

## Discourse organization in expository and persuasive texts

This presentation discusses the interaction between coherence and lexical cohesion in different genres. Our central hypothesis is that lexical cohesion is more closely aligned with coherence structure in expository texts than in persuasive texts. This hypothesis is based on the general idea that texts are constructed by the writer (and reconstructed by the reader) differently in content-oriented, thematically organized (expository) texts (Britton 1994) and in texts with a strongly intentional structure (persuasive texts).

Our hypothesis is tested on a corpus consisting of expository texts (encyclopedia entries and popular scientific articles) and persuasive texts (fundraising letters and advertisements). The genre-specific structures of these texts are determined with the so-called move analysis (moves are the functional components of the genre structure, each of them contributing to the main communicative purpose of the given genre) (e.g., Bhatia 2004). The hierarchical structure of coherence is described in the framework of Mann and Thompson's (1988) Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST; <http://www.sfu.ca/rst/>). Lexical cohesion is analyzed as a network of semantic relations (repetition, hyponymy, meronymy, collocation, etc.) between content words. To measure the alignment between coherence and lexical cohesion, the centrality of discourse units in the coherence structure is compared to centrality derived from lexical cohesion. In the RST structure, centrality is defined in terms of nuclearity and height in the RST tree. For lexical cohesion, centrality of discourse units is measured in terms of the number of lexical cohesive relations, the textual distance, and the type of relation between the content words.

For encyclopedia texts we have derived the move structure 'name' – 'define' – 'describe in general' – 'describe details' from our corpus. For the fundraising letters, we have adopted Upton's (2002) seven moves (including, e.g., 'get attention' and the central move 'solicit response'). The results show that in the case of encyclopedia entries, both the coherence analysis (RST) and the analysis of lexical cohesion point to the discourse units at the beginning of the text (realizing the moves 'name' and 'define') as the most central units. For the fundraising letters, however, there is a central unit according to the coherence analysis (realizing the move 'solicit response'), but no clearly central discourse units can be identified by lexical cohesion.

In the next months, popular scientific articles and advertisements will be added to the investigation. We expect to find similar results for popular scientific articles as for the encyclopedia entries: close alignment between coherence and lexical cohesion. Also advertisements and fundraising letters bear similarities in their discourse organization: one central discourse unit in the RST structure, but no central unit in lexical cohesion. With this broadening of our corpus, we ensure that our findings do not simply reflect genre differences between encyclopedia entries and fundraising letters, but more generally between expository and persuasive discourse organization.

### References

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- Mann, W. C. & Thompson, S. A. (1988). Rhetorical structure theory: toward a functional theory of text organization. *Text* 8(3), 243-281.
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## Illustration of the analytical procedure

First the move structure is mapped onto the RST structure of the particular texts by identifying the most central discourse units realizing a certain move in the hierarchical coherence structure (Figure 1). Then these discourse units are compared to the structuring of lexical cohesion (Figure 2).

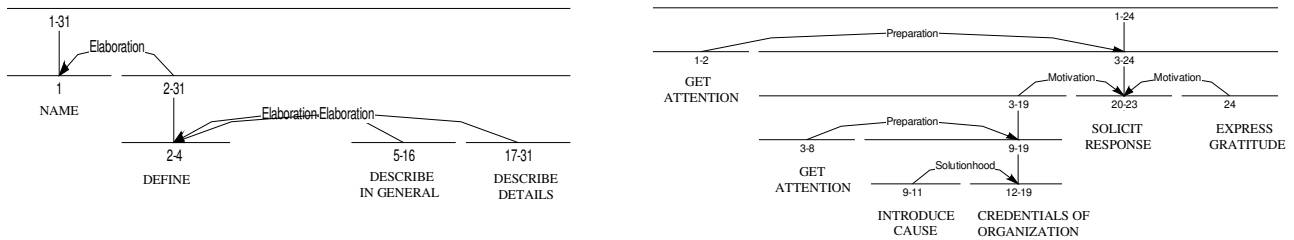


Figure 1: Move structure and top-level RST structure for an encyclopedia entry (left) and a fundraising letter

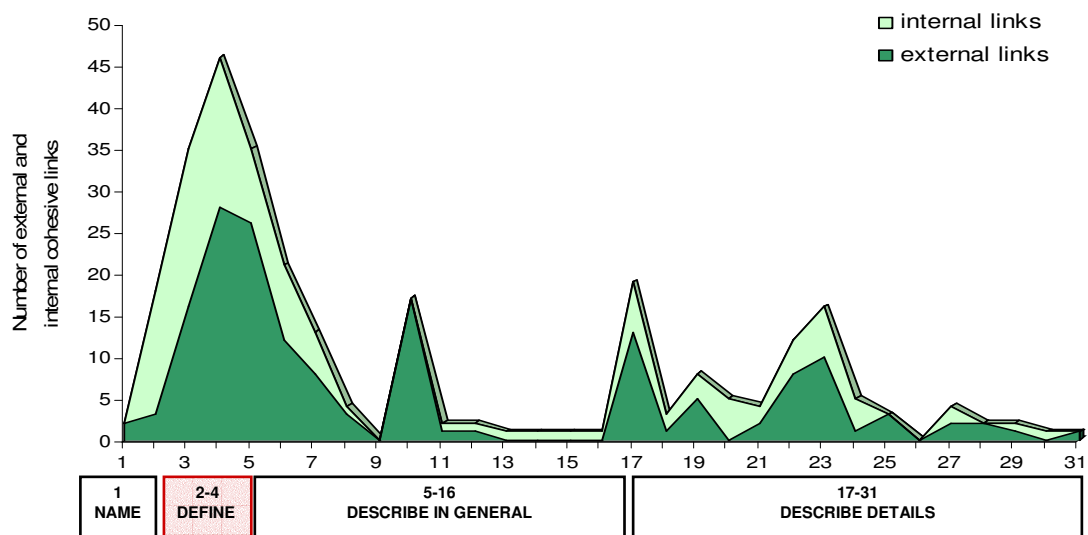


Figure 2: Lexical cohesion of an encyclopedia entry compared to its move structure (Note that here only the number of the lexical cohesive relations is presented for the discourse units.)