THE ABILITY OF PARAGRAPHING
ATTHE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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I.   INTRODUCTION

The linguistic theory is no more confined to the recognition of the sentence as the largest unit that can be explored by what is called a sentential grammar. Linguistics can not proceed very far without a realization of units above the sentence (Cook, 1995:25). The difficulty of creating linguistic 'models' from which a kind of grammar of units beyond the sentence could be worked out may be the main reason why little work has been done in this concern (Chapman, 2002:104). However, recently much attention has been given to know enough about how sentences build up into larger units (see Dijk, 2003:76). Many approaches have been suggested, especially, in text-linguistics to go through this point. Yet, every one is accustomed to recognize and name units beyond the sentence: the paragraph in prose, the stanza in verse, such divisions are often marked graphologically. Beyond these we have more divisions such as: chapters, scenes, and acts, cantos and books, depending upon the different literary 'kinds' (Chapman, 2002:107).

This paper is concerned at first hand with the structural building of the paragraph as a macro-sentence or meta-sentence. Second, it is concerned with the English Department/ third stage students' recognition of the paragraph as a structural unit and their ability of setting off what they read into paragraphs.

II.   STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF PARAGRAPH

It is quite amazing how paragraph has been subject to different analyses; each is trying to put an emphasis on a specific dimension of this unit. The logical analysis deals with the paragraph as a logical unit which should be worked out by both the writer and the reader to follow up the information flow throughout a run of several paragraphs (Archibald, 1991:63). The structural analysis approaches the paragraph as a sequence of structurally related sentences (Christensen, 1993:38), and then, the focus is shifted by the graphological analysis to be on the paragraph as a

visual unit with a striking feature of indention or indentation (Louis, 1985:126).

Though one cannot deny the complementary context within which the three analyses mentioned above are running together, this paper is concerned with the second analysis which tackles the structural dimension of the paragraph. The reason behind this is the researcher's hypothesis that the failure to see the structural relation of each upcoming sentence to what has gone before is probably one major source of the difficulty many students have in paragraphing. Christensen (1993:36) holds that the paragraph has, or may have, a structure "as definable and traceable as that of the sentence" and that it can be analyzed in the same way.

However, before going through Christensen's analysis, we need to look at two major concepts; which might be considered as a corner stone in any rigorous attempt of exploring paragraph-structure (Archibald, 1991:89). The first is called "paragraph movement" which refers to the thought passing through from the topic sentence or down to it. This movement might be chronological (as in narrative), spatial (as in descriptive), and logical (as in discursive) writing (Ibid: 91-92). The second is called "paragraph development" which is concerned with the methods the writer should choose to substantiate the topic sentence (Ibid: 95).

Many attempts have been carried out to classify the so-called methods relying on the kind of writing (Ibid: 105); however, such a classification is really ramified and heads out of the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, there is a sort of consensus on the fact that the methods of paragraph-development are hard to discern except in the light of what may be called a "structural analysis of the paragraph" (Christensen, 1993:41). This fact underscores the role played by such a structural analysis to escalate the two lines of paragraph-development and paragraph-movement; this would contribute a lot in generating paragraphs of a great depth.

Christensen (Ibid: 43) suggests nine headings under which we can approach his structural analysis, yet, we will only focus on the first five headings, leaving out the other four ones. This is simply because Christensen (Ibid.) worked out his analysis and arranged his headings in a way that copes with the structural complexity of the paragraph under investigation, that is, the paragraph-structures in the first five headings are still simple and comprehensible to a third year student, while the paragraph-structures in the remaining headings are quite complex and literarily oriented. Accordingly, they might be feasible to students of more advanced levels*. The five headings suggested by Christensen (Ibid.) are the following:

1. **THE PARAGRAPH AS A SEQUENCE OF STRUCTURALLY RELATED SENTENCES.**

Under this heading, the paragraph has been given a sequential structure that relies heavily on the sentences as being the underlying building blocks. These sentences are simply related to each other either by coordination or subordination (Ibid: 46). Then, we have a quick survey of the possible structural relations that might be held between the first sentence of

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* Christensen has explored in the remaining headings what he has called "Illogical Paragraphing" as it has been employed in literature.

a paragraph (considering it as the topic sentence) and the sentences that follow. Thus, a paragraph beginning with a topic sentence is quite likely to have a second sentence subordinate to the topic being a comment on it, or a development of it (Ibid:48). The third might be coordinate with the second or subordinate to it (Ibid.). The fourth might be coordinate with either the second or third or subordinate to the third (Ibid: 49). And so on. This sequence of structural possibilities might be illustrated in the following diagram:
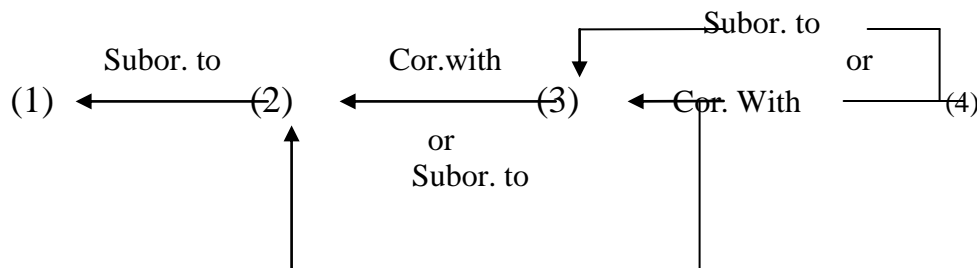
The possible structural relations within a paragraph

Jerrold (1995:62) stresses a point that might be missed by Christensen in this concern. If a sentence does not have any particular structural relationship, whether that of coordination or subordination, with any sentence above it or even the next above it, it will constitute a break down in the sequence. This break down might be a beginning of a new paragraph.

2. **THE TOPIC SENTENCE AS A TOP SENTENCE IN THE SEQUENCE.**

The topic sentence, according to Christensen (1993:48), can be compared with the base clause of a cumulative sentence**. Though, the definition suggested here is not quite different from the other many definitions of topic sentence , it concentrates on the assertion, or meaning or parts of the topic sentence as being elaborated by the sentences added to it (Ibid.).

** Christensen's analysis of paragraph-structure is an extension of the method he proposed in his essay "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," from *Notes Toward a New Rhetoric* in which he has approached the problem of form and content by demonstrating the relationship within the sentence between grammatical structures and meaning.

3. THE TOPIC SENTENCE IS NEARLY ALWAYS THE FIRST SENTENCE OF THE SEQUENCE.

Although Christensen (Ibid: 49) stresses the fact that the topic sentence occurs almost invariably at the beginning of a paragraph, it is the kind of the paragraph-movement that specifies where the topic sentence should occur in the paragraph (Archibald, 1991:95): if it was deductive, the topic sentence is going to be at the end, if inductive, the topic sentence is going to be at the beginning (Ibid: 96-97). Nevertheless; the topic sentences in the paragraphs analyzed below occur at the beginning, and they will always be marked (1), for the top level of the analysis.
What holds the researcher's concern about the topic sentence in this paper is that it is a mere sign pointing to the turn the new paragraph is going to take.

4. SIMPLE SEQUENCES ARE OF TWO SORTS- COORDINATE AND SUBORDINATE.

Christensen (1993:52) describes, in this heading, what he calls the two-level (coordinate) paragraph, and the multi-level (subordinate) paragraph. However, we should be careful in handling the terms: multi-level, and two-level, so that, there would be no conflict or confusion between them and the use of subordinate and coordinate in grammar.
Before going through the analysis of the two structures above, something should be said about the analytical procedures for discovering the kind of paragraph-structure as applied by Christensen (Ibid: 53-55). It is true that one may have some paragraphs with no topic sentence and some other ones have sentences at the beginning or at the end that do not belong to the sequence, yet, one can assume that the first sentence of a paragraph is the topic sentence (Archibald, 1991:105). Then, we need to go through the

paragraph sentence by sentence, searching for likeness between the sentences-that is, for evidences of coordination (Christensen, 1993:58), when they are alike in structure they will be given the same numbered level. If the second sentence is unlike the first one, it is different and so it is set down as subordinate- that is, it is indented and given a different numbered level (2), (3) . . . etc. (Ibid.)

The researcher will apply this quite simple analytical procedure to the following examples ***:

*** The first passage is taken from Anderson, J.R, *The Architecture of Cognition*., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press1983; and the second from Broukal, M., *Toefl Reading Flash*. New York: Henry Holt, 2002

A. COORDINATE SEQUENCE PARAGRAPH

(1)   People have been concerned with their hair since ancient times.
(2) The Assyrians were the world's first true hairstylists.
(2) They were so skillful at cutting, curling, layering and dyeing hair and it is because of them that such skills were known throughout the Middle East.
   (2) They were, in fact, obsessed with their hair, which was oiled, perfumed, and tinted.
   (2) They were so serious about hairstyling that law dictated certain types of hairstyles according to a person's position and employment.

(Anderson, 1983:87)

B. SUBORDINATE SEQUENCE PARAGRAPH

(1) Strictly speaking, cartography is the drawing or compiling of maps.
(2) The explorers and surveyors go out and make the measurements and gather the information from which the cartographers draw their maps.
(3) Sometimes the fieldwork and the creation of the map are done by the same person.
(4) But when the scope is broad and the sources of information many, maps are more often a compilation of that information.
(5) They represent the accumulated work of many people, brought together under the supervision of one person, the compiler.
(6) The value of the map depends, of course, on the expertise of the compiler, who must sift through available information, select the most accurate data, and come up with a thoughtful and accurate synthesis of the geographic knowledge of the region.

(Broukal, 2002: 42)

Four points should be brought up in the two analyses carried out above:

1. the clearest mark of coordination is identity of structure at the beginning of the sentence. Thus, all the sentences marked (2), in (A) and (B), have the same relation to one another, and because of this, they all have the same immediate relation to level (1), or the topic sentence, and as Christensen (1993:67) puts it, they are all children of the same mother. However, in the example marked (B), the third sentence is unlike the second, and of course unlike the first: the fourth is unlike the third or any other above it, and so on, that is, there is no sign of syntactic parallelism at all. No sentence after the second is related immediately to level (1).

2. it should be evident how we must treat the methods of development in the paragraphs analyzed above. In the coordinate sequence, all the coordinate sentences employ the same method (Archibald, 1991:110) - in the example marked (A), the method is that of giving emphasis to the topic sentence. In the subordinate sequence, every added sentence may employ a different method (Ibid: 112).

3. it should be evident, also, that in a subordinate sequence repetition of structure must be avoided (Christensen, 1993: 72). Each sentence added, being different in the method of development, must be different in form.

4. the coordinate sentences need not be identical in structure (Jerrold, 1995:87), but they need only be like enough for the reader to place them. Jerrold (Ibid:91) gives us an example of a paragraph which makes it evident that all three sentences at level (3) below represent coordinate sequence, though they are structurally unidentical:

(1) He [the native speaker] may, of course, speak a form of English that marks him as coming from a rural or unread group.
(2) But if he doesn't mind being so marked, there's no reason why he should change.
(3) Samuel Johnson kept a Staffordshire burr in his speech all his Life.
(3) in Burns's mouth the despised lowland Scots dialect served just as well as the "correct" English spoken by ten million of his southern contemporaries.
(3) Lincoln's vocabulary and his way of pronouncing certain words were sneered at by many better educated people at the time, but he seemed to be able to use the English language as effectively as his critics.

(Ibid.)

5. **THE TWO SORTS OF SEQUENCE COMBINE TO PRODUCE THE COMMONEST SORT- THE MIXED SEQUENCE**

It is not quite often that we have simple sequences relying solely on coordinate sentences (Christensen, 1993:75). Thus, in most cases we have either subordinate sentences added to coordinate ones to give them depth, or coordinate sentences added to emphasize points made in subordinate sequences (Ibid:81). That is, one adds subordinate sentences in case there is a need for clarification, and coordinate sentences in case there is a need for emphasis or even enumeration.

In the example below , the sentences numbered (2) are all used to emphasize one idea related to the nature of society (the main idea of the passage). The sentences numbered (3) and (4) are added to the coordinate sentences to give more depth and clarification to the idea emphasized in the sentences above them:

C. MIXED SEQUENCE PARAGRAPH

(1) Society never advances.
  (2) It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other.
  (2) It undergoes continual changes, it is barbarous, it is civilized.
  (2) It is Christianized, it is rich, it is scientific.
  (3) But this change is not amelioration.
  (4) For everything that is given something is taken.
  (2) Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts.
  (3) What contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club,a spear, a mat , and undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under!
  (4) But compare the health of the two men and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength.

  (Emerson, 1975:65)

III.   THE TEST

    The informants that have been chosen as a representative sample for this study are third year students- Department of English- College of Education/ University of Thi-Qar. It should be noted that this choice is made on the basis that the students have studied how to build up paragraphs, and how to recognize them as units larger than sentence. The students are given three unparagraphed passages, each one consists of two unindented paragraphs, and each paragraph is headed with a topic sentence.

The passages chosen cover the three structural kinds of paragraph discussed in this paper-Coordinate, Subordinate, and Mixed. A group of fifty students were asked to read each passage carefully and then attempt to identify the topic sentences before starting to set down the paragraphs involved in each passage.

The tables below show the score percentages of students' performance related to their ability of paragraphing and of identifying the topic sentence. However,

the scoring of the topic sentence does not take into consideration the identification of the first topic sentence since it is quite expected by the students that the first sentence in each passage holds out as the first topic sentence. Thus, the identification of the second topic sentence is the basis of scoring.

Table (1)
Score Percentages of Coordinate Sequence Paragraph

	CORRECT		WRONG		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
T.S.	32	64	18	36	50	100
PARAGRAPHING	21	42	29	58	50	100

Table (2)
Score Percentages of Subordinate Sequence paragraph

	CORRECT		WRONG		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
T.S.	**29**	**58**	**21**	**42**	**50**	100
PARAGRAPHING	18	36	32	64	50	100

Table (3)
Score Percentages of Mixed Sequence Paragraph

	CORRECT		WRONG		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
T.S.	**26**	**52**	**24**	**48**	**50**	100
PARAGRAPHING	10	20	40	80	50	100

IV.   DATA ANALYSIS

The score percentages shown in Table (1) indicate that most students, (64 %), have successfully identified the topic sentence, but only (42 %) of the (50) students have given the correct paragraphing of the passage concerned. In Table (2), the score percentages of both correct identification of topic sentence and paragraphing began to decrease, when compared with the figures in Table (1): in relation to topic sentence identification, the percentage went down from (64 %) to (58 %), while in paragraphing from (42 %) to (36 %). It seems clear that the students' ability to identify the topic sentence is still higher than that of paragraphing. Table (3) shows more decrease in the percentage of topic sentence identification: from (58 %), in Table (2), to (52 %), and the same with paragraphing, but this time the percentage descended from (36 %), in Table (2), to (20 %), and the percentage of the correct topic sentence identification is again higher than that of paragraphing.

To sum up, a full comparison of the percentages of students' performance in the test above can be shown in the Tables below:

Table (4)
Percentages of Topic Sentence Identification

	CORRECT		WRONG		TOTAL	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	%
COORDINATE. PARAGRAPH	**32**	**64**	**18**	**36**	**50**	100
SUBORDINATE PARAGRAPH	**29**	**58**	**21**	**42**	**50**	100
MIXED PARAGRAPH	26	52	24	48	50	100

Table (5)
Percentages of Paragraphing

	CORRECT		WRONG		TOTAL	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	%
COORDINATE. PARAGRAPH	**21**	**42**	**29**	**58**	**50**	100
SUBORDINATE PARAGRAPH	**18**	**36**	**32**	**64**	**50**	100
MIXED PARAGRAPH	10	20	40	80	50	100

V.   CONCLUSIONS

It is beyond dispute that the paragraph should be attributed with smooth logical connections among ideas, and with visual indention of the first line and the last line left incomplete. However, one cannot deny or disregard the structural relations that hold among the underlying blocks of the paragraph. It is these relations that give the paragraph its distinction as a clear-cut structural unit beyond sentence.

Before being able to write good paragraphs, students should discover and realize the structural relations that create the structural unity of the paragraph. The researcher would urge the importance of teaching the students how to analyze paragraphs into their own structural sequences, and how to recognize their limits, before being asked to write well-structured paragraphs.

The output of the test carried out in this paper suggests two findings:

1. the students do not realize well the relation that holds between the topic sentence and the beginning of a new paragraph. It seems clear that most of them take it for granted that there might be two or even more topic sentences within the same paragraph. Accordingly, they do not get the signal of the topic sentence being a sign pointing to the turn the new paragraph is going to take. This would explain the different percentages of the topic sentence identification and those of paragraphing, so, instead of being equal, the first is always higher than the second.

2. the percentages of correct paragraphing vary directly with the structural complexity of paragraphs. Thus, the percentages run through a descending line from (42 %), to (36 %), and then to (20 %) in Coordinate, Subordinate, and Mixed sequences of paragraphs respectively. It seems that the students' uncertainty and confusion about paragraph-limits might be ascribed to their failure to see the structural relations that make sentences run together in one paragraph.

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APPENDIX

THE TEST

-THE COORDINATE SEQUENCE PARAGRAPH-

Read the following unparagraphed passages carefully and underline the topic sentences involved and then set each passage down into its paragraphs:

People have been concerned with their hair since ancient times. The Assyrians were the worlds' first true hairstylists. They were so skillful at cutting, curling, layering and dyeing hair and it is because of them that such skills were known throughout the Middle East. They were, in fact, obsessed with their hair, which was oiled, perfumed, and tinted. They were so serious about hairstyling that law dictated certain types of hairstyles according to a person's position and employment. Like the Assyrians, the early Greeks liked long, scented, curly hair. They favored fair hair over dark, so they used to lighten, or redden their hair with soaps and bleaches. The Romans, on the other hand, favored dark hair for men for high social or political rank. Early Saxon men dyed their hair and beards blue, red, green, and orange, though they were neither blonds nor brunets. Over the centuries, societies have combed, curled, waved, powdered, dyed, cut, coiffed, and sculpted their hair, or someone else's during times of wig crazes. Churches and lawmakers have sometimes tried to put a stop to the human obsession with hair, but with little success. It seems hairstyling is here to stay, and the future will likely prove no exception.

-THE SUBORDINATE SEQUENCE PARAGRAPH-

Science as we know it indeed is a creation of the last three hundred years. It has been made in and by the world that took its settled shape about 1660, when Europe at last shook off the long nightmare of religious wars and settled into a life of inquisitive trade and industry. Science is embodied in those new societies; it has

been made by them and has helped to make them. The medieval world was passive and symbolic; it saw in the forms of nature the signatures of the Creator. The world has been an active machine. That world became the everyday world of trade in the seventeenth century, and the interests were appropriately astronomy and the instruments of voyage, among them the magnet. Later on, the strength of man along with what he can do in a day's work have been extended, and this has remained our interest since. The purpose of science, in so far as it has something to do with our interest, is to describe the world in an orderly scheme or language which will help us to look ahead. We want to forecast what we can of the future behavior of the world; particularly we want to forecast how it would behave under several alternative actions of our own between which we are usually trying to choose. This is a very limited purpose. Science has a lot to do with setting bold generalizations about the universal workings of cause and effect. It is very crucial to human beings to order the world as an aid to decision and action. Thus we can decide that the order must be of one kind rather than another. The order is what we find to work, conveniently and instructively.

-THE MIXED SEQUENCE PARAGRAPH-

Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes, it is barbarous, and it is civilized. It is Christianized, it is rich, and it is scientific. But this change is not amelioration. For everything that is given something is taken. Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts. What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club, a spear, a mat, and undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under! But compare the health of the two men and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength. The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He has supported himself on crutches, but has lost so much of muscle-support. He has a fine Geneva watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun. A Greenwich nautical almanac he has, and so being sure of the information when he wants it, the man in the street does not know a star in the sky. The solstice he does not observe; the equinox he knows as little; and the whole bright calendar of the year is without a dial in his mind. His notebooks impair his memory; his libraries overload his wit; the insurance office increases the number o