

Process Narrative Strand of Exposition in the Essays of Nigerian Undergraduates

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Abstract: This study examines the problems encountered by Nigerian undergraduates in writing process narrative strand of expository essay. The theoretical framework for this study is Applied Linguistics. Two hundred and twenty-eight students comprising 108 from the Department of English, 65 from the Department of History and International Studies and 55 from the Department of Philosophy offering Use of English course in Akwa Ibom state University, Nigeria participated in the language test. Stratified random sampling method was used to select 15 out of 228 essays for analysis and discussion. The study revealed that the participants had difficulties such as incomplete process, cultural barriers, transliteration, overuse of the 2nd person singular pronoun “you” and the adjective “your” and sequencing in addition to syntactic and lexical issues. A half of the participants performed above average. Extension of Use of English course from one year to two and more exercises on writing have been recommended.

Keywords: Process, Narrative, Exposition, Essay, Nigerian and Undergraduates.

Introduction

Process narrative is one of the five strands of expository essay. It is a type of expository essay that describes, explains or narrates a process that leads to the completion of an action or a procedure. In <http://www.masterclass.com> James Patterson (2022) lists five types of expository essay as: cause and effect, compare and contrast, descriptive, problem and solution and process. For Axelrod and Cooper (2008:632) expository essay is called process narrative. According to them process narrative explains how something was done or instruct readers on how it could or should be done. Whether the purpose is explanatory or instructional, process narrative must convey clearly each necessary action and the exact order in which the actions occur. Axelrod and Cooper (2008:134) identify two types of process narrative: explanatory process narrative and instructional process narrative. According to the source, explanatory process often relates particular experiences or elucidates processes followed by machines or organizations. The source also observes that temporal transitions (then, once, final), present- tense verbs and specific narrative actions (sends, shines, scans, strikes) convey the passage of time and place the actions clearly in this chronological sequence. Continuing, the source avers that temporal transitions such as when, at that moment, before and while, establish a clear sequence of action in time. It asserts that instructional process narrative must include all the information a reader needs to perform the procedure presented. Depending on the reader’s experience, the writer might need to define technical terms, list tools that should be used, give background information and account for alternatives or possible problems.

The explanation of Axelrod and Cooper is re-echoed in <https://www.masterclass.com> which states that process essay is writing that explains how to do something or how something works by giving a step by step explanation. The source states that there are three keys to a process essay: present the

essential steps in the process, explain the steps in detail, and present the steps in a logical order (usually chronological). (cf <https://www.Delma.edu>).

The contribution of <https://courses.lumenlearning.com> is an elucidation on the subject matter. According to the source, there are two types of process essay: those that explain how to do something (how to tune a guitar; how to build a bird house; how to study for a test) and those that explain how something works (transmitting a fax; describing the growth of a cell; going through the steps of a piece of equipment at work). In the first, you are expecting your reader to complete the task and understand it fully. In the second you may be providing information to satisfy your reader's curiosity. In other words, you could describe the process of sending a fax, dialing the number, and all other physical steps; or you could describe how the fax actually transmits information from here to there – the hidden intricacies of the process. The source further delineates two processes: concrete and abstract. A concrete process is one that has clearly defined steps and obvious tools and equipment. Things like recipes, car repairs and craft work are concrete processes. Then there are processes that don't have obvious tools involved: how to get rid of the blues; how to influence someone like you; how to prepare for that test. The source advises that a writer of a process essay should be an expert on the subject which he wishes to write, be able to develop steps into complete thorough paragraphs of 8 to 10 sentences each, define terms, be specific (use exact amount), include reasons, include don'ts and mention possible pitfalls. The topic used in this study was process narrative and the aim of this paper is to examine how the subjects (students) applied the various techniques enunciated by the experts to present their essays and the problems they are likely to encounter in their writings.

Methodology

The test instrument used in this research consisted of a process narrative expository essay entitled: "How to Prepare My Village Traditional Delicacy". The test was administered to a group of 228 students: 108 from the Department of English, 65 from the Department of History and International Studies and 55 from the Department of Philosophy. The students were asked to write process essay in 350 words within 45 minutes. The language test was conducted under strict examination condition. At the end of the test, 228 essays were collected from the students. The method of stratified random sampling was used to select 15 essays for analysis. This means that 5 essays were selected from each of the departments. The essays were coded A to O and scored on the variables of incomplete process, cultural barriers, transliteration, overuse of 2nd person singular pronoun "you" and the adjective "your" and sequencing. Others were malapropism, indeterminacy, syntactic illogicality, wrong spelling, inappropriate idioms, concord errors, tautology and analogous error.

The method used in gathering data for this study is called direct method of data elicitation (Okono, 2021). The strand of direct method used was the clinical method which according to Corder (1973) involves getting the informants to produce data of any sort, for example, by means of a general interview or writing a composition. This type of data is called cross-sectional data. According to Woods, A., Fletcher, P. and Huges, A. (1986:4) cross-sectional data are collected from different groups of children, where each group is of a particular group, and the different groups span the age – range that is of interest to the researcher. The source avers that cross-sectional data can be collected within a brief time span.

Quantitative and Qualitative Limitations

Only three departments out of 38 in the first year participated in the language test. Furthermore, out of 228 students that wrote the test essays of 15 essays were analyzed and discussed. There are so

many language infelicities and idiosyncrasies that could not be captured at any level of analysis and / or discussion.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Applied Linguistics. According to Peniro, R. and Cyntas, J. (2019) applied linguistics is a branch of linguistics where the primary concern is the application of linguistic theory, methods and findings to the elucidation of language problems that have arisen in other areas of experience. Applied Linguistics is a corollary of theoretical linguistics which focuses on the examination of the structure of English in all its manifestations (phonetics, phonology, syntax, grammar at large). One of the core concerns of applied linguistics is the acquisition of a second language.

For Catford (1965: 19) applied linguistics is a term used to cover all those applications of the theory and categories of general linguistics which go beyond (I) the elucidation of how languages work and (II) the description of a particular language or languages for its/their own sake. In his contribution, Lyons (1981:34) states that applied linguistics is a subfield of general linguistics which has as its concerns the application of the concepts and findings of linguistics to a variety of practical tasks. Charles, A. Ferguson (1959) pioneered the establishment of the field of linguistics through the instrumentality of CAL – Centre for Applied Linguistics. The theory of applied linguistics is profoundly relevant to the practical aspects of language use in instructional process narrative as enunciated by Axelrod and Cooper among others. This is to say that the essay given to the subjects in the test for this research: “How to Prepare My Village Traditional Delicacy” falls under instructional process strand of exposition.

Data Analysis

Only subject C wrote an incomplete process of the preparation of traditional delicacy. The subject explained the procedure for boiling the paste “ekpáŋ” and concluded the essay. His essay attracted the query: How is ɔ̀tɔ̀ŋ prepared? ɔ̀tɔ̀ŋ is the broth with which the paste is eaten. Five subjects out of fifteen were affected by cultural barriers in their process narrative essay. They were subjects A, C, F, L AND L. For example, subject F labored to explain “the grated mixed water yam and cocoyam” which could be conveyed in one English word “paste”. Subject L is a native of Idoma tribe of Benue State of Nigeria. He came face to face with finding English words for condiments to be used in preparing a traditional delicacy called “okoho soup”. He constantly referred to “the stick”, “the tree” without attaching any English or botanical name to these objects. The same fate befell subjects B, C and N. Subjects A, D, F, H, I and K exemplified transliteration in their essays. Subject A for instance wrote “soup spoon” a transliteration from Ibibio “íkpaŋ afèrè”. Subject F wrote: “the grated mixed cocoyam or water yam” which in her L₁ is ù̀tɔ̀tɔ̀k íkpaŋ or èbrè . A person who is acquainted with Ibibio language the L₁ of the subject would quickly understand transliteration in the use of “then you wash your meat” by subject H. Direct translation is Ndien àfò àyet ù̀nàm mfò. Only subjects C,D,F and J did not make excessive use of the second person singular pronoun “you” and the adjectival form “your” to direct the reader on the order of preparing a delicacy. Subject H employed these elements 19 times, subject L, 17 times and subject M , 16 times. This style of presentation reduced the essay to vernacular essay. Two subjects F and M portrayed lack of sequencing in the process essay. Between paragraphs 5 and 6 subject F wrote: “ when you are done with wrapping , add crayfish, salt, pepper, seasoning (maggi or knor), meat if it wasn’t cooked yet and any other thing you are using”. Paragraph 6 begins with “ Boil water and pour four cups of hot water into the pot....” The problem is lack of sequencing and/or transition. For subject M in paragraph 4 “moulding the melon” is mentioned as step and in paragraph 5, the beginning is “ So we mould the egusi as coextensive actions. The subject substituted melon for egusi which is an Igbo word melon.

Table 3 shows that 13 subjects representing 87 percent used wrong words in one form or other in their process essays. Subject C, for instance, wrote “smook” for smoke, “pill” for peel. They were words such as “shredded” for chopped, “tieing” for tying and “star” for stir among others. Wrong spellings are a regular occurrence in the process essays of Nigerian undergraduates. “Ten subjects used wrong spellings in their essays. These included: “steem” for steam, “pill” for peel, “greater” for grater, “granding” for grinding, “star” for stir, “ticky” for sticky, “being” for been, “arouma” for aroma and “alot” for a lot among others. Concord errors means subject-verb disagreement. Four subjects: C,I,J,M used plural subjects with singular verbs and vice-versa. Confusion with homophonous variants is sometimes called malapropism. Three subjects were involved in this defective behavior. They included subjects A, K and L. Cases for malapropism included “steem” for steam, “greater” for grater and “pill” for peel. Inappropriate idioms occurred in the essays of three subjects: K, J, N. Subject K wrote “ to stir up thoroughly” in the place of stir; subject J stated “ when all the ingredients have been cooked up and settled finally” instead of cooked or completely boiled ; and subject N wrote “ to tame down the intoxicating effect of cassava” in the place of tame which may imply to tone down, to soften or to lower. Indeterminacy is a recurring decimal in the essays of L₂ learners. Two subjects: C and O exemplified this language trait. Subject C in his third paragraph wrote 13 lines of words without a full stop while subject O cast sentences in 6 lines without a full stop in the second paragraph of her essay. Two subjects: I and K exhibited tautology in their write-ups. Subject I wrote “items and ingredients while subject K wrote “sifting basket”. Subject J portrayed syntactic illogicality or irony in her essay. She used “unlike” to compare tribes in Nigeria instead of like. Analogous error was displayed by subject C when he wrote: My names are Nkereuwem Willie Akwaowo. The data are presented in the tables below:

Table1 Showing General Performance of Subjects in Process Narrative Essay

S/N	SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE %
1	A	10	67
2	B	8	53
3	C	5	33
4	D	13	87
5	E	7	47
6	F	12	80
7	G	12	80
8	H	8	53
9	I	10	67
10	J	13	87
11	K	6	40
12	L	10	67
13	M	8	53
14	N	9	60
15	O	9	60

Note that the formula for calculating the percentage score of the participants is $\frac{\text{score}}{15} \times \frac{100}{1}$ where 15 is the total score for the essay.

Table 2 Showing Subjects’ Involvement in Procedural Defects in Process Essay

S/n	Subjects	Incomplete Process	Cultural Barriers	Transliteration	Overuse of 2 nd Per. Sing. Pron	Sequencing
1	A			3	10	
2	B		2		12	
3	C	1	1			
4	D			1		
5	E				18	
6	F		2	2		6
7	G				12	
8	H			5	19	
9	I			2	16	
10	J					
11	K			1	10	
12	L		10		17	
13	M		14		16	3
14	N		6		12	
15	O				11	

Table 3 Showing Instances of Subjects’ Involvement in Syntactic and Lexical Issues

S/n	Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Confusion with Homophones (Malapropism)	3	20
2	Indeterminacy	2	13
3	Syntactic Illogicality	1	7
4	Wrong Spelling	10	67
5	Wrong Words	13	87
6	Inappropriate Idioms	3	20
7	Concord Errors	4	27
8	Tautology	2	13
9	Analogous Error	1	7

Note that the formula for calculating the percentage of the number of subjects involved in defective language using habit is $\frac{n}{15} \times \frac{100}{1}$ where 15 is the total number of subjects.

Discussion

AN OVERVIEW

Process narrative essay appears to be more difficult than other types of essay in terms of the peculiar characteristics of the presentation of the guides. Two subjects: D and J distinguished themselves in their performance each scoring 87% as shown in table 1. In table 2 subject J was the only writer of the essay without involvement in any procedural defect. She employed passive structures beautifully in the presentation of process essay. Subject D was outstanding in sequencing, language and focus. The only two instances of inappropriate use of language are in the cases of genitive: “village’s traditional delicacy” and “wash your instruments (mortar and pestle)”.

The marking of the genitive case by the use of an apostrophe and “s” was not needed in the title of the essay. Secondly, the use of “instruments” preceding “mortar and pestle” in double quotation marks could have been more appropriately substituted by utensils.

Another outstanding essayist, subject J exhibited two instances of inappropriateness in her essay: syntactic illogicality and inappropriate idiom. These two infelicities will be discussed in the relevant section later. The subject was spectacular in the use of passive structures in her essay. The performances of the two subjects are in sharp contrast with that of subject C who had the lowest score of 33% as indicated in table 1. The subject exhibited defects such as analogous error, indeterminacy, malapropism, and incomplete process. These infelicities are discussed in the relevant sections in this research.

INCOMPLETE PROCESS

The research instrument used in this study was a process narrative essay also called process essay i.e. an essay that requires a writer to show how to do something. In the milieu of the participants (subjects) in this research and in respect of the topic of the essay most of the delicacies have double characteristics. For instance, the delicacy reported in the essay of subject C is prepared in complementarity but the process of preparing the composite meal is not written by the subject. The subject is from Oron tribe of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria whose traditional delicacy is *Ìwe èkpàṅ* (peculiar cassava paste) and *ɔ̀tɔṅ* (special broth). After explaining how to prepare the peculiar cassava paste the subject failed to say something about the preparation of the broth leading to incomplete procedure.

CULTURAL BARRIER

The explanation of the procedure of preparing a traditional delicacy by first year undergraduates in English is bound to experience some cultural impediments. Some of the subjects lack English vocabulary to express cultural processes and /or objects. Exponents of this situation included subject L, a native of Idoma tribe in Benue State in North Central Nigeria who wrote on how to prepare “okoho soup”. He constantly referred to “the stick” and “the tree” which bark is extracted to prepare the soup. He didn’t make an attempt to find English or botanical name for the tree. Another example is subject N who wrote on how to prepare the Oron traditional delicacy: *Ìwe èkpàṅ* and *ɔ̀tɔṅ*. He came face to face with cultural barrier when he changed the cultural object: petiole to plantain leaves. Two or four plantain petioles cut to size are laid in lines with spaces in-between in the bottom of the pot and then the cassava paste folded in thin cylindrical envelopes are placed on them. This is done to prevent the raw paste from getting burnt by the direct heat of the pot when the food is on fire.

TRANSLITERATION

Presenting information in English along the linguistic underpinnings of the vernacular is called transliteration. Examples of transliteration include: “soup spoon”, “grated mixed cocoyam or water yam” and “you” and “your”. The expression “soup spoon” is a transliteration that is based on the vernacular of the writer: *Ìkpàṅ afèrè*. The actual English word is ladle. Similarly, the expression “grated mixed cocoyam and water yam” from *Ù̀tɔ̀tɔ̀k ikpɔṅ ye èbrè* in the L_1 of the writer which is Ibibio, a language spoken in Akwa Ibom State and environs. In the same vein, the expression “then you wash your meat” is also a transliteration of ndien *àfo àyet únàm mfo*. The English version could have been: “then wash the meat”. Transliteration is closely followed by overuse of 2nd person pronoun singular “you” with the adjective “your”. Of the 15 subjects, only 4 did not exhibit this defective habit. It does appear that 2nd language learners who participated in this study write English the way they use it in conversation. This reflects the influence of the L_1

SEQUENCING

Participants in the writing test had difficulty in transiting from one action to another. Some of them listed the actions as though they were outlines. Two subjects were involved in this difficulty.

Sometimes transitional markers could be a helpful device. Such markers as “then”, “next”, “once”, “secondly”, “thirdly”, “fourth” and finally can in the words of Axelrod and Cooper (2008) convey the passage of time and place the actions clearly in a chronological sequence.

CONFUSION WITH HOMPHONES

Our subjects had difficulty with words that are pronounced alike but have different orthography and different meanings. This language situation is also called malapropism. The kitchen utensil called “grater” was spelt “greater”; the action of peeling yam was spelt “pill” and *steam* was written “steem”. Malapropism is assumed to be caused by imperfect knowledge of the L₂, and in this case, English.

For discussion on indeterminacy, wrong spelling, wrong words and tautology contact Okono (2023) in *Erudite Journal of Linguistics and Languages*. Vol. 4. No 1. 64-75

SYNTACTIC ILLOGICALITY

One subject (J) exhibited syntactic illogicality or syntactic irony in her process essay. In paragraph 2 she began : “ Unlike other tribes like the Hausas who cherish tuwo shinkafa , the Yorubas consume amala with ewedu and the Igbos consume Ofe Nsala ... the Ibibios mostly consume áfàṅ soup with fùfù” (diacritics, mine). The subject actually intended and meant “like”. The intended structure was that of similarity, complementarity or correlation and not contrariness. It is an observed language behavior among second language speakers in the milieu of this study to use “unlike” interchangeably with “like” without minding the semantic implications. This type of infelicity shows imperfect knowledge of the English language.

INAPPROPRIATE IDIOMS

English language like any other language is rich in its peculiar idioms. Three instances of inappropriate idioms reflect imperfect knowledge of English by the subjects. In the process essay, the expression “stir up thoroughly” having to do with food in the cooking pot is actually a misnomer. “Stir” is adequate. The same explanation goes for “cooked up” for ingredients and “tame down” for raw cassava. “Cooked” or “boiled” and “tame” would have been appropriate.

CONCORD ERROR

For amateur users of English, concord error is a recurring decimal. The situation reflects a certain degree of carelessness in writing. The most outstanding feature of concord error is subject-verb disagreement. Subject C wrote: This are ingredients used to prepare ékpáṅ.” Subject J wrote: “... all the ingredients including crayfish, pepper has been added...” In the two instances quoted *these* and *have* should have been used. The use of plural subject with a singular verb and vice-versa portrays imperfect knowledge of the language and also renders the language in the essay colloquial.

ANALOGOUS ERROR

Analogous error reflects the thought pattern of a second language user. The expression: “My names are...” comes from error of wrong analogy. The writer thinks that since his nomenclature has first name, second name and surname it should take a plural verb. Names for one person in English idiom has a negative connotation may include but not limited to rogue, thief, swindler, slot and liar. Here again the cause is imperfect knowledge of the language.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from this study that process narrative is a distinct strand of expository essay. Many of our students at the undergraduate level cannot organize a coherent process essay as they cannot handle sequencing of the processes. The major problem is linking one action to another in the

process through the use of transitional markers. Four of the 15 participants who scored 80% and above in the process essay have proved their mettle. Participants in the test had difficulties bordering on incomplete procedure, cultural barrier and overuse of 2nd person singular pronoun to direct action in the process essay. The subjects lacked English vocabulary to express African cultural process in their essays. Other syntactic and lexical issues included: malapropism, indeterminacy, syntactic illogicality, wrong spellings, wrong words, and inappropriate idioms. Others were concord errors, tautology and analogous error. These errors rendered the essays insipid and the language, casual and colloquial.

RECOMMEDATIONS

The Use of English Course for freshmen in Nigerian universities should be extended to two years. Secondly, students offering this course should be given more writing tasks than has hitherto been the case. Reading and correction of students' essays will enhance their performance. It will also make them become acquainted with sound English language using habits.

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