ALAN PARTINGTON

*UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA
(AT FORLÌ)*

REMEMBERING MICHAEL HOEY'S WORK

CONTACT

Alan Partington, Department of Interpreting and Translation, University of Bologna (at Forlì), Palazzo Montanari, Corso della Repubblica 136, Forlì, Italy.
alanscott.partington@unibo.it

ORCID

0000-0001-7881-8062

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Prof. Michael Hoey was one of Britain's leading academic linguists and language theorists who made transformative contributions in the areas of text and discourse analysis, and in 'Big Data' - that is, corpus-based - lexicology and dictionary-building.

Michael Hoey was the Emeritus 'Baines' Professor of English Language at the University of Liverpool since 1993, he was an academician of the Academy of Social Sciences, a member of Council at the University of Chester and a member of the West Midlands Arts Council. His applied linguistic research led to his lecturing in over 40 countries. His work *Patterns of Lexis in Text* (1991) won the Duke of Edinburgh English Speaking Union Award for best book in applied linguistics and *Lexical Priming: A New Theory of Words and Language* (2005) was shortlisted for best book in applied linguistics by the British Association of Applied Linguistics. He was Chief Adviser on the Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, and was frequently consulted by journalists for his opinion on controversial neologisms appearing in dictionaries.

He grew up in Hertfordshire, attended Berkhamsted School and went on to take his PhD in English at University College London, supervised by Sir Randolph Quirk, among the greatest British linguists of his generation. Michael went on to teach, at Hatfield College, Birmingham University and, from 1993 to his retirement in 2014, at the University of Liverpool.

His lecturing style was vibrant, their content always thought-provoking. His writing style was inimitably engaging: "ideas are like people", he once wrote. "They have direct ancestors and share their genes with their siblings. Sometimes they are lucky enough to have children" (Hoey 2017: ix). In which case, Hoey himself was a hugely prolific parent.

Hoey's body of academic work spanned five decades, during which linguistic theory, our knowledge of the way language is structured and the ways in which we employ it, underwent a sea-change. Hoey was one of scholars not only creating the change but also making it comprehensible to a worldwide audience.

Much of Hoey's early work, in conjunction with Eugene Winter and in days when dealing with discourse above the level of the sentence was still a novelty, develops the 'clause relational' system of text organisation. The clauses (or parts of clauses or groups of clauses) of a discourse are related semantically, across clauses, sentences and paragraphs, even across different texts in a limited number of ways. These semantic relations are generally marked by signals to be found *On the Surface of Discourse* (the title of his 1983 book).

Hoey (1983; 1994) deals at length with one particular and very frequent pattern of discourse structure: The Problem – Solution - Result - Evaluation Pattern. In keeping with his view that even written discourse is a dialogue with a reader, the signalling of a

problem of some sort arouses the expectation of a solution in readers, who are thus alerted to be on the lookout for signals thereof. The pattern can be recursive: if a first solution is signalled as inadequate in some way, then the problem persists and the readers therefore still expect a solution to be signalled. When a solution is evaluated as sufficient, the cycle can end. We recognise this recursive pattern from political speeches where the politician's own solution is offered at the end after all previously mentioned ones have been rejected.

The other relations divide into two broad categories – Sequence Relations (including relations such as Time Sequence, Cause – Consequence, and Instrument - Purpose) and Matching Relations, i.e. relations resulting from the bringing together of two clauses or groups of clauses for the purpose of allowing them to illuminate each other, which include relations such as Contrast, Compatibility and Generalisation – Exemplification.

These are the building blocks of argumentation, familiar to us from genres as diverse as school lessons, detective stories and newspaper editorials. Hoey (2015) is a detailed description of how Sequence and Matching relations can even be traced throughout the text of a long poem.

Hoey's realisation that the majority of the physical signals of the semantic relations connecting the different parts of a text were *lexical items* of some sort, in addition to the sets of grammatical connectors previously described in the literature on cohesion, led to his second body of work, culminating in *Patterns of Lexis in Text* (Hoey 1991; followed up in Hoey 2005b, 2017).

The theme continues to be *cohesion* in texts, the way in which texts are organised to aid listeners' and readers' processing (making them *coherent*, that is, more easily comprehended). We all use a set of lexical devices to link what we are saying or writing now to what we have said before and what we are about to say in the future. These devices – including simple repetition, synonyms, paraphrase and closed-set allusion - use reiteration to signal to the readers that some entity is being referred to (again) but in ways that help avoid making textual repetition hugely cumbersome, to aid comprehension by forming ties or chains of reference, and even allow writers to be creative through stylistic variation. 'Crucially, though, it is not just a question of retrieving earlier matter. It is a question of making sense of earlier matter in a new context' (Hoey 2017: 12). Hoey builds on work by Halliday and Hasan (1976) but the originality of his contribution is proving how, by highly meticulous and detailed examinations of cohesive signalling in texts, the role of lexis, previously often thought to be minor in relation to that of grammar was, instead, primary, and that lexical cohesion is pervasive. For instance, Problems can be signalled lexically in a myriad of ways, *unfortunately, somehow needs / has to* ¸etc., while Solutions too are signalled lexically by *come up with, to avoid this*, and so on (Hoey 1994).

One major cause of the leap forward in linguistic theory mentioned above was the development of corpus linguistics and its sub-branch of corpus-assisted discourse analysis,

which enabled linguists to interrogate large collections of texts. This shone a searchlight on how speakers and writers used language in a myriad of authentic circumstances and, given the possibility of acquiring many sorts of statistical evidence, language researchers no longer had to rely on their 'armchair' introspection on what speakers and hearers did with and through language (and, indeed, what was unusual or never done).

During his time as senior lecturer at the University of Birmingham, he co-authored with Sue Atkins, under Prof. John Sinclair's direction, the proposal to Collins Publishers that led to the development of the Collins-COBUILD dictionary, the first-ever corpus-driven dictionary, and he inevitably became 'heavily involved with the running of the project, working closely both with Antoinette Renouf and Patrick Hanks as they wrestled the first-ever corpus-driven dictionary into shape' (Hoey 2013). This too was a sea-change. Few subsequent dictionaries are not grounded in large language corpora which supply a wealth of examples of the use of words in context. 'Without realising it', Hoey (2013) relates, 'I was slowly mutating into a corpus linguist'.

In *Lexical Priming* (2005) Hoey proposes a new perspective on the relationship between words, or lexis, and what we call grammar, that is, the way humans put lexis together in ordered ways to produce coherent utterances. Earlier theories held a 'slot and filler' view of language production, that the grammatical structure of an utterance is generated first and then words and phrases are then conveniently slotted into the appropriate places, or that the semantics of a sentence is decided first and then the words just obediently fall into place. By the 1990s most linguists realised this was too crude a model, did not correspond to what speakers did in practice and that grammatical, semantic and lexical choices were entirely co-dependent. Hoey's 2005 breakthrough was to show exactly *how* they co-depended. By the highly meticulous statistical study of the behaviour of sets of lexical items in context, in particular of what other items they both frequently or very rarely co-occurred, or 'collocated', with, as displayed in a corpus of 100 million words of newspaper texts, he shows how every word in a language, even the most common and apparently banal, is 'primed' to behave in highly complex ways. They are primed to occur with a restricted set of other words (e.g. *inevitable + consequence*; each is primed to occur regularly with the other), with other items from particular semantic sets, with other words performing certain grammatical functions, to occur in certain places in a sentence or text. When a word is polysemous, the primings of each of the senses differ radically, almost 'on purpose' as an aid to a hearer's understanding of which sense is the relevant one.

Hoey's use of the word 'priming' has aroused some controversy; how can words prime themselves? However Hoey explains how priming is a social, psychological and statistical phenomenon. The detailed knowledge of the statistical regularities of use of a lexical item is learned by an individual's long-term exposure to speech and writing, stored in the mind and then reproduced by them, repeating the cycle of priming of other individuals.

Stating that 'a word is primed to collocate with *x,y,z* ' is clearly metaphorical shorthand for 'a word is primed in the mind of a user to collocate with *x,y,z*'. This is just as metaphorical as saying words 'possess' meanings. In reality they 'possess' meanings in the minds of users. Primings are largely shared and similar in the minds of a language community, otherwise communication among members would be nigh impossible. But, at the same time, as Hoey also points out, individuals all have slightly different language experiences and therefore somewhat different lexical primings too.

And all this is only the beginning. Not only is an individual equipped with knowledge of the highly complex rules of regularities of interaction of all the words and phrases of a so-called language, we also know that the rules of regularities of how a lexical item interacts with others are different for every single discourse type of which we have awareness. So an item as common as, say, *years*, has a different set of interactional regularities in popular science writing, in medical discourse and in legal discourse, and so on. Indeed, one significant emblem of belonging to a particular discourse community, whether it be a rap fangroup or the legal profession, is an acquaintance with the way lexis normally is used by the community.

Hoey (2012) illustrates all this with an exegesis of the primings of *according* in a corpus of newspaper popular science articles:

- it collocates with *to* and *a*;
- *according to a* has a **semantic association** with (or **preference** for) research sources, e.g. *according to a recent study*;
- it has a **pragmatic / evaluative association** with reporting something bad (there is a problem somewhere);
- *according to a [research study]* has the **colligation** in newspapers of being often followed by a *which* clause;
- it has the **textual collocation** of rarely being repeated directly but of being paraphrased in subsequent paragraphs as *said*, *told* etc.;
- it has the **textual semantic association** of being usually part of a claim-evidence relation;
- *according to a research study* has the **textual colligation** of being very strongly associated in newspapers with:

  a   the first sentence of the news story

  b   second half of the sentence, often the end of the sentence

However, if we look at the lexical profile of *according to* in conversation (my own analysis of 100 examples from the spoken BNC), we find radically different primings:

- it is primed to actually *avoid* collocating with *a*, and instead **colligates** with proper names (*according to Eileen*), pronouns, and noun phrases introduced by *the*, or a demonstrative (*according to the newspaper, according to this clock*);
- when it collocates with *you* it has a **pragmatic association** with disagreement (*according to you I have no friends ...*)
- it **collocates** with *whether* followed by a new clause;
- it still has a weak **textual colligation** for appearing at the beginning of an utterance, but it also appears regularly in the middle and right at the end (*the year of revolution, according to someone.*)

'So words and phrases as fully described by corpus linguistics' Hoey (2012) affirms, 'are key to our understanding of all other levels of, and perspectives on, language. And, conversely, all this is what it means to know a word'.

The repercussions of this work go well beyond grammar, syntax and discourse analysis but change the way we need to conceive of how words and phrases are stored in the brain, each one along with a string of information of how it is normally employed, and how they are retrieved so rapidly and with so little apparent processing effort. So the theory is of interest to psycho- and sociolinguists, and students of language acquisition, not only by humans but also by machines (AI). Indeed, the most modern language learning programmes work along Hoeyian principles of massive exposure to language from which rules and regularities are inferred.

During his work on Lexical Priming theory, Hoey revisited and took forward his earlier work on lexical cohesion in texts. He recognised that the items writers use to create comprehensibility, the reiterations – repetition of words and phrases, paraphrases, and so on (see above) - all came with their own lexical profile, different parts of which could be activated on each separate occasion of 'repetition'. Yet another discipline of study had been opened.

Michael Hoey will long be remembered for his inspirational contributions to linguistic theory and also, for those who knew him, for the brilliance of his teaching, his infinite kindness, generosity and self-effacing modesty, inspired by his deep Christian faith. The conviviality of his company and conversation, including the wealth of accounts of his personal experiences always attested an inquiring, creative and altogether beautiful mind.

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