A Comparison of English and Urdu Thought Patterns in Expository Writing of Pakistani EFL Students

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Abstract: *Researchers have conducted a variety of studies that have explored either differences or similarities in L1 and L2 Writing. The present study aims at comparing the thought patterns of Pakistani EFL student-writers in Urdu and English expository writings. For this study the selective paragraphs were analyzed to compare Urdu and English thought patterns. The study used a five paragraph structure to analyze the written paragraphs. For the purpose analysis of data an interpretive approach was used.*

Key words: *thought pattern, expository writing, development of paragraph, writing instruction*

Introduction:

Kaplan (1966) claimed, "rhetoric is a mode of thinking or a mode of "finding all available means" for the achievement of a designated end. Accordingly , rhetoric concerns itself basically with what goes on in the mind rather than with what comes out of the mouth…Rhetoric is concerned with factors of analysis, data gathering, interpretation, and synthesis…. What we notice in the environment and how we notice it are both predetermined to a significant degree by how we notice it or both predetermined to a significant degree by how we are prepared to notice this particular type of object…..Cultural anthropologists point out that given acts and objects appear vastly different in different cultures, depending on the values attached to them. Psychologists investigating perception are increasingly insistent that what is perceived depends upon the observer's perceptual frame of reference." Kaplan in these lines proposes that languages differ in their thought cultural patterns that consequently lead to differences in discourse structures. Kaplan laid the foundation of contrastive rhetoric. Till date a lot of researchers have studied differences in discourse structures.

Kaplan (1966) claimed that owing to a greater influence of Greek and Roman philosophers, Medieval European s and West Europeans intellectuals, the thought pattern of English speakers is dominantly linear while writing expository writing. An English writer begins with a topic statement in an expository writing. This topic statement is followed by sub divisionary statements. These subdivisions are supported by examples, illustrations. In English expository writing central idea is developed to support or negate the topic. The central idea creates a web that relates all subdivisions with the main position. This procedure is called the reverse

procedure (Kaplan, 1980). Although the writers use digression in English expository paragraph, all of the subdivisions contribute to support the central idea.

Discourse structures of different languages vary from each other. Kaplan(1966) examined inter-cultural thought patterns and found that while paragraph development in Arabic was based on a series of parallel constructions, Chinese writing was marked by indirection what he called "turning and turning in a widening gyre". French and Spanish writers use much more digression than English writers do. Thus he concludes that each language and culture has its own thought patterns that reflect its pattern of paragraph development.

Hssari(2000) keeping in view Kaplan Analysis of differences between Urdu and English writing claims that (a) the Urdu paragraph is not structured in the same way as the English Paragraph(b) capitalization is alien to Urdu, and punctuation is virtually nonexistent beyond the little it has acquired from European languages, mostly English(c) progressions do not operate in the same in the two languages. Urdu is free-wheeling and oblique in comparison. Urdu tends towards long preambles in beginning a discussion about something (d) English thinking tends to be liner and non directional. Urdu thinking suggests parallel structures, idea stacking and bi-directionality (e) Urdu tends towards ornamentation and a high selection of language. English stresses functionality (f) Urdu operates in a society with low literacy numbers. English operates in widely literate societies. The expectations are different.

Up to now, no study has been conducted to investigate the relationship between L1 and L2 thought patterns in Pakistan. The present study intends to fill this gap and to reveal whether there is a relationship between L1 (Urdu) and L2 (English) thought patterns in expository writing if Pakistani EFL student writers. The aforesaid categories by Hassan(2000) are merely a glimpse into the whole issue, the researcher has not solely discussed the differences of thought pattern in view of investigation of thought patterns. The present study has made within subject comparisons of L1 and L2 expository writing in terms of thought patterns.

Literature Review

Research Questions

The present study addressed the following research question:

Whether the English and Urdu Thought Patterns in Expository Writing of Pakistani EFL Students differ or not?

Method

Participants

A convenient sample of 29 students was chosen for this study. The participants were intermediate students who were studying English as a compulsory subject at a HSS in Lahore City. All of them were Urdu and Punjabi native speakers. These students were selected for their ability to write more sophisticated essays. They had greater stability in their writing style. They had participated in Chief Minister Youth Festivals Essay writing competition held in Punjab. They were considered to be good writers on the basis of their positions in essay writing competition.

Instruments

The participants wrote expository essays. The students were given the following topic for writing: "My Aim in Life". For this task students were not informed beforehand that they would be writing in class, nor about the topic. They were asked to write for 40 minutes, but they were allowed to stop when, or continue until, they felt they had finished. The time they spent ranged from approximately 15 to 35 minutes. They were not allowed to consult dictionary or any other such source.

Data Analysis Procedures

For the purpose of data analysis present study applied the data analysis approach used by Tzung-Yu and Cheng(1993).The researchers explored the Chinese thought pattern and applied Singer and Donlan(1989) 's four basic paragraph structures:1)the deductive organization i.e., the writer presents the main idea at the beginning of the paragraph. All supporting details, divisions and sub-divisions follow the main idea and support it till the end. 2) The inductive organization i.e., the writer supports the main idea follows the supporting details. 3) Topic sentence, the writer introduces the topic sentence at the mid of the paragraph.4) inferential paragraph in which the writer infers the supporting details while advancing. For the present study the researcher followed the lines of Cheng et.al., (1993) and adopted the five paragraph structure to analyze the writing samples of the students. The researcher divided the paragraph into three main divisions:1) the introduction paragraph;2)the body paragraph and 3)concluding paragraph. To find out the percentage of the occurrence based on the five paragraph structures the researcher analyzed each writing sample individually. Most representative sample paragraphs were translated into English from Urdu to present illustrations in the findings. To keep the originality of the place of topic sentence in original Urdu paragraph the location of the topic sentence was not changed during the process of translation from Urdu to English(See Appendix).

Results

Introduction Paragraph:

The written samples consisted of 19 introduction paragraphs. These introduction paragraphs were right at introduction position. The position of topic sentence in introduction has been categorized as: clearly mentioned topic sentence and unstated topic sentence.

- a. Clearly mentioned topic sentence
- b. Unstated topic sentence.

The written samples showed that at the introductory positions of the essays, the students used topic sentence at three different positions or in four different ways. This finding supports the findings of Cheng et.al.,(1993) who found that Chinese middle school writers wrote topic sentence in introductory paragraphs.

A-Clearly mentioned topic sentence

1-Findings show that 5.26 percent students wrote the topic sentence in the introductory paragraphs. They began their topic in this way:

- a. *My aim in life is to become an engineer.*
- b. *I have dream to become a Doctor.*
- c. *My aim in life is to do something for my country.*

2- The initial position of the paragraph was also used to introduce the topic sentence. The findings reveal that 21.05 percent of the students wrote the topic sentence at the initial position of the introductory paragraphs. For example;

- a. *Since childhood I have been thinking to be a cricketer. Cricket is my favourite game. My father also helps me in this area. Currently I am studying in Inter class but I love cricket.*
- b. *I have decided to choose IT as my career. I think now a days Pakistan needs those persons who can help her going ahead.*
- c. *Man cannot decide but pray, so I pray to be a Doctor.*

3- Use of the topic sentence in the middle of the paragraph. 10.53 percent of the students wrote the topic sentence in the middle position of the paragraph. For example;

- a. During my childhood, we lived in a joint family system. My grandfather brought a lot of books for us. I used to study story books that had famous characters, such as Tipu Sultan,Muhammad Bin Qasim so I made my mind to be a soldier. I loved army and this love helped me a lot. My class teacher also used to teach us about heroes.
- b. A student should be hardworking, honest and active. My father is a doctor and my elder brother is also a doctor but my mother is a housewife. My younger sister is in 10th class.

<u>Like my father I want to be a Doctor</u>. A doctor serves the nation and gives life to patients. My mother asks me to work hard.

4- The topic sentence is used in the end of the paragraph. 21.05 percent of the students introduced the topic sentence in the end of the paragraph. For example;

a. Education gives us spirit and awareness. Knowledge makes us different from animals and other creatures. A man is respected if he gets education, without education there is no life. Pakistan is a developing country which demands her people to get education and male her stronger. I am an F.Sc student. <mark>My aim in life is to be a doctor so that I may serve my countery.</mark>

B-Unstated topic sentence or Digression:

Findings show that 42.11 percent of the students used unclear statements of the topic sentence in the introductory paragraphs. For the purpose of illustration the following three examples have been presented:

a. *Life is a combination of different and difficult items such as grief and happiness, difficulties and easiness and tension and tension free life* [**The Topic is: My Aim in Life**].

The student has written this long sentence an introductory paragraph. The student could not clearly state the intention of his writing thus failed to write what he wanted to state in regard of life and its complexities. He could not associate his introductory sentence with his topic.

b. In *my school all of my class fellows talked about the difficulty of subjects. I used to say hard work is key to success. Now when I am doing F.Sc I think about my childhood. We all family members went to Muree in summer holidays to enjoy. This looked like a dream but now I am able to go alone* [**The Topic is: My Aim in Life**].

This student seems to be a bit confused, he has not stated about his aim in future life. He reflects on his past days and begins his paragraph with unclear and digressed statement. This indicates that the student could not clearly state the topic.

c. *My English teacher usually refers to the story of a young seagull. The young seagull was afraid of flying alone. His mother tried her best to teach him the importance of not being afraid* [**The Topic is: My Aim in Life**].

The above mentioned beginning of a paragraph is totally digressive beginning. The student does not clearly mention his aim in life. He mentions only the story of a young seagull's first flight

told by his teacher that leads nowhere till the end. This allusion stated by the writer does not match with his topic sentence.

Body Paragraphs:

The paragraphs included in body paragraphs had been selected from different writers 'sample written work, thus they varied from writer to writer. 28 paragraphs were selected for analysis. They all were present in the body of the paragraphs. Two of the paragraphs consist of most common length. The student writers placed the topic sentence at four common places.

1- Opening Position

Opening position of the paragraph is the initial place for topic sentence; data show that 53.57 percent of the students wrote topic sentence at this position. For example;

> *My father realized me the importance of having an aim in life. The feeling to contest and deciding an aim was a wonderful sensation. I love my father so I decided to do something for my parents, my family and my country.*

2- Mid-Level Position

Almost 10.71 percent students he chose this mid-level position to introduce their topic sentence in the body paragraph. For example;

> *I am a Pakistani student who believes in Allah. I daily recite the Holy Quran. The holy Quran describes the lives of Prophets of Almighty Allah. I realized that all prophets had an aim so I think having an in life is very important. From this inspiration I have an aim in my life. I can also become a good and right man if I work and decide to do so.*

3-Concluding Position

Some writers introduced their topic sentence at the final position of the body paragraph. 25 percent of the writers selected the ending position. For example;

> *My college is a very big college of the city where most of the teachers are prominent teachers. They teach students about future planning and time management. We all class fellows pay full attention to their lectures. One of the teachers is my favorite teacher, he stresses upon the importance of aim in life. He says all sensible human beings have their aim of life so I have also chosen my aim in life that is to become a doctor.*

4-Repetitive Position

Writers repeated the position of the appearance of topic sentence. They placed the topic sentence at three positions in the same paragraph: at the initial position, at the mid level position and at the

final position in a body paragraph. Only 3.57 percent student writers placed topic sentence at the aforesaid positions. For example;

My aim in life is to become an IT engineer. I want to become so because with the help of my qualifications I shall help my people. My country needs IT engineers so this is my aim in life to do so. My father is a business man he is also serving the country but his profession is not such a systemized profession because it lacks proper IT application. This is my aim to redesign the business of my father with the help of It.

7.14 percent of the student writers did not use topic sentence. Topic sentence was absent from the paragraph but it had obvious understanding for the reader.

Concluding Paragraph

The analysis has shown that the writers applied two types of strategies to conclude their essays.

a. Digressive or Strayed from the topic

The student writers ended their essays without remaining tied up with the topic, 73.68 percent of the writers had gone digressed from the topic. For example:

Who is so lucky to get his desires, I feel that students should work hard. They should go to the field and enjoy. The Quran says, observe the world. We have no time to enjoy so there is need to busy ourselves. In the end I shall say students are wasting their much of time on useless things that have no concern with our life [The Topic is: My Aim in Life].

2-Life is not a bed of rose, this is the universal truth. Aim provides happiness in life. Student who are successful are the followers of their aims. I can suggest hard work that is key to success [**The Topic is: My Aim in Life**].

b. Tied up with topic

Student writers applied this strategy of remaining tied up with their topic. This strategy is used by 26.32 percent of the students. For example;

1-A man is not always right and on right path. There are many chances to adopt wrong way. Aim in life keeps us associated with our roots. My aim will consequently lead to success and prosperity. I have a very clear and ideal aim of being a Journalist in future after completing my degree [**The Topic is: My Aim in Life**].

2-All is well that ends well--- my aim is to become a doctor [**The Topic is: My Aim in Life**].

Discussions

The results show that the student writers wrote fairly in the same way as it is often seen in English texts. They did not strictly follow   pure circular pattern or a pure parallel pattern, rather

the organizational pattern, they used was a pure Pakistani thought pattern. The results have revealed that some of the writers were digressive or had strayed from the topic while developing paragraph; however this digression does not occur frequently. Students developed their paragraphs in a slanting style no doubt but it was also not frequent. Students used digression and slanting patterns mostly in introductory and concluding paragraphs. The findings reveal that student writers were inclined to free-wheeling and slanting patterns of thoughts this finding is consistent with Hssari(2000) who claims …………(c) progressions do not operate in the same in the two languages. Urdu is free-wheeling and oblique in comparison. Urdu tends towards long preambles in beginning a discussion about something.

The findings also reveal that in introductory and concluding paragraphs the student writers showed tendency towards long opening sentences that suggests that Pakistani thought pattern stresses upon parallel structures, idea stacking and bi-directionality. The students used digressive pattern t for the sake of ornamentation and a high selection of language for their paragraphs.

The results indicate that a large number of student writers 42.11, percent, used digression as a pattern in their introductory paragraphs, might be the result of a continuous teaching of this particular style of introducing a topic. Teachers might be imparting this particular style. So far as the researcher knows in our conventional classes teachers particularly stress upon a pompous type of introduction while writing an essay. There is possibility that the teachers in Pakistan focus attention on the teaching of the use of ornamental, literal wording and verbose type of sentence structure. There is also a possibility that in Pakistani culture view of dealing with people directly is ethically and morally undesired. A formal type of dealing that is too much direct is considered mechanical and business like activity that has never been socially and culturally supported.

The sense of reader and audience is a very vital factor in the digressive pattern of the students. Might be students were writing such an ornamental beginnings because of their sense of impressing their teacher who is the sole audience. Possibility of lack of intimacy with the teacher and the rater cannot be ignored in the analysis of students being digressed while writing introductory paragraphs.

Most of language teachers in Pakistan have a background of literature. They normally, possess degrees of MA literature in Urdu or English. In Pakistan most of them become language teachers. During their master studies they are required to read and refer classical and modern literature. The study of literature in itself is very ornate and pompous in nature. The more one uses literary references, the abler one is considered. They might influence their students in classroom. The use of too much digressive style indicates that Pakistani writers also believe on oral traditions that are open and digressive in nature.

A majority of student writers followed a very direct pattern during the development of paragraphs, indicates that the student are generally aware of the importance of being direct while communicating any sort of message. This finding also indicates the reader awareness among the student writers that they are aware of the importance of how to attract the reader or audience. They seem aware of the strategy of using topic sentence at a prominent position would attract the reader. This finding also indicates that the organizational pattern of Pakistani student writers is not always digressive, free-wheel, slanting and too much parallel.

All is well that ends well, seems the driving force behind a digressive end of the essays by student. The possibility of consciously taken measure to end the essay cannot be ignored. In Pakistani culture the effectiveness of the task is measured by its proper and good ending, might be this ideology or political propaganda of evaluation of the task at the end influence the student writers to finish their task with strong, verbose and pompous phrases, words and sentences. The possibility of teachers' views about the ending of an essay also seems imperative.

Limitations and Further studies

This study was conducted with a small and selective sample that may limit its generalizability. The researcher suggests that the findings of this study should be confirmed with a larger sample. It is also suggested that to confirm the results with different topics or types of assignments other than expository essay writing in a short period of time. Different groups of participants such as those with lower results and higher results. This study presents the findings of only intermediate level students 'descriptive essays. The most of the essays for this were selected from those Intermediate level students who had participated in Punjab Youth Festival, Chief Minister Essay Writing Competition.

The present study suggests some directions for future research also. There is dire need to investigate the organizational patterns of different groups of students as well as the teachers who may influence the thought patterns of these student writers. This study involves some multi-faceted factors such as; instructional background and perception of students about a well organized expository descriptive essay, genre of the task and time factors.

Implications

The following implications for teaching of writing are suggested:

a. Student writers can be taught that how to weight the reader, they should learn some consistent principles of writing that are common between the reader and the writer.
b. Writing instructors can develop a corpus of thought patterns of L1 and L2 while teaching a language that is not known to the learners.
c. Writing instructor should be aware of the thought patterns of Urdu writers and English writers and also where and how they differ from Urdu thought pattern.

d. Teacher can facilitate student writers in the area of organization of an essay.

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