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A News Story from a Tagmemic Perspective

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Abstract:

This paper provides a way to scrutinize news stories that should be used as a material to teach English to students in the College of Mass Communication. The paper answers two questions. The first question is to show whether it is possible to examine a news story as a tagmeme or not and the second one is to illustrate how this kind of analysis would be of any help to the people teaching and learning English in the College of Mass Communication and in EFL composition classes in general.

1. Introduction

English is taught to students in the College of Mass Communication. It is preferable that the texts that should be used to teach these students English are news stories taken from newspapers written in English. Using such texts as teaching material will help the students discover what is there in a news story.

The present paper intends to use the tagmeme which is the basic unit of the tagmemic analysis to analyze a news story. The questions to be answered in this paper are:

1. Is it possible to examine a news story as a tagmeme?
2. Is this analysis helpful in teaching English to students in the College of Mass Communication?

This paper scrutinizes one news story chosen from the Guardian Unlimited (2004) (Appendix1) using the four features of the tagmeme: slot, class, role and cohesion.

2. What is a tagmeme?

A tagmeme is basically a composite of form and meaning. It is "the correlation of a functional slot on a specific level within a hierarchy with the class of items that fill the slot."(Waterhouse, 1974:10). The tagmeme is described in terms of four features-slot (where the unit can appear), class (what type of unit it is), role (how the unit functions), and cohesion (how the unit relates to other units).The tagmeme is postulated as a small element in language as a whole and in this respect is very similar to the units of the phoneme and morpheme. However, unlike either of these two units, the tagmeme does not reduce language to a set of meaningless sounds. Rather, the tagmeme points in the direction of both preserving a meaningful lexical unit and introducing a meaningful grammatical unit. According to Cook (1969:15), a tagmeme is "the correlation of a functional slot with the class of items that fill that slot. This unit is not merely a form unit, as in other grammatical models, but a composite of function and form." Pike and Pike define the tagmeme as " A constituent of construction seen from the point of view of its four general features: slot, class, role, and cohesion "(Pike and Pike, 1977:35). See display (1) after Pike and Pike (ibid).

SLOT	CLASS(ES)
ROLE	COHESION

Display (1): The Four Features of the Tagmeme

So the tagmeme is an association of a grammatical function with the set of items which may fill that function. Pike and Pike define slot as "The feature of a tagmeme which comprises its nuclear or marginal place in the construction."(ibid: 490). Role is" The feature of a tagmeme which carries the function of the tagmeme in the construction."(ibid: 489). Class is "The feature of the tagmeme which is the substance… listed as the construction or set of constructions; morpheme type, which fills… the slot"(ibid: 482). Finally, cohesion is " The feature of a tagmeme which controls the manner in which it affects (governs) or is affected (governed by) other tagmemes" (ibid: 482).

In this paper, these four features of the tagmeme will be used to examine the news story chosen from the Guardian Unlimited (2004).

3. What is a news story?

A news story is an account of what is happening around us. It may involve current events, new initiatives or ongoing projects or issues. Reah (1998:4) defines a news story as "information about recent events that are of interest to a sufficiently large group, or that may affect the lives of a sufficiently large group."

The structure of a news story is simple: the headline, the lead, and the body. The headline is a unique type of text. It has a range of functions that specifically dictate its shape, content and structure, and it operates within a range of restrictions that limit the freedom of the writer. The space that the headline will occupy is almost always dictated by the layout of the page, and the size of the typeface will similarly be restricted. Reah (1998:13) states that "the headline has the capacity to encapsulate a story in a minimum number of words, attracts the reader to the story, and if it appears on the front page, attracts the reader to the paper." The

reader "can skim the headlines and have an outline of the news of the day, and some idea of its relative impact and importance"(ibid: 14).

The second part of a news story is the lead. One of the most important elements of news writing is the opening paragraph of the story. The lead summarizes the news story and in addition to this it serves three functions:"
1. It answers the questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how.
2. It emphasizes the news feature of the story by placing it in the initial position.
3. It provides such quick identification of persons, places, and events as is necessary to an understanding of the story" (Mott et al, 1958:65). The lead "permits hurried readers to scan the entire news of the day in a few minutes. The complete stories serve more careful readers who desire full details"(ibid: 75).The lead "must summarize the action of the story. This requires answering the six questions who, what, when, where, why, and how which the reader may be expected always to ask; and it requires stating the result or, in a continuing story where the final result is not known, the latest important development" (Mott et al, 1958: 75). In the lead, persons, places, and events "must be given quick identification to make the lead clear to the reader"(ibid: 78). The lead must catch the readers' attention and make them want more to read on, and must provide them with most of the information they need to understand the news story. Thus the lead "provides a readable, straight forward statement of the information that the writer has decided is most important"(Lorenz and Vivian, 1996:38). The best written lead not only satisfies the reader's initial curiosity, but wets his appetite to read more. A good lead "helps capture attention, prepare the audience for the story, and set the tone or mood of the news item that follows"(Shams, 2002:32). An effective lead shakes" the consciousness of the

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readers and arouse their interest in what follows. The lead is the 'hook', the brief bait designed to lure the readers into the story" (ibid).

After the lead comes the remainder of the story. It constitutes the body of the story. It involves combining the opinions of the people interviewed, some factual data, and a narrative which helps the story flow. The body is an elaboration of the lead which "may be regarded as an outline for the body of the story" and " when the facts are clear and well organized, the body will expand each of the points included in the lead in the same order in which the lead has stated them"(Mott et al,1958: 65).

In a news story, all important information is moved to the top of the story, and "everything else is in descending order right down to least important material at the end of the story" (Nehiley, 2004). There are two reasons for this structure. The first reason is that when the story is being sub-edited for insertion a sub-editor can fit the news story to a smaller space by cutting from the end without destroying major details. The other reason is that readers can skim the first few paragraphs and feel that information about the most important facts has been read. This style is called the inverted pyramid structure.

4. The tagmemic analysis of the news story

A detailed tagmemic analysis of the news story culled from the Guardian Unlimited (2004), using Pike and Pike's (1977:35) four general features, will be presented in the following sections.

4.1. Slot

The news story chosen to be analyzed in this paper is composed of eleven slots.

4.2. Class

These eleven slots are occupied by block paragraphs. The majority of these block paragraphs are made up of one sentence except for four and ten which are composed of two sentences and eight which has three sentences. The distribution of words within these sentences varies from one block paragraph to another. The total number of sentences within this news story is fifteen and the total number of words is (353). Table (1) shows the distribution of sentences within this news story:

Table (1): The Distribution of Structures and their Types within the News Story

Slot Number	Structure Type	Number of Sentences	Sentence Type	Number of Words
1	Block Paragraph	1	Simple	٦
2	Block Paragraph	1	Complex	٣٧
3	Block Paragraph	1	Complex	٣٤
4	Block Paragraph	2	Complex	٤١
5	Block Paragraph	1	Complex	٣٣
6	Block Paragraph	1	Complex	٣٢
7	Block Paragraph	1	Complex	٢٨
8	Block Paragraph	3	Complex Compound – Complex Complex	٦٠
9	Block Paragraph	1	Complex	٢٨
10	Block Paragraph	2	Complex	٣٢
11	Block Paragraph	1	Simple	٢٢
	Total	15		353

4.3. Role

A news story is composed of three main parts: the headline, the lead, and the remainder of the story. These three parts appear in a fixed order. Each one of these parts perform a function in the news story system and because of this function, each part occupies a certain position. Wolesley and Campell (1946:153) state that the news story "is imparted in the headline, the introductory paragraph, and the body of the article."

The first part of the news story is the headline. It "is placed above the news story in a large bold typeset to attract the reader's attention. It has a range of functions that dictate its shape, content, and structure. It summarizes the whole story in a minimum number of words, attracts the reader to the story and, if it appears on the front page, attracts the reader to the paper" (Shams, 2002:3). The headline of this news story is:

"Rebels inciting civil war, says PM"

After the headline comes the lead which is the most important unit of the news story since it "determines the nature of the entire structure and attracts or repels the reader" (Wholsely & Campell, 1943: 157). The lead is called so because "it leads the reader into the article, because it precedes everything else in the news structure, or because it shows the way to the news" (Ibid.). The lead represents the beginning of the new story because it "is designed to present the most interesting material in a way that attracts attention, induces readership, and sets the tone"(Nehiley, 2004).

The lead of the news story chosen for this paper is:

"Iraq's interim prime minister warned yesterday that insurgents were trying to foment a sectarian war in the country, as 50 people were arrested over Sunday's twin car bomb attacks in Najaf and Kerbala which left 67 dead."

It summarizes the whole news story in one sentence block paragraph. It is clear, provocative, direct, and so simple that anyone can understand. It is brief and simple because the purpose of the rest of the story is to elaborate on it.

After the lead comes the remainder of the story in which "each paragraph develops one of the main facts presented in the lead, or adds one or more details to the representation of the main event" and that "all the separate paragraphs have close relation to each other in providing the reader with: main act, main participants, other participants, properties of main participants, properties of main event (time, place, circumstances), consequences, context, and history of major factors in the creation of the event…"(Shams,2002:52).

In this news story, all important information is moved to the top of the story and then everything else is in descending order right down to the least important material at the end of the story.

The news story chosen for this study fits into the universal model of the inverted pyramid. According to this model, the news story begins with the most important facts in the first or the lead paragraph which leads the reader into the rest of the story; the lesser facts and background follow (Nehiley, 2004).

4.4. Cohesion

This feature examines whether the slots of the news story are connected together or each one stands by itself.

Slot one is connected to slot two in that the content words of the first one are repeated in the latter as shown in table (2):

Table (2): Structural Elements Connecting Slots One and Two of the News Story

Slot One	Slot Two

Rebels	insurgents
inciting	to foment
civil war	a sectarian war
PM	Iraq's interim prime minister

Slot three is connected to slot two since it elaborates the facts mentioned there as shown in table (3):

Table (3): Structural Elements Connecting Slots Two and Three of the News Story

Slot Two	Slot Three
Iraq's interim Prime Minister	Ayad Allawi
Insurgents	Sunni Muslim insurgents
twin car bomb attacks	deadly strikes
to foment a sectarian war	"create ethnic and religious tensions, problems and conflicts…"

The structures connecting slot four to the previous slots are shown in Table (4):

Table (4): Structural Elements Connecting Slots One, Two, Three and Four of the News Story

Slot One	Slot Two	Slot Three	Slot Four
/	Sunday's twin car bomb attacks	the deadly strikes against Iraq's Shia majority	These attacks
PM	Iraq's interim prime minister	Ayad Allawi	Mr Allawi He He

Slot five is connected to slot three through the repetition of the word "Shia". Thus 'Shia Muslims, who make up around 60% of Iraq's population' mentioned in slot five is an elaboration for 'Iraq's Shia majority' mentioned in slot three. The fact about

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election links slot five to slot four. The connection is being illustrated in Table (5):   Table (5): Structural Elements Connecting Slots Three, Four, and Five of the News Story

Slot Three	Slot Four	Slot Five
Iraq's Shia majority	/	Shia Muslims, who make up around 60% of Iraq's population
/	the January 30 parliamentary elections	the upcoming electoral process

Slot six is linked to slot two in that it starts with the word "Najaf" mentioned earlier in slot two. The phrase "50 people" mentioned in "the 50 people arrested in connection with the bombings" in slot six links it to slot two where it is mentioned first "as 50 people were arrested over Sunday's twin car bomb attacks". The phrases "Sunday's twin car attacks" in slot two,' the deadly strikes' in slot three, and "the bombings" in slot six join these three slots together:

2 "Iraq's interim prime minister warned yesterday that insurgents were trying to foment a sectarian war in the country, as **50 people** were arrested over **Sunday's twin car bomb attacks** in **Najaf** and Kerbala which left 67 dead."

3 "Ayad Allawi said the mainly Sunni Muslim insurgents, blamed for **the deadly strikes** against Iraq's Shia majority, wanted to 'create ethnic and religious tensions, problems and conflicts... to destroy the unity of this country'."

6 "**Najaf**'s police chief, Ghalib al-Jazaari, said the **50 people** arrested in connection with **the bombings** included 'elements'

who had confessed to having links with the intelligence services of neighbouring Syria and Iran."

The phrase "The attacks" at the beginning of slot seven links it to slots two, three, four, and six:

2 "Iraq's interim prime minister warned yesterday that insurgents were trying to foment a sectarian war in the country, as 50 people were arrested over **Sunday's twin car bomb attacks** in Najaf and Kerbala which left 67 dead."

3 "Ayad Allawi said the mainly Sunni Muslim insurgents, blamed for **the deadly strikes** against Iraq's Shia majority, wanted to 'create ethnic and religious tensions, problems and conflicts... to destroy the unity of this country'."

4"**These attacks** are designed to stop the political process from taking place in Iraq, 'Mr Allawi told reporters. He added that he expected more strikes as the January 30 parliamentary elections - the first free vote in Iraq since 1958 - get closer."

6"Najaf's police chief, Ghalib al-Jazaari, said the 50 people arrested in connection with **the bombings** included 'elements' who had confessed to having links with the intelligence services of neighbouring Syria and Iran."

7 **"The attacks** undermined repeated claims by US military commanders that their campaign last month to retake the town of Falluja had dealt a serious blow to the insurgency."
Slot seven is a bridge between what has been mentioned earlier and what is expressed in slot eight with the key words for this linkage which are "the town of Falluja":

7 "The attacks undermined repeated claims by US military commanders that their campaign last month to retake **the town of Falluja** had dealt a serious blow to the insurgency."

8 "Residents of **the city** were told yesterday that they must wait at least another week to return home. Each family is due to get $500 (£257) on returning, but it is not clear whether the Americans or the Iraqi government will pay. There are also indications that guerrillas who fought in **Falluja** are trying to re-infiltrate to pursue the battle."

In slot eight, "the city" refers to "Falluja" reported in slot seven. The word "Falluja" is repeated in slot eight. The word "guerrillas" in this slot links it to the rest of the slots.

The expression "meanwhile" at the beginning of slot nine joins it to the rest of the news story:

9 **"Meanwhile**, the head of Iraq's national electoral commission appealed to security forces to safeguard his officials after three were shot dead on a street in Baghdad on Sunday."

Slot ten is linked to slot nine since it is a quote from Abdul Hussein al-Hindawi identified in slot nine as the head of Iraq's National Electoral Commission and it extends the idea expressed there:

10'"We send an appeal to the Iraqi government and all the people to protect our employees,' Abdul Hussein al-Hindawi said. 'We have no real protection because we work everywhere in the country.'"

Finally, slot eleven is linked to the rest of the news story simply because it tackles events that occurred in Iraq "north of Baghdad" and "near Baghdad airport". A deeper examination may identify further cohesive elements in Al-Hindawi's appeal above in the form of the expressions "and all the people" which naturally means the U.S. army and "everywhere in the country." In a British newspaper with affiliations such as those of the Guardian, the irony in slot eleven is quite possible, i.e., Al-Hindawi is

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seeking the protection of those who could not protect themselves. The fact that the sentence is introduced without any explicit cohesive device to link it with the preceding sentence is evidence of this.

11 "Four US soldiers were injured - three in an ambush **north of Baghdad** and one in a roadside bomb **near Baghdad airport** yesterday."

Cohesion is achieved in this news story through the direct repetition of words and phrases as shown in table (6):

Table (6): Items Repeated in the News Story

Item Repeated	Slot Number	Slot Number	Slot Number
Najaf	٢	٦	
Kerbala	٢		
insurgents	٢	٣	
Shia	٣	٥	
Sunni	٣	٥	
50 people	٢	٦	
attacks	٢	٤	٧

In addition to direct repetition of words, synonyms are used to exhibit cohesion in this news story:

Rebels   insurgents   guerrillas
Attacks   strikes

Pronouns are used to express grammatical cohesion in this news story as exhibited in table (7):

Table (7): Grammatical Cohesion through the Use of Pronouns

Pronoun	Slot Number	Reference
He	٤	Mr. Allawi
he	٤	Mr. Allawi
they	٥	Shia Muslim
We	١٠	Abdul Hussein al-Hindawi and his officials
we	١٠	Abdul Hussein al-Hindawi and his officials

5. Conclusion

It is possible to examine a news story through the four features of the tagmeme: slot, class, role, and cohesion. The combination of these four features presents a form-function analysis of a news story. The analysis conducted in this paper would be of great use to the people teaching and learning English in the College of Mass Communication because it will provide them with a new way of looking at texts to be taught and learned. This type of analysis helps the people teaching and learning English to focus on different points. It enables them to see what structures are used in the news story. It also helps them to see how these structures

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are linked together. And finally, it shows them the function each part of the news story performs.

Using news stories in the teaching process and in this way of analysis will make the lecture vivid and will develop the students' language skills. Besides, it will offer a new horizon in the teaching of composition classes for EFL learners in general.

Appendix 1

1 **Rebels inciting civil war, says PM**

2 Iraq's interim prime minister warned yesterday that insurgents were trying to foment a sectarian war in the country, as 50 people were arrested over Sunday's twin car bomb attacks in Najaf and Kerbala which left 67 dead.

3 Ayad Allawi said the mainly Sunni Muslim insurgents, blamed for the deadly strikes against Iraq's Shia majority, wanted to "create ethnic and religious tensions, problems and conflicts... to destroy the unity of this country".

4 "These attacks are designed to stop the political process from taking place in Iraq," Mr Allawi told reporters. He added that he expected more strikes as the January 30 parliamentary elections - the first free vote in Iraq since 1958 - get closer.

5 Shia Muslims, who make up around 60% of Iraq's population, have been strong supporters of the upcoming electoral process, which they expect will reverse the longtime domination of Iraq by the Sunni minority.

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6 Najaf's police chief, Ghalib al-Jazaari, said the 50 people arrested in connection with the bombings included "elements" who had confessed to having links with the intelligence services of neighbouring Syria and Iran.

7 The attacks undermined repeated claims by US military commanders that their campaign last month to retake the town of Falluja had dealt a serious blow to the insurgency.

8 Residents of the city were told yesterday that they must wait at least another week to return home. Each family is due to get $500 (£257) on returning, but it is not clear whether the Americans or the Iraqi government will pay. There are also indications that guerrillas who fought in Falluja are trying to re-infiltrate to pursue the battle.

9 Meanwhile, the head of Iraq's national electoral commission appealed to security forces to safeguard his officials after three were shot dead on a street in Baghdad on Sunday.

10 "We send an appeal to the Iraqi government and all the people to protect our employees," Abdul Hussein al-Hindawi said. "We have no real protection because we work everywhere in the country."

11 Four US soldiers were injured - three in an ambush north of Baghdad and one in a roadside bomb near Baghdad airport yesterday.

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