse and the translator.*

[4] Two types of schematic knowledge: a) content schemata: background knowledge about the content area of a text; b) formal schemata: background knowledge about the formal, rhetorical, organizational structures of different kinds of texts (Carrel, 1983: 83-84).

[5] For further reference to genre and its relation to text and context see chapter 6 of Halliday and Hasan 1985; and John Swales's Genre Analysis.

[6] For a more complete understanding of the relation of genre, discourse and text, see Hatim, B. & Mason, I. (1990).

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