THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN DISCOURSES IN ENGLISH

Hamta Ghasemi
MA in TEFL, English Deptment, Abadeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abedeh, Iran.
Tel: 00989393029149
E-mail: ghasemi.hamta@gmail.com

Maryam Khoshbouie Jahromi
MA in TEFL, English Deptment, Abadeh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abedeh, Iran.
Tel: 00989389909482
E-mail: mkhoshbouie@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
The present study explores the differences between spoken and written discourses as two modes of communication. We analyzed these differences mainly based on Bartsch (1997) and Paltridge (2006). According to previous researchers, written language is pre-planned, well-organized and transactional, while spoken mode is relatively unplanned, less structured and interactive. It is simple and shorter using non-standard grammar. Speech is a first draft status which has some distinctive features like intonation, loudness/quietness, gestures and body language, stress, pausing, rhythm and variations in speed. Written style is the final draft status, has a denser content and uses punctuations instead of intonation, hesitation and pauses. It is more complex, well-structured and transactional. This study attempts to make a distinction between spontaneous speech and pre-planned speech. These distinctions are discussed in terms of Paralinguistic signals, Preciseness, Organization, Deviations from default orders, and Frequency of repetition. The results of this study suggested that finding the crucial relations between these two styles (written and spoken) can help scholars understand how languages work for different people.

KEYWORDS: Spoken discourse, Written discourse, Organization, Content density, First and final draft status.

INTRODUCTION
Historically, languages were first found in spoken form. Then, they were formulated in written mode. However, many languages do not have a written form, and many people cannot read or write. Moreover, while children can acquire spoken language innately, they have to learn written form at schools. This fact raises a question that is what makes reading and writing difficult to learn? Why children learn to speak fluently, whereas some never master fluency in writing? By discussing the relationship between speech and writing we can understand how languages can work for different people in societies (Tannen, 1983). Discourse analysis makes distinctions between oral and written styles. The typical distinctions between written and spoken language is referred to medium and channel by Hymes because each of them involve a variety of
psychological processes (Van Dijk, 1997). Before dealing with these differences, the author first introduces what is meant by discourse, and then provides a literature review of previous studies pertaining to the distinctions between spoken and written discourses.

**Discourse and Discourse Analysis**

Some scholars like Coulthard (1977) use the term discourse to talk about face to face conversations; some others like Bolinger (1979) use it to mean hypothetical sentences in a row; and some like Tannen (1983, p.79) use discourse to mean “anything beyond the sentence” which form a text. Therefore, the terms discourse and text may be used interchangeably. Accordingly, discourse is related to a stream of any language not just individual sentences out of their contexts (ibid.). We cannot limit the discourse we hear as only a linguistic structure. It is also a representation of how contents are gathered and stored in the mind. Psychological researches have shown that there’s not a strict one to one correspondence between the way hearers understand, store, and remember a discourse and what was actually said (Dooley & Levinsohn, 2001).

Everett (1992) says that "discourses force us to draw upon all we know about our culture, language, and world”. This idea can be grasped completely by considering the speakers’ prior knowledge of the way things happen in the real world and their expectations of what the speaker meant to say. This prior knowledge and expectation are culture specific. However, we need to know more than discourse content, cultural knowledge and expectations to understand discourse fully. We also need to recognize how people perceive, store, and access information. These processes may not be directly observable; they are reflected in how discourse is put together (Dooley & Levinsohn, 2001). That is why discourse analyzers continue to say that intralinguistic factors (e.g. reference, ellipsis, substitution, etc.) and extralinguistic factors (discourse context, world knowledge, the speakers and listeners’ common mental knowledge, etc.) work hand in hand to create coherent texts (Nasr-e-Azadani, 1999).

**LITERATURE REVIEW OF RELEVANT STUDIES**

Donnell (1973) analyzed some syntactic characteristics of oral and written discourse to determine whether written style is more complex syntactically than spoken form. He collected his spoken discourse data from a television program where the speaker answered the questions of three journalists. Also, he collected the written data from four newspaper columns the speaker had written. He classified the discourses into syntactic units and counted the words in each corpus. The results indicated that syntactic units in the written corpus were significantly greater. The ratio of syntactic units which contained one or more dependent clauses was considerably greater in the written sample as well. Moreover, the spoken data samples did not show high frequency of passive constructions, gerunds, attributive adjectives, participles and modal or perfective auxiliaries. Finally, there were considerably higher amounts of noun clauses, progressive auxiliaries and infinitives in the spoken research corpus.

Jahandarie (1999) has provided an excellent place for beginning communication education. He presented a systematic critical viewpoint towards the previous studies concerning the differences
between written and oral traditions especially those literatures which are related to the cultural and cognitive dimensions of these differences. Thereby, he has conducted a unique multidisciplinary work with lots of theories and evidences from different disciplines.

In an activity-based textbook Hughes (1996) talked about the properties of spoken and written language in English and analyzed sample discourses (such as boxing commentaries, detective novels, film scripts, etc.) from the two disciplines. She invited her readers to investigate the differences between spoken and written language in English for themselves and did not directly provide information about the two modes of communication. Doing so, she guided her readers in finding the best methods for this kind of analysis and helped them promote their awareness about those differences. So, the readers can distinguish Standard English from Non-standard one and can formulate their own ideas about a wide range of varieties in spoken and written English.

Paltridge (2006) provided a general survey of discourse analysis which ranged from more textually oriented views to more socially related ones, i.e. from focusing on language features of texts to what the texts do in social and cultural situations. Then, he examined the differences between speech and writing by the use of some examples and relying on Biber (1988) classified them into eight groups as grammatical intricacy, lexical density, nominalization, explicitness, contextualization, spontaneity, repetition-hesitation and redundancy, and continuum view.

Yabuuchi (1988) approached the scheme of examining the most relevant distinctions between spoken and written language. He compared the structures of information flow in spoken language and its well-revised counterpart in written language. He suggested that the most innate difference between the two languages is laid in spontaneity of language production. Also, the most fundamental feature of these discourses is the information coherence and cohesion across the discourse sentences. So, he stated that information is linearly presented in spoken form whereas in order to convey the writer’s intention, information is well-organized in written discourse.

ORAL VERSUS WRITTEN STYLE
Differences between oral and written language have specific applicability to many types of practical linguistic works. For example, in comparing cohesion and coherence of a language, one cannot use both oral and written style simultaneously. This will lead him to different conclusions. Each style has its own characteristics; they are different text types and consequently different discourses. Therefore, it is not wise to choose both of them sporadically in researches. Biber (1988) suggests that written and spoken discourses in English do not have single absolute differences. These variations are as a result of different texts and genres. They can be mixed with each other in settings where spoken language occurs in the form of written language in emails or informal letters. The author will analyze the distinctions between oral and written style from the viewpoint of two scholars: Bartsch (1997) and Paltridge (2006).

Bartsch (1997) have issued the most common observable differences between oral and written texts which have the same genre. According to Dooley and Levinsohn (2001), these differences can be revealed by comparing oral and written versions of a narrative or by comparing recorded
and printed versions of a lecture. In a given language with its specific culture, many texts can have recognizable types; for example, a business letter and a brief greeting exchange between two busy people. Genres are considered as "types of texts that are combinations of textual properties in pursuit of a particular cultural and social goal" (Bakhtin, 1986; Eggins & Martin, 1997, p.236). Comparisons between oral texts of one genre and written texts of another may mislead us (Chafe, 1985) because according to Bartsch (1997, p.45) “different genres have different features, and it is not helpful to compare oranges to apples.” Therefore, as Longacre believes, “the linguist who ignores discourse typology can only come to grief” (1996, p.7).

In Bartsch’s (1997) article an oral and written version of the same narrative in an Algonquian language of North America have been compared. Recent studies include 5 factors on variations between speech and writing, namely as: Paralinguistic signals, Preciseness, Organization, Deviations from default orders, and Frequency of repetition. These concepts will be introduced in turn:

**Paralinguistic Signals**
Aaron (1998, p.3) mentions that “spoken language relies heavily on prosody (pitch, pause, tempo, voice quality, rhythm, etc.) and body language for deixis, respect, interpropositional relations, and so on”. But written language relies on punctuation and description to convey similar effects (Bartsch, 1997). In addition, some deictics, like indefinite “this” in English (such as in “I woke up with this headache”), may also be restricted to oral texts only (Chafe, 1985, p.115).

**Preciseness**
Even if one carefully plans an oral material, still it is the written text that benefits from more careful word choice, because writers have more time to think of the right word (Biber, 1988). However, spoken language often uses hedges like "sort of" and "kind of" (Lakoff, 1972). The English lexicon includes three kinds of items (Chafe, 1985) as:

- Colloquial vocabulary which is often used in speaking (like: guy, stuff, scary, etc.),
- Literacy vocabulary which is often used in writing (like: display, heed, etc.), and
- Neutral vocabulary which is neutral equivalents of the above words (like: man, material, frightening, show, pay attention to).

**Organization**
Written style is more concise, better organized, and mentions new information at a faster pace (Chafe, 1992). And the oral version had extra explanatory material. Also in writing, groupings of sentences tend to be longer than in oral one, i.e. written material tends to be organized into larger groupings (Levinsohn, 2000).

**Deviations from Default/Unmarked Orders**
This property is more frequent in oral material. Such variations are possibly less acceptable in written texts. For instance, this English sentence is used only in oral style:

- Never been to a wedding dance. Neither of us.
Spoken language has lots of repetitions. But written language has limitations as to how much repetition can be tolerated by readers (Aaron, 1998). Bartsch(1997) points out that in telling a story orally, the same item is mentioned 4 or 5 times, but only once in the written material. In addition, if a reported speech was longer than one sentence, the quote tags (e.g., he said) was often repeated in the oral version, but not in the written one.

Moreover, interaction in the way that both include the speaker and the addressee, is not evident in written texts like newspaper, letters, course books, legal texts, etc. However, written texts also have users that are writers and readers. Usually, in this kind of interaction the participants do not have a face to face conversation, but they have a potential presence. Because, for example in argumentative discourses, the writer attempts to convince their readers by reasoning, they assume an imaginary reader and disagree with his claims, and finally convince them by different arguments. This is a way of interacting with their readers (Taki, 2009).

As Woods (2006, p.4) suggests, discourse analysis includes spoken, written, and sign language. Although both written and oral language are kinds of social acts, and what is applicable to oral speech is also applicable to written language, most of the studies emphasize on oral language. But the most important difference between the two is that in oral style the discourse act occurs when language users are face to face, and this interaction is established by turn-taking, and generally the speakers react to what the previous speaker had said. Of course the use of internet in chat has decreased these differences, and eliminated this difference that oral style is improvisational but the written mode is controlled. ‘Chat’ has become a hybrid form of spoken and written communication. For example, in oral discourses’ official genres, like scientific conferences one can simply provide a written text and then read it out loud. Conversely, some notes or e-mails can be improvised, or lectures can be kept as written documents and even be published as a meeting document. Many genres can mix monologues, conversations, and written material together improvisationally (Van Dijk, 1977).

Paltridge (2006) has classified the differences between spoken and written English into eight important aspects, namely grammatical intricacy, lexical density, nominalization, explicitness, contextualization, spontaneity, repetition-hesitation and redundancy, and continuum view. Each of these dimensions will be discussed as follows:

**Grammatical Intricacy**
Halliday (1989) suggests that spoken form is not less highly organized than written discourse; it has grammatical intricacy and also has its own complexities, e.g. English clauses in spoken form are more extended than that of written forms. Paltridge (2006) states that as to written discourse, written mode is more complex and has lots of elaborations. However, Halliday (1989) claims that it is not always the case. Sometimes, spoken forms have a more spread out sets of clauses which form more complex relations than written forms.
Lexical Density

Here, lexical density concerns a proportional relation regarding the ratio of content words over grammatical word within a given clause. Content words are nouns and verbs, while grammatical words refer to article, pronouns and prepositions (Biber, 1988). In spoken form, content words have a tendency to be extended over different clauses. But, they are packed tightly into individual clauses in written language, that is to say here content words have a higher frequency than grammatical words (Paltridge, 2006). This means that written language is lexically denser than spoken form (Halliday, 1989).

Nominalization

By nominalization, Paltridge (2006) means the actions or events that are presented in the form of nouns instead of verbs. Nominalization has a low frequency in spoken language and also they have shorter noun groups while written discourse contains longer noun groups. This makes written language to have a more tightly packed way of presenting information in which the information are packed into less spread out clauses and fewer words.

Explicitness

According to Paltridge (ibid.) explicitness is not absolute. When speaking or writing, individuals may say something directly or they may infer it. So, they can decide how much they say something directly or indirectly. Therefore, as Biber (1988) suggest, depending on what the speakers want their hearers to understand, both of these modes can be explicit. However, writing is more explicit because it is more pre-planned.

Contextualization

Dooley and Levinsohn (2001) believe that when we talk about the context for something, we mean the situation in which it is embedded, and is seen as part of a larger whole. In this project the kind of context that is of importance to us is the context that people are aware of. Therefore, in terms of mental representations context is part of one’s mental representation which is connected to or surrounds the concept which he is talking about, and the phenomena when a hearer attempts to develop a viable mental representation for a text, can be called "contextualization" (Fillmore, 1981).

There is a theory that spoken genres are not strictly dependent on a shared context (Halliday, 1989). However, Tanen (1982) claims that spoken language is dependent on a shared background knowledge or context that is needed for a reasonable interpretation. Conversely, written discourse does not depend on a shared background. Accordingly, Paltridge (2006) concludes that written form is more decontextualized than spoken one. But in some occasions such as personal letters, writing is more dependent on a shared background than some spoken genres as academic lectures. Again, written fictions and non-fictions may provide their readers with enough background knowledge which help them enter into the world the writer has pictured.

Spontaneity

Some scholars believe that spoken discourse is ungrammatical and lacks a good organization, because the speakers may interrupt each other or speak simultaneously; so, the topic can be
changed on purpose or unwantedly (ibid.). But Paltridge (ibid.) declares that spoken language is organized but has a different organization than that of writing. However, spoken form has a benefit for listeners in that they can ask their speaker to clarify what he is saying. Thus, the speaker can correct and reformulate his sayings. Because, spoken form is produced spontaneously, so we can see its process of production as the person is speaking. But, writing is more grammatical and has a well-formed organization. It cannot be interrupted, because the audiences can see it when the product (e.g, book, journal, etc.) is finished and printed. Thus, it is “a highly idealized version of the writing process” (Halliday, 1989). In addition, the use of intonation, different gestures and people’s body language can help speakers to convey the information they want to transfer; while the way of conveying information in writing is limited to a certain number of papers and the audiences do not have the opportunity to ask any questions (Paltridge, 2006).

Repetition, Hesitation and Redundancy
Because spoken language is produced in real time, it uses considerably higher amounts of repetition, hesitation and redundancy. It uses more pauses and fillers such as “ummm”, “ahh”, “you know”. This helps them have the time to think about what they are going to say (ibid.). Another application of these pauses is in turn-taking where the speakers use them to indicate that they want to start speaking after the person who is talking (Biber, 1988).

Continuum View
Based on Biber (1988), McCarthy (2001) and Paltridge (2006) the differences between speech and writing are not simply one-dimensional, but they are regarded as a scale or continuum from some texts like casual conversations that are more involved interpersonally to some other texts as written public notices that are more separated. Some written forms in English may be more explicit than spoken forms. Also, some writings like prepared academic lectures or academic writings which are published may be more tightly organized. Consequently, as McCarthy (2001) states, by considering a scale of differences, one can prevent people from having over-simplified views towards the differences between the two modes of discourse.

CONCLUSION
All languages in the world are used for the purpose of communication to transfer ideas or information from a person to another. The current study attempted to highlight the distinctions between spoken and written language in English in order to make a distinction between spontaneous speech and pre-planned speech. These distinctions are discussed in terms of Paralinguistic signals, Preciseness, Organization, Deviations from default orders, and Frequency of repetition. The results of this study suggested that finding the crucial relations between these two styles can help scholars understand how languages work for different people. These differences are related to paralinguistic signals, preciseness, frequency of repetition, deviations from the default/ unmarked orders and organization. Written style is often planned, more complex, well-structured and transactional. It has a denser content, richer vocabulary and grammatical structures and uses punctuation to help readers understand the writer’s intention. However, spoken form is less planned and less structured, uses more simple vocabulary. The
sentences in oral style are usually simple and shorter using non-standard grammar. Also, it benefits from body language, gestures, intonation, pausing, rhythm, repetition etc. to convey information.

REFERENCES


