| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rhetorical Structure Theory: Towards Writing with a Sense of Purpose

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| ABSTRACT

In recent years, different writing researchers have stressed the importance of integrating text-based and reader-based approaches in writing instruction to enable EFL learners to write both coherently and purposefully. However, combining these two basic features in students' writing remains a challenging task for both students and teachers. Given this challenge, the present paper describes a model of writing instruction that combines text-based and reader-based features based on both Rhetorical Structure Theory and the process genre approach to improve EFL learners' writing quality.

| KEYWORDS

Writing, purpose, coherence, Rhetorical Structure Theory.

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1. Introduction
Writing is one of the most challenging and difficult tasks in language learning; it is a cognitive activity that involves the interaction of a wide range of mental operations (planning, translating, reviewing, and editing) and different types of knowledge (topic knowledge, audience knowledge, linguistic knowledge, genre knowledge, and procedural knowledge or task schemas) (Flower & Hayes, 1980). In this regard, Flower & Hayes referred to writing as "juggling with constraints". Writing in a second or foreign language is even more demanding and challenging than writing in the first language. This is a common problem among all foreign language learners and Moroccan English foreign language learners are no exception. Different recent research has shown that Moroccan EFL learners struggle with writing and the major constraint that encounters them is how to write with a purpose in a way that engages the audience.

2. Literature Review
2.1 The Problem of Writing with Purpose in the Moroccan Context
The issue of writing with a sense of purpose in Moroccan academia was first raised by Dahbi (1984) who contended that Moroccan EFL learners' problem in writing is not linguistic as much as it is cognitive because of their inability to move beyond the "interactional context of composition class." In this regard, Dahbi (1984) argued, "what is almost invariably missing in students' writing is a sense of purpose which is not totally constrained by the context of the classroom and which helps present coherent, self-contained information or argumentation from a writer to his or her audience, not just "English" from a student to his/her teacher" (p.80). Abouabdelkadder & Bouziane (2016, p.44) ascribed this writing deficiency in Moroccan EFL students 'writing to the lack of "retrospective structuring" and "projective structuring" strategies that enable students to make their ideas fulfill their intentions and have an effect on their audience.

In this regard, EFL learners should be equipped with the necessary skills that help them write with a sense of purpose that address a variety of audiences and not just to get good grades. This purpose, which differs from one type of writing to another, includes persuading or convincing, changing the readers' attitudes or rectifying their opinion, and inciting or encouraging them to take action, etc. Thus, EFL learners should bear in mind that they are studying writing to address different audiences, especially upon

graduation when they are required to write emails and business documents to communicate with others. From this perspective, the present study aimed at raising Moroccan EFL students' awareness of how to write with a purpose. The present study suggests a model of writing instruction based on Rhetorical Structure Theory to help Moroccan EFL learners write with a sense of purpose.

2.2 Rhetorical Structure Theory

Rhetorical Structure Theory (henceforth RST) is a descriptive theory of discourse structure that was originated by Mann & Thompson in 1987. According to RST, the building blocks of texts are functional units known as elementary discourse units. These units are put together to create larger units that, when combined hierarchically, complete texts and advance the writer's main goal. Thus, these units adhere to a relational structural pattern and the most frequently occurring type of text structuring relation is the nucleus-satellite relation. This type of relation is asymmetric because the nucleus is more central than the satellite which is peripheral. Text structuring relations in RST are functional because they have a common property of producing specific effects on the reader. These relations can be identified through the writer's intentions, assumptions about the reader, and patterns in the text's subject matter. In this context, Mann and Thompson argued that,

> *Strictly speaking, the relations of a text do not hold between the various word sequences of which the text consists. Rather, the word sequences are realizations of more abstract entities: meanings and intentions that are represented by those word sequences. In this sense, all of RST is pre-realizational since it makes statements about how such meanings and intentions are structured and combined, but not about how they are realized.* (1989, p.8)

In this way, Mann & Thompson is correcting a misconception about the function of language as being informing. Rather, language can perform a variety of presentational and social functions. In this regard, they classified rhetorical relations into presentational and subject matter relations. The purpose of subject-matter relations is to help the reader identify a formal relation, whereas the purpose of presentational relations is to stimulate the reader to take action and which can be achieved through different ways such as fostering acceptance, belief or a positive appreciation of the action presented in the nucleus of the text. The following table is a classification of subject matter and presentational relations according to RST theory.

Subject matter relations	Presentational relations
Elaboration	Motivation (increases desire)
Circumstance	Antithesis (increases positive regard)
Solutionhood	Background (increases ability)
Volitional cause	Enablement (increases ability)
Volitional result	Evidence (increases belief)
Non-volitional cause	Justify (increases acceptance)
Non-volitional result	Concession (increases positive regard)
Purpose	
Condition	
Otherwise	
Interpretation	
Evaluation	
Restatement	
Summary	
Sequence	
Contrast	

(Mann & Thompson, 1987, p. 18)

3. The Description of the Writing Instruction Model

The model of writing instruction in the present study consists of six main stages, namely preparation, modeling and reinforcing, planning, joint constructing, and revising.

1) **The Preparation Stage:** During this phase, the teacher introduces students to various rhetorical relations based on Mann & Thompson's (1987) taxonomy of coherence relations and explains how these relations can accomplish various purposes and have various effects on the reader.

2) **The Modeling stage:** Teachers provide students with texts from various genres as model texts along with exercises that increase their awareness of both reader-based features, such as the text's purpose and audience, as well as text-based features, such as the overall underlying structure and the various coherence relations employed.

3) **The Planning stage:** The teacher provides students with graphic organizers to use as they planned what to write about, which helped them to activate their schemata about the target subject and genre.

4) **The Joint Construction Stage:** during this stage, the teacher and students jointly construct a target genre text by following the three steps of the process approach, namely brainstorming, drafting, and revising.

5) **The Independent Construction Stage:** The teacher encourages students to use the same procedures used in the joint construction stage and write individually during the independent construction stage. At this stage, students are required to strike a balance in their writing between text-based features related to coherence and cohesion and reader-based features related to the audience and text purpose. To achieve this, students are encouraged to use different rhetorical relations they already learned to express different purposes. The teacher gives students assistance and direction when required.

6) **The Revising and Editing Stage:** the teacher first requests students to read and give comments on each other's essays. Additionally, the teacher gives students feedback on their writing regarding both the aforementioned reader-based and text-based features. Students are encouraged to read their writings as oral presentations during the editing phase.

4. Conclusion

This paper aimed at suggesting a model of writing instruction that would enable Moroccan EFL learners to write both coherently and purposefully. However, despite the importance of this model, it has the limitation of being just descriptive. Further research is recommended to test its applicability in different educational contexts.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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