

Lexical Cohesion

One of the most salient characteristics of successfully written text is the controlled and careful selection of lexis. We will now turn our attention to the importance of lexis and how a writer's choice of vocabulary contributes to the register of a text and helps identify the text-type for the reader. This characteristic of lexical choice is central to academic English, which has its own set of lexical items used repeatedly to indicate to the reader the academic nature of the text s/he is reading. If we consider the text from the previous section once more from a lexical point of view, we are able to see that lexis operates as an important cohesive device, helping to bind these four sentences together and that the structure of this paragraph is considerably aided by the repetition of lexical items which are semantically related.

Task 1 Look back again at the first paragraph in the section outlining paragraph structure. Underline the following words in the text, which all pull together to form a tight lexical net:

A text which successfully guides the reader from beginning to end is said to be COHERENT and allows the writer to explain his/her point of view clearly to the reader across time and space. When a writer fails to establish a relationship between the sentences he/she writes, but instead produces isolated statements bearing no relation to the whole, the reader literally loses his/her way. Incoherent text makes the reading process hard work and even an unpleasant experience. Furthermore, the inclusion of irrelevant information might also detract from the overall subject under discussion and even confuse the reader.

Task 2 Below is the first paragraph of an article entitled 'Universities forced to stop teaching languages' by Polly Curtis, www.guardian.co.uk, 9 September 2009. Look how the words in bold, which referring to language teaching at university, form a lexical net, allowing the text to knit together tightly in order to reinforce the text's underlying message.

Universities are being forced to abandon the **teaching** of **pure languages** after the *government* dropped **mandatory lessons** in **secondary schools**, **the head of Universities UK**, which represents **vice-chancellors**, is *warning* as its *annual conference* starts today. Applications **to language degrees** are drying up and those that are left are increasingly dominated by **private school pupils**, Steve Smith, who is also **vice-chancellor** of **Exeter University**, said. **Universities** are dropping **pure language degrees** to do "**language and culture**" alternatives, with less time dedicated to **developing fluency** and **mastering speaking skills**. The *government* has *commissioned* a major *review* into **languages in universities**, which is due to *report* this month.

Task 3 Here is the final paragraph of the same article, which follows on from a discussion of the effect of having very few linguists will have on the economy. There are two lexical nets in operation here: the first is connected to language learning and the second to the economy. Using two different colours, underline the words which form these two nets, which support the text's main semantic message.

Kathryn Board, chief executive of CILT, the national centre for language teaching, warned that without a workforce skilled in languages, the UK would be held back in its efforts to recover from the recession. "English is one of the great global languages of the 21st century but it will only take us so far. Our engagement with the non-English speaking world will remain superficial and one-sided unless we develop our capacity in other languages. In this precarious economic climate, we need to make Britain strong in the global economy." A spokeswoman for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills said it was looking at ways to improve language learning, including by making it compulsory at primary school.