Rhetorical Structure Analysis of EFLs' Written Argumentative: Combining the two Approaches of Rhetorical Structure and Rhetorical Movement

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1. Introduction

This research aims to investigate the organization of Persian learner's writings. Organization refers to the relationship between main ideas and the coherence of the text. Among the various approaches, the rhetorical structure (RST) by Mann and Thompson (Mann & Thompson, 1988) and Swale's rhetorical movement (Swales, 1990) are advantageous for analyzing the coherence of written productions. Since each approach has its shortcomings that the other can address, this study combines these two approaches to efficiently investigate organization.

2. Material and methods

The study examined 39 writing tasks of Persian learners from the adequacy test of the Saadi Foundation. The writing quality of these texts was assessed using the Saadi Foundation Rubric by two trained evaluators, resulting in four quality levels. Subsequently, the expected structure of an argumentative text was determined by 10 Rubric-Trained evaluators, identifying five movements: introduction, statement of the problem, addressing viewpoints, position, and conclusion. Each clause was tagged as a core clause (representing main ideas) or a supporting clause. The study measured the frequency of core and supporting clauses in texts of each level and calculated the correlation coefficient between quality level and organizational structure.

3. Result and discussion

The examination of texts across various quality levels highlights a positive relationship between text quality and several key variables. These variables include the presence of an introduction, the level of support for the introduction, support for the statement of the problem, support for the position, and the presence of irrelevant clauses. Notably, the number of irrelevant clauses within texts exhibits an inverse relationship with the quality level. In essence, higher-quality texts tend to contain fewer clauses that do not serve as either core or supporting elements. This underscores the significance of irrelevant clauses in assessing text discontinuity and overall text quality. However, it is worth noting that variations in text quality levels

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do not necessarily correlate with differences in text organization. While language learners may produce an increased number of clauses and make advancements in vocabulary and grammar, the organization of their texts may not directly align with their language proficiency growth.

Additionally, the research findings uncover a meaningful connection between the quality level of texts and the presence of an introduction section. Essentially, texts across all quality levels may encompass the anticipated structural components. However, those at higher quality levels are more likely to include a dedicated introduction section. Furthermore, concerning the level of support for the main structural movements or ideas, the results indicate a substantial relationship between the quality level and the extent of support for the introduction, the statement of the problem, and the position. In essence, higher-quality texts tend to utilize more clauses to bolster these structural components. When it comes to the issue of text discontinuity, the findings suggest that higher-quality texts are associated with a reduced number of irrelevant clauses. This underscores the idea that the level of text quality is linked to the degree of text discontinuity.

Despite establishing correlations between the quality level and several variables, the absence of a significant relationship between other variables and the quality level, coupled with similar organizational patterns observed at close quality levels (such as pre-intermediate and intermediate), suggests that relying solely on evaluators' judgments for text organization assessment may not provide a dependable indicator for determining the quality level.

4. Conclusion

The research findings lead to a fundamental conclusion: differences in text quality levels may not necessarily manifest as variations in organizational types. This key insight points to several important considerations. Firstly, it emphasizes the need for language learners to receive explicit training in recognizing and applying effective text organization principles. Secondly, it highlights the normative nature of text quality assessment, where evaluators may have focused on various rubric criteria while possibly allocating less attention to the organizational aspect. Finally, it underscores the possibility of imperfect alignment between the rubric's criteria and the actual textual state. This, in turn, accentuates the importance of further research in the field of writing assessment, including revisiting and updating rubrics, and addressing evaluator-related issues to enhance the validity of rubric descriptors. While relying solely on text organization for determining text quality may not be entirely valid, enhancing evaluators' awareness of text organization principles can contribute to more precise and reliable evaluations. Ultimately, the research findings underscore the need to incorporate genre-related concepts and emphasize continuity and coherence in the development of Persian learning syllabi.

Keywords: Argumentative Writing, Organization, Persian Students, Rubric