TEXT ORGANIZATION: THE RELEVANCE OF UNDERSTANDING IT

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RESUMO:

O trabalho tem por objetivo mostrar as aplicações pedagógicas da proposta Hoey (1979) quanto à estrutura do discurso. Parte do pressuposto que uma compreensão dessa estrutura é elemento facilitador no processo de compreensão da leitura. Os elementos marcadores das várias partes da estrutura proposta são enumerados.

The main purpose of this work is to call attention to the way texts are organized and to some aspects of the language used which efficiently sign the structures of discourse.

The analysis of discourse-structure is useful since it helps the reader to understand efficiently his reading comprehension task. The reader, being able to perceive the discourse structures and the language items which sign each of them, is able to play the psycholinguistic game proposed by Goodman (1967) and Smith (1978). According to these psycholinguists the reader will be searching for meaning, by perceiving the relationships between sentences and paragraphs instead of identifying words as isolated bits of informa
tion.

The above psycholinguistic point of view about the reading process is well shown through Goodman's following quotation in which he defines:

"Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and interaction and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time"(1)

and through Smith's saying that (1978) "reading is not a matter of identifying individual letters, or even individual words"(2)

... "to read is to look for meaning and to put meaning into short - term memory"(3).

There are some different approaches to discourse structure analysis. There are the ones proposed by Deyes (1982) and by Hoey (1979). According to Deyes (1982) the text may have INTRODUCTION - PROBLEM - METHODS - RESULTS - DISCUSSION - CONCLUSION and the teaching of these structures can help the students in their reading tasks. According to Hoey a text may have the following structure: SITUATION - PROBLEM - SOLUTION - EVALUATION and the teaching of it can help the readers to find out how language has specific means of conveying logical relations.

After analyzing Deyes (1982) and Hoey's discourse structures I decided to give emphasis to the discourse structure proposed by Hoey since it seems to satisfy the main purpose of this work.

Hence, I planned how I should teach my students to identify the problem - solution structure in texts and its markers. The plan is exposed below:

On the organization of the text, the students should be made aware that texts generally follow a
certain pattern of organization and that they need to be able to identify the pattern used by the author they are reading, since it may help them to understand the text efficiently. They should be made aware that most of the texts have the introduction, the development and the conclusion and that sometimes this pattern can be presented according to Hoey’s pattern: SITUATION - PROBLEM - SOLUTION - EVALUATION.

According to Hoey, the reader should ask himself questions that lead him to finding each of the components of the problem - solution - structure - "questions technique is a theoretically viable way of analyzing discourses"(4). He suggests that through the questions, what's the situation?, the reader can guide his reading in order to find it. Through the question, what's the problem?, the reader can also guide his reading and find the problem. The questions, what's the solution? and what's the evaluation?, may also guide the reader to identify the solution and evaluation respectively. According to Hoey's point of view, not only these questions lead the reader to find out the components of a structure but also some lexical items, verb forms and the position of a structure within the text.

Let's observe some of the signalling marks for situation - problem - solution - evaluation.

I - The Signalling of Situation in the Sample Discourse:

a) Position - generally the situation comes at the beginning of a problem solution discourse. It provides a context for subsequent sentences.

b) Verb tense - the verb is in the simple non past form.

c) Lexical items - an anaphoric item may indicate that an earlier sentence may be regarded as situational.
II - The Signalling of Problem in the Sample Discourse:

a) Lexical items - words such as problem, solution, etc are required and many others used may give the reader clues to locate the problem.

III - The Signalling of Solution in the Sample Discourse:

a) Lexical items - these are some words such as result, response, develop, come up with the solution, etc, which may give the reader clues to locate the solution.

IV - The Signalling of Evaluation in Sample Discourse:

a) Lexical items - words such as: evaluate, fortunately, unfortunately, attack the solution, solution was particularly important, may indicate the evaluation. Taking into account these suggested words that may indicate evaluation one can see that evaluation may be positive or negative. A negative evaluation may signal a new problem.

After analyzing the text structure proposed by Hoey and having decided that it might be useful for reading comprehension, I feel the necessity to point out which steps I would follow in order to make it easier for the reader to identify the problem - solution structures in a text. Keeping this in mind I would start by telling and explaining to the reader the components of the structure and the relevance of identifying them. After that, I think that I would train him to find sentences that do not make sense in the context, to recognize sentences which were arranged in the wrong way and then to find each of the structures involved in the problem - solution structure.

Concluding, I would say that what was exposed
above could be tested by me or by anyone interested in the discovery of the efficiency or inefficiency of teaching the identification of discourse structure and its markers for helping the students' reading comprehension tasks.

NOTES

3 Ib. Ibid. pg. 41.
4 Michel HOEY (1979). Signalling in Discourse. English Language Research, University of Birmingham. pg.16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY