

Integrating Grammar into the Teaching of Paragraph Development Techniques at the University Level.

Lahcene Benyagoub

University Ahmed Draia, Adrar, Algeria,
benyagoublahcene1960@univ-adrar.edu.dz

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Abstract:

Recent development in ELT has seen a shift in focus from teaching individual components such as reading, writing, speaking, and grammar toward teaching these components integratively as they are being used in daily communication. The purpose of this paper is to help third year EFL LMD students benefit from a writing course that integrates grammar into the teaching of paragraph development techniques. Why doing so? Firstly, grammar is the first prerequisite for effective writing. Our students have difficulty in expressing their ideas while writing compositions as they do not have an adequate command of English grammar. Secondly, our students are unable to make use of their knowledge of grammar in composition courses because they are taught grammar in isolation. Thirdly, integrative teaching of grammar and composition will allow teachers to do remedial work and be able to dwell on certain grammar points a second or third time as they appear in students' compositions. Hence, the focal point in this paper will be the integration of grammar teaching with composition which allows for grammatical structures to be taught in the context of particular methods of development for different topics.

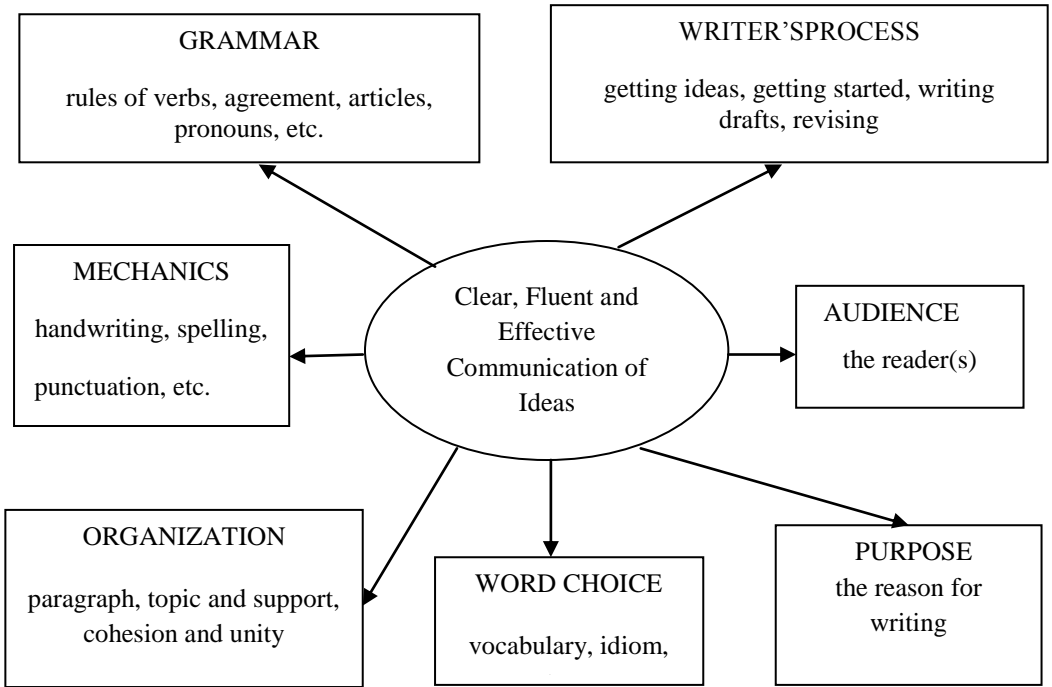
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1. Introduction

(**Bryne, 1979**) argues that writing is neither easy nor spontaneous; it requires conscious mental effort. He divides the problem that makes writing difficult into three categories. The first, he calls psychological, caused by the lack of interaction and feedback between the reader and the writer. The second consists of linguistic problems. He also states that in speech, grammar mistakes become manageable because of the spontaneous nature of the medium which prevents us from fully monitoring what we are saying—particularly, our sentence construction and the inter-connection of our sentences. In writing, on the other hand, we have to express ourselves in a clear and more grammatical manner in order to make up for the absence of certain features of spoken language, such as non-verbal signals, prosodic features, and immediate feedback between the interlocutors. The third category consists of cognitive problems. Unlike speech, the organization framework for our ideas in written communication has to be mastered.

2. Producing a piece of writing

Learning to write is a sophisticated process that combines many interrelated components. The following diagram shows the interrelatedness of these components in writing (**Ann, 1983**).



(Ann, 1983)

Students need to think about the interests, knowledge, and abilities of the people they are writing for and the purpose for which they are writing. They need to learn the value of writing several drafts and developing their ideas. (Ann, 1983) points out that “a student who is given the time for the process to work, along with the appropriate feedback from the readers such as the teacher or other students, will discover new ideas, new sentences, and new words as he plans , writes a first draft, and revises what he has written for a second draft.”

But students also need to learn the styles and formats for a variety of writing purposes, and the grammatical and lexical terms relevant to these purposes as well. Furthermore, they need to be trained to act as an audience for other writers and to comment on the logicity, factualness, and appropriateness of what a writer puts down

on paper as well as the form in which he does it ((**Olshtain, 2001**); (**Kern, 2000**)).

These features of writing cause problems even for native speakers when they produce a piece of writing. If writing is such a complex skill requiring formal instruction and conscious mental effort for native speakers, it will be even more difficult for the EFL student.

3. Needs Analysis

According to Algeria’s national syllabus, when students of English finish their five-year study, they are asked to write a thesis of not less than one hundred pages in order to get their Master’s Degree. However, this goal has turned to be a difficult task beyond most students’ reach at the University of Adrar. As a teacher of written expression and a Master theses supervisor for many years, I have identified the following problems that both students and teachers encounter in grammar and composition courses as well as their needs and expectations:

- The difficult nature of the writing skill itself.
- The methods of teaching.
- Teaching grammar in isolation.
- Grammar should be a part of an integrated course with emphasis on writing.
- Students’ problems with grammar stem from the way they are taught. They should be given more opportunity to apply the structures they have learned to different situations.
- When students are involved in grammar exercises, they focus on a certain grammatical problem and may get the impression they have mastered it. However, in writing compositions, their attention is also

focused on ideas, and organizational skills. Grammar lessons should be done on a textual discourse level.

- Students experience writing as the ability to produce a one-off, perfect, error-free product, through a process of mechanical copying from the board or from a book.
- Students were not encouraged to write meaningfully and purposefully for a specified reader or audience.
- Students did not experience writing as a cognitive, creative, discovery process.

4. Implications of the needs analysis for course design

After analyzing students' difficulties in expressing their ideas while writing compositions, I have seen that our students are in need of a writing course that integrates grammar into the teaching of paragraph development. I have the following justification to consider in doing so:

A. Grammar is the first prerequisite for effective writing. Our students have difficulty in expressing their ideas while producing a piece of writing as they do not have an adequate command of English grammar.

B. Students are unable to make use of their knowledge of grammar in composition courses because they are taught grammar in isolation and do not have the opportunity to make use of what they have learned in real communication. If grammar and composition teaching are simultaneously carried out, students will be provided with a meaningful context in which they can practise the grammar structures they have just been taught.

C. Integrative teaching of grammar and composition will allow teachers to do remedial work and be able to dwell on certain grammar points a second or third time as they appear in students' compositions.

D. From the motivation point of view, students will be gratified to see that they can make use of their knowledge of grammar in their compositions. This will provide them with a context for practising what they have been taught.

5. Integrating grammar with writing

(Raimes, 1981) states that “certain methods of development require certain structures, e.g., a comparison-contrast task will make the use of comparative and superlative forms necessary, likewise in chronological narration, past tenses and in spatial order, prepositions of place will be used. Thus, an assigned topic may require a certain method of development which in turn will require the use of certain patterns. Students should be guided into using those patterns that are to be practised.”

In the same way, (**Marquez, 1981**) points out that paragraph structure and development should be simultaneously taught at every stage of the teaching and learning process. For example, she states that as descriptive paragraphs tell about a person, a place or thing, they generally make use of *be* sentences and a few other verbs like *seem, appear, look, sound, smell, taste, and feel* may be used. Likewise, the narrative paragraph uses mostly action verbs. According to (**Marquez, 1981**), such integration will give the following advantages:

Specific grammatical structures lend themselves to certain types of development, and these ought to be exploited to full advantage. Development by comparison and contrast, for instance lends itself to the teaching of, -er/more than, -est/most, as...as, such as that, so + adjective + that etc. Spatial development is a good place to teach troublesome prepositions and adverbs of place, just as chronological development is a good section in which to teach adverbs of time, both single forms and prepositional phrases. ... An important characteristic of the teaching of selected paragraph structures is that it is inseparable from the teaching of specific grammatical

structures, and practice in one should not proceed without conscious awareness of the other.

A good writer uses *a variety of techniques* to develop his idea. These techniques are helpful for nonnative writers to imitate, so that they can use them in their writing. Therefore, I would like to introduce some of them that seem to be useful, especially for writing a thesis. These writing techniques and the grammar points that I have found relevant to teach simultaneously are as follows:

I. The Descriptive Paragraph: A description paragraph is required when you are asked to describe features or characteristics of something. This may include how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes or feels. You should provide specific details of the most important features and use appropriate adjectives to describe attributes and qualities.

a. Description of a place

Grammar points:

- *adverbs of place (prepositions)*
- *there is/are; have and have got*
- *definite/indefinite articles*

b. Description of a person (physical appearance/general impression)

Grammar points (shared with description of place):

- *adjectives, character adjectives and nouns*
- *adjectives with –ing and –ed*
- *the sequencing of adjectives*
- *adjectival clauses (who, which, that)and reduced clauses*
- *look + like / as if / as though*

➤ *seem + present / past / continuous + infinitive*

II. The Narrative Paragraph: Whenever you have to relate what happened in a particular situation, you will use narration. Narration paragraphs are frequently used in longer written texts and often in reflective writing tasks.

a. Present narration

Grammar points:

➤ *adverbial of time and sequence (by, at, after, before, during, first, next, second, then,*

last, finally, etc.)

➤ *adverbial clauses of time (before, after, until, etc.)*

➤ *simple present vs. present continuous*

b. Past narration

Grammar points:

➤ *adverbial clauses of time (in past) and gerund construction*

➤ *simple past, past progressive, past perfect, past perfect continuous tenses, simple past*

vs. past perfect

➤ *still, yet, since, for*

➤ *non-defining relative clauses (used in narration while setting a scene)*

III. The Expository Paragraph: Expository writing is used to provide a reader with an effective explanation or clarification of a topic or situation. Since an expository paragraph is trying to explain or clarify a topic, it is important that its sentences provide the categories

or reasons that support the explanation or clarification of the topic. Furthermore, these categories and reasons also provide the framework for the organization of the paragraph.

Grammar points:

➤ *transitional words and phrases (another example of ... , for instance, to exemplify, to*

illustrate, etc.

IV. The Comparison and Contrast Paragraph: A compare and contrast paragraph is required if you are asked to examine similarities or differences. While **compare** focuses on similarities, **contrast** focuses on differences.

Grammar points:

➤ *transitional devices for comparison and contrast (both...and..., either...or...,*

neither...nor..., the same as ..., like, unlike, different from, a is x times as ... as b,

[slightly] more ...

than..., as ... as, etc.

➤ *comparison with different tenses*

V. The Classification Paragraph: In a classification paragraph, you are asked to group separate items into categories according to shared characteristics. Depending on the subject, you may be asked to classify people, organisms, things or ideas.

Grammar points:

➤ *transitions to give categories, similarities, differences, examples, certain categories*

➤ *correlative conjunction (both...and..., either...or...)*

➤ *articles (definite, indefinite, deletion)*

VI. The Process-Analysis Paragraph: In a process analysis paragraph, you are required to divide a process into separate steps. A process analysis paragraph explains a sequence or process, presents facts and details in chronological order. Special time words or phrases allow you to tell the reader when a particular step occurs. The process analysis paragraph ends with a specific result—something that happens at the end of the process.

Grammar points:

- *imperative*
- *passive vs. active voice (including “it is said that,” “he is said to...,” “it is supposed to...”)*
- *modals (should, might, must, can)*
- *infinitives of purpose*
- *adverbial clauses of purpose (e.g., so that)*
- *adverbial clauses of time and sequence (before, after, gerund constructions, first, next, etc.)*

VII. The Cause-and-Effect Paragraph: In a cause and effect paragraph you are asked to indicate the cause or reason that produces an effect or result, or to point out the effect or result produced by a cause. The function of a Cause-and-Effect Paragraph is usually to answer the questions "Why", such as "Why did it happen?" or "What", such as "What are its causes?" or "What are its effects?" In short, the Cause-and-Effect Paragraph explains why a condition occurs or the effect that this condition brings about.

Grammar points:

- *conditionals (type1)*
- *conditionals (all types), wish clauses (unless, when, etc.)*

➤ *transitions and expressions for cause and effect (because of..., as a result of..., x results*

from..., x is caused by..., the reason for..., therefore, consequently, for this reason,

although, even though, in spite of, despite, as long as, provided /providing that, so

that..., in case...)

➤ *modals and modal + perfect*

➤ *adverbial clauses of cause (because, as, since)*

➤ *adverbial clauses of result (so + adverb that..., so + few/many + plural nouns that...)*

VIII. The Argumentative Paragraph: In an argumentative paragraph you are asked to present a point of view and provide evidence for the point of view taken. An argument is an opinion supported by facts. An 'opinion' is also referred to as a 'claim', and 'facts' are also referred to as 'evidence'. The claim clearly states a stance on a topic or issue. Evidence to prove this claim can include reasons, statistics, confirmed facts, expert research, and, in some special cases, personal experience. To make the claim persuasive, an argument paragraph must be supported with the most effective evidence that comes from a variety of credible sources.

Grammar points:

➤ *subjunctive noun clause (e.g., recommend that..., advise, request, suggest, etc.)*

➤ *transitional words and phrases (first, second, next, after, last, for example, for instance, to illustrate, in addition, also, besides that, moreover, furthermore, in conclusion, finally...)*

6. Practical Applications

a. Characteristic of Good Writing Material

As (Ann, 1983) points out, all approaches to writing overlap, and teachers should not be devoted to a single approach that they exclude all others. Teachers should be eclectic, drawing from all methods available. They should take into account all the factors involved in good writing. For this reason, I would like to propose the following principles as guidelines for choosing, designing, or adapting materials for paragraph developing skills for EFL learners.

- 1.** Materials should be learner-centered rather than teacher-centered. They should focus on helping students to develop their own strategies for learning.
- 2.** Materials should be creative. They should provide stimulating activities to focus students' attention on the things to be learned. Audiovisual aids such as tapes, pictures, and diagrams should be used to activate the students' awareness of the content as something real.
- 3.** Materials should be interesting. They should be related to students' interests. Moreover, there should be a variety of text types and activity types in the materials to motivate the students' interest in writing.
- 4.** Materials should be task-based. They should use purposeful tasks to motivate students' learning and to make students see the usefulness of writing.
- 5.** Materials should be practical. They should deal with real-life communication tasks.
- 6.** Material should facilitate interactive learning. Students often learn as much from each other as they do from the teacher. Material should make it easy to divide the class into groups or pairs to allow the students to interact with each other.
- 7.** Material should be up-to-date. Some older material can still be very useful. But more recent material is usually preferable if available.

8. Vocabulary and comprehensible input levels should be well-graded. Material suitable for an advanced student will be beyond the beginner's comprehension. Material suitable for a beginner will lack challenge for an adult. It is essential that material matches the abilities of the student.

b. Types of writing activities

There is no better way for students to see the value of writing as a form of communication than for them to produce the kind of practical writing that many people do in their daily life. In the following table, I include (**Jolly, 1986**) extensive list of real writing tasks:

*“Integrating Grammar into the Teaching of Paragraph Development
Techniques at the University Level.”*

| Writing notes and memos | Writing personal letters | Writing instructions, personal ads, and telegrams | Writing descriptions | Reporting experiences | Writing to companies and officials | Presenting facts, ideas, and opinions |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Explanations *Arrangements *Instructions *Inquiries and requests *Apologies and explanations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Invitations *Requests and inquiries *Acceptances and refusals *Arrangements *Congratulations and commiserations *Thank-you letters *Expressing positive and negative emotions *General personal letters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Writing telegrams *Writing personal ads *Writing instructions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Describing people, places, objects, human scenes, habits and conditions, landscape, processes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Reporting incidents and events *Writing biographical information *Narrating *Reporting speech | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Form-filling *Request letters *Letters of application *Giving information *Giving instructions *Letters of complaint *Letters of apology and explanation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Paragraph writing *Letters to newspapers *Summary reports *Personal and factual reports *Essay-writing |

(Jolly, 1986)

7. Conclusion

To sum up, as teachers, our first task is to encourage learners to start writing. Through our experience, we believe that integrative teaching of grammar and composition will increase student motivation and improve performance in writing. This integration can be done in two different ways: composition and grammar can be reduced to only one course in which the teaching of grammar and composition is carried out simultaneously; or students may take two different courses—“grammar” and “composition”—with the integrated model being applied in composition courses. Undoubtedly, students will benefit more from the former.

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