

Culture and Writing

Differences and Variations

Linearity—the English style

- Essays are the form of expository prose taught either in school or in college (first year—yes, that’s you!)
- Topic of essay is taken strictly from the question (e.g. “Discuss the relevance of the PDI in considering questions of cross-cultural understanding”)
- Relevance—include only what is relevant to your argument
- Paragraphs should lead one to another
- No repetition

“Just a Minute”

BBC Radio Quiz Show in which competitors have to speak on air for one minute on a given topic

They can be challenged by the other players if they show

Deviation

Repetition

Hesitation

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/comedy/justamminute.shtml>



Non-linear discourse structures

- So, what happens when ESL students write English essays/papers?
 - Arabic/Semitic students use parallel constructions where one part of a thought is completed in a parallel structure in the second part—
 - Traditional form of writing in Semitic culture: see verses from the OT Psalms, Suras from the Koran, and the NT beatitudes
- <http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/arabicscript/1/1.htm>
- http://www.e-water.net/viewflash.php?flash=beatitudes_en

Psalms

(as non-linear discourse structures)

- Psalm 13 (King James Version)
- 1How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? 2How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? 3Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; 4Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. 5But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. 6I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

Multiple perspectives

In the case of Japanese prose discourse is organized according to the principle of “return to the baseline theme”

Paragraphs organized by means of a return to a theme, each time a new perspective is introduced

Theme is thus constantly reinforced, although not perhaps explicitly stated

Perspectives are structured paratactically—i.e. in a loosely structured string

See example on p. 124f.



Digressiveness: German academic register

- German prose style:
 - Agentless passives and impersonal reflexive constructions
 - The window must be closed. Smoking is prohibited!
 - (es ist verboten... das Rauchen ist untersagt”
 - Hedged performatives using modals (subjective modals)
 - Es muß jemand etwas gesagt haben... Someone must have said something...
 - Nominalizations and Compound nouns
 - Den Rasen betreten ist untersagt
 - der Arm + das Band + die Uhr
 - die Armbanduhr (watch)
 - Complex syntax
 - Inclusion in the argument of an “Exkurs”--digression

Form/Content distinction

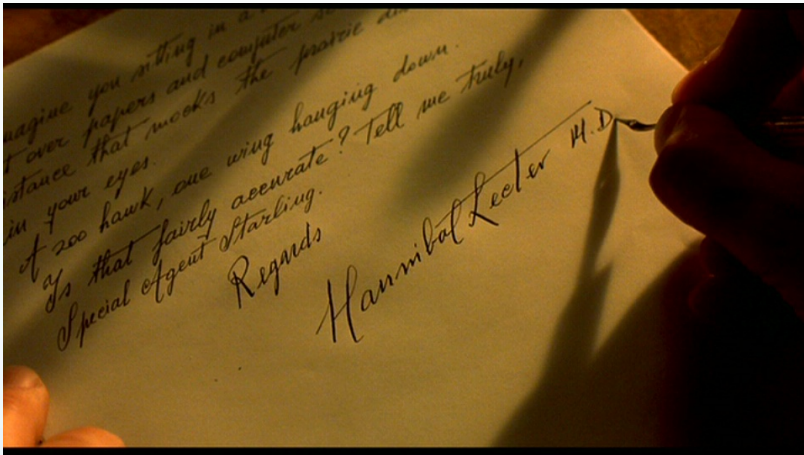
- In German academia, content orientation is deemed important as it increases the authority of the academic/judge/scientist. Therefore ease of understanding is not something to be valued
- In English-speaking academia the linear structure is preferred with its organization and outline
- Clarity of expression is highly valued—form based structures aid in this

Kant's First Critique

- Der reine Verstand sondert sich nicht allein von allem Empirischen, sondern sogar von aller Sinnlichkeit völlig aus. Er ist also eine für sich selbst beständige, sich selbst genügsame, und durch keine äußerlich hinzukommenden Zusätze zu vermehrende Einheit. Daher wird der Inbegriff seiner Erkenntnis ein unter einer Idee zu befassendes und zu bestimmendes System ausmachen, dessen Vollständigkeit und Artikulation zugleich einen Probierstein der Richtigkeit und Echtheit aller hineinpassenden Erkenntnisstücke abgeben kann.

Letter Writing

- Written form of writing that is part of an exchange
- Contain elements of conversations (greetings, closings) and speech acts (requests for information, directives, complaints, threats, promises, social comments)
- The sequencing of these elements can change from culture to culture
- See p. 130



Elements of a letter

- Salutations
 - Dear...
- Honorifics
 - Your Lordship
 - Your Excellency
- Expressions of deference
 - I beg to say, I have the pleasure of
- Parallel constructions
- Closings
 - Yours sincerely, yours faithfully, with best wishes
- Preceded by a reiteration of the main business of the letter
 - Wishing you a wonderful Wednesday night....

Review

- Do Focus questions in class... p. 137