Reading and expertise: The impact of connectives on text comprehension in the financial field

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1. Descriptive abstract
Prior knowledge seems to have contrary effects on learning from expository texts, depending on texts coherence. Some studies have indeed shown that high-knowledge readers learn more from low-coherence than high-coherence texts (McNamara et al., 1996; McNamara & Kintsch, 1996, McNamara, 2001), whereas low-knowledge readers benefit always from high-coherent texts. Such results are of great relevance for the field of text design: they imply that text coherence improvement could have a negative effect on comprehension. However in these studies high-knowledge readers were never specialists in the topics of the texts, and texts coherence was altered on very many plans. In order to progress, we conducted an experiment quite similar to McNamara’s but with real experts, in which text coherence was manipulated in a targeted way, only at the level of presence or absence of backward causal connectives. Tasks consisted in reading texts with or without connectives, in the expertise domain of the participant or not; and in answering comprehension questions. Results showed that high expertise level readers performed always better than low expertise level readers. More importantly, low expertise level readers as well as high expertise level readers learned more from coherent texts (with connectives) than less coherent (without connective).

Keywords
Text coherence; causal connectives; domain knowledge; expertise.

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