
**EXPOSITORY TECHNIQUES IN THE ESSAYS OF NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES:
A CASE STUDY OF AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

This research set out to investigate the expository techniques in the essays of Nigerian undergraduates. The theory of applied linguistics was used as the theoretical base. The method of systematic random sampling was used to select 20 out of 101 essays of year two students of the Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University in Nigeria. The students offered the course titled: Advanced Composition I. The subjects' (students') performances were examined on three variables of definition, comparison and contrast, and explication and classification in addition to nine other grammatical and lexical features. It was discovered that majority of the students did well in the three techniques of exposition but not totally free from interlingual issues such as indeterminacy, wrong word form, tautology, and inappropriate prepositions. More exercises in expository essay have been recommended.

KEYWORDS: Expository Techniques, Essays, Nigerian Undergraduates, Akwa Ibom State University

Introduction

Expository essay is one of the four traditional stands of essay writing. Exposition can mean explanation or explication. Expository writing explains facts in a logical and unimpressionistic way. It is objective and not subjective. Kramer L. (2022) in <http://www.grammarly> states that expository writing explains and educates its readers. The source lists examples of expository writing as scholarly article, textbook page, news report, instructional guide and pieces of business writing. Other examples are technical manuals, research papers, lab reports, investigative journalism pieces, expositive essays, explainer video scripts, recipes, travel guides and biographies. According to Kramer, expository writing is factual, usually presented in a linear format, always presented in a logical format, objective and clear about its purpose. The source lists ways of presenting topics in expository writing to include: definition, comparison and contrast, classification, problem and solution as well as process.

For Axelrod and Cooper (2008:632) expository essay is process narrative. The source explains that process narratives explain how something was done or instruct readers on how it should be done. Whether the purpose is explanatory

or instructional, process narratives must convey clearly each necessary action and the exact order in which the actions occur.

Continuing, the source identifies two types of process narrative: explanatory process narrative and instructional process narrative. According to the source, explanatory process narrative often relates particular experiences or elucidates processes followed by machines or organizations. In this way, temporal and specific narrative actions (sends, shines, scans, strikes) convey the passages of time and place the actions clearly in this chronological sequence. Temporal transitions such as when, at that moment, before and while establish a clear sequence of actions in time. The source asserts that instructional process narrative must include all of 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.

Expository writing and for this paper expository essay requires elegant style to make it vivid and interesting. Kramer, L. (2022) advises that although expository writing is fact-based, it doesn't need to be dry or boring. Continuing, the source maintains that skilled writing can present factual information in an engaging way that only increases the reader's comprehension of the topic, often by borrowing the techniques used in narrative and descriptive writing to make the facts more vivid and impactful. This is of course interdisciplinary or integrated approach. Grammar's further elucidates on instructional process narrative thus:

When you need to explain how a process works or the steps the reader needs to follow to assemble something or complete another task you write out the process step by step, providing much explanation as necessary for each step (Kramer 2022).

As stated by Kramer, explanation of a process is crucial in directing a reader of an expository essay. Ballenger (2009) corroborates the above position when he asserts that explaining involves much more than simply reporting information. It is a way of clarifying thought, enhancing understanding, making useful comparisons and exposing gaps. The gaps in the context of expository essay are the limitations of the writer on the subject of discourse. (cf Ballenger, 2009:70).

As this paper focuses on the expository techniques in the essays of university undergraduates, the aim is to examine how the students have employed the methods of exposition enunciated in this study in the presentation of their essays.

Methodology

The method of carrying out the test for this research was direct method of data elicitation. A total of 101 years two students of the Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University were given a writing test on the topic: Comfort is the aim of science and technology. The essay was written in 300 words for 40 minutes. The students knew ab initio that they were writing an expository essay. The test was conducted under strict examination condition. At the end of the test, 101 essays were collected from the students. Using the technique of systematic random sampling, 20 essays were selected for analysis. According to Okono (2020), systematic random sampling involves five processes: determine the size of the population, determine sample size, calculate the number of items in the population to be represented by each sample ($n = (\text{population size} \div \text{sample size})$), select any item as the first sample and choose next sample which comes at nth position after the previous one, and finally, collect the samples and draw an appropriate conclusion.

The essays were scored on the parameters of definition, comparison and contrast, explication and classification. Other variables were grammatical infelicities and lexis related issues such as homophonous variants (false friends), tenses, tautology, indeterminacy, etc. simple percentages were used to calculate the scores of each subject. The 20 subjects were coded A-T.

Quantitative and Qualitative Limitations

It would have taken more time to analyze all the 101 essays and all the instances of creativity by the subjects could not be highlighted.

Theoretical Framework

The major theory adopted for this research is applied linguistics. Catford (1965:19) sees applied linguistics as 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. Similarly, Lyons (1981 :34) sees applied linguistics as a subfield of general linguistics which has as its concerns the application of the concerns and findings of linguistics to a variety of practical tasks. This theory (applied linguistics) covers the creative effort at expository writing. The application of the theory of applied linguistics to expository essay is succinctly explicated by Axelrod and Cooper in categories which include defining, classifying, comparison and contrasting, problem and solution and process.

Axelrod and Cooper (2008) explain that defining is an essential strategy for all writing. They maintain that autobiographers, for example, must occasionally define objects, conditions, events and activities for readers likely to be unfamiliar with particular terms. They state that:

When writers share information or explain how to do something they must often define important terms for readers who are unfamiliar with the subjects... some published essays and reports are concerned primarily with the definition of a little understood or problematic concept or thing. (Axelrod and Cooper, 2008: 650).

According to the source there are sentence definition, multi-sentence definition, extended definition by word history or etymology and by stipulation. The strategies for carrying out the various strands of definition are straightforward definition, use of subordinate clause and use of appositive phrase. Axelrod and Cooper observe that occasionally, a writer will trace the history of a word, from its first use to its adoption into other languages to its shifting meanings over the centuries. In a stipulative definition, the writer declares a certain meaning, generally, not one found in the dictionary.

Another aspect of the theory is classifying. According to Axelrod and Cooper (2008:658), classifying is an essential writing strategy for thinking about and organizing ideas, information and experience. The process of classifying involves either grouping or dividing in a simple two level or a complex multilevel system. The source avers that writers can help readers follow a classification system by maintaining clarity and coherence.

Axelrod and Cooper say that comparison brings similar things together for examination, to see how they are alike and contrast is a form of comparison that emphasizes differences. The source states that:

The use of comparison and contrast is more than a writing strategy, of course, it is a way of thinking and learning... we acquire new concepts most readily if we can see how they are similar to or different from concepts we already know (Axelrod and Cooper, 2008:664).

The source presents two ways of organizing comparison and contrast: chunks and sequence. In chunking, each object of the comparison is presented separately; in sequencing, the items are compared point by point.

Axelrod and Cooper (2008:668) give another strategy for comparison as analogy. They aver that analogy is a special form of comparison in which one part of the comparison is used to explain the other.

Data Analysis

Seven subjects approached the expository essay with the definition of terms, and, in this case, science and technology. Subject B, for instance, defined the term thus: "science emphasizes the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment, and technology is the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes". Only subjects A, F and T did not define any term in their essays. 11 out of 20

subjects used comparison and contrast in the presentation of their essays. For example, subject C wrote: “In the past life was not interesting, there was no entertainment. The people worked, ate and slept. Conditions of life were hard. Now, radio amuses us and the cinema entertains us: electricity is our maid. She does every impossible and difficult job for us. She moves the fans, heats the rooms, illuminates the cities, presses the clothes, works the machines....”

All the subjects from A to T used explication or explanation in their essays, but a few used classifications. For instance, subject B classified the function of science and technology into six classes or categories: “New knowledge, source of tools, research instrumentation, practice of research, creation of knowledge and knowledge base.” In each category, she gave an explanation of what Science and Technology does. Similarly, subject N explained thus: “The essence of what Science and Technology contribute to the society is the creation of new knowledge and the utilization of that knowledge to boost the prosperity of human lives and to solve various issues facing the society.” It is noted that other strategies of expository essays such as illustration and analogy are subsumed in the above three highlighted.

Indeterminacy is a defective element in the essays of second language users. Indeterminate sentence is a long sentence that appears to have no end and in which there is no focus on the kernel sentence. Four subjects A, F, O and Q representing 20% of the total sample size exemplified these features in their essays. Subject O recorded an instance, while subject A, F and Q each recorded two instances of indeterminate sentence. 10 subjects used wrong word form or word class in their essays either once or more times. Subject Q used “modes of transportation” instead of means. Subject D used “communicate” instead of communication. Wrong preposition is discussed under wrong word form. Other cases of inappropriate usage include tautology, confusion with homophones, long wobbling sentences, sentence-less sentence, wrong spelling and wrong tense. The data are presented in the tables below:

Table 1: Showing Overall Performance of Subjects in Expository Essay

S/N	SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE(%)
1	A	6	60
2	B	4	40
3	C	9	90
4	D	6	60
5	E	3	30
6	F	6	60
7	G	7	70
8	H	7	70
9	I	6	60
10	J	8	80
11	K	8	80

12	L	7	70
13	M	7	Usoro Mark KONO, <i>Ph.D</i>
14	N	6	60
15	O	5	50
16	P	9	90
17	Q	6	60
18	R	5	50
19	S	7	70
20	T	6	60

Table 2: Showing Instances of Students' Performance in Expository Techniques

S/N	Subject	Definition	Comparison and Contrast	Explication and Classification	Cumulative Frequency
1	A	0	0	1	1
2	B	1	0	1	2
3	C	1	3	1	5
4	D	2	1	1	4
5	E	1	0	1	2
6	F	0	0	1	1
7	G	1	1	1	3
8	H	2	5	1	8
9	I	1	3	1	5
10	J	1	1	1	3
11	K	1	1	1	3
12	L	1	0	1	2
13	M	1	5	1	7
14	N	5	0	3	8
15	O	2	0	3	5
16	P	1	2	1	4
17	Q	1	1	1	3
18	R	2	0	1	3
19	S	1	2	1	4
20	T	0	0	1	1

Table 3: Showing Students' Performance in Grammar and Lexis

S/N	VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE(%)
1	Indeterminacy	4	40
2	Tautology	3	30
3	Longsentence	4	40
4	Sentence-lessStructure	1	10
5	Wrongwordform	10	50
6	ConfusionwithHomophones	2	20
7	Wrongtense	2	20

8	Wrong spelling	2	20
9	Inappropriate preposition	2	Usoro Mark OKONO, Ph.D. 20

Discussion

General Performance

The result in table 1 indicates that 10 out of 20 subjects scored 60% and above in the expository essay. This implies that the students were taught this strand of expository essay before the test was given. Subject C scored 90% in a well-articulated write-up. She really explained comfort as the aim of science and technology. Apart from the use of preposition “of” in “traditional medicine did not go so far to help people who suffered of conditions...”, she wrote an essay without blemish and scored 90%. However, the use of “of” in this situation is prevalent in French language and it is called partitive adjective. It is rarely used in English.

The performance of subject K is a good example of coherence in essay through the consistent use of the prepositional phrase: “In architecture, in agriculture, in transportation and even in catering, the role of science and technology cannot be underestimated”. This subject also looked at the disadvantages of science and technology in terms of destructive effects of some of the products; she presented a balanced essay. Her performance shortly contrasts with that of subject E who does not have a good grasp of English lexis and grammar, committed a lot of blunders and also presented very limited examples of the benefits of science and technology. She is the subject that wrote “lacking behind” instead of lagging behind.

Definition

Definition means explaining the meaning of something and, in the context of this essay, it means explaining the meaning of science and technology. Without such an explanation a non-science and a non-technology person may find it difficult to fully understand the concept. Only three subjects A, F and T did not include definition in their essays. They went ahead to narrate the benefits of science and technology. The definitions have enriched the essays by clarifying the concept of science and technology.

Comparison and Contrast

All the 11 subjects that employed the strategy of comparison and contrast compared the pre-science and technology era to the modern age of science and technology in many areas of human endeavor. These areas range from agriculture, transportation, healthcare, communication to house hold appliances. This kind of comparison has actually sharpened the contrast in the conditions of living between these two epochs. In so doing the essayists have been able to buttress the focus of the essay which is comfort is the aim of science and

technology. They have equally highlighted the negative benefits of science and technology as subject L avers that “science is a good and useful servant but it is a bad destructive master”. In like manner subject K used a long paragraph to preach what she called “cold comfort” of science and technology and advises human beings to create a balance in the relationship between persons and nature and to take health and environmental safety as things of concern.

Explanation and Classification

Every subject who wrote this essay used one form of explication or other to present their essay. One may be tempted to want to know the difference between definition and explanation. Definition tells what an object or issue or concept is while explanation tells how an object, issue or concept appears. For instance, after defining science and technology, subject C went ahead to explicate the advent of science and technology in the 18th century. She wrote: “The renaissance first taught man to realize the value of scientific progress, but it was not until 18th century that the industrial revolution in the west really showed the impact science would have on the living through developments in the land”. Classification is a complementary element of explication. Subject B classified the functions of science and technology under six categories. Apart from easing understanding of the functions of science and technology for the readers such classification has enriched the essay by delineating the functions clearly.

Grammar and Lexis

Indeterminacy

Indeterminacy, as has been earlier stated is a defective feature of the writings of some second language users. It is a sentence structure which does not have focus on the kernel sentence and which does not appear to have limit. Of course it is always without full-stop. Four of the subjects exhibited this defective element in their essays. The result of indeterminate sentence structure is loss of intelligibility and consequent loss of information.

Tautology

Tautology is an unnecessary repetitions of word or an idea. It is a defective writing behavior of second language users. It brings too many words into a sentence. This creates a negative reaction in a reader of an essay. There is a difference between tautology and pleonastic doublets, the latter contains a pair of complementary items. An instance of tautology was exhibited by subject J who wrote “people can travel, ride, drive to their work places within minutes or traverse round the globe within hours.” Already traverse means to travel across and so it doesn’t need the preposition to function.

Long sentence

Long sentence is not bad on its own. It becomes a defective writing feature when the writer cannot manage it. It offends the ethics of good writing when a long sentence wobbles and loses focus. A long sentence by experienced writers and quite often first language users contains a lot of punctuation marks to mark off otherwise intervening structures. For instance, subject I wrote a defective long sentence thus: "In fact the main, ultimate and predominant aim of science and technology is to provide us and the society at large is nothing but comfort at all times and make life easier and more comfortable than earlier." The above writer could not organize the sentence with focus on the important point of the sentence.

Sentence-less Structure

A sentence-less structure is a stretch that does not have the requirement of a sentence. That is to say, the stretch does not possess grammaticality. A sentence quite often possesses the compulsory elements of subject and predicate. In the systemic functional grammar model the structure is subject, predicate complement and adjective (SPCA). However, the traditional sequence of elements of clause structure can be rearranged and represented as (S)V(O) (C)(A). The purpose of leaving the verb without parentheses is that it is a compulsory element. In the essay of subject Q this stretch is not a sentence "The discovery of new planets and the establishment of satellites in space because of the very same science and technology." This structure needed a verbal component and a complement and perhaps an adjunct to make it a sentence. As it stands it has not made any sense and cannot be taken as a sentence.

Wrong Word Form or Word Class

Wrong word form or word class is a defective language behavior. Subject D, for example, wrote "coloured television". The form of the word should be colour as in "colour television". The change is from a class of adjective to a class of verb. This change or generalization is sometimes noticed in the writings of second language learners in the word: mature which is erroneously changed to "matured".

Homophonous Variants

Confusion with homophonous variants is a familiar defective language behavior of second language users. Subject E wrote: "Without comfort being the aim of science and technology, I am sure that the society will be lacking behind and the inhabitants will still behave like the primitive people....". The correct word she should have used is lagging. These pair: lacking and lagging can pass for minimal pair. The real reason for this confusion for the subject could be the problem of wrong analogy. Since lacking implies a certain deficiency she generalized it to backwardness which lagging implies. What is needed to correct

this kind of defective behavior is more training in and exposure to sound language using habits.

Wrong Use of Tense

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Wrong use of tense is another feature of the writings of second language users. Subject M used wrong tense in two instances "...in order to make ends meet is minimize;...in the dark age where people are not expose." This is an aspect of grammatical and lexical infelicity. It doesn't bring the language user any honour.

Wrong Spelling

Wrong spelling is a defective language using habit. Subject K wrote: "testescope" instead of stethoscope, a medical instrument that is used for listening to someone's heartbeat. Wrong spelling of this nature can impede the meaning of a particular sentence except the reader want to take a risk of assumption based on the context. Second language users need to be critical of second language spellings to avoid unnecessary spelling errors.

Inappropriate Preposition

Inappropriate preposition has many causes which are both interlingual and intralingual. Even educated users of the language who are not critical of the language structure can fall into this defect. Subject I typified inappropriate preposition in his expository essay. He wrote: "...with the invention of science and technology one can sit at the comfort of his or her room....; The comfort it (science and technology) provides nowadays cannot be compared to that of pre-technological era where people had to travel with donkeys, by feet, which discouraged people to travel to distant places...". In the above sentence, two prepositions are inappropriate: "by feet" should be on foot, "discouraged people to travel" should be from travelling. The candidate does not possess a reasonable degree of competence in the language to enable him perform well. What is required is more training in the language and a cultivation of a positive habit toward the language.

Conclusion

Most of the subjects (students) have done well in the expository essay as 16 out of 20 scored from 60% and above. Two subjects (C and P) wrote the essay excellently; They scored 90% each. Their essays were almost flawless. Our subjects employed expository techniques well. All the 20 subjects used the technique of explication. Of course, expository essay is about explanation. Only 15% of the participants did not use definition as expository strategy. 55% of the sample size employed comparison and contrast, and this strategy enriched their essays greatly. The outstanding performance of most of the subjects' reveals that they were well taught this aspect of the advanced composition course before they

took the language test. For subjects like B and E who performed below average as can be inferred from table 1 they need to refocus on the English Language with the view to developing sound language using habits. The techniques of definition, comparison and contrast as well as explication and classification have been fully deployed by the subjects in their essays.

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As second language users, table 3 contains a record of language infelicities committed by the subjects with wrong word form or word class topping the list. It is my hope that these infelicities can be corrected if lecturers find out areas of deficiency in the students' handling of the subgenre of expository essay and offer remedial training, such defects can be corrected without notice.

Recommendations

It is recommended that students should be made to undergo more writing exercises in expository essay because practice makes perfect. Secondly extrinsic motivational factor such as prize for the best essay student in the course could help spur up others.

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