

**UNGUARDED PATTERNS OF THINKING:
PHYSICAL AND TOPICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS
OF STUDENT JOURNALS**

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Journals have been utilized in classrooms both as a reflective tool for students and as a feedback instrument for teachers. The current study however focused on form by means of analyzing the informal writing styles of students through a physical and topical structure analysis of randomly selected journal paragraphs. Following Lautamatti (1987) and Simpson (2000), two additional topical development schemes have been identified. Results indicate that topic repetition techniques and cohesive devices used adhere to the subjective nature of journal writing. Recommendations and pedagogical implications are also provided.

Genre of Personal Writing

A journal is one example of many kinds of personal accounts that exist in both published and unpublished forms. It usually contains descriptions of the writer's experiences and observations, written over regular time intervals. Similar types of personal writings are diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and letters. The diary form began to flourish in the late Renaissance, a few decades after the invention of the printing press. Due to the increase in the popularity of the written form, both the English and the French began to record personal experiences which include historical details, often of high interest to the people of their times (Doherty & Cornog, p. 140). Although diaries and journals are often intended for the author's use alone, there have continuously been various personalities, such as politicians and celebrities, who attempt to write their biographies for publication purposes, either by themselves, or by ghostwriters.

Journals as Classroom Instrument

Since the genre of personal writing has become relatively popular in literary circles, specifically under the nonfiction category, several scholars have noted the advantages of maintaining journals. Moreover, according to Lucas (1990), “Journal writing, used in different ways and for different purposes, is now a part of many ESL classrooms” (p. 99). Teachers and writing instructors have seen the benefits of having records of one’s experiences and reflections as a collection that can be revisited as a source of writing content. As a prewriting strategy, keeping a journal with free-writings, lists, diagrams and even doodles can already be a form of brainstorming for students.

Numerous studies have been done on the positive effects of journal writing. Since outputs of student writing are typically assessment-related, it has been established that there is a need to engage students in a dialogue where teacher feedback can enable them to perceive that teachers can also be facilitators and friends (Peyton, 1990). Teachers have utilized students’ journals as a classroom instrument for many reasons, some of which are to establish rapport with students and to elaborate on students’ communicative skills (Staton & Peyton, 1988).

Mlynarczyk (1998) states that student diaries have been analyzed in depth and “continuously expanding literature relates to the uses of writing to learn[ing]” (p. 11). Researches done on students’ journals are mostly focused on reflections on subject knowledge. According to a study conducted by Connor-Greene (2000), “The results suggest that journal writing enhanced student learning as reflected in test scores. Furthermore, students perceive journal writing as a valuable assignment that fostered understanding and application of concepts” (par. 14).

Mlynarczyk has also mentioned researches that indicate that students engaging in this manner of informal writing have gained

metacognitive awareness, according to Sternglass (1988), and increased language proficiency, as stated by Britton (1970).

There has generally been positive response to journal writing, especially that which is utilized in language classrooms. To illustrate, studies on online graduate course students (Andrusyszyn & Davie, 1997), Grade Five language learners (Fazio, 2001), high school students (Gorman, 1998) and Japanese intermediate EFL learners (Casanave, 1994) reveal results that indicate improvement of students' writing skills due to the absence of a restrictive assessment nature in journal writing. It has also been recognized that dialogue journals achieve the primary purpose of fostering a relatively comfortable interactive atmosphere for students who seek teacher feedback. However, although there is a general preference for response or dialogue journals (Stallman & Roe, 1994), older students at the graduate level find it less beneficial due to its informal nature, which is normally not the writing practice at their level (Holmes & Moulton, 1995).

Language classes are not the only ones that employ the use of journals. As a tool for reflective practice, other fields of study such as nursing (Riley-Coucet & Wilson, 1997) and teaching (Bain, Ballantyne, Packer, & Mills, 1999; Dart, Boulton-Lewis, Brownless, & McCrindle, 1998; Hoover, 1994,) have also made use of journals as records of learning and observations and have also found it highly functional.

Nonetheless, all the academic studies previously mentioned serve to highlight the fact that analyses of journals have always focused on content, the students' metacognitive development and its feedback purpose to teachers.

Focus of the Current Study

Since there have been various studies that have dealt with reflective content in student journals, the focus of the current study

will be on the ways in which students develop the topics of their entries. “When students write about themselves, they have the additional benefit of interacting about and structuring meaning around content that they know about and in which they are personally invested” (Lucas). This essentially enables the students to write without the additional burden of content barrier, as revealed in academic essays whose content is sometimes not completely familiar to them. Students can then relatively write freely about any topic that they choose in their journals. Also, in contrast with academic writing, students are less conscious about how they are able to apply cohesion in their entries due to the lack of a restricting assessment character in journal writing. These result in composition that is a degree closer to authentic.

While this study also aims to analyze the linguistic implications of reflective journals, the analysis shifts toward cohesion and manners of student thought. Topical structure analysis (TSA) by Lautamatti (1987, originally published in 1978) will be used as framework for the investigation, as well as a definition of an additional topical progression by Simpson (2000).

Moreover, TSA is very much relevant to writing pedagogy since it has been used as a framework in explaining the differences between high- and low-rated essays (Connor, p. 85). In a study conducted by Schneider and Connor (1991, cited in Connor), it is revealed that highly rated essays are those that show a high proportion of sequential progression and an extended parallel progression. These two types of topical development denote that the student writers are able to show a logical succession of their ideas and are able to pull those back to the main theme. For practical purposes, Connor and Farmer (1990) also recommend that TSA be used as a revision strategy so that students may be able to identify mistakes and gain more linguistic objectivity with their works. They state that “clearer focus due to the awareness of extended parallel progression” and “better development owing to the ratio of parallel and sequential progression” have been evident in the preliminary experimental

classes in which they have conducted TSA instruction. It is then the intention of this paper to seek probable points of insight for the teaching of writing in freshman classes.

For this study, the following are the specific research questions posted:

1. What topical progressions are evident in freshmen journals?
2. What are the physical characteristics of the journal paragraphs in terms of topic-repetition techniques and cohesive devices used?
3. What are the pedagogical implications of the physical and topical structure analyses to second language writing and teaching?

METHOD

Data Gathering and Coding

Twenty journals from the researcher's two freshman composition classes have been randomly selected for this study. Of each of the 20 journals, a paragraph has been randomly selected from each student's eight journal entries. The researcher limited her study to paragraphs that belong to entries that consists of two to six paragraphs, and not from a one-paragraph journal output. This ensures that the student delineated subtopics in his/her entries, which will enable the researcher to analyze attempts at topic-partitions. Each selected entry is then marked according to student, entry number and paragraph number. Example of such codification is E-6-5, which means that the entry is the fifth paragraph in the fifth student's sixth entry.

After the two sample paragraphs have been coded, each is then divided according to independent clauses. In Lautamatti's study, full sentences were used in her analysis of a textbook excerpt. However, the current analysis will view independent clauses, as

was done in Simpson. For purposes of clarity, minor grammatical mistakes such as subject-verb agreement and prepositions have been pre-corrected since these are not the focus of the study. Each clause is then labeled accordingly.

Executing a Physical Structure Analysis

Halliday and Hasan (1976) explained the linguistic texture of phrases, sentences and paragraphs. They stated that “textual metafunction creates discourse” (p. 37). They investigated marks of cohesion such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. As a definition, cohesive devices are “surface-level ties showing relationships among elements in the text” (Tannen, 1984, p. xiv). This paper will adapt the analysis of cohesive markers.

Identifying Cohesive Devices Used

Since the initial review of the data revealed that ellipses are not present, the researcher opted to use Lautamatti’s more specific classification of markers. The following are types of connecting markers to be considered for the study:

1. Discourse Connectives indicates logical order, e.g. consequently, but, however, and;
2. Illocution Markers specify the illocutionary force behind the statements, e.g. for example, to illustrate the point;
3. Modality Markers indicate truth value and source of information, e.g. it seems probable, obviously, experts suggest;
4. Attitude Markers maintain the personal beliefs of the writers, e.g. I would like to, in my opinion;
5. Metalinguistic Markers refer to textual properties, e.g. Next we shall discuss, I shall attempt to explain; and
6. Commentaries refer to the giving of direct personal comments for readers.

Identifying Topic Repetition Techniques

The researcher also identified the different techniques by which students reiterated the discourse topics. In the following example, the topics are highlighted in bold fonts:

*“My only **goal** in ENGLONE was just to pass the subject. Seriously, I didn’t have a clear **idea** what ENGLONE was all about. But as we go from day to day, I get to have an **insight** of ENGLONE. And as we move from one essay to another, I get to establish a **goal**. And that is to **take English seriously**. I think I have achieved that through the different **essays** we had to make” (Sample N-8-1).*

In this paragraph, the student is explaining how she came to realize her goal in the English class. In the succeeding clauses, it is evident that the student attempted to replace particular words such as “idea” for “insight”. That is an example of synonym usage. The following are the classifications of repetition techniques identified by the researcher:

1. Pronouns, e.g. it, they;
2. Phrasal Counterpart, where phrases were used in exchange for the single-word topic; these can be in the form of verb phrase or noun phrase;
3. Synonym, where single-word counterparts are used, e.g. “break” for “rest”;
4. Specification, where explanations are given in exchange for the previous topic-word used; and
5. Direct Repetition.

Executing a Topical Structure Analysis

As stated previously, TSA conducted by Lautamatti and Simpson is adapted as framework for the current research. Before

proceeding with the discussion of the TSA process, some terms need to be defined.

Identifying Theme and Rheme Elements

Theme is the known information, or that which is not new to the reader, while rheme or comment refers to the new information. According to the functional sentence perspective, this is in contrast to the traditional grammatical analysis of sentences that divides through the subject and predicate elements. To illustrate, the two sentences will be used below (Richards, Platt, & Weber 1985, p. 115):

<i>1. John</i>	<i>sat in the front seat.</i>	<i>2. In the front seat</i>	<i>[sat John].</i>
Subject	Predicate	Predicate	Subject
Theme	Rheme/Comment	Theme	[Rheme/ Comment]

The second sentence shows that while the subject and predicate remain the same, the theme and rheme elements do not, if the sequencing of clauses were reconstructed.

Identifying the Discourse Topic

The initial step in conducting TSA is the identification of the discourse topic. As opposed to the elementary notion that the topic is often found at the beginning of the sentence, Huddleston (1971), as cited in Lautamatti, clarifies three kinds of topics: the mood topic (the grammatical subject), the initial-sentence element (ISE) and the discourse topic (essentially that which is talked about in the sentence). Lautamatti makes the distinction from mood topic to discourse topic. While the previous may be located in the sentence-initial position, in the active voice, the discourse topic may be located elsewhere. The essential difference is that the discourse topic is the idea being discussed in the independent clause.

As the application of these definitions is realized in journal paragraphs, confusion arises in data samples where “I” is the clearest mood topic. Again, the discourse topic is printed in bold letters in the following example:

*“I am a **member** of Santugon and I just love **being one**. I am so glad that **I** am part of this family. There are a lot of genuine or true **people** there. **I** am one of them now because I have underdone **welcoming**” (Sample L-5-2).*

The immediate topic identified could be the personal pronoun “I”. However, the rheme or comment part of the sentence reveals a new kind of topic that is developed in the succeeding clauses. This is then identified as the valid discourse topic since it is consistently being discussed in the paragraph.

Identifying the Topical Progression

After topics have been identified, they are plotted in a table to recognize the topical depth and manner of topical development. A similar analysis has been conducted by Albertini (1990). He patterns his study on that of Weissberg (1984), who adapted the topic development framework of Danes (1974). TDA shows similarities with Lautamatti’s TSA. Sixty paragraphs from experimental research reports were investigated for cohesion. The results reveal that there is a preference for given-new sequence, or the sequential progression.

Also coming from the Prague School of Linguistics and the development of topic-comment theory, Danes’ original framework names three types of progression: the simple linear progression (the theme follows that of the rheme element of the preceding sentence), the continuous theme progression, (identical themes are found in a sequence of sentence), and the derived theme progression (where sentences are connected to an extra theme called hypertheme).

The current study adapted Lautamatti's (1987) topical structure analysis where repetition of key words and phrases are analyzed in order to identify how sentential topics are discussed and developed in discourse. She classifies three kinds of sentential progressions: parallel, sequential, and extended parallel progression. In 2000, Simpson applied Lautamatti's framework in independent clauses and recognized a fourth progression which she calls the "extended sequential progression."

Here are the definitions:

1. Parallel Progression, in which topics of successive clauses are the same, producing a repetition of topic that reinforces the idea for the reader;
2. Sequential Progression, in which topics of successive clauses are always different, producing a continuous text whose clausal topics are introduced in the rheme element of the previous clause;
3. Extended Parallel Progression, in which the first and the last topics are the same but are interrupted with some sequential progression; and
4. Extended Sequential Progression, in which the comment of one clause becomes the topic of a non-consecutive clause.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of the current study is the small number of sample data retrieved from student journals. Only 20 samples are used and these are all taken from two freshman Engineering classes. In order to generate more conclusive results, an increase in the number of samples is recommended.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the summary of numerical results of the data. As can be seen in Table 1, there is an average of 4.45 topics

discussed in 5.75 independent clauses per paragraph. More significantly, there is an equal number of sentences to discourse topics.

Table 1.
Summary of Numerical Results

Elements	Frequency / Ratio
Total number of words	1,203
Average words per paragraph	60.15
Total number of sentences	89
Total number of independent clauses	115
Total number of discourse topics	89
Average clauses per paragraph	5.75
Average topics per paragraph	4.45

These results indicate that the entries contain almost the same number of topics per clause, which signifies that the students are less likely to expound on a single topic in an entire paragraph. The sample paragraphs reveal that there are only a few occurrences of topic development where a single discourse topic is explored throughout the sample.

Cohesive Devices Used

The physical structure of the student paragraphs in their journals shows that there is very little attempt to include cohesive markers in their writings. As can be seen in Table 2, the total number of markers used is 41. Comparing this with the total number of words in the entire sample, there is only a single cohesive marker used for a little over 29 words. This definitely signifies that the students make no attempt at cohesion in their journals. This is most likely due to the personal nature of the genre wherein stylistic restrictions in composition are less required than in academic writing. There is then no conscious effort to make the entries more coherent. Therefore, strings of words and phrases not directly content-related to their discourse are omitted, since these are not mandatory.

Also, the lack of cohesive markers in the samples are associated with the lack of topical development, or extended explanations of a single topic, since there is evidence of a one-to-one correspondence between topics and sentences. It is only through clauses that previously mentioned discourse topics are elaborated on.

In terms of the specific types of discourse markers, the table also reveals that discourse connectives like *because*, *also*, and *but* are the most frequent markers, comprising 83% of the minimal 41 occurrences of discourse markers.

Table 2.
Frequency of Discourse Markers

Discourse Markers	Frequency	
	No.	%
Discourse Connectives	34	83%
Illocution Markers	0	0%
Modality Markers	2	5%
Attitude Markers	2	5%
Metalinguistic Markers	0	0%
Commentary	3	7%
Total	41	100%
Ratio to Clauses	1.00	2.80
Ratio to Sentences	1.00	2.17

Discourse connectives are also the most commonly used marker since they are the most familiar kind of cohesive device learned by the students at their level. There are no occurrences of illocution and metalinguistic markers like *for example* and *I shall attempt to*, since these phrases most often require the writers to extensively elucidate on their ideas. Because the journal entries run for a maximum of six paragraphs, with four to seven brief sentences each, such insight exploration is not feasible for the students. Moreover, such markers also denote a level of formality that is often found in more intellectual written pursuits like academic writing; not in personal journals.

Modality, attitude and commentary markers are minimally present in the data, though not as frequently as the more common discourse connective samples. Modality markers signify the truth in the claims as in the data samples: *To tell you the truth* and *in fact*. These are also the only modality markers present in the data. These phrases, similar to illocution markers, offer a degree of formality, which is again ignored in personal journals. More specifically, the reason why such modals are absent may be attributed to the subjective nature of journal writing. Most content of student journals is opinions, reflections and observations. Such markers are then unnecessary in their writing: There is no need for students to distinguish facts from opinions, while this practice is a definite requirement in more formal writing.

Attitude and commentary markers such as *I would like to* and *in my opinion* also appear less frequently than discourse connectives do because these phrases can be omitted without sacrificing authorial intent. Adding these markers may also indicate a level of directness of communication with the reader, which assumes that the previous statements, prior to these markers, are stated *indirectly*. This is naturally not the case for student journals, whose lone reader is the teacher.

In sum, the cohesive markers used in student journals are only those that are necessary in the explanation of opinions. The use of other kinds of markers that are absent in the data would entail the student's needlessly addressing the reader, which would then forsake the personal nature of journal writing.

Topic Repetition Techniques

Since the analysis of topic development entails the observance of how students repeat discourse topics, it is then necessary to categorize the kinds of parallel progression techniques evident in the sample. In Table 3, it can be seen that half of the occurrences of topic repetition are through the use of pronouns.

Examples of these are *I*, *it*, *they*, and *them*. It should be noted again that the use of “I” in the sample is not directly taken as the discourse topic. The researcher had to distinguish the discourse topic, which may not be the speaker himself, from the mood topic, which is often the pronoun “I”.

Table 3.
Frequency of Topic Repetition Techniques

Topic Repetition Techniques	Frequency	
	No.	%
Pronoun	13	50%
Direct Repetition	7	27%
Synonym	2	8%
Specification	2	8%
Phrasal Counterpart	2	8%
Total	26	63%
Ratio to Clauses	1.00	4.42
Ratio to Sentences	1.00	3.42

The use of the pronoun “it” is the most common among all other pronouns used to indicate a repeated topic. As can be observed in the following examples, “it” can refer to direct and indirect ideas within the text.

*“This movie is the worst movie I’ve ever watched. **It** has a comedy” (Sample E-6-5).*

*“In my previous school, there are no such things as organization and I found **it** too boring” (Sample B-3-2).*

*“Even though I know that **it** wasn’t really that difficult, the fact that we are in school for the whole day for six days in a week is very tiring” (Sample T-3-2).*

The manner by which “it” is used in the first sample directly refers to “movie”. However, in the next two samples, “it” refers to

the clauses “no such things as organization” and “the fact that we are in school for the whole day,” respectively. In these aspects, the use of “it” is the simplest substitute for the ideas of students.

The next technique with the highest frequency of occurrence is direct repetition. Similar to pronoun usage, the comfort level of students while writing in their journals is also revealed in the textual structure of their output. There is evidently less effort to use other means of repetition such as synonym, specification and phrasal counterpart, with only two occurrences each, since these three require that students generate different terms to specify what they are attempting to reiterate. Consequently, such practice again calls attention to the linguistic devices rather than the content – an unnecessary act in journals.

Topical Progression

Simpson identifies a fourth progression – the extended sequential – as an addition to Lautamatti’s three topical progressions. As revealed in the student journal samples, it is necessary to identify two more types of progression: the sequential-parallel and its reverse, the parallel-sequential progressions. These new progressions do not follow the four original topical development patterns identified by Lautamatti and Simpson.

As can be seen in Table 4, the extended sequential progression, the sequential progression and the sequential-parallel progression are the most frequent topical development scheme found in student journals, with 35%, 30% and 25% frequency, respectively. There is a single occurrence for both extended parallel and parallel-sequential progressions, while there is none found for parallel progression.

Table 4.
Frequency of Topical Progression

Progression	Frequency	
	No.	%
Parallel	0	0%
Sequential	6	30%
Extended Parallel	1	5%
Extended Sequential	7	35%
Sequential-Parallel	5	25%
Parallel-Sequential	1	5%
Total	20	100%

A detailed discussion of each topical structure follows.

Sequential Progression

The sequential progression occurs in 6 of the 20 sample paragraphs studied for this paper. It is a relatively frequent topical development scheme that is evident in student journal entries. Here, the initial sentential topic is further developed in the succeeding paragraphs through the introduction of new topics, which serve to relate to the previous sentential topics. The following example is given as an illustration. The topics are again printed in bold fonts.

“After reading literary pieces from fiction to editorials, I have finally learned to appreciate the **art of writing**. In fact, I tried out for my **school’s official news publication** and fortunately, I bagged the position of **Filipino feature writer**. I have loved our **mother language** for so long and I knew that this would be a great **opportunity** to enhance my flexibility in terms of communicating efficiently with both the English and Filipino language” (Sample A-4-2).

The student began by introducing the idea of the “art of writing,” after which she elaborates on how her knowledge of the art of writing has helped her gain the position of Filipino feature writer. Then she points out that the class, which is implied, would

be a venue for her to improve on her English and Filipino communicative skills.

Although there seems to be a break in the logical flow of her ideas between the second and third sentences, the reader can conclude that the writer's love of the "mother language," which is Filipino, was one of the factors that enabled her to acquire the editorial position. This is an example of a lack of using a cohesive device, which could really have helped the reader understand the progression of topics.

Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the sample paragraph's sequential progression. Here, the five clausal topics are connected through a sequential or linear progression, wherein the discourse topics of succeeding clauses are based on the clauses that directly precede them.

Clause No. (A-4-2)	Topical Depth					Topic Level
	1	2	3	4	5	
A	Art of writing	SP ↓				1
B		School's official news publication	SP ↓			2
C			Filipino feature writer	SP ↓		3
D				Mother language	SP ↓	4
E					opportunity	5

Figure 1. Sample of Sequential Progression

The sequential topical progression can be characterized by a constant and uniform discussion of related ideas. Each succeeding topic serves to correlate with the previous clause. As a mark of informal writing, a teacher may conclude that the students who utilize this manner of topical development are fully aware of the content of their writing and the manner by which they can further explore that subject.

Extended Parallel Progression

Extended parallel progression is characterized by a series of clauses whose first and final topics are the same, with an interruption of sequential clauses. This is actually the preferred type of progression by teachers, as previously stated, since it shows the ability of the students to seal their discussion back to the main theme. Unfortunately, the following is the *only* sample for this kind of scheme:

*“It’s about time that the students got a little **rest** from the extensive first weeks of school. Even though I know that **it** wasn’t really that difficult, the fact that we are in school for the whole day for six days in a week is very tiring. Not to mention that we have **homeworks** every weekend. Still, a **break** for a day is quite rewarding”*
(Sample T-3-2).

Figure 2 illustrates the progression more clearly by showing how the topics are graphically presented by topical depth. The first and final clausal topic, which is “rest”, is referred to once again in the final clause with its synonym “break”. This provides evidence of the student’s ability to repeat the topic without using the same words. Between the first and final clauses are short sentences that are developed in a sequential pattern.

Clause No. (T-3-2)	Topic Depth			Topic Level
	1	2	3	
A	<p>The diagram illustrates the flow of information across four clauses (A, B, C, D). Clause A starts with 'Rest' (Topic Depth 1) and 'SP' (Topic Depth 2). Clause B continues with 'It' (Topic Depth 2) and 'SP' (Topic Depth 3). Clause C contains 'Homeworks' (Topic Depth 3). Clause D ends with 'Break' (Topic Depth 1). Arrows indicate the progression: Rest to SP, SP to It, It to SP, SP to Homeworks, and Rest to Break. A vertical arrow labeled 'PP' (Parallel Progression) connects Rest in clause A to Break in clause D.</p>	1		
B		2		
C		3		
D		1		

Figure 2. Sample of Extended Parallel Progression

It can be speculated that the student who wrote this passage may have reread what she had previously written in this paragraph, thus enabling her to conclude with her introductory statement. Although this is a journal entry, where students are not required to keenly achieve a degree of coherence and style, there is still some indication of effort in this sample. The act of referring to the initial topic in the final clause reveals a sense of closure for that particular discussion. This awareness and effort may then be the reason why there is only a single occurrence of this topical structure. The informal and even casual nature of journals does not compel the students to write in such a well-structured manner.

Extended Sequential Progression

There are seven occurrences of the extended sequential progression. It is defined as a regular sequential progression interrupted by discussions of a rheme element of a previous clause.

In this example, as can be seen in Figure 3, the general pattern of topical development is sequential. The student explains the instances that have led to the memory of his own father's death. In the final clause, "it" refers to the rheme element of the third sentence which is "(reminisce about) the same situation."

"When I checked the new posts in our block group, I was shocked of what I read. Pao wanted to inform us that he wouldn't be able to go to class this week because his father passed away just a few hours after he made that post. I began to reminisce about the same situation that I had when my own father died. Emotions came rushing in, and I remember that I felt a mixture of emotions that I can't understand. I kept wishing that it was just a nightmare that I would wake up from" (Sample F-3-3).

Clause No. (F-3-3)	Topic Depth						Topic Level
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
A	Posts	SP					1
B		Pao	SP				2
C			Father	SP			3
D				Situation	SP		4
E					Emotions	SP	5
F						I	6
G					Emotions	PP	5
H						It	4

Figure 3. Sample of Extended Sequential Progression

One may characterize this progression as a minor adaptation of the extended parallel topical development. This is evident in the majority of the sample paragraphs and it signifies that there is an attempt to explore a given topic by providing linear explanations in the succeeding clauses and returning to a previous point of discussion, as evident in the fourth to final clause in the sample.

Sequential-Parallel Progression

There are five occurrences of the fourth type of progression. The sequential-parallel combination is not identified in the data from either the Lautamatti or Simpson study. However, the freshman journal paragraphs reveal the need to specify another category.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the sequential-parallel is defined as a topical development scheme wherein a sequential progression is interrupted by a consistent *subset* of parallel progressions.

Clause No. (P-5-1)	Topic Depth				Topic Level
	1	2	3	4	
A	Knives				1
B			SP		2
C			Words		2
D			PP		2
E			Words		3
F			PP		4
		It	SP		
			Backstabbing	SP	
				Experience	

Figure 4. Sample of Sequential-Parallel Progression

This progression type shows that there are similarities with its original counterpart. Note, however, that the identification of a new type of scheme does not guarantee that this is an ideal kind of topical development due to its sequential and parallel components.

In the following example, the student introduces the topic of *backstabbing* with a metaphor of *knives*. Knives then become the first topic discussed in the data. The topical depth graph shows that the student, after relating knives with *words* (“So as words”), in the next sentence, explains the similarity between the two topics through a description of the second.

“Knives are known to be good in the culinary world and bad for the criminal mind. So as words. Words can be good and can make you happy if used properly or it can badly hurt you if used foolishly. Backstabbing is one of the social problems that we encounter today. In my experience, it is worse” (Sample P-5-1).

Although coherence and identification of meaning will enable the reader to see the connection between the D (“it can badly hurt you if used foolishly”) and E (“**Backstabbing** is one of the social problems”) clauses, the interruption between ideas is similar to the discussion of sequential progression previously. It also necessitates that the student use a cohesive marker that would directly relate *backstabbing* with the previous rheme, which is again lacking in the sample.

However, an evaluation of the overall clause would reveal that the student was still able to form a uniform progression, and the manner by which he related his ideas are highly coherent and lucid due to the largely sequential progression of key ideas.

Parallel-Sequential Progression

Unlike the sequential-parallel progression, parallel-sequential topical development is not an integration of two simple progressions.

The parallel-sequential progression is defined as the *addition* of a sequential pattern to a consistent initial set of parallel progression.

In Figure 5, the sample paragraph began with a series of parallel progressions where *movie* is the subject, and later on repeated with the *it* pronoun. It is only in the sixth clause that a new topic has been identified and developed in the subsequent clauses.

Clause No. (E-6-5)	Topic Depth				Topic Level
	1	2	3	4	
A	Movic ↓ PP				1
B	It ↓ PP				1
C	It ↓ PP				1
D	Movie ↓ PP				1
E	it	— ↓ SP			1
F		Lessons	— ↓ SP		2
G			Person	— ↓ SP	3
H				Napoleon	4

Figure 5. Sample of Parallel-Sequential Progression

There is only one incidence of the parallel-sequential combination. It can be observed in the sample below that this progression has a repetitive beginning, as though the student has only decided on the focus in the middle section of his writing. The sample also indicates a lack of cohesion within clauses.

*“This **movie** is the worst movie I’ve ever watched. **It** has a comedy but **it** doesn’t make me laugh. I can’t see why this kind of **movie** is produced. **It’s** kinda boring but I learned some **lessons**. Every **person** has the freedom to express himself. I’m amazed at **Napoleon** whose face remains the same even though he’s happy, sad or mad”*
(Sample E-6-5)

Parallel Progression

The final type of progression, which is constant topic development, is not identified in the data. It is defined as the scheme that contains a similar theme element in the entire paragraph. Similar with the parallel-sequential progression, it is characteristic of a repetitive beginning, although for parallel progression, the topic is repeated until the final clause. To illustrate, here is a segment of an entry that contains parallel progression:

*“**It** is about a man, a lady with gloves, etc. **It’s** quite tricky.”* (Sample I-4-2).

The repetition of sentence topic is further burdened by the direct repetition of the *it* pronoun. Admittedly, this is only minor evidence of parallel progression. The reason for the lack of incidence of this kind of topical structure is that the majority of the students are mindful of the negative stylistic effect if only one topic is stated at the beginning of the clauses. This progression echoes the manner in which beginning writers structure a series of sentences where the topic is constantly repeated as the initial sentence element. And since freshman students are intermediate to advanced language learners, they no longer apply this kind of topical progression.

General Observations of Topical Progressions

It is apparent from the analysis of student journals that students vary in their metalinguistic awareness. Some students are skilled in utilizing different kinds of topic repetition strategies and

are more aware of cohesive devices, while others are not. Essentially, however, the lack of highly varied repetition strategies and cohesive devices may be caused by the informality of journal writing. However, the overall observation is that even without the implied requirement of writing “good” entries, students generally have coherent manners of developing their topics due to the high occurrence of sequential progressions in its varied forms.

Summary and Pedagogical Implications

This study involves a topical structure analysis of 20 freshman student journals. The results indicate that the most frequently occurring progressions are those that show sequential patterns such as the sequential-parallel, simple sequential and the extended sequential topical development schemes. Since some of the sample paragraphs cannot be classified under the original progressions identified by Lautamatti and Simpson, two additional schemes have been considered, namely the parallel-sequential and the sequential-parallel progressions. Although new topical structures have been identified, these are not declared to be the preferred type of progression since the study is only a descriptive and analytic undertaking, though stylistic qualities of each progression have been analyzed.

Aside from topical structure, the physical structure of the data samples has also been examined. There is very little evidence of cohesive devices used by students in the sample paragraphs. This can be attributed to the personal, informal and subjective nature of journal writing. Direct repetition of topic words and use of pronouns are also the most common repetition techniques, since grammatical and stylistic assessments are not present in journals, thus allowing the students to write as comfortably as they can.

The researcher believes that the current study of student journals reveals the informal writing styles of students, elements of which appear in their academic output. Apart from a general

discussion of these styles with the students in order to facilitate a degree of language awareness, the study may also highlight points of error in grammar and style that can be discussed in composition classes. It has been a persistent difficulty for teachers at the tertiary level to teach and correct basic grammar, which some students have not yet completely acquired. Journals can serve as venues to identify the writing concerns that still need to be addressed. In essence, therefore, the twofold function of journals may be realized: aside from establishing rapport and accessing feedback from students, journals can also be utilized as a constant diagnostic tool for teachers.

In terms of the framework used, the researcher agrees with Connor (1996) and Chui (2004) that teaching students how to recognize topical development in their essays can be a beneficial revision strategy. Metalinguistic awareness and objectivity is essential so the students can be adept at identifying points of review for their essays, without the continuous aid of the teacher.

Consequently, from the awareness that coherence is an essential aspect of writing, students may be made more cognizant of the presence of a reader – that it is necessary to guide them through the use of various linguistic techniques. It must be evident to teachers of composition classes that the initial perception of students is that in-class writing aims to develop skills and to generate ideas born from critical thinking. More than that, however, they must be made more conscious of the communicative feature of writing. With sensitivity to the intended readers' context and skills and the ability to read from another perspective, the students will hopefully consider these aspects as they fulfill the writing tasks.

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