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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# The Use of Descriptive Sequences in Teaching French as a Foreign Language

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**Abstract**

The descriptive act proves to be essential when considering the transmission of various linguistic elements to foreign language learners, such as nominal groups, adjectives, epithets, relative clauses with adjectival functions, appositions, prepositional groups, or stative verbs. This paper aims to apply, to a poem, Jean-Michel Adam's sequentiality concept, designed as a textual analysis method, and to examine the didactic relevancies resulting from this implementation. First, the theoretical section discusses the descriptive organization of texts and the corresponding descriptive operations. Second, the above-mentioned sequential method was applied to a poem. Third, the didactic relevancies of the method were discussed in the context of teaching French as a foreign language.

**Keywords**

Description in teaching French as a foreign language • Descriptive act • Textual sequentiality • Descriptive sequences

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## Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Descriptive texts or sequences are intended to particularize or amplify a topic-theme, such as an object, a person, an action, a landscape, a process, etc. In the context of teaching French as a foreign language, these prove to be beneficial in terms of transmitting information concerning linguistic constructions such as nominal groups, adjectives, epithets, relative clauses with adjectival functions, appositions, manner adverbs, prepositional groups, past continuous tense, and stative/presentative verbs, etc. In the light of the above, Jean-Michel Adam's sequentiality method was applied to a descriptive poem, and didactic implications were drawn from this.

## Theoretical Framework

According to Adam (1997; 2011), a text is conceived as a hierarchical structure comprising a number of sequences of the same or different type(s). This concept of textuality is called "sequentiality" and includes various sequential types, including the descriptive one. The layout of a descriptive sequence is elucidated through a series of four macro-operations and operations. The first macro-operation is called "thematization," and refers to the denomination/expression of the topic-theme in the descriptive sequence. It includes three operations. First, depending on whether this denomination is effectuated at the beginning or the end of the sequence, two operations arise within the first macro-operation : pre-thematization and post-thematization. Second, if a theme-topic is reformulated via a new lexical unit within the sequence, the operation involved is called "re-thematization." The second macro-operation is called "aspectualization" and relates to two operations : fragmentation and qualification. The fragmentation designates the operation of proceeding from the whole to the parts; i.e., from the topic-theme toward its semantic meronyms (in the spatial perspective, a meronym is the name of the part of a whole; conversely, a holonym is the name of the whole with regard to its parts). The qualification includes the consideration of the properties of the topic-theme or its semantic meronyms (as the parts of the topic-theme). As the third macro-operation, "linking" includes analogical operations or figures of speech such as comparisons, metaphors, metonyms, etc. The fourth macro-operation is called "sub-thematization," and relates to the thematization of one of the parts of the topic-theme.

## Methodology

The descriptive poem by Jacques Charpentreau, entitled "L'École" (The School), was analyzed according to Adam's sequentiality concept. Firstly, the descriptive macro-operations and operations were explained within the scope of the poem. Secondly, the close formal relationship that the sequentiality concept bears with the syntactic organization of the poem (i.e., the thematic/rhematic layout of the text) was revealed.

## Findings and Discussion

Three findings or rather relevancies deserve to be underlined in terms of the sequential analysis of the poem. First, descriptive sequences, as heterogeneous textual structures, do not only generate a process where the text proceeds from the holonymic whole to its meronymic parts, but they also bring about holonymic linkings, which can be considered the reverse operations to aspectualization. The second finding consists in the zoom effect created by the macro-operations of aspectualization and sub-thematization. The above-mentioned effect makes a more elaborate description possible and, thus, it proves to be beneficial in terms of didactic practices. Thirdly, for the very same reason, there can be simultaneous use of different macro-operations/operations in a descriptive text, such as thematization, sub-thematization, fragmentation, qualification, and/or metaphoric/metonymic linking. Another finding relates to the thematic/rhematic layout of the text; i.e., there is a strict correspondence between informational/syntactic groups and descriptive operations. Hence, descriptive operations bear a close relationship to the types of syntactic/informational segmentation, such as dislocations at the beginning/end of a sentence, rhematic postpositions, and stative/presentative structures, etc.

## Conclusions and Propositions

In the didactic perspective, the poem by Charpentreau uses relatively simple vocabulary and is constructed around the use of the stative/presentative structure *il y a* (there is/there are). Hence, while covering the descriptive sequences or the act of describing, the poem may be introduced to students at A2 level. If we consider the descriptive operations that are analyzed and the thematic/rhematic layout of the poem, some relevancies arise : thematization/sub-thematization, use of stative/presentative *il y a*, qualificative adjectives/relative clauses/present participle, prepositional groups used without dislocation, metaphors/metonyms, adjustments brought to the predication/thematization, and meronymic/holonymic progressions, etc. From these, teachers might resort to linguistic activities or create tasks to stretch writing and speaking skills. For example, after presenting the poem, they may introduce rewriting activities where the students must change the narrative dynamic or the theme of the poem and read out their version in the classroom. Therefore, teachers may propose activities and/or tasks in order to raise linguistic awareness concerning operations that lie beneath the act of describing a theme-topic.

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