CONTRASTIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ARGUMENTATIVE AND INFORMATIVE NEWSPAPER PROSE IN ARABIC, FRENCH, AND ENGLISH: SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING/LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR JOURNALISTIC PURPOSES (EJP) IN MOROCCO

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THESIS

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS BY

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BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Director of Thesis Research

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the major concerns of research related to language pedagogy is the issue of whether knowledge about language similarities and differences could help the language learner and/or the language teacher achieve better. Various attempts to enhance achievement have been made. The introduction of contrastive analysis into the field of language pedagogy was motivated by such a goal. This involved a comparison of the structures of the native and target languages to predict and explain likely problems for second language learning and teaching, and to contribute to efficient organization of instructional materials (Lado, 1957). More recently, contrastive analysis was extended beyond the structure of the languages to include a deeper and more comprehensive consideration of factors such as discourse structure, rhetorical structure, sociolinguistic rules, the speaker's or writer's intent, and the audience. The language sample which is analyzed is not considered distinct from the speaker or writer, nor from the audience for whom it is intended. Consequently, since the field of language pedagogy has been following research in linguistic theories, the current aim of language teaching is to teach the
values, social habits, and ways of thinking of the target
language people.

The purpose of this study was to undertake a cross-linguistic
investigation of different genres of newspaper writing in a
contrastive mode, and to provide some suggestions for the
teaching/learning of English as a foreign language for
journalistic purposes (EJP) in Morocco. More particularly, the
focus was on patterns of the discourse structure of newspapers in
Arabic, French, and English. Selected methods of discourse
analysis were used in order to examine two kinds of newspaper
prose: argumentative and informative.

Some of the reasons for the choice of newspaper data resided
in the fact that newspapers embed social and cultural features of
a community. Ropko (1985) attests to this fact:

A paper identifies itself with a particular community
... Newspapers mirror ... national values, habits
and preferences. Newspaper reading, ... is a
kind of passive participation in the life of the
national community. (p. 13)

Reasons for choosing a written medium rather than a spoken
one (e.g., radio broadcasts) for this study were:

1. Literacy is of major international concern in the field of
language teaching, and the findings of the study on a written
medium can be checked or compared with the work of other
specialists in this critical area.

2. The students who are learning EJP in a foreign language
context as opposed to a second language context need English more
for reading and writing purposes than for speaking.
3. The written language expresses the knowledge that the writer has about the language itself and the world, and the analysis of this medium may allow greater understanding of this knowledge, as well as how it is encoded.

4. Writing allows the writer enough time to think and organize ideas, and requires more explicit statement of world knowledge than more highly contextualized oral communication. Analysis thus requires less inferencing by the analyst and may be more valid for the contrastive purposes of the study.

This dissertation is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 defines the problem, and describes the scope of the study and its significance. Chapter 2 presents a survey of the pertinent literature. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology that was used for the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 presents and discusses results about the argumentative samples. Chapter 5 presents findings about the informative samples and contrasts them with the argumentative ones. Chapter 6 discusses the main conclusions and suggests possible guidelines for the teaching/learning of EJP.

The Problem and the Population

A major construct underlying research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a concern for the needs of the learners. The language learners that this dissertation targeted are Moroccan college students learning EJP. The linguistic repertoire of
these learners includes Arabic (the national language and medium of instruction), French (a second language), and English (a foreign language). Journalism majors in this population need to learn English for intranational as well as for international purposes, and they need to be acquainted with and trained in the latest theories of journalistic research. The age of freshmen students in this program ranges between 18 and 22. Each year, the Institut Supérieur de Journalisme admits approximately 100 students who have a Baccalauréat degree (a high school diploma which is conferred upon successful completion of a series of exams) and who have successfully passed the competitive entrance examination. It is during the last three years of high school that Moroccan students study a foreign language (Zizi, 1993).

English is usually taught as an integrative course which involves writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Therefore, we can assume that freshmen students in journalism have a fair level of communicative competence in English.

One purpose of this study, then, was to examine the nature of the material that Moroccan students of journalism need to read and/or write. Due to the multilingual nature of the linguistic repertoire of these students, my analysis encompassed data from three languages, namely, Arabic, French, and English. Using methods of discourse analysis as a tool, I attempted to unveil patterns of discourse structure in newspaper prose. More specifically, the aim was to discover differences and/or similarities in the development of discourse types within and
across languages. Reading and/or writing journalistic prose involves more than knowing how to make a sentence or a headline. It entails factors such as empathy, and a grasp of cultural, societal, and cognitive factors, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Scope of the Study

Using Arabic, French, and English for comparative purposes, the present cross-linguistic examination of newspaper writing addressed the following questions:

1. How is coherence in terms of the relationship between the headline and the text achieved within and across languages?

2. What are the different domains of prior knowledge that contribute to the coherence of newspaper prose within and across languages?

3. How is the organization of discourse—content structure and global structure—achieved within and across languages?

4. How and to what extent is the stylistic feature of repetition realized in each language, and how is it different and/or similar within and across languages?

5. What types of speech acts are used in each language, and how are these different and/or similar within and across languages? What do these differences and/or similarities reveal about the different cultures?
To what extent do texts within the same genre across languages resemble one another compared to texts from different genres within the same language?

7. What are the implications of these similarities and differences for teaching English as a foreign language for the specialized purposes of reading and writing newspaper prose?

The above questions were pertinent in that they allowed me to identify the dynamic nature of the variables that are involved in reading/writing journalistic prose in a third language. Not only am I able to show some ways in which Arabic, French, and English newspapers are similar or different, but also how within each language there may be similarities and/or differences between genres. Focusing on argumentative and informative articles, I will present an account of how newspaper prose embeds elements of communication, elements of social life, and ways of thinking in the different genres and languages.

Significance

The present study makes a unique contribution to the field of applied linguistics in five respects. First, to my knowledge no prior linguistic study has compared the discourse dynamics of newspaper prose in Arabic, French, and English for pedagogical purposes. Second, unlike most contrastive rhetoric studies which have focused primarily on narrative, this one examined informative and argumentative types of prose. Third, this