Vol.27 No.1 January - March 2021 ISSN 2408-0845 (Print) ISSN 2651-1487 (Online)

การวิเคราะห์โครงสร้างการเขียนเรียงความของนิสิตระดับปริญญาตรีเอกภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 4 มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร

An Analysis of the Topical Structure of Essays Written by Fourth-Year English Majors at Naresuan University

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Received : July 4, 2019

Revised : September 25, 2019

Accepted : October 11, 2019

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ มีจุดประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษารูปแบบการเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษของนิสิตระดับปริญญาตรี ชั้นปีที่ 4 เอกภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร โดยมีคำถามวิจัยคือ 1) ลักษณะองค์ประกอบของย่อหน้าในเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนิสิตเป็นอย่างไร และ 2) ลักษณะการพัฒนาหัวข้อในเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษที่เขียนโดยนิสิตเป็นอย่างไร รูปแบบการวิจัยเป็นการวิจัยแบบกรณีศึกษา กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาวิเคราะห์ คือ นิสิตจำนวน 68 คนซึ่งเป็นนิสิตในระดับปริญญาตรี ชั้นปีที่ 4 เอกภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือ แบบฝึกหัดการเขียนเรียงความภาษาอังกฤษ 1 หัวข้อ โดยมีระยะเวลาในการเขียน 1 ชั่วโมง ในการวิเคราะห์ ดำเนินการภายใต้กรอบทฤษฎีการวิเคราะห์โครงสร้างแก่นประโยค หรือ Topical Structure Analysis ของ Lautamatti. (1987) ผลการวิจัยสรุปได้ดังนี้ คือ 1) ผลการวิเคราะห์องค์ประกอบของย่อหน้าในเรียงความ พบว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างทั้ง 68 คน มีความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับโครงสร้างของการเขียนเรียงความ นิสิตส่วนใหญ่สามารถสร้างย่อหน้าที่มีองค์ประกอบของส่วนนำ ส่วนเนื้อหา และส่วนสรุป 2) ผลการวิเคราะห์ลักษณะการพัฒนาหัวข้อ พบว่านิสิตส่วนใหญ่มีการสร้างความเชื่อมโยงภายในย่อหน้าด้วยการกล่าวถึงหัวข้อเดิมซ้ำๆ การพัฒนาไปยังหัวข้อใหม่ที่มีความต่อเนื่องกันค่อนข้างพบได้น้อย นอกจากนั้น มีนิสิตจำนวนเพียง 6 คนที่สามารถเรียบเรียงความตามโครงสร้างย่อยและนำเสนอเนื้อหาที่ประกอบไปด้วยข้อมูลเฉพาะได้อย่างพอเพียง นิสิตส่วนใหญ่ในกลุ่มตัวอย่างมีการเขียนเรียงความที่ประกอบไปด้วยเนื้อหาที่กว้าง ทำให้เรียงความไม่มีการพัฒนาหัวข้ออย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำสำคัญ : เรียงความภาษาอังกฤษ / โครงสร้างการเขียนเรียงความ / การวิเคราะห์โครงสร้างแก่นประโยค / การพัฒนาหัวข้อ

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ปีที่ 27 ฉบับที่ 1 มกราคม - มีนาคม 2564 ISSN 2408-0845 (Print) ISSN 2651-1487 (Online)

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to study patterns of English writing structures produced by fourth-year undergraduate students in an English major at Naresuan University. The two research questions were 1) what organizational patterns of English writing appeared in the essays produced by the informants? and 2) what patterns of the topical structure based on the Topical Structure Analysis framework (Lautamatti, 1987) were found in the essays produced by the informants? The research design was a case study under the descriptive-qualitative design. The samples of the study were 68 informants who were the fourth-year undergraduate students in an English major at Naresuan University. The instrument of the research was the English essay writing exercise. The duration for the essay writing was 1 hour. In the data analysis, the overall organizational pattern and the topic development were analyzed based on the framework of the Topical Structure Analysis proposed by Lautamatti (1987). The research findings were as followed. 1) Most of the informants organized their essays with the 3-paragraph pattern. It was found that most of them were able to produce their writings following the English conventional rhetorical pattern having introductory, body and concluding paragraphs. 2) Regarding the topic development, the findings showed that 6 from the 68 informants were able to address and fully develop the topic within a paragraph. Most of the informants produced their essay with supporting details that were too general and did not consistently support the topic sentences. Hence, their essays were not effectively developed.

Keywords : English Essay / Essay Organizational Pattern / Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) / Topic Development

Introduction

In writing an English essay, many ESL and EFL learners tend to experience problems regarding coherence. These kinds of problems are very common among Thai learners who have a lot of ideas, but do not enough experience to express what they would like to say in a comprehensive way (Hinds, 1990; Hyland, 2003). One of the frameworks that helps learners understand coherence in their writing is the Topical Structure Analysis (henceforth TSA), an analysis of coherence proposed by Lautamatti (1987). By examining the internal topical structure of each paragraph, it helps a writer check their writing coherence and the repetition of key words and phrases they produce.

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Studying English as their major, students are clearly expected to be able to develop comprehensive and productive skills in English writing and have knowledge in organizing their written work for the purpose of presenting a clear thesis and logical text structure (Langan, 2011; Oshima & Hogue, 2006). Accordingly, the researchers are interested in conducting a research study on paragraph development in writing among Thai students based on the framework of the Topical Structure Analysis proposed by Lautamatti (1987) in order to examine organizational characteristics and rhetorical patterns in essay writings produced by fourth-year English majors at Naresuan University.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate rhetorical patterns reflected in English essay writings produced by fourth-year undergraduate students in an English major at Naresuan University.

Research Questions

1. What organizational patterns of English writing appear in the essay writings produced by the informants?

2. What patterns of the topic development are found in the essay writings produced by the informants?

Significance of the Study

It is expected that the findings from the study would benefit learners who have problems with rhetorical and coherence problems and help them find strategies to produce a piece of English writing in a more effective way.

Scope of the Study

1. The data of the analysis covered 68 sample essays written by 68 fourth-year English majors at Naresuan University.

2. The sample essays were collected during the first semester of the Academic Year 2018.

3. Any errors in grammatical structures, spelling, and punctuations were ignored.

4. The collected data were analyzed based on the framework of the topic development by Oshima and Hogue (2006) and the framework of the Topical Structure Analysis by Lautamatti (1987).

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Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

The analysis of students' written essays were based on the theoretical framework of thematic progression called the Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) with an additional guideline of topic development according to Oshima and Hogue (2006). The TSA was developed under the concept of analyzing discourse coherence in writing by Lautamatti (1987). The TSA is considered a method for analyzing discourse coherence. It has been widely employed as a device to examine coherence in writing by a number of researchers including Almaden (2006), Barabas and Jumao-a (2009), Carreon (2006), Dita (2009), Hinkle (2004), Hoenisch (2009), Regala-Flores (2015), and Simpson (2000).

1. The Topical Structure Analysis

Based on the TSA framework (Lautamatti, 1987; Simpson, 2000), a paragraph is examined under the theme of the topic-comment analysis. A topic is the main idea presented in the sentence while a comment is what is being said about the topic. To see how a writing topic is developed, three progressions of the discourse topics will be identified. The three progressions include parallel progression or the repetition of the sentence topic, sequential progression or a topic containing a comment of the previous sentence and extended progression or a topic with a parallel progression interrupted by sequential progression.

2. The Writing Organization

Based on Oshima and Hogue (2006), an essay is a piece of writing that usually contains at least three paragraphs. It should be written about one single topic that contains several main points. In a writing, there should be three sections including an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs and a concluding paragraph. Regarding the topic development within a paragraph, an outline of an essay can be summed up as follows.

I. Introduction

- general statements
- thesis statement

II. Body 1

- topic sentence
- supporting idea 1 (with examples & specific points)
- concluding point

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III. Body 2

- topic sentence
- supporting idea 1 (with examples & specific points)
- concluding point

IV. Body 3

- topic sentence
- supporting idea 1 (with examples & specific points)
- concluding point

V. Conclusion

- summary / opinion / suggestions

Methodology

1. Subjects

In this research, there was one group of subjects, namely, the fourth-year undergraduate students in an English major enrolling in the 1st semester of the 2018 Academic Year at Naresuan University. They were the English majors who had already taken the four major required courses related to English writing skills (Basic Writing, Paragraph Writing, Essay Writing, and Research Report Writing Courses).

2. Informants

Sixty-eight fourth-year undergraduate English majors enrolling in semester 1 of the 2018 Academic Year at Naresuan University volunteered to participate in this research study. They were chosen as the writers whose work to be analyzed in this study. All the informants had already taken the four major required courses as previously discussed in 7.1.

3. Instrument

In this research, the instrument used in examining writing coherence was the informants' finished writing assignments. 68 argumentative essays with the minimum of 300 words, one from each informant, were of the same topic – "While recruiting a new employee, the employer should pay more attention to their personal qualities, rather than qualifications and experience. To what extent do you agree or disagree? Give your opinion and include relevant examples."

4. Data Collection

The data were collected during the first semester of the 2018 Academic Year. The informants were assigned to write an essay in the room at the Faculty of Humanities at

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Naresuan University. The topic is “While recruiting a new employee, the employer should pay more attention to their personal qualities, rather than qualifications and experience. To what extent do you agree or disagree? Give your opinion and include relevant examples.”

5. Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the following procedures were taken.

1. Writing organizational patterns based on Oshima and Hogue (2006) were applied to examine an overall organization pattern of the essays. In this analysis, numbers of paragraphs were counted, and each paragraph was identified its part.

2. To investigate the topic development, the patterns of a topical structure based on the TSA developed by Lautamatti (1978) were applied to examine characteristics of topic development in each essay. Firstly, a Thesis and topics in each paragraph were identified. Secondly, each topic was examined. Then, supporting details were divided and checked. After that, a concluding point in each paragraph was highlighted. Finally, characteristics of the topic development and the types of the sentence progression were described.

3. For reliability and validity, a native English-speaking instructor in the Department of English Language in the Faculty of Humanities at Naresuan University was invited as an inter-rater to review the essay samples and to check whether the writing analyses were described correctly.

4. The findings were tabulated and calculated into percentage and frequency of the patterns of the topical structure.

The Research Findings

1. Occurrences of the organizational patterns in the Essays Produced by the Informants

Table 1 Numbers of the Paragraphs in the Essays Produced by the Informants

Numbers of the Paragraphs	Frequency	Percentage
1	2	2.94 %
2	4	5.88 %
3	46	67.65 %
4	5	7.35 %
5	11	16.18 %

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Table 1 indicates that most of the essays contained at least three paragraphs (91.18 %). The pattern of the overall organization that was the most frequently produced among the participants was a three-paragraph essay (67.65%). It was found that 8.82 % of the essays contained only at one or two paragraphs, which did not follow the suggestions recommended by Oshima and Hogue (2006). A small number of the essays contained two paragraphs (5.88%) and one paragraph (2.94 %).

Table 2 Summary of the Organizational Patterns in the Essays Produced by the Informants

Organizational Patterns	Frequency	Percentage
Conventional Organizational Pattern (Introduction-Bodies-Conclusion)	48	70.59
Introduction-Body	13	19.12
Body-Conclusion	4	5.88
Only Body Paragraph	3	4.41

From Table 2, most of the essays (70.59%) followed the English conventional rhetorical pattern. Some of the essays (19.12%) presented introduction and body parts while no conclusion paragraph was built. A small number of the essays (5.88%) contained body and conclusion parts; no introduction paragraph was presented. Three of the essays (4.41%) contained only a body part; neither introduction nor conclusion was established.

2. Patterns of the topic development of the essays produced by the informants

2.1 Patterns of the Topical Structure of the essays produced by the informants

Table 3 Summary of Types of the Topical Structure in the Essays Produced by the Informants

Number of Essays	Number of T-Units	Types of the Topical Structure					
		PP		EPP		SP	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
68	1,767	743	42.04	562	31.81	462	26.15

Note. PP = parallel progression, SP = sequential progression and EPP = extended parallel progression

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Table 3 presented the frequencies of the topical structures. The findings indicated that the parallel progression was found to be most frequently employed while the frequencies of the use of the extended parallel progression and the sequential progression were quite close (31.81 % and 26.15% respectively).

Example 1:

(a) First, personal qualities are important because it is a reflection of how we develop our work discipline.

(b) Our habits can contribute to a success of our work habits and our responsibilities.

(c) Personal habits are very connected to everything in life, especially in work.

(d) It influenced our work attitude and work skills.

(e) If your personality is that you are very talkative, it means you may talk a lot during work or in a good way you may be good at a job as a PR officer.

(An excerpt from the data from Student 18)

Figure 1 Plot of Topic Structure Progression of Example 1

Clause	Topical Depth
1	personal qualities
	⇕
2	our habits
	⇕
3	Personal habits
	⇕
4	It
	⇕
5	your personality

As can be seen, a total of 5 topics are the same topic. All topics were instances of the parallel progression whose subjects refer to the same thing.

2.2 Characteristics of the topic development

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Table 5 Patterns of the Topic Development within a Paragraph in the Essays produced by the Informants

Patterns of Topic Development	Frequency	Percentage
Group 1 1. A thesis statement with controlling ideas 2. Topic sentences corresponding to the thesis statement 3. Specific supporting detail 4. Concluding points in body paragraph	6	8.82
Group 2 1. A thesis statement with controlling ideas 2. Topic sentences corresponding to the thesis statement 3. specific supporting detail 4. No concluding points in body paragraphs	5	7.35
Group 3 1. A thesis statement with controlling ideas 2. Topic sentences corresponding to the thesis statement 3. A few specific supporting detail 4. concluding point in body paragraphs	12	17.65
Group 4 1. A thesis statement with controlling ideas 2. Topic sentences corresponding to the thesis statement 3. No specific supporting detail 4. No concluding point in body paragraphs	21	30.88
Group 5 1. A thesis statement with controlling ideas 2. topic sentences not corresponding to the thesis 3. specific supporting detail 4. concluding point in body paragraphs	2	2.94

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Table 5 (continued)

Patterns of Topic Development	Frequency	Percentage
Group 6 1. A thesis statement without controlling idea 2. topic sentences not corresponding to the thesis 3. no specific supporting detail 4. concluding point in body paragraphs	1	1.47
Group 7 1. A thesis statement without controlling idea 2. topic sentences not corresponding to the thesis 3. specific supporting detail 4. no concluding point in body paragraphs	2	2.94
Group 8 1. A thesis statement without controlling idea 2. topic sentences not corresponding to the thesis 3. No specific supporting detail 4. No concluding point in body paragraphs	3	4.42
Group 9 1. No thesis statement (No controlling idea) 2. topic sentences 3. specific supporting detail 4. No concluding point in body paragraphs	6	8.82
Group 10 1. No thesis statement (No controlling idea) 2. topic sentences 3. No specific supporting detail 4. No concluding point in body paragraphs	8	11.77

Based on Table 5, the most frequently used pattern of the topic development was the writing pattern with no specific detail nor concluding point in a body paragraph. Twenty-one of the informants (30.88%) produced their essays with a thesis statement containing controlling ideas. The topic sentences were related to the thesis statement. However, in the

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supporting detail, there was no specific supporting detail included. In a body paragraph, a concluding point was not built.

Table 6 Summary of an Analysis of the Topic Development within a Paragraph in the essays produced by the informants

	Introduction		Body paragraph				Conclusion paragraph	
	Thesis	Controlling idea	Topic sentence	Topic sentence responding to thesis	Specific details	Concluding	Summary	opinion
Essays	52	46	66	44	33	21	16	36
%	76.47	67.65	97.10	64.71	48.53	30.88	23.53	52.94

Table 6 presents an overall summary of the topic development in each part of the essays produced by the informants. In an introductory part, it was clear that most students (76.47%) presented a thesis statement in their essays. However, some of the essays (67.65%) that contained a thesis statement did not have a controlling idea. Regarding a body paragraph, 97.10 % of the data presented a topic sentence. Forty-four out of these essays (64.71%) built a topic sentence that corresponded to the thesis statement. In supporting details, 48.53 % of the overall data had supporting details with specific information or examples. Meanwhile, only 30.88 % of the essays presented a concluding point in a body paragraph. In a conclusion paragraph, 36 (52.94%) out of 56 essays that contained a conclusion paragraph gave a short opinion on the topic of the essay while 23.53 % made a summary in this part.

Conclusion

1. What organizational patterns of English writing appear in the essay writings produced by the informants?

In response to the first research question, the overall organizational patterns of 68 informant's English essays were examined. Most of the essays (67.65%) had a three-paragraph format. Overall, 70.59 % of the essays contained a convention of the three-part format: introduction, body and conclusion. Hereby, the findings suggest that they generally

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understood the organizational pattern of an essay and were able to follow a traditional writing pattern of English academic structure.

2. What patterns of the topic development are found in the essay writings produced by the informants?

Regarding the topical structure analyzed based on the framework of the Topical Structure Analysis based on Lautamatti (1987), the findings indicate that the most frequently used type of the topical structure was the parallel progression followed by the extended parallel and the sequential progression. The findings reflect that the informants tend to repeat a sentence topic and not many new topics were developed. To return to the topics mentioned earlier, the extended parallel progression was employed to pull back their content to the discourse topic. The frequency of the use of the sequential progression was the lowest. This confirmed that the informants did not usually build new topics. It also suggest that the informants tended to establish connections by repeating the topics. They did not make a comment of a prior sentence to be a new topic. They tried to strict to the main topic that was firstly introduced in order to control their idea.

Regarding the topic development within a paragraph based on the framework proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2006), it was found that a low number of the informants (8.82 %) produced an essay with an essay format within a paragraph. The informants presented different styles of topic development. It was found that 30.88 % of the overall data contained a thesis statement with controlling ideas. The informants (64.71 %) were able to construct topic sentences that corresponded to the thesis in the introduction. However, there were no specific supporting detail nor concluding point in a body paragraph. It is interesting to find out that while the informants tended to understand a significance of a thesis statement and a topic sentence, they experienced a problem in generating supporting detail with specific details or examples. The details presented in the data were quite general. Moreover, the frequencies of a concluding point in a body paragraph was low (30.88 %). Regarding a conclusion paragraph, most of the informants (52.94 %) made an opinion instead of a summary (23.53 %) in this paragraph.

Overall, the research findings suggest that the informants seemed to be aware of the topic development in essay writing expected by native English speaking audience. However, they could not completely follow a format. Based on the findings, the informants could

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organize an essay into an introduction-body-conclusion format. However, they did not establish details concerning general and specific supporting information.

Discussion

It could be interpreted that most of the informants understood and were able to follow the conventional overall organization of an essay. One significant characteristic of the topical structure was that most of them tended to make coherence within a paragraph by repeating a topic using the parallel progression. In developing a topic within a paragraph, one significant characteristic emerged was that the informants were unable to provide specific details or examples to support the topic mentioned earlier. Hereby, the findings suggest that the informants should increase their awareness of the difference between general and specific information due to the fact that if they are able to raise specific details or clear examples, their essay would be more precise and adequate.

Implication

1. It is expected that the findings from this research can be applied in the teaching of English writing to Thai students as it is useful in raising an awareness of the mastery of writing skills.

2. The findings from this research can be used as a guideline for teachers in creating their teaching materials in the future.

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