

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

The current chapter presents a theoretical framework of the study. In particular, it provides a description of the study context relating to '*Discourse Analysis*' and states the problem. It points out some existing practices and it attempts to show how concentration on language system and its grammar may have adverse effects on teaching and learning English writing. The study stresses the need for a paradigm shift and argues for a new approach for developing the students' productive abilities that is based on interaction and meaning analysis moving beyond the grammatical structures of a language and relate it to context.

The chapter spells out the aims of the study as well. It also formulates the questions for investigation and proposes the hypotheses. Significance of the study is also shown. Lastly, it unfolds the research limits and methodology to be adopted for carrying out the analysis part of the study.

1.1 Context of the Study

In the study of discourse analysis, usually the focus is on aspects of what is unsaid or unwritten, yet communicated. In order to interpret the discourse, people have to go beyond the primary use of language, look behind the forms and structures present in the text and pay more attention to psychological concepts such as background knowledge, beliefs and expectations. In the study of discourse analysis, researchers inevitably explore what the speaker or writer has in mind (Yule, 2000).

Communication is not simply a matter of producing correct linguistic structures; it is a matter of learning to be able to interpret what others say or write and how it is interpreted by others. If learners of either a first or a second language are to acquire an ability to communicate in speaking or writing, they have to learn not only to speak or write correct sentences , but also to infer the speaker's or the writer's intention, get a meaning of the discourse and make a sense of it (Brown & Yule , 1983) .

Concentration on the description of a particular language with the accurate representation of the forms and structures is, in fact, helpless and it does not present what the language actually communicates. However, language-users are capable of more than simply recognizing correct versus incorrect form and structure. They can cope with language which even contains ungrammatical forms. Rather than simply rejecting the text as ungrammatical, they try to make sense of it (Yule, 1985). That is, they attempt to arrive at a reasonable interpretation/meaning of what the speaker or the writer intended to convey.

To arrive at an interpretation , and to make the message interpretable, people certainly rely on what they know about linguistic form and structure. However, as language–users, they have more knowledge than that (ibid). Different aspects of language are concerned not merely grammar; such as authorial intention, the interactive process, sentences connections and meaning development. This is, in fact, what is involved in the analysis of language as a discourse.

Coming to evaluate the actual practices in English writing classrooms (referring to Saudi context), it seems that much of the efforts are misdirected and are not promising. As a matter of fact, most of the Saudi teachers, if not all, ignore the interactional and functional nature of language teaching/learning. This is clearly reflected in the methodology that underlies their practices. Their teaching is rooted in the presentation of

language forms and structures rather than its functions. Their primary aim is to provide students with knowledge about the system of language, in the hope that this will enable them to use the language in real life. It has been proved that this methodology is insufficient for the development of language use.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that many English language learners in Saudi context know a lot of words, grammatical rules and structures, but they cannot use the language productively. They cannot express their ideas in the language they learn; nor are they able to write long coherent discourse. This seems to be due to that most Saudi language teachers spend much of the classroom hours in teaching forms and patterns of the language. They consider them so important in the sense that they encourage memorization of particular structures. They emphasize language structure rather than language as a resource for making meaning.

Knowing the system of language is not enough for the creative use of it. Not denying the importance and the usefulness of knowing the system, but one may point out that this by itself does not encourage students to construct their own sentences to express their personal meaning, and neither does it enable them to express their ideas in logical and coherent paragraphs within larger discourse. Teachers who focus on teaching forms and patterns, do not teach students to use the language.

Language should be set into motion, and students should be allowed to use the TL to execute some communicative functions. The most effective language teaching will mean that language is presented in context and students are set realistic tasks where they use language for purpose rather than manipulate it for its own sake (Brown, 2007). They should be given the chance to practice analyzing texts and make interpretations of the

meaning communicated realizing relation between meaning and the grammatical forms. Halliday (1985, xiv) claims: “a language is interpreted as a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realized and answer the question, “how are these meanings expressed?” This puts the forms of a language in a different perspective: as means to an end, rather than as an end in themselves.”

That the teachers do not extend their practices to larger units other than individual sentences, is also one of the inadequacies of writing classroom practices which results in the students inability to use the language productively. When writing practice is attempted all the activities generally center on producing isolated sentences and learners do not get the opportunity to practice constructing coherent, meaningful discourse realizing the relations between sentences and ideas. Discourse meaning is organized within units of language larger than single words or unrelated sentences. It is structured at paragraphs level and even longer units such as a whole chapter of a book; and concentration on one unit such as sentence is, indeed, not sufficient. The student who understands individual sentence will not necessarily be able to transfer that knowledge to the understanding of extended text. Extended text has certain features which do not occur in individual sentences, for example, there may be paragraphs beginning with 'topic sentences' which are then expanded in certain types of writing with relations between general statements and examples being signaled by certain words and phrases such as *on the other hand, however, on the contrary, in similar way, conversely*, etc (Halliday & Hassan 1976). Therefore, students need to practice language at discourse level; realize how sentences are connected and how ideas are developed to produce coherent meaningful text.

Writing in the TL cannot automatically happen. People derive the ability from the act of writing. Unless students practice writing; unless they

are set in real situations for interaction, they cannot acquire the skill. It is the context that regulates learning; the communicative demands and the difficulties experienced by the individual in the management of these demands. In every attempt for interaction, new understanding emerges when the individual discovers his or her communicative problem. To use the language productively, is thus, a matter of interaction and not of understanding (Brown & Yule, 1983).

This way, it appears that teaching writing in Saudi classroom is unnecessarily narrow, and is urgently in need of a paradigm shift. A shift from concentration on teaching the system of the language (forms & structures) to go behind the forms and structures of the text dealing with it as discourse, i.e., presenting language in contexts, getting texts meaning, arriving at the authorial intention, paying more attention to psychological concepts such as background knowledge, beliefs and expectation.

In the present study, analysis of discourse features of media-texts is going to be attempted to help the language teachers better understand the discourse process of written texts and realize the relation between grammar and meaning in language use. Accordingly, they are expected to modify their teaching practices in classrooms to help students develop their productive abilities and use the language creatively; expressing their ideas in logical and coherent paragraphs within larger discourse.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to :

1. Highlight and compare the discourse features of media-texts written by native and non- native writers of English.
2. Raise awareness into how writers construct discourse and make different language choices to transmit their ideas.

3. Investigate how the writers maintain interpersonal relationship with the readers.
4. Analyze how meaning is developed in written texts producing cohesive discourse.

1.4 Research Questions

The study raises the following questions:

1. To what extent would the discourse features vary in the media texts produced by native and non-native writers of English?
2. What are the factors that cause the differences?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. There are considerable variations in the discourse features between native and non-native writers of English.
2. Differences in the written texts by native and non-native writers of English are due to cultural aspects, social contexts, targeted audience and the authorial intentions in reporting an event.

1.6 Significance of the study

Analysis of the discourse features of written media texts can help guide teaching and learning the writing skill. It can show the link of language, thought and understanding. If it is granted that learning is dependent on discourse and that discourse is not simply a system of some structures and forms but also depending on context and meaning-making, language learning too must be based on context and meaning analysis.

Exploring the discourse features of written texts may also raise awareness on language teachers to develop the language use on the learners through a deliberate goal of a reflective practice.

1.7 Research Limits

'Media texts' will be the subject of analysis. The research will focus on the analysis and comparison of pairs of articles from two online newspapers dealing with similar topics; one written by native speakers of English and the other by non-native speakers of English. The newspapers concerned are the *Washington Post* and the *Arab News*. The former newspaper is published in the United State of America and the latter is published in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To ensure variety of data, the concerned online newspapers will be browsed to collect topics on some current issues relating to economy, business, education, sport, and the like. Four articles on similar topics will be collected from each newspaper. The number of the collected articles will be eight. Each pair of articles will be compared to identify the discourse features of the written texts.

1.8 Research Methodology and Materials

The method adopted in this study is an analytical, descriptive and comparative one. To verify the research hypotheses, the researcher will attempt comparing and analyzing pairs of articles from two online newspapers dealing with similar topics; one written by native speakers of English and the other by non-native speakers of English.

According to the aims of the study and the nature of data collected (media texts), Halliday's theory of Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) will be applied to carry out the analysis. SFL is a potent framework for describing and modeling language as a resource for making meaning and choices. This framework treats language beyond its formal structures and

takes the context of culture and the context of situation in language use (Halliday 1985, 1994; Matthiessen, 1995; Martin & Rose, 2003). In SFL, the immediate goal of text analysis is “to show why and how the text means what it does” (Halliday 1971; Halliday, 1983; Martin, 1992; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

As long as the aim of this analysis is to examine discourse features by comparing media texts written by native and non-native writers of English, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis will be useful. The former will be used for the detailed analysis of data and the latter for counting and comparing frequencies of features to be analyzed.

1.9 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has provided the theoretical framework of the study. It has mainly focused on the description of the study problem and the research methodology.

The overall goal of this study was to arrive at a better understanding of the discourse nature and features of written texts. Firstly, the study has argued that the current practices for the teaching of writing in Saudi classrooms are inadequate and in need of reassessment. This claim was underpinned by the tendency of the Saudi teachers to concentrate on the teaching of the language system; its rules and structures. In fact, the learning of a language and the ability to use it productively cannot be achieved with such narrow/loose practices. Learning a language should be introduced in wider contexts of language practices that allow interaction, meaning-making and communication. Secondly, drawing mainly on the view that learning a language is an interactional activity and exchanges of meaning, the study attempts to examine the discourse of media texts by native and non-native writers of English. This is mainly to understand the discourse features in different contexts, the disparity of interaction,

knowledge transmission, different vocabulary choice, diversity of clause structures, meaning development and how language actually works. Accordingly, this understanding is expected to raise awareness for the need of a similar analytical and interactional process in language classrooms.

The study aims at making the language teachers become aware of the methodology that underlies their 'textual' practices. It aims at helping them overcome their narrow practices on the language system that continue to dominate their teaching of writing and which impede development.

Finding out the differences between texts written by native and non-native writers of English, is one way of trying to examine the use of language in different contexts and the different language choices. Once the differences are known, the knowledge may supply the language teachers with insights into how different people tend to write and how they develop their ideas persuading the readers. This is expected to help them develop appropriate methodology to deal with the teaching of language more effectively enabling learners develop their productive abilities.