
Intertextuality in Essay Writing by Students in High Schools in Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This article studied the observance to intertextuality as an element in high school students' written work. It investigated the texts by students to find out the degree to which they followed the application of intertextuality as a necessary component in the students written texts. Intertextuality refers to the relationship between a given text and other relevant texts encountered in prior experience. It touches on factors, which make the utilization of one text dependent on knowledge of previous information encountered in the text. The use of this aspect in writing is achieved when there is a relationship between a given discourse and other written forms that existed in the past. Communication is paramount in any written text. For dissemination of information to take place, the meaning of the writer must be clear and complete. The objective for this study was to explore the extent to which intertextuality as a standard of textuality was used by high school students in their essay writing. The purpose of this paper was to outline the notion of intertextuality in the essay written the students. The study further checked the structure of the students' written texts to find out whether they had evidence of fragments of other texts encountered earlier. An experimental research design was used. This called for the use of both experimental and control group. These two were subjected to a pretest and a posttest. Further, the experimental class was exposed to the aspects of intertextuality, after which the two did a posttest. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The situation established that the written forms had evidence of borrowing from other areas and that high school students employed the intertextuality in their essays.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Written discourse, Text, Textuality, Performance, Discourse elements

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

English is the most widely spoken language world over (Bennett, 1974). The language is largely used in Europe, the North American Continent, Australia, Central Asia, including the Indian Sub Continent, and in many countries of Africa. This language has the third largest number of speakers in the world; after Mandarin- Chinese and Spanish. About four hundred million people speak it as a first language and nearly the same number use it as a second language. Kenya like many other countries in the world uses English as the official language. This extensive usage of the English language was an incentive in writing this paper.

In Kenyan high schools, English is a compulsory subject. It has been given this importance because it affects many areas of life. Thus, substantial resource should be used fully in order to ensure that any written text in English is well organized. It is essential to produce people who are proficient in their performance in the written discourse. The English language that is taught in secondary schools is used to facilitate communication in institute and in life after school (MOEST, 2005). As a result of this prominent use of the English language, there is need to have principles to be used specifically as a means for judging written discourse. The absence of such adherence impacts negatively on the performance of students in composition writing. Consequently this leads to production of school leavers and, by extension, executives who cannot communicate effectively (Day and McMahan, 1980).

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In this paper, some theoretical foundations of the term intertextuality are discussed. This part of the paper deals with the meaning of text and intertext, and it establishes a connection between the classical term, as introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva, and the notion of intertextuality as brought out in the written texts.

Intertextuality is the interdependent ways in which texts have a relationship with one another to produce meaning and communicate. It originated in 20th-century especially in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The term itself was coined by the Bulgarian-French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. The term “intertextuality” was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. Since then it has been borrowed and transformed many times. It concerns the factors which make the use of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered texts, (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981). Intertextuality as a standard of textuality concerns "the ways in which the production and reception of a given text depend upon the participants' knowledge of other texts" (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981).

According to Bell (1991) intertextuality refers to "the relationship between a particular text and other texts which share characteristics with it; the factors which allow text-processors to recognise, in a new text, features of other texts they have encountered". Neubert and Shreve (1992) see intertextuality as related to the notion of text type, and intertextual distinctions are "first-order text-typological distinctions". Intertextuality is therefore based on what the text user, not the analyst, expects to see in the text.

Objectives of the Study

The objective for this study was to investigate the extent to which intertextuality as a standard of textuality was used by high school students in their essay writing. The purpose of this paper is to outline the concept of intertextuality in the essay writing by high school students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intertextuality

The relationship between History and the text, reader, reading and writing contribute to the shaping and interpretation of the text. The historical aspect is what Plottel and Carnery call Intertextuality, (1978). One partakes of other texts before they are able to create their own through references, quotations and influences of every kind, (Still and Worton, 1990). According to Kristeva, the authors do not create their texts from their own minds but rather compile them from pre-existent texts, (Kristeva, 1980). A text is not individual or isolated but it is a compilation of other texts.

A text ‘dialogues’ with others. They cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social – textuality, therefore, they contain ideological structures. We see the text evolve. There are benefits of knowledge and use of these standards (Awoniyi 1982). A student is able to: share with others his feelings, make requests, seek information, record work for later reference and generally communicate. Intertextuality is an aspect that touches especially on paragraph links. One text will depend on the other. There should be a link between what is said now and what was said before. This aspect leads to the development and growth of a text. In a text, intertextuality covers all the things studied so far and goes beyond them. The students written compositions were used.

As discussed earlier, intertextuality refers to the relationship between a given text and other relevant texts encountered in prior experience. It touches on factors, which make the utilization of one text dependant on knowledge of previous information encountered in another text. A text will depend on the next text. Intertextuality was evident in the students writing. For example, a student wrote; ‘Finally,

the results were out and Leah and I had passed so well.’ This was a good link between the paragraphs. This implies that there was an earlier exam that had been done. The fact that they had passed gave hope of a bright future. A number of students were able not only to link what they were writing to the other parts of their texts but also to other texts and experiences outside the given text.

Intertextuality and its Beneficiaries

Intertextuality is about a text’s existence within society and history,(Kristeva,1980). They have no unity of meaning on their own. The meaning of a text is complimentary rearrangement of elements with socially pre- existent meaning. This meaning is inside (the reader’s view) and outside (society’s influence) the text. It refers to an idea that any text or work of art has been affected and moulded by other elements of texts that have been encountered before it. This means that text will most certainly be borrowed from others before it.text should be seen and understood as the intertextual relation between words andtheir prior existence in past texts. Intertextuality is important several people, including, writers, readers, speakers and audience. The existence of intertextuality is so that different sectors of art and communication can use it. This is because it motivates creativity from ones environment.

According to Kristeva (1980), texts do not present strong and steady implications. They represent society’s encounter over the meaning of arguments. Intertextuality deals with a text’s reality within society and the past. They have no harmony or unified meaning of their own; they are systematically linked to on-going traditional and shared methods. A text’s meaning is understood, in Kristeva’s view, as a temporary re-arrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meaning. Meaning then, is concurrently both ‘inside’ (reader’s view) and ‘outside’ (society’s influence) the text (Kristeva 1980).

The communication between author and reader is always combined with an intertextual relation between arguments and their past being in past versions. As Kristeva stated: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 1980).

Types of Intertextuality

There are people who believe that there is no possibility of having an original or unique item, be it in speech, artwork or writing because all creative pieces are obviously gathered from pieces of previously existing skills, (Allen, 2000).

However, there have been attempts to closely define different types of intertextuality. John Fiske, an Australian media scholar has made a distinction between what he labels 'vertical' and 'horizontal' intertextuality. The latter show references that are on the 'same level', for example when a book makes reference to other books. Vertical intertextuality on the other hand is when, for instance a book makes reference to song, film or speech.

Fairclough (1992) distinguishes between 'manifest intertextuality' and 'constitutive intertextuality.' The former signifies the use of intertextual aspects such as presupposition, negation, parody and irony. While the latter signifies the discursive features which include structure, form, or genre in a text.

He further states that Intertextuality is a matter of_recontextualization, which can be distinct as the "dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one speech or text-in-context to another. It can be plain for example, when one text quotes directly from another. Sometimes a text can be implicit: when the "same" meaning is mentioned to in different texts. Porter (1986) differentiates between two types of intertextuality: *iterability* and *presupposition*. To him Iterability refers to the 'repeatability' of certain written pieces. This means that every discourse is composed of some elements of other texts that assist to bring out its meaning. Presupposition on the other hand refers to assumptions that a text creates about the reader, the setting and what it is mentioning (Porter, 1986).

Instances of Intertextuality

Intertextuality as earlier explained is shapping of a text’s meaning by using another one. This can be witnessed when an author borrows and transforms another text, or when a reader refers to one text while reading another. In the Holy Bible, Deutronomy refer to events described in Expodus.the new testament quotes from the old testament, (Porter, 1997).

Another example is by the famous American president, John Fredrick Kennedy’s: “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country” was later transformed into, “The issue is

not what America can do for women but what women can do for America.” This was used by Geraldine Ferraro, the Democratic Congresswoman and Vice President nominee in 1984, (Jasinski, 2001)

Essay Writing and Intertextuality

Essay writing has traditionally been regarded as the most difficult academic skill (Nyarige, 2002). Ventola (1994) suggests that there is little that is known on how second language learners compose while writing. It is by observing their essays that we learn what nature of problems they have while composing. Some of the areas of weakness the teachers have pointed out include; poor tense usage, disorganization of texts and poor paragraph links by the students. The identified weaknesses have some impact on the overall performance of the students in composition writing. This study intended to investigate the use of intertextuality in the writing of high school students writing.

Textuality is a textual reference that is reflected in the text of another. It has the power to influence the majority or the entire literature piece instead of a small insignificant passage. Intertextuality in writing is therefore the way a single work can actually consist of several texts or the transposition of one set of signs into another. According to Belton, (n.d), text is the way artworks quote, rip off, refer to, pay homage to enrich each other. Pure originality is attainable but is rare and most work involves a writer or speaker organizing traces, codes and signs into a new text or speech for a specific group, (Porter 1986).

In essay writing, the students used the English language. This is a language whose use students and others have to learn for effective communication. Mastery of thinking skills is a prerequisite to good writing. In writing there is creative and critical thinking. Creativity involves the ability to rearrange ideas in new and different ways. Critical thinking involves examining new ideas and deciding on whether they have merit. In critical thinking there are tasks involved. These include: judgment, evaluation, analysis, classification and synthesis of ideas.

Another aspect of writing that is rarely taken into account is the variety of registers (Cahill et al, 1969). Due to the many aspects of written language that count in a good piece of writing, there is need for a set standard along which writing could be evaluated. A writer must know the rubrics and conventions of all writing. Older texts are gathered and used to create new ones. Almost all texts are woven from the past.

The study looked at all the other aspects of text production which include among others, intertextuality. Crowhurst (1987) and Yde and Spoelder (1985) found a developmental trend in the cohesive patterning of third and sixth grade children. On the other hand Onditi (1994) argues that learners do better in oral than in written tasks and also better in reception than in production tasks. Nevertheless this study was interested in the application of the intertextuality as a standard of textuality by high school students.

Intertextuality Theory

This study was informed by De Beaugrande and Dressler’s Theory of Text Linguistics and Julia Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality. For a text to be viewed as complete, it should have the seven standards of textuality. These include among others, intertextuality (De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981). Further proponents of this theory, concur that a text lacks if it misses any of the standards. This perspective of thought was constantly considered in this study.

The second theory also had an input in the study; Intertextuality is a word invented by Julia Kristeva, a French linguist who has had a lot written on this matter. This word has a broader meaning in today’s context. Her notion of Intertextuality refers to the literal and effective presence in a text of another text. A text according to her is a permutation of texts, an Intertextuality in the space of a given text, in which several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another (Allen 2000).

Intertextuality as a theory exists so that any kind of media can use it. Posters, adverts and plays all get ideas from somewhere or use previous ideas as guidelines. Kristeva believes that a text is permutation of texts. This means that intertextuality in the space of a given text in which several utterances are taken from other texts.

Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations: any text is the absorption and transformation of another text, (Kristeva, 1980) utilized before. Such previous texts are used to transform the current texts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected had information on the results of the students – their general performance from test one. After exposure to aspects of textuality, test two results were recorded. The K.N.E.C. marking scheme was used to ensure uniformity. The aspects of textuality were also used to judge the students’ written work. There was use of quantitative data to look at the results of the students in the two tests. Analysis of each test was then done. The collected data was analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistics.

Results

The usage of this aspect in school ‘A’ experimental class pretest and posttest results were 76% for both classes. School “A” control class had 52 candidates. In the pretest exam, the best student scored 12 marks. The lowest score was 8. There was a deviation of 4 marks. In the posttest exam, in the same class the best student got 12 marks while the least mark was 7.

The mean score of the school A control class was 10.3 in the pretest and 9.6 in the posttest. There was a drop of 0.7. In the pretest the experimental class had the following, intertextuality by 76%. In the control class, intertextuality was used by 90% of the students.

In school ‘A’ Control Class Pretest Results was 90%. Both classes used intertextuality in almost the same percentage, which was 76% in the experimental class and 77% in the control class.

In school “B”, the experimental class had 41 students. The highest score in the pretest was 11 while the lowest was 7. There was a deviation of 4 marks. The mean of the pretest was 8 and that of the posttest was 8.3. There was a slight change of + 0.3. The correlation was 0.60.

In school “B”, the control class had 38 students. The best student in the pretest had 13 marks while the lowest mark was 5. The class had a deviation of 8.

The class evidently applied intertextuality as a standards of textuality in their essay writing.

In the posttest, the control class applied all the standards of textuality. In this test, the aspects of textuality were used among the candidate as follows: Intertextuality, 48%;

The correlation of the students in the posttest was then calculated. The average correlation coefficient for the control class was calculated thus; the implication was that higher values of pretest tended to be associated with higher values of posttest; and lower values of pretest were associated with lower values of posttest.

In School ‘C’ Experimental Class Results in Pretest and posttest were 56% for both classes of the students used intertextuality. The mean score in the pretest was 9.2. It went up by 0.1 to 9.3 in the posttest.

In school “C”, the control class intertextuality was at 58%. The correlation coefficient of school C control class was 0.51. The mean score in the pretest was 9.0.

Summary and Analysis

The following is a summary of the above results on the usage of intertextuality as an aspect of textuality in students’ essay writing. There is also a presentation on the average preference of all the students in the study. Additionally, there is a presentation on the grand preference of all students in this study.

Evidence of Application of the Standards of Textuality by the Students.

The students displayed the use of textuality in the compositions that they wrote.

Intertextuality was used by 60% of the students in their writing. The use and order of preference for the standards of textuality in the pretest by the students in the different schools; A, B and C, is shown in the following table.

Table1. The Pretest Results of the Three Schools; (A), (B) and (C).

	EXPERIMENTAL				CONTROL		
	A %	B %	C %		A %	B %	C %
Inter	76	34	56	Inter	90	37	58

For the posttest, the performance was as follows.

Table2. *The Posttest Results of the Three Schools*

	EXPERIMENTAL				CONTROL		
	A %	B %	C %		A %	B %	C %
Inter	76	37	56	Inter	77	48	45

Table3. *Total Percentage Usage of the Standards of Textuality*

	EXPERIMENTAL			CONTROL	
	Pretest %	Posttest %		Pretest %	Posttest %
Inter	57	58	Inter	65	58

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use and the impact of the standards of textuality on the performance of form two students in composition writing. Evidently, the students that were exposed to the seven standards of textuality had some change between the two tests that were given out during the study. On the other hand similar changes were also evident in the control class, though they were not exposed to the said standards. It was furthermore not possible, to explore in detail the other factors that had contributed to such changes, especially for the control class. The use of Intertextuality by students was at (60%), this aspect of textuality was key to communication.

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