

**For a Teaching Device of Textual Cohesion  
in foreign language(s): Which Didactic Intervention (s)?**

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**Abstract:**

In this article, we focus on several fundamental concepts in the teaching of foreign languages, in particular teaching French, namely the didactic intervention, the task, and the language needs to produce at the end a device for teaching textual cohesion, and of course this is based on an empirical observation among first year university students of French language.

**Keywords:** didactic device, didactic intervention, language need, textual cohesion

**Résumé :**

Dans cet article, nous mettons l'accent sur plusieurs concepts fondamentaux en didactique des langues étrangères, et particulièrement en didactique du FLE à savoir l'intervention didactique, la tâche, les besoins langagiers pour produire à la fin un dispositif d'enseignement de la cohésion textuelle, et ce partant d'un constat empirique auprès des étudiants de 1<sup>ère</sup> année universitaire de langue française.

**Mots clés :** besoin langagier, cohésion textuelle, dispositif didactique, intervention didactique

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نركز في هذه المقالة على العديد من المفاهيم الأساسية في تعليم اللغات الأجنبية وخاصة الفرنسية، وهي التدخل التعليمي، والمهمة، والحاجات اللغوية لإنتاج في النهاية نموذجاً لتدريس التماسك النصفي المكتوبة باللغة الفرنسية، وهذا انطلاقاً من منهجية تجريبية لدى طلبة اللغة الفرنسية في السنة الأول الجامعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدخل التعليمي، المهمة، الحاجات اللغوية، التماسك النصفي،

## Introduction

The present research work is the outcome of long scrutiny of recurring deficiencies in the written expression students of the first year in the French department of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of the University of Djelfa. We noted, in fact, a considerable lack in textual cohesion in almost all the dissertations (G. Kleiber, C. Schnedecker, JE. Tyvaert, 1997), which was generally manifested by "referential discontinuity". Among the elements of textual organization that caught our attention in the essays, we are interested more in those which contribute to ensure cohesion and which linguists call "anaphors".

### 1. Key concepts:

#### 1.1. Textual Coherence and Cohesion:

As soon as we assimilate the phenomenon of textuality, we have been to rethink (check out) more deeply two key concepts in this nascent review in text studies "coherence" and "cohesion". A remarkable ambivalence have been, for a long time, hovering on the link between these two terms, and more on the limits that must separate their areas. Along with the development of research in textual linguistics, especially the release of the fundamental work *Cohesion in English* (1976) by Halliday and Hasan, the subtle variation between the two terms regressed and the separating lines became clear and ambiguity have been lifted as R. Patry points out: "we can situate the complete separation of cohesion from coherence; that is, its autonomous affirmation as a concept and as a methodology of analysis, with the publication of the major contribution of Halliday and Hasan, 1976." (1993: 17).

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Mr. Charolles takes up this distinction by separating the two concepts, "on the one hand, coherence which has to do with the interpretability of texts, and on the other, the marks of relationship between statements or constituents of statements. Concerning the marks, since M.A.K Halliday and Hasan (1976), we tend to group them under the name of cohesion... " (1988: 53).

### **1.2. Anaphora:**

Due to its important, and sometimes crucial, role in textual cohesion, anaphora became a central subject of research for wide range and high rank of linguists and didacticians. However, taking interest in this textual phenomenon rise of many difficulties especially when the matter is to define it, as G. Kleiber points out: "the first problem, as in many other fields, is that of the definition of the phenomenon" (1994: 21). This notion has traditionally been defined as a stylistic device, a rhetorical process of repeating a word or a series of words for the purpose of emphasis, or symmetry. If we leave rhetoric aside and embrace the field of textual linguistics, we note that the notion of the anaphora is no longer a figure of speech, but rather a syntactic process consisting in taking up a segment previously cited in a well-defined text.

### **2. Development of the textual cohesion device:**

#### **2.1. Didactic device:**

The term "device" is also considerably present in didactic (thinking, research field) to highlight all the components in terms of teaching-learning means and tools made available to teachers and learners, for the appropriation of knowledge. A didactic device implies dynamicity of actions and interactions between the different elements involved in a teaching-learning situation, namely: learner, knowledge, and teacher as noted by A. Berten who considers that the device « (...) *It is a way of considering the natural or built environment of man as a place not for the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, but as a knowledge mediation network - from which, of course, can emerge acquisitions and transmissions.* » (1999: 42).

A didactic device is, therefore, a process of action and reaction between the different parts (poles) in a teaching-learning situation. This process is linked to the disciplinary knowledge brought into operation. In this article, we are interested in the way the disciplinary knowledge destined for textual cohesion is taught, learned and especially appropriated by 1st year university students, those who are enrolled in the Department of Languages (French section) at the University of Djelfa. In order to develop our didactic device, we go through six important stages which constitute the main pillars of our device and which mark our didactic intervention. These steps are:

- problem-situation;
- identification of needs ;
- determination of objectives;
- device axes: textuality and discursiveness;
- methodological approach: tasks and activities;
- Evaluation.

In the following subtitles we will present the role and the organization of each step

## **2.2. Situation-problem:**

The concept of "situation-problem" has been the subject of much work, including that of J-P. Astolfi (1991), M. Develay (1993, 1994, 1995), G. de Vecchi and N. Carmona-Magnaldi (2002). It is a methodology that advocates, from obstacles, scriptural activities intended to master a set of abilities, to arrive at a coherent text set. It marks a break with most of the activities offered in class and in textbooks which are limited to the application of grammatical rules to outlying decontextualized statements.

This step is the starting point of this device and even of our research. It consists of observing the students in a problem-situation . We asked the students to write a text in which they should explain and develop the reasons behind the choice of French as a study stream. It was quite noticeable, in almost all of the written productions, a great and apparent gaps

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showing lack in textual cohesion (G. Kleiber, C. Schnedecker, J-E. Tyvaert, 1997). These gaps are generally discernible through a “referential discontinuity”. We underlined, therefore, and as a forgone conclusion, that a problem of dysfunction of the anaphora system is in a persistent action in the writings of these students who recorded ten to twelve years of French in the school cycle.

### **2.3 Identification of needs**

According to the precursor R. Richterich, “the notion of language need (...) immediately refers to what is necessary for an individual in the use of a foreign language to communicate in the situations which are particular to him as well as to what it lacks at a given time for this use and which it will fill by learning ”(1985: 92). Indeed, language needs refer to the different language resources required by learners to manage the various communication situations they are confronted with.

As several didacticians point out (J. Courtillon: 2003), (J-P. Cuq, 2003), language needs are not necessarily and exclusively reducible to language activity. Indeed, the language need is sometimes related to linguistic difficulty; as for example, when the learner is confronted with the fault and he needs to solve this problem in a linguistic way (that is to say to acquire a good grammatical and lexical proficiency).

The need for language can also have a psychological origin. This can be prominently observed in shy learners who are especially in need of regaining their self-confidence before anything else. These different needs are not isolated, since we can find several of these aspects in the same subject. The language need is, anyway, a prerequisite for any teaching-learning process as confirmed by T. Bouguerra: “the analysis of language needs represents the prerequisite for any construction of methodology insofar as it determines both the choice of content and the methodologies to be implemented” (1991: 20).

This step is very important in any teaching-learning process. It helps to know the different deficiencies, the various dysfunctions in terms of textual cohesion including the anaphoric system. Therefore, from the proper analysis of the different forms of resumption in the

written productions of learners, to see where the different dysfunctions of the anaphoric system really lie; and this after having given them a task instruction to which they should respond in writing.

It is important to know that we have worked with two groups of students who all have the same profile (university background, level of learning, specialty); and, who are all 1st year university students registered in the department of languages (French section) at the University of Djelfa, where in we exercise our teaching task. These two groups consist of:

- A control group which includes student and who produced writings without any intervention from us. These students participated only in the 1st step of the process of our didactic device, namely the situation-problem in order to identify the different language needs relating to textual cohesion, more precisely, to the functioning of the anaphoric forms of repetitions.
- An experimental group which includes student-actors and which will be subjected to a series of interventions in the form of tasks and activities as part of the experimentation of our teaching-learning device of textual cohesion.

The first set includes texts produced by a control group, which produced writings without our interventions, i.e. the students do what they are used to do when asked to produce a text in French. The second set will include texts produced by an experimental group. This will be subjected to a series of interventions on our part in the form of experimentation before writing a text according to the same instructions given to the first group of students. It is important to know that all students have the same profile (university background, level of learning, specialty). We would like to remind, once again, that these students are enrolled in the Department of Languages (French section) as 1st year of university students at the Faculty of Letters and Languages at the University of Djelfa.

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## **2.4. Determination of objectives**

From the analysis that we carried out of the written productions of the learners of the control group and which relates to the functioning of the anaphoric system, we set the teaching objectives which we present as follows:

General objective: to get the student to produce a coherent and cohesive speech in writing;  
Specific objective: to get the student to assume a correct use of the anaphoric system in his written production.

## **2.5 Device axes**

While relying on the discursive approach, we started from a main idea: the student-writer must have resort to to textuality and discursiveness to produce a coherent and cohesive discourse. It is, therefore, by following this perspective, that we can articulate our interventions on two axes, the objectives of which are determined in the following table:

<b>Axe</b>	<b>objectives</b>
<b>Textuality</b>	Emphasize the textual elements and the different skills (linguistic, referential, strategic, cognitive, etc.) that the writer must call upon to produce his text.
<b>discursiveness</b>	Emphasize contextual elements namely the role played by the text producer, the effect produced on the text recipient and the type of text produced. These must also relate to the organization of the content of the text and its presentation. Emphasis should also be placed on context in the written text.

## 2.6 Methodological approach: tasks and activities

### 2.6.1 Didactic intervention

According to R. Bouchard (2007), the didactic intervention generally manifests itself in the different interactions that take place in a language class: teacher's tasks, the organization of teaching-learning situations, the construction of didactic sequences, and the adaptation to the type of learner. There is intervention to structure learning, to solicit, to meet the needs of learning. In this regard, JF Halté does forget to stress that the operationalization of teaching objectives cannot be carried out on the sole basis of the application of learning theories: "it also implies a deep knowledge of the knowledge to be taught. (1992: 9); for example, to know grammar is a thing, and know how to teach it is another.

When learning a language, there are all kinds of elements that must be distinguished:

- linguistic knowledge (phonetics, lexis, grammar, etc.);
- communicative skills (know-how to respond to language functioning situations);
- an adequate cultural behavior is inseparable from the language.

In addition, there is a very close relationship between the didactic intervention and the problem situation. Indeed, as soon as there is a learning situation where learners have a problem of acquiring and appropriating knowledge, there is a didactic intervention on the part of the teacher marked by the implementation of teaching strategies: adaptation of the program to the class, organization of work in projects or others, management of progression according to the levels of language classes As specified by JL Chiss, J. David and Y. Reuter "One of the major directions of procedural didactic intervention consists in offering children aids, facilitations which would allow them to work in "problem spaces" more complex than those in which they can normally act. (2005: 105).

### 2.6.2 The notion of "task":

We point out, following the example of T. bouguerra (2012), that the notion of task considered as the fruit of current research in language teaching has already been worked on



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in several previous works such as those of (Long (1985), Prahbu (1987)), Nunan (1989)...), contrary to what most researchers think. Thus, "presented as 'a new' concept in language teaching, the notion of task, has been debated in French language teaching since the 1980s" (T. Bouguerra, 2012: 71).

Indeed, among these works we present, as an example, the work of characterization and typologization of tasks by V. Frauenfelder and R. Porquier in their article entitled "The problem of tasks in the study of language among learners". They distinguish four main types of tasks presented as follows:

- Tasks of manipulating forms or utterances (transformation of sentences, morphological substitutions, repetition of phonemes, etc.),
- Tasks consisting in providing an "equivalent": repeating sentences, transcoding (dictation, reading aloud), translation (L1-LE, LE-L1), synonymy, paraphrase, rewriting ("repeat otherwise", for example stories to re-tell),
- Production tasks / guided or semi-free expression: summary, contraction of text, expression on images, etc. [...],
- Intuitional or metalinguistic tasks consisting in providing linguistic or sociolinguistic judgments, explanations or comments, in identifying (and possibly correcting) errors, in finding appropriate contexts or situations for statements.

We also point out that in the action perspective, the notion of task plays a central role, inscribed in a resolutely action-oriented model. The authors of the CECRL define the task as being: "any action activity that the actor presents as having to achieve a given result according to a problem to be solved, an obligation to be fulfilled, a goal that is fixed. It can be just as well, according to this definition, to move a cupboard as to write a book, to make the decision in a negotiation, to play a game of cards ... "(2001: 121).

Our interventions will be carried out with a view to make the students of the experimental group aware of the importance of taking into account situational variables, of textual

cohesion and coherence, of referential continuity and of the logical sequence of ideas, during the production of a speech i.e. a written production. In other words, these interventions will focus essentially on all the language skills that a learner must have, on the importance of speech and all the elements that structure speech such as anaphora, on the sensitization of aspects of the situational context (extratextual).

The objective of our experiment will be to bring the student to exercise his role of text producer, in particular, as someone engaged in a written interaction, to become aware of all the references and the repeats that he makes of all the pragmatic values of what he writes, and to take into account the conditions of production of the speech.

The various interventions that we will make with the students belonging to the experimental group combine theoretical and empirical demonstrations touching both discourse analysis and textual linguistics, with special attention paid to extratextual factors. The final objective of these interventions is to teach and study the anaphora as a discursive strategy involving several syntactic, pragmatic, cognitive and discursive processes at the same time.

This means that we try to approach the text as a local unit and all the operations that take place inside the text, including the anaphoric system, but also as a global unit with taking into account the elements of the context when choosing and organizing linguistic elements in order to provide it with overall coherence, while subscribing to the logic of the tasks asked by learners through micro-situations prototypical. The last serve as a guideline for our interventions. They provide us with "a situational context" which facilitates work on each of the two axes. Our work consists of bringing together the two axes "textuality and discursivity".

The work with the students of the experimental group on the two axes will take place in the form of tasks, and this around prototypical micro-situations of which we cite a few examples:

- The student writes a letter of motivation for admission to a french university.
- The student writes a letter to the cultural attaché of the french embassy in Algeria requesting a scholarship for a linguistic development course in France.

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- Students write a letter to the Head of Department to ask him for indispensable works for their training in French.

Our interventions also take the form of language activities in which we deal with the language errors that we have identified in the second step, namely "the language needs analysis". We, therefore, propose activities that make it possible to meet language needs by giving more importance to the learning of textual cohesion, and of course to the functioning of the anaphoric system which is the object of our study.

In short, the various didactic interventions are devoted to work on all of the two axes "textuality and discursiveness". If we choose to intervene on textuality and on discursivity, it is for us a way not only to highlight the different mechanisms in the production of the text in which the anaphora is a part, but also to underline the importance of anaphora as a complex discursive strategy.

### **2.7 Evaluation**

After having into consideration the different interventions, we will propose to our actors of the experimental group a task consisting in producing written texts. Indeed, we will ask the students learning in the group, subjected to our interventions, to answer the following instruction:

"You are first year students enrolled in the department of French. Write a text for your specialist language teacher (me) in which you justify why you have chosen French as a course of study at the University".

We present, in the following, a canvas that summarizes the approach of our didactic device of textual cohesion.

3. Canvas of the didactic device of textual cohesion

Didactic intervention	Concerned public	Description and organisation	
<b>Problem-situation</b>	<b>First year university students</b>	Initial finding from a diagnostic assessment: - Malfunction of the anaphoric system in written productions; -referential discontinuities; -Incohesion of the writings of learners.	
<b>Needs analysis</b>	<b>Control group</b>	Analysis of the functioning of the anaphoric system in the written productions of the control group.	
<b>Determination of objectives</b>	<b>Experimental group</b>	<b>general</b>	lead the writer to produce a coherent and cohesive speech
		<b>specific</b>	lead the writer to ensure the correct use of the anaphoric system in his written production
<b>Axes of didactic device</b>	<b>Experimental</b>	<b>textuality</b>	Emphasize the textual elements and the different skills (linguistic, referential, strategic, cognitive ...)
			Emphasize the contextual elements namely the role played by the producer of the text, the effect produced

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	<b>group</b>	<b>discursiveness</b>	on the recipient of the text and the type of text produced.
<b>Didactic intervention</b>	<b>Experimental group</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<p>Present to the students demonstrations touching both discourse analysis and textual linguistics, with particular attention paid to extratextual factors.</p> <p>-Approach the text as a local unit and all the operations that take place within the text, including the anaphoric system, but also as a global unit taking into account the elements of the context when choosing and organizing linguistic elements in order to endow it with a global coherence.</p> <p>-Propose prototypical situations in which learners are called upon to respond to the given tasks, by producing written productions either individually or in small groups.</p> <p>-offer language activities</p>

			<p>covering the two axes of our device, namely the textual and contextual elements, giving more importance to the learning of textual cohesion, and of course to the functioning of the anaphoric system.</p>
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### Conclusion:

Working with writing implies a great and a strong energy on the part of the writer, because he implements various operations whose functioning is interactive. In order for the writer to be able to simultaneously manage the various text-setting operations, it is necessary to master those which are centered on local or even textual capacities, but nevertheless extremely important, which, if not sufficiently mastered, risk mobilizing all the subject's energy for a certain time, and therefore causing him to lose the thread of his speech. Indeed, by training students to carry out local operations, we help them develop behaviors that they will afterward mobilize in more complex tasks.

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