

A Contrastive Analysis of Cross-paragraph Theme-supporting Cohesion in Japanese and American Editorials

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Introduction

Due largely to the influence of frequently-cited articles by John Hinds (1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1987, 1990), three assumptions about the general preferences for the organization of Japanese expository prose are repeatedly encountered. The first is that there is a preference for rhetorical induction which results in a “delayed introduction of purpose.” The second is that inductively organized texts in Japanese may deviate from the norms of English inductive development, resulting in “quasi-inductive” organization. The third is that languages and their texts can be categorized according to whether responsibility for clarifying meaning lies with the writer or listener, with English being a “writer-responsible” language and Japanese a “reader-responsible” one.

Hinds, while influential, has been criticized (Donahue, 1998 ; Kubota, 1997, 1998 ; Mc Cagg, 1996 ; Mohan and Lo, 1985 ; see also Connor, 1996, for a summary), especially for basing his assertions about Japanese exposition on only a small number of texts of a specialized genre. However, many researchers, both critics and those who have seen some real or potential merit in Hinds' ideas, have sought to support their claims by resorting to the work of student writers composing in either their first language (L1), second language (L2), or both (see, for example, Kubota, 1997). Hinds, on the other hand, was a strong advocate of seeking answers about first language rhetorical preferences and influences by studying texts written by competent first language writers rather than by analyzing texts by students. He referred to these products of competent authors as *accomplished texts* (Hinds, 1987). Despite possible shortcomings in his research, his point about the importance of focusing on accomplished texts is well taken. It is in no way in conflict with his critics' observations about the need to understand many genres and avoid hasty generalizations based on a single kind of expository writing.

The purpose of this paper is to address these issues, at least in a small way, by presenting the results of a preliminary contrastive analysis of theme-supporting cohesion in editorials on the same topics from American newspapers and Japanese editorials translated into English by the parent newspaper. The methodology is derived from an informative but seldom cited contrastive rhetorical study by Thomas Ricento

(1987), in which Japanese newspaper columns in English translation are compared with newspaper editorials from the United States. In this paper I will first describe the aspects of Ricento's methodology that apply to the present study. Then I will present the results of an analysis of cross-paragraph cohesion in American and translated Japanese editorials and compare and contrast them with Ricento's findings.

Ricento's study of Japanese and English editorializing texts

Ricento considered many structural variables related to Hinds' assertions about delayed introduction of purpose, quasi-induction and reader/writer responsibility, but the variable most relevant to this paper is cohesion. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976) cohesion

“occurs when the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements—the presupposing and the presupposed—are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text” (1976, p. 4)

Ricento was interested in cohesion only in cases where it supported thematic continuity and thus aided in establishing coherence, and thus counted only those instances which maintained thematic continuity *across* paragraphs.

Halliday and Hasan's framework for analyzing textual cohesion in English involves the classic relations of a) reference, b) substitution, c) ellipsis, d) conjunction, and e) lexical cohesion. Of these, Ricento counted only relevant instances of reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion since they are recognized as common surface indicators of cohesion related to thematic development and continuity. Reference involves the use of *demonstrative reference* through words like *this/that* and *the*, *personal reference* through certain referential pronouns, or *comparative reference* through certain expressions indicating similarity or difference. Conjunction involves explicit linking of concepts through words or phrases that indicate relationships are *additive*, *temporal*, *causal*, or *adversative*. Lexical reference is of a different sort, creating links either through *repetition*, *synonymy*, *part-whole* or *member-class* relations, or through the use of *morphological* variation of a root form.

Ricento searched the texts for noun phrases (NP) which were deemed thematic according to the titles and summaries provided by consultants. To be selected as a countable cohesive item, it first had to make anaphoric reference, referring back to an NP in a previous paragraph. If this condition was met, additional reference to it within the paragraph was counted. By plotting cross-paragraph linkage, reference chains with

cross-paragraph thematic continuity could be identified (p. 64).

For his study, Ricento selected five English translations of the *Tensei Jingo* column from the *Asahi Shimbun*, which appears in English translation in a sister newspaper, the *Asahi Daily News*. Five more texts were English translations from another regular column from the *Asahi Shimbun*, the *Weekend Special*. This column, like *Tensei Jingo*, was originally written in Japanese and appeared in English translation in the next day's edition of the *Asahi Daily News*. The corpus was augmented with five English-language editorials from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*. (p. 92)

Ricento took pains to ensure that the texts selected dealt with accessible topics and did not require any special culturally-based knowledge to understand. His decision to group the Japanese columns and the English editorials together as potentially representative of the same text sub-type was based on William Grabe's factor and cluster analysis of English prose, which indicated that "editorials, professional correspondence, and academic and popular humanities texts are of the same text-type, and are classifiable under the general expository umbrella" (p. 91). However, Ricento noted that at the time of his study no similar empirical study of Japanese expository prose existed to allow direct comparison of text-types based on the same variables, but concluded that a comparative approach was justifiable :

"Until a broad-based empirical study is conducted on Japanese expository prose to determine the text-type groupings within the general expository genre, researchers must assume that texts which are purported to be, for example, editorial by professional writers and scholars are relatively similar to their English counterparts. In fact, based on a comparison of the various cohesion measures used in the current study, as well as the number of sentences and words per sentence, the English and Japanese texts appear to be fairly similar" (p. 92)

To reduce bias in determining what aspects of texts could reasonably be considered thematic, Ricento employed 30 bilingual native Japanese speakers and 23 monolingual American English speakers as consultants to read untitled versions of the texts and then write a suitable title and a two to three sentence summary (p. 116).

Thematic noun phrases were then selected based on the titles and summaries.

The current study

Ricento selected texts which, in some sense, could all be considered roughly equivalent textual subtypes of the expository genre (p. 91), and for his purposes, considered them

all to be a form of editorializing text. This study restricts itself to texts specifically designated as editorials by newspapers themselves. These are a universally recognized expository form in the newspaper world, specially designated in the English press by the heading "Editorial" and by "Shasetsu" in Japanese newspapers. By all appearances, they serve the same function in both nations' newspapers, and, as a prestige form of professional writing, are exemplary examples of accomplished texts. By restricting the texts in the current study to a single, well-delimited genre, similarities and differences between American and Japanese editorials and Japanese commentary columns will become clear.

In addition, this study controls for topic. Editorials on two topics, a) the ethical dilemma of human cloning and b) the initial response to the collision between the US nuclear-powered submarine and a Japanese fisheries school training boat named the Ehime Maru, provide the corpus for this study. The *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* were the source of the English editorials, with one exception. Because this writer could not find any *Washington Post* editorials on the initial response to the Ehime Maru incident, an editorial in a California regional newspaper, the *North County Times*, was analyzed. The Japanese editorials in English translation came from the three major Japanese quality press English newspapers: *The Asahi Evening News*, *The Daily Yomiuri*, and *The Mainichi Daily*. Characteristics of the texts are presented in table 1, and a comparison of the means for number of words and paragraphs in Ricento's study and the present study are presented in table 2.

In Ricento's corpus Japanese newspaper texts averaged 413 words and 7.2 orthographic paragraphs, and the American editorials 348 words presented in an average of 5.2 paragraphs per text. The Japanese editorials in the current study were 610 words in length on average and comprised 14.8 orthographic paragraphs, while the American editorials averaged 479 words and 6.3 paragraphs. Both the Japanese and American editorials in the current study are longer than those used by Ricento.

Table 1
Editorials

<i>Topic: Cloning</i>			
<u>Source /Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Words</u>	<u>Paragraphs</u>
[Japanese]			
AD (8/25/97)	Resisting the temptation to clone human beings	630	22
DY (7/8/96)	More cloning questions raised	712	16
MD (2/8/01)	Banning cloning	505	13
(Means)		615	17
[American]			
CT (2/8/98)	The needless rush to ban cloning	439	6
NYT (11/27/01)	Frontiers of cloning	589	7
WP (4/10/00)	Don't clone people	486	4
(Means)		504	5.6
<i>Topic: Ehime Maru Incident</i>			
<u>Source</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Words</u>	<u>Par.</u>
[Japanese]			
AD (3/7/01)	Navy officers must reveal truth about Ehime Maru	646	13
DY (2/11/01)	Sea tragedy must not be repeated	573	15
MD (2/25/01)	Collision off Hawaii	594	10
(Means)		604	12.6
[American]			
CT (2/15/01)	Questions about the Greenville	382	8
NYT (2/17/01)	Navy stonewalling	404	6
NCT (2/15/01)	Tragedy in the Pacific	578	7
(Means)		454	7
Means for all Japanese editorials		610	14.8
Means for all American editorials		479	6.3

Explanation of abbreviations:

AD (Asahi Daily News); DY (Daily Yomiuri); MD (Mainichi Daily); CT (Chicago Tribune); NYT (New York Times); NCT (North County Times); WP (Washington Post)

The issue of translation

This study, like Ricento's and Hinds' before it, is based on the assumption that translations which conform as closely as possible to the organization of the original at all levels above the sentence, and which preserve the semantic sense of the original sentences, convey in important and reliable ways the organization and discourse structure of the text in the original language. The more direct the translation, the more accurate this representation is assumed to be.

All of the English versions of the Japanese editorials were checked by this writer against the original editorials in Japanese. When questions arose, native-speaking Japanese colleagues were consulted. Comparison of the originals with the English translations revealed only slight differences in organization, virtually all resulting from two short sentences in the Japanese version being combined into one longer sentence in the English version, probably for stylistic reasons. Therefore, sentence counts are not always identical for the Japanese and English versions of the same editorials. These small differences, however, did not affect thematic development or the various cohesive measures counted in this study.

Table 2
Comparison of means for texts in Ricento study and present study

	<u>Ricento (1987)</u>	<u>Present Study (2006)</u>
	<i>Tensei Jingo and Weekend Special</i>	<i>Japanese newspaper editorials</i>
Number of words:	413	610
Number of paragraphs:	7.2	14.8
	American newspaper editorials	American newspaper editorials
Number of words:	348	479
Number of paragraphs:	5.2	6.3

Consultants

The present study involved three participants, the author and two colleagues who acted as consultants. The consultants were provided a packet of all 12 editorials and were asked to read untitled versions of the editorials when they had the time and then to write short summaries of them as well as writing a suitable title on an attached form. This writer also read the editorials and wrote summaries but no title since he had already seen the originals. These summaries and titles were used to determine what concepts and related vocabulary readers identified as thematic. This information was then used by this writer to analyze various cohesive textual elements associated with thematic development and continuity along the lines of Ricento's original study.

Thematic cohesion across paragraphs

Table 3 presents the counts for reference, lexical cohesion, and conjunction in all editorials. Before comparing the results with Ricento's, a few points should be addressed. One outstanding point is the dramatic difference in frequency of demonstrative reference between the "Cloning" editorials (82 instances) and the "Ehime Maru" editorials (20 instances), regardless of the Japanese or American origin of the editorial. Both the American and the Japanese editorials had long sections dedicated to description of events, conditions, and participants in the accident. The great majority of demonstrative references in the "Ehime Maru" texts are instances of "the" being used to designate one of two of a series of participants in the incident: "the submarine" or "the ship," "the Japanese government" versus "the Americans," "the Navy" and "the Pentagon." The cloning texts, on the other hand, devoted much of the text to definitions and explanations of complex scientific concepts and dilemmas, and relied very little on this kind of demonstrative reference as a means of maintaining thematic continuity. This is an example of how topic can have a noticeable effect on a given text even when other variables like genre and text-type are controlled for.

Lexical cohesion

Ricento found in his study that the English and Japanese texts were fairly similar in terms of lexical cohesion, as well as in sentence length and words per sentence (p. 92). The mean for total lexical cohesion (all four types) in the six translated Japanese texts in his study was 26.7 instances per text (6.5% of total words) and 24.6 (7.0% of total words) for the five English editorials. The longer texts in the current study produced higher figures: a mean of 54.3 instances (8.9% of all words) per translated Japanese text versus 45.6 (9.5% of all words) for the English editorials. In relative terms, the observation that lexical cohesion appears to play a similar function in both languages still holds true, but the higher frequency for editorials in the current study is harder

to account for. It may indicate that the editorial in Japanese, as a specific text type, differs in this respect from the *Tensei Jingo* and *Weekend Special* texts, but the fact that it is higher than the American editorials Ricento studied is interesting. The difference could have resulted from topic, but it is also possible that this writer was more generous in identifying thematic NPs and linked vocabulary than Ricento was despite attempting to apply the same methodology.

Table 3
Cohesion by language and topic

Topic	Source	<i>Japanese Editorials</i>											
		Reference			Lexical				Conjunction				
		P	D	C	R	S	P	M	A	T	C	Ad	
Cloning	AD	3	4	2	25	9	10	17	1	1	1	2	
	DY	1	10	2	22	16	12	15					
	MD	3	6	1	11	10	12	5		1	1	4	
	<u>Totals</u>	7	20	5	58	35	34	37	1	2	2	6	
Ehime Maru	AD	2	33	2	24	23	3	6			1	1	
	DY	3	23	1	26	18	8	10		2			
	MD	4	26		14	16	5	9					
	<u>Totals</u>	9	82	3	64	57	16	25	1	4	3	7	
(Means for Japanese texts)				Ref: 26			Lex: 54.3				Conj: 4.3		
Topic	Source	<i>American Editorials</i>											
		Reference			Lexical				Conjunction				
		P	D	C	R	S	P	M	A	T	C	Ad	
Cloning	CT	4	9		11	10	6	9		1			
	NYT	4	13	1	30	14	5	7				2	
	WP	3	11		20	8	4	13				1	
	<u>Totals</u>	11	33	1	61	32	15	29		1		3	
Ehime Maru	CT	4	28	1	16	18	4	8					
	NYT	4	25	1	23	12		5		1			
	NCT	4	28	1	19	16	6	10					
	<u>Totals</u>	12	81	3	58	46	10	23		1			
(Means for English texts)				Ref: 23.5			Lex: 45.6				Conj: 0.83		

Explanation of abbreviations

Sources: AD (Asahi Daily News); DY (Daily Yomiuri); MD (Mainichi Daily);
CT (Chicago Tribune); NYT (New York Times); NCT (North County
Times); WP (Washington Post)

Reference: P=personal; D=demonstrative; C=comparative

Lexical: R=exact repetition; S=synonym; P=part-whole/member-class;
M=morphological variant

Conjunction: A=additive; T=temporal; C=causal; Ad=adversative

Averages for exact lexical repetition in the Ricento study were 17.1 (4.1% of total words) for the Japanese columns and 13.4 (3.9% of all words) for the American editorials. Meanwhile, Japanese editorials in the current study averaged 20.3 instances (3.2% of all words) for exact lexical repetition while the figure for American editorials was 19.8 (4.1% of all words) for exact repetition. In terms of the percentage of all words, the results are similar in both studies, especially for the American editorials.

Regarding synonymy, however, Ricento found a noticeable difference between the texts written in America and those in Japan. His texts produced a mean of 2.5 (0.6% of all words) for synonymous expressions for theme-supporting vocabulary for the Japanese texts and 4.8 (1.4% of all words) for those from the American newspapers, and he concluded that the Japanese writers favored lexical repetition more than the American editorial writers. He noted that this supported other research involving Japanese expository texts in which all NPs were counted, which also showed them to display far more exact lexical repetition than English, Chinese, and Spanish. (p. 99).

The figures in the present study are higher for both the Japanese and American texts. The Japanese editorials had an overall mean of 15.3 (2.5% of all words) for synonymy, compared with a mean of 13.0 (2.7% of all words) for synonymy in the American editorials. The Japanese editorials display more synonymy than the Japanese columns in Ricento's study while simultaneously indicating a similarity between the Japanese and American editorials in the current study.

Reference

Ricento found that, on average, the Japanese texts displayed more use of reference to connect paragraphs than did the English texts: 10.9 instances (2.6% of total words) versus 6.4 (1.8% of total words). This may have been due to topic, in his opinion, as more Japanese texts dealt with people as subjects, making personal reference a natural choice for carrying the theme across paragraphs.

In the present study, total instances of reference were higher than in texts from both countries in Ricento's study, with a mean of 26 (4.3% of total words) for the Japanese

texts and 23.5 (4.9% of total words) for the American. Interestingly, the similarity between the translated Japanese editorials and the American editorials stands out in comparison to the Japanese columns but the difference is even more noticeable with the American editorials in the Ricento study. Again, the cause for this is difficult to determine with any certainty, but could again be due to topic or because of differences in executing the analysis of texts themselves.

Conjunction

A relative lack of cross-paragraph thematic continuity established through conjunction was found for both the Japanese and the English texts in Ricento's study : one instance in the English texts and six in the Japanese. Such sparseness was reflected in the results in the current analysis as well, and the balance was similar. Only four instances of theme-supporting cross-paragraph conjunction were found in the American texts and 16 in the Japanese. Ricento noted that this paucity runs counter to the "commonly held prescriptivist beliefs about expository prose and provides further support for the idea that expository prose, as a genre, encompasses a variety of sub-types (such as editorials) which may exhibit different rhetorical and syntactic structures" (p. 100-101).

Summary and Conclusions

The analysis of cross-paragraph, theme-supporting cohesion presented in the present study indicates that Japanese editorials are similar in many respects to American editorials but different in important ways from the Japanese columns in Ricento's study. This is especially true of the *Tensei Jingo* columns which have drawn so much attention over the years.

Among Ricento's summary observations, two are especially relevant to the present study. First, he observed that lexical cohesion, reference, and conjunction appear to be used with relatively equal frequency in both languages, although differences appeared in the types of lexical cohesion favored. This observation is supported by the findings in the present study.

The second is that there appear to be similarities across the two languages regarding expository prose as a general text type, especially in patterns used to establish cohesion and topical focus. However, major differences appear to lie in literary conventions such as sentence length, paragraphing practices, presence or absence of unambiguous thesis statements, indirect introduction of topic through anecdotes, and indirect conclusions.

He also noted an aspect of text organization which warrants further study. Ricento's experience in analyzing translated Japanese texts led him to propose that the editorializing Japanese texts often exhibited an "episodic type of thematic development, in which topics related to the overall theme are presented in separate paragraphs,

loosely linked by reiteration of lexical NPs from preceding paragraphs, all somehow relevant to the overall topic which is enunciated by the title” (p. 84). An analysis of episodic development was not a focus of the current study, but the episodic type of development is, in this writer's opinion, common in the Japanese newspaper editorials in this study. This appears to be a fruitful subject for future research. So, of course, is the continued contrastive analysis of editorials, columns and other accomplished forms of writing, texts which have the most potential to help us better understand the similarities and differences between Japanese and American texts.

Notes

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