Discourse Patterns (Kaplan)

The discourse pattern (the logical arrangement of ideas) of an expository text or of an oral presentation for informational purposes will vary depending on the culture and the native language of the writer/speaker. That is, logic is not universal. The logical arrangement of ideas is culture-bound.1

- True message is given in the discourse pattern not in the words
- Usually first observed in the 4th grade and up
- “If I don’t perceive that you care about me as a person, then I don’t understand what you say to me even if I speak the language.” (know language but don’t use appropriate discourse pattern)2

1. Importance of discourse patterns to literacy skills
   1.1 If one doesn’t know the discourse pattern, one can’t read for comprehension (effect begins in 4th grade)
   1.2 If one doesn’t know the discourse pattern, one can’t write for comprehension

2. Discourse patterns in various languages
   Different languages organize information differently
   2.1 English (linear discourse pattern)3

   2.11 Male-Female differences in the U. S.4
   Male: Academic, direct & confrontative; short, quick to the point, don’t beat around the bush
   Female: inductive, main idea alluded to, not explicit, receiver is supposed to guess the idea, intent

   2.12 English in the U.S.
   Deductive & linear: Thesis/topic sentence, main idea, support . . . , conclusion5

   2.13 English in England
   Inductive & linear. Idea, idea . . . , conclusion (Thesis/topic sentence) Very lengthy to get to the point, elaborate then add “thus”, “therefore”, “we can conclude” and give the conclusion.6
2.2 Asian Languages (Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese studied so far; most likely applies to Hmong, Lao, Mien)
Thought is developed through indirection. To directly address the main idea or issue is considered very rude. Eight poetic hints are given, one must figure out the main idea through them. Causes intergenerational differences & cultural differences.

2.3 Native American Languages (Navaho, Yaqui, Apache studied (all in Arizona); most likely applies to other indigenous groups (57 identified in Mexico)
Same as Asian.

2.4 Semitic languages (Arabic, Hebrew)
Link together at the end, loose in between; information is given, person may/may not link information to next concept; you ask a question and the person responds with a question.

2.5 Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian)
Development by digression; takes lots of time; begin with topic, go off on tangent, contradict tangent, conclude with main idea; flowery, fancy, formal, intensifiers, reiteration, say it up to 7 times (average is 3 times) each time gets bigger, better, more flowery than before.

• Sending a message in English discourse pattern may come across as a rude command
• English speakers want them to get to the point quickly
• Credibility issue for interpreting/translating (longer in Spanish)

2.6 Russian language
Situational, always changes; sometimes one way, next time rearrange story and give different version; may appear to others to be inconsistent because of changes in discourse pattern.

2.7 Chicano English (2nd-6th generation)
AN ORAL, SOCIAL CONTACT DIALECT
The initial study was done with Latino and Anglo students; however it appears this discourse pattern can be applied to other 2nd-6th generation language groups.
Conversational in tone; casual register, all social, basic inter-communicational skills; used like one is addressing a peer audience; run-on sentences; additive relationships (and then, and then... end with “that’s all I’ve got to say”); subconscious
deviations (didn’t know they had done it); little evidence of planning & organizing before writing; stream of consciousness links (one idea links another to topic); use lexical chains alone to link ideas (vocabulary holds composition together); redundancy (limited vocabulary) ELEMENTS OF PEOPLE WHO DON’T READ-DON’T KNOW ACADEMIC ENGLISH

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS: Discourse pattern is tied to literacy skills. Students cannot read nor write standard American English if they do not know the discourse pattern expected in expository compositions or in informational oral presentations. Teach students the discourse pattern of American English explicitly along with subject area content. Some recommended strategies include:

3.1 Use skeleton outline (lecture, video, reading, combined with a letter about the subject being taught); used for development of English for expository writing for comprehension in content areas

3.2 Use doodles, little pictures, boxes to show what they need to do

3.3 Do 1/2 page summaries; Draw box, then bullets (more advanced than skeleton outlines) – clip together – ready for writing an essay

3.4 Record skeleton outlines and 1/2 page summaries on cassettes in discourse pattern of academic English (auditory learning) – can listen at school, car, phone (great for Special Education students)

3.5 Use techniques that organize information (multiple modalities, analogies), (graphic organizers)

Teach writing: start at the paragraph then go back with the rules (fragments, run-ons, etc.)

1Kaplan, Robert, Professor of Sociology, University of Southern California, 1972, 1980.
2Dr. Cardenas, Professor of Sociology & Education, Texas A & M University.
3Kaplan.
4Tannen, Deborah, Professor of Sociology, Georgetown University.
5Kaplan.
6Ibid.
7Ibid.
8Ibid.
9Ibid.
10Ibid.
11Ibid.
12Montaño-Harmon, Professor Emeritus, California State University, Fullerton, 1983.