

# Topical Structure Analysis of American and Philippine Editorials

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## Abstract

This paper examines the topical structure of the Philippine and American editorials published in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The New York Times*. It specifically examines the number of words, clauses, and sentences in a paragraph; number of words and number of clauses in a sentence; and number of words in a clause. It also analyses the difference in the internal coherence between the American and Filipino editorials in English in terms of parallel progression, extended parallel progression, and sequential progression. The findings of the study reveal that the difference between the two writings is very minimal. American and Filipino editorial writers have similar style in terms of topical progressions but Filipino writers tend to write longer and more wordy clauses and sentences. The study provides an idea that both the American and Filipino writers achieve internal coherence in writing as reflected in the number of parallel progression, extended parallel progression, and sequential progression in every paragraph.

**Keywords:** Topical Structure, contrastive rhetoric, American and Philippine editorials

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For several years, linguistic research focused more on the cultural influences in language. It started with the findings of Kaplan's (1966) where he linked his original work to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which created an implication on the relationship between language and thought.

Kaplan (1966) emphasized that writing styles differ across cultures which has been widely supported in many linguistic research and linguistic analysis. Therefore, it might be crucial to explore, find, and describe the origins of rhetorical differences in various cultures. The need to discover and describe the causes for the preferences found in other cultures is based on the notion that there are unique rhetorical traditions in at least the world's major cultures. This idea supports the fact that people in different cultures do not only write in contrasting styles, as has been adequately demonstrated in numerous contrastive rhetoric studies, but they also develop other methods of writing because of the difference in world view.

It is generally known that Asian culture shares minimally with the Anglo-European and the American cultures. This is evident in the perception of Asian people which differ from those of the native English speakers in constructing reality and in seeking the truth through rhetorical activities. It can further be understood that the rhetorical patterns of communication are influenced by the speakers' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These rhetorical patterns are evident in reading and writing particularly among the learners of English as a second language.

Recent studies in linguistics and applied linguistics have started to emphasize the connection between reading and writing, attempting to define the process of transferring the skills from the former to the latter. For instance in writing, students might be able to acquire the writing skill faster if they are provided with good writing models to read before they do the actual writing. Such models function as a scaffolding device which could facilitate the writing process by using certain rhetorical patterns to achieve coherence in writing.

Application of coherence theories as in Connor and Johns (1990), suggested that such application can improve writing instruction. One particularly promising attempt to describe discourse-based coherence, which is applicable directly to writing instruction, is the “topical structure analysis.” In an ESL context, Schneider and Connor (1990) conducted a study using essays written for the TOEFL Test of Written English (TWE). The major findings showed that topical structure analysis correlated with the readers’ judgments of writing quality. From the findings of the study, they concluded that highly rated essays have the following characteristics: a high proportion of sequential progression and an extended parallel progression which help pull the essay back to its main theme (Schneider and Connor, 1990).

However in writing, there is a need to consider the cultural and linguistic background of the writer especially for the second language learners. Ostler (1987) stressed that the learners’ linguistic and cultural background are interrelated. Second language learners of English who are more exposed to English language are “literate” in their writing style. On the other hand, those who write in Arabic and exposed in oralized form of communication tend to be rhythmical and formulaic in their writing style. Therefore, it can be said that the rhetorical patterns in English are more established than that of the Arabic language.

Simpson (2000) in her study on *‘Topical Structure Analysis of Academic paragraphs in English and Spanish’* found that English writers tend to have more repetition of keywords and phrases, whereas, the Spanish writers link ideas together across the distance of a paragraph. It reveals that the two languages vary in their patterns of writing. The two studies show that the rhetorical patterns are culturally bound and proved that there are different rhetorical patterns in different cultures.

To discover more differences of written texts from two different cultures using the same language, a comparative study of editorials written by American and Filipino writers is conceptualised. This study examines the English newspaper editorials of two broadsheets – The Philippine Daily Inquirer and the New York Times.

The focus of the study is to analyse the physical structure and topical structure of the American and Filipino editorials in English. Another concern is on the level of significance between the American and Filipino editorials as far as coherence which is based on Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) that looks at patterns of repeated keywords and phrases (Lautamatti, 1987).

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study analysed the differences between the American and Filipino editorials in English. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do American editorials differ from the Filipino editorials in terms of:
  - Number of words per paragraph?
  - Number of sentences per paragraph?
  - Number of words per sentence?
  - Number of clauses?
  - Number of clauses per sentence?
  - Number of clauses per paragraph?
  - Number of words per clause?
  
2. Is there a difference in the internal coherence between the American and Filipino editorials in English in terms of:
  - Parallel progression?
  - Extended parallel progression?
  - Sequential progression?

### 3. SELECTION OF CORPUS

This study used twenty-eight editorials, written by American and Filipino writers, published in leading broadsheets. The newspapers, *The New York Times* published in the United States and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* published in the Philippines, were used. Fourteen editorials from each broadsheets were the corpus used for physical analysis and topical structure analysis.

For specific purposes, the editorials chosen were published in the same dates from August 11-24, 2002. In the said editorials only the first two full paragraphs were chosen for analysis. There were fifty-six paragraphs selected for analysis. The paragraphs were analysed in terms of their physical structure and their topical structure which include three progressions: Parallel progression, Extended Parallel progression, and Sequential progression. Table 1 shows the titles of the editorials selected for research.

Table 1. Editorial titles

<b>Date</b>	<b>American Editorials (The New York Times)</b>	<b>Filipino Editorials written in English (Philippine Daily Inquirer)</b>
August 11, 2002	1. The First Domino	1. Recipe for Paralysis
August 12, 2002	2. International Justice	2. Unfinished Business
August 13, 2002	3. Steps Before War	3. Boat People
August 14, 2002	4. The Anger of Arab Youth	4. An Incredible Tale
August 15, 2002	5. Oily Diplomacy	5. Deadly Comeback
August 16, 2002	6. The Skateboard Habit	6. Bad Calls
August 17, 2002	7. Unlimited Power?	7. War Talk
August 18, 2002	8. A Hard Line in Colombia	8. Anti-crime Show
August 19, 2002	9. Some Spam is Clever	9. Hearts of Gold
August 20, 2002	10. Anthrax and Suspicion	10. Extended Run
August 21, 2002	11. Who's Mending the Store	11. Good Movies
August 22, 2002	12. The Russian Military	12. Quick Box
August 23, 2002	13. Share Iraq Audience	13. Burning in Hell
August 24, 2002	14. A Message to Cairo	14. Joe's Call

## 4. METHODS FOR ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Physical Analysis

The physical analysis was done by counting the number of words, number of sentences and number of clauses per sentence manually. The first two paragraphs in each editorial were analyzed. Moreover, the editorials both written by American and Filipino writers were published in the same dates to avoid potential differences.

### 4.2 Topical Structure Analysis

The researcher followed the Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) of Lautamatti (1987), which was used to determine the effective discourse and to identify the internal structure of the paragraph by plotting the repetition of keywords and phrases.

The analysis was done by describing the three basic important elements that play important roles in topical structure analysis. These include the Initial Sentence Element (ISE), which refers to the word or group of words that comes first in the sentence which can be a subject of the sentence, an introductory phrase or a clause. The next element is the mood subject or the grammatical subject of the sentence. The last element is the topical subject, which may or may not be the mood subject. After identifying the three elements in each sentence of the paragraphs, the topical subject was plotted into a graph by considering the three types of thematic progression in the presentation of topical structure analysis. Lautamatti (1987) identified the three progressions as follows:

1. Parallel Progression (The topics are semantically co-inferential)
2. Extended Parallel Progression (A parallel progression is temporarily interrupted by a sequential progression)
3. Sequential Progression (The topics are always different and derived from comment of the previous sentence)

In deciding the topic of each sentence, a certain amount of intuition is needed and may not be thought of as being the same by two different people, depending on their perceptiveness. The following steps were used to clarify the basis of topical structure analysis:

1. Numbering each sentence in the passage.
2. Highlighting the topic (word or phrase) in each sentence.
3. Drawing a diagram of the passage sentences.
4. Checking for coherence of ideas and make changes accordingly.

For the purpose of this study, only the topical subjects of independent clauses were identified.

### 4.3 Research Design

This study used the quantitative research design to demonstrate some of the differences between the American and Filipino editorial writings in English. To arrive at a valid result, a corpus was collected from two different newspapers: *The New York Times* and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* from two different cultures.

This study used a corpus of 28 editorials, 14 editorials in each group. It mainly compared and contrasted the physical and topical structure of writings among American and Filipino editorial writers. Two methods were used in the study: the physical analysis and the topical structure analysis.

The corpus was coded and tabulated for textual analysis. If culture specific rhetorical characteristics are detected in the editorial writings, it may reaffirm and substantiate the hypothesis and claim that there are distinctive rhetorical differences between the two cultures.

#### 4.4 Research Instruments

This study used the editorial writings from the two known broadsheets in America and the Philippines. *The New York Times* and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* were chosen by the researchers as instruments in studying topical structure analysis. Twenty-four newspaper editorials written by American and Filipino writers were analysed but this study included only the first two full paragraphs. A total of fifty-six paragraphs were used as samples for the analysis.

### 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 The Physical Analysis

The physical analysis of the paragraphs shows some predictable physical differences as revealed in Table 2.

Table 2: General Data

	<b>The New York Times</b>	<b>The Philippine Daily Inquirer</b>
Total number of words	2,066	1,583
Average number of words per paragraph	77.9	57.54
Total number of sentences	96	67
Average number of sentences per paragraph	3.13	2.79
Average words per sentence	21.52	27.67

Table 2 shows the general data, which reveals the total number of words, average number of words, average number of words per paragraph, total number of sentences, average number of sentences per paragraph and average words per sentence.

The table shows the differences of American and Filipino editorials in their physical structure. *The New York Times* had 2,066 words and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* had 1,583 words. The New York Times has an average of 77.79 where as *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* has an average of only 57.54; the total number of sentence in *The New York Times* is 96 and

in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* is 67; the average number of sentences per paragraph reveals an average of 3.13 in *The New York Times* and 2.79 in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* and the average word per sentence in *The New York Times* is 21.52 and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* is 27.67.

The result reveals the differences between the writings of the Americans and Filipinos. The Americans write short sentences but more sentences in a paragraph, while Filipino writers write longer sentences but use only few sentences in a paragraph.

Table 3: Clause Data

	<b>The New York Times</b>	<b>The Philippine Daily Inquirer</b>
Total number of clauses	170	24
Average clauses per paragraph	6.77	4.13
Average clauses per sentence	1.77	1.75
Average words per clause	11.12	13.2

Table 3 presents the clause data, which includes the total number of clauses per paragraph, average clauses per paragraph, average clauses per sentence and average words per clause.

The research shows that *The New York Times* contains 170 total number of clauses and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* contains 124 total number of clauses. The average number of clauses per paragraph in *The New York Times* is 6.77 and the in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* is 4.13. However, the average number of clauses per sentence of the two newspaper editorials seems to be almost the same. This close similarity is demonstrated by the fact that, *The New York Times* has an average of 1.77 and *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* 1.75. On the other hand, the number of words per clause shows a difference in quantitative data, with *The New York Times* revealing an average of 11.12 words while *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* has an average of 13.2 words.

The data reveals that the American writers use many clauses in a paragraph but few words in every clause. The Filipino writers, on the other hand, use only few clauses in a paragraph but many words are used in every clause.

The physical structure of the American writings and the Filipino writings differ particularly in the number of words, average number of words per paragraph, total number of sentences, average number of sentences per paragraph, average words per sentence, total number of clauses, average clauses per paragraph, average words per clause. The data in Table 2 and 3 could still be utilised for tracing the significant difference by the use of the t-test as a statistical treatment, which will give a clearer and more specific difference.

### Topical Structure Analysis

Table 4: Summary of Topical Development of American Editorial Writings  
(The New York Times)

Editorial No.	Independent Clauses	New Topics	Parallel Progression	Extended Parallel Progression	Sequential Progression
1	6	3	1	1	1
2	8	5	3	2	1
3	7	3	2	2	0
4	8	3	4	0	1
5	8	3	2	1	1
6	8	5	3	0	2
7	5	3	2	1	1
8	7	6	1	2	2
9	8	6	1	2	2
10	8	2	4	1	1
11	9	6	1	2	2
12	7	4	2	1	1
13	7	4	2	1	2
14	5	3	2	0	2
Total	101	56	30	16	19

Table 4 presents the summary of topical development of the American editorial writings. It specifically reveals the number of editorials used; the number of independent clauses in every editorial and the number of new topics that occurred in every paragraph. Furthermore, it gives a clear idea on the number of parallel progression, extended parallel progression and sequential parallel progression in every paragraph. The topical development in *The New York Times*, contains 101 independent clauses, 56 new topics, 30 parallel progressions, 16 extended parallel progressions and 19 sequential progressions.

Table 5: Summary of Topical Development of Philippine Editorial Writings  
(The Philippine Daily Inquirer)

Editorial No.	Independent Clauses	New Topics	Parallel Progression	Extended Parallel Progression	Sequential Progression
1	6	3	2	0	1
2	7	3	3	0	1
3	3	1	1	0	0
4	7	3	2	1	2
5	4	3	1	0	1
6	3	1	1	0	0
7	6	2	2	1	1
8	3	3	0	0	1
9	4	2	2	0	1
10	6	4	1	1	2
11	6	2	2	1	1
12	3	2	1	1	1
13	4	4	0	0	3
14	5	4	1	1	2
Total	67	37	19	6	17

Table 5 presents the summary of topical development of the Philippine editorial writings. It obtains 67 independent clauses, 37 new topics, 19 parallel progressions, 6 extended parallel progressions and 17 sequential parallel progressions. This summary gives an indication of measurement of whether there is a significant difference between the editorial writings of the American and Filipino writers.

### Topical Structure Analysis

Table 6: Comparative Summary of Totals for Topical Structure Analysis

	The New York Times Editorials	Percent %	The Philippine Daily Inquirer Editorials	Percent %
Clauses	101		67	
Topics	56	55.4	37	55.2
Parallel Progression	30	29.7	19	28.4
Extended parallel progression	16	15.8	6	8.9
Sequential Progression	19	18.8	17	25.4
<b>Total Progression</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>64.4</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>62.7</b>

Table 6 shows the comparative summary of totals for topical structure analysis. In *The New York Times*, the data show a total of 101 clauses, with 56 topics that is equivalent to 55.4 percent, 30 parallel progressions which is 29.7 percent, 16 extended parallel progression which is 15.8 percent, 19 sequential progression which is 18.8 percent and a total progression of 65 which is equivalent to 64.4 percent.

*The Philippine Daily Inquirer* on the other hand, contains a total of 67 clauses, 37 topics, which is equivalent to 55.2 percent, 19 parallel progressions, which is 28.4 percent, 17 sequential progression which is 25.4 percent and a total progression of 42 equivalent to 62.7 percent.

The result of the study reveals that the American and Filipino writers have minimal differences in writing. They have almost the same percentage in the repetition of phrases and clauses.

For the number of topics that occurred in every paragraph it shows that there is no difference at all for the American editorials which obtain 55.4 percent whereas the Philippine editorials obtain 55.2 percent. However, in the repetition of keywords and phrases, the data show a minimal difference. In the parallel progression of the American and Philippine editorials, it shows a difference of 1.7; the extended parallel progression, a bigger difference is revealed, which is 6.9. The sequential progression has a difference of 6.6 and the total progression in both writings shows only a small difference of 1.7.

The difference in the findings still proves that the editorial writings of the American writers, are more coherent than that of the Filipino writers. This phenomenon could be attributed to the western culture with its proclivity towards being direct. The minimal differences between the American and Filipino editorial writings suggest a similarity in the internal coherence between the Filipino writers and the Americans writers. It can be interpreted that the

similarities of writing between the Filipinos and the American native speakers are related to the variety of English used in the Philippines which is closely related to the American English.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The result of the study explains how the American and Filipino writers write in an editorial. Based on the corpus, the differences between the two writers is very minimal as far as the topical progressions are concerned. Although, they show the similarity in style, the Filipino writers tend to be verbose while the native writers (Americans) are more concise..

The study further proves that both the American and Filipino writers achieve internal coherence in writing as reflected in the number of parallel progression, extended parallel progression, and sequential progression in every paragraph. Therefore, it is evident that the writings of the Filipino writers closely parallel their American counterparts.

This study provides an idea for some researchers who might wish to replicate this research to further prove its findings. Engaging in newspaper discourse will produce more critical language users as well as textual characteristics. Towards this end, the researchers suggest to increase the corpus in studying topical structure analysis of American and Philippine writings in English and extend the genre to either professional writings or academic writings. Different results might emerge when other relationships (i.e. text production and consumption) are explored. What this research has shown is only applicable to editorial writings of American and Filipino writers.

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