

The Iranian EFL Journal June 2011 Volume 7 Issue 3

Iranian EFL Journal



ISSN On-line: 1836-8751

ISSN Print: 1836-8743

The Iranian EFL Journal

June 2011

Volume 7

Issue 3

Chief Editors:

Dr. Paul Robertson

Dr. Rajabali Askarzadeh Torghabeh

Iranian EFL Journal

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Time Taylor International Ltd.

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The Iranian EFL Journal June 2011 Volume 7 Issue 3

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The Iranian EFL Journal Press
A Division of Time Taylor Publishers
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Chief Editor: Dr. Paul Robertson
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ISSN Print: 1836-8743

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Title

The Relation between Paragraph Organization and the Topic Progression Used in English Paragraphs Selected from Native Books on Teaching Writing

Authors

Zargham Ghabanchi,(Ph.D.)

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Sahar Zahed Alavi,(M.A.)

Bojnord University, Bojnord, Iran

Bio data

Zargham Ghabanchi got his Ph.D. from the University of Liverpool, UK in Applied Linguistics. Now he has a chair at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. He was the chancellor of Sabzevar Payam Noor University for five years. He has published several books and articles.

Sahar Zahed Alavi got her M.A. in TEFL from Sabzevar Teacher Training University in 1388. She has been teaching various English courses in different English institutes, Sabzevar University, Bojnord State University and Bojnord Payam noor University.

Abstract

Coherence is one of the most important factors in effective writing. Lautmatti (1978) proposed a model, based on the progression of topics in a paragraph, for maintaining coherence. Using Lautmatti's (ibid) framework, the study examines the types of topic progression techniques used in 120 paragraphs which are selected from a number of academic books on teaching writing. Three types of paragraph, namely forty paragraphs of comparison and contrast, forty paragraphs of cause-effect and forty paragraphs of chronology, with two different types of organization, listing and time, are selected to be analyzed. The present study investigates the relationship between the paragraph organization and the types of topic progression techniques used in them. As the results of the Chi-square tests show, there is a relationship between the

paragraph organization and the types of topic progression techniques. Among four types of topic progression techniques_ parallel, sequential, extended parallel and extended sequential_ in paragraphs with listing organization sequential progression (38%), and in paragraphs with time organization extended parallel progression (35%) and parallel progression (29.4%) were the dominant types of topic progression techniques. The knowledge of the types of progression in paragraphs with specific organization helps one in writing a coherent paragraph.

Keywords: Lautmatti's (1978) framework, Types of topic progression techniques, Paragraph organization, Types of paragraph, Paragraphs of comparison and contrast, Cause-effect and chronology

Introduction

Writing is a highly complex process for novice and non-novice writers, since it involves a host of advanced skills that include critical thinking, logical development, and coherence of ideas. A coherent text involves reciprocal interaction from both text- and reader-based features.

Realizing coherence in written discourse is one major challenge confronting writers, since it is not only a desirable character of a text but also a crucial aspect that establishes the oneness of a collection of abstract thoughts. One can only claim a written text is successful if it is able to found a relation between the writer and reader, and between clauses, sentences, and paragraphs.

Lautmatti (1978) mentioned that the logical sequencing and clear progression as well as the smooth connection of ideas in a composition cause the composition to be a coherent one. He proposed a model, named Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) to determine the coherence of a paragraph based on the consideration of the progressions of the topics of sentences in the paragraph. According to this model there are four major progressions namely parallel progression, sequential progression, extended parallel progression and extended sequential progression.

The knowledge of the types of progressions used in the TSA can help one determine whether a composition meets the standards of high quality paragraph. TSA is one strategy to make compositions easier to understand. One can detect the type of topical progression most frequently used in paragraphs with different types of organization, which are temporal, listing and spatial. Then, he can have a generalization about the type of progression used in paragraphs with a

specific organization, which is the arrangement of sentences in a text according to some factors such as time, listing and space. Then, it will be easier to write a coherent paragraph with specific organization.

Research Questions

This study tries to answer the following questions by using Latuamatti's (1978) framework:

1. Is there any relation between the paragraph organization and the frequency of the use of topic progression techniques in the sample paragraphs?
2. Is there any difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with listing organization?
3. Is there any difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with time organization?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no relation between the paragraph organization and the frequency of the use of topic progression techniques in the sample paragraphs?
2. There is no difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with listing organization?
3. There is no difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with time organization?

Review of related literature

An effective paragraph must meet mainly four requirements. First, it must discuss one topic only; that is, its statements and illustrations must show a *unity* of subject matter, often expressed in a topic sentence. Second, it must say all that the readers need to know about the topic; it must be complete. Third, the sentences in the paragraph must show an order that the readers can recognize and follow. Order in paragraphs is considered as the direction of movement. There are three directional patterns in paragraphs: chronological, listing and special order. Chronological order is a way of organizing the ideas in a paragraph in the order of their occurrence in time. Listing is a way to organize the items and ideas in a paragraph in the listing form. In spatial

(place) organization, the ideas call for a presentation in space. Fourth, the sentences in the paragraph must show coherence, allowing the readers to move easily from one sentence to the next sentence without feeling that there are some gaps in the sequence of the writer's ideas (Trimmer, 1992).

Coherence in writing especially in English can be achieved through certain strategies such as introductory activities, explicit teaching, awareness-raising tasks and writing practice (Lee, 2002). Lauttmati (1978) proposed TSA as another device to achieve coherence in writing. In TSA, researchers look at sequences of sentences and examine how the sentence topics work through the text to progressively build meaning. Lautmatti (*ibid*) introduced three types of progression: parallel, sequential and extended parallel progression. In parallel progression, successive sentences have the same sentence topics; that is, the topics of the various sentences are referentially identical, using repeated lexical items, synonyms, near-synonyms or pronouns. Writers who use parallel progression are fully aware of the content of their writing and the manner by which they can further explore that subject (Carreon, 2006). In sequential progression, the sentence topics are always different, and the comment part of the previous sentence often becomes the topic of the following sentence. Extended parallel progression is a parallel progression which is temporarily interrupted by a sequential progression. As Cerniglia, Medsker, and Connor (1990, p.238) indicated, extended parallel progression "often develops an idea well but also brings the reader back to the main idea to achieve a closure". Extended parallel progression is actually the preferred type of progression by teachers, since it shows the ability of the students in their discussion to go back to the main theme (Carreon, 2006). Simpson (2000) revealed a fourth type of progression identified as extended sequential progression. It occurs when the rheme element of a clause is taken up as the theme of a non- consecutive clause.

About the different types of progression, Fries (1994) mentions that there is no claim that every text segment must have a single simple method of development or must express a single point. Different types of progression can be seen in a text.

Several studies (Connor, 1987; Connor & Farmer, 1990; Chiu, 2004; Shan Fan ,2008) show that students can use TSA to increase the quality of their writing. Connor and Farmer (1990) suggest the use of TSA as a revision strategy in college writing classes. They found that being aware of and using extended parallel progression helped students to focus on their writing, while

regulating the ratio of parallel to sequential progressions helped them to develop their compositions better.

Schneider and Connor (1991) conducted research studies on TSA of low-rated and high-rated essays. They found that the low-, medium- and high-rated essays differed significantly in the proportion of parallel and sequential progression. The medium- and low-rated essays contained a greater proportion of parallel topics than did the high-rated essays, which contained a greater proportion of sequential progression.

Almaden's (2006) study investigated the topical progression in paragraphs written by Filipino ESL students. His samples consisted of sixty paragraphs lifted from the students' portfolios. The paragraphs were analyzed using Lautamatti's TSA. It was found that parallel progression was the most preferred progression in the paragraphs, extended parallel progression was the second one, sequential progression was the third most preferred, and extended sequential progression was used least in the paragraphs.

In Hoenisch's (2009) paper, the highest quality accomplished essays contain a large proportion of coherence-building sequential progression and a small proportion of parallel progression.

Method

This study investigated the types of topic progression technique used in 120 paragraphs (40 paragraphs of comparison & contrast, 40 paragraphs of cause-effect and 40 paragraphs of chronology).

In conducting TSA, some steps are taken. First the topic of each unit (any independent clause and all its required modifiers, or any non-independent clause punctuated as a sentence as indicated by end punctuation, or any imperative) is determined. The determination of topic is based on interpretation (Witte, 1983; Schneider & Connor, 1991) and "As for" device (Hoenich, 2009). As the next step, the topics of all the units are plotted onto a graph, and a physical representation of the thematic development and the types of progression identified by Lautamatti (1978) and Simpson (2000) - parallel progression, sequential progression, extended parallel progression and extended sequential progression- can be visualized. The following paragraph taken from the samples is provided as an example of how the procedure was done:

Lincoln's early political career did not foreshadow the success he was to have as president. In his early twenties, he moved to Illinois. It was there that, having first tried his hand at the variety of occupations (store keeper, postmaster, surveyor), he first became interested in politics. He was not successful the first time he ran for office in 1831. After having served only this one term in the U.S. Congress, he was defeated for reelection and returned to practice law in Springfield. However, he was successful in his subsequent attempts, and served four two-year terms in the state legislature, from 1834 to 1842. During this same period, he added the study of law to his legislative duties, finally being admitted to the Illinois bar in 1836. Shortly after passing the bar exam, he moved to Springfield, Illinois, to set up his own legal practice. In 1846, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives for two years. Indeed, he had almost entirely lost any hope of holding political office when, in 1854, the slavery question once again forced him into the political arenas. Although he was defeated twice for election to the U.S. Congress, he finally managed, in 1860, to be nominated by the Republican Party as its candidate for president.

1. Lincoln's early political career
2. he 
3. there  (Illinois)
4. he
5. reelection 
6. he
7. law*
8. he
9. he
10. political office
11. he

t-unit	Parallel progression	Sequential progression	Extended parallel progression	Extended sequential progression
11	1	3	5	1

Note:  represents sequential progression

*  represents extended sequential progression

Results

The hypotheses of this research are investigated with the use of descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics.

The frequency of the use of each types of topic progression technique in three types of paragraphs is given in Table 1. And the bar graph presenting this data is shown in Figure 1.

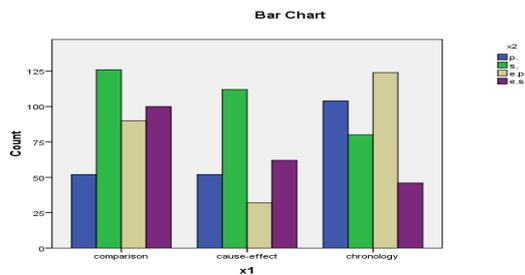
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Use of Topic Progression Techniques in Paragraphs of Comparison and Contrast, Cause-effect and Chronology

		Frequency			Percent			Valid Percent			Cumulative Percent		
		Com p. & con.	Caus e-effect	Chro.	Com p. & con.	Caus e-effect	Chro.	Com p. & con.	Caus e-effect	Chro.	Com p. & con.	Caus e-effect	Chro.
Valid	p.	52	52	104	14.1	20.2	29.4	14.1	20.2	29.4	14.1	20.2	29.4
	s.	126	112	80	34.2	43.4	22.6	34.2	43.4	22.6	48.4	63.6	52.0
	e.p.	90	32	124	24.5	12.4	35.0	24.5	12.4	35.0	72.8	76.0	87.0
	e.s.	100	62	46	27.2	24.0	13.0	27.2	24.0	13.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Total	368	258	354	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			

Figure 1

Bar Graph for the Use of Topic Progression Techniques in Paragraphs of Comparison and Contrast, Cause-effect and Chronology



This study investigates two organizations of time and listing: 80 paragraphs with listing organization (40 paragraphs of comparison and contrast and 40 paragraphs of cause-effect) and 40 paragraphs with time organization (paragraphs of chronology). In order to test the null hypothesis, where it has been hypothesized that: There is no relation between paragraph organization and the type of topic progression technique, the Chi-square test was used. Table 2 shows the observed frequencies of the types of topic progression techniques in 80 paragraphs with listing organization and 40 paragraphs with time organization. As the result of the Chi-

square test, provided in Table 3, shows the null hypothesis is rejected and there is a relationship between paragraph organization and the type of topic progression technique.

Table 2

Observed Frequencies for Topic Progression Techniques in Paragraphs with Listing and Time Organizations

		p.	s.	e.p.	e.s.	
x1 listing	Count	104	238	122	162	626
	Expected Count	132.9	203.1	157.1	132.9	626.0
	% within x1	16.6%	38.0%	19.5%	25.9%	100.0%
Time	Count	104	80	124	46	354
	Expected Count	75.1	114.9	88.9	75.1	354.0
	% within x1	29.4%	22.6%	35.0%	13.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	208	318	246	208	980
	Expected Count	208.0	318.0	246.0	208.0	980.0
	% within x1	21.2%	32.4%	25.1%	21.2%	100.0%

Table 3

Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	73.370 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	74.174	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.881	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	980		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 75.13.

Another chi-square test is used to examine if there is a relation between the organization of paragraphs of comparison and contrast and paragraphs of cause-effect (listing organization) and the type of topic progression technique used in them. As the result of the Chi-square test which is

provided in Table 4 shows, there is a relationship between the organization of paragraphs of comparison and contrast and paragraphs of cause-effect (listing organization) and the types of topic progression technique.

Table 4

Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.555 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	19.111	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.189	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	626		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 42.86.

The observed frequencies of the types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with listing organization can be seen in Table 1. As it is shown in table 5, the differences between the frequencies of topic progression techniques in paragraphs with listing organization are not due to chance.

Table 5

Chi-square Test

Observed value	Critical value	Sig.	d.f.
67.84	7.81	.05	3

As it is presented in Table 2, sequential progression with the percentage of 38 is the dominant type of progression used in paragraphs with listing organization.

To see if there is a real difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression used in paragraphs with time organization, the Chi-square test is used. As the result of the Chi-square test shows in Table 6, the null hypothesis is rejected. That is, there are differences between the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with time organization, and these differences are not due to chance.

Table 6

Chi-square Test

Observed value	Critical value	Sig.	d.f.
38.16	7.81	.05	3

As it is presented in Table 1, extended parallel progression with the percentage of 35 is the dominant type of progression used in paragraphs with time organization.

Findings and conclusion

The first research question posed in this study asks if there is any relation between the paragraph organization and the types of topic progression techniques. The Chi-square test shows a significant relationship. The second and the third questions of the study respectively ask if there is any difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in the sample paragraphs with listing organization, and if there is any difference in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques used in paragraphs with time organization. As the results of the Chi-square tests show, the differences in the frequencies of types of topic progression techniques in paragraphs with listing organization- paragraphs of comparison and contrast and paragraphs of cause-effect- are not due to chance. In these paragraph types, sequential progression is the most frequently used type of topic progression technique. Moreover, the analysis indicated that the differences in the frequencies of types of topic progression in paragraphs with time organization_ paragraphs of chronology_ are not due to chance, and parallel progression and extended parallel progression are the most frequently used types of topic progression techniques among these types of paragraphs.

In paragraphs of chronology, with time organization, the repetition of key words or phrases in consecutive clause (parallel progression) and in nonconsecutive clauses (extended parallel progression) are used to reinforce an idea in the reader's mind and remind the readers of the important topics (Schneider & Connor, 1991). In these types of progression, writers choose to string ideas close together rather than link them across paragraph (Almaden, 2006). On the contrary, in paragraphs of comparison and contrast and cause-effect, with listing organization, an idea is developed by extended sequential progression. This type of progression, adds detail to a

topic mentioned earlier in a rhyme of a clause (Carreon, 2006). It increases the number of different topics and connects the ideas across paragraph.

As it is seen, nearly similar types of topic progression techniques are used in paragraphs of comparison and contrast and paragraphs of cause-effect. This might be because both types of paragraphs have the same paragraph organization, namely, listing. And as it is evident, these paragraphs have topic progression techniques different from those used in paragraphs of chronology. Again, this can be related to their paragraph organizations. Since paragraphs of comparison and contrast and paragraphs of cause-effect on the one hand, and paragraphs of chronology on the other hand have different paragraph organizations, the types of topic progression used in each group should differ from the other. The results of this study are compatible with those of Alavi's (2010) thesis, which analyzed TSA of paragraphs of chronology, comparison and contrast and cause-effect written by EFL students.

Based on the findings and conclusions, this study offers some implications for teachers, EFL learners and material developers. Teachers can provide the students with the general information about four types of topic progression techniques, and then they can teach the types of topic progression used most frequently in paragraphs with a specific organization. They should emphasize that in paragraphs with different organizations, different types of topic progression techniques are likely to be used. Students can learn about topic progression techniques to write their paragraphs coherently. The syllabus designers had better emphasize on discourse level rather than sentence level. It is a good idea that syllabus designers present TSA and topic progression techniques as explanations to the way coherence is created in paragraphs. Moreover, they had better devote some parts of the writing text books to introduce different types of topic progression used in paragraphs with different types of organization.

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