

Discoursal Analysis of Rhetorical Structure of an Online Iraqi English Newspaper

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Abstract

Rhetorical structure is helpful in improving how the writers maintain cohesion in their writings. This study examines how the Iraqi writers maintain cohesion in the text by analyzing the various rhetorical moves in Azzaman, an online Iraqi newspaper. To this purpose, twelve opinion articles from Azzaman Iraqi newspaper, published from January 2013 to June 2013 were analyzed. The findings revealed a common rhetorical pattern: the introduction section, the intermediate section, and the coda section (conclusion stage). All these were frequently used, but the use of intermediate section (solution stage) and coda section (moral stage) were less frequently-used in comparison with the introduction section. The findings of this study reflect the way Iraqis write opinion articles in English newspapers, and generally show that the use of similar patterns in the rhetorical structure mirrors the writing of second language writers' writing to convey information to second language readers.

Keywords: Rhetorical structure, rhetorical moves, online newspaper, cohesion, opinion articles

Introduction

News is a means of transferring new information about recent events (Reach, 2002). In the discourse of news, there are two types of texts, i.e. expository texts like news reports and argumentative texts like opinion texts which reflect the author's opinion about a specific subject. Opinion texts or articles are usually published in newspapers or magazines. Moreover, it is also featured in several opinion articles from periodicals editorials, columns, Op-Eds, etc. (Hatim and Mason 1997). Opinion articles express the opinions of the authors and represent the perspective of the organization. It influences the ordinary readers since it is blended with values and beliefs of the writers. Stromback (2005) analyzed the opinion articles in Sweden newspapers and the New York Times (an American newspaper) about the 'War in Iraq' and revealed that writers differ in their views and political opinions. They argue that American newspapers used some words to glorify and justify the United States' war on Iraq through using some linguistic tools that reflect their political opinions.

In fact, the language used in newspapers does not always give facts about the real world but it represents ideas, values and beliefs (Fowler, 1991). It reflects the culture and influences the readers into constructing certain beliefs, attitudes and opinions, i.e. social representations, towards certain events in society. It shows how the news can affect the opinion of the readers. In this sense an opinion presents an effective way to indirectly influence the readers' opinions about a specific subject. Moreover, culture has a great impact on the language used in the news. It influences the norms of writings (Kaplan, 1966). In fact, mother tongue affects the manner in which the individual perceives the world and this may affect how that individual learns a second or foreign language (Kaplan, 1966). As a result, when news is written by foreign language

speakers it might be influenced by their mother tongue languages. According to Kaplan (1966, 1987), essays written by foreign language speakers in English language are indirect and include many digressions due to differences that are induced by culture. He states that second language writers have a compounded challenge of producing coherent texts when writing in foreign or second language such as English due to different cultural background. This is true since “written texts represent a convergence of different stylistic, cultural, religious, ethical, and social notions, all of which comprise written discourse notions and frameworks” (Hinkel, 1994, p: 353).

According to Kaplan’s suggestion, writing styles differ across cultures. This point of view has been widely supported by linguistic researches paving the way to the discovery that there are unique rhetorical traditions. This supports the fact that “people in different cultures do not only write in contrasting styles, as has been adequately demonstrated in numerous contrastive rhetoric studies, but they also develop other methods of writing because of the difference in world views” (Dumanig et al., 2009: 3). In fact, one of the most influential theories to make the writing more effective is the rhetorical structure theory which comprises a set of strategies used to make articles more persuasive. Mann and Thompson (1988) define rhetorical structure as “the art of effective expression (speaking & writing) and the persuasive use of language” (p. 218).

The use of language and its social structure are considered to be factors in identifying the rhetorical structure. In a study conducted by Katajamaki and Kosketa (2006) they presented their rhetorical structure model of the editorial news text and divided into three sections: the introduction, intermediate and coda section. The intermediate section is subdivided into two stages of rhetorical structure which include the intermediate stage and solution stage. The last section is the coda section which is subdivided into two stages: conclusion stage and amoral stage.

The introduction section describes an event and gives an overview about the events or situations. In opinion writing, at this stage the writer may present the opinion or personal views about the events, issues or situation. On the other hand, the intermediate section provides reasons, examples and suitable solution for the events, issues or situation which eventually moves the text to the consequences of the event/issue. This section is also subdivided into two stages, the intermediate stage and solution stage. Intermediate stage refers to the reasons or examples of the events or issues while the solution stage gives the suitable solution for the events. Lastly, the coda section gives a conclusion and moral for the events or situations. It is also subdivided into two stages: the conclusion and moral stages. Conclusion stage ends the text or events while moral stage is considered as a section of its own. Such a model of analyzing the opinion articles will help in organizing the writing at the macro level.

Based on what was stated above, the present study adopted the rhetorical structure analysis in order to describe the relations between text parts in functional terms. Rhetorical structure consists of sections and stages such as: introduction, intermediate (intermediate or solution stage) and coda section (conclusion or moral stage). The use of rhetorical structure provides the macro structure in writing, which helps in making the writing more organized. Consequently, the writing could easily be understood and is reader-friendly. More specifically, this study focuses on the rhetorical moves that play an important role in maintaining the cohesion of a text.

Methodology

The present study made use of qualitative approach to collect and analyze the data. To this purpose, twelve opinion articles were randomly selected from Azzaman Iraqi newspaper. The

data were collected from the website <http://www.azzaman.com> of Azzaman which publishes daily news in Iraq. This Iraqi newspaper is considered as widely-read online news in Iraq. It is published in two languages--Arabic and English. However, the news used in this study was selected from the English edition. The data were collected within a period of six months, starting from January 2013 and ending in June 2013. This means that 2 opinion articles, which focused on the most important political issues, were taken each month. The issues related to politics were chosen because this is the common place where columnists write their views and opinions most easily accessible online to the public.

The data analysis in this study focused on the rhetorical structure of the news and thus, the researchers classified the texts into three sections: the introduction section, intermediate section and the coda section. The intermediate section was further subdivided into two stages: the intermediate stage and solution stage. The coda was also classified into two stages, i.e. the conclusion stage and moral stage. Also, the researchers integrated the rhetorical structure theory, modified by Van Dijk (1993) and later on modified by Katajamaki and Kosketa (2006). The rhetorical structure helped to identify the various parts of the opinion articles.

Analysis and results

The results of the study show that in terms of rhetorical structure, the three sections mentioned above are used in most of the selected articles, but they differ in the use of stages especially at the solution and moral stages. Most of the articles do not have solution and moral stages. The solution stage is found in 3 articles out of 12 articles, while the moral stage is evident in 5 articles out of 12 articles. This simply means that the writers do not provide the readers with proper solution and moral for the events.

Rhetorical structure in Iraqi online opinion articles

The results of the study reveal that the occurrence of introduction section, intermediate section and coda section are evident. Such occurrences are presented in table 1 below, with the frequency of occurrences of the rhetorical structure found in the 12 articles.

Table 1. Frequency of occurrence of the rhetorical structure

Rhetorical structures Sections	Rhetorical structures occurs in 12 opinion articles	%
Introduction section	12	100%
intermediate stage	12	100%
solution stage	3	25%
Conclusion stage	12	100%
Moral stage	5	41.6%

Table 1 illustrates the occurrences of rhetorical structure in Azzaman's online opinion articles. The structure of opinion articles differ in the intermediate and coda sections. From the table above one can infer that even the opinion articles provide all the sections, though their structures differ from one section to another. Among the 12 articles, the introduction section,

intermediate section (intermediate stage) and conclusion sections (conclusion stage) have equal number of occurrences used in the 12 articles. However, other stages have different number of occurrences. For instance, the solution and moral stages have less number of occurrences of rhetorical structure. In the intermediate section, 3 articles (25 %) used the solution stage out of 12 opinion articles. In the coda section of the opinion articles, 5 articles used the moral stage (41.6%).

It is to be noted that Kaplan's (1966) point of view that culture influences the norm of writings and Tannen's (1984) view that writers establish within their culture specific norms of writing in a foreign or second language, have been widely supported by the results of the present study. This indicates that Iraqi opinion article writers too have created certain norms of writing in English language by supplying their readers with three basic rhetorical structures: introduction, intermediate and conclusion, which designates that Iraqi opinion article writers do not have a penchant to supply their reader's with suitable solutions and morals regarding the issues being tackled, as shown in Figure 1 below:

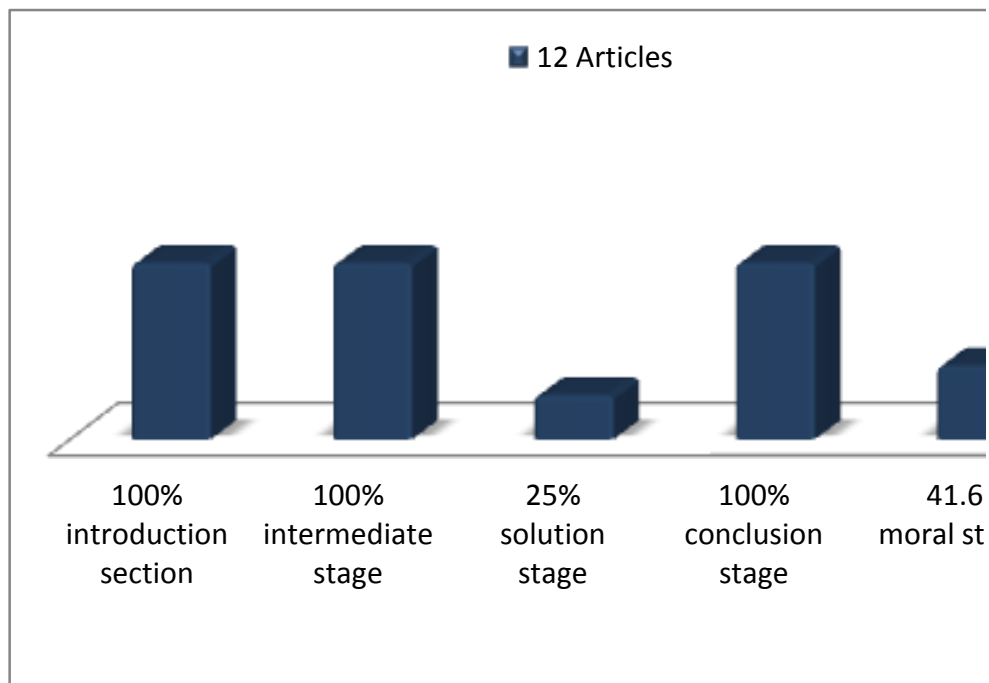


Figure 1. Occurrence of the rhetorical sections in 12 articles

Figure 1 reveals the commonly-used sections in the 12 online opinion articles from Azzaman newspaper. It shows that the introduction section, intermediate section (intermediate stage), coda section (conclusion stage) are frequently used. Of course, the least used rhetorical structures are intermediate section (solution stage) and coda section (moral stage). The opinion articles in the Iraqi newspaper show that the rhetorical pattern focuses on introduction section, intermediate section (intermediate stage), coda section (conclusion stage) rather than the other stages, i.e. solution and moral stages. The example below shows the norm that Iraqi writers follow in their writings.

Azzaman, January 28, 2013: Iraq warns Kurds over oil exports to Turkey. By Shaymaa Adel

Introduction section

“Iraq has issued a stern warning to Kurds over their attempts to export large quantities of crude oil to Turkey. This is a red line, warned Iraqi Oil Minister Abdulkareem al-Aibi. The warning came as the minister was briefing the local press on the surge in the country’s oil output and export capabilities.....”

Intermediate section***Intermediate stage***

“Oil is the bone of contention and the Kurds have angered the central government by proceeding ahead with the development of oil fields and contracts with foreign firms without Baghdad’s approval.....”

Solution stage

“The Kurds are under obligation to ferry all the oil, they produce to the national export systems. But unfortunately this is not the case. Our oil differences are exacerbating.”

Coda section***Conclusion stage***

“The Kurds say they can produce up to 200,000 barrels a day but the disputes over how to export the volume and who will collect the royalties have not made it possible to add the volume to Iraq’s surging oil exports.”

Moral stage

“There are no confirmed reports of the volume of crude oil the Kurds are shipping to Turkey, but the minister said the government would not tolerate any action by the Kurds to export their oil to neighboring states.”

The facts in the opinion articles are usually presented to force the readers to the biases presented in the article. Therefore, all the new ideas and opinions are usually proven through the rhetorical argument. In this, the writers make use of the facts that are acceptable by their audience to gain support about their ideas. The above example shows the rhetorical structure in the article on “Iraq warns Kurds over oil exports to Turkey”. The fact here is that “Kurds exports oil to Turkey”, but the article uses several rhetorical structures in the introduction section in order to convince the readers to the idea that Kurds do not have the right to export oil without agreement from the central government. This is evident that Iraqi online opinion writers follow different rhetorical structures to express their opinions on a particular issue.

The introduction section in the opinion articles usually provides a general overview about the issue in which specific issues are foregrounded. For example, the introduction section article used rhetorical argument that supports the article’s idea starting with “*Iraq has issued a stern warning to Kurds over their attempts to export large quantities of crude oil to Turkey...*”. Then, it moves to the intermediate section. It includes the intermediate stage which is common in most writings. Similarly, Iraqi opinion writers provide the reasons about why the central government warns Kurds not to export their oil as highlighted in the introduction section. In this article, the readers are made aware about the importance of oil according to Iraq government and how Kurds do not abide with the contract held with the central government by developing oil fields and contracts with foreign companies and exports oil without the approval of Baghdad for instance, by saying “*Oil is the bone of contention and the Kurds have angered the central government by proceeding ahead with the development of oil fields and contracts with foreign firms without*

Baghdad's approval.”After the reasons have been highlighted in the intermediate section, the solution is provided. Iraqi writers at this stage offer solutions, but in this article no solution has been offered, rather the writer tries to gain the readers to his side about the oil issue by explaining to his readers the disagreements between Baghdad and Kurds government due to reasons which have been highlighted above. This is evident in this text, “*The Kurds are under obligation to ferry all the oil, they produce to the national export system, but unfortunately this is not the case. Our oil differences are exacerbating.*”

The coda section-conclusion stage- in the opinion article is also emphasized by Iraqi writers. The coda focuses more on the concluding statement rather than providing the moral issues related to the problems presented in the introduction section. In the conclusion stage, the article supplies its readers about the Kurds’ insistence on disagreement with the Baghdad government by increasing the number of barrels of oil production and not by adding to "Iraq’s oil exports" as illustrated above in the example "*but the disputes over how to export the volume and who will collect the royalties have not made it possible to add the volume to Iraq’s surging oil exports.*”

Lastly, in the coda section-moral stage-the article tries to state moral for the issue. From the example above, in this stage, the writer provides information that if the Kurds export their oil without the central government’s approval, the government would not tolerate them. The moral stage in this article tends to be more action-oriented, tangible, and concrete rather than abstract or moral.

Generally, it can be said that the way Iraqi online opinion writes in Azzaman news follow a more structured flow of writing. Such writing is similar to the way western writers write. Dumanig, et al. (2009) state that American writers tend to follow a more structured flow of writing. From the 12 articles examined in this study, it can be concluded that the solution stage, if provided in an article, may just persuade the readers about the issues discussed in the article. This is somehow similar to the Malaysian style of writing. According to Dumanig and David (2012), Malaysian news writers do not normally include the solution stage in their writings because second language writers tend to write for second language readers and provide them with simple rhetorical structures. Apparently, the rhetorical structure in writing the online opinion articles uses persuasive techniques in order to influence the readers in adopting the media’s political views.

Conclusion

Opinion articles are one of the most widely-read parts in newspapers. It is evident from the findings of the present research that minimal differences in the rhetorical structures exist in opinion articles of Iraqi English newspapers. In the rhetorical structures, the difference occurs only in the intermediate section, particularly the solution stage and in the coda section specifically in the moral stage. Actually, Iraqi opinion articles tend to shy away from giving their readers with suitable solution or moral value. As mentioned earlier, this could be due to different factors-- linguistic-cultural, even political factors. There might be a gap not only in language, but also in writing what is considered culturally or politically correct as well. It can be noted that the articles emphasize more on the action for the event or issue at hand than on giving solution or moral about the situation. It can be concluded that the use of similar patterns in the rhetorical structure reflects the writing of second language writers’ writing to transport information to second language readers.

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