

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

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**A Dynamic Text Linguistic Model for the Development and
Measurement of Text Comprehension Skills**

Possible alternative applications of a cognitive, functional, pragmatic
framework in the 7th and 8th grades at primary schools

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1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation

The research for this dissertation was conducted as part of my researcher teacher program spanning from January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2020, whose general goal is twofold: to integrate theoretical linguistic knowledge in pedagogical practice and to take into account the demands of classroom activities in theoretical research. This twofold goal is traceable throughout the present thesis.

The subject of this dissertation is interdisciplinary, covering text models and the development of text comprehension skills from both a theoretical linguistic and a pedagogical perspective, and it aims at contributing to an effective implementation of the development of text comprehension skills in public education.

The relevance of the subject was justified by identifying the problems related to the development of text comprehension skills.

1.2. Identifying the problems related to the development of text comprehension skills

Looking through the results of the national and international measurements of reading comprehension of the past 20 years, one can state that the text comprehension skills of the students are far below the expectations of the society and the requirements of the labor market (Csapó et al., 2014; Csapó, 2015; PISA 2015; Ostorics et al., 2016), consequently, the goal-oriented, continuous development of the text comprehension skills of the Hungarian students is imperative (Kerber, 2005). The question is what foundations this development may be built on at school.

During my practice in adult education, I observed that teachers' competencies required for targeted text comprehension development (such as knowledge, ability, attitude, autonomy-responsibility) are not utilized during the day-to-day teaching-learning process. The theoretical and practical issues related to text are not systematically present in the teaching-learning process: the development is done in an ad hoc manner, there is more emphasis on measurement and less on conscious development (Zs. Sejtes, 2018).

The results of the psycholinguistic (phonological and morphological) research on language awareness since the 1970s are built into the daily process of teaching reading (reading techniques, data-driven (bottom-up) components) in the first four grades of primary school education. However, similar research at the level of text (syntactic, pragmatic and language awareness studies) is still delayed due to its interdisciplinarity and complexity (Zs. Sejtes, 2019).

The results of cognitive linguistic and psycholinguistic research on the micro- and macrostructure of text or the results of studies using dynamic text models are not present in today's mother tongue education despite the fact that the process of text comprehension may be made more transparent by examining the linguistic structure of texts and the underlying psychological processes in text comprehension (Pléh, 2014: 287–305). The metalinguistic elements of knowledge related to text are not even present in the two fundamental documents of Hungarian public education, NAT, 2012; KTT, 2012 (Zs. Sejtes, 2019).

NAT (2012) and KTT (2012) use Chomsky (1965)'s distinction of competence and performance in which the knowledge of language is distinguished from its use and pragmatics is distinguished from grammar. This sharp distinction is a cardinal problem for today's mother tongue education, which makes it difficult for the students to associate their own observations with their studies (Kugler–Tolcsvai, 2015: 18; Kugler, 2018: 38).

Today's institutionalized mother tongue education must take an integrative role and convey the linguistic components supporting the metacognitive knowledge (both structural and of usage) in the development of text comprehension skills as segments supporting each other. This requires a dynamic, functional approach which views the system and its usage in interaction (Kugler–Tolcsvai, 2015: 19).

2. Goals, hypotheses and specific research questions

With its twofold goal, this thesis aims at renewing that pedagogical practice in the development of text comprehension skills by examining the theoretical linguistic (cognitive, functional and pragmatic) approaches to dynamic text models from the perspective mother-tongue education, thus it is a pedagogical text linguistic study (Crystal, 2003: 512).

This thesis bridges theory and practice. During critically analyzing the theoretical research in text linguistics and examining the empirical grounding of the theories, I will focus on approaches related to written texts which are compatible with the processes of text comprehension and the development of text comprehension skills. Testing a theoretical model of text with empirical data and checking its applicability with quantitative methods is beneficial for linguistics. The combined results of theoretical linguistic and pedagogical research may contribute to our understanding of the framework and systemicity of the process of the development of text comprehension skills.

This work prioritizes the interdisciplinary approaches to text linguistics (van Dijk, 1980; van Dijk and Kintsch (1978, 1983; Petőfi S., 1997, 2004; Tolcsvai, 2001; Beaugrande–Dressler, 1981/2000) which cover the production, use and reception of texts (psycholinguistics, cognitive text linguistics, cognitive pragmatics, functional text linguistics) (cf. Tátrai, 2011).

In accordance with the twofold motivation, the goal of the dissertation is to contribute to both theoretical and applied research.

2.1. The goals of the theoretical research (GTR)

GTR1) a critical synthesis of the psycholinguistic, text linguistic and pedagogical research with relevance to the development of text comprehension skills to work out a systemic framework for the development,

GTR2) a quantitative survey about the metalinguistic knowledge of the notion of text among 13–14 year old students with a test developed by the present author using Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s text linguistic model.

2.2. The goals of the applied research and development (GAR)

- GAR1) examining the correlations between the metalinguistic results and background variables¹,
- GAR2) verifying that the metalinguistic knowledge about the notion of text is at a higher level and more complex among students with good text comprehension skills than among those with weaker results,
- GAR3) measuring the results of the two-year development process based on Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s text linguistic model,
- GAR4) drawing the conclusions relevant to the development.

2.3. The hypotheses of the theoretical research (H)

- H1) Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s text linguistic model is applicable to the description and measurement of the metalinguistic knowledge about the notion of text among 13–14 year old students,
- H2) it is possible to develop a test based on the model which can reliably measure the students' metalinguistic knowledge about the notion of text.

2.4. The hypotheses of the applied research

- H3) there is a correlation between metalinguistic knowledge and text comprehension skills,
- H4) there are correlations between the background variables used in the research and the metalinguistic knowledge concerning the students' performance,
- H5) students who are capable of producing metalinguistic statements about the notion of text due to their general language development, linguistic

¹ The background variables are the results of the National Assessment of Basic Competencies (NABC) in mathematics and text comprehension spanning 6th through 8th grades, the results of 8th grade students at secondary school entrance examinations in Hungarian language and literature and mathematics, and the results of the survey on 8th grade students' metalinguistic knowledge and text comprehension skills.

intuition and usage experience will have better results at tests measuring text comprehension skills,

- H6) students who have participated in the development built on top of the cognitive, functional, pragmatical linguistic model will have better results than those who do not receive such development.

An indirect goal of my work is to present an approach based on cognitive, functional, pragmatical and pedagogical foundations which supports teachers in a targeted development of the text comprehension skills in the 5th to 8th grades. Special emphasis is put on the development of the students' competency in language use, raising their awareness that the knowledge of language and the knowledge of language use mutually reinforce each other, raising their awareness of pragmatical competency and the rule system of the usage of utterances and texts produced for the purpose of communication and their age-appropriate application in natural settings relying on real-life experience in interpreting different text types and genres (Zs. Sejtes, 2017).

3. The theoretical framework

3.1. The notion of reading and text comprehension in an interdisciplinary approach

The reading theory models combining cognitive, psycholinguistic and pedagogical approaches indicate that reading and text comprehension is both data- and concept-driven (bottom-up and top-down) relying on linguistic processes and knowledge. Text comprehension is a problem-solving process during which the readers recall their own experiences and their knowledge of the world and make use their knowledge of texts as well (Csépe, 2014: 341).

In the critical assessment of the psycholinguistic and pedagogical approaches to reading and text comprehension, I discussed the particularities of a cognitive, metacognitive change of approach, proposing the usability of a bottom-up and top-down interactive model, and evaluated the metalinguistic knowledge of text from the perspective of reading strategies based on metacognition (Goodman, 1985; Pressley, 2000; Tolcsvai, 2001; Nagy, 2004, 2015; Rumelhart, 2004; Adamikné, 2006; Józsa–Steklács 2012; Schnotz–Molnár, 2012; Pléh, 2013; Csépe 2014; Haase, 2017).

3.2. Competency, explicit and implicit knowledge, skills at the boundary of linguistics and pedagogy

The competency-based, criteria-oriented, development aiding pedagogical model by Nagy (2015) (KKFS) deals with competency, skills and abilities in a unified framework and views text comprehension and the text processing ability as indispensable conditions for the key competency of communication. Following Nagy (2015), I summarized the characteristics of reading and text comprehension competency, explicit and implicit knowledge and ability in an interdisciplinary framework (pedagogical, psychological and linguistic) and proposed a consistent terminology. Combining the pedagogical and linguistic approaches to concepts of competency and knowledge was also motivated by the fact that the theoretical pedagogical studies on reading incorporate the results of theoretical linguistics.

The reasons for selecting the target group for my research are that students at the age of 13 and above are already able to monitor their metacognitive processes, connect their metalinguistic knowledge of text with their practical knowledge and thus the metalinguistic knowledge of written texts and the knowledge of language use mutually reinforce each other (Zs. Sejtes, 2018).

3.3. From the static notion of text to dynamic models

The central part of the dissertation proceeds from a critical assessment of the static notions of text to the characterization of dynamic text models. The goal of assessing the relevant theoretical linguistic literature and discussing the different approaches with a practical orientation is to justify why I chose Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s cognitive, functional and pragmatical model as the theoretical framework. According to their model a text cannot be interpreted in itself; a text is realized in the processes of text creation and text reception. The process becomes dynamic by the embeddedness of the product and the production and the structure and the procedure in a single framework (Beaugrande–Dressler, 2000: 287). A dynamic view is also characterized by a search for recurring patterns, which provides regularities and a probabilistic approach to text comprehension rather than by the use of deductively abstracted, static rules. The goal of text processing and the development of text comprehension skills is to discover regularities, strategies, motives, preferences and defaults rather than formulate rules (Tolcsvai, 2001: 29). The

model contains both grammatical (formal) and functional, pragmatical components and thus it covers both knowledge and usage.

The specific research questions of metalinguistic test concerning explicit and implicit knowledge follow the model's approach and pertain to general criteria characterizing both the substance of text (cohesion and coherence) and communication (intention, acceptability, newsworthiness, intertextuality) (Beaugrande–Dressler, 2000: 23).

4. Empirical research

In the empirical part, I surveyed the metalinguistic knowledge of 13-14 year old students about the notion of text with a test developed by myself on the basis of Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s text linguistic model and did a correlation-analysis on the results of the metalinguistic test and the standardized skill assessments.

4.1. Tools of measurement

I used two tools of measurement: one to measure text comprehension skills and another to measure metalinguistic knowledge. Since the purpose of the fundamental research is to examine the usability of the metalinguistic test, this thesis focuses on it.

The test developed by the present author contains 11 exercises and 106 items and it measures the students' (explicit) metalinguistic knowledge of text built on top of Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 2000)' text model pertaining to the seven standards of textuality and the mental operation of comparing texts. Most questions of the measurement tool are open-ended items requiring short answers.

4.2. Sampling (target group, location, time)

The test measuring metalinguistic knowledge and text comprehension skills was filled in by 124 students of 8th grade in the classrooms at their own schools in the October and November of 2017. One of the schools is in a housing estate neighborhood (Tabán Általános Iskola, Tabán Primary

School) and the other is downtown (Juhász Gyula Primary School affiliated with the University of Szeged).

4.3. Processing and evaluating the metalinguistic test

The test filled in by 124 students was processed by me using a predefined evaluation guide, ensuring the objectivity of the sampling by using a scoring method by items and a separate score sheet for each student. During data processing, I did classic, descriptive statistical analyses (analysis of variance (ANOVA)) and correlation-analyses.

5. The results of the thesis

The hypotheses drawn from cognitive text linguistic theoretical research (psycholinguistic and pragmatical) and pedagogical, applied research were supported by the results of the quantitative survey.

5.1. Results concerning goals of the theoretical research

GTR1) After summarizing the results of psycholinguistic, text linguistic and pedagogical research with relevance to the development of text comprehension skills, it could be proved with a quantitative method that Beaugrande–Dressler (1981)'s cognitive, functional and pragmatical theoretical framework combined with a pedagogical approach (KKFS: Nagy, 2015) can be used in the development and measurement of 7th and 8th grade students' text comprehension skills.

GTR2) As an outcome of the research, the present author developed a tool of measurement (a metalinguistic test), which can be successfully used in measuring the knowledge related to the notion of text among 13-14 year old students.

The reliability of the test is shown by its very high Cronbach-alpha value: 0.908. The tool of measurement consistently measures the students' metalinguistic knowledge. As a tool with an expected high consistency and reproducibility, it can hopefully be used in further research.

The diagnostic mapping indicates that the validity of the tool can be acknowledged: the tasks of the metalinguistic test are based on the textuality standards of the selected linguistic theory.

The identical settings and predefined evaluation guides ensure the objectivity of the data processing and the evaluation.

5.2. Results concerning goals of the applied research

GAR1) The metalinguistic test shows strong correlation with the results of the standardized text comprehension assessments and the other background variables, consequently the metalinguistic knowledge has influence over other cognitive skills.

GAR2) An important survey result for the development is that students with good text comprehension skills have higher level and more complex metalinguistic knowledge than students with worse results.

GAR3) Comparing the results of the 8th grade students who participated in a two-year development process based on Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s text linguistic model with the results of students who did not confirm that the theoretical linguistic framework applied during the two-year targeted development can be effectively used in classroom activities to increase the students' metalinguistic knowledge and improve their text comprehension skills.

The results of the measurements of metalinguistic knowledge using cognitive, text linguistic elements from drawn from theoretical research, the following conclusions can be drawn for the practical application of linguistic theory in the development of students' metalinguistic knowledge related to text (GAR4):

- a) Identifying the linguistic components related to the macrostructure of texts, their overall schemata and types is necessary in the development of text comprehension skills among 13-14 year old students.
- b) One way to achieve the goal is to use the concept-driven principle in an interactive approach.

- c) Text comparison activities can be based on Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s textuality standards and the basic notions concerning the substance of language and the process of communication.
- d) The fundamental concepts to be used during the development, the metalinguistic knowledge related to text (textuality standards) as components of the metaknowledge may support the recognition, shaping and use of individual text comprehension strategies based on metacognition.
- e) The application of the theoretical knowledge in practice supports the development of the students' explicit knowledge related to text, which has a positive effect on implicit knowledge component of the text comprehension skills.

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that it is possible to describe and measure the metalinguistic knowledge related to text using an integrative (pragmatical and systemic linguistic) model. The metalinguistic test based on Beaugrande and Dressler (1981)'s textuality standards is a reliable tool of measurement and can be effectively used in skill development. It fills a gap in domestic and international research by carrying out a survey of metalinguistic knowledge at the level of text with respect to both the substance of language and communication.

Another novelty of the interdisciplinary approach (combining theoretical linguistic, psycholinguistic and pedagogical approaches) is that it shows that components of the process of text comprehension in systemicity providing a help to teachers.

It was unambiguously corroborated that the process of the development of text comprehension in the classrooms can be built on top of a dynamic theoretical text linguistic model in an applied cognitive framework, on top of an interactive, bottom-up and top-down approach and the KKFS model in pedagogy (Nagy 2015).

6. References

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