

A SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PARATAXIS AND HYPOTAXIS IN ACADEMIC IELTS SAMPLE ESSAYS

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Abstract - The International English Language Testing, which involves the assessment of four English skills, has been selected as the preferred test to measure English language proficiency of non-native English speakers. In IELTS academic writing, grammatical range and accuracy, of which test-takers are required to use, is one of the four criteria employed to evaluate candidates' written essays, which record a considerable occurrence frequency of clause complexes. In order to shape clause complexes, two basic kinds of logical relations in language are employed: parataxis and hypotaxis. They indicate how two or more adjacent clauses are connected to each other in dependent or interdependent ways. This study conducts an analysis of how clause complexes in IELTS academic exposition and discussion essays are formed by highly successful test-takers in light of Functional Grammar developed by Halliday and Matthiessen [10], thereby providing non-native writers with a better understanding of accurate parataxis and hypotaxis employment to produce good IELTS academic writing essays. 60 sample essays were used as data for text analysis. The findings reveal that prevailing type of taxis employed in IELTS sample essays is hypotaxis, demonstrating that the writers tend to support their viewpoints by utilizing unequal status.

Key words - Parataxis; hypotaxis; clause complex; exposition essays; discussion essays

1. Introduction

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), which takes meaning as central for linguistic study, is a useful and powerful tool for analysis of texts. The most common application of SFL is 'to understand the quality of texts: why a text means what it does, and why it is valued as it is' [1: xxix]. Halliday claims that we use language to talk about our experiences and to describe events and states and the entities involved in them; that is the *experiential metafunction*. We also use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relationships with them, to express our own point of view on things the world over, and to elicit or change theirs; that is the *interpersonal metafunction*. Besides, we organize our messages in such ways that indicate how they fit in with other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing; that is the *textual metafunction*.

The study investigates academic IELTS sample essays collected from textbooks and relevant IELTS websites which have been rated 8.5 or 9.0 or prepared by examiners as examples of very good models which focus on parataxis and hypotaxis. The study is also restricted to two types of argumentative essays: Exposition and Discussion, which are viewed as common types found in the IELTS academic module [2, 3, 4] and within the six common topics namely education, work, environment, health, social issues and family.

It is evident that effective IELTS academic writing requires a number of things such as the range of vocabulary to convey meanings with its accuracy and appropriateness, choice of vocabulary, varied and accurate grammatical

patterns, and use of cohesive devices appropriately to assist in making clear the relationships between and within the clauses. In order to meet the requirements of grammatical range and accuracy as well as cohesion and coherence, which belong to the criteria used to evaluate candidates' written essays, clause complexes should be taken into consideration. As a result, the present study demonstrates an analysis of how clause complexes in IELTS academic exposition and discussion essays are constructed by highly successful test-takers or prepared by examiners as examples of very good models in light of functional grammar, with a view to gaining an insight into parataxis and hypotaxis employment, thereby producing more effective IELTS academic writing essays.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies

Within systemic functional linguistics, there has been much interest in developing descriptions of written argumentation [2, 5]. Several studies on clauses in combination in writing have been conducted so far. For example, PraditaDwiAnggara and Sunardi [6] focused on the relations of clause complex in ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in delivering information and found that hypotactic relations are used more than paratactic ones, which makes it easy for the readers to understand the agreement.

Sagheer Eid's [7] research showed that the two news articles from two news websites; namely <http://english.alarabiya.net/> and <http://www.aljazeera.com/> have complex grammars and exhibit different proportions of taxis and lexico-semantic relations of which hypotactic clauses outnumber paratactic ones in order to provide the readers with the central theme of the event. He also confirmed that SFL is an effective tool for uncovering the meanings that lie behind the texts.

Similarly, using a SFL framework to analyse English writing, Ngongo [8] found that hypotaxis is employed more than parataxis in taxis relation and proved that the use of taxis and logico-semantic in these writing is crucial for the text cohesion.

Recently, Jomaa and Bidin [9] examined the logico-semantic relations in citations by EFL postgraduates from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Results from their study showed that logico-semantic relations in the citations consisted of expansion, projection, and a combination of expansion and projection with the dominant use of expansion, followed by a combination of expansion and projection, which indicates that EFL Arab postgraduates tend to employ more than two clauses in one citation.

Given the crucial essence of clause complexes, this study aims to apply insights gained from the analysis of

how clause complexes are connected in a certain systematic and meaningful way in the sample essays to draw the IELTS candidates' attention to parataxis and hypotaxis employment as essential elements in achieving cohesion, coherence as well as grammatical range, which in turn helps test-takers achieve high scores in IELTS academic writing.

2.2. Theoretical Background

2.2.1. Clause and Clause Complex

In SFL, the clause, the highest unit in the lexicogrammar has received a special status. According to Halliday [10, p.74], the clause is "the unit where meanings of different kinds, experiential, interpersonal and textual, are integrated into a single syntagm."

In Halliday's theory of functional grammar, in the analysis of a written text, a sentence can be interpreted as a clause complex: A Head clause together with other clauses that modify it. A clause complex can be constructed from more than one clause in a certain systemic and meaningful way while a clause simplex consists of a single clause.

Based on the work of the Prague school of linguistics and Halliday [10], logical interdependency analysis involves first separating the sample essays into clauses including clause simplexes and clause complexes. The clause complexes are marked off by the symbol ||| and then their interdependency is analyzed to find out how they are related to each other paratactically or hypotactically but not through embedding.

2.2.2. Parataxis and Hypotaxis

The syntactic dimension or taxis system, which indicates the logical interdependency relation between clauses in a clause complex is one of the two systemic dimensions that need to be taken into consideration in analyzing the logical structure of the clause. There are two basic forms within the system of taxis: parataxis and hypotaxis [1, p.224].

Parataxis describes the logical interdependency between elements of equal status, one initiating and the other continuing. If two clauses are paratactically related, the primary one is initiating and the secondary is continuing. Paratactic structures will be described by a numerical notation (1, 2, 3...) as in:

||| Some students can solve arithmetic sums more easily
1
|| and there are also children [[who have an aptitude for
2
science]]. |||

Contrasting with parataxis is hypotaxis, which is the logical interdependency between elements of unequal status. If two clauses are hypotactically related, the primary one is dominant (α) and the secondary is dependent (β). Hypotaxis will be marked by the Greek letter notation and a single slash in which an alpha (α) is used for dominant clauses and a beta (β) or a gamma (γ)... is marked for dependent clauses.

|||If intelligence was truly an innate quality, || there
 β α

would be no need for this training.|||

2.2.3. Exposition and Discussion Essays

IELTS writing task 2 presents a common situation or a present-day subject or problem about which people have different points of view and IELTS candidates are asked to express their opinions or to argue appropriately about a familiar topic. This is because the IELTS test-takers are being tested not for their knowledge, but for their ability to write well in a formal style appropriate to an academic context [11].

The study investigates academic IELTS sample essays taken from the textbooks and relevant IELTS websites with band scores ranging from 8.5 to 9.0 or ones prepared by examiners as examples of very good models focusing on parataxis and hypotaxis. Two types of argumentative essays namely exposition and discussion, which are viewed as common types found in the IELTS academic module, are selected for the analysis.

An exposition asks for the candidates' personal point of view, which is supported by arguments. The following is an example of an exposition essay in IELTS writing Task 2.

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

'Prevention is better than cure.'

Out of a country's health budget, a large proportion should be diverted from treatment to spending on health education and preventative measures.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

A discussion, on the other hand, is a text type that requires candidates to write about both sides of the argument followed by a judgment or a proposition towards the issue. Below is an example of a discussion essay in IELTS writing task 2.

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Some people say that the only reason for learning a foreign language is in order to travel to or work in a foreign country. Others say that these are not the only reasons why someone should learn a foreign language.

Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.

3. Research Methodology

Given this nature of the study, the descriptive method was employed as the principal one to conduct an in-depth

analysis of clause complexes employed in 60 very good or 8.5-9.0 scored essays to disclose the prominent features of clause complexes in terms of paratactic and hypotactic relation. Each sample essay was divided into clause simplexes and clause complexes. The clause complexes which were demarcated by the symbol ||| and then identified to find out how they are related to each other: parataxis and hypotaxis. After quantitative data had been collected, descriptive statistics were imported in the Microsoft Excel software for calculating the frequencies of each aspect of taxis in the data and producing charts for illustration.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Distribution of clause simplexes and clause complexes

Type	Clause simplex	Clause complex			Total No.
No.	508	537			1045
No.		Two-clause complex	Three-clause complex	More-than-three-clause complex	
No.		359	134	44	
Percentage		34.4%	12.8%	4.2%	
Percentage	48.6%	51.4%			100%

As can be seen from Table 1, it is apparent that IELTS writers make use of more clause complexes than clause simplexes in order to show the type of interdependency in the texts. The number of occurrence of clause complexes and clause simplexes is 537 and 508, representing 51.4% and 48.6% respectively. The analysis also shows that in 537 clause complexes, there are 359 two-clause complexes, accounting for 34.4%, 134 three-clause complexes, making up 12.8% and 44 with more-than-three complexes, representing 4.2%. Below are some examples of clause simplexes and clause complexes employed by IELTS writers.

- (1) ||| Industries provide employment || but they also cause a great deal of pollution. |||
- (2) ||| There are, nonetheless, some learners [[who still prefer traditional classroom learning]]. |||
- (3) ||| If they spend too much time on their computer, || they will lose their focus on studies || and their grades will suffer. |||
- (4) ||| I believe || that child-rearing should be the responsibility of both parents || and that, whilst the roles within that partnership may be different, || they are nevertheless equal in importance. |||

Among four instances, extract (2) is a clause simplex while the remainders are clause complexes of which example (1) consists of two clauses, example (3) includes 3 clauses and example (4) involves 4 clauses.

With regard to taxis system, the findings indicate that there is some inequality between the paratactic relation and the hypotactic relation among clauses in the clause complexes in the essays. Specifically, there are 217 clause complexes being of paratactic relation whereas hypotactic relation is represented in 554 complexes to indicate the dependent relationship among clauses in complexes.

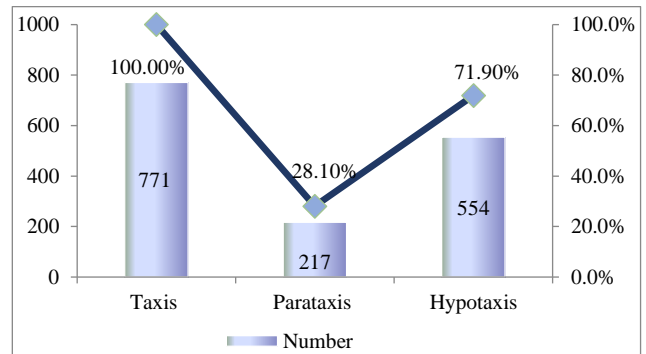


Figure 1. Distribution of parataxis and hypotaxis

A great number of employed hypotaxis suggests that IELTS writers tend to present their arguments using unequal status. In fact, Eggins [12, p.338] stated that “Hypotaxis is generally more common in written texts because dependency relations require more care by the writer to construct and more effort by readers to interpret than parataxis. The hierarchic organization of information demanded by hypotaxis also offers the writer a resource for offering readers a more closely controlled logic between events.”

It is notable that the majority of hypotactically semantic relations are enhancement with 371 instances. Examples of hypotactic enhancement are illustrated below:

- (5) ||| In contrast, those [[doing blue-collar jobs]] may face redundancy || *when* too many applicants compete for the same position. |||
- (6) ||| This is not surprising || *because* a big chunk of the global population lives in developing countries. |||
- (7) ||| Most students will not learn anything || *unless* it is compulsory. |||
- (8) ||| For example, a 3 year old can learn multiple languages || *by* simply interacting with people [[who speak those languages]]. |||

It can be seen that the clauses in examples (5), (6), (7) and (8) do not have equal status. One clause enhances the meaning of another by qualifying it with reference to time, reason, condition or manner to provide a cohesive tie to the previous clauses in the text. These resources enable the writers to control the flow of information and to organize the text by showing relationships between clauses.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the second most frequent in clause combination is paratactic extension with 178 instances. The following are some examples taken from the sample essays.

- (9) ||| Nowadays, online classes have become more popular || *and* many students enroll in them. |||
- (10) ||| Many people are aware of the benefits of recycling; || *yet* they prefer to dump their domestic waste on the streets or in landfills. |||
- (11) ||| In my opinion, experience is certainly important || *but* it is not as important as a degree. |||
- (12) ||| It is important for children [[to realize their mistakes]]; || *otherwise*, they will grow up into adults [[who pose a threat to the wellbeing of the society]]. |||

In examples (9), (10), (11) and (12), two clauses are paratactically related, which are introduced by such conjunctions as ‘and’, ‘yet’, ‘but’ or ‘otherwise’, the primary one is initiating and the secondary one continuing, showing an equal status.

The findings of the study also show a slightly high percentage use of three-clause complexes and more than three-clause complexes with 12.8% and 4.2 % respectively. An implication of this, therefore, is that the writers have a tendency to use a combination of paratactic and hypotactic linkage to set up a semantic relation with what precedes. Consider the following extracts from IELTS sample essays.

(13) ||| Disruptive students may be very intelligent || *and* find the classes boring || *because* the work is too easy. |||

(14) ||| *If* they regularly turn up late for work || *or* take too many holidays, || it can lead to disagreements. |||

(15) ||| *When* others recognize our efforts, || we will want to work even harder || *and* achieve greater results. |||

(16) ||| *Since* they have to constantly upgrade their skills || *and* learn new programming languages || *as* they arrive, || the online tutorials are a boon for them. |||

In example (13), the primary clause specifies ‘disruptive students’ while the second clause is added to the primary clause by means of paratactic extension and the third clause qualifies the previous clauses with some circumstantial features of cause. In extract (14), (15), and (16), the combination of parataxis expressed via ‘or’, ‘and’ and hypotaxis accompanied via ‘if’, ‘when’, ‘since’ and ‘as’ to form clause complexes, which represent textually-related messages in such a systemic and meaningful way.

5. Conclusion

The present study has sought to identify how IELTS writers develop their ideas through generating complex structures by means of parataxis and hypotaxis. Based on a systemic-functional linguistic analysis, the study has found that the dominant type of taxis employed in IELTS sample essays is hypotaxis, which indicates their dependency. Such analysis can act a reminder of expectations for effective clause-combining strategies in written language. It is obvious that mastery of a range of clause combinations by means of parataxis and hypotaxis is of great importance for the expression of arguments and opinions in written

English, helping writers, in this case, learners of English establish logical relations between states of affairs with a wide variety of structures, thereby resulting in highly desirable IELTS essays.

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