

## THE PARAMETERS OF DISCOURSE AND RESEARCH IN FILIPINO

EDWINA S. CARREON  
De La Salle University

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of language beyond the sentence has opened exciting new doors in the field of linguistics and language teaching. It has made possible, among other things, the exploration of meaning in social and cultural contexts; the analysis of phenomena such as coherence, organization, and style; and the study of language production processes. In this conference, we will explore the potentials of discourse and discourse analysis in the intellectualization of language, particularly the Filipino language.

The following questions will be the focus of our discussion: (1) How is discourse related to the intellectualization of a language? (2) What aspects of discourse are necessary considerations in the process of intellectualization?

### 2. DEFINITIONS OF DISCOURSE

To define discourse as a linguistic form beyond the sentence, composed merely of a string of sentences, will be to limit the potentials of discourse study. It will be well, therefore, to combine this concept (usually called 'text' by linguists) with the concept of discourse as text, spoken or written, 'used as a message with a communicative function' (Enkvist 1978:2). Thus, in our study of intellectualization, both surface structure and deep structure phenomena will be considered.

### 3. DISCOURSE AND INTELLECTUALIZATION

Intellectualization as a mental process involves the acquisition of the ability to learn and reason, to think abstractly and profoundly. The role of language in this process is obvious, whether seen as the shaper of thought or the one shaped by thought; it is a car-

rier of information, a medium of communication, a source of knowledge. The enormous bulk of texts produced in various languages, from epics, speeches, and poetry to technical manuals, news reports, and scientific treatises is evidence enough of the place of discourse in intellectual activity. We may even further conclude that the amount and type of discourse produced in a particular language can reveal the degree of sophistication and intellectualization that language has reached.

Reasoning and learning in the field of science, technology, the humanities, and the social sciences involve complex thinking processes which can be expressed and captured on the discourse level, not the sentence level. In discourse the development and organization of topic and information are based on an underlying logic, which, in turn is based on conceptual structures in mind. It is no wonder that many people measure a good mind by the quality of a person's discourse.

To intellectualize a language, therefore, will mean expanding its capacity to handle various ways of reasoning and abstracting. It will mean extending and redefining the present range of functions and notions, as well as the structures it is capable of expressing. These areas of inquiry are the domains of discourse analysis.

#### 4. ASPECTS OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE

What aspects of discourse, written and oral, should be investigated in line with our present endeavor? We can begin research in four areas: topic and focus, cohesion, rhetorical organization, and the concept of function.

The Prague School linguists investigated the concept of topic, particularly topical structure in discourse. Their study 'carries the theme or topic through the text and [that] controls the placement of information relevant to the topic' (Faigley and Witte 1983:60). The readability of a text and ultimately its coherence depends on its topical structure.

We can define topic as the theme or subject matter of a text. Much of the success of a piece of discourse in terms of its ability to communicate depends on the overall clarity of the topic or theme as a whole and part by part as it is developed from one sentence to another. The development of the topic through the text and the control of the placement of information relevant to it is called topical structure, and here lies possible areas of importance to intellectualization. For example, Lautamatti (1978), in comparing original and simplified texts, notes five possible combinations of the subject of a main clause (79-81):

- Type 1. Initial sentence element, mood subject, and topical subject coincide.
- Type 2. Initial sentence element is separate from mood subject and topical subject, which coincide.
- Type 3. Initial sentence element and mood subject coincide while topical subject is separate.
- Type 4. Initial sentence element and topical subject coincide, while mood subject is separate.
- Type 5. Initial sentence element, mood subject, and topical subject are all separate.

The study reports some interesting trends. Among these is that Types 3, 4, and 5 occur infrequently or not at all in simplified discourse; Type 1, the least syntactically complex of all five types, is of high proportion in this kind. In contrast, the three more syntactically complex types are found in great proportion in the original or authentic versions. In a similar study, Witte (1983) reports in his analysis of topical structure and writing quality that Types 3 and 5 occur most frequently in essays judged to be of high quality.

We can suppose that the implication for Filipino of this area of inquiry is the possibility that particular types of topical structures in English (the more syntactically complex ones) appear to lend themselves more ably to develop complex and complicated ideas and notions. If this analysis holds true of the Filipino language, then the implications for pedagogy should be seriously addressed.

There is also the matter of topical progression, the manner in which topic is elaborated on and used to advance discussion. Again, Lautamatti (1978) classifies this into four general types:

1. Parallel progression
 

Topic<sub>1</sub> / Comment<sub>1</sub>  
 ↑  
 Topic<sub>2</sub> / Comment<sub>2</sub>  
 ↑  
 Topic<sub>3</sub> / Comment<sub>3</sub>
2. Sequential progression
 

Topic<sub>1</sub> / Comment<sub>1</sub>  
 ↘  
 Topic<sub>2</sub> / Comment<sub>2</sub>  
 ↘  
 Topic<sub>3</sub> / Comment<sub>3</sub>
3. Extended parallel progression
 

Topic<sub>1</sub> / Comment<sub>1</sub>  
 ↑  
 Topic<sub>3</sub> / Comment<sub>3</sub>  
 ↑  
 Topic<sub>4</sub> / Comment<sub>4</sub>
4. Extended sequential progression
 

Topic<sub>1</sub> / Comment<sub>1</sub>  
 ↘  
 Topic<sub>2</sub> / Comment<sub>2</sub>  
 ↘  
 Topic<sub>4</sub> / Comment<sub>4</sub>

The study by Witte (1983) using Lautamatti's classification reveals that high quality texts utilize much more of the parallel progression and extended parallel progression types, as opposed to the low quality texts which contain a very high proportion of T-units in sequential progression. Note that in both parallel and extended parallel progressions, T-units occurring one after another carry the same topical subject. High quality texts then elaborate and develop topics more lengthily than low quality texts. They also introduce fewer topics as a result, focusing only on the more major ideas. On the other hand, low quality texts tend to keep introducing new topics, never developing them enough for readers to gain a satisfactory grasp of the matter.

From the points of view of composing and reading comprehension, the results of topical progression analysis can illustrate how coherence and clarity of expression, particularly those of a scientific and technical nature, can be achieved. This is true too from the point of intellectualization and probably crucial from the view of contrastive rhetoric, schema theory, or any theory that discusses the way in which culture affects the manner in which information is processed and presented. What do texts and oral discourses reveal about the way topic is handled and pursued in Filipino? Are present structures in the Filipino language conducive to what Witte calls high quality essays?

What is the state of research on the topic in Filipino discourse? Can the topic or focus of a discourse in Filipino be readily identified (see De Guzman 1986)? How many positions can the topic take? Is there a need to encourage more frequent use of and teaching of certain types of discourse and topic structures?

Let us now turn to the related area of cohesion. The best study of cohesion so far has been Halliday and Hasan's (1976), and they define the concept as referring to 'relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as text . . . [It] occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another' (4). We might hypothesize that a language's resources for capturing concepts, ideas, problems in various disciplines of study, not to mention the expression of the logic underlying these disciplines, need to be vast. In particular, its system of cohesive ties will have to be quite elaborate to accommodate the complex ideas and relationships involved (those expressed, for example, in coordination and subordination).

How does Filipino stand in respect to cohesion? What are the ways in which it is achieved in the Filipino language? Are there equivalences in concept to the types recorded by Halliday and Hasan such as reference, conjunction, collocation?

The third area which should be investigated is rhetorical organization, in relation to both schema theory and to the discourse of science and technology (EST discourse).

Schema theory acknowledges the role of background knowledge such as content, text organization, in language use and discourse processing. This theory contends that what a person says or what he understands of a text is influenced by the various schemata or cognitive structures that he has acquired. There are serious attempts to explain and legitimize the concept of culture-specific schemata and revive the notion of contrastive rhetoric which R. Kaplan presented in his 1966 article on cultural thought patterns (see Hinds 1983a, 1983b; Carrell 1984a, 1984b, 1985). Present research agenda on the Filipino language, therefore, should include investigations on the discourse schemata of Filipinos both when English is involved (since this is typically the language used in EST discourse and text produced in other disciplines) and when Filipino and other Philippine languages are involved.

Louis Trimble and the Washington school have neatly put together a classification system for EST discourse which includes various paragraph types, such as physical, process, and function description; definition; classification; and cause and effect. Then there is the discourse of non-prose forms--graphs, lines, tables, and figures--which so abound in EST discourse. This categorization can be compared to a present model used to describe discourse in the country. This model, based largely on the work of Longacre (1968, 1983), classifies discourse paragraphs in Philippine languages (see Bangalan 1978 on the investigation of Tagalog discourse using Longacre's classification) into narrative, hortatory, explanatory, procedural, and dialogue. Although it is possible to expand some of the types of paragraph mentioned so that they can include paragraph types found in scientific and technical discourse (for example, explanatory paragraphs can accommodate paragraphs of definition, classification, and description), it may still be necessary to include the appropriate subcategories for each of the main types presently being used or revise the Longacre typology by increasing the corpus of text types included in the study or by first generating the structures in Filipino to express the other types of paragraphs in Trimble's classification of EST discourse. I refer to paragraphs such as definition, which is essential to the field of science and technology, and which, therefore, should be an important notion in the intellectualization of any language:

The general characterization of abstract thinking ... to group the essential of a given whole, to break up a given whole into parts; to isolate and to synthesize them is embodied in the power to give definitions by genus and difference which comes at a later stage than definition by example or reference to actual use. (Henle 1966:39-40)

One last area in discourse which should be addressed is the concept of function in language, i.e. how people use language and how language varies according to use. This concept is based on a social theory of language which sees function as more important than form.

American composition theories have adopted the concept of function and the social view of language in explaining the process of composing a discourse.<sup>1</sup> The terms they use are 'reader-based prose' as opposed to 'writer-based prose' to explain the degree of awareness a writer or speaker has of audience, setting, and other variables present in the context of a situation. Writer-based prose is highly subjective and egocentric; journal writing, creative writing, typical 'theme-writing' exercises are examples of this type of composition. On the other hand, reader-based prose is more objective, often adjusted in style, amount of information assumed and given according to a perceived audience or reader. Flower (1979) describes the difference as a difference in maturity, quite similar to Piaget's concept of intellectual development. Writer-based composing represents an early stage of development, while reader-based composing, a more mature stage.

What this means for intellectualization is the need for some movement away from personal discourse to discourse that fulfills more social, discipline-related functions (see Herrington 1984, Hairston 1986). A kind of weaning away from, without totally abandoning, subjective writing should be in the present and future agenda of composition teachers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the efforts to intellectualize the Filipino language, it may also be part of the task of the discourse analyst to consider problems in cognition and social and cultural orientation since these aspects of human language production appear to be vital in the development of language; at several instances in this paper, our discussion has led us to tread into other disciplines. It may be wise, however, to note the limits of discourse and discourse analysis the way we presently acknowledge the limits of the sentence. Enkvist (1978) notes that linguistics is expanding in the direction of logic and pragmatics in certain cases when higher discourse levels need to be studied (intellectualization is one such example). In these cases, discourse may have to give way to other disciplines.

It is equally important to note the necessity of evaluating the present tools for the analysis of Filipino and the models that have been presented in this paper in terms of their adequacy in describing Filipino discourse. In addition to corpus building, it is necessary to undertake research in the line of a discourse or text-based grammar for Filipino based on Filipino. This can originate from the expansion of the present sentence-based grammar to cover intersentential phenomena, or it can come from a totally new grammar especially conceived for discourse analysis. However, there is evidence that whole discourse cannot be adequately described, even analyzed, using sentence-based grammars (Enkvist 1978; Starling 1980). The Balarila then might have to be set aside. In its place should develop a method of describing and analyzing the variety of discourse types, discourse features, and characteristics found in or possible in Filipino, in other words, a new approach that can deal with intersentential phenomena such as topical development and cohesion, with temporal and causal relationships, and with the manner in which argument proceeds in various types of discourse.

There are numerous other areas within discourse study which should be discussed in the light of the present problem; there is even the whole area of oral discourse which

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<sup>1</sup>The European strain is evident in Languages for Specific Purposes or the more popular English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

has not been given enough attention in this paper, unfortunately. However, I have focused on those aspects of written discourse which I believe are of primary importance in the intellectual development of Filipino.

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