# Analysis of Omani Students' Discourse Skills Using Hoey's Model

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*Abstract - This study attempted to assess the development of the discourse skills of students in the Faculty of Foundation Studies, Gulf College. Using Michael Hoey's model, this paper specifically tried to identify the discourse skills of the respondents, the level which these discourse skills become systematic and how these discourse skills develop. This research paper used the longitudinal descriptive method in identifying the acquisition of the various discourse skills which are reflected in the final examination of the respondents at three levels (PRE-IFP, Semester 1 and Semester 2. Hence, this study could provide feedback in sequencing the learning outcomes specifically topics on discourse skills in the Writing Module. The model proposed by Hoey (1983) follows the pattern: Situation- Problem-Response- Result-Evaluation. Based on the result of the study, there is invariant sequence of the discourse structures of the students. All the structures of the narrative discourse except evaluation become systematic (+) among the Semester 2 students. The other structures (response, result and evaluation) remained variable in the lower programs; however, situation and problem which are used systematically (+) as reflected in their narratives. Situation and problem are acquired immediately at PRE-IFP and continues until Semester 2. Response is only acquired at Semester 1 while result and evaluation indicates a move towards systematicity in Semester 1 and Semester 2 respectively. It can be said that the discourse functions follow the natural order of development as reflected in the three stages. Likewise the data display the systematicity behind the route of acquisition of functions. The findings and conclusions of this research propose some pedagogical directions and implications in order to improve the teaching of narrative essays in the FFS. It is concluded that the developmental stages in the language acquisition could be a great help in determining the learnability or teachability of the discourse functions. The learning objectives can be sequenced in terms of the functions that the learner is expected to use correctly. This research recommends that the discourse structures which appeared systematic and variable should serve as guide in sequencing the Writing Module Handbook. Likewise, the lecturers teaching the writing module should be aware of the results of this study in order to help the students speed up the process of acquisition of the discourse functions. The acquired discourse functions must be continuously taught while those that are variable should be taught intensively in all the programs.*

*Keywords - Hoey's model of narration , acquisition, discourse skills, function, narrative discourse pattern, systematic,, sequence, variable, program level.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of language and its integrated system involve three divergent viewpoints. The first viewpoint considers the learners and the progression they go through as they learn the language. The second viewpoint pivots on the code and the uses to which it might be put. The third viewpoint emphasizes the teaching of the language. This research addressed the first perspective which is the nature of language acquisition and language learning.

Winter (1994) underscored that to explain the progression of the writing skills of the learners, it is equally significant to look at the structure of the narrative in general and study discourse to identify the occurrence of forms and the language function involved. This research is part of a vital trend in the discipline that considers a discourse oriented look at writing development.

Johns (1994) concluded that little consideration has been given to the way discourses are narrated and that some discourse skills are not given attention by most language teachers. Most students have the ability to write narratives. However, they do not pay attention to the various discourse skills that writers should possess. This claim is confirmed by the Gulf College lecturers that the Omani students have significant difficulty in coping with language in its communicative use.

McCarthy (1991) conducted discourse analysis for language teachers and he found out that there is a great change of focus of the narratives of the respondents. He also reiterated that majority of the discourse functions revealed in their narratives are systematic. Evstigneeva, I. A. (2013) also concluded that there are discourse functions which are systematic and variable from different levels. As students are progressing, these functions are slowly acquired and therefore become systematic. It is also very essential that lecturers should provide more exercises in order to unlock these difficulties.

In this study, the acquisition of discourse skills by the students of Gulf College was analyzed using Hoey's model. Insights into the process of learning the discourse functions are gained through the analysis of systematicity and variability of the learners in realizing all the functions. Hence, this study could provide feedback in sequencing

the learning outcomes specifically topics on discourse skills in the Writing Module.

## II.     STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study looked into the development of the discourse skills in written narratives of students in the Faculty of Foundation Studies, Gulf College for the academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What discourse skills are revealed in the written narratives of FFS, Gulf College students?

2. Which program level do these discourse skills become systematic?

3. What discourse functions are acquired in each program level?

## III.     LITERATURE REVIEW

This part presents the literature review which served as a guide for the conceptualization of the study. The researcher utilised Hoey's model, which is one of the four models of narratives, to shed light on the analysis of narrative discourse.

Thorndyke (1972) proposed the first model of narrative writing which is the story grammar.  It consists of different rules to define various elements in a written narrative. The first rule is interpreted as a story consists of a *setting*, a *theme*, a *plot,* and a *solution*. The second rule defines setting as the introduction of the *characters*, the *location*, and when the story is anchored in time.  The third rule defines the *theme*, which is a sequence of events leading up to a goal.  The fourth rule defines the *plot* as a series of episodes.  The fifth rule defines the *episode which is* a cluster of actions representing a subgoal, a series of *attempts* and an *outcome.*  The sixth attempts to realize a subgoal or may involve other subgoals as indicated in the next rule. The seventh rule defines the *outcome* of any episode which is either a resulting state or another event. The eighth rule defines the *resolution* which is the final result of a story with respect to the theme.  The ninth rule shows different alternatives of a desired state while the rule defines *characters, location* and *time* which are realized as statives.

Labov (1972) offers the second model which focuses primarily on the clause as the smallest unit of linguistic expression to define the functions of semantic units in the narratives.  The narrative structure has six parts, namely: *abstract, complication, evaluation, orientation,, resolution,* and *coda*.  The obligatory structures are orientation, complication, evaluation and resolution while the peripheral structures are abstract and coda.

Crombie (1985) offers the third model wherein a narrative first presents a *situation* which gives rise to a *problem*. *Solutions* are then attempted leading to a *resolution* and *evaluation*. Semantic relations operate within the clause and between clauses and sentences. Therefore, in a problem-solving macro pattern, the various elements function in relation to one another to create a coherent discourse.

The fourth model proposed by Hoey (1983) follows the pattern:  Situation-Problem-Response-Result-Evaluation. Parts of the model are the assumptions underlying the second macro pattern. The first assumption considers discourses as organized in a hierarchical basis. The second assumption emphasizes that discourses are perceived by listeners or readers. The third assumption highlights that there is something inherent in the discourse that helps the listener or reader perceive the organization of the narratives. The last assumption considers that discourse patterns which are signaled by a finite number of clues.

Robert (2010) discovered the order of acquisition of certain discourse structures in the narratives of adults for both speaking and writing. The researcher reported the order of difficulty of students in incorporating all the discourse structures in their essays. Likewise, the researcher revealed that there is a natural order in which ESL students acquire certain discourse skills at a certain level.

Carter (1994) found out that the discourse structures can be acquired from different levels. Syntactic and semantic signals have various functions in organization of discourse. He also pointed out that students are struggling in using the syntactic signals than the semantic signals. From the findings of his study, he recommended that lecturers should be aware of the difficulties of the learners in organizing their narratives in order to give more emphasis on these discourse skills.

## IV.     SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This research analyzed the discourse skills in the written narratives of students at three program levels: PRE-IFP, Semester 1 and Semester 2. It is limited to the written discourse which is the final examination as material for analysis.

Since the developmental of discourse skills in the second language learning process is the emphasis of this research, it analysed the final exam paper of students which were collected during the final examination of the respondents from the academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

*Discourse Analysis and Scoring*

The following steps make up the analysis procedure used:

1. Determine the frequency of occurrence of discourse functions and signals.

2. Identify the pattern of variability and systematicity by functions by program level.

3. Utilize the scalogram technique to identify the developmental stages in the acquisition of functions and forms.

The analysis worksheet for the narration is used to determine the non-occurrence and occurrence of the narrative discourse structure and its systematicity and variability of the forms signaling the discourse function in order to describe the developmental stages. The analysis worksheet is illustrated in Table 1 which is used in signaling narrative discourse strategies.
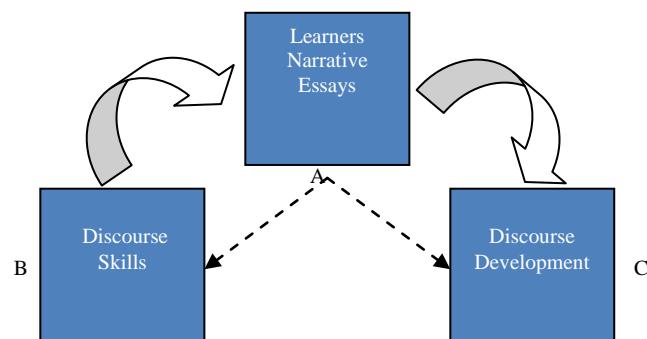
Table 1 .Analysis worksheet narrative discourse structures.

| Code | Discourse Structure | PRE-IFP | Semester 1 | Semester 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | Situation<br>- Non-occurrence<br>+ Occurrence | | | |
| P | Problem<br>- Non-occurrence<br>+ Occurrence | | | |
| Rp | Response<br>- Non-occurrence<br>+ Occurrence | | | |
| Rs | Result<br>- Non-occurrence<br>+ Occurrence | | | |
| E | Evaluation<br>- Non-occurrence<br>+ Occurrence | | | |

## V. RESEARCH PARADIGM

Utilising the written narrative essays of the respondents in the three program levels (Pre-IFP, Semester 1, Semester 2), the narrative discourse processes in the box are revealed. Also, the discourse development in Box C is described using the narratives of the respondents. The procedure of the present study is represented by the broken arrow in the diagram connecting the learner output in box three (Box A) to the cognitive and discourse operations in Box B. This explains the way learner construct rules for signaling discourse. Therefore, analyzing the output of the students in the three term-levels is possible to describe the

stages the learner goes through in his endeavor to arrive at form-function correspondence.



## VI. RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a descriptive study of English language acquisition (SLA) using the model of Hoey (1983). It is a longitudinal qualitative study of the discourse patterns and development of written discourse of students at three program levels.

*Research Locale and Population*

The Faculty of Foundation Studies has a total population of about 800. There were about 100 students in the Pre-IFP program when the study was conducted. Only 37 students who went through three consecutive semesters constituted the sample of this study. It included only one group of learners because it is designed to identify the development of the discourse skills reflected in their essays, namely; Pre-IFP, Semester 1 and Semester 2.

*Data Gathering Procedure*

The written narratives of the same group of respondents when they were in Pre-IFP, Semester 1 and Semester 2 provided the data for the study. Specifically, the data consisted of the compositions of students during the final exam in these three levels; AY 2014-2015, 1st and 2nd semesters and AY 2015-2016, 1st semester respectively. The analysis of data focused on two concerns, namely:

A. Discourse Analysis (Occurrence and non-occurrence of Discourse Structures)

B. Discourse Pattern of Development

The present study included same group of students whose written narratives from the final exam were collected from their English lecturers to represent the three semester programs which would reflect the language development over time.

*Coding and Scoring Procedure*

The coding system proposed by Scott (2011) was utilized to record the discourse functions that are present in the narratives of the respondents. The researcher used the concept of Boyle (1996) wherein every narrative or discourse structure is considered as *test entry* and each function was recorded as follows: discourse structure,

*occurrence* means one (1) point, *non-occurrence* means zero (0) point. To identify the sequence of acquisition, the group score method, devised by (Burt 1982) was utilised. The group score was computed as follows: first, add the expected marks or scores across all students in the program

level; second, divide the total actual mark or score by the expected score; and finally, multiply the result by 100. This forms the group's percentage of accuracy in generating the structure.

For evaluation, the percentage of occurrence for the three program levels was computed as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-occurrence (-) | 5 |
| Occurrence (+) | 32 |
| Total | 37 |

$$\text{Percentage of occurrence} = \frac{\text{Actual score}}{\text{Expected score}} \times 100$$

$$= \frac{32}{37} \times 100 = 86\%$$

The structures, using the group score method, were ranked according to decreasing group score so that the acquisition sequence may be inferred using Pavesi's (1987) scale.

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 – 19 % | Variable (-) |
| 20 – 49 % | More variable than systematic($\mp$) |
| 50 – 79 % | More systematic than variable ($\pm$) |
| 80 – 100 % | Systematic(+) |

The pattern of development as sequence of acquisition of the discourse skills among FFS students was described using the scalogram or implicational scaling. The plus sign (+) means that the function was signaled properly or correctly (80%-100%). Thus the function is acquired systematically at that program level. The minus sign (-) indicates that signaling the function was below 80%. The minus–plus ($\mp$) indicates a move away from randomness towards systematicity. The plus-minus ($\pm$) sign means that the discourse function becomes more regular indicating a move closer to systematicity.

## VII.  PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND NTERPRETATION OF DATA

This part analyzes the data on how the FFS learners at the three program levels realize the discourse structures in the written narrative discourse. It identifies the types discourse skills in the narrations which are acquired by the students at each program level (Pre-IFP, Semester 1and Semester 2).

The respondents in this study used discourse structures in a certain order. This supports the natural order theory. Using the group score method of Halliday (1988), the acquisition order is obtained by ranking the macro discourse structures according to decreasing group scores. The order of acquisition of the macro discourse structures is shown in Table 2. The order of development is as follows: *situation*

(100%), *problem* (84%), *response* (83%), *result* (59%) and *evaluation* (50%).

Table 2. Mean percentage of occurrence of discourse skills.

| Discourse Structure | Mean | Rank | Pattern |
|---|---|---|---|
| Situation | 100% | 1 | Systematic |
| Problem | 84% | 2 | Systematic |
| Response | 83% | 3 | Systematic |
| Result | 59% | 4 | Variable |
| Evaluation | 50% | 5 | Variable |

Table 3. Discourse development pattern across program levels

| Discourse Structures | PRE-IFP | Semester 1 | Semester 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Situation | + | + | + |
| Problem | + | + | + |
| Response | ± | + | + |
| Result | $\mp$ | ± | ± |
| Evaluation | $\mp$ | $\mp$ | ± |

*Legend: -  Variable*
*$\mp$ More Variable than Systematic*
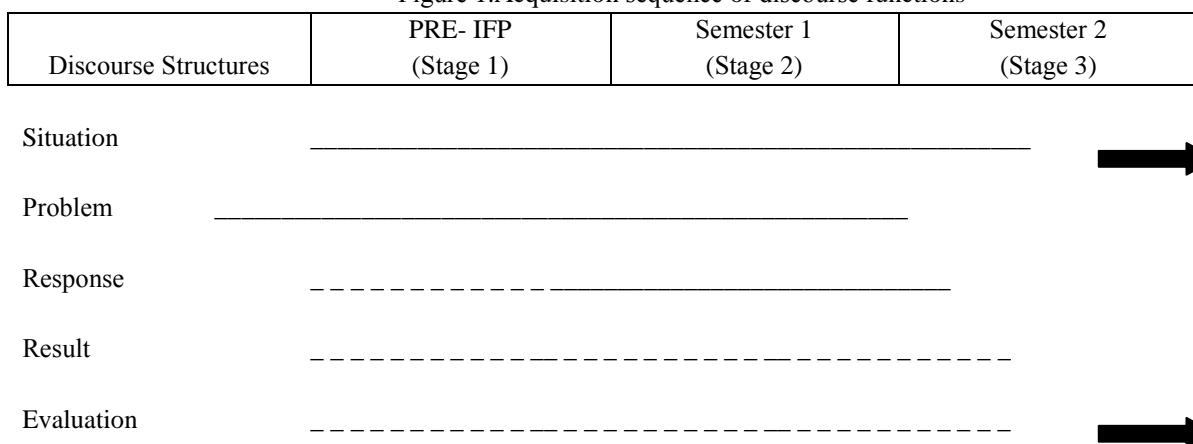*+  Systematic*
*± More Systematic than Variable*

To show the pattern of discourse development over time, the implicational scaling is used. Table 3 shows the emerging discourse development pattern of the narratives of the respondents.

All the structures of the narrative discourse except *evaluation* become systematic (+) among the Semester 2 students. The other structures *(response, result and evaluation)* remained variable in the lower programs; however, situation and *problem* are used systematically (+) as reflected in their narratives. Situation and problem are acquired immediately at PRE-IFP and continues until Semester 2. Response is only acquired at Semester 1 while result and evaluation indicates a move towards systematicity in Semester 1 and Semester 2 respectively.

It can be said that the discourse functions follow the natural order of development as reflected in the three stages. Likewise the data display the systematicity behind the route of acquisition of functions. The development progression in three stages is presented in Figure 1. Stage 1 includes those functions present in the learners' interlanguage at PRE-IFP, stage 2 at Semester 1 and stage 3 at Semester 2. The broken line in the arrow shows that the function is present in the stage however they are not yet systematic. Whereas the straight line in the arrow shows the stage where such a function is systematic and is maintained up to a certain point in the acquisition process.

Figure 1.Acquisition sequence of discourse functions



| Discourse Structures | PRE- IFP (Stage 1) | Semester 1 (Stage 2) | Semester 2 (Stage 3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Situation | | | |
| Problem | | | |
| Response | | | |
| Result | | | |
| Evaluation | | | |

## VIII.      SUMMARY

This study attempted to look into the development and acquisition of discourse skills in the written narratives of FFS- Gulf College students. More specifically, this study tried to answer the following questions: First, what discourse skills are reflected in the English written narratives of the students? Second, at which program level do these macro discourse skills become systematic? Third, what discourse functions are acquired in each program level?

Furthermore, it is a longitudinal descriptive study on the acquisition of discourse skills in English narratives at three program levels. It focused on the analysis and description of discourse structures using Hoey's five-point narrative structure.

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Foundation Studies, Gulf College. All the written narratives from the Final Examination of the 37 students who went through the three program levels, were collected to elicit discourse functions. Specifically, the data comprised the compositions of 37 students in the final examination when they were in PRE-IFP, Semester 1 and Semester 2, for the AY 20014-2015, AY 2015-2016, respectively.

The analysis of data commenced on the narrative discourse levels to identify the non-occurrence and occurrence of the five narrative structures. The systematicity of linguistic signals was determined adopting the 80% level of acquisition (Pavesi 1987). Using the scalogram technique, the developmental stages in terms of the acquisition of discourse skills were identified and the route of development was predicted.

The scalogram technique was used to describe the group performance and the developmental processes in the acquisition of the discourse skills of the respondents.

## IX.      FINDINGS

The analysis of the narratives of the respondents revealed that there is an invariant sequence of the discourse structures of the respondents. The acquisition of the discourse functions increases with program level as reflected in the discourse structures such as *response, result and evaluation*. *Situation and problem* structures become systematic as early as Pre-IFP while *response* and result become systematic at Semester 1 and Semester 2 respectively. Moreover, the signals for *evaluation* remain variable across program levels.

*Evaluation* remained variable and cannot be said to have been acquired as far as the discourse pattern is concerned. Although there are differences, the sequences obtained from the respondents reveal a developmental pattern. The

trend suggests natural order in the acquisition of the five discourse skills.

## X.    CONCLUSION

The discourse skills acquired systematically as early as PRE-IFP were *situation and problem.* On the other hand, response and result are acquired at Semester 1 and Semester 2 respectively while evaluation was never acquired systematically in the three levels. The acquisition of discourse skills follows the natural order of development. The result of the study reveals that the students in the Faculty of Foundation Studies encounter more difficulty in narrating the result and evaluation since these functions are not acquired at the lower programs.

It is therefore imperative that the discourse structures that appeared systematic and variable should serve as a guide in sequencing the topics in the writing module handbook in the Faculty of Foundation Studies.

## XI.    PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings and conclusions of this research propose some pedagogical directions and implications in order to improve the teaching of narrative essays in the FFS. It is concluded that the developmental stages in the language acquisition could be a great help in determining the *learnability* or *teachability* of the discourse functions. The learning objectives can be sequenced in terms of the functions that the learner is expected to use correctly. This research recommends that the discourse structures which appeared systematic and variable should serve as guide in sequencing the Writing Module Handbook.

Likewise, the lecturers teaching the writing module should be aware of the results of this study in order to help the students speed up the process of acquisition of the discourse functions. The acquired discourse functions must be continuously taught while those that are variable should be taught intensively in all the programs.

Language lecturers should give proper intervention and they should be aware and sensitive to the stages (e.g. the three stages in this study) the learners are in during the acquisition process. Acquired discourse structures must be sustained while those which are variable must be intensively taught across program levels.

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