

COHERENCE AND CONTEXTUALITY: LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF REGISTER IN THE TEXT

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Since the publication of Michael Halliday and Rugaiya Hasan's *Cohesion in English*, a number of studies have extended, critiqued, and qualified their substantial contribution, made in that book, toward understanding how texts make sense. Richard Larson reviews these studies along with other work on coherence and cohesion through 1986 in Gary Tate's *Twelve Bibliographic Essays* (65-72). Some researchers have developed classification systems for kinds of coherence out of Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy for kinds of cohesion (e.g., Winterowd, Fahnestock, Stotsky, Black, Markels). Others have argued for a view of coherence as both static and dynamic (e.g., Black, Phelps). Rochelle Smith and Peter Elbow view coherence relations in written prose as deriving from oral communication pragmatics, and suggest that what we need to know about coherence for the purpose of teaching writing can best be learned by studying oral discourse structure and strategy. Both Smith and Elbow suggest that our composition model of writing as text structure that hangs together in virtue of the words on the page is inaccurate and is probably to blame for much stuffy, uninteresting, as well as incoherent, prose. Better, they say, is writing that speaks to an other—that has a distinct sense of an audience, as in conversation. The "experience" of structure and coherence flowing through time is, as Elbow puts it, the "test of good organization in writing—as in speech" (295).

It has been difficult enough to show what holds sentences together, which is what Halliday and Hasan attempted. Most of the work mentioned above has focused on studying what holds a paragraph together; only a few go beyond it. Sometimes criticism has been leveled at Halliday and Hasan because the cohesive ties they describe cannot explain what makes a string of sentences coherent. It is possible to write an incoherent paragraph that has plenty of cohesive ties. Cohesion seems to explain something, but not what makes a text coherent. Cohesion *describes* reference ties within the text, but those ties only explain a small part of the making of coherent text.

I have not seen it pointed out, much less emphasized, that Halliday and Hasan never intended their theory of cohesion to explain what makes texts coherent. Quite the contrary. They carefully place their work on cohesion in the larger question of coherence. Cohesion they define as connections between parts of sentences in which one part depends on another part for its meaning (6). No claim is made for coherence of the group of sentences. In fact, the group of sentences is defined as not necessarily a text. Text, rather, is defined as a block of discourse that makes sense. A block that doesn't make sense is not Text; it is non-text, or non-sense. Furthermore, a text is an event, a *semantic unit*, not a *form of meaning* (25-26). A text is thus a coherent block of discourse, not a set form; it is abstract, not cast in specific words and sentences, but "realized" in sentences. A text can have more than one realization. Thus cohesion may exist in concrete words, but coherence exists in the whole event of the abstract text and its realization in a specific instance.

The counterpart to cohesion is *register*. Together, Cohesion plus Register equal Text. Halliday and Hasan propose the fol-

lowing about the relation between cohesion, coherence, text, and register:

In general, if a passage hangs together as a text, it will display a consistency of register. In other words, the texture involves more than the presence of semantic relations of the kind we refer to as cohesive, the dependence of one element on another for its interpretation. It involves also some degree of coherence in the actual meanings expressed: not only, or even mainly, in the CONTENT, but in the TOTAL selection from the semantic resources of the language, including the various interpersonal (social-expressive-conative) components—the moods, modalities, intensities, and other forms of the speaker's intrusion into the speech situation.

The concept of COHESION can therefore be usefully supplemented by that of REGISTER, since the two together effectively define a TEXT. A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent with respect to the context of situation, and therefore consistent in register; and it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive (23).

Halliday and Hasan go on to point out that neither of the two facets of coherence is sufficient by itself, and one may exist without the other, thereby yielding a non-coherent passage. (I like the distinction implied between text, as defined earlier in the book, and *passage* of text here, of written prose as a passage, an activity of moving from one point to another.) But of the two, the features of register, not cohesion, make the larger share of difference in the texture of text, in the properties that make it hang together as a semantic unit.

The distinction between cohesion and coherence offers a fruitful area for investigation.¹ For if we are looking only at logical relationships between sentences and paragraphs, or even conversational ones, we are still missing a large part of the text event. Halliday and Hasan's view that register is the counterpart to cohesion offers a place to begin examining what it is that lies between the realized text and the abstract text event that causes coherence. The text event is equivalent to the whole context in which a text "happens" as an event, and from which it draws its meaning. Therefore, another way of stating the problem is to say that the concrete text must be examined with respect to its relations in the area of register, which together with cohesion ought to yield, according to Halliday and Hasan, a description of text (one semantic unit).

The value of such description is not the description itself, but rather the identification of *differences* among registers, in what happens when a situation shifts enough to necessitate shifts in register. A taxonomy for register domains permits us to see and include linguistic features we might well overlook and to understand thereby more of what makes a text coherent. I see two immediate values of such description for teaching composition. The first is a better knowledge of what constitutes coherence in reading and writing texts, both professional models and student texts. The second is that a better understanding of coherence features and principles can lead to better teaching.

This paper only begins such study: first, by giving a classification of three domains of register, taken from Halliday and Hasan; and second, by examining examples of student writing for evidence of register. The largest portion of the paper is an analysis of two student papers used by Mina Shaughnessy in the chapter from *Errors and Expectation* titled "Beyond the Sentence." I chose them because they show register features of the two dominant discourse styles—oral and literate. The oral is the style used

by the basic writer and the literate is the style of academic and other informational discourse. A final section of the paper suggests implications for composition theory, research, and practice.

I

What makes up register? Halliday and Hasan propose that "linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features—with particular values of field, mode, and tenor—constitute a REGISTER" (22). The classification scheme for features of register is adapted from an earlier work by Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens, who adopted the terminology from Gregory and Spensor.² *Field* refers to "the total event in which the text functions; it includes subject matter and purposive activity of the speaker or writer. *Mode* refers to the function of the text in the event; it includes channel and genre (rhetorical mode). *Tenor* refers to the type of role interaction; it includes the configuration of social relations among the participants in the context of situation in which the text occurs.

The *linguistic features* associated with a particular configuration of situational features in a passage of text are what constitute the register of the text. If we analyze those linguistic features in a text for the features of situation from which they derive, we ought to be able to arrive at a view of the text's register. This in itself is not important; what is important is a description of the *differences* among registers, which will enable us to understand configurations of features as arising from a register that is being used instead of an academic register. We ought to be able to identify patterns of errors, as Mina Shaughnessy taught us to do.

Another value to composition studies of descriptions of features relating to register is that it will enable descriptions of well-written and poorly-written texts in terms of the degree of success in signaling, through linguistic features, the development of a text within the expected context of situation. Since I assume, with Halliday and Hasan, that people don't deliberately make non-sense, such study will enable us to see what context(s) of situation students have brought to their writing, perhaps inappropriately, in order to perform in a situation with which they are not yet familiar. This problem of inappropriate situation is the key to a majority of problems in student writing. Halliday and Hasan's concept of register offers a way to begin such study.

Mina Shaughnessy's chapter, "Beyond the Sentence," deals with discourse level problems. Her analysis follows Halliday and Hasan's categories of cohesion—grammatical and lexical. She is able to understand many problems in student texts; but an analysis of features of register yields more insight than an analysis of cohesion alone.

Shaughnessy recognized the need for students to know the expectations and needs of an academic audience, and described some of the text conventions that referred to them. This was the beginning of a description of the context of situation. The major features of the situation of academic discourse she saw to be an interplay of concrete and abstract thought, especially requiring an ability to sustain and develop a point and direction for thinking about a topic. Shaughnessy saw the linguistic features involved as grammatical and lexical. Some of these features were examples of Halliday and Hasan's two kinds of cohesion. Shaughnessy was able to pinpoint many differences between well-written and poorly-written texts on the basis of grammar and vocabulary.

Many of the linguistic features Shaughnessy explained by reference to context of situation. Still more were left unexplained, some certainly because they have only recently been identified by

linguists. It is these features I want to examine in Shaughnessy's examples in order to show how the coherence systems that students do know are being used in a situation where they are neither expected nor suited. The point is that the features are explainable, and so is the process of passage through the text—what makes it coherent—if the context of situation in which the writer thought herself to be can be seen. By identifying what students *are* doing, it ought to be easier to teach them what they *ought* to be doing in the classroom situation. That, after all, was the lesson we all learned from Mina Shaughnessy: by understanding the errors students make, we understand better how to help them learn to write.

Shaughnessy describes an essay test question in which students were asked to agree or disagree with the author of a story about a father and child. In the story, the child is watching and enjoying some birds and the father comes along and teaches him the names of the birds. "The episode," writes Shaughnessy, "is intended to illustrate a contrast between two ways of experiencing the world—the child's direct way, through his senses, which, according to the author of the passage, gives the child a capacity to enjoy beauty, and the adult's way, through objective analysis, which involves the acceptance of society's way of classifying the world."

Two of the responses are a mere three or four lines in length. Of them Shaughnessy says that the two writers saw only a literal contrast between child and adult ways of behavior. Though Shaughnessy does not mention reading level, I would guess that the writers have reading difficulty, especially with coherence since they did not "get the point"—the semantic intent—of the passage. This kind of reading difficulty stems from using a different coherence system, one which does not make point in argument and exposition in the same way as the sample that was given them to read. Here are the two pieces of writing:

(1) As I read the paragraph, in fraunt of me, I have consider the main point of it is to say that when you are a infant growing up it is not hard for you to see or hear. but when you get older it become very hard to do this. So you need the help of man made tools like glasses or a hearing aid.

(2) I disagree on the fack the paragraph sed that when get old you must get it secondhand. Whell that it not true becacuse they are a god meny of older people hou can see a hear beter than the year one and this is true all over.

What these students did write indicates that their coherence systems do not include those employed in literate style discourse (which includes also the academic essay). Shaughnessy says that they didn't get the "implicit point." There is no indication in what these students wrote that they know what is meant by main point. Each zeroes in on a detail.

The evidence in their writing is corroborated by the linguistic communities described as the student population—basic writers from New York City's poor neighborhoods, including many non-standard dialect and ESL speakers. Research (Ong, Erikson, Michaels, Gee, and Jarrett) demonstrates that there are two basic kinds of discourse organizational styles, one characteristic of oral societies and one characteristic of literate societies. A major difference is in the ways of "making point." The oral style, sometimes called "topic-associating," has a rhapsodic organization, with topic and subtopics loosely stitched together, and point indicated implicitly through such features as lexical repetition, repetition of metrical patterns, and other emphasizing devices such as voice volume and gesture. Discourse participants know

the point; to say it directly is not only pointless, it's insulting. By contrast, the literate style employs direct statement of topic and point; this obviates the need for emphatic repetitions and creates a preference for lexical variation over repetition. This style is developed with what Walter Ong called "analytic linearity," while the oral style is developed by a group of participants who use episodes and commonplaces as subject matter and statements of topic leading and following to establish assent to what is presented.

The writers of the two brief paragraphs above seem not to have understood the "point" of the passage they were presented to read. Shaughnessy ascribes their failure to a lack of knowing how to reason abstractly, and more importantly to know the interplay between abstract and concrete. According to recent research, however, the problem is not a failure to reason abstractly, for that is done in both styles; rather the problem is that the students don't know the literate style organizing system. That is, they don't know what they're supposed to do when they read the passage, just as they don't know what they're supposed to do when they write. Even at age five, in kindergarten, the styles learned at home are brought to school and appear in oral "sharing time" stories (Michaels, Gee). Teachers misread the oral style as incoherent, just as adult users of the literate style misread the oral style as incoherent (Jarrett, Erikson).

The essay that appears as Example Essay A was written by a third student who, Shaughnessy says, "has perceived a general point underlying a concrete situation." She views the student's difficulty as one of forging the interplay between abstract and concrete out of a limited, non-analytic vocabulary. Indeed, much of the problem is that the vocabulary is limited, and non-analytic; but the vocabulary is an indication of a register that is non-academic, yet a complete and coherent system. The student is actually in transition between the first two writers above and a fourth, who is much more experienced and whose essay appears as Example Essay B. The text of Essay A bears many features not only of grammar and vocabulary differences, but of field, mode, and tenor. If we can identify the system, and the reason for the presence of the linguistic features we find, we should have a clear view of what *specifically* he or she needs to be taught.

Student Essay A

(1) My understanding is that parent delusion their children at a early age. (2) As the child gets older he starts to separate one from another. (3) With help from the parent. (4) Their talent is lost at an early age for beauty.

(5) To a certain extend I agree with the father. (6) He is only teaching the child about life. (7) The reason I feel that children are desluion easy because they are innocent.

(8) They start life and to them everything goes with everything. (9) That to say thye don't relate anything to anything. (10) its all one big mass. (11) That why many lose this talent, which we have with mother nature.

(12) When a child starts separating one from another then they notice the other side to things. (13) Everything has two sides. (14) This I would image this period starts between the ages of 5 year to 10 years.

(15) Then as they look they compair and criticizes. (16) This is when they start losing their talent for the mass which everything is beautiful. (17) The father is only breaking him in for the real world. (18) As they taught us. (19) But who is to say who's right? (20) For children are influence by their parent. (21) So its a cycle we play out on

each other. (22) Until somebody gets hip on to it and changes it. (242-43)

This student, whom I will call Writer A, appears to be a primary user of an oral discourse mode instead of the literate mode. She uses a great deal of repetition, she writes fragments when elaborating on a topic, and she works for identification with the audience. Research by Michaels, Gee, and Beaman indicates that students who use a literate style when speaking learn to write relatively easily. Users of an oral style have difficulty learning to write because the differences between the two styles are great. The two gravest problems are the absence of audience and the absence of a physical context for the text and the topic. The writer must speak about something that can't be seen to an audience who can't react and can't hear. The nature of the deictic system has to change, for references in time and space have to be located in the text or in a context that is either a commonplace or is shared knowledge. It can't be pointed to in the physical context, as a speaker could with a present audience and subject. Secondly, since the reader can't hear as a listener can, the prosodic signaling capacity of the oral coherence system is lost. Estimates on the degree of coherence that comes through prosody in the oral style range between 50% and 70% (Beaman). That's an enormous amount of signaling to be lost from discourse processing. That's what happens when an oral style is written down; and that's a large part of the reason for difficulty in reading the student essay above as coherent. The other part is that the topic is developed in a radically different way, that is in the oral style, where the topic is developed through interactive participation and the organization is rhapsodic rather than linear-analytic.

Both of these difficulties can be more easily understood if broken down and categorized under their affect on field, mode, and tenor. In a lengthy study, "Coherence Strategies in Black American Conversation," Frederick Erickson explores in detail the linguistic features of the oral style that differ from the written style. He finds an elaborate, subtle, and complete rhetorical system that is different from the Standard English variety and not a fragmentary, substandard attempt at it. (His work does for rhetorical system what Labov's work did for grammar in the 1960's.) He summarizes the issue thus:

The improvisation in real time of these strategies for establishing logical relations in oral discourse in speech events of the urban black speech community contrasts dramatically with the situation of writing, in which an audience is absent, in which cohesive devices must reside in the text rather than in speaker-listener collaboration in discourse production, in which points are made directly and explicitly, and in which sequences of points are preplanned and ordered analytically in linear fashion. The contrast, in short, is that which Ong draws between oral cultures and literate ones. In the former one, "thought is exquisitely elaborated, not in analytic linearity, but in formulaic fashion, through "rhapsodizing," that is, stitching together proverbs, antitheses, epithets, and other "commonplaces" or loci (topoi). . . . in truly oral rhetoric the devices for coherence and persuasion by which discourse is organized and information is shared . . . are qualitatively different from those employed in writing." (91-92)

The majority of the features are generalizable to some other oral styles; Erickson mentions Caribbean populations as one. Though it is not certain what background Shaughnessy's writer A is from, most were of Black American and Caribbean descent, from the lower class, which is where oral cultures are concentrated,

regardless of ethnic background. (In middle and upper class homes, books and other print materials are present so that children learn literate style discourse.) The grammatical, lexical, and rhetorical features of the sample text fit Erikson's examples and analysis.

Field, Mode, Tenor. From Erikson's analysis we can extract some useful features of register that will illuminate the writing of students like Shaughnessy's. In addition, those features will illuminate Standard Written English by way of the contrasts between the two styles that are brought into view. In mode, the oral conversational style uses a "logic of particulars." It is a participatory way of forming an argument in which several people take turns making various "moves" which are well defined, regulated, and meaningful. The tenor, or interaction of discourse participants, is thus entailed by the mode. The subject matter of the discourse was an exploration and argumentation regarding the cause of a particular community situation. The statements were largely cast in commonplaces (topoi). The subject matter and the purposive activity, Halliday and Hasan's *field*, are thus also entailed by mode. The elements of discourse are interconnected; mode, for instance, partially determines tenor and field. Field as total event includes the other two. It seems better, therefore, to use field as the broad arena of the action in which the discourse takes place. I will consider three classes of features under field: mode, tenor, subject matter. Purposive activity is defined by a relation among these three within the context of situation.

In the student essay above, the flow of discourse proceeds, as Shaughnessy notes, as if it were a conversation. Unused to school writing and the analytic linear flow of discourse, the student uses as her field a situation for producing text that she does know. The development of argument through participatory advancement with commonplace topics is what the writer apparently knows. The short sentences, many of them fragmentary, most likely proceed from the give and take of interactive development described by Erikson, in which one speaker will initiate a topic, another will add confirming statements, another may offer a counterargument, and others will voice confirming phrases or short pieces of information that have the force of adding confirmation to what was said. Fragments like "With help from the parent," and "As they taught us," and "For children are influence by their parent" may well have this function. The writer is trying to carry on the roles of several discourse participants besides doing it all in writing, an unfamiliar mode. Rapid shifts in supporting statements probably also result from the background field of several speakers, each offering confirming or opposing statements. The jump in sentence 4 into a new topic with no preparation may indicate a supposed change in speakers. Same for sentence 7.

There is probably a commonplace behind this passage to the effect that children lose their innocence about the world being one big beautiful "mass" sometime between the ages of five and ten; then they begin to see it the way it really is, to distinguish beautiful and ugly, appearance and reality. This commonplace is the source of such arguments as the topic idea expressed in sentence 1, i.e., the concept that parents help their children to adjust to the real world. An aphorism, that everything has two sides, is seen to relate to the governing commonplace, and so it is offered as a supporting argument. These kinds of arguments were familiar to Aristotle, who preferred argument by enthymeme, used in analytic linear argument, but recognized that the example was more persuasive with an audience untrained in dialectic. Sociolinguists frequently point out that Aristotle's

Rhetoric contains the features of oral style discourse that still pertain in primarily oral societies today.

I have already touched on some matters of participant relations as they pertain to field. Other features are related to tenor; Erikson identifies these:

1. Affirmation of argument comes from participants, not academic experts as sources of authority.
2. More argumentative force accrues to statements made by participants who are higher on the scale of leader/follower. Successfully initiating a new topic correlates with higher status. This aspect of tenor obviously is opposed to success in academic discourse, which requires lengthy sustaining and probing of a topic. Offering counterarguments correlates with the second most powerful status, because the counterargument is made against a topic that was initiated by the leader of the group.
3. Personal display is valued and confers power. In language, personal display is realized in skill with language in aesthetic dimensions. Rhyming, rhythm accentuated by metrical regularity, repetition, steeply rising irony, and joke telling are valued and hence have the power to convince. Other attention gaining devices, such as gesture and voice volume, also increase the warrant of a claim by increasing its force.

Student A uses affirmations that arise from the commonplaces she is drawing upon. Restatement is a major kind of affirmation, as it is in the oral conversational style. The affirmations increase the power of the warrant. So do the repetitions of metrical patterns:

Their talent is lost / at an early age / for beauty.
 They start life / and to them / everything goes / with everything.
 That to say / they don't relate / anything to / anything.
 to separate one from another (s. 2) / separating one from another (s. 11)
 the other side to things. / The other side to things
 When (begins paragraph 4) / Then (begins paragraph 5)
 So its a cycle / play on each other
 gets hip on to it / and changes it

These phrases match each other in metrical pattern. Interestingly, in sentence 4, the word beauty is misplaced for literate style but is metrically pleasing; the first two phrases are duplicates of each other, and serve to throw "for beauty" into relief. That's probably where prominence is intended; the essay really takes up the problem of losing the talent for beauty rather than the point of the passage about the father and child. The writer has gone beyond the point of the reading and into a discussion of implications of the point, which she understands much better than the writer of the more academic Essay B below.

In addition to these phrases, there are some key points of alliteration and assonance. One is the lovely "talent for the mass," which has the two accented words rhyme the short *a*. Another is sentence 9: "That" and "mass" rhyme to open and close the sentence; "say" and "relate" chime in the middle of the sentence. Yet another pair is the hard *cs* in sentence 14, "compair and criticizes." There are the many exact duplications on "thing," "anything," and "everything," and "other," "each other," and "another." The repetition of these and other words have the more important function of keeping the topic in view and emphasized. In participatory discourse, the repetitions would help to ensure that the participants were in agreement with the leader. If there

were disagreement, the statements would still be cast in similar rhythms and vocabulary, the more to throw contrast.

In mode, Erikson identifies these features:

1. The genre—argumentation—is a logic of particulars.
2. The channel—spoken language—is critical to understanding shifts in topic, irony, most elements of verbal display, rhetorical crescendoes, and crescendo sequences. The channel is also critical to the development of argument, which *must* proceed interactively. Without speaking, there can be no exchange of speakers to affirm and rebut; thus, the development of argument will be seriously hampered in writing, since the argument develops differently and since users of an oral style do not have experience in sustained one-person argument with absent audiences. Nor does it make sense, since important features of warranting claims and persuading are eliminated.

The prosodic differences between oral and written styles alone are significant enough to cause confusion in learning to write and in understanding a written-down oral style as coherent. An important difference is that the end of a topic is signaled by falling intonation in the oral style described by Erikson. In literate spoken style, falling intonation signals the end of a sentence. The writer of the essay above is probably putting a period at every pause. An oral reading by a student would reveal whether that was so in any case. It might also reveal where topic changes were being initiated, since they would be preceded by falling intonation. It might also turn out that the student is mixing the two modes, because she knows parts of the new mode, but not all of it. An oral reading would reveal where the problems were, and work on intonation patterns could begin. Good writers, we know, have internalized the sound of writing. Since prosody is so important in oral discourse, and more so in oral style than literate style, time spent on intonation study might prove a faster route to good writing than some methods we now use. I know of no studies in this area, but they are needed.

In Essay A, sentence 4 is an example in which the prosody probably indicated "early age" as focal and thus the end of the new information, with "for beauty" tacked on as an explanation of the old information, "their talent," as is common in conversation. As it appears, focal emphasis goes to "beauty," and destroys coherence within the paragraph.

This commonplace undoubtedly gave a focus to the student's interpretation of the passage, which differs markedly from that of the student whose paper appears below. That student too uses a commonplace, but one drawn from the academic world.

If a student's oral discourse style places values on these kinds of maneuvers, she needs to know how to create the impression of prestige in academic writing. She needs to learn a whole configuration of discourse moves, modes, and commonplaces along with new vocabulary and grammar. Her primary mode is loaded with power, identity, and a way of looking at the world. Until a student has mastered the school essay, the oral style is going to be used to write essays, because it is what the student knows. To recognize that she already can create coherent discourse, and to show her another way, a way that is used in certain situations, is to leave her with her integrity.³

II

Shaughnessy gives another paper written in response to the same essay question. This writer (B) is much more knowledgeable about the academic world.

(1) I believe the author of this short exposition is explaining how he sees the creativity and imagination of children stifled by their elders attempts to "educate" them. (2) Since young children's perceptions are more often physical than intellectual, the author states, adults feel they must provide children with what the adults consider objective knowledge of a subject, in addition to the emotional knowledge which the child readily acquires through his own sensory mechanisms.

(3) The author's premise is undoubtedly true, for, from the time they are born adults are anxious for their children to "learn," whether the subject in question is toilet training or advanced mathematics. (4a) I believe this sharing of knowledge can be a beautiful, healthy experience for both child and adult; (4b) I make this statement with equivocation, however, by stating that the opportune time for this communication is the time when the child desires to learn. (5) In this manner, the child receives the full benefit of the information, and retains it well, because his desire is the motivating force.

(6) Giving a child knowledge is exactly that, not forcing something upon him for which he sees no need or desire. (7) After a child has recorded and absorbed all the sensory experiences of a particular subject, he will be prepared, and eager, to learn the other aspects of his new discovery. (8) It is at this time that learning becomes a true human communication, and a joyous discovery. (243-44)

Like Writer A, Writer B uses a governing commonplace; but hers is an academic commonplace. Shaughnessy calls it an "official view of child development." The organization is topic-centered, i.e., is in the literate style. Sentences are longer: compare the 8 sentences in Essay B with the 22 sentences in Essay A for the same amount of space. The pattern of development is a probing of the topic announced in sentence 1 according to the commonplace of an "official view" of child education. In other words, Essay A and Essay B each proceed to develop a commonplace, but categorically different ones: B's commonplace is acceptable in the academic world, while A's is not. (Both are objective, but B's proceeds from the academic community while A's proceeds from a social community). Instead of arising from participants during the discourse process, authority comes from the academic world, especially its published research texts.

The field—or subject matter and purposive intent—are different in the two. Writer B employs the subject matter of an official view, with the intent of using it as an acceptable approach to her reading of and writing about the passage she was given. Writer A employs a commonplace that makes sense with the passage but which is not acceptable in an academic essay. Her intent seems to be to come to grips with the meaning and intention of the passage and to make assertions about the "two sides." Writer B couches assertions in tempering language ("undoubtedly true," "opportune," "with equivocation"). Writer A is playing at least two participant roles, and the language bears the marks of the straightforward, assured statement that is valued in the oral style.

In field, the subject matter generated is the analytic-linear development of literate style. Different aspects of the topic are explored in each paragraph, with each sentence bearing an extension of the topic in a different direction or into a finer point of the topic. Writer A extends the topic by cause-effect and time-space relationships. Writer B uses a wider variety of relationships and the purposive activity is focused on directing these relation-

ships. Sentence 1 states the topic – the writer's position on the point of the passage read. Sentence 2 draws in a partition between physical and intellectual and correlates them with emotional and objective knowledge, as acquired through the senses and thought, respectively. Using Fahnestock's taxonomy of cohesive relations, adapted from Halliday and Hasan, sentence 2 would have the following cohesive ties, all signaled lexically: "since," indicating a *premise* and a *conclusion*; and "in addition to," indicating an *addition*. Sentence 3 begins with a *conclusion*, and then states the *premise* with "for" and an *exemplification* with "whether." Sentence 4 presents a new statement with a qualifying concession, which becomes the topic statement for the rest of the essay. Sentence 5, with "in this manner," provides the *exemplification* of the concession, and the "because" clause provides a *premise* as analytic support for the exemplification. Sentence 6 has a discontinuative relation with the preceding discourse, not signaled lexically but cohering through a complex of words involved in the configuration of the semantic unit that has been established to this point. Thus, "giving knowledge" contrasts with "forcing something on" and both tie in to the earlier words "sharing knowledge," "desire to learn," and "desire is the motivating force." At this point, the suggestiveness of the quotation marks in sentence 1 on "educate" and in sentence 3 on "learn" becomes clear, thus drawing in, through irony, the meanings the writer had in mind from the beginning. The device for carrying the meaning is, however, still verbal rather than textual, for the irony depends on intonation, which can only be signaled here by quotation marks. A more skilled writer would find another way to bring forward the irony.

Sentence 7 is a *restatement* of sentence 6 that harks back in topic and vocabulary to paragraph one, probably with the intention of securing coherence with the opening paragraph. That, after all, is the strategy taught in beginning writing courses. Sentence 8, in true topic-centered form, makes a capping statement, a kind of concluding "punch."

The last paragraph proceeds by restatement and time and space relations—which was the main method of Essay A. The lexical items for analytic-linear cohesion are gone, replaced by statement and temporal indicators ("time," "after"). Probably, they aren't needed, because the last paragraph traditionally makes a conclusion.

This organization is much closer to the academic model than Essay A. The vocabulary and grammar are obviously more academic, but the sentence relations are also, for reasons that could not have been seen without an analysis of field, mode, and tenor. The nature of the sentences in Essay B arises from a sustained single voice who develops arguments in certain directions from certain commonplaces and who must temper one's statements instead of seeking to gain power through topic initiation, emphasis, restatement, volume, and rhythm. Thus, tenor (participant interaction), mode (genre, channel) and field (subject matter and purposive activity) are an interrelated set of domains which appear in discourse in linguistic features.

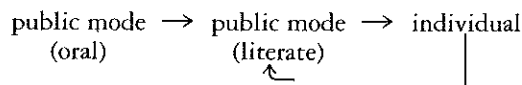
III

Implications: Theory. The existence of a kind of mode that has a distinct and whole organizational system means that we must revise our theoretical models for composing. If discourse production like that of Essay A results from a public mode rather than a private, individual organizational idiosyncrasy, then we are teaching an *alternative* public system—the literate style—instead of a better version of a poor style. The theory of modes developed by James Britton, for instance, would place Essay A as expressive

writing and Essay B as transactional. Britton's definition of expressive writing is actually quite close to the definition of oral style, except that Britton does not see it as a viable public mode; rather it is a personal mode, "close to the self." Britton's theory predates the research I've been citing throughout by fifteen years, so naturally Britton's view is in line with the then current research that expressive writing was a poor attempt at writing by "language impoverished" students.⁴ Linda Flower's cognitive theory too does not deal with language variation in rhetorical strategies. The movement from writer-based to reader-based prose by which she describes the process of revision assumes an internal self as audience during drafting. That model is probably accurate for experienced writers, but it may be quite inaccurate for many students, who must work from their knowledge of oral discourse in constructing written discourse.

James Kinneavy's theory of discourse suggests a way to revise these theories of composing to account for the movement from one public mode to another. In his discussion of expressive writing, Kinneavy adopts the position of philosopher Georges Gusdorf on style and personality. Expressive writing, he says, is public, with the individual taking a role that is very much enmeshed in his (or her) social role. In fact, it is only when an individual style develops that the individual qua individual emerges from his social roles (404-05). This seems to be a closer depiction of what happens in learning to write: the student writer must learn the social roles that writers may take, through imitation, before he or she is able to forge a distinct kind of role matched by a distinct style.

The progression from public to public and then to self describes also at least some aspects of the revision process. Linda Peterson and others have demonstrated how the process of revising entails a circling closer through successive drafts to a clear focus. This has been called circling closer to one's meaning, at the same time that writing clearly for an other—an audience—is going on. The two directions appear to be opposed; but what actually happens is that the writer must first develop what *he* has and wants to say as distinct from the rest of the group, the public, knowledge. The writer, in other words, *begins* from a public position, must go toward the self in order to discover or develop something that is not shared, and then must go outward once more to communicate the discovery to the public. The diagram below shows the progression of a piece of writing and of the growth of writing ability:



Implications: Teaching. As Orlando Taylor and Maryon Matsuda have pointed out, not to recognize a student's primary language style is a form of classroom discrimination, however unintentional it may be. An instructional approach that is unaware of register difference is probably damaging to the student's esteem, as well as to learning. To teach features in isolation of the reasons for their occurrence confuses students, and delays their learning. Some who are much confused may never learn; for they have too much to figure out (configure) for themselves. They merely give up and rely on the teacher to tell them what's right and what's wrong, how to revise and how to edit each separate piece of writing. That is what has been found to happen in elementary schools. Most students fail to learn to control the language to say what they have to say; they give up in frustration and confusion to let the teacher direct the speaking or writing process (Michaels, Gee). That is undoubtedly what happens with many

college learners as well. The analysis of register configurations and features should help us to understand better what students do when they begin to learn academic writing. And it should help us to understand the ways we do make sense of expository writing — why we know what we know but that we mistake for granted as the way all language users understand discourse.

Learning to write topic-centered discourse requires learning the means a particular linguistic community uses to organize experience and discourse. The means of organization include aspects of field, mode, and tenor, plus the coherence signaling system that makes the meanings hang together in one text. In some way the student must learn the literate style coherence system in order to read and write discourse in that mode. If it's not learned at home, it must be learned at school. Some students will learn on their own from sample texts and current modes of writing instruction. However, many are being lost in the current system of instruction. Many could be retained with an instructional sequence that teaches directly to the differences between the features of field, mode, and tenor in the two systems. Again, the cultural context may need to be considered in some student populations, for the two systems may have differing features within different cultures.

Implications: Research. We need research on student writers of all ages and many socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in order to determine the nature of the field, mode, and tenor of their discourse, and the linguistic features that signal coherence. We need studies of how these features and systems are learned in writing, and what progressions they follow. We need studies of student writing and protocols in which students talk about why one sentence follows another so that we can discover what their strategies for coherence are as they move from an oral style to a written one.

An especially fruitful area of investigation I would see as the direct teaching of the prosodic system behind the literate style as a base upon which the written style depends. Some oral communication researchers (e.g., Orlando Taylor) regard the teaching of the literate spoken style as a necessary prelude to teaching written literate style to students whose primary mode is the oral, topic-association. Success with this approach has been achieved in the elementary grades in the California Richmond Unified School District.

Finally, a study of field, mode, and tenor for various types of written discourse is needed to supplement the studies on cohesion. At least some of these need to be studies of what happens during the text event, that is between text and context. Research like Stephen Witte's on pre-text is a good example of such a study; Witte's notion of pre-text is actually close to Halliday and Hasan's idea of text as an abstraction, which becomes realized in concrete terms in a specific situation. Only when we know enough about how texts are formed and understood will we be able to design the writing instruction that can meet the needs of those students who are not yet learning well the writing skills they must acquire.

NOTES

¹Not all researchers have agreed with Halliday and Hasan's definitions of cohesion and coherence. Deborah Tannen cites objections and prefers to use the term cohesion for textual ties and coherence for "underlying principles" (intro. *Coherence*). Halliday and Hasan's definitions have the advantage of distinguishing linguistic features and principles from situational ones.

²Halliday and Hasan cite the source for their categories as that proposed by Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens, *The Linguistic Sci-*

ences and Language Teaching. The book in turn adopted the terminology used by Gregory and Spensor in *Linguistics and Style*.

³Orlando Taylor and Maryon Matsuda regard the failure to recognize the topic associating style in classrooms to be a source of discrimination, though usually unintentional.

⁴The term "linguistically impoverished" is not frequently used by linguists, at least since the studies of language variation began in the late 1960s. A language may be rich even though it may not be the preferred majority language in a country. The first studies of grammar of English dialects done on Black English in the 1960s helped to shift the view of dialects as deficient versions of Standard English to *different* versions of English. James Britton was writing *Language and Learning* during this period; it was published in 1970. He probably was unaware of these studies, for had he known of them he may have seen the implications for his theory—that is, that if a child possesses a rich language, she is not "impoverished," as he says she is (*Prospect* 100), but different. And if different, then she is moving from one public mode to another, rather than from an individual mode to a public mode.

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