

Rhetorical devices in the final thoughts of the economist articles

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Abstract: The paper offers an indepth analysis of different English writing techniques actually used to write engaging final thoughts in the conclusions of articles featured in the Economist. Various editions of the Economist, primarily those from the 2023-2024 series, were explored to identify and dissect these techniques. The study is shaped by a conceptual framework introduced by Robert Harris with 10 umbrella writing strategies. Yet, seven out of them were selected given the limit of the paper and the distinct features of a final thought. Accordingly, the paper shed lights on significant implications of these findings in terms of pedagogy and future research studies.

Keywords: Writing techniques, rhetorical devices, English essays, final thoughts, conclusion, articles, the Economist

Introduction

One of the challenges EFL students confront in writing English essays is composing a final thought – the last sentence in the conclusion. This sentence functions as the closing statement where students express the last thoughts on an essay topic, often in a more informal tone with a thought-provoking statement. It is an aspect that is often overlooked and undervalued by students who may lack interest, motivation or necessary skills to write it effectively. A wide range of instructional approaches to help them in this respect have been introduced and typical among them are the opinion-based strategies Chin et al. (2012) suggest: giving a comment, calling for action and making a prediction. Though these techniques are useful in giving students a clear direction to write the final thought, difficulties in creating engaging and authentic ones seem to remain. Meanwhile, the Economist, a British periodical published in print or digitally, is known for its clear and simple writing style – a style of originality (Green, 2023, pp.4-5). Thus, the paper aims at analysing writing techniques employed in the final thoughts of articles in the Economist publications for potential application in EFL classrooms to improve students' English essay writing skills.

Analysis of writing techniques used in the final thoughts

This section is deployed, basing on a list of rhetorical devices suggested by Harris (2018), namely, emphasis, clarity, syntax, figurative language, restatement, sound, word play, balance,

drama and transition. The first seven ones were selected within the confines of the paper and due to the nature of a final thought in the conclusion: brief and closing. There are different rhetorical devices under each category, yet a number of them were chosen for an indepth analysis on the ground of originality, popularity and incidentality. The data was gathered mainly from several 2023 and 2024 publications of the Economist for the up-to-minute information. All the final thoughts of the articles in a publication were scanned through to match with those defined in the framework. Each article chosen was, then, scrutinized to provide the context for the analysis so that the writers' intentions in using certain strategies can be unveiled as follows.

1. Emphasis

Effective writers know how to make words or ideas, though simple, stand out by embracing an emphasis technique, i.e. arranging them purposefully. Two among the emphasis devices are climax and sentential adverb that are scrutinized therein.

Climax

Climax involves presenting a list of ideas in an order of importance rather than in a random way. By doing so, the writer could direct the audience's attention to the more important ones.

"They also need to face up to the fact that protectionism frustrates their climate goals. It leads to lower returns, higher prices for power and more broken promises over decarbonisation." ("Power trip", 2023, p.14)

In the final thought provided, the consequences

of protectionism progresses from the immediate economic impacts, i.e. diminished financial gains and higher cost of electricity to broader societal and environmental concerns, i.e. failed commitments in addressing climate change. This one-built-upon-the-previous structure helps reinforce the increasing severity of the issue.

Sentential Adverb

Sentential adverb is a word or short phrase, often put in the middle of a sentence to emphasize the previous or subsequent words or that part of the sentence.

The outcome of the election, if it goes ahead on December 20th, is impossible to predict. It could, depressingly, be more of the same. (“Cobalt and chaos”, 2023, p.45)

In the article “Cobalt and chaos”, complex issues prior to elections facing the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were explored. President Tshisekedi was criticised for unfulfilled promises while corruption and displacement in the country raised the public concern. Opposition candidate Mr. Katumbi was a potential alternative but doubts were cast on his wealth sources. There were looming fears of potential violence or a coup following the election. By strategically putting “depressingly” in the middle of the final thought, the writer puts more emphasis on the disappointing aspect of the possible election outcome .

2. Clarity

Sometimes, the writing may include ambiguous ideas and a good writer will know how to communicate the concepts clearly to the reader. Among listed techniques, amplification was chosen for an illustration of this technique for the nature of the final thought in the conclusion: brief, concise and impressive. The others including distinctio, exampum and metanoia are better-suited in the body of the paper.

Amplification

Amplification is a word or an idea that is repeated with additional details in order to capture attention.

*“Israel’s leaders need to realise that if they block supplies, they will be held accountable by **the court of public opinion – the only court available.**”* (“Show trial”, 2024, p.10)

Israel has been accused of committing genocide against Palestinians, which has ignited controversies on international justice. However, the focus on the

genocide charge seems to sway the public attention from Israel’s potential breaches of international laws of war, specifically concerning civilians in its occupied territories who are in need of medicine and food. In the final thought, the writer calls the reader’s attention to this critical issue by amplifying the idea “the court”, i.e. reiterating it with a slash for some pauses of thought and adding more details to it (the only one available).

3. Syntax

There is an array of syntax-related strategies, two of which are chosen for analysis on the ground of their authenticity.

Prozeugma

Prozeugma is the omission of a verb or linking word, once it is stated at the beginning, in subsequent sets of words or phrases that are connected. This device is used when the information in the sentence takes precedence over the verb itself. In the example provided, the verb phrase “are likely” is omitted in the second clause.

*“As China’s economy slows, more businesses are likely to go bust – and **their bosses to go missing.**”* (“A corporate whodunnit”, 2023, p.62)

In 2023, the chairmen and CEOs of 11 listed companies in China were reported to disappear mysteriously, causing a drop in share prices and attracting police attention. In this context, the use of prozeugma highlights such incidents and stresses the challenges facing companies in maintaining transparency and investor trust within an unpredictable business landscape.

Hyperbaton (flipped structure)

Hyperbaton is defined by placing words in an abnormal word order, usually at the beginning or at the end of the sentence, to put great emphasis on them. The following is a case in point.

*“**Much about today’s Communist Party would startle Mao. Cynicism, he would recognize.**”* (“Chaguan, Xi Jinping’s disruptive friends”, 2024, p.36)

China’s supportive relationship with Iran, North Korea and Russia raises doubts when these countries are considered “disruptive powers”. This seems to go in contrast with its leader Xi Jinping whose focus is on order and stability. This helps explain why “cynicism” is inverted to the beginning of the sentence as a big question about the drive behind China’s complicated strategic partnerships.

4. Figurative language

Figurative language is one of the most creative techniques that makes unfamiliar or abstract ideas more vivid through imagery. Metaphor is one telling example of this.

Metaphor

A metaphor is an implicit comparison between two unrelated subjects without using “like” or “as”. This type of rhetorical devices is frequently used in the Economist which requires original metaphors distinct from those often encountered in print (Green, p.4, 2023). Below are some common examples of this technique in action.

“Whichever AI platform comes out top, you can’t go wrong selling picks and shovels in a gold rush.” (“Intelligence services, 2023, p.57)

The emergence of generative AI models, such as ChatGPT has aroused interest in investment in AI technology. Together with this come legal ethical issues surrounding AI platforms. However, significant funding continues to be poured into various AI startups and infrastructure required to support advanced AI models. In this scenario, “selling picks and shovels in a gold rush” is a metaphorical expression that compares selling tools and equipment during a gold rush to providing services or products within the booming development of AI technology. This metaphor signifies that regardless of AI platforms, there is always a promising opportunity in providing essential tools and resources for this fast-growing sector.

“With each passing day the window for mercy in Louisiana closes a little more.” (“Murder on his mind”, 2023, p.20)

In his last term, Louisiana’s governor, John Bel Edwards, boldly opposed to the capital punishment, which raised concerns over its fairness and effectiveness. The article finishes with a metaphor that compares the diminishing opportunities for death-row inmates to appeal for clemency with a closing window. This comparison sends a strong message that the chances for mercy are gradually narrowing.

5. Restatement

As the name calls, restatement is the repetition of words, phrases or clauses to emphasize an idea and promote the stylistic aspect of the writing. One of the authentic restatement methods is epistrophe that will be delved into in the following.

Epistrophe

Epistrophe is characterised by words or phrases

repeated at the end of consecutive phrases, clauses, or sentences. The following can exemplifies this clearly.

“For the first time in a long time, Thais have reason to feel more hopeful about their country’s future”. (“Moving forward”, 2023, p.33)

By repeating the word “time” at the end of the second prepositional phrase, the writer effectively highlights the historical significance of the recent election in Thailand. The reader can grasp the message immediately through such a simple word arrangement. Politics in Thailand has long been shaped by the monarchy and military. However, the recent election witnessed the emergence of a new liberal force, called Move Forward alongside Thaksin’s Pheu Thai party, which signifies a move towards a more democratic Thailand, supposedly marking a milestone in the country’s political history.

6. Sound

There are different sound techniques including alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance and consonance. Within the limited scope of the paper, two among them were incidentally identified while scanning the articles: *alliteration and assonance*.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the first sound of several words that are close to each other. This literary device lends music to the writing and enhances memorability.

Lenin Tamayo Pinares, Peruvian artist, mixes Korean pop with Andean culture to create Q-pop, reflecting a unique multicultural music movement in Peru. Commenting on his initial career success on the social media, the writer of the article “Call it Q-pop” uses alliteration to highlight a supportive attitude towards this young talent. The repeated sound “s” in “small”, “standards” and “start” assists in reinforcing the idea and improving reader retention.

“That is small by Korean standards – but it is a start.” (“Call it Q-pop”, 2023, p.36)

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of the same vowel sounds in neighbouring words. As is seen in the example below, the sound /əʊ/ in “low” is mirrored in “growing”, creating a rhythmic pattern. Aside from that, the writer seems to put an emphasis on the potential danger of the increasing congestion of satellites in low orbit when China started to develop its own satellite communication network to enhance its competition for space dominance.

“As low orbit gets more crowded, the chance of a nasty collision is growing.” (“Don’t look up”, 2023, p.36)

7. Word play

This is perhaps the most creative and challenging technique that adds subtle nuances to the writing. Anthimeria is one of the way writers can play on words, making them highly memorable.

Anthimeria

Anthimeria is a shift in parts of speech. The word “green” in the sentence below serves as a prime illustration. While “green” is typically used as an adjective, its part of speech, in this example, is changed into a verb, adding a fresh touch to the conveyed concept. This linguistic shift is also a kind of play on word when green is often associated with trees, implying a clean environment.

“Europe has the chance to **green** itself fast and cheaply through imports. It should seize it.” (“Charlemagne, Europe’s solar boom”, 2024, p.47)

Cheap Chinese solar modules were exported to the European market, which led to debates on import restrictions and sustainability. Some went for local solar panel producers, promoting sovereignty and job security for local people whilst a school of thought held that such imports are important to the realisation of green energy goals and solar power innovation. The European Commission targets at increasing the continent’s solar panel installation by 2030 for a shift towards sustainable energy sources. The use of the verb “green” hints at Europe’s embracing the opportunity to improve its environmental

development.

Conclusion

The analysis has demonstrated that there are an array of effective strategies available for EFL students to employ in creating captivating final thoughts at sound, word and structure levels. Teachers can integrate these writing techniques into the syllabus to enhance students’ writing skills and promote creativity in writing the conclusion.

The findings also provide the following insights for future research: (1) how is the use of rhetorical devices in final thoughts shaped by cultural differences, particularly in diverse EFL settings; (2) how are rhetorical devices in final thoughts used across different genres or academic disciplines; (3) what are students’ perceptions towards challenges and benefits of using rhetorical devices in final thoughts.

Writing as a craft should be improved through daily practice and continued efforts are needed to make students see “what can” in their writing journey.

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Khai thác hình ảnh trong sách giáo khoa... (tiếp theo trang 22)

khai thác và sử dụng hợp lý kênh hình nhằm phát huy giá trị của mỗi loại hình ảnh trong việc tái hiện thời gian, không gian, nhân vật, sự kiện LS một cách đầy đủ, sinh động và hấp dẫn nhất đối với HS. Đồng thời chú ý khai thác và sử dụng kênh hình trong SGK ở nhiều thời điểm, trong nhiều hoạt động dạy học khác nhau, qua đó không ngừng nâng cao hiệu quả hoạt động DHLS, góp phần phát triển phẩm chất và năng lực người học.

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