A Discoursal Analysis of GEPT Advanced and High-intermediate Writing Samples: With the focus on proposition combining

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Abstract

Writing is a complex task in which writers use linguistic devices to make an effective self-expression. In the generating process of ideas to language, writers search for linguistic devices, in particular sentence patterns, to indicate propositions. Nevertheless, the choices of appropriate sentence structures to match the intended meanings are a challenge to L2 writers. A major reason can be that most L2 writers have not been taught the strategies in selecting and manipulating grammatical forms to express their ideas precisely. Little research has been conducted from discourse perspective to explore how L2 writers transform abstract ideas into logical propositions, and further translate these propositions into sentences. To respond to the issue, the present study investigates how L2 writers use language forms to combine their propositions in English writing. The analysis data are one hundred writings of test takers passing the high-intermediate and advanced levels in GEPT. The analysis framework includes both semantic relations between propositions and their syntactic structures. The semantic analysis is based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) and Stalter's (1978) coherence relations that include four major semantic relations of elaboration, causal, temporal and adversative used or found in text. The syntactic analysis covers seven syntactic structures of adverbial, noun and relative clauses, participles and prepositional phrases, infinitives and nominalizations. Two analysts with TESOL background code the writings in two systems: the first is the semantic relations between the propositions in the sentences; the other is the syntactic structures used to realize the semantic relations. The results show (1) the frequency of the four semantic relations and (2) the tendencies of how the four semantic relations between propositions are realized by linguistic structures. The study is expected to provide English teachers with an alternative approach of analyzing L2 writers' writings, and bring in a pedagogical implication in grammar instruction from the discourse rhetorical perspective.