

# Helping Novice EFL/ESL Academic Writers Appreciate English Textual Patterns through Summary Writing

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When learning how to write academic English essays, EFL/ESL learners often find it difficult to appreciate the value of textual patterns. They tend to perceive the patterns as rules controlling them rather than as tools facilitating their growth as writers. In helping EFL/ESL writers dispel such a negative notion of textual patterns, this study suggests that teaching summarization is effective. In this paper, I will discuss how summary writing activities using satellite English TV news items can be exploited in teaching textual patterns. I will also report on the results of a series of summary writing lessons conducted in a class of ESL writers at the upper-intermediate level.

英文学術論文の書き方を学ぶ際、英語学習者(EFL/ESL writers)は論文に用いるテキストの展開パターンに違和感を覚えることがしばしばある。学習者はこれらのパターンをライティングの手助けというよりも彼らを縛り付けるルールとして受け止めがちである。本論では、学習者の抱くテキストの展開パターンへの否定的なイメージを取り除くことに、サマリー・ライティングが効果があることを論ずる。まず、衛星放送英語ニュースを活用したサマリー・ライティングをどのようにしてテキスト展開パターンを教える際に用いるかを論じる。さらに中上級(upper-intermediate)用コースで実際に行った一連のサマリー・ライティング授業の結果について報告する。

**W**hen teachers introduce novice EFL/ESL writers of academic writing to textual patterns commonly exploited in English written discourse, they like to entertain the idea that by teaching such patterns, they are imparting a set of “tools” (Cornwell & McKay, 1998, p. 16) that would facilitate students’ writing and thinking. Contrary to teachers’ expectations, however, students often perceive these patterns as a set of rules that inhibit their growth and creativity as writers. Hildenbrand (cited in Krapels, 1990), for example, who “daily observed her Spanish-speaking subject write in two community college courses” found that “the subject’s preferred writing mode—creative, personal writing—conflicted with

the academic mode expected of her, thereby hindering her writing process" (p. 42). Similarly, Easton (cited in Kobayashi, 1984, p. 115) and Inghilleri (1989, p. 401) reported on ESL writers' "resistance" to exploiting the English textual patterns expected of them.

Like the subjects in the above studies, some of my own students—high school seniors at the high-intermediate level—complained to me during one lesson on paragraph organization and patterns that they were already capable of freely expressing themselves and that they did not need any textual patterns to help them. Though I could have responded to their claim by abandoning the teaching of all patterns to "respect" their personal style of writing, I did not because I believe that such English rhetorical conventions are important for writing any kind of English text. In fact, recent studies provide evidence that native speakers exploit specific textual patterns for encoding and decoding meaning of written texts (Carrell, 1987; Connor & McCagg, 1983; Hoey, 1983; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Reid, 1996). This suggests that if EFL/ESL writers are to express meaning clearly to a native-speaker audience, they need to embed it within rhetorical conventions commonly used by native speakers (Hoey, 1983; Inghilleri, 1989). Unless they do so, they risk being misunderstood by them (Hoey, 1983; Inghilleri, 1989), failing to fulfill native-speaker readers' expectations (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Reid, 1996). Clearly the solution to the problem was not to abandon the teaching of textual patterns, but to teach them in a way they would be appreciated by the students. To do so, I reintroduced the patterns by giving my students summary writing lessons.

### Why Teach Summary Writing?

Previous studies have indicated that summarization is one of the most important writing skills required outside EFL/ESL classrooms (Campbell, 1990; Horowitz 1986; Kirkland & Saunders, 1991; Leki & Carson 1997; Spack, 1988). Moreover, a study by Connor and McCagg (1983) suggests that summary writing may be effective for teaching textual patterns to nonnative English speaking writers. They compared immediate recall paraphrases of a source text written by native-speaker and ESL writers and report that paraphrases written by ESL writers "appear[ed] to be inhibited or constrained by the structure of the original passage" (Connor & McCagg, 1983, p. 267). As a result, Connor and McCagg (1983) suggest that instructors take advantage of this tendency of ESL writers to teach them English rhetorical conventions by giving them paraphrasing tasks similar to the ones in their study. In short, Connor and McCagg's (1983) study indicates that the whole "process of putting someone else's

material" (Walker, 1997, p. 128) into one's own words through paraphrasing or summarizing may be conducive to teaching English textual patterns to EFL/ESL learners.

The present study attempts to put Connor and McCagg's suggestion into practice, as so far no study has attempted using summarization to teach textual patterns to EFL/ESL writers. This study makes two modifications to Connor and McCagg's original conception. First, it focuses on summaries rather than paraphrases. Though both paraphrases and summaries are means of restating other people's words or ideas (Walker, 1997), the latter seem more useful in teaching textual patterns than the former. Whereas paraphrases need not be shorter than the original (Walker, 1997) but simply a reproduction of "the exact sense of a written passage or oral statement" (Walker, 1997, p. 120; Connor & McCagg, 1983), summaries are condensed versions of the originals, including only the main ideas with specific information eliminated (Walker, 1997). For this reason, it is suggested that summary writing better serves the purpose of this study—teaching textual features of the original texts—than paraphrase writing.

Second, unlike Connor and McCagg's study, which instructed subjects to write immediate paraphrase protocols based on their memory of the given source text, the present study allows subjects to use several words, phrases, or both from the source texts in their summaries. This decision was made to help writers become more acquainted with the whole idea of "writing from other texts" (Spack, 1988, p. 41) and "to develop better awareness and skill in using information from background reading texts and acknowledging that text's author" (Campbell, 1990, p. 226).

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were 34 upper-intermediate high school seniors taught by the researcher at a private Japanese high school. Except for two non-returnee students, all were English-speaking returnees who had studied at least two years in English-speaking countries, schools, or both. Before learning about summary writing, the students studied the basic skills of writing one-paragraph essays using a textbook called *Basic English Paragraphs* (Kitao & Kitao, 1992). These skills included writing topic sentences, linking subsequent sentences with the topic sentences, writing outlines, and using transitions. In addition, the students learned basic paragraph patterns such as description, illustration, contrast, and cause-and-effect. Each paragraph pattern opened with a topic sentence followed by the body of the paragraph, that is, detailed information relevant to the topic sentence. In a one-paragraph essay, the body was

usually followed by the conclusion of the paragraph. If, however, the paragraph was a component of a long article or a chapter of a book, the conclusion was usually omitted. Thus, in a descriptive one-paragraph essay, for example, the body included "the actual description" (Kitao & Kitao, 1992, p. 31) of the subject that was introduced in the topic sentence and the conclusion summarized or restated the subject mentioned in the topic sentence. The students familiarized themselves with these textual patterns by working on analysis questions in the workbook, which required them to find key elements in a paragraph, such as topic sentences, bodies, and conclusions from sample paragraphs written in simple English. Later, the students wrote undocumented one-paragraph essays for homework based on examples or facts from their own experience, using the skills and textual patterns learned in class.

### *Materials*

Source texts used in this study were British and U.S. satellite TV news items for students to write their summaries. Japan's copyright law permits teachers to use foreign news programs aired by Japanese broadcasters for nonprofit purposes (Azuma, 1998). By the time a Japanese broadcaster airs a program made by a foreign producer, it has compensated the producer for the use of copyrighted material (McIntyre, 1996, p. 123). Taking advantage of this fact, I chose to use news items for the following two reasons. First, their use in EFL/ESL classes often increases student motivation (Morrison, 1989). Second, unlike most written texts used for summary writing, such as print media and academic journals, satellite TV news items are accompanied by visual cues that could lighten the cognitive load of summary writers (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991) and facilitate their comprehension of the texts. Of course, this does not mean that any news item can be used for teaching summarization. In some news items, visual images have no connection with the news script (Meinhof, 1994); and this mismatch of the script and the visual images, or "double encoding" (Meinhof, 1998, p. 25), may become a source of confusion for a nonnative speaker audience (Meinhof, 1998). Thus, instructors are advised to carefully choose their materials.

The recorded and transcribed materials were five American and British TV news items from NHK's Satellite Channel 7. Two were from *BBC Six O'Clock News*, two from *ABC World News Now*, and one from *CNN Headline News*. All news items lasted about two to three minutes; the transcripts of the news items were each about 250-520 words long. All news items were topics familiar to the students: the Japanese Imperial couple's visit to Wales, new cancer-killing chemicals, India's second nuclear tests, violence on TV, and new types of computer games. Show-

ing news items with familiar topics, which promote students' use of their "content schemata" (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991, p. 108), should enhance students' comprehension, making summary writing easier for them. Each transcript was accompanied by a listening activities worksheet.

The worksheet included two types of listening exercises designed to highlight the gist of the news item and vocabulary or expressions unfamiliar to the students. One type of exercise required students to listen for missing sentences or phrases needed to fill gaps created in the text: the lead, other passages or phrases of the news describing the main points of the news, or both. The other required students to answer listening comprehension questions by circling the appropriate answer from among four alternatives after hearing relevant portions of the news item.

### *Procedures*

#### *Class Listening Activities*

Treatment consisted of five 45-minute listening lessons. At the beginning of the first lesson, the students studied a basic generic feature of English TV news items: that the lead of a news item usually provides the summary of what is to follow. Once this point was clarified each lesson proceeded in the following manner. First, the students received a worksheet and were shown the news item of the day once, watching it without taking any notes. From the second viewing they were encouraged to take notes so they could start working on the two exercises in their worksheet. In the fill-in-the-gap exercise they listened to a missing phrase or passage from the news item a few words at a time. After listening to that portion of the news item several times, volunteers shared what they understood. These comments were written on the board if correct. If incorrect, the students again listened to the passage several times until somebody in the class could give the correct answer. Once the missing elements were in place, difficult expressions or grammar and the main points of the passage were explained. Then the students listened to the passage again to allow them to review what they had heard. For the listening comprehension questions they again listened to the relevant sections of the news items several times. Later, they listened to those sections once more to help them check their answers.

#### *Summary-Writing Preparation Lessons*

The five listening lessons were followed by two 45-minute summary-writing preparatory lessons. In the first lesson, the students received the full transcript of a *BBC Six O'Clock News* item about the Japanese Imperial couple's visit to Wales (Rogers, 1998). By then, they were already

familiar with the main passages of the transcript since they had studied those passages in the listening activities. The students then skimmed through the transcript and discussed in pairs which of the patterns (description, contrast, or cause-and-effect) best described the news. The teacher monitored the discussions and provided help when needed. About fifteen minutes later, one student gave the correct answer, contrast. Because the student was too shy to give his reasons, the teacher provided support for this answer on his behalf. The students also received a one-paragraph summary of the news item written by the teacher (Appendix A). After reading it aloud, the teacher told the students that a summary of a news item is usually made up of two parts: a brief description of the lead and a focused topical description of the news item. The lead is the introductory sentence of a news item which provides answers to some questions the audience of the news item bring to the task of reading or listening to it: What happened? Who is/are involved? Where did the news happen? When did it happen? Why did it happen? How did it happen? The explanation emphasized that students needed to exploit two textual patterns for these two parts of the summary to be included in one paragraph.

In the case of this summary, the students were taught that the introduction (the summary of the lead) exploited the description pattern and the passage following it, the contrast pattern (the discussion of the differences existing between two or more people, things, places, or ideas). Further instruction showed that by using the contrast textual pattern, the summary could include two examples of contrast manifested in the news item. The first contrast referred to the types of labor the former POWs of the Japanese Imperial Army and the present Welsh community experienced with the Japanese: the former in prison camps, the latter in electronics companies. The second contrast referred to how the Imperial couple was greeted by these two parties. To point out the second contrast, students were asked to recall scenes from the news that showed the former POWs protesting against the Imperial couple *outside* Wales' Cardiff castle, where *inside* the castle, Welsh dignitaries were holding a ceremony welcoming them. The students were told that these visual images reinforced the message conveyed in the news soundtrack.

In the second summary-preparatory class, the four other news items were analyzed in a manner similar to the first. However, this time there was no instruction to study the transcript handouts due to time limitations, and the students did not receive summaries of these transcripts. In reviewing each news item, they were asked to recall keywords or scenes that justified the use of a certain pattern to be exploited in summarizing the text. After that, an outline on the board served to illustrate the main points

of the news item. By this time, the first-term final exam involving writing summaries of two news items out of four chosen by each student had been announced. Each summary had to meet specific requirements. It had to be well-organized and about 150 words in length. Furthermore, it had to include seven to thirteen words, phrases, or both from the news script. The meanings and usage of these words and phrases were explained in previous lessons. The students did not have to memorize these words and phrases since they were printed on their exam sheet. All they needed to do prior to the exam was to remember how these words or phrases should be used in their summaries. To prepare for the exam, the students were encouraged to thoroughly read the transcripts of the news items they planned to summarize and to practice writing their summaries using the outlines introduced to them in class.

#### *Summary Writing and Post-Writing Lessons*

About a week later, the students took their exam and wrote their summaries. They were instructed to underline all words and phrases they were required to use in the summaries to indicate fulfillment of one of the task requirements.

After the summer break, the students received the summaries of the four news items written by the teacher. Among them were two versions of one summary (Appendix B). The first version was a plain summary, similar to the ones the students wrote. The second was similar to the first version but included quotation marks around every borrowed phrase in the news transcript, a parenthetical citation after every borrowed phrase, an opening sentence explicating "the pragmatic condition of the task: 'This article was about . . .'" (Connor & McCagg, 1983, p. 264), and phrases introducing reported speech: "According to," ". . . say(s)," and ". . . suggested." After pointing out the contrasting features of the two versions of the summary, the students were told that summaries written for U.S. colleges have to include the features of the second version in their summaries. By contrasting the two summaries (Willis & Willis, 1996), the students experienced firsthand what is meant by "borrowed words from other source texts" and saw how these words should be acknowledged in their essays. Lectures and exercises on specific rules of documentation according to the Modern Language Association style and how to write multiparagraph research papers followed this explanation. Later, the students each wrote one documented research paper. By then, they were already familiar with the fact that a text can be made up of a combination of more than two textual patterns and thus needed no further encouragement to combine textual patterns in writing their multiparagraph research papers.

## Results and Discussion

The summaries were graded according to three criteria. First, were all the required words or phrases used in the appropriate context? Second, did the summaries include the key information of the news item? Third, did summaries keep to the content of the news item? Ten points were given for each summary that met these criteria. Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors were overlooked as long as the three criteria were met.

Students whose summaries met these three criteria received a total of 20 points. Out of 34 students, 16 received full marks (see Appendix C for two examples). The rest of the students received marks ranging from 19 points to four. Points were deducted from these students' summaries according to four criteria. One point was deducted if a required word or phrase was not used in the appropriate context. For example, one student wrote "Monopoly and Packman are classic games and they RESURRECT (a required word) some adult." Yet, in the original, this required word was used as a synonym for the word "revive," to suggest that companies are trying to market old but famous games as new computer games. Second, one point was deducted if the main point of the original news piece was distorted by a word or a phrase used in the summary. For example, one student wrote "One doctor is hopeful because he believes that this whole new approach can solve the problem of growing back cells." However, the original discussed the fact that this doctor is hopeful because his new approach will help prevent cancer cells from growing back. Third, five points were deducted if a summary was less than 100 words long, even if it included all the required words or phrases. Fourth, 10 points were deducted if a student failed to write the entire summary.

As a result, five students received 19 points, three received 17 points, two received 16 points and three received 13, 12, and 11 points respectively. There were only five students who received less than ten points.

Many students also borrowed other words, phrases, or both from the source texts, which may be the reason why their summaries seemed more sophisticated (Campbell, 1990) compared to their previous essays. In passing, it should also be noted that the summaries written by the two non-returnee students were among the best (see Sample 2 in Appendix C).

In addition to writing summaries, 34 students also answered a questionnaire which asked how helpful they thought summarizing English news items was. On a scale of one (not helpful) to five (very helpful) 14 students gave a five, 15 gave a four, four gave a three, and one gave a two. These results suggest that most students felt that summary writing



was rather helpful. Eight students noted that summary writing was difficult for them; nonetheless, five of these students felt it was helpful or would be helpful. Over a third of the students wrote that summary writing helped them understand the gist of the news items well. Four students explicitly stated that summarizing news items was helpful for learning summarization skills. Surprisingly, the fiercest critic of the initial writing lessons gave a five on the questionnaire and wrote “. . . it was very helpful because one of my weakest point[s] in English was summarization . . . I learned the techniques that are needed to summarize.”

One surprising fact about summary writing activities is that after their implementation no one argued about using textual patterns in essay writing. The change in students' perception may have come about because they used the textual patterns for two challenging and worthwhile purposes (Leki & Carson, 1997) that helped them realize that textual patterns are more than just rules they must follow. First, they used patterns to find and comprehend the main points of difficult authentic news items. This taught them to see textual patterns as tools for comprehending texts. The second purpose of using textual patterns in the summarizing activities was to allow them to bring together seemingly unrelated vocabulary, phrases, or ideas in the news items in writing their summaries. This taught them to see the patterns as tools for writing essays.

To prevent the students from completing the course with the notion that vocabulary or phrases from external sources can be exploited freely without documentation, the post-writing lessons taught them about the differences between the writer's own language and borrowed words or phrases. This facilitated the smooth introduction of other aspects of academic writing such as documentation and writing of multiparagraph research papers.

### Conclusion

Though EFL/ESL writers do not become competent writers simply by learning how to use English textual patterns, the skill becomes indispensable as they start acquiring and using generic knowledge (Paltridge, 1996) as well as engaging in more challenging tasks that “emphasize recognition and reorganization of data” (Horowitz, 1986, p. 455). Yet, as has been pointed out earlier, EFL/ESL writers often cannot see the point of using these patterns on their own. The present study suggests that summary writing activities can help students see the potential of textual patterns as a means of comprehending and writing English texts and can provide them with an accessible and meaningful entry point into the world of academic English writing and reading.

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## Appendix A

### Sample Summary by the Teacher

[A summarized description of the lead] Twenty former prisoners of war made protests against the Emperor of Japan and his wife in South Wales on the second day of their state visit to Britain. [Contrasts in the news; topic sentence of this paragraph] This event highlighted two differences that exist between people of Wales today and the former POWs who labored in Japanese prison camps during Second World War. The first difference is their impression towards Japanese people. The former show their appreciation to the Japanese for giving them jobs at Japanese electronic companies, while the latter are angry at them for making them suffer as POWs. The second difference is in how they greeted the Japanese Imperial couple. The former greeted them by having a special ceremony and traditional events inside Cardiff Castle, but the latter waited outside the castle to make protests against them.

## Appendix B

### Two Versions of a News Item Summary by the Teacher

#### Version 1

[A summary of the lead] According to the latest report on violence on television, American TV viewers have a six in ten chance of seeing something violent. It also says that over three years, violence on network prime time increased 14 percent while Prime Cable has violence on 92 percent of its shows. What is more, nearly three-quarters of violent scenes on TV show no remorse, criticisms

or penalties. [Topic sentence] Obviously, opinions on these violent shows differ depending on each individual. [Contrasts] Some parents, like the Smiths, are worried about TV violence; their children, however, say it does not hurt anyone. Broadcasters too, argue that violence on TV does not affect youth. But many researchers say that TV violence does have a connection with aggressive behavior. They say that worried parents will be able to get rid of violent programs by using the V-chips.

### Version 2

This news item was about the latest report on violence and television. It said American TV viewers “have a six in ten chance of seeing something violent” (ABC World News Now). It also said that over three years, “violence on network prime time increased 14 percent” (ABC World News Now) while Prime Cable has violence on “92 percent of its shows” (ABC World News Now). What is more, it suggested that “nearly three-quarters of violent scenes on TV show no remorse, criticisms or penalties” (ABC World News Now). According to the news, opinions on these violent shows differ depending on each individual. Some parents, like the Smiths, are worried about TV violence; their children, however, say it does not hurt anyone. Broadcasters too, argue that violence on TV does not affect youth. But many researchers say that TV violence does have a connection with aggressive behavior. They say that worried parents will be able to get rid of violent programs by using the V-chips.

## Appendix C: Sample Student Summaries

### Sample 1

We used to think computer game industry produce video games soft-ware only for adolescent boys, but now it's pursuing new strategies to sell the games to attract to the girls and some adults.

Cosmo Makeover is the first example of the game that are made for girls; however there is also a model for men, so they won't feel left out. The another example is the game called "Spiral the Dragon." This game is designed to appeal to the girls by cute title character and less confrontation. The games makers are resurrecting also the old favorite, like "Monopoly," and arcade classics like "Pacman" now in 3D. These games are made not only for children, but also adults. For the last example there is a game called "Laura Croft," it's a famous superstar game character that appeals to children and adults, both. These days, software games are not only for adolescents boys.

### Sample 2

According to the latest report, people have a six in ten chance of seeing something violent on television in America. The violence on network prime time increased by 14 percent and nearly three-quarters of violent scenes on TV show no remorse, criticism, or penalties. There are two types of views about TV violence. First, parents and researchers are worried that TV violence has a bad influence on children. Parents, therefore, limit their children's TV viewing.

Since many researchers say studies do correlate TV violence with aggressive behavior, they are at least happy that parents will soon have the V-chip to screen out violent programs. On the other hand, children don't think it problem to see a violent program, because it doesn't hurt anyone. In addition, broadcasters suggest that TV violence has nothing to do with juvenile crime, for Canadians don't face such problems even though they receive the same TV programs as Americans. In conclusion, there are totally opposite opinions about violence on TV.

Note: The students' grammatical and vocabulary errors have been left uncorrected. The underlining indicates the words and phrases they were required to use in their summaries to fulfill one of the task requirements.