

**IN THE NAME OF GOD**  
**THE COMPATIONATE**  
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**The Reading Comprehension Skill of  
Iranian Pre-university Students  
Regarding Narrative and Expository  
Discourse**

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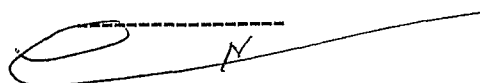
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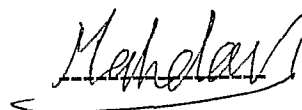
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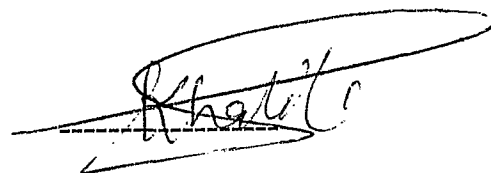
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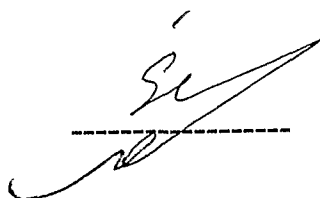
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**Dedicated to**

*my family*

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Reading Comprehension Skill of Iranian Pre-university Students Regarding Narrative and Expository Discourse**

**Mohsen Shafaghi**

Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from text (Sweet & Snow, 2003). Among the various models of reading comprehension, reading through discourse analysis is considered to be one of the most relevant, disclosing, precise, and efficient ways of reading a text. The present study aims at investigating how discourse analysis can be applied to comprehending texts. The research area focuses on two different modes of discourse - narrative and expository. More specifically, it addresses three questions: "Is there any statistically significant difference between reading narrative and expository texts? Does reading through discourse analysis affect reading comprehension? Does reading narrative texts have any effect on reading expository texts?" The participants of the study consist of two homogeneous experimental and control groups of Iranian pre-university students (30 students in each group). At the pretesting stage, a test on narrative and expository texts was given to either of the groups. The results of t-test analysis showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the performance of the two groups in comprehending narrative and expository texts. Next, the experimental group received treatment in reading narrative texts through discourse analysis framework whereas the control group did not. Then, a test on narrative texts was given to both groups and it was revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in comprehending narrative texts. Finally, both groups were administered the same expository texts as the ones at the pretesting stage and it was shown that reading narrative texts affects reading expository texts in a statistically significant way. The results of the study provided support for the pedagogical value of discourse analysis in reading various types of texts.

**Key words: discourse analysis, narrative text, expository text**

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1-1 Preview

Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from text (Sweet & Snow, 2003). “Understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible. It is not enough to understand the gist of the text; more detailed comprehension is necessary” (Grellet, 2006: 3).

In order to design a model of reading to provide the reader with the most efficient clues for understanding the text, a number of researchers have made attempts with different points of attention. Some have presented models which shed light on the text itself. Some have supported models which focus on the author; some others have designed models which shift the attention to the reader and still others have propounded the idea of text structure awareness.

Research over the past 15 years on discourse analysis and language comprehension has demonstrated that text structure awareness has a strong impact on efforts to improve reading instruction (Grabe, 1996). In addition, there have been some attempts to design a model of reading that corresponds to all the sides of the triangle of “text—author—reader”. A reading based on discourse analysis is considered to be one such model which examines reading from a broader standpoint.

Today there is a considerable body of research evidence which supports the use of discourse analysis and text structure instruction as a means for improving reading comprehension and learning (Grabe, 1996). Indeed, text structure instruction is one of the important comprehension strategies with consistent results. Other strategies which include summarizing, predicting, forming questions from headings and sub-headings, and using adjunct questions all appear to improve awareness of text structure (ibid.).

Discourse analysis approach allows us to recognize the organizational features of a text; it also leads us to see where meaning is really located and considers reading as a multi-dimensional activity. When a reader is able to identify text structure and elements and to

explore meaning in the abstract space between the three interconnected sides of the “text—author—reader”, many of his/her problems in reading comprehension will be solved.

In this research, the nature and function of discourse analysis will be investigated. Among the various types of discourse, two types—narrative and expository—will be examined inclusively. Then, the function of discourse analysis in reading comprehension of texts, especially narrative texts will be explored.

The principal purpose of this study is to propose a comprehensive model of discourse analysis for reading and interpreting narrative texts. To develop this model, a great deal of study on discourse analysis, genre analysis and especially narrative genre is required.

## **1-2 Background**

In recent views of reading, meaning is no longer considered to be in the utterance or text having an independent existence from both the reader and author, but it is taken as a communicative process in which the mind of the reader interacts with the text in a particular context. This view owes its existence to discourse analysis.

Originated from discourse, the term discourse analysis first entered general use by Zellig Harris in 1952. As an interdisciplinary concept, discourse analysis began to develop in 1960s and 1970s in most of humanities and social sciences disciplines such as semiotics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

Discourse analysis has two main branches. One branch is concerned with conversations and face-to-face interactions and is called conversation analysis. The other branch, known as ‘text linguistics’, often focuses on the abstract structures of (written) texts and is concerned with how different parts of a text are organized and related to one another to form a meaningful whole. But there is much overlap between these two domains of discourse analysis.

In this study, the researcher will use discourse analysis to refer mainly to the linguistic analysis of written discourse that is identified with the second branch of DA.

One can read a text in a variety of ways; one way is reading through discourse analysis. This type of reading focuses on the structure and organization of text and attempts to find the hidden meanings between the sentences and behind the structure of the text. Thus, discourse analysis can be applied to reading various types of texts. Nevertheless, the capacity of DA can be revealed more evidently in dealing with texts with deeper meanings and more complicated structures.

Thus, literary texts can be regarded as the typical example of the texts to be read and interpreted through discourse analysis. Among the various types of literary texts, we have chosen narrative texts, because apart from being motivating for ESL students, they are very appropriate to be analyzed through discourse analysis.

Our contribution in this study is to explore reading comprehension of narrative texts from the viewpoint of discourse analysis. We hope that this research will enrich the achievements in discourse analysis.

### **1-3 Statement of the problem**

The studies and researches on learning a foreign language demonstrate that many learners experience great difficulty in reading and understanding texts in a foreign language. A major problem for students in reading is that they often do not comprehend the text as a whole well even though vocabulary and sentence structures have not caused major problems in their understanding (Grabe, 1996).

Thus, if we wish to solve the reading problem of our students, we should avoid designing models based on guesses and speculations and instead try to design an appropriate approach to reading texts.

In Iran, despite the recent efforts to make English school books more comprehensible and enjoyable, there are still great difficulties among our students reading such books. In this study, the focus will be on Iranian pre-university students and their English course text book. The reason is that they are faced with a critical problem which is entering university. Also, there are some problems with their English course text book.



#### **1-4 Significance of the study**

Reading is one of the four major skills in learning a foreign language and often the one that provides the students with the best opportunity of being in contact with English after graduation. Our presupposition in this study is that the students' difficulties in reading English course text books can be at least minimized if they are taught to read in a specific framework, namely, discourse analysis. Furthermore, making some changes in the content of English pre-university books may contribute to solving this problem because almost all the reading comprehension texts in Iranian pre-university English course text books are limited to one major type, i.e. expository texts.

In this regard, the purpose of this study is to propose other modes of written texts to be included in pre-university English course text books. One benefit of the researches carried out through discourse analysis is that the students work with coherent texts that cover a range of genres. Thematically related reading materials provide many purposeful opportunities for exploring the structure of texts.

Since students have relatively little practice with a number of these genres, it is important that the genre structures underlying much of English school books be made deeply known to students, in order to be then a focus of direct instruction.

#### **1-5 Research questions and hypotheses**

There are three research questions in this study which are as follows:

- 1- Is there any significant difference between reading narrative and expository texts among Iranian pre-university students?
- 2- Does reading through discourse analysis affect the reading comprehension of Iranian pre-university students?
- 3- Does reading narrative texts have any effect on reading expository texts among Iranian pre-university students?

Accordingly, there are three null hypotheses which correspond to the research questions:

- 1- There is not any significant difference between reading narrative and expository texts among Iranian pre-university students.

- 2- Reading through discourse analysis does not affect the reading comprehension of Iranian pre-university students.
- 3- Reading narrative texts does not have any effect on reading expository texts among Iranian pre-university students.

### **1-6 Definition of key terms**

1. **Discourse:** Formal definitions typically characterize discourse as a unit of coherent language consisting of more than one sentence; functional definitions characterize discourse as language in use.
2. **Discourse analysis:** Discourse analysis is "the study of language in use that extends beyond sentence boundaries".

McCarthy (2005: 5) states that discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used.

3. **Expository text:** Expository text is a mode of writing in which the purpose of the author is to inform, explain, describe, or define his or her subject to the reader. It includes essays, speeches, journals, newspaper and magazine articles, etc.
4. **Narrative text:** A narrative text is an account of events, usually in the past, that employs verbs of speech, motion, and action to describe a series of events that are contingent one on another, and that typically focuses on one or more performers of actions.

### **1-7 Limitations of the study**

There have been some limitations in conducting this study:

1. The participants were all male students studying at pre-university level. There were two reasons: first, studying the previous researches done on similar subjects showed no statistically significant difference between the performance of male and female students. Second, the researcher was male and thus not allowed to conduct such a study at female schools.

2. Among the various modes of discourse, two were selected for conducting this study - narrative and expository – and the other modes were not examined due to the limitations of time and space.
3. Due to the purpose of this research, the model developed in this study was for reading narrative texts through discourse analysis approach. Therefore, the findings of this study might not be valid for other modes of texts.
4. To close, we can say one major accomplishment of written discourse analysis has been its impact on reading comprehension. Needless to say, further research with many different L2 student groups and instructional contexts should be carried out to establish better the various ways in which research in written discourse analysis supports L2 instructional practices on reading comprehension.

### **1-8 Outline of the Study**

In chapter 1, the subject matter which is reading through discourse analysis is introduced, the significance of the study is stated and the research questions are proposed.

In chapter 2, a literature review will be introduced to bring together various studies and models of discourse analysis. Moreover, a model will be developed for reading narrative texts through discourse analysis approach to bring about a more comprehensive model for reading narrative texts.

In chapter 3, the methodology selected for conducting the research will be introduced and the stages for doing so are to be explicated. Besides, the details of the model developed in chapter 2 will be discussed through a sample of the work which has been carried out in the experimental group class.

In chapter 4, the results developed from the study will be presented in a stepwise manner. The procedure for carrying out the research will be explained and the statistical analysis of each stage will be illustrated in tables and graphs.

In chapter 5, summary of the findings, conclusion, pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research will be proposed.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**