Rhetorical Structure Analysis of EFLs' Written Narratives of a Picture Story

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Abstract

This study was set to reveal how second language learners use rhetorical relations in their written narratives in terms of Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) primarily proposed by Mann & Thompson (1987) and developed by Mann, Matthiessen & Thompson (1992). To this end, sixty written narratives based on the picture story book 'Frog, where are you?' were collected from EFL learners and were put to the RST for analysis. The results overall indicate that among the 25 rhetorical relations under investigation, *sequence*, *cause cluster*, *elaboration*, *circumstance*, and *concession* were the most common relations in the texts. Close scrutiny of the sample RST trees manifests remarkable resemblances at the two upper levels of hierarchical structure and considerable difference at the lower ones. This confirms the crucial importance of temporality, among other things, in sequential events of narrative. Sparse distribution of 'orientation' at certain points and their displacement are other interesting cases which could be attributed to the L1 effect.

1. Introduction

Rhetorical patterns in language are not fixed but so diverse and the diversity comes from the various factors involved in writing and this complexity which is manifested in students' writing has to be embraced and explained by contrastive rhetoric (Hirose, 2006). RST is a model of investigating the rhetorical patterns in text structure and its organization by postulating hierarchical relations holding between contiguous text spans. Though the theory was first intended for computational text generation, it is applied to other areas including cross-linguistic studies, dialogue and multimedia, as well as discourse analysis, argumentation and writing (Taboada & Mann, 2006b). In the domain of discourse analysis, there has been a line of research attempting to determine typical RS relations of various text types and the interplay between these relations and the content they express (Kosseim & Lapalme, 2000; Kamyab, 2003; Rimrott, 2007). However, while there has been a plethora of studies on the discourse structure of narratives on the one hand (see Hemphill, 1999; Kamimura & Oi, 2001; Rubio, 2003; Schiffrin, 2003; Chang, 2004), and the RS analyses of different text types on the other, there are barely any studies, as we understand, on the RS of narratives produced by EFL learners.

By employing twenty-five RS relations introduced by Mann & Thompson (1987) and Mann et al. (1992), this study opted to investigate the rhetorical structures (RSs) of the narratives produced by Iranian EFL learners. It sought primarily to determine which rhetorical relations enjoy the highest frequency of occurrence in EFL learners' narratives and further to explain how the relationship between these rhetorical relations and the content they express is established. Moreover, through a careful analysis of the obtained RSs, this investigation manifested the global RS pattern(s) of EFL learners.

2. Review of Literature

Kaplan (1966), inspired by Sapir-Worf's hypothesis, stressed that different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are likely to have impatcs

on the organization of students' writing with a different culture. In order to produce an acceptable piece of writing, any non-native writer of Englsih, besides the system of the L2 writing, should learn conventions which operate on discourse and text level which are the result of L2 speaker's culture and thought patterns. Furthermore Kaplan (1984) contends that the main concern of contrastive rhetoric is that speakers of different languages use different devices to present information, to establish relationships among ideas, and to show centrality of one idea as opposed to another to select most effective means of presentation.

In his earlier studies, Kaplan (1966) analyzed the organization of paragraphs in about 600 ESL student essays. His view was that culture and language shape an individual worldview and perceptions of the self. After making the link between the cultural thought patterns and language, he pointed out to what he considered the erroneous assumption "that because a student can write an adequate essay in his native language, he can necessarily write an adequate essay in a second language" (p. 3). Kaplan claims that "the foreign-student paper is out of focus because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violates the expectation of the native reader" (p. 4). Leki (1991, p. 123), however, notes that although the work of Kaplan was "exploratory" and to some extent "more intuitive than scientific", it was "valuable in establishing contrastive rhetoric as a new field of inquiry".

Another popular study was Mohan and Lo's (1985) which evaluated 3700 essays written by students with different cultural background (Chinese and English). They, on the contrary, found no significant difference in the organizations of these compositions. They concluded that one cannot really deduce the paragraph structure in a language by ESL/EFL student writings (p. 531). In other words, since EFL/ESL students are in developmental stages of language learning, their writing features cannot be assumed to show a full picture of the rhetorical writing systems of their languages. This observation is also supported by some other researchers (Connor, 1984, 1990; Clyne, 1987; Eggington, 1987).

As far as writing narratives are concerned, many studies have approached its structure from a Labovian perspecive (e.g., Bell, 1999; Hemphill, 1999; Rubio, 2003; Schiffrin, 2003; Chang, 2004; Georgakopoulou, 2006). Labov (1999, pp. 225-26) defines narrative as one way of recapitulating past personal experience in which the verbal sequence of clauses indicates the order of actual events. To him, temporal juncture or temporal sequence is a defining characteristic of all narratives. Therefore, a minimal narrative is one containing just one temporal juncture. However, in a fully-formed narrative, Labov identifies six structural components in the order of abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (see also Labov & Waletzky, 1967), though evaluation can often change its position.

A more comprehensive type of analysis has been proposed by systemic-functional linguists who take the clause as the unit of analysis and analyze the function of it in terms of givenness, newness, verb processes, and participant role or transitivity (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 1994). Another offshoot of systemics is the analysis of rhetorical structures developed by Mann, Matthiessen, and Thompson in the 1980_s, referred to as rhetorical structure theory. This is a theory of text structure that provides a framework for describing rhetorical relations holding among adjoining spans of a text, spans that range in size from clausal units to paragraphs or longer stretches of discourse that are "either nuclei or satellites" (Mann et al., 1992, p. 42). A particular rhetorical relation, as stated by Mann & Thompson (1987), can be defined in terms of a) a set of constraints on the nucleus, satellite, as well as combination of both, and b) the intended effect on the reader and the locus of the effect either by the nucleus alone or combination of both. Some of these 25 relations outlined below are principal and some are peripheral, which, except for a few like 'circumstance' and sometimes 'solutionhood', all depends on the context of use and the effect every component in a clause has on its neighbouring clause which results in the same effect of that clause on the reader.

Circumstance, Evidence, Non-volitional result, Interpretation, Joint, Solutionhood, Justify, Purpose, Evaluation, Elaboration, Means, Concession, Restatement, Background, Volitional cause, Antithesis, Summary, Enablement, Non-volitional cause, Condition, Contrast, Motivation, Volitional result, Otherwise and Sequence are the relations used in the RST paradigm (See Appendix 1 for the rhetorical relations and the defining features of 'circumstance', as one of the key components in this paradigm). As the name of each relation signifies, they all have a corresponding function to their names; e.g. 'evidence' relation is used to provide a supprot in terms of evidence to its preceding nucleus clause. Similarly, a 'volitional' relation can indicate whether the action carried out is volutarily done or accidentally happened. 'Interpretation' invloves to what extent a clause provides an extra meaning or information to its previous clause. An 'antithesis' relation is used to show some contrast to its preceeding clause, and so forth and so on. It is worthwhile mentioning that msot of these relations can be signalled by their respective grammatical morphemes, hence little confusion in the selection of one particular rhetorical relation.

What comes out as the result of the analysis of a text is a tree structure where a top-level relation covers other relations of its lower levels (Taboada & Mann, 2006a). The top of the tree can represent the nucleus and the branches coming off are respectively the satellites supporting the nucleus. Sometimes, however, the schemas in a frame are muti-relational. That is, several relations might explain or elaborate on one nucleus, or, likewise, one or more relations might expand on one satellite relation. In either case, the same rule applies.

Since its inception, RST has led to fruitful research in various areas of linguistics. In an attempt to find a way of organizing the content of a text in a coherent and natural way computationally, Kosseim & Lapalme (2000) made a corpus analysis of French instructional texts. Based on the results of their analysis, they determined nine different senses (*Attribute, Required operation, Condition, Outcome, Guidance, Co-temporal operation, Option, Prevention, and Possible operations*) and seven

rhetorical relations (*sequence*, *c-condition*, *elaboration*, *purpose*, *result*, *means*, and *concurrency*) as typical of instructional texts (Kosseim & Lapalme, 2000). In addition, the mapping between the senses and rhetorical relations revealed that while some senses such as *Attribute* were presented through one type of rhetorical relation, others such as *Condition* and *Outcome* were realized through three or four different rhetorical relations.

Kamyab (2003) in an analysis of three review articles on Oncology for their RS relations found that in comparison with most other relations, *evaluation* and *interpretation* enjoyed a considerably high frequency of occurrence, indicating that scientific articles of this nature are not, as commonly believed, disinterested or detached. Examination of the context of the use of these two relations revealed that *evaluation* and *interpretation* were mostly preceded by a *solutionhood* relation. Interestingly, non-terminal occurrences of *evaluation* and *interpretation* were also followed by a *solutionhood* relation in a considerable number of cases. That is, on the one hand, *evaluation* and *interpretation* were employed in assessing the significance of solutions proposed for problems and, on the other hand, *solutionhood* was used to justify the assessment made by the writer.

In the same line, Rimrott (2007) investigated the RS of ten research article abstracts in Computer-Assisted Language Learning. Having analyzed the results of the study, she marked *preparation* and *elaboration* as near-essential elements of abstracts due to their frequency, others such as *background* and *list* as common relations, and some like *enablement* and *motivation* as the improbable ones. The researcher also found a strong association between some RS relations and the content they express. First, the title of the research article was generally the satellite of a *preparation* relation. Second, in all of the abstracts, the statement of the research article topic was the comprehensive locus of the effect, that is, the main nucleus of the text. Furthermore, information related to previous research and/or current practices or beliefs in the research community was normally expressed as a *background* satellite of

the main nucleus of the abstract. Finally, *elaboration* satellites of the abstract's main nucleus frequently referred to the method or results of the study was part of the abstract.

Majority of the narrative works in the literature on second language learning have had their focus on point of view (Kamimura & Oi, 2001; Shokouhi, Daram & Saba, to appear), referential strategies (Kang, 2004; Shokouhi, 2000; Shokouhi & Kipka, 2003) and contrastive rhetorics (Kaplan, 1966; Kubota, 1988), among other things. As seen in the above review, except for a few (e.g. Rimrott (2007) who investigated the rhetorical relations in the frame of Mann et al. (1992) of ten research article abstracts in Computer-Assisted Language Learning, no serious study has ever been tried to investigate the specific elements within the rhetorical structures in narrative in terms of main and satellite functions on as big as a range of 25 rhetorical relations. It seems in order to initiate a study of this sizeable relation in the realm of English as a second language to shed some lights on how the principal and the peripheral clauses are treated by a group of second language learners.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A total of sixty male and female undergraduate junior and senior level students studying English as their major discipline at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at the Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran, participated in this investigation. Since majority of the participants were female, gender was not a controlling factor in our study. The outnumering was due to the increasing rush of female students into the Iranian universities.

All the participants had already passed their writing courses, namely, two four-credit 'Grammar and Writing I & II' courses, another two-credit 'Basic Writing' course and a two-credit 'Advanced Writing' course, a total of 4 writing courses with 216 hours of attendance including the exam sessions.

3.2 Task

Picture stories have been extensively used as a prompt for producing oral or written narratives (see, e.g., Kamimura & Oi, 2001; Kang, 2004). The picture story selected for this study is the famous *Frog, Where Are You?*, by Meyer (1969), containing twenty-four wordless pictures enjoying a series of connected events. A boy wakes up and he sees his pet frog is lost and starts his search of the frog with the help of his dog. There are a series of events happening while his search is done. The reasons for selecting this very story was that it is a popular story in psycholinguistics research (Slobin and Bocaz, 1989; Slobin, 1997), hence providing a fairly rich context for narrative production. Second, with twenty-four pictures, the story allows the participants to use various rhetorical relations to express different propositions. Last, all the pictures are simple and unambiguous.

However, whether the results would have been similar or different if a different task was assigned is always a great issue of contention in Humanities. As Hirose (2006, p. 144) rightly argues, an explicit and specific task may push the participants of a study to express their views right "at the outset of their writing", which can likely affect their choice of rhetorical and organizational patterns. The result of this study being no exception could have been different if a different task, such as telling a personal narrative, had been assigned to the participants.

Each participant was first handed a copy of the picture story book and a separate blank sheet. They were then asked to review the pictures and write a story on the blank sheet based on what they had seen in the picture series.

3.3 Data collection

The data were collected from all the participants in one session under the researchers' supervision. In order to elicit narratives from them, each participant was first handed a copy of the picture story book 'Frog, where are you?' and a separate blank sheet. They were then asked to review the

pictures and write a story on the blank sheet based on what they had seen in the picture series, and were given enough time to write up their drafts.

3.4 RS analysis

The data gathered were analyzed based on the tenets of RST model. Each sample frog-story narrative was first divided into units with independent functional integrity, that is, the units which are typically non-embedded clauses. This is because restrictive relative clauses as well as embedded clauses, clauses relativizing subjects and objects, are part of their host clause and are not rhetorically motivated.

The next stage dealt with identifying spans and rhetorical relations. Implementing a top-down analysis, each narrative was divided into two large text spans; one entailing the problem in the story and the other the solution to the problem. Then, by using plausibility judgments, a rhetorical relation (say *solutionhood*) was assigned between them. Subsequently, each of the two text spans was divided into smaller spans and the relation holding between them was determined. The acts of text dividing and relation assigning between contiguous text spans were continued recursively until finally the level of individual units was reached and, as a result, each narrative grew to an RS tree. Figure 1 below illustrates the RS representation of a sample narrative written by one of our participants. The full text of this narrative appears in Appendix 2.

Figure 1. RST diagram of the sample narrative in Appendix 2

* All the abbreviations in the diagram are as follows:
bac=Background   cir=Circumstance   con=Concession   ela=Elaboration   evi=Evidence   int=Interpretation   joi=Joint   jus=Justify   mea=Means
n.v.cau=Non-volitional cause   n.v.res=Non-volitional result   res=Restatement   seq=Sequence   sol=Solutionhood   v.cau=Volitional cause   v.res=Volitional result
**1-44 stands for clauses 1 to 44 of the sample narrative in Appendix 2.

3.5 Statistical analysis

To determine which rhetorical relations enjoyed the highest frequency of occurrence, the relative frequency of all rhetorical relations appearing in the sample RS trees were once calculated separately for the whole narrative set. The complexity of narrative structure was calculated by dividing the number of backgrounded clauses to foregrounded ones in each sample (Rubio, 2003). Foregrounded clauses, as asserted by Hopper (cited in Shokouhi & Kamyab, 2004, p. 204), are those which form the backbone of a narrative and correlate with independent clauses and perfective aspect. In contrast, backgrounded clauses do not realize main events of a narrative but provide supportive material and elaborate on foregrounded clauses, hence correlating with dependent clauses and imperfective aspect. Having examined a series of narratives by English speakers, Tomlin (1994) rejected the above-mentioned correlation between tense-aspect and foregrounded/backgrounded clauses and maintained that foregrounding is managed only through the selection of independent and dependent clauses. For this reason, in the present study, nuclear units were taken as realizing foregrounding information and satellite units as expressing backgrounding information. In the last step, in order to explore global pattern(s) of rhetorical organization in the corpora, all sample RS trees came under close scrutiny.

4. Results

4.1. Frequency of RS relations

The RS analysis of the data produced by a group of EFL students revealed that out of the twenty-five different rhetorical relations under investigation only twenty-one relations were found in the sample narratives. Four relations, namely *enablement*, *motivation*, *otherwise*, and *evaluation* were not used by any of the prticipants of the study at all.

Since five of the rhetorical relations present in the data, namely *non-volitional cause*, *non-volitional result*, *purpose*, *volitional cause*, and *volitional result,* involve the notion of causation, hence serving nearly the same function, they were put in one class which, following Mann &

Thompson (1987), was called *cause cluster* and thereafter was considered like a single relation. Table 1 below illustrates the distribution of these relations.

Table 1: Distribution of RS relations in students' narratives

RST relation	Frequency	Percentage
Sequence	897	37.29
Cause cluster	557	23.16
Elaboration	385	16.0
Circumstance	200	8.32
Concession	137	5.7
Background	76	3.16
Solutionhood	62	2.58
Evidence	20	0.83
Contrast	17	0.71
Restatement	12	0.5
Antithesis	11	0.46
Joint	10	0.41
Means	7	0.29
Interpretation	7	0.29
Justify	4	0.17
Summary	2	0.08
Condition	1	0.04
Total	2405	100.00

As shown in Table 1, *sequence* was the most frequent RS relation, amounting to 37.29 percent of all rhetorical relations in the sample narratives. *Cause cluster* with a percentage of 23.16 stood second. The next most frequent rhetorical relation was *elaboration* (16%), followed by *circumstance* (8.32%) which was in turn followed by *concession* relation (5.7%). It is noteworthy that this descending order of frequency for the above-mentioned relations not only held for all samples but

almost for each of the two narrative sets. The other twelve rhetorical relations appeared in sample narratives, i.e. *background, solutionhood, evidence, contrast, restatement, antithesis, joint, means, interpretation, justify, summary,* and *condition* together constituted only 9.52%; that is, they were less than 10 percent of all the RS relations in the texts.

4.2. Global RST structure of the narratives

A careful look at the sixty trees drawn from the participants' responses revealed that they exhibited one of the two global patterns depicted in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Global RST illustrations of EFL learners' narratives
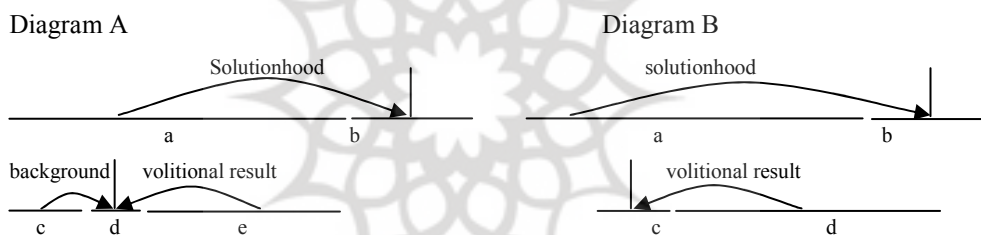
As illustrated in the above figure, diagrams A and B resemble each other at the first level of analysis but differ at the second level. Regarding the first level, both diagrams involve a *solutionhood* relation which holds between satellite unit 'a' and nuclear unit 'b'. However, concerning the second level, while diagram A contains a multi-relation schema, diagram B contains a single-relation one. Interestingly, out of the sixty trees resulted from RST analysis, fifty-nine instances exhibited a global pattern like diagram A and only one looked like diagram B in its global pattern of rhetorical structure.

5. Discussion

5.1 Frequency of RS relations

Given the nature of narrative, the predominance of the *sequence* relation among other RS relations could be quite anticipatory. The skeleton of a

narrative, as Labov (1999) maintains, is formed by a series of temporally sequenced clauses called *narrative clauses*. The fact that a narrative can consist almost entirely of narrative clauses confirms the crucial importance of temporality in sequential events of narrative. Considering the significance of temporality and the fact that among the twenty-five RS relations employed here only *sequence* can impose an order on the text spans, it is quite obvious to observe such high incidence of the *sequence* relation (37.29%). However, the result could have been different if a different narrative like retelling of a personal narrative simultaneaously was the target. The extract below taken from the end of a sample narrative written by one of the participants can well exemplify the point. The related RS representation follows the text.

Extract 1
1. They reached a hill.
2. There was a deer behind it.
3. The deer dropped them into the river.
4. Suddenly they heard a sound behind a tree trunk fallen in the river.
5. It was the frog's voice.
6. They took their frog
7. and went back home.

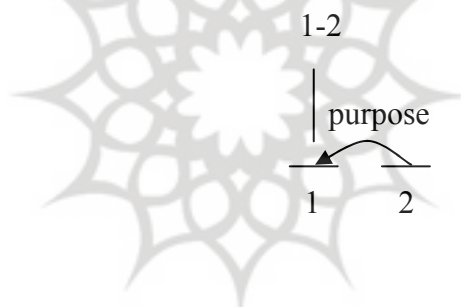Figure 3: RST diagram of Extract 1
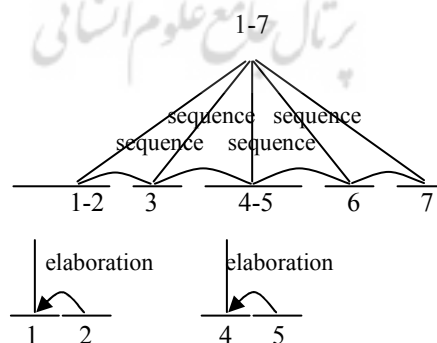
Concerning *cause cluster*, the high percentage of occurrence (23.16%) can be explained in terms of the prominence of causality in creating coherence at both local and global levels of narrative structure and providing supportive and evaluative information. As stated earlier, *cause cluster* consists of five RS relations: *non-volitional cause*, *non-volitional result*, *purpose*, *volitional cause*, and *volitional result*. To see how these relations work in narrative, consider the following examples:

Extract 2
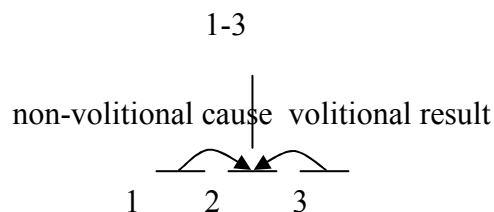1. They both went to the jungle
2. to search for the frog.

Figure 4: RST diagram of Extract 2

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              1-2

               |
               | purpose
              /\
            1    2
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Extract 3
1. Then his dog shook a tree on which there was a beehive.
2. The beehive fell down
3. and the bees followed him.

Figure 5: RST diagram of Extract 3
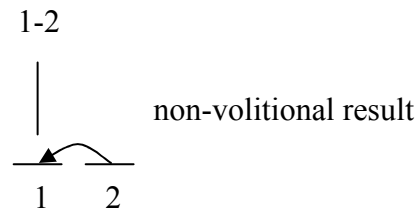
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              1-3

                    |
non-volitional cause  volitional result
              /\  /\
            1   2   3
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Extract 4

1. The poor frog had found his family.

2. John and Pepper got so happy for him.

Figure 6: RST diagram of Extract 4

1-2

non-volitional result
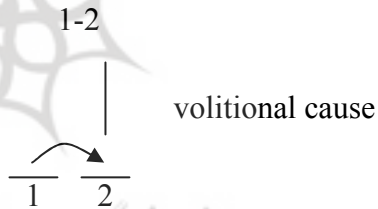
1   2

Extract 5

1. Seeing something is moving behind a big stone,

2. Jack jumped there.

Figure 7: RST diagram of Extract 5

1-2

volitional cause

1   2

Note that while all the above examples demonstrate coherence at local levels, except for *purpose,* other relations in *cause cluster* appear at more global levels. The diagrams in Figure 2 above show how a large satellite is connected to the nucleus of a multi-relation or a single-relation schema through the *volitional result* at the second level of the global structure.

This finding is somewhat in harmony with what Van Den Broek, Linzie, Fletcher & Marsolek (2000) found concerning the role of causality in native participants' narrative writing. Based on the results of their study, *causal* relations served two main purposes in such texts. First, they provided local coherence in the unfolding text. Second, they

satisfied Grice's (1975) maxim of informativeness. The lack of reference to global coherence created through causality in their finding can be justified by the fact that instead of writing entire narrative texts, the participants were only asked to write short continuations to already existing sections of the narratives.

In justifying the high percentage of occurrence for *elaboration*, the third most frequent RS relation in the sample narratives (16%), it is important to emphasize the role of this relation in adding backgrounding information to the skeleton of a narrative. The presence of this relation in all sample narratives indicates that all the participants in the study found it necessary to help the readers overcome misunderstanding or lack of understanding through the use of this relation, thus fulfilling Grice's maxims of quantity and manner. To illuminate the point, see the extracts below taken from our sample narratives.

Extract 6
1. Suddenly an animal lifted him up.
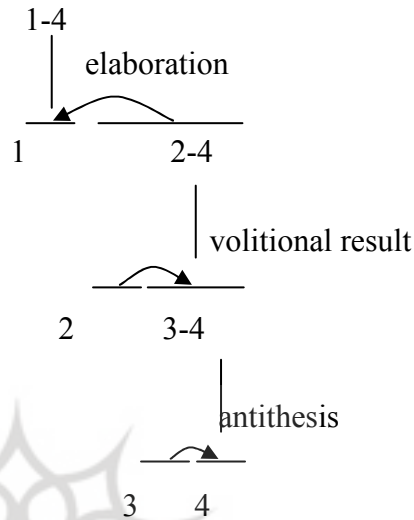2. It was a deer.

Figure 8: RST diagram of Extract 6
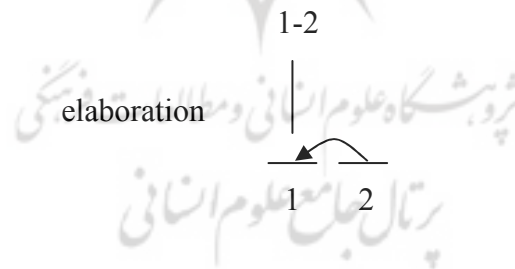
Extract 7
1. Then something strange happened:
2. they moved.
3. They were not branches.
4. They were Mr. Deer's horns.
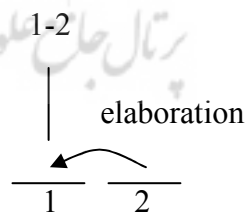
Figure 9: RST diagram of Extract 7

In addition to the above-mentioned function, this relation plays the secondary role of adding evaluative remarks throughout the narrative structure, as in the example below:

Extract 8
1. Once upon a time there was a little boy who had a frog.
2. He loved it very much.

Figure 10: RST diagram of Extract 8

With a percentage of 8.32, *circumstance* was discovered to be the forth common RS relation in our data set. The significance of this relation lies in its function in helping the reader arrive at a better understanding of the situation through adding backgrounding information

to the backbone of the narrative. An interesting finding concerning the use of *circumstance* is that while this rhetorical relation appeared at different points in the narrative structure, there was a noticeable concentration of this relation at the beginning of the 'complication' of the story. A close look at the sixty sample RST trees revealed that 80 percent of the participants employed this relation at least once in the nuclear span of the multi-relation or single-relation schema at the second level of the global RST structure of the narratives. This means that a great majority of them preferred to add backgrounding information to the beginning of the 'complication' of the story by using the *circumstance* relation. The following extract taken from a sample narrative produced by one of our participants exemplifies the point.

Extract 9

1. When he and his dog were asleep,

2. the frog got out of its bottle

3. and ran away.

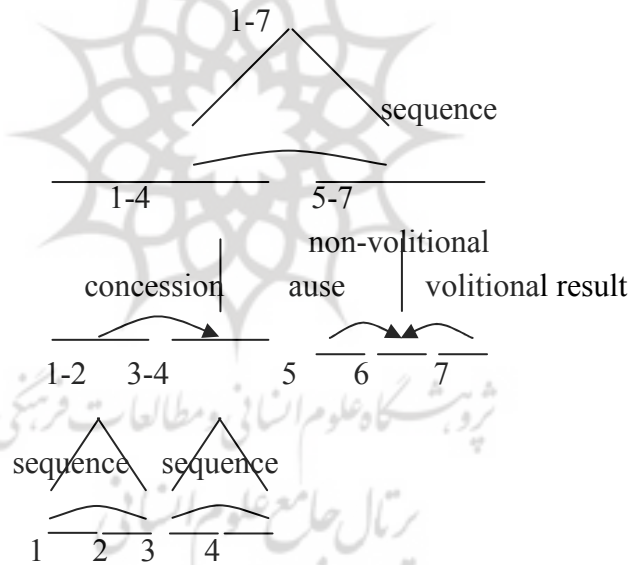Figure 11: RST diagram of Extract 9
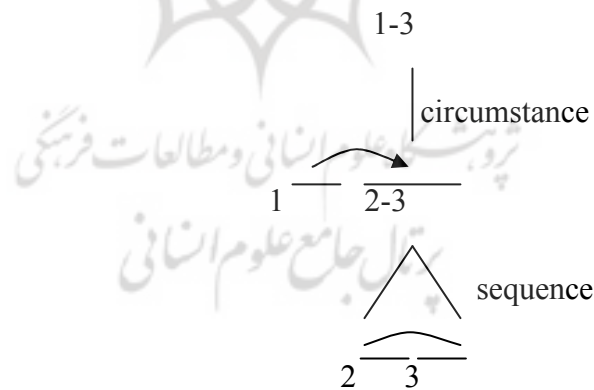
As for the last element in the list of the most frequent RS relations in our narratives, i.e. *concession* (5.7%), the satellite unit of this relation incorporates backgrounding information into the narrative structure which serves an evaluative purpose. Moreover, careful examination of the context of this relation in sample narratives shows that the participants used this relation to either bring about transition from one

story event to the next or achieve local causal coherence, as in the following examples:

Extract 10

1. In the jungle Tom looked into a hole in the ground
2. and called his frog,
3. but suddenly a mouse came out
4. and bit his nose.
5. Then his dog shook a tree on which there was a beehive.
6. The beehive fell down
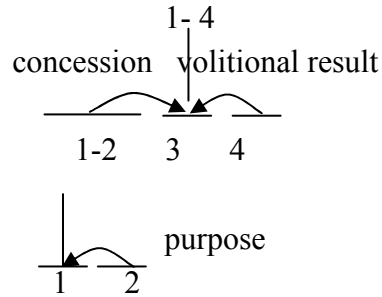7. and the bees followed him.

Figure 12: RST diagram of Extract 10

Extract 11

1. John and his dog searched everywhere in the room
2. to find it,
3. but it seemed that the frog had escaped;
4. therefore, John decided to search outside.

Figure 13: RST diagram of Extract 11

5.2 Global RS of the narratives

Concerning the global RSs of sample narratives, we explored that all followed the same pattern at their first upper level of RS with *solutionhood* relation making the bridge between 'resolution' and the rest of the story. Variation, however, appeared at the second level of analysis in which the satellite of the *solutionhood* relation was divided either into three smaller spans which together formed a multi-relation schema consisting of a *background* and a *volitional result* relation or into two spans linked to each other through a *volitional result* relation (see Figure 2 in section 4.3). The results show that a vast majority of the participants (98.33%) followed the former pattern wherein the satellite span of the *background* relation represents the 'orientation' of the story, the nuclear span of the schema reveals the 'revelation' of the problem, and the satellite of the *volitional result* relation shows the elaboration on the 'complication'. This indicates that our EFL participants had a great tendency to assign a separate beginning section to the 'orientation' of their story, thereby following the normal order of structural elements of narrative. The absence of the separate 'orientation' section in the latter pattern results in its dispersal of the nuclear and satellite spans of the *volitional result* relation which is mainly involved in the presentation of 'complication'. This displacement of the 'orientation' section, as Labov (1982, p. 226) and Labov & Waletzky (1967, p. 32) maintain, often serves an evaluative function. The idea is confirmed by Toolan (1988) maintaining that the distribution of components of 'orientation' and their

belated appearance at strategic points in narrative where their revelation is quite essential are the most interesting cases of 'orientation' since they may lead to considerable surprise or even shock (p. 151). Bearing in mind that the organizational patterns in students' L1 could have possible influence in their narrative dexterity in L2, the displacement of orientation in the latter pattern could have occurred as a result. In here we would agree with Kubota (1998) who asserts that students' L1 background in writing can intefere their composing in English.

Similarly, the nuclear span of the *solutionhood* relation is broken down into smaller spans at the second level of RS. The results interestingly exposed that 98.33 percent of the participants preferred to produce story units that are linked to each other using the multi-nuclear relation, i.e. *sequence*, to form the 'resolution' of the story. The other alternative for breaking up of the text span was the *volitional result* relation. Lower levels of analysis were subjected to wide variation except for the satellite span of the *volitional result* relation, representing the 'complication' of the story, which is divided into smaller spans linked to one another via *sequence* in a great majority of cases at the third level of analysis.

Our RST analysis further designates that in contrast to 'orientation', 'complication', and 'resolution' that are mainly realized through fixed text spans, no special text span can be assigned to another structural component of narrative, i.e. 'evaluation', due to its omnipresence in the narrative structure.

6. Conclusion

This study denotes that five RST relations, namely *sequence*, *cause cluster*, *elaboration*, *circumstance*, and *concession*, could be marked as characteristics of EFL learners' written narratives. The findings lead us to conclude that linguistic proficiency and exposure to natural discourse are not the only factors affecting non-native speakers' ability to produce complex narratives. Telling narrative "does not only mount up with age", as Labov (1982, p. 226) states, but is reinforced by "natural dexterity" in

storytelling. Some students are good storytellers by nature and use a variety of resources to make their story interesting while others are impoverished. The observed global patterns of rhetorical structure point to the participants' strong inclination to assign a discrete 'orientation' section to their narratives. Given that the delayed appearance of the components of 'orientation' at strategic points in narrative makes the story more interesting, one arrives at the conclusion that the EFL learners under investigation were not so much, as we expected, competent in the art of storytelling in general.

Furthermore, a point worth noting is that in most EFL/ ESL classroom situations, lexical and syntactic accuracy is overemphasized and the essetial elements of composition, like organization and rhetoric, are ignored. What is more is that writing practices are not much appreciated in many students' classroom in their own native language. These can account as a major factor in students' drawbacks in forming proper rhetorical patterns in English. As Kubota (1998) suggests, students' writing ability in their L1, their English proficiency and "composing experience in English" can be enumerated as factors affecting the quality of their essays in English (pp. 69, 88).

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Appendix 1
A list of Rhetorical Structure relations based on Mann & Thompson (1987) and Mann et al. (1992)

Circumstance	Evidence	Non-volitional result	Interpretation	Joint
Solutionhood	Justify	Purpose	Evaluation	
Elaboration	Means	Concession	Restatement	
Background	Volitional cause	Antithesis	Summary	
Enablement	Non-volitional cause	Condition	Contrast	
Motivation	Volitional result	Otherwise	Sequence	

Definition of the *circumstance* relation, among other relations, as a sample of one of the key relational components

- -

Relation name:	**Circumstance:**
constraints on N:	None
constraints on S:	S presents a situation (not unrealized)
constraints on the N+S combination:	S sets a framework in the subject matter within which R is intended to interpret the situation presented in N
the effect:	R recognizes that the situation presented in S provides the framework for interpreting N
locus of the effect:	N and S

- -

N=nucleus   S=satellite   R=reader

Appendix 2
A sample frog-story narrative written by one of the participants (see the analysis in Figure 1 above)

1. Once upon a time, there was a boy named John.
2. He had two pets: a puppy that he had named Pepper and a frog he called Momo.
3. John and Pepper loved Momo;
4. in fact, they adored the creature.
5. They stared at him day and night.
6. But the poor frog wasn't really happy,
7. being kept in a jar all the time.
8. He wished he could play freely with his friends like all others of his kind.
9. So, one night when John and Pepper were deeply asleep,
10. Momo quietly jumped out of the jar
11. and ran away.
12. When John and Pepper woke up in the morning,
13. they saw that Momo wasn't there
14. and the jar was empty.
15. They felt so sad
16. but didn't know what to do.
17. John looked inside his boots,
18. hoping that he might be there,
19. but he wasn't.
20. Pepper put his head into Momo's jar,
21. but still saw it empty,
22. and his head got stuck in it, too.
23. They both went to the window,
24. opened it
25. and shouted Momo as loud as they could without getting any response.
26. Suddenly Pepper fell out of the window on the ground,

27. and the jar broke.
28. John went out
29. and hugged Pepper,
30. being happy
31. that at least he was fine
32. and nothing happened to him.
33. Once more they started searching,
34. but this time in the nearby forest.
35. John yelled Momo in every hole he found on the ground.
36. Suddenly a squirrel jumped out of a hole
37. and bit John's nose.
38. Poor Pepper jumped at a beehive above his head on a tree.
39. The beehive fell down from the tree
40. and the bees followed him.
41. With whatever power he had
42. he ran away from them.
43. Then an owl above John's head scared him so much
44. that he hit his head badly on a huge rock he was hiding behind.
45. When the owl was gone,
46. he climbed the rock
47. and shouted Momo.
48. This time a huge deer behind the rock brought his head up
49. and held John on it,
50. and began running away.
51. Pepper ran in front of him.
52. The deer went to a cliff
53. and then threw John into the lake.
54. Pepper fell down, too.
55. They both got wet.
56. Suddenly John heard a sound behind a log near them.
57. He toed Pepper to be quiet.
58. They looked behind the log.
59. There they saw Momo, his mate, and their children.

60. The poor frog had found his family.
61. John and Pepper got so happy for him.
62. John took one of the baby frogs
63. and said goodbye to the frog family.
64. Then they left happily for home.