

Teaching the Use of Discourse Types in Academic Writings

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The discourse types the students use depend on the types of the writing tasks. In the creative type of writing tasks students used less academic type of writing styles which lack the supportive evidences for their author's points. On the contrary, in the library research type of the task they frequently quoted the papers of authorities, which contain structural organization of an academic discourse.

Introduction

Typical style of academic writings

Ota, 1965 explained the rationality in academe by presenting two sets of requirements. The first one is verification, which tests the way of dealing with the subject of study. The constituents are 1) Is the way the researcher understands the subject matter correct? 2) Is there over-interpretation of the subject matter, 3) Is the way the subject matter is examined appropriately, 4) Is the recognition of the fact authentic? , 5) Is there any misjudgment in the inference from available evidences? The second one concerns with the rationality of the author's logic. The constituents are 1) Is the use of concepts consistent? , 2) Is there irrationality in inferring the cause of the problem? , 3) Is there any trace that the author infers from the previous inference?, 4) Is there irrational construction of the idea?, 5) Is the conclusion compatible with the related matters already known?¹ Saito, 1977 insisted that a paper could be scientific with these criteria fulfilled. Some more concrete procedure in writing a paper is shown in Kono, 1997, he suggested that persuasive description is possible with rational inference and substantiation. He gave three examples for substantiation. 1) experiment, observation, questionnaire survey, interview, 2) testimony, quotation from an authority, 3) evidence already recognized, common sense. Even more clear ideas about making a paper rational are more easily found in American literatures and the basic idea about the rationality is the same². Maker, et al., 1997, is practical for the learners of academic writing in that they presented four kinds of supporting details for author's points, which were examples, reasons, quotations from authorities, and facts. Author's points are very frequently not supported by supporting details in students' papers. This paper tries to examine the features of discourse that appear in students' writings and discuss from a teaching perspective in relation to task types and discourse types.

Method

Papers written by two groups of subjects were examined in terms of the use of supportive

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details to support their author's point. All the subjects were majoring English language and culture at a women's college. Following are the details of the two groups:

Group 1 (EFL reading course)

The subjects were 20 third year students and 2 fourth year students who submitted a term paper for the course.

Course description

This EFL reading course was for advanced students. The topics for reading were related to linguistics and applied linguistics. In the semester that this research was made, *Second Language Acquisition*³ was used with some handouts picked up from *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*.⁴ The latter one with details such as statistical data etc. was a rewritten version of the prior one for the introductory readers of the field. In each class the teacher gave a contextual cue for their reading by explaining the concepts of important terms and the points of each section. The students were required to read after the class. There were 12 classes in a semester and there were two semesters in a year.

Task for Group 1

The students were required to choose one topic related to applied linguistics and write a paper. At least three references were required to be used. There was no restriction on the form or the size of the paper, or no limitation of the number of words. The basic style and organization of the academic writing⁵ was shown after the mid-term examination and the use of supporting details was emphasized.

Group 2 (EFL methodology for teaching grammar course)

The subjects were 29 first, 19 second, 45 third and 4 fourth year students who submitted a term paper for the course.

Course description

In the course, methods of teaching were presented. The textbook used was *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* by Richards et al. The ways grammatical items were dealt with were studied in each method.

Task for Group 2

The students were required to choose one or two grammatical items, write the teaching materials for the items and explain the rationale for the materials. The hidden expectation by the teacher was that the students used the theories of the approaches and the methods presented in the class. As was the case with the task for Group 1, there was no restriction on the form or the size of the paper, nor any limitation on the number of words. The basic style and organization of academic writings were shown after the mid-term examination and the use of supporting details were emphasized.

The students' papers were evaluated and categorized into AA, A, B and C. AA is given to the one in which supporting details were perfectly effective. A was given to the one in which most of supporting details functioned as the writers expected. B was given to those ones in which supporting details were used but not correctly. C was given to those ones in which no supporting details was used.

Results

Following are the numbers of the students who used supportive details appropriately, used ones but inappropriately, and did not use ones at all in each group.

Group 1 Total=22

Appropriate use	9 (3 rd year students 9, 4 th 0)	40.9%
Inappropriate use	10 (3 rd 9, 4 th 1)	45.5%
No use	3 (3 rd 2, 4 th 1)	13.6%

Ratio of users in each grade (number of user/total number of each grade)

Appropriate	1 st - %, 2 nd -%, 3 rd 45.0%, 4 th 0%
Inappropriate	1 st - %, 2 nd -%, 3 rd 45.0%, 4 th 50%
No use	1 st - %, 2 nd -%, 3 rd 10.0%, 4 th 50%

Group 2 Total=97

Appropriate use	32 (1 st 9, 2 nd 6, 3 rd 16, 4 th 1)	33.0%
Inappropriate use	26 (1 st 10, 2 nd 6, 3 rd 9, 4 th 1)	26.8%
No use	39 (1 st 10, 2 nd 7, 3 rd 20, 4 th 2)	40.2%

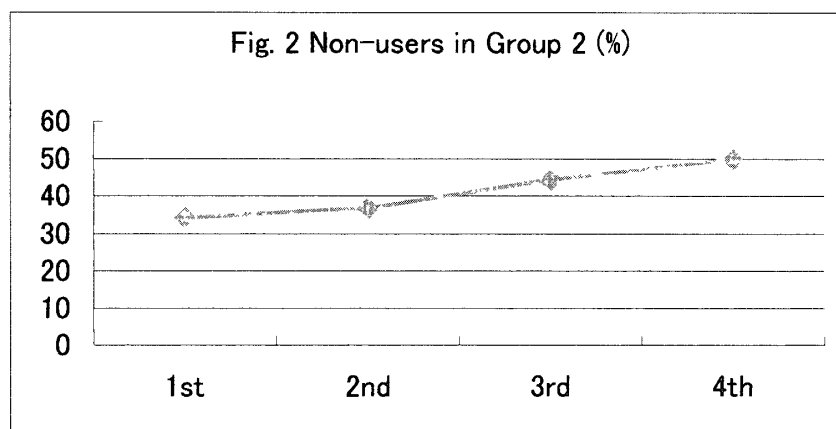
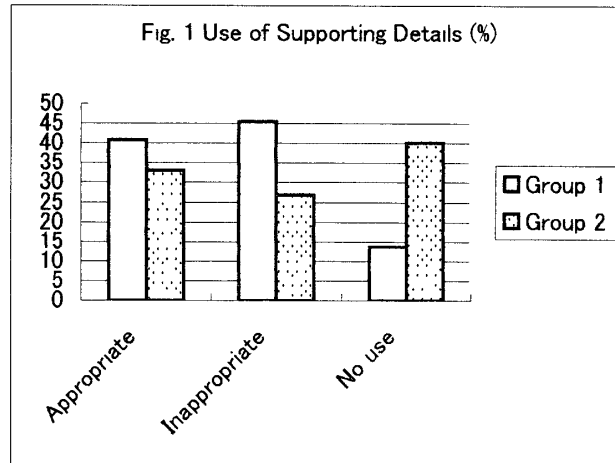
Ratio of users in each grade (number of user/total number of each grade)

Appropriate	1 st 31.0%, 2 nd 31.6%, 3 rd 36.0%, 4 th 25%
Inappropriate	1 st 34.4%, 2 nd 31.6%, 3 rd 20.0%, 4 th 25%
No use	1 st 34.4%, 2 nd 36.8%, 3 rd 44.4%, 4 th 50%

1) Smaller number of students used supportive details in Group 2. Forty point two percent did not use supporting details in Group 2 while in Group 1 only 13.6% of the students did not use ones. See Fig. 1.

2) The ratio of the non-users in each grade in Group 2 showed as the grade of the students proceeded, the less number of students used supporting details.

3) Patterns of inappropriate and non-use of supporting details (The examples below are the translations from the student sentences originally written in Japanese) Comments are in the parentheses.



a) Quotations made without a specific aim to support author's points in Group 1.

e.g.

(Author's point 1)

...Why Japanese people can not speak English though they emphasize the importance of English and have been made many learning programs? You can find the reason in the purpose and the motivation for L2 acquisition. There are many kinds of purposes...

(Quotation without a specific reference continues -Lists of books were added at the end of the paper)

The first one is regional, the second one is international, The third one is...

(The explanation of each category continues)

(Conclusion -author's point 2 might be expected but not here)

And Japan is more or less negative about accepting foreign cultures and English for an entrance examination is in the center of the education in Japan.

In the case above the author's point is not supported but additional knowledge is given. The

argument is divergent. Conclusion is not supported, either.

Quotations were made without a specific aim to support author's points. Some students cited authorities and used supportive details by copying or following the academic style of supporting their idea.

b) Quotations at second hand. Many of the quotations were not direct ones with the list of the references. This one was found in Group 1.

...Ellis presented six characteristics of interlanguage...(The six aspects of interlanguage are listed)...Selinker suggested that five principal processes operated in interlanguage. These were...(Ellis, 1985. pp.48. The student added a few pieces of explanation to the original one, but still had to mention that)... (There was not Selinker's literature in the list of references in the paper)

c) Non-users of supporting details

e.g.. (i)

...Firstly, as be-verb is very important in making progressive form in English (The explanation about why it is important might be expected here), I gave a review. As the learners are junior high school students, they will feel difficulty in understanding it without hints by the teacher. (The reason why they feel difficulty will be necessary to persuade readers) (In Group 2)



e.g..(ii)

Reading in L2 a lot and writing creatively after you learn about articles, will require a lot of efforts and patience (Wrongly concluded here?), but the shortest way to the mastering of articles is like this. (An answer to the question why you think so will be expected here) (In Group 2)

e.g..(iii)

I think the basic ability is important in learning English (Explain why), so you should take enough of your time for the explanation of the future tense. (In Group 2)

d) Wrongly attributed

Wrong uses of articles will confuse your readers, so for the Japanese who do not regularly speak English, learning articles is very difficult but very important. (The use of "so" is not cohesive here. A wrong reasoning is confusing)... (In Group 2)

Discussion

1) Recognition of discourse types by students

In Task 1, the students recognized the library research as the point of the requirement. The students used 3.3 books in average as references. In Group 2, only 0.52 book was used. This difference might be attributed firstly to the announcement provided to them. In the Task 1, the use of three books at least was required, but in Task 2, it was not specified. The writing of L2 grammar materials was creative in that they had to write materials for themselves, but the task requires some more in the latter half of it. They had to describe the rationale for their materials. In supporting what they have created, 42% of the students did not notice the importance of reasons, facts, examples, quotations from authorities, etc. From these facts, it can be concluded that for the students investigated in this paper, the meaning and the ways of expressing themselves in an academic discourse should be taught or trained.

2) The effect of the forced use of quotations from authorities

In Task 1 which the students recognized as a library research type of paper, they used references, but the problem was that they did not always use references as supporting details for their opinions. They tend to use references for the demonstration of their reading, but not for that purpose. In Task 1, though, they might have had that task as the learning opportunity of the styles of quotations in an academic writing. In the Task 2 type ones, the students will not frequently use references for any purpose. This tendency is more obvious as their grade proceeds (See Fig.2). The same tendency is observable in Task 1, too, even though the number of subjects was not enough to pose a variable data. The possible causes of this might be explained in terms of the gradual decrease of motivation, the transfer of writing habit, or lack of knowledge in academic writings. In another research the use of strategic knowledge depended largely on motivation, (Tanabe, 1994). Assuming this is the case, teachers should firstly examine students' knowledge about academic writings and then try to find the solution to the problems related to motivation. Identifying the causes is not possible in this paper, though.

3) Learning opportunities of supporting their opinions in writing tasks

Quotations at second hand will not be approved unless ones are clearly indicated in notes, but many quotations used in the tasks in this research were not direct ones with the list of the references. Even though the students in those cases were wrong, the students might have learned the style of quotation by copying authorities. This tendency in students could be applied to the teaching of the aspect of academic writings. For example, picking up samples of citations from authorities and analyzing them or copying them would be a good opportunity for them to be aware of the way a citation is made.

4) The importance of the teaching of research paper writing with the appropriate type of tasks for making the students become aware of the style of academic discourse

From the results, the creative type of task gives students the impression that creativity is freed

from the supports by theoretical background or supportive details. On the contrary, library research type of tasks will facilitate citations from special fields the students are in. In an educational sense, teachers who know what types of tasks induce a specific type of discourse in writing would be able to prescribe appropriate tasks for the immediate students.

Conclusion

From the results, some typical types of students' discourse in academic writings were identified.

The causes for the less number of the higher graders using supporting details in the academic writing tasks will be the theme of further study.

From the discussion above, the following issues should be considered in academic writing courses:

- 1) The examination of the students' knowledge about the discourse
- 2) The choice of appropriate types of tasks for the students' motivation and for the use of references.

In writing courses, the points above should be sequential.

Note

1. Ota Hidemichi, *Introduction to History*. Shigakugairon. Gakuseisha. 1965.
2. Babbie, E. *The Practices of Social Research*. Wadsworth Publishing Company. 1979. He presented seven types of misleading causation. Those are, over-generalization, selective observation, inaccurate observation, made-up information, ego involvement in understanding, the premature closure of inquiry and mystification.
3. Ellis. Rod. *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press 1997.
4. Ellis. Rod. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press. 1985.
5. What is the basic organization of a paper? In the wider sense the knowledge about rhetoric must be necessary, or the more philosophical discussion of the use or no use of rhetoric might be necessary (e.g. Vico, 1709). The genre in rhetoric (e.g. Swales, 1990), the formality (Maker, et al. ibid.) in the required paper might also concern. To the problem, "a taxonomy of academic writing skills, knowledge bases, and processes" will give a bird's-eye view. (Grabe, et al., 1996). The definition must be given with technical consideration in the limited class hours. The basic types of argument (e.g. Olsen, et al., 1991), an author's point supported by supporting details (e.g. Maker, et al., ibid.), and the typical organization (e.g. Jordan, 1997). Jordan presented introduction, methods (and materials), results and discussion as the constituents of "Overall shape of a research paper"

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