

Original Paper

Clear Like an Expert

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Received: March 20, 2020

Accepted: April 16, 2020

Online Published: April 20, 2020

doi:10.22158/eltls.v2n2p43

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v2n2p43>

This short comment owes much to current research in academic writing, text sophistication, and text readability.

The linguistic devices that predict text readability and comprehension are not all equal. The connecting words in

The cat sat on the mat. In addition, the cat purred while sitting on the mat. Secondly, the cat got off the mat. Finally, the cat ran away,

While extremely predictive of text comprehension are also liable to result in negative judgments of writing quality. This is also the case for less complex sentence patterns, less diverse vocabularies, and the use of commonly occurring words.

Academic writing that is always highly rated is a corollary of both text sophistication *and* text intelligibility. Complex syntax, a broad and deep vocabulary, and less frequent words are, according to research, always salient. Research has also found that expert writers exploit quite specific language resources for readability. These resources include lexical (word) overlap and repetition, semantic (meaning) overlap, and text givenness.

Lexical overlap involves the repetition of lemmas and their inflections or diverse forms. Lemmas are base-words that correlate to the dictionary form of a word. *Cat*, for example, is the lemma for *cats*, *catted*, *catlike*, and *catting*; *sat* the lemma for *sit* and *sitting*; and *mat* the lemma for *mats*, *matted*, and *matting*. Expert writers utilise noun, verb, and adjective lemmas across all parts of a text.

The straightforward repetition of words across paragraphs is also typical of successful academic writing. Applied Linguists measure the repetition of words via type-token ratios, which divide the number of **types** (discrete words) by the number of **tokens** (overall word count of a text). In the following sentences, for example, there are 18 types and 29 tokens:

The (1) cat (2) sat (3) on (4) the mat (5) but (6) them at was (7) wet (8), so (9) the causation the dry (10) ground (11) instead (12). Then (13), it (14) rained (15) again (16) and the cat went (17) inside (18).

The type-token ratio of lexical diversity is, therefore, 63% while the ratio of the repetition of types is

37%.

Type-token ratios provide a base measure for comparison across all kinds of contexts. Type-token ratio analyses have shown, for example, that expert writers repeat key content words and function bundles such as *in order to*, *as well as*, and *it can be argued* much more than novice writers.

Synonyms, by definition, effect semantic repetition when deployed across adjacent paragraphs. Synonyms for *sat* include *perched*, *lounged*, *slouched*, *sprawled*, *squatted*, and *straddled* while synonyms for *mat* include *rug*, *carpet*, and *floor covering*. In academic writing, the most cohesive types of synonymic sets are noun, verb, and adjective sets such as *cat = feline, mouser, kitty, tabby*, and *moggy* as well as the *sat* and *mat* sets above.

Text givenness is also a robust predictor of text intelligibility. Texts high in givenness integrate a range of mostly anaphoric (point backwards) devices to evoke what has already been written in the text or, if you like, what has already been given to the reader. The use of pronouns is one way to realise givenness.

Instances of personal pronouns such as *he*, *him*, *she*, *her*, and *they* index what has gone before as in *The cat sat on the mat. In addition, they purred while sitting on the mat.*

The demonstratives *this*, *those*, *that*, and *these* also possess markedly cohesive properties as they can point both backwards and forwards in a text. Note the connections forged in the following sentences:

The cats got off the mat. This means that those cats were no longer on that mat.

Unattended demonstratives, in contrast to attended demonstratives, require more processing time but are even more predictive of text readability. The following sentences include unattended demonstratives:

There was a dog on the mat. This (dog) scared the cat.

The owner removed the mat. This (lack of a mat) stopped the cat from sitting on the doorstep.

High quality texts also tend to contain more of the definite article as *the* can likewise point to something preceding in the discourse.

It is clear, then, that in order to be clear in the right kinds of ways, writers need to repeat different word forms, key words, and function bundles; utilise synonyms; and make use of *this*, *that*, and *the*. Deploying these language resources across contiguous paragraphs allows the reader to make meaning. They are a fail-safe way to facilitate comprehension. No matter how sophisticated the writing.