

SITUATION - PROBLEM - SOLUTION - EVALUATION: RECOGNISING HOW THESE FUNCTIONS ARE SIGNALLED IN A TEXT

MARIA INÉZ PROBST LUCENA

Colégio de Aplicação/UFSC

Introduction

One requirement for comprehending the message of a text is the ability to recognise different text organisation (McCarthy & Hewings 1988, Meurer & Motta-Roth 1997, Meurer 1998). Studies in text analysis have been developed in order to make people aware of the importance of recognising different patterns of organisation in different texts. McCarthy & Hewings (1988) point out that the preparation of a text frame is a valuable pedagogical tool which can enable teachers to lead their students to read and write better. In another study Meurer (1998 chapter 3) discusses textualization strategies used by writers to 'conduct' readers throughout texts. In this paper I suggest an analysis of one text taken from a current magazine. Based on Winter's (1994) and Hoey's (1994) assumption about the basic

text structure, Situation - Problem - Solution - Evaluation, I intend to examine the text and point out how this pattern can be identified.

The Text

Natural Friends

(1) Those people with the courage to flee city life for the tranquil beauty of the countryside often realise that there may indeed be problems of adjustment. (2) But few imagine how isolating the transition can be. (3) In Britain, however, help is now available for those seeking that country-loving, environmentally-concerned soul mate. (4) *Natural Friends*, a specialised Green Friendship Agency, has been set up for the purpose of putting like-minded environmentalists in touch with each other. (5) Started by Barbara and James Bradshaw, who even in their village retreat found few people with whom they could share social and environmental interests, the agency now has more than two thousand members - all green-minded and looking for romance. (6) *Natural Friends* hasn't yet looked into the prospect of expanding beyond British shores, but other agencies will no doubt follow their lead. (7) "Green dating", just like "green tourism", green shopping", and even "green living", will inevitably become part of the international environmentalist lexicon. (Speak up 69:7 Dec. 92 reproduced with permission by Karl Kopler editor of Speak Up)

The Analysis

The above text is a news report about a dating agency for environmentalists, which tries to put those "green minded" individuals in touch with each other, solving their problem of loneliness.

We can say that a Situation- Problem - Solution - Evaluation pattern is illustrated in the text above, but it is important to recognise how the different functions are signalled in the text. My intention is to break down the text and, by referring to the numbered sentences, point out some linguistic items which are used by the writer to signal these functions.

A number of features signal sentence (1) as a situation that has a problem associated with it. The environmentalists who want to escape from the city to live in the tranquillity of the countryside is the Situation. The Problem is that many of those people develop a feeling of loneliness, having problems with adjustment, because it is not easy for them to find a partner who shares the same feelings about the countryside. Thus in (1) the situation is described and the problem is subsequently signalled. The word *problem* in sentence (1) functions as a helpful device to signal the text structure.

It may be said that the first clause of the text, according to Hoey (1994), is a situation clause which is expressed in evaluative terms. Therefore (1) *Those people with the courage to flee city life for the tranquil beauty of the countryside often realise that there may indeed be problems with adjustment* is an example of Situation-Evaluation. Hoey (1994) points out that this can be shown if the first sentence is paraphrased into two separate sentences. So we can have:

Those people flee city life for the tranquil beauty of the countryside.(Situation) and *They are courageous.*(Evaluation)

The word *courage* positively evaluates people who want to live in the countryside in preparation for the negative evaluation that follows: *There may indeed be adjustment problems.* This kind of evaluation implies a problem. Even though this sentence does not describe the problem, it is a general statement and is followed by the particular problem, that is, the solitude caused by isolation of environmentalists who want a refuge. In addition, a negative evaluation is also implicit in (1) pointing out the problem, *there may indeed be adjustment problems.* So, despite being courageous, people suffer from problems of solitude.

Hence, the specification of the problem is signalled by sentence (2) *But few imagine how isolating the transition can be*, which details the problem or may be analysed as an example of the problem.

The use of the adjective *few* referring to people is an anaphoric reference to *people* in sentence (1) and helps readers to match the group of sentences. The conjunction *but* is a connection which signals a contrast with what was posited before and it indicates that sentence (2) contains material that is incompatible with the positive evaluation of sentence (1).

The use of the adverb *how* in this context, i.e., preceding “isolating”, is a signal of the problem and may raise the expectation that a response is pending. What can be done to solve the problem of isolation? A response is missing and the reader needs one. It comes in (3) and (4): an agency which puts like-minded environmentalists in touch with each other.

Sentence (3) follows on to present a response or, in other words, signals the solution. The sentence *help is now available* refers anaphorically to sentence (2) where the problem of being isolated is illustrated. In (4) the expression *set up for the purpose of...* indicates an attempt to solve the problem and this attempt is legitimised by the evaluation of the agency: *specialised.* So, the solution is posited. On the whole, all sentences (3) - (6) contain elements of Solution (or response) and at the same time these sentences provide more details about the agency, which validates the solution, thus making it more authentic and real.

In essence we could say that the lexical item *purpose* is an item signalling a response. For example, in our context the purpose is to put people (environmentalists) in touch with each other and in doing so, solve the problem of solitude for those who want to live in the countryside. Another feature of response is the verb form that occurs in sentence (4), the present perfect which, according to Hoey (1994), “is the natural tense for the description of Response”. In accordance with his statement, responses happen in the past but influence the present.

Last but not least, we can say that this text provides a positive evaluation for the particular solution presented, which avoids a dissatisfaction on the part of the reader. As McCarthy & Carter (1994) point out,

A text which ends with no positive solution offered leaves the reader with a feeling of unease; no one likes to think problems are insoluble. (MacCarthy & Carter, 1994: 55)

However as we have already seen, evaluation occurs in different parts of this text and not only at the end. Sentences (3) to (6) explain why the agency is important. Sentence (4) gives a positive evaluation of the *Agency*. As a result, the evaluative clause already given in the middle of the text may serve to provide an incentive to read on. As Hoey (1994) puts it this is common when people report someone else's work.

Additionally, according to Winter (1994) it is necessary to have a basis/reason for the Evaluation. Sentence (5) is a likely Basis/Reason for the evaluation on sentences (6) and (7). Then, in (5) *The agency now has more than two thousand members - all green-minded and looking for romance.* The expression *more than two thousand members* is a reason for evaluating the result of the initiative of the agency in sentences (6) and (7).

The expression *no doubt* in sentence (6) *Natural Friends hasn't yet looked into the prospect of expanding beyond British shores, but other agencies will no doubt follow their lead*, excludes the uncertainty about the expansion of such an agency, judging, in a sense, how good this kind of organisation actually is. Finally, in sentence (7) "*Green dating*" just like "*green tourism*," "*green shopping*," and even "*green living*" will *inevitably become part of the international environmentalist lexicon*, the adverb *inevitably* indicates the quality and the value of the organisation, concluding that *Green Date* will certainly be part of the environment lexicon, helping people who love nature to find other, like-minded people and thus avoid their problem of solitude.

Finally, we could say that despite the fact that this text is not an advertisement, it could function as one. A product is described (the agency), a problem is proffered and the solution is offered by the product.

Conclusion

As we have seen, lexical items and the existing connections between sentences may be fundamental to predict text structure, leading readers to identify the writer's purpose. Thus the investigation of text structures may be used effectively by teachers and students in a classroom setting. For instance, the analysed pattern of text organisation, Situation - Problem - Solution - Evaluation, occurs frequently in advertisements. Learners may be taught to recognise the different parts of texts that are familiar to them but most of the time are not aware of the different function of each part of these texts. Consequently, by learning how to identify different patterns of texts and how to recognise their macrostructure, learners will considerably develop their writing abilities besides adopting a more independent and critical posture towards meaning during the process of comprehension.

REFERENCES

Hoey, M. 1994. Signalling in discourse: a functional analysis of a common discourse pattern in written and spoken English. In *Advances in Written Text Analysis*, ed. by M. Coulthard. London: Routledge.

MacCarthy, M. and Hewings, M. 1988. An alternative approach to the analysis of text. In *Sonderdruck aus PRAXIS des neusprachlichen Unterrichts*. Dortmund: Verlag Lambert Lensing.

MacCarthy, M and Carter, R. 1994. Observing and exploiting patterns. In *Language as discourse: Perspectives for language teaching*. London: Longman.

Meurer, J. L. 1998. *Aspects of Language in Self-help Counselling*. Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente. Florianópolis: Ed. da UFSC.

Meurer J. L. e Mota-Roth, D. 1997. *Parâmetros de Textualização*. Santa Maria: Ed. da UFSM.

Winter, E. 1994. Clause relations as information structure: Two basic text structures in English. *Advances in Written Text Analysis*, ed. by M. Coulthard. London: Routledge.