



Title	The Christensen Method: Student Progress with Coordination and Subordination in the Paragraph
Author(s)	Gosewisch, Ronald
Citation	長崎大学教育学部人文科学研究報告, 35, pp.75-81; 1986
Issue Date	1986-03
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10069/32953
Right	

This document is downloaded at: 2019-04-22T02:50:56Z

The Christensen Method:
Student Progress with Coordination and Subordination in
the
Paragraph

Ronald GOSEWISCH
Instructor of Foreign Studies

Introduction

Writing programs for intermediate to advanced students of ESL have proliferated over the past several years. One must ask, however, to what degree has progress been made over previous techniques used and, moreover, whether or not methods used for native users would prove any more or less effective. If the goal in a foreign or second language curriculum is the eventual independence from the teacher, doesn't this mean, in effect, that the student will be expected to communicate with first language users on the terms of those same first language users? In other words, it is natural that second language users will wish to deal with the second language on a par (or as near as possible to par) with first language users of the language. And, if so, shouldn't methods devised for first language users be as useful for advanced second language users as they are for first language users? On these two premises, a program of extensive reading, lasting three and a half years, from freshman year to the middle of the senior year, coupled with a three year writing program beginning with the sophomore year was started at Nagasaki University six years ago. The method used in the final year of the writing program is based largely on the work of the late Prof. Francis Christensen at the University of Southern California. His work concentrates on the use of coordination and subordination in what Prof. Christensen called the 'cumulative sentence' and the correlation between this type of sentence structure and that of the English paragraph.

Purpose

The focus of this paper is on the second semester of the fourth year, the last semester, of the program. The goal set for the students in this writing class was to transfer the principles of sentence structure that they had internalized in the first semester of their last year in the program to that of the paragraph.

Method

The principle pedagogical approach was to give homework assignments that were reviewed and analyzed by the class, as a whole, using a “printed page” projector. The aim was not so much instant correction but, rather, a clear understanding on the part of each individual as to just where and for what reason or reasons his or her work was dissatisfactory or, just as importantly, satisfactory. This was done in four stages. First, practice with coordination in paragraphs using assignments from the text and/or those made up by the teacher. Second, practice with subordination in paragraphs in the same way as the first step. Third, practice in writing introductory paragraphs for the students’ own graduation theses, which included one coordination sentence to introduce each chapter, usually numbering three or four, and, in a few cases, writing introductory paragraphs for each chapter of their theses. Fourth, and finally, practice writing introductory paragraphs for their graduation theses with both coordination and subordination. To indicate the levels of generality, the students were asked to use numbers followed by a period to indicate the level of a sentence and, in some cases, numbers in brackets to indicate the same of phrases within sentences. (Re B. Christensen in *The Christensen Method* and this writer’s article “On the Christensen Method” in the Fac. of Ed. Bull. No. 32).

The first step, being quite straight forward, was quickly grasped by the students. As in the sentence, the principle of beginning phrases of the same level of generality with similar grammatical forms was here applied to sentences of the same level of generality in the paragraph. The following four examples by Nagasaki University English majors and minors illustrate the concept quite well.

Examples I -IV

- I.
 1. Books have always been many things to the thoughtful person.
 2. They can be mothers, who lull you to sleep, making you feel at home.
 2. They can be friends, who will cry, laugh and become angry with you.
 2. They can be teachers, who are willing to give you hearty advice.
 2. They can be loves or lovers, who take you to the world of romance.
- II.
 1. I have a favorite point in each season.
 2. In spring, I love the atmosphere that lets me feel at ease.
 2. In summer, the briskness and the heat that vividly overwhelms the town is good.
 2. In autumn, the beautiful color change of nature is most impressive.
 2. In winter, I love the cold wind in the early, clear mornings that blow straight into me and encourages me somehow.

- III. 1. Although more and more Americans see a college degree as a passport to the future, the unprecedented rise in college enrollments has had a number of unpleasant side effects.
2. One problem is a marked decline in the students' scholastic attainment.
 2. Another problem is a lack of college facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, cafeterias and so on.
 2. Still another problem is the difficulty of getting a satisfactory job after leaving the school because of the high competition among college graduates.
- IV. 1. Yesterday three of my friends gathered in my room.
2. One was a clerk of a small office, who was complaining about the boredom of her business.
 2. Another was a clerk of a bank, who was saying that she was still shy of speaking to customers.
 2. And the other was a student of the university, who was anxious about being posted to a remote island as a teacher.

The second stage focuses on subordination in paragraphs, the assignments, as in the first stage, supplying only the topic sentences, the students completing the paragraphs. The next example shows clearly what was done.

Example V

- V. 1. Good company makes a good evening.
2. Several close friends of mine and I often go out to enjoy one.
 3. It is spent, for the most part, with a lot of highly "sophisticated" discussions about the girls we are interested in.
 4. We are so fond of them that, losing our sense of time, we spend the evening far into the night with a lot of great enjoyment.

The third stage can be illustrated by the next two examples, the first an introductory paragraph to a thesis, the second an introductory paragraph to just one chapter of a thesis.

Examples VI–VII

- VI. 1. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the relationship between the process of expanding symbols and the transition of marriage relations over three generations.
2. Chapter one is concerned with the process of developing symbols — the figures of the arch, rainbow and cathedral.
2. Chapter two is concerned with how marriage relations are changed according to each generation.
2. Chapter three is concerned with the contradiction of the symbolic development treated in chapter one and the gradual breakdown of marriage relations treated in chapter two.
- VII. 1. Dreiser describes social evil by indicating ‘chemisms’.
2. In this chapter, this theory of ‘chemisms’ is analyzed in the following order.
3. First, the definition of ‘chemisms’.
3. Second, the cause of ‘chemisms’.
3. Third, the influence of ‘chemisms’ on the characters of *Sister Carrie*.
3. And last, about the great cities where the elements of ‘chemisms’ concentrate.

Finally, the fourth stage tries to bring it all together, the students attempting to write well structured and well textured introductory paragraphs for their graduation theses. The final example below should indicate to the reader what can be done.

Example VIII

- VIII. 1. (2) In the Sandcastle,
- (1) there are a lot of interesting symbolic elements,
- (2) inserted skillfully in some important scenes,
- (3) magnificently in one case,
- (3) secretly in another case,
- (2) telling us what Murdoch wants to say.
2. (1) The title of this book,/, plays an important part.
- /(2) *The Sandcastle*,
3. (1) It just means the airy castle of fantasy,
- (2) being only beautiful,
- (2) producing nothing.
2. The water is also an important element.
3. (1) It signifies a fleeting and temporary help for building the sand castle,

- (2) by firming the sand,
- (2) soon to be evaporated by the sun.
- 2. (1) The weather is very interesting,
- (2) becoming rainy when the relation between Mor and Rain progresses,
- (2) the sun shining when people are obliged to face the severity of reality.
- 3. Rain and water can be considered to mean the same thing.
- 2. (1) The deaf and dumb gipsy is meaningful,
- (2) like an omen of the love between Mor and Rain.
- 3. (1) He can be considered as a warning against the trap of fantasy,
- (2) appearing where Mor and Rain meet,
- (2) threatening them somehow.
- 2. (1) The characters' names, / / are also noteworthy.
- (2) /some of them,
- 3. (1) It is obvious that Rain Carter has a relation to the rain of the weather,
- (2) suddenly coming and suddenly leaving,
- (2) like a fleeting daydream.
- 3. (1) Felicity Mor just means felicity,
- (2) the real happiness of a human being,
- (2) playing the part of the bond of Mor's family.

In the above example, both coordination and subordination are clear, i.e., those sentences of the second level of generality (marked with "2") all begin with similar grammatical and lexical structure, the definite article followed by a noun, in this case, each being one of the symbols in the novel. As a result, when the paragraph is typed in the traditional block style, the sentences unmarked by numbers, the reader can easily discern which sentences are of equal import, the coordination in the paragraph. The other sentences, then, are subordinate to these second level sentences, tied to ideas (words) in these second level sentences by direct reference, in this case, by the use of the pronoun "it" in all but the last third level sentence wherein proper names refer back to "The characters' names" in the preceding second level sentence.

Such paragraphs, as the one above, are well knit and provide excellent control over the organization of what follows the paragraph, the students' graduation theses, the subject of each second level sentence providing the topic of the chapters in the theses, the subjects of the third level sentences providing subtopics for sections within the individual chapters.

Conclusion

In summary, then, what can be said of the capabilities of Japanese students of English? This writer feels that the evidence presented in this very brief paper clearly indicates that, like anyone given the proper “tools of the trade” and a bit of motivation, our students at Nagasaki University can write English very well indeed.

Bibliography

- Allwright, Richard L., “Classroom-centered Research on Language Teaching and Learning: A Brief Overview,” *TESOL QUARTERLY*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1983, pp 191-204.
- Carr, Marion (PBVM), “Applying the Pre-Writing Process,” *Bulletin of Junshin College* (Nagasaki, Japan), Vol. 20, Mar 1984, pp 51-56
- Carr, Marion (PBVM), “A Repertoire of Teaching Models” *Bulletin of Junshin College* (Nagasaki, Japan), Vol. 21, Dec 1984, pp 55-62
- Christensen, Francis L., *Notes on a New Rhetoric: 6 Essays for Teachers*, NY: Harper and Row, 1967.
-, Bonniejean Christensen, *A New Rhetoric*, NY: Harper and Row, 1976.
- Christensen, Bonniejean, *The Christensen Method*, NY: Harper and Row, 1979.
- Croll, Morris W., “The Baroque Style in Prose,” *Style, Rhetoric and Rhythm: Essays by Morris W. Croll*, 1966.
- Elbow, Peter, *Writing with Power*, NY: OUP, 1981.
- Erskine, John, “The Craft of Writing,” *Twentieth Century English*, Philosophical Library, 1946.
- Gosewisch, Ronald, “On the Christensen Method,” *Faculty of Education Bulletin*, Nagasaki University, No. 32., Mar 1983, pp 83-88.
- Gosewisch, Ronald, “The Christensen Method: Student Progress with the Cumulative Sentence,” *Faculty of Education Bulletin*, Nagasaki University, No. 33, Mar 1984, pp 83-95.
- Hinds, John L., “Contrastive Rhetoric: Japanese and English,” *Text*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1983, pp 183-195.
- Johnson, M. Margueritte, *The Verbid Clause in Current English*, unpublished dissertation, University of Washington, 1960.
- Kaplan, Robert B., “Contrastive Rhetoric and the Teaching of Composition,” *TESOL QUARTERLY*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1967, pp 10-16.
- Krashen, Stephen D., *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*, NY: Pergamon Press 1981.
- *Writing: From Theory to Practice*, NY: Pergamon Press, 1984.

- Krashen, Stephen D., and Tracy Terrell, *The Natural Approach*, NY : Pergamon Press, 1983.
- Purvis, Alan, "Language Processing : Reading and Writing," *College English*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp 129-140.
- Raimes, Ann, *Focus on Composition*, NY : OUP, 1982.
-, *Techniques in Teaching Writing*, NY : OUP, 1983.
-, (ed), Writing and Composition, Supplement No 1 to *TESOL Newsletter*, TESOL, Feb 84, 16.
- Richards, Jack, "The Secret Life of Methods," *TESOL QUARTERLY*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1984, pp 7-23.
- Robinett, Betty W., *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*, Univ. Of Minn Press, 1978.
- Rockas, Leo, "Abstract and Concrete Sentences," *CCC*, May 1963.
- Stevens, Peter, "Language Comprehension, Learning and Use" *Prospect : Journal of the Adult Migrant Education Program*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Adelaide, S. Australia.
- Weissberg, Robert C., "Given and New : Paragraph Development Models from Scientific English," *TESOL QUARTERLY* Vol. 18, No. 3, 1984, pp 485-500.
- Witherspoon, A. M., and F. J. Warnbe, *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, 2nd Ed., 1963.