

The Effectiveness of Narrative VS .Expository Texts: Which One is More Effective On the Scores Gained by TOEFL Test – Takers

Habibollah Mashhady¹

Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the effects of the narrative vs.expository texts on the TOEFL test-takers' scores. To this end, the data were obtained and gathered from students of Shaheed Rajaee University who were studying English as a foreign language, having the same background knowledge, including both males and females. The data seem to indicate that there is no significant difference in the scores gained by students on a standard TOEFL test between expository texts and narrative texts.

Key Word:Narative Text , Expository Text,TOEFL test, native language

¹- A member of scientific Society, English Teaching Department, Zabol University

1- Introduction

There are several reasons for studying the differences between a narrative text and an expository one, based on students' performances on standard placement test of TOEFL. From a more scientific point of view, studies of this sort represent a rather new research frontier in this field. There is little known about how learners perceive different genres like expository and narrative, as they read a text. The extent to which learners' scores may vary on a standard placement test like the TOEFL, based on their knowledge of the genre styles has rarely been looked at from a more practical point of view. This factor will with little doubt have important consequences on the results of different sorts learners may obtain.

More detailed understanding of the difference between these two genres will help both test-designers to realize in which kind of genre students perform significantly better and teachers who will know which kind of texts are more comfortable and comprehensible for students. Having these considerations in mind, this study was designed to search about some students' performance on a standard placement test with respect to the different kinds of genres they were being tested, particularly wanting to know whether the students performed better on narrative texts, as it is assumed by most researchers. This study was framed by one primary research question. The question specifically asked what is the relationship between narrative texts and expository texts based on scores gained by TOEFL test - takers? In order to answer this question the results obtained by a particular group of students on the TOEFL test was compared to see whether there existed any significant difference between the two genres.

There were several reasons for examining a narrative genre and an expository one. The first reason was that although this matter may have consequential implications, little research has been done on this topic particularly in Iran. The second reason was the ongoing debate

about the fact that narrative discourse as opposed to informational discourse is more natural, accessible and learnable. With respect to the second point, it should be pointed out that although there is a rich literature on the powerful effect of the narrative discourse (Nino, 1988; Peterson and McCabe, 1983), there is lack of research regarding the comparison of this type of genre with others including the expository genre. It has been the case that most researchers and theorists in the field of genre analysis have claimed that narrative genres are innately more natural for students to learn than other types of genre (Bruner, 1986). Another reason why this research was chosen was that its results could possibly be generalized and thus have an impact on the types of texts students study in school. If it is proved that narrative texts are more comprehensible for learners, curriculum makers, especially in Iran, could begin thinking about some serious version in their work regarding the kind of genre they implement in students' textbooks.

2- Writing as Product or Process

Most students, both in their native language and in the second language, have receive minimal or no instruction in learning how to write, or how to understand both the written and the oral texts. They recieve feed-back-often unhelpful because it is incomprehensible to them (Cohen and Robbins, 1976) – on the product they have submitted for correction and grading but no one has led them through the process of generating ideas, organizing them into a coherent sequence, and putting them on paper.

What has been taken for instruction in composition has been effect, evaluation of a product. Recently, various writing specialists have proposed a distinction between the process of writing and the written product. Their contention is that if the teacher wants to improve the product. She must assist the students in ways that will enable them to improve the process they go through to produce that

product. Murray (1980, P. 30) makes this point quite graphically by saying. “The process of making meaning with written language cannot be understood by looking backward from a finished page. Process cannot be inferred from product any more than a pig can be inferred from a sausage. It is possible however for us to follow the process forward from blank page to final draft and learn something of what happens.”

As Donovan and McClelland (1980, P.X) so succinctly describe the situation, thinking of writing from the point of view of a process and a product “turns our attention from the experience of praising and blaming the writer to the more profound action of making the writer”. They underscore the necessity of redirecting the orientation toward composition, saying,

Until the recently the field of composition has been sustained by attention to written product and to questions about the presentation of that product. But anomalies have become apparent: the weak correlation between grammar instruction and writing ability; the limitations of negative criticism and editorial marginalia; the frustrations of dedicated teachers, the alienation of students.

Zamel (1983, p. 165) supports this position when she states, “Having recognized that the investigation of students’ written products, tells us very little about their instructional needs, researchers are now exploring writing behaviors, convinced that by studying and understanding the process of composing, we can gain insights into how to teach it.” She stresses (p. 167) the need for such research, maintaining that “ESL writing continues to be taught as if form preconceived content, as if composing were a matter of adopting

preconceived rhetorical frameworks, as if correct language usage took priority over the purposes for which language is used.”

3- Various Views on Narrative V S. Expository Texts

Regarding the whole picture of both narrative and expository texts, we come to the idea that narrative writing asks students to tell a story or describe a series of events. Narrative essays are almost always arranged in chronological order. Narrative essays may be written as a personal narrative in which the author tells about something experienced. However, expository writing asks students to give information, explain something, or define the meaning of something. Expository essay may be developed with facts and statistics, examples, cause and effect, and/or definitions. Usually, the expository essay is unemotional and written in the third person.

Dyson (1988) in the examination of the drawing, talking, and writing of kindergartners, first, and second-graders, focuses on children’s growing awareness of text time and space as they develop as authors of fictional prose. Dyson questions the developmental appropriateness of traditional assumptions about embedded” and “disembedded” language and about “narrative” and expository” prose. Carey and Flower (1989) examine the composing process of experts writers working in expository genres. Taking a problem-solving perspective, they address the concept of creativity in writing as it is embedded in ordinary cognitive processes.

Dipardo (1989) also explores the schism between narrative and exposition and argues that instruction which fosters a “grand leap” away from narrative into the presumably more grown-up world of expository prose denies students the development of a complex way of knowing and seeing, robbing them of critical developmental experience with language. On the other hand, Kants (1989) connects recent research on expository writing with a discussion of common student problems in writing a term paper. She describes rhetorical

strategies students can learn that will make their essays more interesting.

Newman (2002) describes the idea of creating a glove for each of the composition strategies for use with different text structures. He further notes that the gloves serve as a multisensory approach by providing visual clues through icons on each finger and the palm, and discusses three different gloves: the prereading glove, the narrative text structure glove. Freeman (1999) suggests that students in grades 4-12 can develop their ear for expository writing and improve their skills by having well-written expository pieces read to them regularly.

McCallum and Moore (1999) examine the relationship between reported imagery and comprehension of main ideas in exposition. They find that constrained imagery is positively associated with the comprehension with failure. They also suggest that imagery and comprehension are related to subject's background knowledge, so they conclude that imagery is not a precondition for comprehension.

In an attempt to address the role of prior knowledge in the comprehension of narrative and expository text, Gordon (1992) proposes two major categories of discourse, and gives insights into some of the differences in the essence of prior knowledge required to comprehend each text type. Vogt and Connet (1992) argue that teachers should apply the same techniques to teach expository writing in social studies textbooks as they do with teaching children's literature. McIntosh (1991) presents four forms of writing appropriate for the mathematics class: (1) logbooks; (2) journals; (3) expository writing; and (4) creative writing. Scharer, Lehman, and Peters (2001) investigate the nature of books discussions about expository and narrative texts in fourth and fifth-grade classrooms, and found that literary and informational topics are discussed most in both texts. They further claim that teachers' questions posed during the expository discussion are more literal than for the narrative text.

Kress (1982) defines a narrative text as the sequence of events which suggests its own sequential, linear structure to the child. She believes that in these types of texts, the presence of cohesive ties is mostly evident. However, in standard tests like TOEFL, instead of narrative texts, it is mostly expository texts which are used. But most genre researchers believe that the use of narrative texts should be employed more often in standardized tests. Kress points to several features of a narrative text that have a profound effect on how learners perceive them and also how students perform on such genres. Some of these characteristics include:

- these genres have cohesive ties
- these genres have sequence of events
- these genres have co-present clausal units
- these genres tend to be more on the subjective side
- these genres obey the natural order in which events take place
- the structures go unnoticed because they are part of the whole text.

4- This Study

The aim of the present study was to determine the effects of the narrative versus expository texts on the scores gained by TOEFL test-takers to get their relationship. To this end, it was designed to test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis:

there is no relationship between narrative and expository texts in the terms of the scores gained by TOEFL test-takers.

5- Method

5-1- Participants

The subjects were 30 males and female students of English, participating in a proficiency test. The subjects were studying English as a second or foreign language to get their B.A in teaching English at

Rajae's Teachers' Training University in Iran in the fall of the year 1382.

5-2- Instrumentation

Determining whether students did better on narrative texts or expository texts, the following two measures were respectively used:

1. Students' scores on a narrative text and an expository text

Here the students answered 10 questions that followed every passage in the Reading Comprehension section of the TOEFL test. Overall, the students had to read five passages and answer up to 50 questions. However, among the five passages only two passages were chosen, each passage followed by 10 questions to be answered by the subjects. The passages that were chosen included the first passage which was a narrative text and the last passage which was an expository text.

2. The TOEFL Test

The test used in this study consisted of three sections: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension.

5-3- Design

For conducting this study, an ex-post facto design was used.

5-4- Procedure

In order to test the hypothesis of the study, the following statistical procedure was utilized:

1. The matched t-test procedure was used to find out whether there existed any significant difference in student's performance on expository and narrative texts.

6- Results

When the matched t-test was run to investigate the relationship between the results of the two tests, the following tables were obtained:

Table1. Paired Sample Correlation

N	Correlation	Sig.
30	.098	.608

Table 1 indicates the paired sample correlation which demonstrates that there is almost 'no' correlation between the sets of scores.

Table2. Paired Sample Test

Paired Differences					t	df	g.(2-tailed)
Mean	d. Deviation	Std .Error Mean	95% confidence interval of the Difference				
6.6667	26.3050	4.8026	lower 3.1558	upper 6.4891	1.388	29	.176

Table 2 suggests that there lies no statistically significant difference between the two measures obtained. Since this piece of information indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the two sets of scores, the null hypothesis presented earlier in the paper cannot be rejected. Thus, the belief held by many researchers that narrative texts are more comprehensible for learners, is not justifiable and can seriously be challenged.

7- Discussion

When the performance of the students in the two passages was compared, a statistically significant difference was not found between the two sets of scores obtained by the students. Consequently, it was

statistically proved that students do not necessarily perform better on narrative texts. These results suggest that at least in standardized tests like TOEFL it does not make a great difference whether it is a narrative or an expository genre that is employed.

Yet, there is a possibility that perhaps if the students were faced with questions following the text that were of a different nature, and reflected the type of genre that was implemented; the results could have been significantly different. There are occasions where a text may be very comprehensible to readers but the questions that advance it misguide the readers and force them make wrong decisions regarding the right answered.

Therefore, it would not be all to logical to conclude that just because a certain number of students achieved a particular score on a particular test, the problem is with the text they were being tested on. As much as the problem may be with the texts, it could also be because of the preceding questions or even with other factors like the students themselves. Thus, in order to come up with more definite results, more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to shed more light on this issue.

8- Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

As the results obtained from this study were being analyzed to determine whether or not students performed better on narrative texts as it was claimed by many researchers, it was concluded that students did not do significantly better on narrative texts, as would have been expected, These results may have been due to the questions that followed the texts, which sometimes required the learners to do inferencing instead of becoming aware of the chronological time – order that existed in the text.

In the past the approach to communicative competence in writing was one off drill and skill. Teachers drilled the various grammar forms expecting students to develop the skill needed to

communicative via written messages. Both teachers and students focused their attention while reading and/or writing on the correct use of the drilled grammar forms. All writing was directed to the teacher, and little interest or importance was attached to the content that was written (Atwell, 1985).

So, more detailed understanding of the difference between narrative and expository texts will help both test _ designer to realize in which kind of genre students perform significantly better and teachers who will know which kind of texts are more comfortable and comprehensible for students; therefore, these considerations should be kept in mind of all the authoritative people.

9- Suggestions for Further Research

Due to the generative nature of research, each study can arise a lot of questions. In the case of this project, there are some aspects which deserve further investigation:

1. The nature and complexity of prior knowledge as it relates to narration and exposition.
2. The interaction of text variable and prior knowledge that make narratives or expositions easy or difficult to comprehend.
3. The effects of such components of prior knowledge as different attitudes, beliefs, social affiliations, and communication conventions on comprehension of narrative and expository text.
4. The relative importance in comprehension of exposition and narration.
5. The role of prior knowledge in relation to top-down processing concerns such as schema selection, activation, maintenance, and utilization.
6. The differences in processing demands across the two genres.
7. The role of narrative and expository text in promoting conceptual change, and.

8. The role of personal involvement as a component of prior knowledge in the comprehensive of narrative and expository text.

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کارایی متون توصیفی در مقابل متون توضیحی

حبیب ا... مشهدی¹

هدف از مطالعه حاضر تعیین تاثیر متون توصیفی در مقابل متون توضیحی بر نمرات آزمون شوندگان تافل است. برای این منظور، داده‌ها از دانشجویان (زن و مرد) رشته زبان انگلیسی دانشگاه شهید رجایی که از دانش پیش‌زمینه‌ای یکسانی برخوردار بودند، جمع‌آوری شدند. داده‌ها حاکی از این است که تفاوت قابل ملاحظه‌ای در نمرات امتحان استاندارد تافل دانشجویان بین متون توصیفی و توضیحی وجود ندارد.

واژگان کلیدی: متون توصیفی، متون توضیحی، آزمون تافل، زبان مادری