Written Text Analysis

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1.0 Introduction

A foundational part of what we do as language teachers involves working with text. We expect learners not only to read authentic texts, but to produce texts that successfully express their ideas to others. How can we as teachers adequately deal with such a vast subject as "text"? Traditional methods usually involve the teaching of grammar, vocabulary and sentence construction. Educators such as Hedge (1988) see text as " . . . developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure" (p. 89). And while Raimes (1983) calls for techniques that teach " . . . a connected text and not just single sentences." (p. 11), the first three of her nine areas of relevance are sentence structure, grammar and mechanics. These methods have value, although many sense something lacking in merely teaching *about* the building blocks of text. What is missing is a larger model of what goes into successfully handling text itself. It is in this framework that we find potential solutions in written discourse analysis.

As McCarthy (1993) states, written discourse analysis is not a new method for teaching languages. It offers us " . . . a fundamentally different way of looking at language compared with sentence-dominated models" (p. 170). This paper will cover the approach of written discourse analysis, followed by an analysis of an actual text. Afterwards, an explanation of the implications and relevance of written discourse analysis for language learning will be discussed.

1.1 Approach of Written Discourse Analysis

Written discourse analysis starts with the assumption that text is naturally organized. However, unlike other approaches that view the sentence as the base point of relevance, it is the clause that is the foundation of context in written discourse analysis. As Winter (1994:47-48) affirms, it is the clause that is linguistically relevant, significant, and

highly structured; while the sentence is more or less a grammatical structure.

In written discourse analysis, text operates according to rules that most successful writers unconsciously follow and readers unconsciously expect to find. McCarthy (1993) asserts that " . . . there is a hierarchy of units comparable to acts, moves and changes, and . . . conventional ways of opening and closing texts" (p. 25). Some of these items are clauses, clause relations (how clauses integrate to form larger bodies of text), and lexical cohesion. McCarthy (1993) defines lexical cohesion as the " . . . exact repetition of words and the role played by certain basic semantic relations between words in creating *textuality*, that property in text which distinguishes it from a random sequence of unconnected sentences" (p. 65). Cohesion leads to coherence, which McCarthy (1993) and others Neubauer (1983) affirm is the feeling that the text is a unified piece of writing and not a disorganized collection of sentences. Assessment discourse-organizing words (McCarthy 1993:75), which are also called *anaphoric nouns*, problem and issue words play a part in the process of *signaling* the text, that is, to show the reader what is meaningful and how they should interpret the writer's intentions. Hoey (1994) feels that unsuccessful texts " . . . can be shown to arise from 'faulty' or missing signaling" (p. 44).

All these smaller items of clauses, clause relations, coherence, signaling and textuality form textual patterns, which in time become ingrained and are subliminally expected by readers and writers alike. Winter (1994) and Hoey (1983, 1994) discuss this dialectic in detail, callin it the clause-relational approach. Two basic categories of this approach are matching relations and logical sequencing.

Matching is when two parts of a text that are repetitive are compared to each other, logical sequencing " . . . is concerned with representing selective changes in the

space/time continuum . . . " (Winter, 1994:52). Winter (1994:50) continues to explain how these clause relations go on to form text structures, which then form message structures.

Characteristic patterns of message structures in written discourse analysis are the Problem/Solution structure, discussed in Hoey (1994), the Claim/Counterclaim structure covered in McCarthy (1993), and the General/Specific structure discussed in Coulthard (1994). By studying the textual and lexical elements of these texts, one can learn to regularly recognize if the structure is basically Problem/Solution or Claim-Counterclaim. For example, if one finds lexical signals that indicate situation-problem-response-result (Hoey, 1994:31), we can know with some certainty that we are dealing with a Problem-Solution test. When one identifies vocabulary items that signal doubt or skepticism, (words such as *appear, suggests, speculation,* etc.), we know we are dealing with a Claim-Counterclaim structure. In fact, McCarthy (1993:31) goes as far as to say that, while the sequence of these structures may be varied, we should always find all the elements we are looking for in a well-formed text.

It should be mentioned in passing that not all linguists (Hodge and Kress, 1993) are confident that such linguistic structures can always be clearly recognized. However, as research continues, new and more defined structures will be discovered. It is wise to keep in mind that written discourse analysis is at present a theory which attempts to explain current phenomena in language, and as such is subject to change. Eventually written discourse analysis will build the foundation for new theories that will even more accurately describe the linguistic processes of text.

At any rate, there is little doubt that, at present, written discourse analysis can shed much light on the inner workings of authentic texts. We will now identify lexical signaling,

clause relations, text structures and other pertinent written discourse analysis features in an actual text, highlighting items that the writer uses to express his message.

2.0 Analysis of Essay on Theories of Evolution

This analysis follows some general guidelines offered in Martin (1985:222-38), and borrows some of the structural frameworks found in Hoey (1994:37). In the interest of time and space, only sections of the text will be treated to demonstrate the various uses of this form of analysis. For a general overview, please refer to the Text Diagrammatic Representation.

2.1 Surface Observations

We can see from the text (see appendix 1) that the writer is a supporter of the Aquatic Hypothesis of Human Evolution. The perceived readers are:
* Well-informed about current theories of human evolution.
* Probably proponents of the Savannah Theory of human
 evolution, or are aware of problems with the Savannah Theory, and open to other options.
* Another segment of the audience is not
 particularly aware of either view, and open to be "converted" to the writer's views.
The text is best understood in the format of the Claim/Counterclaim structure, as detailed by McCarthy (1993:161). Claim-Counterclaim patterns are often used to refute opposition in political, ideological, theological and scientific literature. The writer uses this pattern to convincingly cast doubt upon the generally-accepted claims of the Savannah Theory of human evolution and replaces them with the counterclaims of the Aquatic Theory of evolution.

2.2 Discourse Type and Signals

Holland and Lewis (1994:36-39) define Claim-Counterclaim

patterns as having the following characteristics: A section of solidarity or "common ground" with the opposition, a section (or sections) where the claims of the opposition are presented (usually in an unfavorable light), and a section where the writer's beliefs are stated as counterclaims. This Common Ground-Claim-Counterclaim structure can clearly be lifted from the sample text.

2.3 Signaling for Common Ground

Some signals for "common ground" are: "...palaeontologists are generally *agreed* on the developments . . . ", " . . . a process which has been *proved* . . . ", " . . . and it is largely *uncontested*."
This writer applies strong lexical signals witht active verb tenses to develop rapport with his audience before beginning any counterclaims. The writer cannot begin by alienating his audience, but must first show that both he and they begin at the same place, speak the same language, and part of the same community of learning. Verbs are also in a finite tense, which Winter (1994:62) says will cause the readers (or "decoders") to trust the clauses as true.

2.4 Signaling for Contrast

Contrastive discourse markers help prepare the way for lexical items intended to cause suspicion in the mind of the reader. Prominent contrast signals in this text are: "There are major disagreements, *however*, . . . ", "*But* there is a gap . . . ", "It is not, *however*, the norm for marine creatures . . . ", and "*With regard to* the loss of body hair . . . ". Before this writer can begin an outright refutation of the claims, he must prepare them by such markers. "But" and "however", which McCarthy (1993:31) calls *adversative*, feature prominently after the statement of several claims. Immediately after stating the common ground, the writer inserts constrastive discourse markers to literally erase any feeling of a

consensus the reader might develop from the strong verb tenses in the common ground section.

2.5 Signaling for Claim

The writer has already sown the seeds of doubt, and now begins to present the claims of his opposition in a negative light. Here begins a section of text that Winter (1994) would call a Hypothetical-Real structure: "But the moment a clause has modals or any other signal of suspension of fact we enter into hypotheticality of some kind. What this means is that hypothetical and real is the marked structure, with the hypothetical as the key sign that real is potentially next" (p. 62).   All of the claim signals carried strong elements of hypotheticality: Among claim signals were the following: "It is *argued* that early hominids . . . " and "The savannah theory *claims* that . . . ", "The most widely accepted theory *attempts to account* . . . ", "Analysis of bones . . . *suggest* . . . "

Many of these verbs are what Leech (1983) would call *non-factive* or *counter-factive*, words that neither state truth nor deny it, but may indirectly suggest something is false or untrustworthy.

The writer also makes use of matching clause relations that Winter (1994:50-51) explains can introduce denial and correction. The clause " *. . . not from forest to plain, but from land to water . . .* " is a classic example of how matching sequences state, deny and correct information one wishes to refute.

These and other hypothetical claim markers state the opposition's current situation with an air of doubt, preparing the readers to find solace in the "real" counterclaims that will inevitably be offered soon.

It should also be noted that, in every case, the claims are stated in the passive voice. Hodge and Kress (1993) show how passive modals are usually interpreted quite negatively.

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Hodge and Kress (1993:23) also show that when an actor in a text is referred to only abstractly and nominalized (a move called *transformation*), readers will subconsciously distance themselves from that nominalized actor, and focus upon the active actor in the text, for good or ill. In this instance, we see the Savannah Theorists become frequently nominalized and passivised, such as in the previously stated sentence: "It is argued that . . . ". Who argues? We never find out, for we are being prepared for the real counterclaims and the real scholars, who will be introduced shortly.

2.6 Signaling for Counterclaim

The writer spends only about 1/3 of the article discussing the Savannah Theory's claims, but in the remaining 2/3 of the article, offers counterclaims in active, affirming verb tenses that encourage agreement, solidarity and a sympathetic acceptance of the Aquatic Hypothesis. Most of the verbs would be described by Leech (1983) as *factive*, to assert that something is true. Sentences such as "the ancestors of the whales and dolphins" will undoubtedly give warm fuzzies to readers with any environmentalist concerns. Some counterclaim markers are: "...proponents of the aquatic theory *stress the fact* . . . ", " . . . the *argument proceeds by noting* . . . ", and " . . . they *point to the fact* that . . . ", " . . . the theory *takes* as its starting point . . . ", and " . . . they *point to the fact* that . . . ". To give the counterclaim signaling even more weight, the Aquatic Hypothesis is shown to have the backing of well-written authors and titled people (Elaine Morgan, Sir Alistair Hardy). We do not know who put forth the older theory. In the counterclaim section, we see many cataphoric references ("read on and find out messages" (McCarthy 1993:42)) as "and . . . and", which keeps the readers by necessity following the counterclaims until they reach their conclusion in a well-placed logical sequence marker (see Winter 1994:52) "It is thus proposed . . . ",

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giving the general impression of the counterclaim sections as credible, organized, logical, respected and truthful.

2.7 Other Textual Patterns

Other textual patterns can be found inside a larger pattern. McCarthy (1993:159) notes how imbedded patterns serve as supporting actors by dedicating the best of their textual characteristics to strengthen the complete text. There were many General-Specific components in the sample text. A General-Specific pattern starts with a broad general statement, which Coulthard (1994) calls an *enumerable*, and then offers more detailed statements to back up the first general statement (called *matching relations* by Coulthard (1994)). One good example of a General-Specific structure is found in the first paragraph of the text:

General Statement (enumerable): "...palaeontologists are generally agreed on the developments that human beings underwent on the African plains from the emergence of *Australopithecus* about 3.7 million years ago.

Specific Statement (matching particular): "The development of tools . . . "

Specific Statement (matching particular): "...a hunter-gatherer economy . . . "

Specific Statement (matching particular): "...radically new social structure . . . "

Here is an example of another General-Particular structure imbedded in the text:

General Statement (enumerable): "However, the theory takes as its starting point the contention that <u>other</u> factors must have been involved".

Specific Statement (matching particular): "...numerous animals survived . . . without developing bipedalism . . . ".

Specific Statement (matching particular): "Nor have other animals . . . shed their fur . . . "

Specific Statement (matching particular): "A number of

primates . . . continue to copulate ventro-dorsally . . . ".
The writer uses the General-Particular mainly as a platform
for building his case for the Aquatic Hypothesis. By making
general statements and then backing them up by further detail
and/or questions, he continues to successfully weaken the base
of the Savannah Theory while strengthening the possibility for
acceptance of his alternate theory.

There are also Problem-Solution structures in the text. This
pattern allows writers " . . . to organize what they have to
say as *solutions* to *problems* in terms of the four-part
structure Situation-Problem-Solution-Evaluation . . . " (Hoey,
1994:8). Our writer uses the Problem-Solution pattern to
highlight his perceived problems with the widely-accepted
Savannah Theory, while offering his Aquatic Hypothesis as the
solution in form of a counterclaim.

Here is an example an imbedded Problem-Solution pattern:
Situation: "There are major disagreements, however, amongst
those attempting to explain what happened in the period
preceding this - the astonishing transition from 'man-like
ape' to the 'ape-like man' of 3 million years B.P."
Problem: "The problem centres around what is popularly known
as the 'missing link'.
Solution: "The 'missing link' is, from this point of view,
best characterised as *homo aquaticus*."

As we can see, the situation is in the present tense, so that
the readers know that, even as they read, unrest is brewing in
the halls of academia. Already we are prepared to find out
what the problem is by the lexical signal of *"major
disagreements".* Further on, the problem is clearly stated:
where is the "missing link"? Where is the answer to all the
questions that have daunted evolutionists for years? Later in
the text, we finally get the solution of *homo aquaticus*
through the lexical signals of " *. . . is . . . best
characterized as . . .* ". The writer states the solution only
after numerous counterclaims, enumerable, matching particulars

transformations and many other devices had been used to prepare the reader. If the solution had been offered at the beginning of the text without the preparation, undoubtedly it would not be as well received as at the end of the text. Through this process, we can clearly see how written discourse analysis reveals the writer's usage of the language in new and exciting ways. We learn how a Claim-Counterclaim structure is an effective method to help us to understand the writer's message: to encourage skepticism and dissatisfaction with the popular Savannah Theory. By highlighting the weaknesses of the Savannah Theory, he can competently show the strengths of the Aquatic Theory of human evolution.

3.0 Implications and Relevance for Teaching

Written discourse analysis has great potential in providing a new theoretical base for materials and writing texts, even moreso since a form of political correctness has seeped into language teaching under the guise of "communicative language teaching". For years teachers have been told to be more enlightened by looking past accuracy to a broader base of "correctness" (see McDonough and Shaw, 1993, p. 180). This is to a certain extent true, but this should not be an excuse for allowing shoddy text production.

The following is a sample from Niigata University, located on the northwest coast of Japan. The students were asked to explain why they believed or disbelieved ghosts. This is a sample from a Japanese freshman:

Text

I believe in ghosts. But I haven't ever seen them.

*Ghost's programs are often used on TV at night in summer.
 I often watch them. Though I know that   watching
ghost's programs are dreadful, I often watch   them. Many
people say on TV that they have seen   ghosts. I believe
their saying. When I heard their   saying, I found that
good ghost and bad ghost exist   over us. I have thought*

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that ghosts are very dreadful   for a long time. Perhaps
many people are also afraid of them. Ghosts usually appear
at night. So I am   afraid of night too. However, I think
that ghosts are   not only dreadful but also protect us.
After men died,   they become ghosts. I believe people who
become ghosts   look after us somewhere. That is why I
believe ghosts   though I haven't seen them. But I have not
wanted to   see ghosts.

To be fair, Japanese writing style is much more feeling based
and "stream of consciousness" oriented than Western writing
styles, as can be inferred from this text. Also, Japanese
High School students are not taught how to write essays or
other process papers at all, either in Japanese or English,
since the main purpose in Japanese High School is to assist
the students in memorizing great amounts of raw data for
passing university entrance exams. Students write few if any
papers until the very end of their time in university, when
they are required to write a "graduation thesis", which is
little more than the imitation of the form of the British
university system. Due to the lack of experience with
writing, and little or no instruction in written styles, there
is little substance to this form. Almost every student paper
is accepted with little comment, and unsurprisingly, the
student thesis are often of little reading value.

In this current situation, is undeniable that this student's
sample text and Japanese student writing at large would be
more coherent if taught a background knowledge of basic text
structures. McCarthy (1993) feels that these concepts (such
as lexical relations) can be taught early in language learner
development, and that students can be trained to recognize
text along discourse lines, making writing easy for both them
and the teacher. Martin (1985:81) feels that teachers can
make use of text structures when we evaluate student essays,
and choose textbooks that will be more open to a written
discourse analysis approach. Cook (1989) offers all sorts of

activities that teachers can use which takes advantages of the insights gained from written discourse analysis.

Coulthard (1994) calls for linguists and teachers alike to "admit what we have always secretly acknowledged, that some texts and some writers are better than others, and to try to account . . . why one textualization might mean more or better than another" (p. 1). Coulthard (1994:1-2) suggests that though studying both *inadequate textualizations* (poor writing) and *possible textualizations* (a term for good writing) we can discover structures and principles that we can teach to our students.

Undoubtedly, written discourse analysis is needed and would be welcome in Japanese University English writing classes (if offered by the university). A large part of education in Japan involves learning and processing structures anyway. In Peak's (1986) essay on *Training Learning Skills and Attitudes in Japanese Early Education,*
three basic training practices were universally observed in Japanese preschool and elementary schools:

"* Calculated arousal of learner motivation to acquire a specific skill and become a member of its social setting.
* Repeated practice of precisely defined component routines until they become automatic.
* Development of self-monitoring of learning performance" (p.99). By the time students reach Junior High School, this learning process is automatic. One could argue that the culture framework is already set for Japanese students to accept the structural nature of English text and run with it, once it has been shown to them. However, this form of writing still involves much cognitive thinking into when and how to use a specific pattern, so care needs to be taken not to allow some students to merely search for an easy system to write good English automatically without cognitive thought. Allowing such would certainly cripple the impetus of written discourse analysis.

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4.0 Conclusion

This is a dynamic new way to look at text. It must be accepted that there are acceptable and unacceptable styles of written English text, and linguists such as Coulthard must be strongly congratulated for taking this stand. While some new and innovative ideas such as written discourse analysis in the classroom will be met with skepticism and resistance, and many will object on traditional, theoretical and cultural grounds, it cannot be denied that written discourse analysis has provided us with a fresh and practical way to identify patterns in text, which allows not only our students to become better writers, but for us as teachers to become better writers as well.

Appendix

Text For Analysis

While there may be some argument over details,
palaeontologists are generally agreed on the developments that
human beings underwent on the African plains from the
emergence of *Australopithecus* about 3.7 million years ago.
The development of tools, of a hunter-gatherer economy, and of
radically new social structures constitute a process which has
been proved beyond much reasonable doubt and is now largely
uncontested. There are major disagreements, however, amongst
those attempting to explain what happened in the period
immediately preceding this – the astonishing transition from
'man-like ape' to the 'ape-like men' of 3 million years B.P.

The problem centres around what is popularly known as the
'missing link'. We have fossil evidence of man-like apes
(*Ramapithecus*) which lived in the East African Rift Valley
around 9 million years ago. There are relatively plentiful
fossilised remains of *Australopithecus* , *Homo Habilis* and
Homo Erectus , from the same area and dating from 3.7 million
years B.P. onwards. Analysis of bones from these later
anthropoids suggests that they already exhibited many of the
features which typify modern man : they were, for example,
bipedal. But there is a gap (what Leakey described as the
'yawning void') in the fossil record for the intervening 5
million years and, in the absence of hard evidence from this
crucial period, serious – and often bitter – disputes persist
between competing theories of human evolution.

The most widely accepted theory attempts to account for
the major changes in proto-human physiology in terms of
adaptations to climatic change on the African continent at the
time. A progressively hotter, drier climate and the consequent
replacement of forests by grassy plains (*savannah*) over large
areas of the land mass meant that certain species of ape were
gradually deprived of what had been their natural environment.
It is argued that early hominids were descendants of those

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apes which emerged from the dwindling forests onto the plains - a move which inevitably meant alterations in diet, precipitating a development from vegetarian to carnivore and, ultimately, to hunter.

According to the 'Savannah Hypothesis', all the startling evolutionary changes leading from ape to human proceed from here. The proto-humans learned to stand on two legs in order to see further - providing 'early warning' of the approach of predators across the plain. Standing upright left their hands free to make tools and - as their tool-making skills progressed - bipedalism had further advantages, since they could now run after prey and carry weapons at the same time. Hunting on the hot plains was uncomfortable for creatures which had evolved in the shady forest, and they shed most of their body hair to prevent overheating. The developing hunter-gatherer economy led to the need for new social arrangements - particularly regarding the care of the young - which made monogamous 'pair-bonding' a positive survival behaviour. The savannah theory claims that ventro-ventral (face-to-face, literally '*belly-to-belly*') sex, which is almost unheard-of among other primates, developed as a means to increase sexual intimacy and thus cement the pair-bond.

The 'Aquatic Hypothesis' - originally put forward by Sir Alister Hardy and more recently associated with Elaine Morgan* - does not reject the savannah theory as such. The centrality of climatic change and the transformations undergone on the savannah from 3_ million years BP onwards are not disputed. However, the theory takes as its starting point the contention that other factors must have been involved. It observes that numerous animals have survived on the African savannah and evolved into efficient carnivorous predators without ever developing bipedalism : after all, four legs are generally much faster than two and in evolutionary terms it's difficult to see how a little extra vision would have offset the loss of speed. Nor have other animals found it

necessary to shed their fur ; indeed, a hairy coat provides
better protection against both daytime sun and night-time cold
than the apparently deviant evolutionary strategy adopted by
the 'naked ape'. A number of other primates practise pair-
bonding (gibbons are in fact much more strictly monogamous
than humans) but continue to copulate ventro-dorsally, as is
the norm for almost all terrestrial animals.

   It is not, however, the norm for marine creatures, and it
is this insight which lies at the heart of the aquatic theory.
Simply stated, the aquatic hypothesis is that during the
catastrophic changes in the African climate, the man-like apes
initially moved not from forest to plain but from the land
into the water - just as the precursors of modern marine
mammals must at one time have done. Unlike the ancestors of
the whale and the dolphin, these proto-humans later moved back
onto dry land, but the creatures which emerged from the water
were much changed. Various pre-adaptations to the
physiological differences between them and other primates had
already been introduced, and it was these which led to the
development of *homo sapiens* on the savannah.

   In their account of bipedalism, proponents of the aquatic
theory stress the fact that no mammal - with the single
exception of man - has ever developed the habit of walking and
running on two feet, with its spine perpendicular to the
ground. Even those which do occasionally stand on their hind
legs (and it is admitted that this constitutes an advantage
for spotting predators on the plain) invariably drop back onto
all fours in order to run. The argument proceeds by noting
that a four-legged creature, during the initial stages of
adaptation to an aquatic environment, would naturally tend to
 stand upright in order to keep its head out of the water to
breathe, and that it would be better able to do so due to the
buoyancy that water provides. A prolonged period (we are
talking here about several million years) standing in, and/or
'treading', water would result in a shift in the creature's

centre of gravity, in the development of a more flexible
spine, and in an altered pelvic structure. All these would
make it more difficult for such an animal to revert to
quadropedalism on its return to a terrestrial existence.

   With regard to the loss of body hair, they point to the
fact that fur, once wet, provides poor insulation, this
purpose being far better served by fat *under* the skin - hence
the thick layer of blubber in relatively hairless marine
mammals like the whale, and a lot of subcutaneous fat in
wallowing creatures like the hippopotamus and pig.
Subcutaneous fat is demonstrably far more extensive in humans
than in any other ape, indeed *homo sapiens* is the only
primate which lays down surplus fat in a layer under its skin.
As for our odd predilection for ventro-ventral sex, the
aquatic contention is that this is only peculiar in land-
dwelling animals : if humans are seen as 'aquatic apes' then
the practice no longer appears unusual. The vast majority of
marine mammals copulate ventro-ventrally, and the exceptions
are largely those species which come ashore to mate.

   It is thus proposed that bipedalism, loss of body hair,
and ventro-ventral sexual intercourse are in fact evidence for
an aquatic, or semi-aquatic, phase in human evolution. The
aquaticists claim that the similarities between human beings
and their marine relatives (a number of other shared features
include the shedding of tears and a diminution in the
olfactory sense) are simply too numerous and too striking to
be mere coincidence. The 'missing link' is, from this point of
view, best characterised as *homo aquaticus .*"

* see Morgan's *The Descent of Woman* (1972), *The Aquatic Ape*
   (1982) and *The Scars of Evolution* (1990).

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