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### DIALOGUE WRITING AS A FIRST STEP IN DISCOURSE PRODUCTION



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Dialogue is an instance in oral communication. As a discourse unit it involves framing questions and eliciting responses to the questions. Writing a dialogue has relevance in discourse production for two reasons. To write a dialogue successfully requires dramatic ability: for the writer must not only see both perspectives of a question, but has also to put himself in the shoes of two imaginary persons so as to make them express their opposite opinions naturally and in keeping with their characters. Therefore, careful preparation is necessary for writing a dialogue. Therefore it is advisable to make a plan or outline of the dialogue before beginning to write: Arranging ideas in logical order otherwise the dialogue may be rambling and pointless. Yet at the same time, it must not give an impression that it is a laboured effort. Dialogue writing as practised by these learners would be a formal one avoiding features present in real life dialogues such as use of colloquialisms, incomplete sentences, repetition of utterances or digression since they were instructed to avoid such features.

A dialogue has the same features as any other discourse.

- It should have an introduction in the form of a salutation or greeting,
- A body containing a series of exchanges- which takes the form of a question-answer response, logically progressing in a direction relevant to the topic given and
- Conclusion which ends the conversation by bidding farewell or wishing well or offering some friendly advice.

The dialogue should begin in an interesting way arresting the reader's attention straight away. The middle that is the series of exchanges should lead to some definite conclusion. It should not end abruptly and in the air. In other words it was impressed upon the learners, that dialogue written in a natural conversational style formal dialogue like any other type of written discourse should be well organized with an introduction, a body and a conclusion.

Aim of the Test :

This test aims at finding out whether :

- Learners have the ability to produce written form of oral discourse.
- ii. Learners are aware of the various phases of dialogue i.e.,
  - a. *opening*
  - b. *closing*
  - c. *turn taking.*
- Learners maintain cohesion between turns iv. Learners produce coherent dialogues

### **RATIONALE OF THE TEST :**

The rationale of the dialogue writing test is to exchange or elicit information in question-answer form.

- *to assess learners' abilities in framing questions using the right structure and giving coherent replies to the question posed*
- *to maintain formality in the language by avoiding colloquialism, incomplete utterances and*
- *to maintain unity in the dialogue with or without cohesion.*

Analysis:

The test was conducted with 50 learners belonging to the first year B.E./B/Tech. class of (Instrumentation and Control Engineering and Polymer Technology) of B.S.A. Crescent Engineering College. The class strength is 60. Only 50 learners took the test and the rest were absent. 25 out of 50 scripts had contained dialogues with the format of a discourse. The learners began the dialogue with a greeting and then discussed the topic. They described campus life from three aspects.

- The infrastructure available in the college in terms of laboratory equipment, central library, internet connection, computer facility, PC/ STD booth and canteen,
- Hostel accommodation and other facilities like access to Playing outdoor and indoor games and
- Quality of teaching and access to staff.

They have concluded the dialogue with a farewell utterance.

The question- answer mode of eliciting information in the dialogue made them confine themselves to the context without digressing. There are a few scripts where the utterances in answer to questions posed were written with ease. The length of the answers bears testimony to this. These answers were in complex sentences. However, there are dialogues that were written in simple sentences.

So the inference is that the learners who had fluency of expression answered in lengthy utterances and those whose mastery of language was not so good confined their answers to simple structures. The analysis also revealed that the dialogue written by 8 learners were hardly worth analyzing. Those scripts were overlooked. The remaining scripts revealed errors arising from cultural differences and from the influence of the mother tongue. Besides, there were grammatical errors of prepositions, tenses, word order pertaining to cohesion.

The dialogues of 7 learners conformed to the format of a discourse. But they were not considered as examples or good dialogues because they did not focus on the topic at all. In fact, the dialogues of two learners were free from grammatical errors but their fault was they completely digressed from the topic. Two dialogues were about the previous semester

examination and their anxiety about the results. And one dialogue was about the recent change from Madras University Anna University.

Two dialogues discussed the topic only partially, though they had discourse format. The topic was the campus interview conducted recently but there was no mention of the other aspects of campus life. 2 others learners focused on enquiring about each other's college, the choice of engineering branch which was a total digression.

Types of Cohesion and Coherence Errors.

Wrong Choice of Cohesive Devices:

A common question found in many scripts after the opening of the dialogue was:

Question: How is life going on?

While many learners wrote correct replies, one learner wrote:

Response: "They all very fine".

Obviously the learner had not learnt the use of referential markers like "'t' H 'they' And so used 'they' for the pronominal 'it'. In one script the dialogue to the question regarding the branches of engineering Begins thus

Q: "How is many branch in your college?"

R: "They are Civil, Polymer, Mechanical".

Here the correct cohesive link is 'there and 'they'. The learner should have written "What Are the branches offered in your college? "or" How many courses are there in your colleges/Three more examples are given below;

1) Q : How is about lab facilities

R): "They have good facility is lab".

Here the definite article 'the' would be an appropriate pronominal 'they' ('the lab facility is good'). cohesive instead of the

2) Q:" How about your staff members?"

R: "It's O.K." Here the learner should have used 'they'. " The

3) Q: " How was your sports activities?"

R:" Its pretty well. My sports skills developed well in these two years.

The learners could have written a simple and direct reply like "My participation in sports and games is very satisfying..." He used the wrong cohesive link 'it'. Here 'they ' would have been appropriate.

Example of wrong use of "it".

Q: Hai, Arun. I am fine. How about you"

R: "It is fine"

The learner should have written "I am".

Example of wrong use of "so".

Q: 'Can you manage the subjects"

R: "It seems to be difficult. I will try to do so".

So is a discourse marker which expresses a causal relation and has a reference To the preceding sentence. Us use here affects coherence. The learner's intended meaning should be - "The subjects are difficult . However, I will try to cope with them".

R: " In some trouble and also the language problem. I like to speak English fluently. How it is possible, say some advice? Here the learner should have used a causal conjunction because one sentence is a statement of a problem and the following sentence states one of the probable causes for the problem. So the correct cohesive would be a causal conjunction -"and". Another instance of coherence without cohesion is

Q: "It is getting late"

R: "O.K. I will see you later"

An interesting feature here is that the learners' responded coherently to the question asked but did not make use of cohesion. (Learners have used the interrogative structure correctly but have committed grammatical errors. Such question forms are:

Q: "How do you wrote the exams in last semester?".

R: " How is your class teaching?"

Q: " Your practice in play ground?"

R: "How is your college life going on?"

Q: " What about the facilities of your class?"

R:" Next time I will for you home"

#### Coherence Errors

Illogical replies affecting coherence

Q: " How is your family members?"

R: "Every staffs are worked in two or more software companies in 2 or 3 years experience?"

Here the learner 's response is irrelevant and does not form a coherent exchange. Thus the analysis revealed the learners' areas of difficulty in verb forms, use of prepositions, question forms, subject verb agreement and word order.

#### Interpretation of Analysis

The strengths and weaknesses of the learners as revealed in the analysis are:

##### Strengths:

Most learners seemed to be aware of the convenience of dialogue writing. They knew how to open a dialogue by greeting, proceed by taking turns with their partner and close it with a farewell utterance. Some learners wrote lengthy responses which showed their ease in writing. A few others handled the topic in a comprehensive manner by focusing on hostel life, infrastructure facilities and teaching - learning process. Some learners could establish coherence with right use of cohesion and even without cohesion. While the former is common. The latter needs mention and make the dialogue very natural. Examples: Q:"how is life in your college R: "In our college we have lots of funs" Another reply was

"In our college we have lots of entertainment"

All learners adhered to the format of a dialogue i.e. an opening , a middle and a closing. Their dialogues had long and informative exchanges which showed their ease of expression.

Weaknesses: There were instances of coherence getting distorted due to cohesive errors. This incorrectness in cohesion can be classified as:

- i. Omission of cohesive devices,
- ii. Wrong use of pronominal cohesion

- iii. Redundant use of cohesive links
- iv. The pedagogical implication of these findings are :
  - a) Learners' communication or discourse writing was impaired because of lack of mastery in the use of pronominal cohesive devices.
  - b) The learners' had problem with simple cohesive devices like 'it', 'they', 'this' and 'because'.

Remedy:

- Learners should be made to take part in role-play giving real- life situations
- Contexts depicting industrial situations could be given and the students may be asked to write dialogues for them.
- Dialogues may be written for a Group Discussion situation
- Students could be asked to participate in Mock Interviews as these are also like a dialogue.
- They could also be given more exposure to and meaningful practice in the use of cohesive devices.

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