

The Effect of Picture Story in Creating Textual Coherence in Narrative Genre

Yadollah Alidoost

Department of English Language, Ministry of Education, Andimeshk, Iran

Soudabeh Tabatabaei

Linguistics Department, University of Mysore, India

Morteza Bakhtiarvand

Department of English Language, Ministry of Education, Andimeshk, Iran

Abstract—Writing skill develops slowly and lags some way behind other skills EFL learners of English have difficulty organizing their ideas at clause and text level to produce a coherent text. Given this, the study was an attempt to examine the effect of picture story on the organization of ideas in the narrative text. Participants (n= 60) were divided into two experimental and control groups. Then the Experimental and control groups were invited to produce a narrative text with and without pictures respectively. When the texts were analyzed, it was revealed that in the texts produced with pictures, the number of NPs to begin an episode outnumbered those produced without pictures. It is more common in English to begin a new episode with an NP and then in the next mentions use a pronoun to create a more smooth text to reduce the cognitive load on readers and/or listeners. Also a close examination of the data revealed that pictures contributed to focus the subjects' attention on the text organization of narrative genre in terms of relating events in the text by employing temporal/causal relations to create semantic relations in the text. The statistical analysis of a Matched t-test, by applying SPSS version 13, was performed and it was revealed that the mean differences between the performances in the two tasks were meaningful, rejecting the null hypothesis and confirming the hypothesis that picture story helps to create coherence in the narrative text in terms of organization.

Index Terms—picture story, narrative text, NP, cognitive load, coherence

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the teaching of writing was at the service of language practice; writing was viewed essentially as secondary and in some cases inferior to the spoken language. Then this model-based approach transformed to the more recent rhetorical movement with a focus on organization of rhetorical acts and manipulation of cohesive features. So following this tradition, this study intends to examine the effect of picture story on different discourse factors.

Nunan (2001) believes that in terms of skills, producing a coherent, fluent, and extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in language (p. 271). It is something most native speakers never master. For second language learners, the challenges are far more enormous. Although Iranian writers of EFL at the intermediate or even advanced levels are able to write with accuracy, they often fail to write with fluency. They are able to compose an error-free piece of writing but they often fail to organize ideas logically and often mention the topic late in the text so it causes confusion to readers. So L2 writers are often preoccupied with mechanics and neglect the organization. Thus this research attempts to examine the effect of picture story on improving coherence in narrative text because pictures, according to Kang (2003), are assumed to reduce the burden on the working memory and help writers organize complex ideas conceptually (p.60).

Givon (1984) proposed that text organization may vary from one genre to another and from one text to another (p. 8). Discourse organization of narrative has been investigated in the area of oral production and reading comprehension in native speakers by researchers such as Givon (1984). However, this study probes the ability of learners of English as a foreign language to produce a narrative genre. The choice of narrative as one of the methods of developing ideas is due to its wide usage in educational settings in which English is taught as a foreign language. Narrative is a good asset for learners to express, by practicing language, their personal feelings and build a world of imagination.

When we begin writing a paragraph we are thinking of the actual act of writing. However, in most Iranian classes, writing is at the service of language to teach or manipulate grammatical structure. We witness that Iranian language writers are often plunged into writing without preparing any drafts of their writings. So this study attempts to examine the way pictures can affect the writing behavior of Iranian learners of English as a foreign language in narrative genre.

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Does picture story affect the type of grammatical structures used to mark off the clause boundary?
2. Does picture story affect voice in narrative genre?

3. Does picture story help to produce greater transitions in narrative genre to make it more coherent?

The above research questions are stated in the form of the following null hypothesis:

Picture story does not affect the organization of narrative genre.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Writers do not simply encode ideational meaning; they also create textual meaning as well as interpersonal meaning (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Although the ability to write presupposes some level of morphological, lexical, and syntactic as well as idiomatic knowledge, such knowledge alone does not guarantee the ability to write well because writing involves much more than constructing grammatical sentences. Halliday and Hasan (1976) suggest that sentences need to be connected by cohesive ties in ways that can be followed by the reader (15). The whole text also needs to be coherent, that is, various parts of the text have to work together conceptually in a particular rhetorical context. Although cohesion and coherence are related concepts, cohesive text is not necessarily coherent (Witte & Faigley, 1981:189).

In text organization, schematic structure or discourse organization refers to the staged, goal-oriented organization of the genre or text. For example, when we hear, or see "once upon a time" we know that we are about to hear or read a narrative of mythical events; when we hear or see "can I help you?" We expect a transactional genre (e.g. buying and selling genre); "A funny thing happened to me on the way to home" has us expecting of a narrative of personal experience.

A genre is often made up of constituent stages. In most general terms, the constituent stages of a genre are a Beginning, a Middle, and an Ending. Van Dijk (1981) and Van Dijk and Kinstch (1983) articulate how utterances in discourse influence each other in systemic ways through the relations of discourse semantic coherence. Local coherence connotes linear relations between propositions at the semantic level. The propositions connected locally at the micro-structural level lead to higher level hierarchical relations and ultimately form larger macro-structures or global semantic structures that organize the local microstructures of discourse and are fundamental to complex information processing and discourse organization.

There are relations in discourse that are seemingly signaled by an explicit way. Relations can be signaled by cue phrases (discourse markers), mood, tense, and aspect or structural characteristics such as adjacency pairs in conversation. Rhetorical relations, however, can be signaled either through lexical/phrasal units or through syntactic relations (e.g. embedding). Cue phrases have been the main object of study in the area of discourse relations. They have received different names: coherence markers, cue phrases, discourse connectives or discourse markers.

Carrel (1987) argues that teaching ESL writers about the top level structure of texts and teaching them how to signal a text's organizational plan through linguistic devices would all serve to make their writing more effective (p.55). Rothery (1986) used functional grammar as well as discourse and register theory develop in the framework of systemic approach to identify qualities of children's writings. They claim that good student writing exhibits essential features of particular genres.

Coherence in written text is a complex process, involving a multitude of reader and text-based features. In text-based model, coherence is defined as a feature internal to the text. Hodges and Whitten (1972) divide coherence into two constructs: cohesion [i.e., the linking of sentences] and unity [i.e., sticking to the point] (p.150). Halliday and Hasan (1976) speak of a coherent text as having two features: cohesion (i.e., ties between sentences) and register (i.e., within text) (p.23). They focused almost exclusively on cohesion as a text feature that is achieved through reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions, etc. Halliday (1985) believed that in English, as in many other languages, clause is organized as a message by having a special status assigned to one part of it (p.38).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

Participants in the study were 60 female and male intermediate learners of EFL at Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, faculty of Letters and Humanities. For choosing the participants in the study, one hundred students who had received a score above 70% percent on their writing tasks both during academic year and final examinations at the Faculty of and Humanities of Ahvaz were randomly selected and then, through the Michigan test 60 students were chosen as the final population for the study. The test comprised 30 items on vocabulary, and 20 items on grammar.

B. Materials

In this study, the data were collected from participants through assigning a writing task to the participants. Participants were given a picture story (see Appendix) to perform the writing task. The pictures were linear in organization consisting of a sequence of events related together by causal and/or temporal connectors. The participants were required to produce texts of about 250 words of length because the length of the texts produced may affect the internal validity of the results.

C. Procedure

To perform the task, participants were divided into two control and experimental groups of thirty and then invited to perform the task. The experimental group performed the task with and the control group without pictures. The two tasks were carried out in similar physical settings to reduce the threats to the internal validity or reliability of the study. After collecting data, the texts produced were analyzed for the type of grammatical constructions such as active versus passive, the type and the number of logical connectors marking causal/temporal relations between propositions, phrases, or paragraphs in the texts created by the participants. During the tasks, participants were provided with any possible needed information because the emphasis was not on the micro-level of the text instead the focus is on the macro-structure or hierarchical organization of the text. Then the collected data were analyzed for their discourse relations in creating coherence in the texts.

D. Data Analysis

After writing the task, the data obtained from the participants were analyzed and compared by employing some quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The analysis began with counting the number of causal/temporal relations, passive/active constructions, and the number of full NPs at the episode boundary. In addition, through a qualitative analysis, the distribution of evaluative device in the texts was analyzed. The mean and standard deviation of all these categories were calculated. Then to examine the hypothesis that picture story improves coherence in the text, the statistical procedure of Matched t-test, by applying SPSS version 13, was applied to see whether the differences observed are meaningful or not. In the task with pictures, participants tended to generate greater number of temporal/causal relations (N=139). On the other hand, in the task without pictures subjects produced less number of causal and temporal relations (N= 82). This provides evidence for the rejection of the null hypothesis that picture story does not contribute to promote coherence in the text. The mean for both causal and temporal relations in the texts with pictures (M= 4.36) is higher than those produced without pictures (M= 2.73). The results indicate a main effect of picture on improving textual organization in text. It seems that, based on the results, picture story functions as road signs that tell writers what direction they are moving. It makes it possible for the writers to move smoothly from one piece of writing to the next and establish relationships between ideas in a paragraph to create a logical progression of ideas in a paragraph. Without transitions, your paragraph will not be coherent and well developed.

TABLE 1.
PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS

	Mean	N	St. Deviation	St. Error Mean
With Picture & Without Picture	4.6333	30	1.84733	0.33728
	2.7333	30	1.14269	0.20863

Sample text 1. produced with picture:

One day Bill was playing football in the street. He shooted the ball hard and broke the ball. So he went to a repairman and asked him to fix the window of their home. He accepted and repaired the broken window. After that, Bill returned his ball back and run away and left the owner of the home pay the charge...

Sample text 2. produced without picture:

Ali went out of the house and wanted to play football. A window was broken. Then the boy went to a repairman to get him to repair the broken window and he accepted and fixed it. The owner of the house thinks the repairman is the father of the son so she gave the boy his ball back. When the repairman asked for the price they realized that the boy had tricked both of them. I think the boy did a wrong thing ...

A close examination of the texts partially confirmed Tomlin's (1985) claim that writers usually use full NPs to designate clause boundaries. Findings from this study show that although participants often use NPs at the beginnings of episodes, in some other cases writers choose pronominals to show the clause boundaries. However, The number of noun phrases produced at the paragraph boundary in the task with picture (N=104) outnumbered those generated without picture (N= 63). This fact is indicated in Table 2. Below.

TABLE 2.
PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS

	Mean	N	St. Deviation	St. Error Mean
With Picture & Without Picture	3.4667	30	0.50742	0.9264
	2.10	30	0.60743	0.11090

The mean for texts produced with and without picture, as Table 2. Shows, was set at M =3.46 and M= 2.10 respectively. As the results indicate, the mean number of nominals at the paragraph boundary i.e. at the thematic position, in the texts produced with picture is higher compared with those produced without pictures. Some extracts from the texts in the two tasks are illustrated below to show the use of anaphora at the episode boundaries. Episode boundaries are shown by three dots.

Text 3. produced with picture:

One day under the sunshine a boy was playing football individually. At once he shot the ball powerfully... Then the boy who was playing in the street went and brings a repairman to repair the window...

Text 4. produced without picture:

Once upon a time there was a boy who was playing with a ball in the street. He threw the ball toward the window of a house and broke it ... He went to find a repairman for fixing it ...

It is common in English to use a noun phrase to start an episode and then use a pronoun in the next mentions in the internal structure of the text. The results from a matched t-test, by applying SPSS version 13, suggest that the difference in using a noun phrase at the thematic position in texts with and without picture is meaningful. This is illustrated in Tables 3. Below.

TABLE 3.
PAIRED SAMPLES TEST

PAIRED SAMPLES TEST							t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
With- Without Picture	Paired Differences								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the difference					
				Lower	Upper				
	1.36	0.71	0.131	1.09	1.63	10.420	29	0	

It seems that choosing the type of anaphoric relations may be related to the number of characters in narrative genre; using specific full NPs may contribute to the resolution of ambiguity in discourse. So one way of getting students to focus on the agent and use a noun phrase at the beginning of an episode can be picture story. So it is recommended that teachers of EFL choose the type of narratives for their students that have lesser number of characters because it seems that these types of texts may cause readers to lose track of events and focus more on the participants in the text than to trace events in the text.

To analyze story grammar categories, Mandler and Johnson's (1989) model of story grammar was adopted for the interpretation of the data. Of narrative stories some story constituents are recalled better than others, in particular, beginnings, attempts, and outcomes are recalled better. The number of story grammar categories in the task performed with the help of picture was slightly higher compared to those produced without pictures. In the task with pictures, participants tended to mark the beginning, ending, attempts, and outcomes more than in the task without pictures. This is in line with Mandler and Johnson's (1989) model of story grammar category. A significant finding, contrary to the above mentioned model, is that the proportion use of the constituent 'ending' is higher than outcomes and goals in both texts produced in the two tasks.

Also the number of passive verbs in the texts produced with pictures was less than those produced without pictures. The mean for the two tasks are illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4.
PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS

	Mean	N	St. Deviation	St. Error Mean
With Picture	0.46	30	0.57	0.10
Without Picture	1.63	30	1.2	0.22

To show that the difference in the production of passive and active structures in the task with and without pictures is meaningful, the statistical procedure of a Matched t-test was applied and the results indicate that the difference is meaningful ($t = -5$, $df = 29$ and $p < 0.005$). Table 5. Below, show the scores obtained from the Matched t-test by applying SPSS version 13.

TABLE 5.
PAIRED SAMPLES TEST

PAIRED SAMPLES TEST								
	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
WiWithout Pictures	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std.Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the difference				
				Lower	Upper			
		-1.1	1.26	0.23	-1.6	-0.69	5.06	29

The analysis revealed a main effect of pictures on the use of passive or active voice. The general assumption is that the difference between active and passive is largely a difference in theme or emphasis. The passive occurs when the patient is more important than agent. The use of passive voice relates to the impersonal character of science or technology. By using passive structures, writers deemphasize the actor and direct attention the act.

Research (Bates and Devescovi, (1989) affirms that perceptual and psychological discourse factors affect the production of active and passive clauses. If this claims that there is a rule which links voice and syntactic subject to thematic information then we can conclude that the competence underlying the child's knowledge of English is tied to cognitive processing of information management. The results from this study show that perceptual, and discourse factors conspire in the production and comprehension of active and passive clauses. Tomlin (1985) presented a cognitive model of sentence production in which subject assignment in English is tied directly to the location of one's focal attention at the moment an utterance is formulated. When showing, for example, subjects animation of one fish eating a second one, while directing the attention of the subjects to the agent fish results always in an active sentence, directing attention to the patient fish results always in passives in this model, the traditional notion of theme or topic is replaced by the cognitive notion of focal attention. The hypothesis is that the English active-passive

alternation that is tied to the assignment of a locally attended referent to syntactic subject might be explained as an English cognitive strategy that places important elements first in linear arrays.

The analysis so far has revealed structural differences between the texts produced during the two tasks. Another way to mark narrative genre differences is through the use of evaluative or highlighting markers. Labov & Waletzky (1967) revealed the literature on both children's and adolescents' narratives which indicated that speaker or writer may evaluate narrative events through the use of linguistic forms such as phonological stress, adverbial intensifiers, and inferential commentary on events (p.157). The narrative framework used to analyze the evaluating system is that developed by Mandler and Johnson's (1989). In this study, a substantial difference between the mean of evaluation devices in the texts produced with ($M=11.5$, $SD=24\%$) and without picture ($M=11$, $SD=23.5\%$) was not observed.

However, a close examination of the texts for the distribution of evaluation devices in the texts showed that the texts written with and without pictures do not follow the framework proposed by Mandler and Johnson's (1989) for different stages of narrative genre. Generally speaking, all the texts more or less contained a wealth of evaluation devices. The significant difference, contrary to the above mentioned model, was that the distribution of evaluation devices in texts is not ad hoc but rather appears in multiple clusters, as opposed to a clearly identifiable manner. It was observed that evaluations are distributed within the whole text and might be found near the outset, closure or any point between the two. It seems that Iranian writers of English as a foreign language break away from the Mandler and Johnson's (1989) framework for evaluation devices and put them at the beginning, middle and everywhere in the text. Here are some extracts from the study that shows this fact.

Text 5: Evaluation at the beginning of the text

Once upon a day there was a rascal and talented boy who was playing in the street. He hit the ball hard and broke a window of a house...

Text 6: Evaluation at the end of the text

One day a boy went out of house to play. When he was playing he broke the window of a lady. He went to a repairman to get him fix the window. The lady thought that the man was the boy's father so gave the boy back his ball and the boy escaped and the lady have to pay the charge. I think the boy did a wrong thing...

As you notice, evaluation clusters occur when a speaker or writer breaks away from narrating the main events in the story and provides some kind of commentary or opinion. It appears that in the texts produced with pictures, participants attempt to create more solidarity. This indicates the fact that producing any pieces of discourse is part of the social world where the relationships between people are of great importance. Writers use language for interpersonal purpose, particularly evaluative devices. So evaluation refers to a speaker or writer attitude or values or Martin's (2001) appraisal system. Evaluation serves as a system of organizing discourse and a means by which writers express their value systems typical of their discourse communities. So it seems that Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Mandler and Johnson's (1989) model have ignored the regional conventions which writers employ during the writing task.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to examine the effect of picture story on organizing ideas in the text both at clause and paragraph level. Close analysis of texts revealed the effect of pictures on structuring clauses within paragraphs. Also texts were analyzed to examine the effect of pictures on text organization such as such as causal/temporal relations, story grammar categories, passive/active constructions.

In the task with pictures, participants produced more transitions to relate ideas in a logical way. For story grammar categories, picture story helped participants to come up with a text that better conformed to Mandler and Johnson's (1989) model of story grammar. The texts produced accompanying pictures, the beginning, attempt, and ending were better marked off. In any pieces of writing, narrative is no exception, there is a Beginning, a Middle and an Ending. The story pictures contributed to creating a schematic structure that was smoother and coherent for the readers.

Another part of the study addressed the type of anaphora participants used to designate the beginning of an episode. The study confirmed Tomlin's (1985) model that writers usually use full noun phrases to begin a new episode. The number of noun phrases used to begin a paragraph was greater in the texts produced with pictures. This provides evidence for the fact that picture story contributes to produce a more coherent text because it is common in English to start a paragraph or episode with a noun phrase and then in the internal structure of a paragraph use a pronoun in the next mentions to create coherence in the text and reduce the cognitive load on the listeners or readers. This is especially critical in narrative genre because using a pronoun at the beginning of a paragraph that includes a great number of characters can confuse the readers in terms of who refers to whom in the text.

The last but not the least part of the study dealt with the number of passive structures produced in the texts. A close examination of the corpora revealed that in the task with pictures the number of active constructions was greatly higher than passive ones. Active structures are more vivid and clear so they give the text a more conversational tone. Since active voice is more direct, it is more effective than passive voice especially in settings where English language is used for everyday conversation.

The first implication of the study is the need to provide students with opportunities to engage in top-down analysis which complements bottom-up analysis. The potential of such an approach is exemplified in Swales (1990) analysis of the introduction of articles (1990). To produce a text with a logical organization and gain control over particular genres,

by definition, an awareness of the top down or macro-structure level and content schemata for structuring discourse is necessary. They provide an outline and section heading for a text. During performing the task, the author interviewed the participants to find out the degree of their familiarity with narrative genre and their papers were marked for the purpose of interpretation. During analyzing texts, it was recognized that those participants who claimed to be familiar with narrative through extensive reading generated texts which were more coherent in terms of organization.

It seems that the provision of rhetorical understanding of texts or different genres undermines the deficit view that misrepresent writing as a universal way of participating in communities. Thus, learning to write involves acquiring an ability to employ appropriate linguistic choices both within and beyond the sentence and teachers can assist this by providing students with an explicit functionally-oriented grammar and models of effective texts. Therefore, teachers are recommended not to rush students into the act of writing before gearing up the situation for the writing task. Pictures and other strategies such as brain storming, making an outline or branching can help writers come up with a text with better organization and overcome the writers' block in expressing their opinions. Sometimes writers feel blocked and are unable to begin writing task or assignment. To overcome this mental problem, we can use different techniques mentioned above. It was observed that pictures made a substantial contribution in resolving this problem because it took participants less time to perform the tasks.

In summary, visual aids are indispensable part of any language learning and teaching process. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words and this is particularly true for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Visual aids can be used to teach everything from vocabulary to propositions. In addition to instructional advantages, they keep lessons interesting for learner and reduce the load exerted on the working memory. Another potential area of research is to explore the impact of picture story on the organization of another genre (e.g. exposition or cause-effect, etc.) or explore the impact of picture story on the peaking ability of learners of EFL or ESL.

APPENDIX



Sample text produced by one of the participants:

Ali went out of the house and wanted to play football. A window was broken. Then the boy went to a repairman to get him to repair the broken window and he accepted and fixed it. The owner of the house thinks the repairman is the father of the son so she gave the boy his ball back. When the repairman asked for the price they realized that the boy had tricked both of them. I think the boy did a wrong thing...

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Yadollah Alidoost was born in 1969 in Iran. He completed his Bachelor Degree in ELT in Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran and further finished his Master Degree of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran. His main areas of interest include TESOL, TEFL, and Discourse Analysis. Now he is teaching e instructed numerous in-service training courses.

Soudabeh Tabatabaei was born in 1982 in Iran. She finished her MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, Iran in 2008. She is currently a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics in the University of Mysore, India. Her main areas of interest include language teaching and testing, dynamic assessment, sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

Morteza Bakhtiarvand was born on the 23th of December in 1981. He completed his Bachelor Degree in ELT in Islamic Azad University, Dezful Branch, Iran and further finished his Master Degree of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Islamic Azad University, Research and Sciences Branch, Ahvaz, Iran. He has published many papers in the field of ELT in different International Journals such as RELC Journal, Researcher, The International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World, World Journal of English Language His main areas of interest include TESOL, TEFL, and English Methodology.