Combining Written Discourse Analysis with the Teaching of Second Language Writing

Abstract

The ever-increasing technological development along with the ever-decreasing distance between nations, cultures, and communities place writing at the top of the skills pyramid. Along with its social, communicative, and economic benefits, writing is an essential component of success within the educational enterprise and in language apprenticeship, more precisely. This paper looks at the practicality and possibility of applying written discourse analysis to the teaching of L2 writing for Second Year L.M.D students. A discourse-oriented paradigm of teaching writing uses written discourse analysis as a method of instruction which would raise the students' awareness of the text and discourse patterns and develop their abilities of topic introductions, smooth shifts, persuasion devices, and their lexico-syntactic means of establishing cohesion.

Keywords: Writing, discourse analysis, written discourse analysis, cohesion, text patterns.

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Résumé

Le développement technologique ainsi que la distance de plus en plus courte entre les nations, les cultures et les communautés placent l'écriture au sommet de la pyramide des compétences. Outre ses avantages sociaux, communicatifs et économiques, l'écriture est une composante essentielle du succès au sein de l'entreprise éducative et, plus précisément, dans l'apprentissage des langues. Cet article examine donc l'utilité pratique et la possibilité d'appliquer l'analyse du discours à l'enseignement de la rédaction pour les étudiants de deuxième année L.M.D. Un paradigme pédagogique de l'Expression Ecrite orienté par l'analyse du discours écrit peux sensibiliser les élèves au contenu textuel et aux schémas discursifs et leur permettre de mieux présenter et changer de sujet, de faire appel à la persuasion et à la cohésion.

Mots clés: écriture, analyse du discours, analyse du discours écrit, cohésion, modèles de texte.

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ملخص

إن التطور التكنولوجي المتزايد باستمرار جنبا إلى جنب مع المسافة المتناقصة باستمرار بين الأمم والثقافات والمجتمعات تضع الكتابة في قمة هرم المهارات. إلى جانب منافعها الاجتماعية والتواصلية والاقتصادية ، تعد الكتابة عنصرا أساسيا للنجاح داخل المؤسسة التعليمية وفي التدريب المهني اللغوي ، على نحو أدق. هذه المقالة ، وبالتالي ، تنظر في إمكانية تطبيق تحليل الخطاب لتدريس الكتابة لطلاب السنة الثانية. يستخدم هذا النموذج تحليل الخطاب المكتوب كطريقة للتدريس من شأنها أن ترفع وعي الطلاب بأنماط النص والخطابة وتطور قدراتهم على إدخال المقدمات والتحولات وأجهزة الإقناع والوسائل المعجمية والنحوية لتأسيس التماسك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة ، تحليل الخطاب ، تحليل الخطاب المكتوب ، التماسك ، أنماط النص.

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Introduction

Discourse analysis in terms of both spoken and written language is considered as a helpful strategy of analysis for both linguists and language teachers. For the sake of simplicity and directness, discourse analysis stands for "the study of language in use" (Gee & Handford, 2013:1). Written texts constitute a significant asset that needs to be analysed. In so doing, composers gain a better mastery over writing and make it more cohesive as well easier to read. Cohesion, coherence, clause relations and text patterns are all parts of written texts.

This paper, therefore, aims at highlighting the importance of analysing written texts in the development of students L2 writing abilities. The paper consists of three parts. In the first part, the literature regarding the meaning of texts and discourse analysis is briefly reviewed. An illustration of cohesion and coherence is included. After this, grammatical and lexical devices and text patterns that help written texts to be understood are presented and discussed. The rationale for choosing to analyse written texts is addressed. The second part provides an analysis of a written text, with a focus on the cohesion devices and text patterns discussed in the first part. The third part suggests how to apply the analysed discourse in the classroom in such a way as to help teach written texts.

1. General Overview

Discourse analysis is the study of the relationship between language and the context it is utilised. It can be either written, such as in books, essays, newspapers, magazines, road signs or invoices, or spoken, such as in conversations, verbal interactions and TV programmes. Discourse analysts study language in either spoken or written use. According to Gee and Handford (2013:5), the importance of discourse analysis "lies in the fact that, through speaking and writing in the world, we make the world meaningful in certain ways and not in others". Recently, the scope of linguists has switched from analysing single sentences to the distribution of linguistic elements in extended texts and the relationship between texts and social situations. This paper has an emphasis on written texts with an attempt to clarify how natural written discourse looks and sounds. This understanding will creat a room for a better production of teaching materials (McCarthy, 1991). By taking the scope of this paper into account, discussing written texts normally includes the consideration of cohesion, coherence and text patterns. Thus, each aspect will be discussed in the following sections.

2. The Notion of Discourse Analysis

There exists no generally agreed-upon description of discourse analysis. The latter has been conceived as a slippery concept which might be interpreted differently by various scholars. For the sake of simplicity and directness, discourse analysis is a theoretical and methodological framework for exploring language. Prior to examining the notion of 'discourse analysis', it is necessary to briefly sift through the relevant research literature in search for what scholars mean by the term 'text' and 'discourse' as they both form two basic concepts in discourse analysis and their use often lacks clarity.

2.1 Defining a Text?

The term 'text' has been used in literature with different meanings. It is "the verbal record of a communicative act" (Brown and Yule, 1983: 06). Within the same scope of communication, an identical description stated by Widdowson (2007) "we

identify a piece of language as a text as soon as we recognize that it has been produced for a communicative purpose" (04). Further, Nunan (1993: 6) describes the text as "any written record of a communicative event. The event itself may involve oral language (for example, a sermon, a casual conversation, a shopping transaction) or written language (a poem a newspaper advertisment, a wall poster, a shopping list, a novel)". For Halliday and Hasan (1976), the notion 'text' is "a term used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole" (1-2). Cook raises the issue of context in his definition when he describes text as "a stretch of language interpreted formally, without context" (1989: 158).

2.2 Definition of Discourse Analysis?

When most linguists' major focus was limited to analysing the structure of sentences, Zellig Harris published his paper entitled *Discourse Analysis* in 1952, in which he accounted for the linguistic elements distribution in extended texts. Despite the different scope of these initial studies, from the discourse analysis studied today, more and more scholars, either of linguistics or of other disciplines, began to involve themselves in relevant studies. These investigations of 1960s and 1970s are taken to be the starting point of discourse analysis as "a wide-ranging and heterogeneous discipline, which finds its unity in the description of language above the sentence and an interest in the contexts and cultural influences which affect language in use" (McCarthy, M.1991: 7).

As referred to above, the term discourse analysis has different definitions depending on what school, or approach, of discourse analysis one adheres to. For example, some scholars treat it simply as language above the sentence (Cameron, 2001; Martin & Rose, 2007), others use it to refer to language in use (Potter, 2004; Widdowson, 2007). More specifically, some other scholars view discourse analysis through unique theoretical perspectives; for example, as written and oral texts in social practices (Potter, 2004). Based on the different definitions of discourse analysis available in the literature, Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001: 1) classify most of them into three main categories: the study of linguistic structure beyond the sentence, the study of language in use, and the study of social practices that is mainly associated with language. These definitions are further explained below:

The first classic definition of discourse analysis is derived from the formalist or structuralism views to mean the description of language above the clause or sentence. This kind of definitions owes its origin to Z. Harris who was the first linguist to introduce this term (McCarthy, 1991). He viewed discourse analysis as the next level in a hierarchy of morphemes, clauses, and sentences. In fact, this definition does not imply to neglect other linguistic units below the sentence level, but it rather introduces discourse as it is constructed from words, phrases and sentences, and these small units are used to build the larger units that make up discourse.

The second definition of discourse analysis to be considered is 'language in use'. This definition is adopted by the functionalists who give much importance to the purpose and functions of language. In supporting this direction, Brown and Yule (1983: 01) state:

> The analysis of discourse is necessarily, the analysis
> of language in use. As such it cannot be restricted to
> the description of linguistic forms independent of the
> purposes or functions which are designed to serve in
> human affairs.

The third definition of discourse analysis refers to the study of language as a form of social practice. Widdowson (2007: 57) has this to say about the social perspective of this concept:

The term 'discourse' can be understood in rather a different way. The meanings that people make are not only constrained by the language they know but also by the social group or community they belong to. Meanings are socio- cultural constructs of reality: they present particular believes and values that define ways of thinking about the world. The study of discourse in this case would focus […] on how they (meanings) are socially constructed so that expressing them is effectively a kind of social practice.

3. What is Written Discourse Analysis?

While the spoken discourse analysis focuses on the discussion of exchange structures and analysis of conversations, written discourse analysis has the agenda of expanding to coherence, cohesions and text patterns. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), a written product is, "not just a string of sentences", rather it may be of any length. It is, then, legitimate to argue that it is a large grammatical unit, not identical to a sentence, but a semantic unit whose "texture" is dictated by its interpretation within a particular context, or environment. Halliday and Hasan (1976) have done much research into what makes a text a text, i.e. how possibly can a cohesive grammatical unit be different from a random collection of sentences. Five cohesive devices have been elaborated, namely, "reference, substitution, ellipses, conjunctions and lexical ties" (Hatch, 1992: 223).

3.1 Reference

Reference is usually established by using pronouns, demonstratives and comparatives as cohesive ties. It includes exphoric reference which is referring to something outside the text. As for endophoric, it is a reference within a text, referring to the person(s) or item(s) talked about within a previous (anaphoric), and/or succeeding (cataphoric) context.

3.2 Substitution

Unlike reference, substitution is the replacements of an item stated previously. It can be used to substitute nominal, verbal or clausal items. For example, when an item is mentioned for the second time, it is more likely to be replaced by *one(s)* or *(them)* to avoid unnecessary repetition.

3.3 Ellipses

Similar to substitution, ellipses are also available means to establish ties to nominals, verbals, and clauses for the sake of concision. What distinguishes ellipsis from substitution is that ellipsis is a "zero" cohesive devices because it is not actually said or written down.

3.4 Conjunctions

Another cohesive device, conjunction, as its name suggests, is employed to link clauses, such as *besides, yet, therefore, then*, etc, by showing additive, adversative, causal, temporal or other different kinds of conjunctive relations.

3.5 Lexical Ties

The last category of cohesive device of Halliday and Hasan's system is the device of lexical ties. To achieve lexical cohesion, we can use repetition, synonym, near synonym, superordinate, general words, antonym ordered series, metonymy, members of the same lexical set or any words from the same semantic field (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

4. Text Patterns and Clause Relations

Clausal relations, including logical sequence, matching or multiple clause relations, are described as common cognitive processes "whereby we interpret the meaning of a clause or group of clauses in the light of their adjoining clause or group of clauses", Winter (1994:49). Text patterns are used to detect the writer's logic of organising ideas and his/her actual way of presenting them in a written text since "every writer is faced with the problem of how to organize and present his/her non-linear message in comprehensible linear form", Coulthard, M. (1994 7). As argued by Hoey (2001), text patterns include the following categories:

A). **Problem-solution pattern:** a framework through which a solution is given to a problem raised by the writer, usually at the beginning of the text; signaled by words as issue, problem, situation, assessment, approaches, solution.

b). **Goal-achievement pattern**: indicating how what people set as aims is pertinent to the way of achieving them, with signaling words like want to, would like to, aim, objective and means, method, way;

c). **Opportunity-taking pattern:** providing chances in certain situations and how to make use of them, using signals including opportunity, offer, unique, special, unusual, outstanding and meet, come upon, find, read, hear, or see.

d). **Gaping in knowledge-filling**: providing concrete and exact answer to what may be beyond people's common sense, signaled by words such as question, puzzle, mystery and explanation, hypothesis, theory, suggest, and solve.

e). **Claim-counterclaim (response) pattern**: whose signals are often words of claim, and words of denial or affirmation, usually signaled by claim, suggest, propose and so on.

f). **Interlocking pattern:** which may combine goals-methods and problem-response in one passage. It is through all these "culturally popular" text patterns that the authors present the readers cohesive, coherent, interesting, inspiring, and/or thought-provoking written discourses.

5. Second Language Composition and Written Discourse Analysis

Written discourse analysis is a growing field of study. It allows researchers to follow different lines of investigation. Grabe (1984:101) states that the analysis of discourse involves "the study of literary texts" and "the study of form-function relationships within language segments".

According to McCarthy, (1993) written discourse analysis is not a new method for teaching languages. Rather, it is "a fundamentally different way of looking at language compared with sentence-dominated models" (170). Generally, written discourse analysis has the agenda of studying global (macro) elements of written texts, such as the sequencing of ideas, and the organisation of information in writing. The initial objective of such a paradigm was to identify the discourse structure in the composition of L2 learners in US universities in the early days of applied linguistics.

As far as writing is concerned, it is believed that the main purpose of teaching composition for students is the understanding of the communicative value of

linguistic items in a discourse (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 2001; Candlin & Hyland, 2014). It has been argued that cohesion is an indispensable part of written texts. Therefore, the reader's knowledge, the writer's aim and the information delivered should all be considered and taken into account. Witte and Faigley (1981) argue that clause and sentence structure are taught out of their discourse and out of context. By the same token, Cook (1989) states that cohesion is almost mistreated in language teaching. He argues that students' difficulties arise from their difficulties with cohesion. This negligence has resulted in cohesive problems for students. Cook (1989) further stresses that this mistreatment is due to a lack of awareness of the various discourse features that are omnipresent whenever involved in the process of writing. In addition to cohesion devices, clause relations and text patterns should also be analysed. Writers, if they are to produce high-quality compositions, should take readers into account when writing.

In light of the above-mentioned scientific findings, teachers should have the ability to "create authentic materials and activities for the classroom" (McCarthy, 1991:147). To do so, instructors should teach learners how to make use of the cohesive devices and text patterns they encounter in written discourse. By doing so, learners can identify references, synonyms and antonyms in reading texts and can then make use of the devices. Moreover, task-based language teaching activities are one of the teaching methods that can be employed to teach text patterns. In the Algerian context, for example, students always struggle with lexical cohesion and text patterns. Written discourse analysis is one available means that can be employed to help students overcome the encountered composition difficulties.

6. How to Practically Implement Written Discourse Analysis in the L2 Writing Classroom

To apply written discourse analysis in the writing classroom, teachers can provide their students with a short written passage and model the way this passage should be analysed. This might take place by showing learners how to use cohesive devices and Problem Solution Pattern as strategies which help them thoroughly understand the passage.

One of the implications of this teaching practice is that "conformity to the pattern when writing is likely to make organising and reading the text easier" (Hoey, 2001:167). Hoey (2001:123) believes that a problem solution pattern can be presented in "a short fabricated text". Therefore, a problem solution pattern is proposed below to show how it can be taught in the classroom. To do so, a task-based language-teaching (TBLT) lesson can be divided into six phases. The rationale behind choosing a TBLT lesson is because it focuses on the meaning, the real world process of language use and on communicative outcomes. These features of TBLT seem suitable for teaching students the relationship between the language and the context in which it is used (Ellis, 2003). The task can be a combination of reading and writing practice through written discourse analysis.

The following passage is an example of how one of the cohesive devices can be taught. The same passage can also be used to teach a Problem Solution Pattern.

"(1) Tony and Sheila's first home was a terraced house, one of a line houses all connected. (2) But several years later when they had a small child, they found it rather cramped for three people. (3) They wanted something more spacious and so decided to move. (4) They went to an estate agent and looked at details of the houses he had to offer. (5) They looked at a semi-detached house (one of a pair attached to each other),

liked it, and asked a surveyor to inspect it for them. (6) He said that it was in good condition and they therefore decided to buy it. (7) Luckily, they sold their house quickly and soon a removals firm was taking all their furniture and other possessions to their new home. (8) But already, after a couple of years, they are hoping to move again. (9) Tony's business is doing well and they want to get an architect to design a modern, detached house for them, and a builder to build it" (Thomas, 1995:13).

In the above extract, as expected, references are the most cohesive devices employed in the passage. For instance, Tony and Sheila are referred to nine times by the pronoun "they" as they are the focus of the passage. It is used in sentences two (twice), three, four, five, six, seven, eight and nine. Likewise, "their" is used three times in sentence seven. The first time this refers to their current house, the second time this refers to the furniture and the third time this refers to the new home. "It" is used six times in sentence two, which refers to the current house, in sentence five (twice) as a reference to the new house, in sentence six (twice) referring to the new house and in sentence nine, which refers to their future house. "Them" is used twice in sentences five and nine. "He" is used twice in sentences four and six as a reference to the estate agent.

The example above, also, covers the four functions of a problem solution pattern. The first step presents a particular situation; the second raises a problem; the third provides a response to the problem raised; and the fourth positively evaluates the proposed solution. These are the 'situation, problem, response and evaluation pattern (SPRE)'. If we are to use the same passage to teach students the four functions of a Problem-Solution Pattern, the teacher can go through six main phases. These steps are as follows:

1st phase: The teacher encourages students by starting a discussion regarding houses and how to buy one or when you might move from one house to another. This discussion is in the form of brainstorming and acts as an introduction to the topic.

2nd phase: The teacher asks the students to skim or scan the whole passage with a focus on the cohesion devices that they may encounter. A handout should be given to the students containing the meaning of new words and further information about the topic.

3rd phase: The teacher asks the students to read the passage again carefully and try to find any problems in the text that might arise regarding buying a house or moving to a new house and if there is an answer to such problems.

4th phase: The teacher asks the students to analyse the text and explains to them the way solution problem pattern functions.

5th phase: After the students have learned the solution-problem pattern, the teacher asks them to identify the parts of the pattern in the text as a practical part of the lesson and to make sure they understand how the pattern works.

6th phase: Subsequently, students should move to the writing part where they are asked to write a short passage about any topic they like. In their writing, students should start with a particular situation with a problem that has to be solved. Then, a response or solution should be provided.

Finally, an evaluation of the proposed solution, whether positive or negative, should be presented. If a negative evaluation is attained, a repetition of the pattern should be implemented until a positive evaluation is achieved. The same task could be extended to the next lesson as a second part by focusing on analysing cohesion devices and the above phases can be repeated.

Conclusion

Due to its natural occurrence, written discourse analysis is a supportive function when it comes to teaching L2 writing. The foremost goal of teaching writing is to help learners gain mastery over the written form of language. Therefore, applying written discourse analysis lessons in the classroom is very helpful. By doing so, learners will have the ability to make their writing coherent and readable. The analysis of text patterns is an available means that creates a room for dispelling some of the predicaments associated with the enigmatic process of writing.

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