Patterns in Text Analysis

As part of the Spoken Classroom Discourse
and Written Discourse MA Module

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Assignment question: Choose an authentic text in English. Analyze the text in terms of problem-solution , general specific or claim-counterclaim patterns. Briefly discuss the challenges and opportunities that such text patterns present for teachers of English as a foreign language.

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Introduction/ What is Written Discourse?

Written discourse involves communication by using textual material. Compared to other academic disciplines such as psychology, anthropology and sociology, the academic discipline of discourse analysis is relatively new. It can be defined in many ways. McCarthy defines, discourse analysis as "the study of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used" (McCarthy1991:5). Text grammarians have contributed to the discipline of discourse analysis by studying written text as a medium apart from spoken discourse (Winter,1994 Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Unlike the analysis of spoken discourse, written discourse does not have to contend with people speaking all at once or even with spontaneous interruptions. McCarthy(1991:6) mentions that in written discourse the writer normally has time to prepare the text. McCarthy also expresses that in written discourse, "the sentences are usually well formed in a way that the utterances of natural spontaneous talk are not"(ibid: 25). In fact, Fairclough has defined discourse as "any spoken or written language use conceived as social practice" (Fairclough 1996: 71). Sometime written discourse is the reflection of a writer's social experiences. Written discourse is a formal lengthy discussion on a subject without any spoken dialogue. Moreover, Aitchison compares spoken language to written language by

claiming that the author has written "an uninterrupted flow of words"(Aitchison 2003:118). Written discourse is uninterrupted.

In this paper, the concept of text analysis will be discussed in section 1, then in section 2 a chosen text will be analyzed. Finally, in section 3, challenges for the chosen text and how it relates to teaching it will be discussed.

1.**Aspects of Text Analysis**

There are four terms that can be used when analyzing written text. These terms are as follows: 1.cohesion 2. ellipsis 3.signals 4.problem-solution pattern. These terms will be discussed in 1.1,1.2 and 1.3.

1.1 **Cohesion explained**

Written text has been analyzed by looking at the links between the clauses and sentences of the text known by the linguistic term as **cohesion.** More discussion of grammatical cohesion will take place in section 2.7.

1.2 **Elipsis and signals explained**

Most texts also have examples of **ellipsis.** Ellipsis is when expected elements of the text are omitted because they have already been mentioned previously in the text or that they are automatically understood. For example in the following sentence: *At the golf course, the men will drive the golf balls from the men's tees and the women, the women's tees.* From the first mentioning of *will drive the golf balls* from the men's tees, this phrase is not mentioned a second time before the phrase *the women's tees* because it is automatically understood that the women will drive from the women's tees. Analyzing text is the act of **interpretation** and it depends on how much effort the reader evaluates the text just as much as the author writes it. In a written work, the reader needs to look for clues or **signals** that give understanding to specific segments of the text. For example, read the following two sentences:

      (A)I walk to the store on Mondays.

      (B) I walked to the store last Monday.

In sentence (B) the reader can see from the –ed in walked there is a reference to the past but also to a specific time in the past. In sentence (A) the reader sees "I walk" and that walk is in the present simple but with the last two words "on Mondays" the reader can use the last two words as a hint that the verb is being used in a habitual context. A little bit further in this assignment I will talk more about other **signals** that assist readers in written discourse analysis. By realizing the **signals**, readers can gain a better comprehension of the **syntax**, the arrangement and form of words in the text. **Additive signals** such as *and,also* and *furthermore* give additional information to the reader. More discussion of additive signals will be discussed later on in this assignment in 2.2 and 2.9.

1.3 **Problem – solution pattern explained.**

Malcolm Coulthard writes and explains that there are different types of patterns in written discourse. The **problem-solution pattern** is displayed in a four-part structure Situation-Problem-Solution-Evaluation. Coulthard uses Winter's example by using a soldier on duty. The example is as follows:

I was on sentry duty	Situation
I saw the enemy approaching	Problem
I opened fire	Solution (to the Problem)
The enemy retreated	Evaluation (of the Solution)

(Coulthard 1994 : 8)

Writers can show us knowledge that they have in a linear way. Text is linear and writers need to organize their thoughts in a way that the reader can comprehend the wrtier's knowledge clearly. There are several patterns in rhetorical structures such as the **general/particular** pattern , **claim-counter claim** pattern and the **problem-solution** pattern.

In the problem-solution pattern , the writer starts off with a given situation and then presents to the reader a problem with questions that need to be answered. The writer then attempts to answer the questions the reader may have and finally gives solutions to the problem in the text with an evaluation as a follow-up. Fairclough also writes that intertextual analysis is a necessary "complement to linguistic analysis" (Fairclough 1999: 184). The example written in the beginning of this discussion is a very simple display of the problem-solution pattern that shows an example in analyzing and evaluating text but the piece of text that I have chosen is a little bit more complicated.

This problem-solution pattern certainly relates to the following piece that I have chosen from **Looking for Alaska** by Peter Jenkins

Extract 1
(1)When Ted gets a call at home, he has to get dressed,get his dart gun, and try to find the lovelorn bull moose. (2)Fortunately many of the new swing sets are built cheap,so with each smack by the moose they lose another piece.(3) It's the older swing sets built with better metal that really tangle them up, or the ones custom built with stronger chain.(4) One time Ted had to rescue a moose that had tangled with a swing set, then run for the middle of a marshy lake. (5)Normally moose run into the middle of a lake when a major predator is chasing them, a pack of wolves or a brown bear.(6) The swing set almost drowned the moose. (7)By the time Ted got there with his boat, the moose was too weak too swim. (8)Just his head and a bit of the swing sets were sticking barely out of the water. (9)Ted and his wife, feisty and blond Elaina, shot it with a dart, then had to hold its head above water and cut off the swing set. (10)Elaina climbed into the water with it to get a better grip on its head. (11)They were with that moose for over five hours, and finally it got strong enough to hold its head up by itself without fear of drowning, and they were able to leave.
      (12) Once a cross country skier found a golden eagle that had lost its front talons on its right foot. It was so weak it could not take off from the small, dead tree it sat in. (13)The skier caught it, wrapped it in a coat, risking freezing herself, and brought it to town. Ted met her and put the eagle in the truck with him. (14) Ted shoots a moose every year, like many Alaskans;it is a large part of the meat he eats every year. The moose meat goes along with the salmon he and the family catch, the clams they dig, the halibut they haul in, and some caribou too.(15) Well, that winter Ted fed a surprising amount of that moose to that recovering golden eagle that lived in his garage on the bad days and on the bright and sunny winter days in a perch in his backyard.(16) He released her that spring as healthy as a golden eagle could be. (17)She had gained so much weight eating at least 125 pounds of moose meat over that winter of recovery that she was a real armful, even for a strong man like Ted, who is six feet tall, 195 pounds.

2.1 **Analysis of chosen text and pattern comparison**

The selected text has similarities to Winter's example.

Table 1. Comparison of the problem solution pattern between Winter and the selected text.

	Winter	Jenkins
Situation	I was on sentry duty.	(1) Ted is contacted to find a moose.
Problem	I saw the enemy approaching.	(3) The moose is found tangled up in a swing set.
Solution (to the problem)	I opened fire.	(9) Ted and Elaina untangle the moose from the swing set.
Evaluation (of the solution)	The enemy retreated	(11) Ted and his wife were able to leave

From Table 1, it is clear that there is a specific order of discourse from the selected text. Moreover, Hoey writes that the problem solution pattern "is signaled by the means of questions"(Hoey 2001:26). Hoey suggests that written passages are implicitly designed to answer spoken questions. In section **2.2** , I will show how questions illustrate Hoey's point.

2.2 **Analysis of first paragraph in Extract 1 and how it answers questions in relation to the problem solution pattern.**

In (1) there is a given **situation.** The character, Ted, is contacted by phone and has to find a wild animal; however, the whole situation is not completely clear in this sentence. In sentence(2) the word, *fortunately* , an **additive positive** signal, gives information about swing sets in contact with a moose but the reader is not aware of the moose

actually being completely tangled in a swing set until point (3). At this point the reader is most likely provoked to ask the question, "What seems to be the problem?"

What was the problem?

From the phrase *tangle them up* , indicates the situation the moose is in. In point (6), the reader sees from the word *drowned* how dangerous the situation is.

What aspect of the situation required a response?

In point (9) the reader sees how Ted with his wife untangle the moose after shooting it with a dart and cut the moose from the swing set. Point 9 clearly shows how the situation has been given a **solution**. In points (4) and (5), Jenkins mentions how a moose runs to the middle of the lake when being chased giving more relative information to the situation.

What was the solution? What was the result?

In point (11) the reader sees how Ted and his wife make sure that not only is the moose untangled from the swing set but it is also clear that the animal is safe from drowning. In the end of the pattern, Jenkins writes *they were able to leave*. The **problem** of saving the animal has been given a **solution** and the last five words in the first paragraph from Jenkins' text is the **evaluation** of the solution. The reader can see an order of events that correspond to the problem-solution pattern.

2.3 **Text Analysis of second paragraph in Extract 1**

Grimes(cited in Hoey 2001:27) notes "Both the plots of fairy tales and the writings of scientists are built on a response pattern. The first part gives a problem and the second its the solution."   Although Jenkins did not write fairy tales or scientific articles, his writing follows a pattern of responses that coincide with the problem-solution pattern. As Hoey writes(2001:33) "the projection of monologue in question and answer dialogue is an important test of the structure of discourse." The following analysis of Extract 1 is able to pass that *important test* Hoey writes about.

What was the problem?

The reader sees in point (12) that an eagle has suffered a physical injury and that the animal was weak.

What aspect of the situation required a response?

In point (12) it is written *it could not take off from the small,dead tree* , the reader sees the **situation.** Further on in point (13), Ted met the woman who saved the eagle and he took care of the animal from that point in the text.

What was the solution? What was the result?

In point (15) , the character ,Ted, fed moose meat to the eagle in order to nurse it back to normal health. Feeding moose meat to the eagle contributes to giving a **solution** to the **problem.** In point (16), the eagle is released into the wild after recovery. The result is clear from this point that the **problem** in the pattern has been solved. Finally in (17), the author gives an **evaluation** of the solution as he describes the eagle as having *gained so much weight* and that the eagle ate so much meat during *that winter of recovery.*

2.4 **Matching relation in text**.

Coulthard has discussed the psycholinguistic pattern, or **matching relation,** in which traditional children's stories are marked with massive repetition and minimal replacement. Coulthard(1992:35) recalls from such classic pieces of children's literature such as **Three Little Pigs**, there are two pigs whose homes are "huffed , puffed and blown down," and that the same words appear repeatedly in the text without using other words to replace them. The chosen text is not as repetitive as a children's story but there is an example of **matching relation** in it. Point (2) mentions *many of the new swing sets* and shortly afterwards in point (3) there is repetition with *the older swing sets.* There are different adjectives such as *new* and *older* but the **matching relation** of swing sets is clear to the reader. The word **swing sets** gives information that gradually introduces the reader to the **problem** of the animal getting tangled up in a swing set.

2.5**Vocabulary and text analysis**

Vocabulary identifies the topic and structure of discourse. McCarthy mentions that when text is read, the reader can "match the words with the segments" and that the reader "can render an account of what 'the problem' is"(McCarthy 1991:75). In the following table, specific vocabulary and phrases are shown in how they occur in **Extract 1,**(paragraph 2) and in what part of the problem-solution pattern that they fit into.

Table 2. Vocabulary segments and phrases from the selected text and how they relate to the problem-solution pattern.

Situation	(12)Once, found a golden eagle

Problem	(12) lost its front talons, so weak, could not take off
Solution (to the problem)	(13) caught it, wrapped it, fed, amount of that moose to that recovering eagle
Evaluation (of the solution)	(16) released her that spring, healthy as a , eagle could be

Rutherford mentions about the given-new principle in which he explains that all texts have "beginnings and endings" (Rutherford 1987:68). The start of the problem-solution pattern with the word *Once* is the beginning of a new situation and the situation is further informed with the phrase *found an eagle*. From the phrases *lost its front talons*, the problem is introduced and from the phrases *caught it* and *wrapped it,* the solution of helping the eagle is described. The word *fed* gives more detail about the solution to the problem. Moreover, from the phrases *released her that spring* and *healthy as a* give evaluation of the solution with the eagle gaining health. In the right column of **Table 2**, there are no complete sentences but just words and phrases that relate to the segments of the problem-solution pattern. McCarthy writes about discourse analysis and vocabulary. McCarthy mentions that a second language learner who has trouble with certain words "may be disadvantaged in the struggle to decode the whole text"(McCarthy 1991:76). (more discussion about this is section 3)

2.6 **Hapax Legomena explained and its connection to the problem-solution pattern.**
The lexical choice of *lovelorn* in (1) from **Extract 1** is an example of **hapax legomena,** words used only once in a given text. Lovelorn, sad because someone you love does not love you, is a hint from the author that the moose is in a negative situation that leads into the pattern. Honore uses(cited in Coultard 2000:282) the term **hapax legomena**, when analyzing the richness of vocabulary text.

2.7**Grammatical cohesion in text**
Cohesion in text gives meaning to the reader. Halliday and Hasan are pioneers in the study of **grammatical cohesion.** They explain "The concept of cohesion is a semantic one;it refers to the relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as text"(Halliday and Hasan 1976:4). They comment in their work that what makes

cohesion in text is "elements that are structurally unrelated to one another are linked together, through the dependence of one on the other for its interpretation" (Halliday and Hasan1976:27). Halliday and Hasan wrote about four different types of cohesion in text analysis: additive, adversative, casual and temporal. Two types of cohesion that I would like to discuss from my chosen text are **Cohesion through reference** and **Cohesion through temporal conjunction**. Cohesion through reference uses personal pronouns to refer to something that has already been mentioned in the text.

(2) Fortunately many of the **new swing sets** are built cheap, so with each smack by the **moose they** lose another piece. (3) It's the older swing sets built with better metal that really tangle **them** up…

  From the phrase, *new swing set* referred to by *they* and then with the word *moose* referred to by *them* are two examples of **anaphoric** reference. Anaphoric means to use different words that refer to something previously mentioned in the text.

Cohesion through reference with the use of a reflexive pronoun can be seen in point (13) with the use of *risking freezing **herself***, is the first time the sex of the cross country skier is identified. In the text leading up to point (13), the reader only knows that a cross country has found an injured eagle in need of help. The fact that the cross country skier is female is further reinforced with more cohesion when the text reads in point(13) met **her.** The use of **herself** and **her** force the reader to sense the meaning of who the cross country skier is. The use of **herself** and **her** are examples of **cataphoric** reference, information that is withheld from the reader until later on in the text. Another cataphoric reference is in point (16) *He released **her***, is the first time that *her* or any gender reference, is used in reference to the eagle. Both cataphoric and anaphoric references not only force the reader to understand vocabulary but also to follow the order of events in the problem-solution pattern. The reader is forced to understand the meaning of vocabulary mentioned earlier in the text and grammatical cohesion later in the text in order to understand the references.

 2.8 **Temporal conjunction discussed.**

Cohesion through temporal conjunction involves signals that notify the ready about the sequence of events. Words used to signal **temporal conjunction** could be *from now on,*

finally , at once, previously etc. The chosen text has examples of temporal conjunction in the following:

(11) They were with that moose for over five hours, and **finally** it got strong enough to hold its head up by itself without fear of drowning, and they were able to leave.

The word , *finally,* is also a signal that not only is there a solution to the problem but that there is an evaluation to the problem. After the word *finally*, the moose could *hold its head up by itself without fear of drowning.*   The reader realizes that there is no fear of drowning and it is clear that the moose has been saved. The final words in segment (11) give clear evaluation that Ted and his wife could leave the scene and the problem in this problem-solution text pattern has been solved. The use of the word *finally* relates to how Halliday and Hasan define **cohesion through temporal conjunction** because the word *finally* signals the end of something.   As Rutherford writes , "language is temporal" (Rutherford 1987: 68). Point (15) starts off with *Well,* and the word *well* is used as a linking adverb in this context. The word *well* is a very useful word for beginning something new that you have to say or write(Leech 1989:518). After *well*, the chosen text adds new information on how the eagle was fed moose meat until recovery contributing to the solution of the problem in the pattern. As mentioned in 2.5 of this assignment, Rutherford mentions of beginnings and endings. *Once* signals the beginning. *Finally,* signals the ending. **The problem-solution pattern has a beginning and an ending.**

2.9 **Clause Relations in the chosen text**

 Clause relations relate to the sequence of events in written discourse analysis. Winter has written about basic clause relations in that the relations are "sequential relations" and that they are signaled by "connective devices" (Winter 1994:46). An example of a clause is in (7) **By the time** *Ted got there with his boat, the moose was too weak to swim.* The timing of the clause is signaled with **By the time** and of course grammatically a comma is used to separate the main clause from the subordinate clause. The sequence of events is clear. The main clause shows the reader that Ted arrived at the location to solve the given problem and of course in the subordinate clause **the moose was too weak to swim,** the reader sees the problem that needs to be solved. With further analysis of point(14) there is an example of **ellipsis**. In point (14) , as opposed to a phrase the author simply has one word missing. *Ted shoots a moose every year, like many Alaskans**; it is a large part*

of the meat he eats every year. The comma is used grammatically to separate the clause when it reads *like many Alaskans* but instead of writing ***and** it is* , the author chose to use a semicolon to link the clauses together adding to the cohesion of the text. In the main clause , *Ted shoots a moose every year* is followed with the phrase *like many Alaskans*, the reader is informed that many Alaskans hunt for this animal. If the author had used **and** followed by the subordinate clause, the reader could have seen **and** as an **additive** signal to see that Ted not only shoots a moose but also uses it for meat. By omitting the additive signal, **and**, with a semicolon it is still understood that the author is giving additional information. The use of clauses and ellipsis allows the reader to see a well-written work organized in the problem-solution pattern.

3. **Challenges in teaching the text to a second language learner**

There are three main points that teachers who use this text in their classrooms may want to keep in mind. The first is vocabulary and grammatical cohesion discussed in point 3.1 and the second is the awareness of the problem-solution pattern in 3.2

3.1 **Vocabulary and grammatical cohesion challenges for the second language learner.**

For a teacher of English as a second language, vocabulary is always a challenge. In section 2.6, low frequency words in text such as the example of **hapax legomena** give students words that they would rarely see. Text can be a complicated structure for a second language learner.   Aitchison has mentioned that written text not only has a single writer but also has an "elaborate structure" (Aitchison1999:117). Students need to be aware of the meaning of all the words in the text and of course the syntax. As a teacher, the student needs to be aware of the significance of words such as **once**, **finally**,**by the time** or any sign of temporal sequence so that the student is aware of a particular order of events. In Table 2 of this assignment, specific vocabulary words are shown in relation to the problem-solution pattern and students would need this awareness in order to interpret the meaning of the chosen text.

In this particular text, there is a lot of reference along with the constant use of pronouns. Japanese students of English have a history of confusing the pronouns *he* and *she* (McCarthy:1991: 36). The English language is different in using such items in reference

in discourse such as "it, this and that" (ibid:36). When teaching English as a second language , students often confuse various points of reference. The examples in 2.7 of this assignment with the use of pronouns that are connected to the use of cataphoric and anaphoric references along with reflexive pronoun references such as **herself** are valuable aspects that the teacher should be aware of so that there is no confusion for the student.

3.2 **Problem-solution pattern awareness for the second language learner.**

The **problem-solution** pattern can be a guide for the teacher as to what predictions or even assumptions that the student might attempt to make. As I have mentioned earlier in this assignment, in section 2.1 there is an order of events in the pattern that the student needs to be aware of. In sectons 2.2 and 2.3 the chosen text is analyzed showing a pattern of responses to questions. With the information from sections 2.2 and 2.3 , the teacher can think of various questions to elicit responses. If a teacher were to give his/her students several texts of the same author and the text have same patterns, than the students might be able to identify the writer's style. As Coulthard writes in his essay, *Whose Text is it?*, "some authors, like painters, have distinctive styles and that those sufficiently sensitive can recognize the style"(Coulthard 2000: 281). On a more practical note, analysis of linguistic styles helped convince the infamous Unabomber, because of family members who realize his "stylistic idiosyncrasies in the 35,000 word Unabomber document" (ibid:281). From a complete investigation of the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski's style of writing it was concluded after a web search of 3 million documents that only 69 documents contained exactly 14 lexical items that Kaczynski used in another piece he wrote to a newspaper many years before(ibid:282).

3.3 **Conclusion**

In reality, I do not expect students to look at my chosen text to solve a murder mystery but with an awareness of lexical cohesion, temporal conjunction, vocabulary in text analysis and the basic concept of the problem-solution pattern, students will be able to recognize the specific styles of writing from a specific author. With the constant pattern of problems in the text that need to be solved, the teacher can test the students to see if they can find or understand the evaluations of the problems that are being solved in the pattern. From the chosen text in this assignment, single sentences have been blended together to create a cohesive text and section 2 of this assignment clarifies that.

Understanding of the words along with a knowledge of the problem-solution pattern adds meaning to how a student can comprehend and analyze a text for his/her own enrichment. More analysis of a given text can give more accomplishments to the students. I would like to conclude my assignment with a quote from Halliday (cited in Coulthard:2001:1) which mentions "The higher level of achievement is a contribution to the evaluation of the text."

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