Information Structuring in Learner Texts: a Possible Relationship Between the Topical Structure and the Holistic Evaluation of Learner Essays

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Abstract. The present paper sets out to investigate coherence in written texts of Lithuanian learners of English. Intermediate learner essays were analysed with the purpose of establishing a possible relationship between the holistic evaluation of the essays and the type of information structuring used by the learners. Topical structure analysis (Lautamatti, 1978) was employed to determine the type of information structuring.

Analysis has shown that sequential progression is a predominant type in both high-rated (50%) and low-rated (40%) essays, which may suggest that sequential progression has little or no direct impact on the holistic evaluation of the essay. Results have also shown that as many as 30% of high-rated essays use extended parallel progression, and as many as 40% of low-rated essays use parallel progression, which may suggest that the use of extended parallel progression contributes to the overall higher rating of the essay, and the over-extensive use of parallel progression contributes to the overall lower rating of the essay. The study implies that the use of the three types of topical structure should be carefully balanced to produce a coherent and thus readable essay.