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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE USE OF DISCOURSE
DEVICES IN SHORT STORIES AND JOURNALISTIC WRITINGS**

By

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ABSTRACT

This research sets out to study the use of discourse devices in two different genres, the short story and journalistic writings. The study tries to find if there is a difference in the density of the devices used to indicate the professional writer's flow of thought in these two types of writing. In producing a reader friendly text, writers use available linguistic mechanism, to assist readers understand the text and follow the direction of discussion. These linguistic mechanisms are perceived by readers as signals of discourse patterns of organization. Such signals employed by writers are largely connected to topic continuity and topic shift strategies. For the purpose of this study, the researcher has selected ten contemporary short stories (written between 1990 to 2001) and thirty journalistic articles that span a three-month period (September to November 2001) from three different internationally accepted magazines, namely *The Economist*, *Times* and *Newsweek*. The stories depict human sufferings and achievements, while the articles revolve around the issue of bombing of the World Trade Center, in the United States of America.

The study documents every occurrence of discourse devices in each short story and articles and calculates the densities of them in both types of writing. The densities of the devices are then compared and contrasted using the T-Test to determine if there is a significant difference in the density of the use of discourse devices based on word as well as sentence count in both types of writing. The test concerning the density based on sentences count shows that there is a significant difference in the use of discourse devices in both genres. Journalists use discourse devices more in their writing of expository texts compared to novelists in their short stories. The researcher also found that the most predominant type of devices used are those that function as continuity

strategies. Due to consideration of several factors, the researcher believes that the more appropriate material for the teaching of writing would be the expository text.

ملخص

يشرح هذا البحث استخدام آليات الخطاب في نوعين أدبيين مختلفين: القصة القصيرة، والكتابات الصحفية. وتحاول هذه الدراسة أن تثبت صلة كثافة استخدام تلك الآليات بمدى تدفق أفكار الكاتب المتمرس في هذين اللونين الأدبيين. وفي محاولتهم لإنتاج نصوص طيعة قابلة للقراءة، فإنّ الكتاب يستعملون الآليات اللسانية المتاحة لمساعدة القارئ لفهم النص ومتابعة أفكاره.

إنّ آليات الخطاب المذكورة يُنظر إليها من قبل القارئ بوصفها إشارات دالة على أنماط الخطاب المنظّمة له. هذه الرموز اللسانية (الإشارات) مترابطة وبشكل أكيد- باستراتيجية الاسترسال في الموضوع واستراتيجية التخلص منه؛ ومن أجل هذا فقد عمد الباحث إلى اختيار عشر قصص قصيرة معاصرة كتبت ما بين 1990م و 2001م ، وثلاثين مقبلاً صحافياً تُغطّي فترة زمنية تقدر بثلاثة أشهر، (من سبتمبر إلى نوفمبر 2001م). وقد تمّ اختيار هذه المقالات من ثلاث مجلّات مختلفة تتمتع بقبول عالمي واسع؛ وهي على التوالي: الإكونومست، والتايمز، والنيوزويك. وإذا كانت القصص القصيرة تصف المعاناة والإنجازات الإنسانية فإنّ المقالات تدور حول حادثة تفجير مبنى التجارة الدولي في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية.

ولقد قامت الدراسة بتسجيل جميع حالات ورود الآليات الخطابية في القصص والمقالات. كما قامت بحساب كثافتها فيهما أيضاً، وبعد ذلك تمّت مقارنة كل كثافة على حدة لتتم دراستها بشكل مقارن وتقابلي عن طريق استعمال نمط (T) الإختبار لتحديد ما إذا كان هناك تنوع ذو ميزة خاصة في الكثافة الإستعمالية لآليات الخطاب المبنية على حساب الكلمات والجمل في كلا النوعين من الكتابة. ولقد أظهر الاختبار المتعلق بالكثافة المبنية على حساب الجمل فرقا مهماً في استخدام آليات الخطاب في كلا النوعين الأدبيين.

هذا ولقد أظهر البحث أن الصحفيين يستخدمون آليات الخطاب في كتاباتهم للنصوص الإيضاحية بشكل أكثر، مقارنة مع الروائيين في كتاباتهم لقصصهم القصيرة. ولقد وجد الباحث أن استراتيجيات الاسترسال هي من أكثر الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة، هذا ويؤمن الباحث بعد اعتبار العديد من العوامل، بأن النص الإيضاحي يعتبر أنسب المواد لتدريس الكتابة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in English as a Second Language.

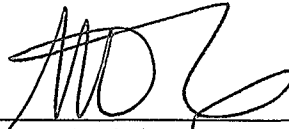


Subramaniam Govindasamy

Supervisor

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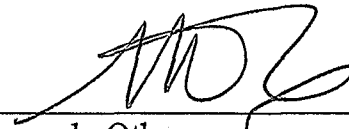


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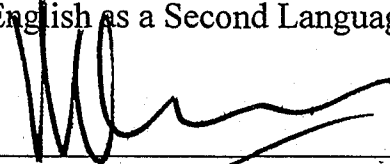


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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by proper citations giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: Mahdalela Binti Rahim

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**A Comparative Study of the Use of Discourse Devices in Short Stories and
Journalistic Writing**

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Dedicated to my ever-beloved husband, son, mom and dad

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Language has often been defined as a system of communication and the word discourse is used to refer to “a stretch of language in use, taking on meaning in context for its users, and perceived by them as purposeful, meaningful and connected” (Cook, 1994, p. 85). According to Cook, this quality of perceived purpose, meaning and connection is known as coherence, thus a discourse is a coherent stretch of language either spoken or written. To achieve successful communication, writers or speakers make use of existing mechanisms and strategies to assist readers or listeners in following their (writers’ or speakers’) flow of thought. To keep the latter on track, writers and speakers should alert them of changes in the development of ideas. This changes in direction can be signalled by using discourse strategies that are available in languages.

According to linguists, many language features employed by writers are perceived by readers as signals of discourse patterns of organization (Gumperz, 1982; Hoey, 1983; Brown and Yule, 1983). These signals indicate continuity and discontinuity of a topic discussed in a text, and largely signify *topic continuation*, *topic framing*, *topic introduction* and *topic closure* (Goutsos, 1997). Based on his research on expository texts, Goutsos listed seven topic signals to show shift and continuity: orthographic markers, metadiscourse items, discourse markers, sentence structure, time framing, cohesive devices and predictive pairs of questions and answers.

An analyses of the use of these devices in different genres would give us an insight into how successful writers employ such strategies in their writing. Such analyses may also answer these questions: Do fiction writers make use of discourse devices as much as journalists in showing his or her flow of ideas? Is sequential technique the only strategy utilized by these writers to keep readers on track?

Statement of the Problem

For decades, numerous ESL textbooks present sentence-level grammar in a discourse context and teach students to write generalizations (topic sentence and theses) and to provide supporting examples and details (Huizenga, Snellings and Francis, 1982; Rice and Burns, 1986 as cited in Johns, 1986). Students are taught that the controlling idea of a piece of writing is the topic or subject discussed. The notion of 'topic' is definitely important, as it is one of the main sources of text connectivity and provides the writer with a mechanism for actively achieving coherence in a text (Goutsos, 1997). Goutsos also argues that it is possible to analyse discourse topic organization by focusing on sequential relations in discourse and he proves this with his study on strategies of sequentiality of expository texts. These strategies are identified as discourse devices used to indicate continuity and discontinuity of a topic discussed in a text. Goutsos suggestion is an invaluable pedagogical input in an ESL classroom as it expands the horizons of learner writers' capacity to enhance coherence in the text they are producing. The question that remains is whether or not writers, be they journalists or novelists, use such techniques in a predominant manner in order to make their text coherent to the readers. The researcher will adopt Goutsos' framework of sequentiality in comparing the discourse devices used in the short stories and journalistic writings. Basically, the study will clarify if writers of these two different

genres differ in using signals to control their flow of thought. The findings may be of great help to ESL students as it introduces alternatives to traditional instructions to improve communication skills, particularly in the area of discourse devices. This could enable learner writers to compose messages clearly so that their readers could follow the flow of ideas easily.

Research Significance

The outcome of this research could suggest a different approach that emphasizes the use of discourse devices as signals of discourse organization for writers, especially to students of ESL who have not acquired the mechanics of expressing ideas clearly. It would complement present techniques that mainly focus on teaching students to write thesis statements followed by topic sentences and the supporting ideas. Present instructions do not include lessons on expressing ideas in a connected manner. The research will also contribute ideas and suggestions towards the development of appropriate course material in the English classroom; which will be detailed in the conclusion of the thesis.

Research Objectives

The study is expected to contribute to knowledge in the following areas:

1. The predominant type of discourse devices (topic continuation, topic framing, topic introduction and topic closure) used in journals and narratives (short stories);
2. The density of the use of discourse devices in fiction and expository text;
3. The function of various devices or strategies in controlling the writers' flow of thought;

Research Hypothesis

The following will serve as the hypothesis of the research:

1. There is a difference in the density of the use of discourse devices in short stories and journalistic writings.
2. Expository text as material in ESL writing class is more appropriate than the narrative text based on the density of the discourse devices used.

Research Questions

The research will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the predominant types of discourse devices used in short stories and journalistic writings?
2. Is there a difference in the density of the use of discourse devices in short stories and journalistic writings?
3. What are the functions of the various devices or strategies featured in the two sets of texts?

Scope of the Study

This research is a comparative analysis of the use of discourse devices in two different genres, narrative text or short story and journalistic writing. The narrative text or short story was chosen from the various types of literary texts available (short stories, novels, dramas, poems and so on) because of several reasons. In comparison to the novel, it is shorter and thus more manageable. Furthermore, more complete texts and styles of writing can be analyzed in the same time it would take to study one novel (and one writer's style of discourse). Dramas and poems would also not be very appropriate as they often do not use sentence structures that conform to standard

patterns in writing (which form the focus of this study). The former uses conversational or spoken discourse, while the latter often exhibits non-standard sentence structures.

With regard to journalistic writing, the *Economist*, *Time* and *Newsweek* were chosen from the numerous internationally accepted journals and magazines because the three are easily available. The researcher believes that ten short stories and 30 articles from the three magazines mentioned above are sufficient to represent both genres under investigation.

The various discourse devices from both genres will be analysed, documented and tabulated. From here, the researcher will try to discern recurring patterns of discourse devices used in both types of texts. The means of the densities of the discourse devices used in expository texts and journalistic writing will be looked at and compared using the independent sample T-test. The recurring patterns of discourse devices will be further analysed to observe the functions of the discourse devices in both sets of texts.

Conceptual Definition of Terms

The following are conceptual terms that are used in this study:

Comparative study

A study or research that involves the comparison of two or more things related to one another. In this study the concern is on the use of discourse devices in two different genres, i.e., the short story and journalistic writing.

Short story

A written story about imaginary events that is only a few pages long. A longer definition as defined by Wright (1982) in Lohafer and Clarey (1989) who states that “the short story tends to be between five hundred words long and it tends to deal with character and action in its fictional world. This action tends to be externally simple, with few developed episodes and no subplots or secondary lines of action and the short story tends to be more strongly unified than other short prose narrative forms” (p. 47).

Journalistic writing

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has adapted a definition of journalistic writing given by Brooks, Kennedy, Moen and Ranly (2002). It is defined as articles that appear in newspapers or magazines that deal with a particular subject or professional activity that include talk of crime, politics and world affairs, talk of everyday life, humour and gossip.

Discourse devices

Language devices strategically used by speakers and writers in spoken or written communication such as the use of signals (paragraph, metadiscourse items, discourse markers, repetition, etc.) to show changes in the speakers’ or writers’ flow of thought.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication between humans is an extremely complex and ever changing phenomenon that can only be effective if both the speaker and listener or writer and reader are involved (Harmer 1983). Without the involvement of both parties, namely the producer and receiver, communication would be meaningless.

In achieving successful communication, a communicator produces language, which, to his receiver seems connected, coherent and relevant to the subject at hand. A discourse which is coherent implies a logical flow of thought, for there is a continuity of senses among the knowledge activated by the expression of the text (Beaugrand and Dressler, 1994). To produce such discourse a communicator must creatively use the existing mechanisms of linguistic devices that indicate his or her flow of ideas.

Topic Continuity and Shift

Topic, as defined in Collins Cobuild (2001) dictionary, is: "the main idea, the subject of conversation or the item of discussion. In this sense, a topic serves as a unifying thread running through the text as a whole (Goutsos, 1997). This point of departure or topic is organized in every clause, sentence and paragraph as a braid, which connects layers of topics to form coherent and cohesive discourse (Grimes, 1984 and Evensen, 1996 as cited in Gosden, 1998). This is why sentences have to be connected and related to what had been discussed before. To do this writers develop their ideas using certain strategies or techniques to assist readers in following the flow of topic in their

(the writers') discourse. Some of the most important of these are the strategies or the linguistic mechanisms a writer uses to indicate continuity or discontinuity of the topic discussed. The kinds of "bridges" and "paths" do the writer build for his readers to indicate these changes are signals which would definitely depend on the writer's intention either to introduce a new topic or to continue, frame and end a topic. To show these changes, a writer has to inform readers by giving them prior notice. As argued by Bialystock (1993) in Govindasamy and David (2002), offering notices to indicate a shift in direction entails a strategy and a certain kind of competence. This strategy of providing linguistic signposts that signal impending shifts in flow of thought in texts is expected by readers, as such signals help them to enhance their comprehension of the text (Govindasamy and David, 2002).

According to Goutsos (1997), a range of discourse devices have been mentioned as signals of topic segmentation. This is consistent with the common view in literature, according to which linguistic elements or expressions can be used to convey information about discourse patterns and organization (Hoey, 1979; Gumperz, 1982; Brown & Yule, 1983). Renkema (1993) studied signals in the light of discourse relations that concentrated on links between sentences, which bear meaning. According to him, two basic types of relations are addition such as *and*, *but* and *or*, and causal relations such as reason, cause, means, consequence, purpose, condition and concession. Related to this, are in depth studies on particular discourse devices such as conjunction, for example, *but*, *nevertheless* and *because*. These function as signals to indicate continuity and discontinuity in a text (Brown, 1983; Hoey, 1993; Blackmore, 1999). Strategies such as conjunctions that a writer uses in helping readers to follow the development of his ideas are linked to topic continuation, topic closure,

topic framing and topic introduction (Goutsos, 1997). Goutsos presents a detailed analysis of these techniques and strategies in his book (1997).

The following text taken from the *Asiaweek* magazine illustrates continuity and shift strategies:

Now the struggle between believers in individual freedom and proponents of state control is simmering again. Call it Cold War 2. Rather than NATO, it is the IMF defending the West's ideology, using cash with conditions to keep nations in the free market fold. After over a year, however, The International Monetary Fund's mix of open markets, stringent austerity and economic restructuring has yet to revive countries hit by the Asian Crisis.....

Last week, the ranks of market economies broke at last: several nations announced actual or planned restrictions on financial trading of one kind of another...

Finally, Hong Kong, that paragon of open, unfettered markets, unveiled measures to strengthen its link to the greenback, after spending more than \$10 billion to prop up stocks and deny speculators gains from attacking the local dollar.

(Asiaweek, Sept 18:29; excerpt taken from Govindasamy and David, 2002)

According to Itule and Anderson (1994), time transitions are important devices in media writing to move readers smoothly from one idea or paragraph to another. In the above example, time expressions *now*, *after*, *last week* and *finally* show the strategy of topic continuity.

Topic introduction is associated to topic shift. An example of this type of strategy is as follows.

First, the good news. As the yen strengthened to around 130 to the US dollar Sept. 7, other Asian currencies also began moving upward....

Now, for a reality check. The yen retreated to 139 to the dollar Sept 9 as the Bank of Japan cut interbank rates to an ...

Asiaweek, Sept 18:30

In the above example, *now* in combination with *first, the good news*, allows for one continuity span to end before introducing an important topic, *the reality check*.

It has been shown that the devices mentioned above play important roles in determining the direction of the discourse. However, according to a study done by Crewe (1990) these signals are frequently misused as well as over-used by ESL writers. Consequently, the thread of the argument zigzags as each signal point in a different direction. He states that “non-use is preferable to misuse because all readers, native speaker or non-native speaker, can mentally construe logical links in the argument if they are not explicit, whereas misuse always causes comprehension problems” (Crewe, 1990, p. 324). But this does not mean that signals as mechanics of expressing one’s flow of ideas should not be employed at all in students’ writing. What is more important is for students to know that linguistic mechanisms such as signals can be valuable if their functions are clearly illustrated and understood. In this way they (students) can make full use of these mechanisms to improve their writing.

Regarding the comprehensibility of a text, Green (1998) states that the findings of his research indicate that the overall effect of signals or miscues is perceived to be a more important contributing factor to text comprehensibility than the ordering of information. Information order does not really assist readers’ understanding of a text as much as the signals do. Therefore, it cannot be denied that student writers need a much greater awareness of the problems of over-use and misuse, and they also need a much more rigorous training, which would make them think through their argument before deciding on how it might be reinforced with signals.