Establishing Coherence in Text. Conceptual Continuity and Text-world Models

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Abstract

In this paper, coherence is described as conceptual continuity which depends both on the surface structure of the text and on the mental activity of the recipient. It is shown that the plausibility of this conceptual continuity is governed by the specific text-world model and its particular ontology with which the recipient finds himself confronted. Furthermore, it is argued that the ability to establish coherence is part of our textual competence based on our linguistic and conceptual knowledge; establishing coherence is not to be equated with the process or result of general text interpretation. Using data from naturally occurring texts, the paper illustrates that the process of establishing coherence may involve more cognitive processing than merely activating an appropriate script or frame from long-term memory.

1. Introductory remarks

One of the central – and at the same time most difficult – aims of modern text linguistics is to explain how coherence in text is established if the linguistic structure is referentially underspecified, that is if there are not enough explicit means in the text that help the reader to build up a conceptual representation of the underlying state-of-affairs. Although in the past twenty years great advances have been made in the understanding of both the implicit connections of texts and the inferential processes during reading which lead to the establishment of coherence, a lot of problems still remain to be solved; cf. Bublitz (1999), Rickheit and Schade (2000). This is first and foremost due to the fact that coherence is indeed a very complex phenomenon, revealing many different representational and procedural aspects along the micro- and macrostructures of natural language texts. Moreover, there is neither a generally accepted definition of coherence nor a comprehensive theory of coherence which adequately explains all facets and varieties of the phenomenon. Over the last decades, the quest for the coherence of text has led to different perspectives and models reaching from text-centred views, which search for coherence in the text itself, to procedural positions, which claim that coherence is not a text-inherent property at all but rather emerges during text understanding as a result of a highly subjective process; I refer to Lundquist (1985) and Hellmann (1995) for a short overview.

Furthermore, the term coherence is confusingly used in different accounts to refer to different things: i) either to both surface connectivity and underlying continuity, ii) only to the underlying conceptual continuity, or iii) to the result of the interpretation process in text comprehension; cf. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) and (1994), Brinker (1996), Sanders et al. (1993). Thus, not all text linguists distinguish between cohesion, which is the common term for overt linguistic devices at the surface structure of the text, and coherence, which is the common label for semantic-conceptual interrelatedness in text. Halliday and Hasan (1976), however, define cohesion in semantic terms.

Recent developments in text research – see Gernsbacher and Givón (1995), Motsch (1996), Spooren (1999) – suggest that the conceptual relations in text are of vital importance and deserve particular attention. At the same time, many researchers have realized that no serious analysis of coherence can be carried out without appealing to its cognitive aspects. However, this should not lead to the conclusion that coherence can be explained purely as a mental process without considering the structure of texts, a view which is implied in accounts favouring a conception of coherence “less dependent on the language of the text itself” (Bublitz 1999, 1).

In this paper, I will argue for a cognitive and procedural approach which at the same time does
not neglect the surface structure of texts, and I will discuss briefly some of the main problems of present research on coherence. In addition, I am going to argue that a distinction has to be drawn between establishing coherence (in the sense of conceptual continuity) and text interpretation. In this respect, we should not define the establishment of coherence as a highly subjective process but as part of our textual competence, which is based on both our linguistic and conceptual knowledge. I will seek to demonstrate how coherence is established during reading as a form of conceptual continuity based on the compatibility between the mental representation of the reader and the model of state-of-affairs expressed in text structure. Using data from naturally occurring texts, I will then illustrate that this process of establishing continuity may sometimes involve much more than just activating a matching schema, or script, in memory.

2. Basic assumptions about coherence

A text consists of linguistic information which normally refers to a — non-linguistic — part of the world. It depends on the text function whether the reference is to the real world or some kind of fictional, imaginative or otherwise mental world.

The concept of “text” used here is specific. A text is a complex linguistic structure which performs a communicative function and which consists of several sentences (at least two). The sentences of the text are usually either explicitly or implicitly connected with each other, or both. These connective relations tie together the referents, events, and so on, that are described in the text. The text, as a consequence, is perceived as a coherent structure, rather than as an assembly of disjointed referential information.

It is a well-known fact, that coherence may be expressed explicitly or implicitly. (1) is an example of a text in which the sentences are connected by cohesive ties and at the same time are conceptually related:

(1) The man arrived at the station in the middle of the night. The station was empty. The man looked around. He wanted a taxi. But there was none.

The italicized anaphoric expressions indicate referential identity which obviously is an important form of continuity. Further continuity relations are, for instance, causality, identity of time and place, identity of goals and motivations, global themes, results etc.; see Hobbs (1979) and (1983), Hellmann (1995), Dahl (1995), van den Broek (1994) for further discussions. Conversely, (2) is a text which is perfectly coherent, although it lacks explicit cohesive means:

(2) The man arrived at the station in the middle of the night. The clock stroke midnight. The train had been two hours late. The shops were all closed and there was no taxi available on the street.

Cohesion, then, is not a necessary condition for a text to be coherent. The missing overt connectedness is made up by a plausible conceptual interrelationship between the events described in the sentences. The state-of-affairs described in the text are compatible with the reader’s mental representations in memory. Hence, there is a plausibility assumption leading the comprehension process which plays an important role in establishing coherence (I return to this issue in section 5).

According to many linguists, texts which are implicitly coherent have a special status among the class of coherent texts. They argue that the recipient has to apply special procedures in order to impose coherence; see, for instance, Reinhard (1980, 163). I do not conform to this assumption. Readers accept and understand implicitly connected texts with the same ease as explicitly connected ones (for further discussion see section 3). For example, a global theme or connector may integrate seemingly disconnected events into a continuity relation, as in (3):

(3) Children were yelling on the street. A dog was barking furiously. The radio of my neighbour was playing. Two men were engaged in a discussion on taxes. I could not stand this noise any longer.

The different events described in the four sentences are summarized and taken up by the complex anaphor this noise which at the same time supplies an evaluation of the events. Thus, if a common conceptual integrator exists there need not be a local coherence/continuity relation between each adjacent pair of sentences.

In (4) there is no overt conceptual relationship, although we find cohesive means on the surface structure. There is no continuity, as a matching process in which the semantic representations of the sentences are mapped into an appropriate world-model is lacking:

(4) Two men were engaged in a discussion on taxes. A dog was barking furiously. The radio of my neighbour was playing. The children were yelling on the street.
(4) The man arrived at the station in the middle of the night. The station was empty, because the rabbit had the mad cow disease. He sold his shoes, then went to see the chancellor in order to make a telephone call.

Therefore, it is difficult—if not impossible—for the reader to establish plausible conceptual relations between the sentences. Only by applying several interpretative inferences one might get to some overall sense of (4). But without any further information (stimulated, for instance, by the fact that the sentences are part of a science-fiction novel or a modern fairy tale), which could help as a clue to integrate the seemingly absurd events described into some kind of a text-world model, this task would still turn out to be quite difficult.

A text, then, is considered to be incoherent if its state-of-affairs representation is not congruent/matching with any plausible continuity constellation derivable from the readers memory representations. In this view, coherence can best be described as conceptual continuity in the sense that the events expressed by parts of the text can be connected and integrated into the text-world model; furthermore, this is done automatically and without effort, and on the basis of our linguistic and conceptual competence. Hence it should come as no surprise that as a rule coherence is not recognized by readers (except by linguists searching for it), only incoherence is recognized.

Since a lot of texts lack formal cohesive devices and are still considered to be perfectly coherent, while other texts contain cohesive devices but are nevertheless not coherent, the role of cohesion in defining coherence can best be depicted in the following statement which is commonly found in modern text linguistics, e.g., in Hellmann (1995) and Spooren (1999): Cohesion is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for coherence. This position, however, does not imply that coherence is some non-textual phenomenon explainable solely in cognitive terms. True, coherence can felicitously be described as “conceptual linkage”, as “relations between the states of affairs” expressed in the text, but this should not lead to the conclusion that coherence is “not an inherent property of a (...) text”, as was put forward by Gernsbacher and Givón (1995, vi); for a similar view see Bublitz (1999). This view is highly misleading because it disregards—or at least plays down—the role of surface structure. We have to admit that coherence is sometimes a scalar phenomenon since different readers may deal differently with text structures due to their different knowledge structures (this is especially the case with scientific texts). Nonetheless, the potential for establishing coherence lies within the text itself, viz., its grammatically expressed information and meaning representation.

Thus, the question would always be: Where else if not in the text is coherence to be found? Text researchers should stop making confusing and misleading statements like the one discussed and turn to the explication of coherence as part of our textual competence within textual structures. The exploration of the sources of individual differences in inferential processing is something which belongs to a more general theory of language comprehension.

Hatakeyama, Petöfi and Sözer (1989) expand the dichotomy cohesion/coherence into the trio connexity, cohesion and coherence (for a similar distinction see Reinhart 1980 and Bublitz 1999). They define connexity as the connectedness at surface level and cohesion as a connexity that depends on sense-thematic relations, whereas coherence is regarded as being the compatibility the interpreter expects from the extra-linguistic correlate. While I do conform to the conception of
compatibility, I reject a strict separation of grammatical, semantic, and conceptual continuity. Instead I suggest one overall concept of coherence which includes information internally represented within the text as well as information externally added through knowledge activation and inferences.

Conceptual linkage is dependent on surface structure and in this respect it is bound to the explicit information given in the text. It is the surface structure that helps to activate semantic and conceptual representations and stimulates the process of building up a mental model of the state-of-affairs. In this respect, explaining coherence means at the same time finding an explanation for the interaction between language structures and cognitive procedures within the exemplary realm of text comprehension.

3. Underspecification and conceptual elaboration

It is generally agreed upon that one of the central aims of modern text linguistics is to describe and explain coherence as a network of explicit and implicit relations which are responsible for the connectedness/continuity in texts. In order to describe and understand coherence, three different levels of textual representation have to be distinguished, as is illustrated in (5):

(5) Text 1

S1 S2 S3 S4 Syntactic level (surface structure)
P1 P2 P3 P4-5 Semantic level (lexical meaning of text structure)
RS1 RS2 RS3 RS4-5 Referential level (text-world model)

The first level is the level of surface structure which involves the sentences S1, S2 etc., including their grammatical structure and, occasionally, cohesive ties. The second level, the one of semantic representation, can be described as a set of propositions P1, P2 etc. These representations form the lexical meaning of the text and are based on the explicit information of surface structure. The semantic form is compositionally derivable from the lexical means of the sentence. The third level represents the referential states-of-affairs (RS1, RS2 etc.) described in terms of conceptual constellations which form the “text-world model” of the text including all participating referents, their mutual relations as well as the events and situations in which these referents are engaged. The text-world model is based on the information of the text itself, but at the same time it is elaborated as a result of cognitive processing performed by the reader; or, to put it more succinctly, a text-world model is the result of applying knowledge representations to the text base. Building up a text-world model is a highly automated process which always takes place in the comprehension process.

In accordance with the diagram in (5), a text (Text 1) can be considered connected in a cohesive way if the sentences S1 and S2, S2 and S3, and so on, are explicitly linked on surface structure by lexical means (such as connectors, anaphoric expressions etc.). Accordingly, a text is (locally) coherent if the sentences S1 and S2, S2 and S3, and so on, present propositions that refer to conceptual representations which stand in plausible relations to each other. Note, however, that this is not to be understood as the overlapping of propositions; really crucial is the compatibility of the underlying conceptual representations. We may find semantic overlapping between propositional arguments, and yet the text can be incoherent (as demonstrated in [4]).

There is no isomorphic relation between the informational representations of the three levels. A complex sentence may include several propositions (as depicted in the model by S4), and a proposition may refer to a more elaborate conceptual representation (within the text-world model). For instance, the meaning representation of a sentence such as (6) refers to a conceptual representation in which the referential slots concerning the accidents have to be filled with appropriate entities:

(6) Several accidents happened on Monday because of slippery ice on the B 4.

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1 Different conceptions of text-worlds or mental models can be found in Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) and (1994), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), Johnson-Laird (1983), and Givón (1995).
Hence, the reader will elaborate the semantic form by establishing a referential default value such as VEHICLES. The result of such an operation is quite predictable because it is based on common and shared default assumptions which are part of our conceptual knowledge. No reader of (6) would make an elaboration by filling the referential slot with BOOKS or KEYS. Completing the propositional form in order to get to the conceptual representation is demanded quite frequently and it often involves some sort of semantic-thematic decomposition, as can be seen in (7) and (8):

(7) She dug a hole into the frozen ground.
(8) She opened the door reluctantly.

To fill in the missing entities of the complete conceptual representations, some slot-filling or referent-creating operations have to be performed; I refer to Singer (1994) for discussion of the procedural aspects of these elaborations. That these default elaborations play an important role in establishing and accepting coherence is illustrated by the continuity relations expressed by appropriate definite noun phrases:

(9) She dug a hole into the frozen ground.
   (a) The shovel was very heavy.
   (b) "The key was very heavy.
   (c) "The spoon was very heavy.

The continuation with shovel in (a) is accepted as coherent without any cognitive effort, whereas in (b) and (c) the reader would have to make an extra inference to establish some kind of (strange or unusual, though possible) continuity relation.

The phenomenon of indirect anaphora constitutes a type of referential underspecification which is very common in texts. The term indirect anaphor refers to a definite NP which has no explicit antecedent in text and is linked via a cognitive process to some element in the preceding text. This referential element is said to function as some kind of anchor for the interpretation of the indirect anaphor.

The interpretation of many indirect anaphora is based on the activation of script-knowledge (Sanford and Garrod 1981; 1994); for a detailed account on different types of indirect anaphora see Schwarz (2000a). Let me roughly and very briefly summarize the accounts of text comprehension which share the basic assumption that our conceptual knowledge is stored in memory in modular chunks (so-called frames, schemata, scripts or scenarios). According to these accounts, language understanding is a process in which linguistic bottom-up and conceptual top-down processing interact. On reading, for example, a sentence in which the linguistic items going to a restaurant appear, the recipient retrieves the matching RESTAURANT-script in memory. The knowledge stored and activated in this script, then, provides the appropriate information (about food, waiters, costumers, cooks etc.) which is necessary to interpret the text which is often referentially underspecified. Consider (10):

(10) I know a lovely restaurant in Jena. The food is excellent and the waiter is a nice guy.

Establishing a coherent link between both sentences in (10) is to treat the waiter and the food as fulfilling typical roles, or default values, of the script which is activated in a top-down process by the anchor-expression restaurant. The recipient has to localize the referent of the indirect anaphor in the mental structure of the script.

Several other kinds of cognitive processing have to be distinguished. For example, the indirect anaphor in (11) illustrates a conceptual type which is based on drawing an inference:

(11) The Mossad agent was found dead at his writing desk. In spite of the farewell letter, captain Purzel does not believe in the suicide version.

Texts like (11) are quite frequently encountered in cinema and TV briefs. The NP the farewell letter can only be understood if the reader draws some inference about what has been going on, especially THE POLICE FOUND A FAREWELL LETTER WHICH WAS WRITTEN BY THE AGENT. This process of inferential anchoring, however, does not necessarily involve the activation of one specific frame or script.

Another type of underspecification can be found in (12). Text-externally expressed actions or events are not always linked together by explicit means which serve to indicate a continuity in the sense of causality:

(12) I was stuck in traffic for almost two hours. My boss screamed as I entered the bureau.

Although the two events described in (12) are not connected in any way in surface structure, the reader relates them conceptually in the sense that the first event is the cause for the second event.
To sum up, we may formulate the condition of underspecification in the following way. A text \( T \) is referentially underspecified if there is no explicit link between the propositions \( P_1 \) and \( P_2 \) etc. of the sentences \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) etc. and/or if the syntactically bound meaning representation does not provide the referential values which belong to the complete conceptual representation of the RS1.

Three main subtasks are involved in resolving underspecification: i) matching the states-of-affairs described in the text at hand with default assumptions in memory, ii) linking referential events, and iii) slot-filling operations which enrich the semantic form with appropriate referents; see Singer (1994) and van den Broek (1994) for a more detailed account on text base elaborations. Under-specification and implicitness in text should by no means be regarded as some kind of textual deviance (which is done in many accounts). On the contrary, systematic underspecification is to be regarded as default. It is the result of applying the principle of relevance to the production process by leaving out superfluous information (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995). Underspecification is achieved, in accordance with some principle of cognitive economy, by selecting really relevant information and thereby avoiding redundancy.

In order to complete the semantic form of the text, the reader automatically assigns a mental text-world model to the information rendered by surface structure. The text-world model incorporates both information from the text and information activated through inferential processing. Thus, the text-world model represents a referential constellation of states-of-affairs which is – in most cases – more complex and elaborated than the semantic text basis. Semantic enrichment and conceptual elaboration occur spontaneously and have to be considered as part of our textual competence. Generally speaking, texts do not give us enough information to build up continuity. To find an explanation for coherence, therefore, is at the same time to explain our ability to cope with underspecified language structures.

4. Coherence versus text interpretation

Coherence has been regarded by many text linguists to be the constitutive property of natural language texts, as, for example, in the following quotation:

[If an expression (...) is coherent it can be called a text. (Bokay 1985, 415)]

Coherence, however, is not a criterion to distinguish a text from a non-text because there are natural texts which are not coherent but still perform a communicative function. This is especially evident in literary texts. Therefore, there should be a differentiation between the process of establishing coherence (conceptual continuity within the text-world model) and the process of interpretation, which is not so much dependent on coherence but, rather, on the overall sense and function the reader assigns to the text. Nonetheless, many linguists tend to equate coherence and text interpretation, as the following quotations suggest:

The idea of coherence in text itself is meaningless. A text can only facilitate an interpretation. (Sanford and Moxey 1995, 183)

(Coherence is not a text-inherent property at all (as are cohesion and connectivity). It is not given in the text invariantly and independently of an interpretation. (Bublitz 1999, 2)

From this point of view, understanding a text means constructing a coherent representation of that text (see also Sanders et al. 1992). This view, however, is unwarranted, and the resulting conception of the process of language understanding is severely biased. Obviously, the set of coherent texts is not identical with the set of comprehensible and interpretable texts, as was pointed out already by T. Reinhart:

But, since there are hardly any known limits on what the human mind can understand, given the appropriate amount of effort, imagination and patience, such an analysis would have to wind up stating that any string of sentences forms a coherent text, a statement for which, of course, we need no theory of text-coherence. (Reinhart 1980, 162)

We have to distinguish between two interrelated but for heuristic reasons independent areas: conditions on text coherence and principles of text interpretation. The main task of text-linguistics is to explain how we recognize coherence in texts and how we distinguish coherent from non-coherent texts.

To establish coherence in text is part of our textual competence and this competence is based both on our linguistic knowledge and our common conceptual knowledge about the world. However, even if there are neither explicit nor
implicit connections, the reader may still accept the text as a communicatively functional, though not coherent text. The aim of language processing theories, therefore, is to explain in a much wider perspective how recipients may arrive at interpretations.

With regard to literary texts, discoherence as well as discontinuity are very often used to indicate the global “sense” of the text leading the interpretation process of the reader into a certain direction. We might, for instance, interpret linguistic dissociations and discontinuity within a piece of literary art as a hint that the underlying meaning is to reveal discontinuities of the realm expressed in the text. Consider the example below:

(13) Hallucination großer fremder Städte Stadt
starrt aus eingefallen Ecke Silberburg-Rosenbergstrasse Novembersonne Gerüst Ahnung ...
(first part of Helmut Heissensbüttels poem
“Gedicht über Hoffnung” [Poem on hope])

Thus, connectedness — even a minimal amount of it — cannot be considered as a condition for the interpretation of texts, although this seems to be widely assumed in traditional text linguistics. An expression considered to be a text can be interpretable even if the interpreter cannot assign a matching text-world model — and thereby continuity — to it. Interpretation, on the other hand, may exceed by far the establishment of coherence, since it may relate to all kinds of affective, connotative, and stylistic aspects. While establishing coherence normally comes as a “by-product” in the reading process, interpreting a text may be a constructive process requiring other mental activities.

5. Text-world models and the overall concept of conceptual plausibility

As I have already pointed out, continuity within the states-of-affairs of the text-world model means that each sentence in the text will be conceptually consistent with the previous sentence. The maintenance of continuity can best be described as a process of mapping referential representations onto conceptual representations of the preceding text. The relations between the sentences are restricted by the shared knowledge we possess about plausible connections in our long term memory (as part of our knowledge stored in scripts). Conceptual plausibility is more dominant than cohesion and even overrules the function of cohesive ties, as is illustrated in (14) and (15):

(14) Sigi could not attend the lecture. He missed some interesting talk on coherence.

(15) "Sigi could not attend the lecture. Therefore, he missed some good ice-cream.

Even though a connector links the events described in (15), the reader will find the causality relation expressed highly unlikely since there is no plausible congruence between the causal continuity in the text and the default causal continuities found in or inferred from memory. In (14), there is no explicit connector expressing causality, yet the reader will find it easy and highly plausible to relate the events. From this it can be gathered that plausibility, taking the term in its widest sense, is one of the most dominant principles in establishing continuity in a text. On the other hand, plausibility is dependent on the specific text-world model of the text, too. What is considered normal varies with the text at hand. In this respect, Dahl (1995) has pointed out that continuity and plausibility (in his terms “normalcy”) often go together, a view which is quite similar to what I am proposing here.

Conceptual compatibility/plausibility is governed by the global pattern of the mental text-world and by its specific ontology with which the reader finds himself confronted. This ontology functions as the overall framework into which readers have to incorporate all further information. The complexity of the problem stands out much more clearly if one looks at real texts rather than simple examples construed for linguistic purposes. (16) is an example of a text sequence in which the state-of-affairs described is not compatible with our common model about the real world, yet it turns out to be perfectly reasonable within the text-world model:

(16) After a while she remembered that she still held the pieces of mushroom in her hands, and she set to work very carefully, nibbling first at one and then at the other, until she had succeeded in bringing herself down to her usual height. (L. Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, 47)
The event described in the first clause is interpreted as the cause of the event in the second clause. The causal relation between eating from a mushroom and changing one's height is plausible only because it can be incorporated in the pre-established conceptual representation of the states-of-affairs of the fictional text-world.

A similar example is offered in (17). Within the text-world model of the fairy tale we accept the otherwise highly unusual causal relation between the event of lighting a fire and the appearance of a dog:

(17) Wo ist mein Feuerzeug? Er schlug Feuer, und da kam der Hund mit den Augen so groß wie Teetassen. (H.C. Andersen, "Das Feuerzeug", 266)
‘Where is my lighter? He lit his pipe, and the dog with the huge eyes appeared in front of him.’

There is continuity only because the reader accepts the normalcy conditions within the mental world of the fairy tale. The comprehension of the following example (18) illustrates in what ways different processes must coordinate in order to accept conceptual continuity:

‘A snob is on a cruise on the Nile. The boat capsizes. Within a second, some crocodiles get near the boat. "Oh, how noble!", the snob shouts delightedly, "even the lifeboats are made by Lacoste."’

In this example we find a very specific and highly unusual kind of referential identity, viz. that between crocodiles and lifeboats. This specific identity, which only exists in the perspective of the snob, is established uniquely within the internal text-world model of the text at hand. Whether this identity is accepted or not ultimately depends on the willingness and ability of the reader to accept the relationship within the cognitive state of the text-world, i.e. on the basis of the reader’s knowledge of text functions as well as the crocodile-label from Lacoste. Recognizing the intended representation of the joke is building up a model in which the entities are represented on two different conceptual levels: on the normal, ontological level where there is no identity between boats and crocodiles, and on the level of the text-world model, including the mental perspective of the snob from which the different entities are “identified” with each other.

Clearly, merely activating a script or scenario in memory which constrains the possible inferences made by the reader and at the same time functions as a default structure, does not work in cases like these. Consequently, an adequate description of continuity in texts sometimes demands a much more complex explanation than merely in terms of default assumptions. Establishing continuity within the domain of a mental text-world model may involve much more than just retrieving an appropriate knowledge chunk from one’s long-term memory.

6. Summary and outlook

In this paper, it has been argued that a theory of coherence should be a text-based theory which takes into account that coherence is realized internally within the text but through the interaction of cognitive processing. Furthermore, the phenomenon of coherence which is to be explained on the basis of our textual competence is not to be equated with the process or result of general text interpretation.

Coherence can best be described in terms of conceptual continuity which is governed by the mental concept of plausibility. Readers will accept a text as coherent if they find compatibility between the states-of-affairs described in the text and their mental representations of the matching world-model. Since most natural texts are referentially underspecified, establishing coherent links often goes hand in hand with the conceptual elaboration of the text base. The compatibility-matching process involved in this elaboration is based on default assumptions and plays an important role in establishing and accepting continuity relations. Sometimes, however, this default congruence is overruled by the specific constraints of the text-world model at hand.

An important problem which remains to be solved is how different knowledge structures and processes interact in comprehension. The view put forward in this paper suggests that the immediate process of establishing coherence comes about through an interaction between i) the information in the text, ii) the mental accessibility of both default representations and appropriate inferences, and iii) the mental state of the current text-world model. The interaction between these variables definitely deserves more attention in future research.
References


