Discourse Analysis into the Classroom of Iraqi EFL Undergraduate Learners

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١,١ Introduction

What we want to say and how we say it are events often addressed by spoken discourse analysts. Behind every utterance is an illocutionary force, or the purpose of the utterance. This purpose is defined by the grammatical structures, the lexical items and the intonation used. The perlocutionary effect is the interpretation of the words. (Coulthard ١٩٨٥). Thus, for the utterance to be interpreted in the intended sense, context and participant co-operation is important (Brazil ١٩٩٢). The same can be said of written discourse (Moon and Caldis-Coulthard ٢٠٠١).

A text is written within a certain context, aimed at specific readers. The writer's purpose is realized with the structure and lexis used. However, while we can rely on visual/aural clues to understand spoken language, the clues for written texts are not so obvious, necessitating an understanding of the relations between paragraphs, sentences and clauses.

Connections between sentences and ideas are possible because all texts have structure. This structure is created through an overall textual pattern, lexical signals, inter-clause relations, and lexical and grammatical cohesive links (Cook ١٩٨٩).

However, recognizing this structure and the relations found within the text i.e. how to organize and present his/her non-linear message in a comprehensible linear form can be problematic for learners of English as a Foreign language (EFL), negatively affecting their language acquisition. The ability to see how grammar and vocabulary contribute to the linking of sentences and ideas not only helps in their comprehension of the language but helps them to develop the ability to use the language in a more fluid manner.

١,٢ Aims of the Study:

This report on written discourse aims at :

١.introducing relevant background literature on written discourse and its components,

٢.analysing problems in processing texts produced by Iraqi EFL learners, ٣.ending with a number of recommendations(in the light of the results of the study)on

how to better instruct the students in overcoming similar problems and difficulties when producing written discourse.

١,٣ Limitations of the Study:

This paper is limited to the analysis of twenty pieces of discourse which are written by Iraqi EFL undergraduate learners in the university of Babylon/College of Education / Department of English.

٢. Literature Review on Written Discourse Analysis

"Discourse is a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit"(Crystal,١٩٩٢:٢٥).Discourse analysis is interested in what language does or is doing rather than just the functions it performs and the grammar and lexical forms used(McCarthy,١٩٩١).It is mainly concerned with spoken and written communication which are the two main things that our students are exposed to. Formulae and conventions which we follow in each type are different(McCarthy,١٩٩١:٨)

Thus the study of written discourse should be approached via its organization and operation: 'discourse is organized prospectively' and 'discourse operates within an interactional framework' (Holland and Lewis ١٩٩٦: i and ii). Coulthard (١٩٩٤b: ٧) explains that 'knowledge is not linear, but text is'. A text should be structured and organized in sequence, usually from the beginning to the end. The sequence is identified by the relevance between clauses, which is determined by the lexical and grammatical choices of language (Holland and Lewis ١٩٩٦: ٢٩). The reader makes inferences from the textual information so that a text takes shape in the mind. Text coherence is, at the same time, the result of an interplay between the writer and the reader. People communicate based on their common ground; McCarthy (١٩٩١: ٢٧) explains that 'making sense of a text is an act of interpretation that depends as much as on what we as readers bring to a text as what the author puts into it'. The text structure, sentence grammar, and choice of words project a particular characteristic typical of the culture and genre. On the other hand, it is the same with the reader: they build meaning into a text, based on their socio-cultural identities and experience of the world. The reader activates such knowledge, makes inferences, and constantly assesses interpretation in the light of the situation (McCarthy ١٩٩١: ٢٧). It is not always easy for the reader, therefore, to interpret the text in the way the writer desires.

Concerning discourse Analysis into the classroom which is the concern of the current study , it had added a new frame to the understanding of language and its

usage despite its relative novelty .It has given the teacher new tools with which to cater for students' needs.

٢,١ Written Discourse Components :

McCarthy(١٩٩١:٢٥) says that meaningful communications in which the words and /or sentences are linked to one another is a fashion that corresponds to conventional formulae and that " most texts display links from sentence to sentence in terms of grammatical features such as pronominalisation , ellipsis and conjunction of various kinds". The various linguistic devices that we use to create a text should include the following :"coherence or the way a sentence makes sense or hangs together" ;cohesive markers which create links across the boundaries of sentences and also chain together related items. But making sense of a text is also dependent on our interpretation of it which can also be done based upon our own personal schemata(our shared knowledge of a subject).As we process texts ,we also recognize textual patterns which are manifested in functional relationships between the parts of a text(phrases, clauses, sentences or groups of sentences, or as McCarthy(١٩٩١:٢٨)calls them "textual segments" Readers interpret the relationship between textual segments, questioning the text as it unfolds.

When discussing textual organization or the components of written discourse , three key elements are considered: text(overall) patterns, clause relations and cohesive links. While these elements work together, they will be addressed individually in this section .

٢,١,١ text patterns:

Holland and Lewis and McCarthy state that there are several overall textual patterns to help facilitate organization and presentation of a text(١٩٩٧:٢٧;١٩٩٦:١٥٧). The three commonly exploited textual patterns are: the General-Specific pattern(G.S.),the Problem- Solution(P.S.) pattern and the Claim-Counter Claim(C.C.C.)pattern. Although one pattern forms the overall organization of a text, quite often other patterns are imbedded within , creating sub-patterns(McCarthy ١٩٩١;Johnson and Holland٢٠٠١).The C.C.C. pattern can be organized in two ways .It is either a group of claims or a group of contrasting countered claims which is presented in relation to a given controversial issue(Holland and Lewis,١٩٩٧:٢٣).Both the G.S. and the C.C.C. patterns often include common ground information. Though the position of the presentation of patterns is of a strategic importance for both illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect ,they can be presented anywhere in the

text.(Johnson and Holland٢٠٠١).The P.S. pattern follows a question-answer style of English thinking(Hoey,١٩٩٤:٢٩).It consists of four basic elements: situation , problem, solution and evaluations. If evaluation is negative ,it causes a second problem, resulting in a recurring problem-solution-evaluation cycle.

McCarthy (١٩٩٦:٧٥)states that each text pattern is associated with certain words known as discourse organizing or signaling words. These lexical signals and clause relations help to recognize text patterns. They also function to organize and structure the argument as well as help the reader to locate a pattern in written discourse or text.

٢,١,٢ Clause Relations:

Clause relations can be defined as the relations between clauses ,both clauses within the same sentence or across sentence boundaries .In other words, they are the links between a given sentence and the sentences which precede and follow it(Holland and Lewis,١٩٩٦:٢٩). For ideas to be logically presented ,they must follow a certain sequence. Clause relations are the building blocks of these sequences .There are two types of clause relations: logical and matching ones. Logical relations are further categorized as :

١. cause – consequence
٢. instrument – achievement
٣. condition – consequence
٤. denial – correction
٥. basis – conclusion
٦. concession – cause
٧. phenomenon – reason
٨. phenomenon – example

Moreover, matching relations relate the overall pattern of a text to its smaller-scale elements through matching compatibility and matching contrast (Holland and Lewis ١٩٩٧: ١٨). The definitions of the two aspects of the relation are found in the literature as follows: (i) where one compares or matches one attribute, person, action, event, thing etc in respect of their similarities (compatibility) and differences (contrast) (Winter ١٩٩٨: ٥٠ - ٥٢), (ii) when segments of a text are compared or contrasted with one another (McCarthy ١٩٩٦: ٢٩), (iii) when information is matched by comparison and parallelism (Coulthard ١٩٩٢), and [iv] when the signal of the realization of hyponyms in text is often a matching relation, that is the partial

repetition of a piece of text where a combination of repeated constant and new variable forces the reader to see items not otherwise overtly linked as comparable (Coulthard ١٩٩٨: ٧).Details of the concepts along with exemplified data including analysis are reported by Holland and Lewis(١٩٩٦:٣٠-٣٢)and McCarthy(١٩٩١:١٥٥-١٥٧).

These relationships, however, are not always salient and require either lexical or grammatical structures to signal them (McCarthy ١٩٩١).

٢,١,٢,١ Signaling of Clause Relations:

The clause relations are connected through what is known as *Vocabulary (١)* such as : After; (al)though; as; (as though); as far as; apart from ___ing; as well as ____ing; at the same time as; on the basis that; because; before; besides ___ing; by __ing by the time that; except that; far from ___ing; for; from the moment that; given that; granted that…..etc. ; *Vocabulary (٢)for example:* Accordingly; in addition; All the same; also; Alternatively; and; Anyway; as such; As a result; at any rate; At least; at the same time ,basically; besides; but; In that case; In such circumstances; In comparison; Consequently; In contrast; conversely…..etc. and *Vocabulary(٣)as:* Achieve; addition; action Affirm; alike; analogous; Antithesis; attitude; Attribute; basis; case; Cause; characteristic; Change; common; Compare; compatible; Concede; conclude; Condition; confirm; connect Consequence; constant; contradict; contrast; Correct; correspond; deny Deduction; depend; differ which respectively comprise subordinators, coordinators and lexical items including nouns, verbs and adjectives according to Winter (cited in Holland and Lewis ١٩٩٧: ٣٢), and Carter(١٩٩٦: ٧٤ - ٧٨).

Tadros (١٩٩٤), Francis (١٩٩٤), and Caldis-Coulthard (١٩٩٤) recognized the following groups of items as being functions of Vocabulary ٣ words: enumerators, labels and reporting verbs. Enumerators are signals that commit the writer to specification. If someone wrote, ‘There are a number of advantages to this’, we would expect these advantages to be given (Tadros *op cit*). Advance labels (cataphoric nouns), for example ‘the following’, are akin to enumerators – they indicate that exemplification is to follow. Retrospective labels (anaphoric nouns), for example ‘those ideas’, function to encapsulate previously given information (Francis *op cit*; McCarthy *op cit*). Reporting verbs have various functions, depending on their relation to the reported clause (Caldis-Coulthard *op cit*; Tadros *op cit*). Illocutionary verbs, for example *urge, declare* and *state,* name the speech situation, clarify and exemplify the

illocutionary force of the quote (Caldis-Coulthard ١٩٩٤). Other verbs are descriptive, indicating the

manner and attitude of a speaker; while a third group are discourse signaling words that clarify either the relationship of the quote to other sections of the text or how the text is developing (*ibid*:٣٠٦). These signals include *repeat, agree, add,* and *continue*. It has been argued that these lexical signals enhance rather than detract from comprehension:

> "If discourse organizing words are seen as signals of the authors intent, then inability to understand them…could cause problems."
>
> (McCarthy ١٩٩١:٧٦).

٢,١,٣ Cohesion :

One important component in written discourse is cohesion. Cohesion is the formal link between sentences and clauses. Halliday and Hasan (١٩٧٦) believe that most texts display some links between sentences in terms of grammatical and lexical features. These features include base forms of *conjunction* (which connects the parts of sentences, phrases and clauses) *pronominalization* (which refers to words in their pronoun-form) and finally, *ellipsis* (which is the omission of clauses, phrases and words that can be recovered from context or elsewhere in the discourse) and parallel structures, as well as reiteration, collocation and super-ordination. Cohesion is a vital component in making written text more coherent for the reader. Without it, the reader may be left with an incoherent piece of non-sequential discourse to decipher. Winter (١٩٩٤:٩٤) states that clause relations can affect textual cohesion at the bottom-up or micro-level(see section three).

٣. Data Collection:

In this paper ,the implementation of written discourse in the writing of Iraqi EFL under-graduate learners are investigated. Twenty third-year students in the department of English are involved in this study. The texts analyzed in this paper are from the students' response to the question "write a letter to your dear or best friend".

٤. Data Analysis:

٤,١ The Text:

(The lines of the text *have been numbered* for the purpose of easier identification in the analysis)

١) Hello, this is Huda. How`re you today?? I just came back from the market

٢) It was really nice to take Nahla with me.. Also, I went to zoo

٣) before that. I have done my hard duties… I was impressed

٤) about beautiful clothes in the market. Also Nahla reminds me of you. of counrty place. So I enjoyed a lot there. Do You know that, I stayed at my aunt house in

٦)Abu Ghraib one night. It was so scary. I should not have stayed there. I guess

٧) everyone could tell that. But, I did with my friend. It was so dangerous, but I had a

٨) good experience. Also, in Al karada, I met so friendly people, then, they let us in their

٩) house as we heard bomb. Because I couldn`t find any place to stay. I felt so kindness of

١٠) people at that time. I was supposed to visit Al kadhim, but we couldn`t

١١) because we didn`t have enough time there. Next time we`ll travel around Arbeel.

١٢) Recently I haven`t used English much…So I`m lacking English skills…I have no

١٣) roommate now, so I need to find people to talk. How about you?? I guess it is

١٤) your role now. Did you go somewhere?? Have you meet

١٥) Rana?? I haven`t see her for long time. I heard she`s got married. So

١٦) I`m wondering how she is…She might study English like me…Anyway, I have to

١٧) go now. I`ll write to you again. See you later, Huda

٤,٢ Data Analysis:

٤,٢,١ Problems in Text Patterns

Finding problems in the text is a matter of interpretation by the reader, making use of clues and signals provided by the author. It is not a question of finding *one* right answer, and it will often be possible to analyze a given text in more than one way. But certain patterns tend to occur frequently in particular settings. After reading the text, an overall **General-Specific** (G-S) pattern seems to emerge. McCarthy (١٩٩١) identifies this pattern as having an initial *general* statement followed by a series of more specific statements, concluding finally with a further generalization. The nature of personal or informal letters might suggest that this pattern is an appropriate vehicle for this style of text. Below is the overall G-S pattern (with all of its original errors) found in the text:

General statement: Hi, this is Huda. How`re you today??

Specific statement ١: I just came back from the Market.

Specific statement ٢: Anyway, I was impressed about beautiful clothes in the market .

Specific statement ٣: Also, In AL Karada , I met so friendly people,

(etc. I have no roommate now, so I need to find people to talk. (**new** pattern)

General statement: How about you? I guess it is your role now.

Did you go somewhere? Have you meet Rana?

Although the text appears to follow McCarthy`s (١٩٩١) G-S pattern, there is a slight deviation towards the end. Even though '*How about you?'* is a general question, it does not follow the previous link of *travel-related* statements in the pattern. To review the sequence of events: the text starts off with a general introduction, and then three specific statements about . This is followed by two smaller patterns (to be analyzed later) appearing in the middle. At this point, the text seems to have an acceptable G-S sequence pattern. However, the text loses direction at the end of text when the topic moves from visiting places, to her struggle with English, back to her friend, and finally to a general inquiry about another student. Because of this pattern deviation and lack of clear sequencing, the text is difficult to follow and interpret what exactly she is asking of the reader *e.g. 'Did you go somewhere* **or** *do you have people to talk with?'.* This sequencing problem affects the cohesion, which in turn, affects the coherence of the discourse. It would be more appropriate to have the last general-statement of this G-S pattern be related directly back to the **topic** of travel or visit *e.g. line ٣, 'I have done my hard duties'.* Then, the reader may be able to recognize that the end of the topic is near or the pattern will change soon. Other patterns seem to be embedded within the G-S pattern. The student describes a problem encountered during her visit to the market. This fits with Hoey`s (١٩٨٣) **Problem-Solution** (P-S) pattern, containing a situation (within which there is a problem), a problem (within the situation, requiring a response), a response or solution (to the problem), and an evaluation or result (of the response/solution). The text reads:

Situation: I went to the Market

Problem: (No reservations/money?) I should not have stayed there

Response/ Solution: I stayed at my aunt house

Result/Evaluation: It was so scary

In analyzing this pattern in the text, it appears to follow Hoey`s (١٩٨٣) P-S pattern. As a result, it fails to reveal any significant problems in cohesion or sequencing of the text. A short **Cause-Consequence** (C-C) pattern can also be found. This is one of the simple patterns that exist under the *clause-relation* family. These clauses are very significant

semantic units of sentence function because they make the text more cohesive and coherent. This pattern is followed by another P-S pattern, inside the larger G-S pattern:

Cause: Recently, I haven`t used English so much

Consequence: So, I`m lacking English skills…

Problem: I have no roommate now

Solution: so, I need to find people to talk

٤,٢,٢ Problems with Cohesion:

Even though the C-C pattern changes abruptly to a P-S pattern, it remains cohesive at the micro level, because the final solution is an elaboration of the initial cause of her difficulty with English skills. So, it may be argued that the subject successfully uses these two text patterns *within* the overall general-specific pattern. However, the **sequencing** of the text (in lines ١٣-١٤) creates a problem with cohesion because it is different from McCarthy's (١٩٩١) *typical* G-S pattern. As a result, it affects the coherence of the text. This will be a primary objective in rewriting the original text. At the macro level, `*How about you?'* (in line ١٣) falls completely out of sequence, and should appear toward the beginning of the text as an initial general statement/question. At the micro level, there appears to be some general confusion and a misuse of **pronominalization** or reference to words in their pronoun form. In the text, the subject makes many references to what *she* does during summer vacation. This makes the reader assume that even though *they* traveled together, the experiences belong exclusively to *her.* As a result, the text appears incoherent with these inconsistent references between 'I`, and `us/we`. For example, in line ٨ '....in , ***I*** met so friendly people, then, they let ***us*** stay…'and in ١٠-١١, '***I*** was suppose to go to Al kadhim, but ***we*** couldn`t because ***we*** didn`t have enough time'.

McCarthy (ibid.:١٦٧) believes a reason for this problem is some languages tolerate more repetition of the noun head (as it seems to operate in Japanese) rather than correct pronominalization. As a result, students may unnecessarily repeat the same noun-head, disrupting the cohesion/coherence of the text. However, I argue that it may be irrelevant in this case, because the subject doesn't repeat the same noun-head; she merely displays trouble in *matching* the correct pronoun to the original noun-head. At the *macro*-level, the student initially produces a *semi*-cohesive text, which loosely follows McCarthy's (١٩٩١) general-specific pattern. Along with a cause-consequence situation, she incorporates Hoey`s (١٩٨٣) problem-solution

pattern for the general shape of her text. In the analysis, only three lines *(٣, ١٣, ١٤)* in the text were identified as being out of sequence, thus creating the problem with cohesion in the discourse.

However, by clearly marking these clauses at the *micro*-level, the letter became more coherent and easier to predict. As Winter (١٩٩٤:٤٩) states, 'the sensible connection between topics is made the moment two sentences are put together.' The text will then make sense because of expected relationships between the clauses. In the end, this reasonable connection made it a much easier piece of discourse to interpret and rewrite.

٥. Conclusion and Recommendations:

٥،١ Conclusion:

The study proves that written discourse and analyzing it is not an easy task. The reader cannot easily interpret the meaning of what is written because of the many problems present in the text .However, the different approaches employed to identify those problems in the text help to write a text without losing meaningful content .This encourages students to notice particular features of the target language, such as grammar orientation(who the message is about and for),lexical phrases, collocations ,and text structures ,by helping students develop awareness of the sequential relation of clauses through writing a real and meaningful texts.

To understand the writer's intention, the reader should look at clauses in context; that is, he/she should pay attention to the choice of lexical and grammatical items, in the perspectives of the co-relevance between clauses and the coherence of a text. At the same time, the writer's intention is to convey their message to the reader, usually having a particular reader in mind, with a particular purpose.

٥،٢ Recommendations:

This section is a discussion of the pedagogical implications(i.e. how to remedy in-class the problems encountered in a text).

١.It is best to examine many language-teaching strategies for the practice it provides in the elements of discourse ,so the teacher have a wide range of activities to teach.

٢.It is recommended to use classroom activities that are directed towards similar problems at the macro-level and cohesion at the micro-level.

٣.To help students with the problem of sequencing ,students may be asked to recreate a text from its constituent parts or to reorder them after disordered or to form a coherent text from a randomly divided sentences.

٤.Students can read what they have written in reverse order. This bottom up activity helps take attention away from the intended meaning and forces the students to look closer at the micro-level of the text(Hacker,١٩٩٦:٣٤).

٥.It is presumed that students are able to learn some areas of written discourse from writing activities that do not focus on forms from the beginning and they are meaning oriented .

٦.To better develop written discourse skills, teachers should consider utilizing more common sense rather than complicated exercises ,thus a wider path can open to coherent written discourse for effective communication.

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