THE QUALITY OF CLAUSE COMPLEXES IN ARTICLE ABSTRACTS WRITTEN BY SEMARANG STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Clause complexes tend to be difficult for foreign language learners to master. However, they hardly avoid using them in article abstracts as their use of them can be one of the ways to shorten the abstract which should usually consist of only a paragraph of 250 words. The approach used in this study is qualitative with the theories of clause complexes introduced by Halliday (1994) as the instrument of the study, particularly taxis (the system of interdependency), logico-semantic relations, and the realization of them. The results of this study prove that there are only some problems found in the clause complexes used by the graduate students. This implies that their competence in making use of clause complexes in their abstracts is considerably good.

Keywords: abstract, clause complex, article, quality

Introduction

An abstract which should be available below the title of a journal article has a paramount role in academic writing. It acts as the gate of the scientific information to be presented. It is the part which is usually read by readers since they hope to have a picture of the whole study by only reading it. Usually a journal article is written based on a study. The readers do not consider that the length is determined in the guideline which is usually not more than two hundred and fifty words written in a paragraph. It is quite often the case that the readers are disappointed when finding that the

abstract is inaccurate.

The length requirement of the abstract causes the writers to have a tendency of using clause complexes to shorten the text. Considering this, anyone writing academically should have a good skill of constructing clause complexes.

A clause complex is comprised of two or more clauses logically connected or of a sequence of processes which are logically connected (Gerot, 1994:89). Based on my experience in teaching English to foreign language learners (Indonesian students) a clause complex is likely to be difficult for them to construct. This does not only happen to undergraduate students, but graduate students as well.

The result of research conducted by Rukmini (2010) on the clause complexes used by undergraduate students in their final project report abstracts revealed that they were not satisfactorily written, particularly in terms of grammar. She recommended that undergraduate students should achieve at least 'AB' (81 to 85) for grammar subjects (traditional, syntactic, and systemic functional) before allowing them to conduct the final project since they should write a report on their final project as well as publishing articles in a journal.

This article highlights the quality of the clause complexes used by the graduate students of Semarang State University, Indonesia, in their article abstracts.

Educational Policy on Journal Writing

In line with the vast communication technology development, students of higher education in Indonesia are demanded to publish their articles which are written based on their studies in a journal. The journal can be national or international. For undergraduates it can be of an accredited national level; the graduates and post-graduates, an international level.

Every journal has guidelines to guide anyone who wants to publish an article in it. The guidelines can be different from journal to another. It can usually be found in the front or back of the journal. Any detailed requirements are usually written clearly in it, including the abstract.

An Abstract

An abstract can be varied depending on the circumstances. It is, for example, a final project report abstract, a thesis abstract, a dissertation

abstract, a journal article abstract, etc. As it is named an abstract it is usually short. It contains a summary of the text following it. As it is given first, there are usually guidelines by the journal. The guidelines usually concern the content, the number of words, the style of writings, the size of fonts, the space between lines, etc.

What is common in the guidelines of an article abstract is the limitation of words. This limitation causes the writers to use a strategy which reduces the use of words in expressing meanings in the abstracts. The strategy which becomes the concern of this article is the use of clause complexes, particularly their quality.

Clause Complexes

The definition of a clause complex is given in the background of this article. Viewed through *systemic functional grammar* (SFG), a clause complex can be analyzed in two principles: the logico-semantic relation and the system of interdependency.

Based on the logico-semantic relation a clause complex can have two ways of combining: expansion and projection.

Expansion links processes by providing additional information (Gerot and Wignell, 1995:89). This involves three kinds of relationship: elaboration, extension and enhancement.

In elaboration, there are four possible relationships between clauses combined: specifying in a greater detail, restating, exemplifying, and commenting. The explanation and examples below may give a clear understanding of each of them.

A clause is said to have a specifying relation when it provides detailed information, for example:

1) *Eighty students were chosen as samples,* **forty of them are grouped as an experimental group and forty others as a control group.**

   The clause in bold specifies the clause which is written previously. It provides detailed information of *eighty students.*

2) *The findings show that the various systems of appraisal,* **which are affect, judgment, appreciation, graduation and engagement,** *are realized in five religious speech services.*

   The bold typed clause provided above is an example of restating

clause. The clauses, **which are affect, judgment, appreciation, graduation and engagement,** restate the various systems of appraisals.

3) *It means that the teacher in the experimental group used humorous materials,* **such as jokes, riddles and anecdotes related to the topics in each part of the lesson**, *during the warm up, discussing the topic and teaching new words.*

   Humorous materials in the combined clause are provided with examples in the clause typed in bold (**such as jokes, riddles and anecdotes related to the topics in each part of the lesson**).

4) *After having been taught with that method the students could write a recount text with complete elements* **they gained much improvements**.

   The clause **they gained much improvements** comments on the meaning in the clause preceding to it.

The second type of expansion relation of a clause complex is extension. This extends the meaning of a clause by adding something new. The common conjunctions used here are *and, but* and *or.* The following example may clarify this.

   The purpose of this study is to figure out what kind of problems the students of Vocational School of Garuda Nusantara face in mastering the speaking skill concerning the availability of the learning material **and to find out how the comic strips for learning materials are developed.**

   The clause typed in bold extends to the previous one. It adds new information about the other attempt of the research to find out how the comic strips are developed, not only to figure out what kind of problems the students face in mastering speaking skill.

The third type of relation is enhancement where the circumstantial information is coded as a clause. The possible kinds of relationships can be temporal, conditional, causal, concessive, spatial, and manner.

   The students were given a treatment using sequences of pictures **although they have got used to being treated that way.**

   The bold typed clause is an example of concessive enhancement. The students were given the same treatment even tough they have had the treatment many times in the past time.

Clause-complexes can be combined logico-semantically by means of

projection. What is being projected or what is projecting can be of two kinds (Gerot and Wignell 1995: 91). They are idea and locution. Ideas are projected through mental processes, and locution through verbal processes.

For example:

The teacher replied to the students **that they can use a bilingual dictionary.**

The clause **that they can use a bilingual dictionary** is an example of locution which is projected through the verbal process *replied.*

Another example deals with the idea (in bold type) which is projected through the mental process *think.*

The researcher thinks **that the results can be used to support the previous findings.**

The analysis of a clause complex is not complete without analyzing its system of interdependency or taxis. Based on it, a clause complex can be classified into two classes: parataxis and hypotaxis.

Parataxis is a clause complex of which one independent clause is combined with another independent clause, as seen in the following example:

In this study humor is used as a material to teach vocabulary and it is a model to teach the text construction.

Both clauses combined above are independent, as one clause only initiates another.

Hypotaxis is the relationship of clauses in the clause complex which decides whether one clause is dominant or dependent upon the other(s).

The population of this study was the second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus **which consists of 242 students.**

The clause **which consists of 242 students** is dependent upon the previous one. It cannot stand by itself as it depends on clause *The population of this study was the second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus.*

Method of the Study

The approach of the research is qualitative and the instrument for data analysis is the theory of clause complex suggested by systemic functional grammar introduced by Halliday (1994) as explained above. The subjects are 12 (twelve) students of the graduate program of Semarang State University, Indonesia, whose abstracts of journal articles are the data of this study. In order to get the authentic data which can bring about authentic results, the abstracts written by those graduate students are the ones which have not been edited yet. The choices of the subjects are done randomly since this study does not mean to generalize the findings.

In detail, the data are analyzed in the following steps: Considering that not all clauses in the abstracts are clause complexes. First, the clause complexes in the abstracts under study are identified. After that the taxis analysis is done by marking the clauses based on the kinds of taxis the clause complex belongs to. When the taxis is parataxis the marking used is a figure, such as 1, 2, 3, etc. When it is hypotaxis the marking is given in a Greek letter, such as α, β, γ, etc. In this step the independent clause should be marked α and this is not always the first clause of the clause complex. The third step is the logico-semantic analysis. This is done by marking the clause with = (equal) when the clause elaborates another clause, + (plus) when it extends the other clause, x (multiplication) when it enhances the other clause. When the clause is projected or projects a locution it is marked with " (double apostrophe) when it is projected or projects an idea it is marked with ' (single apostrophe).

The following example of analysis may give a clear idea of each step.

From this study, I conclude that the book review is a potentially face-threatening act since it must establish a harmonious relationship with the reviewee in a balanced way through compliment strategies.

This clause complex is analyzed as follows:

α From this study, I conclude

β =that the book review is a potentially face-threatening act

1

2 X since it must establish a harmonious relationship with the reviewee in a balanced way through compliment strategies

The above complex clause consists of three single clauses. The main clause is *α* which is hypothetically combined with clause *β*. The logico-

semantic relation of that clause combination is elaboration (=) since the second clause elaborates the first clause, whereas the third clause is joined with clause 2 paratactically, and it is marked **X** since it enhances the second clause.

When doing the segmentation of the clause complex and/or the marking is hard to do, there is an indication that a problem may happen in the concerned clause complex. This may also indicate that the concerned clause complex does not have a good quality.

The next steps done are presenting the findings and interpreting them, and the last step is the drawing of conclusions.

Findings and Interpretation

The information in the table below is the summary of the findings in terms of the taxis and the logico-semantic relation between clauses in the clause complexes.

Table 1. The summary of taxis and logico-semantic relation between clauses in the abstracts under study

No	Taxis	Extension	Enhancement	Elaboration	Projection	Total
1	Parataxis	6	-	-	-	6
	Hypotaxis	1	-	5	-	6
2	Parataxis	1	1	-	-	2
	Hypotaxis	-	-	3	-	3
3	Parataxis	-	-	-	-	0
	Hypotaxis	-	-	3	-	3
4	Parataxis	2	-	-	-	2
	Hypotaxis	-	-	2	-	2
5	Parataxis	1	-	-	-	1
	Hypotaxis	-	-	2	-	2
6	Parataxis	-	-	-	-	0
	Hypotaxis	-	-	1	1	2
7	Parataxis	1	-	-	-	1
	Hypotaxis	-	-	1	-	1
8	Parataxis	1	-	-	-	1
	Hypotaxis	1	-	3	-	4
9	Parataxis	-	-	-	-	0
	Hypotaxis	-	-	2	-	2
10	Parataxis	-	1	-	-	1
	Hypotaxis	-	-	2	-	2
11	Parataxis	1	-	-	-	1

	Hypotaxis	-	I	2	-	3
I2	Parataxis	-	-	-	-	0
	Hypotaxis	-	-	I	-	I
		I5	3	27	I	

The clause complexes found in twelve abstracts analyzed are forty five (46) of which 5 (five) are problematic. This means that 1.08 % of the clause complexes used by graduate students in their article abstracts is not appropriately written.

They can be problematic in terms of logico-semantic relation, or in their system of interdependency, or in both of them. As it is stated previously, the problems can be easily recognized when the researcher finds them difficult to segment, and/or to label the clauses.

Some of the problems are discussed below.

The first clause complex under study is very problematic, as shown below:

Humor as English foreign language teaching material to improve students' speaking skill with of high or low motivation for the students and the effect that the use of humor gives to their teaching. (1)

At a glance, the clause above looks like a paratactic clause complex. But when it is segmented, a problem occurs. The researcher cannot segment or label it. The problem is caused by the fact that *Humor as English foreign language teaching material to improve students' speaking skill with of high or low motivation for the students* is not a clause, it is a word-group the meaning of which is difficult to understand. Because of it, the researcher can only give suggestions for improving it:

Humor as an English material to improve students' speaking skills and its effects towards the teaching are the concerns of this study. It is conducted with the students who have a high motivation and the ones having a low motivation.

Another problematic clause complex is presented below:

*The results of this quantitative study revealed that humor as teaching material has significant effect on the students' speaking skill to those who have high and low learning motivation in **the way** that some second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus expressed that humor in the classroom situation affected their learning positively to those who have high or low motivation rather than conventional material.* (5)

The fifth clause complex under study is hard to understand if it is not divided into at least two clause complexes. The misuse of the word group *the way* seems to be the trouble maker making the analyses is of both the logico-semantic and system of interdependency problematic. The analysis is done by ignoring the trouble maker. The first clause-complex is: *The results of this quantitative study revealed that humor as teaching material has significant effects on the students' speaking skill to those who have high and low learning motivation;* and the second one is: *Some second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus expressed that humor in the classroom situation affected their learning positively to those who have high or low motivation rather than conventional material.* Still, the second clause complex does not convey a clear meaning.

α *The results of this quantitative study revealed*

β = *that humor as teaching material has significant effects on the students' speaking skill* **to those**

γ + *who have high and low learning motivation*

The word group **to those** is inappropriate; it should have been replaced with **for both.**

Unfortunately the second clause complex *Some second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus expressed that humor in the classroom situation affected their learning positively to those who have high or low motivation rather than conventional material* is hard to understand. An improvement can be the following: *This is expressed by some second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus when they are asked to give comments on the use of humor compared to the conventional material. Some second semester students of Tarbiya Program of STAIN Kudus expressed that humor in the classroom situation affected their learning positively to those who have high or low motivation rather than conventional material.*

This clause complex is also problematic: *I conduct the research,* **which** *the purposes are to discover the syntactic patterns and topics of compliment, the compliment strategies are used by the students in evaluating the* **books** *and the function of each strategy* **of which** *the purposes are to discover the syntactic patterns and topics of compliment, the compliment strategies are used by the students in evaluating the* **books,** *and the function of each strategy.*

Other problems of writing of clause complexes analyzed belong to the

same phenomena. Therefore, they are represented by the problem explained above.

Conclusion and Suggestion

After analyzing in detail the clause complexes in the article abstracts written by graduate students of Semarang State University, it can be concluded that the quality of them are considerably good, since there are only 37.5 percents which are problematic.

However, editors of journals should be critically aware of these problems and the lecturers in any of post graduate program, particularly the ones responsible for the academic writing subject, should focus more on the improvements of those problems by training the graduate students on writing complex clauses effectively.

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