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Anna Re

English & the Arts
A Contemporary Romance

Language, Style, Genres

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To eternally young art lovers,
eager to experience a world of marvels

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Preface

Paolo Proietti*

Figure 1. The Thames, London © fgc.

Associating a natural, common language with a specific area of study and research undoubtedly means dealing with terminological and lexical issues. But it also means taking into consideration aspects that lead back to grammar and the pragmatics around which the text in consideration is organized. It is a relationship as beautiful as it is insidious; one that takes shape and is set up within the constant consideration of grids and models of textual analysis. In these we can see on one hand categories like textual typologies that design the aims of a given piece of writing, or textual genres, in other words those expressive modalities or forms that speakers give their written and/or oral texts, or still further to the communicative acts of everyday life. On the other hand, we can find the expressive, truly linguistic component, the oscillations in direction this leads to, the overall dominant aspect that one wishes a given text to be characterized by. Nevertheless, above and beyond these grids and modeling of discourse, language grapples with questions of a cultural order that need to be taken into account for their capacity to modulate terminologies and syntaxes in relation to the sector under consideration, the medium employed and the recipient one wants to reach: writing about the arts, concerning the arts, in a popular or scientific

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form requires taking all of this into account. It requires establishing a bond, a connection between the moment of linguistic representation and that of cultural interpretation. The trap lies precisely in the margin existing between terminological taxonomy and its "translation" in a culturally–ordered perspective: it is within this threshold that the peculiarities born by every natural, common language and expression, in its written form just as in its oral presentation, encounter one another. Thanks to these qualities, every language is assimilable to a social and cultural institution, in the measure in which it receives and reflects within a given time and space a feeling and social and cultural being, to which it will correspond a progressive terminological enrichment and a constant semantic remodeling. To provide one simple example, the English word *table*, from the Latin *tabula*, has been affected over time by a constant process of reworked semantics that has allowed it to take different shapes in a great variety of environments, from mathematics to economy, architecture, anatomy… all the way to the recent technological development of *tablets*. Yet this does not prevent the word *pen*, from old French *penne*, in turn from the Latin *penna*, from still being used today, in English just as in other Western languages, to refer to the tool used for writing that was once constituted by a sharpened goose feather, and successively substituted by a small tube equipped with a nib. Then again, any consideration of language and specific environments cannot avoid taking into consideration the specializations of the audience concerned, whether the producers or recipients of the message, entering into that which today are defined as community speakers, in function of which the linguistic sector is modulated, in a specialist form or with more popular modalities, involving the text grids mentioned earlier in the communicative process.

English & the Arts. A Contemporary Romance has the merit of attempting to establish a first systematization of the complex relationship that the English language establishes with the universe of the arts. Anna Re, addressing a non–Anglophone audience and carefully considering the dialectic surrounding the arts, covers the entire field, taking moves from the grammatical foundations of writing in English in order to shift between the languages and terminologies of the arts, considering textual typologies and genres, without ever once forgetting the affects these produce on the organization of an oral discourse on the artwork. It transmits an effective message: the specialized text into which language flows — in this case English — can be aimed at a more or less specialized audience who will receive it in accordance with a codified expectation, though one connoted by the culture accompanying it. And if the terminology enacts a distinction between the common use of the words and their sectorial application, we must reorient that act of writing and reading, transforming these corresponding grids into still further options for cultural expression.

Introduction

People either love me or they hate me, or they don't really care

Banksy, *Wall and Piece*.

Figure 2. A wall in Prague © fgc.

This book was born of the need for an academic publication for "English for the arts" courses at IULM University, Milan. When I was invited to organize the courses, I began evaluating available books, and found many excellent volumes[1], but soon realized that they were not entirely suitable for

1. I would like to mention: Daloiso M., *Apprendere ed insegnare l'inglese per l'arte*, Guerra Edizioni, Perugia 2007; Gebhardt F., *English for the Arts*, Cafoscarina, Venezia 2000; Glenton E., *Professional English: Arts Management*, Cafoscarina, Venezia 2006; Notini A.S., Mazzoli V., *Artistically Speaking: An Elementary to Intermediate Course in English for Italian Students of the Fine Arts*, CLUEB, Bologna 2006; Notini A.S., Monaco H., *English Through the Arts: Practice in Reading Comprehension*,

my students. This is a specialized field of study that involves a varied range of students: from art high school students to those from Academies of Fine Arts or those of the art departments. In University Art degree programs, in general, there is not a mandatory course of English for the Arts, thus where it is initiated you need to adjust it to the degree course and the students to whom it is addressed.

With this in mind, I set out to create a useful, practical tool enriched with theoretical considerations. In the first chapter, I tackle themes like style, grammar, and textual forms. I focused a lot on writing that — in the academic and Anglo–American context — is fundamental. I give instructions on composition and samples of different genres with the aim of practicing the language and teaching the terminology of some forms of art.

In subsequent chapters, I present art descriptions and examples. For the most part, the written language used for art is the same language used in other courses. It should avoid unusual words, but use the language of art history when it is clear, concise, and accurate. Some specialized words are known to the general public, some only to those who have been educated in the arts or who have studied critical theory for art or literature.

I included a part on academic writing and journalism that may be useful to our students, in particular to those who will spend a period of specialization in an English–speaking country. These forms of writing also make it possible to present good examples of how the English language "works".

I then wrote a chapter on "Speaking". The linguistic and communicative differences between spoken and written English are significant, and it was necessary to emphasize them. Another chapter deals with the creation of a CV, an essential tool for promoting an individual in the international work world. I propose many examples that students can use to create their own CVs in English.

The last chapter is dedicated to the vocabulary of art. In the study of English for the arts, you need to become familiar with a specialized terminology, though within a limited context like this book, I could not include a wide range of words. Instead I focused on some art disciplines that fit my courses.

Most of the material has already been "experimented" on students, making this a custom–tailored volume. But I have expanded the sections on "Writing" and "Speaking", so that the book may be of interest to a wider audience of art scholars who increasingly find themselves dealing with projects, papers, articles, reports, websites, and more written in English.

The "romance" between English and art is recent, but has taken hold relentlessly. English is not only the language of business and economics: it

CLUEB, Bologna, 2006; Picello R., *English Through Art: The Language of the Visual Arts, Architecture, Cinema and Design*, Hoepli, Milano 2007.

is the world's language, and therefore also the language of art. Those who study the Arts must know English. More to the point, they must be familiar with the the sub–language of English for the arts.

This relationship appears destined to last. *People either love it or they hate it, or they don't really care. . .*

Chapter I

Writing in English

Style, Grammar & Genres

Figure 1.1. London © fgc.

1.1. Elements of Style

In his well–known volume *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk Jr. offers basic but key indications for writing in English. He proposes a list of "Elementary Principles of Composition" that everyone should follow when writing, stating:

Make the paragraph the unit of composition: one paragraph to each topic.
As a rule, begin each paragraph with a topic sentence, end it in conformity with the beginning.
Use the active voice.
Put statements in positive form.
Use definite, specific, concrete language.
Omit needless words.
Avoid a succession of loose sentences.
Express co–ordinate ideas in similar form.
Keep related words together.
In summaries, keep to one tense.[1]

In her *Guide to News Writing*, Rene J. Cappon briefly offers additional useful tips:

Prefer the short word to the long
Prefer the familiar word to the fancy
Prefer the specific word to the abstract
Use no more words than necessary to make your meaning clear.[2]

In the following pages, I will discuss some of these principles to make it clearer how to improve written English.

1.1.1. *Paragraphs*

A paragraph is a group of sentences in which a single topic is developed. Diana Hacker writes: «paragraphs are clusters of information supporting an essay's main point... Aim for paragraphs that are clearly focused, well developed, organized, coherent, and neither too long nor too short for easy reading»[3]. Paragraphs shouldn't mix ideas. To be effective, a paragraph should present a single idea. A good writer will generally start a new paragraph when she or he needs to introduce a new idea.

Begin a paragraph with a topic sentence that makes the main idea clear. Direct its development; continue with supporting sentences that maintain a consistent flow. The topic sentence is the most important. It should provide a "general summary" for your paragraph. The supporting sentences stand between the topic sentence and the concluding sentence. They "support" the topic sentence, explaining and elaborating it. Paragraph development should progress with some evidence: an example, a quote that serves to clarify your point. What follows is an explanation of the examples to show

1. Strunk W. Jr., *The Elements of Style*, Pandora Box Classic, Edizione del Kindle, 2017, pos. 15.
2. Cappon R.J., *Guide to News Writing: The Resource for Professional Journalists*, Arco, Lawrenceville (NJ) 2000, pp.17–18.
3. Hacker D., *A Writer's Reference*, Bedford Books, Boston 1998, p.15.

readers why you chose to use those examples as evidence to support your central claim.

The concluding sentence is the last sentence in the paragraph. It either emphasizes the thought of the topic sentence or states some significant consequence. It should briefly end the paragraph and can include a transition to the next paragraph.

Features of a Paragraph

A paragraph should be logically organized so that it flows from one idea to the next. Every paragraph should have these features:

— unity: all of the sentences in a single paragraph should be related to a single controlling idea under discussion. A paragraph should not develop new ideas that wander from the paragraph's main idea;
— coherence: this refers to the flow of your writing. The sentences should be arranged and connected in a logical manner and should follow a definite plan for development;
— adequate–development: to be considered "adequate", a paragraph should be well developed. The reader should not be left with questions. Each affirmation should be adequately explained and supported through evidence and details that work together to explain the paragraph's controlling idea. In order to achieve a sufficient development, you can provide examples, cite works, provide definitions, describe, analyze, and organize your ideas[4].

Paragraph Length

There is no set length to a paragraph. It normally ranges between 100 and 200 words. But there are exceptions. Paragraphs longer than 200 words appear in scholarly writing, shorter than 100 words in newspapers, informal essays, and business letters[5]. Paragraphs need to be long enough to express, describe, and explain a main idea. The theme and content of the writing determine the length of a paragraph.

Methods of Development

There are many different patterns that can be used alone or in combination to organize a paragraph:

4. Cfr. Rosen L., Behrens L., *The Allyn and Bacon Handbook: Annotated Instructor's Edition*, 4th Ed., Allyn and Bacon, Boston 2000, p. 119.

5. Hacker D., *A Writer's Reference*, cit., p. 28.

— narration tells a story and develops chronologically;
— description defines a person, place, thing, etc. by using specific details that appeal the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch;
— process explains how something works or is made;
— comparison and contrast stress similarities and/or differences that define two subjects presented;
— analogy draws a comparison between items that at first glance appear to have little in common;
— cause and effect moves either from cause to effect or effect to cause. For instance, the topic sentence describes an effect and the supporting sentences describe the cause;
— classification and division gather items in groups according to a topic;
— definition explains a concept as part of a general class, then offers details to distinguish it from other concepts in the same class;
— examples and illustrations provide examples and clarify how those examples prove your point. As extended examples, illustrations are often presented in story form[6].

1.1.2. *Transitions*

They should be used from one paragraph to the next to connect ideas and concepts, and are logical and verbal.

The New Paragraph

All writers struggle with making the transition and moving to the next paragraph. If a new idea comes into your writing, it should be presented in a new paragraph. If not, the coherence of the paragraph will be lost. You begin a new paragraph:

— to mark off the introduction and the conclusion;
— to signal a shift to a new idea;
— to indicate an important shift in time or place;
— to emphasize a point (by placing it at the beginning or the end, not in the middle, of a paragraph);
— to highlight a contrast;
— to signal a change of speakers (in dialogue);
— to provide readers with a needed pause;
— to break up a text that looks too dense.[7]

6. Cfr. *Ibidem*, pp. 17–23.
7. *Ibidem*, p. 28.

Examples

It should now be clear what a paragraph is and is not. Here are a few examples that will help you understand the theory.

This is not a paragraph:

> In this period the Museum of Culture hosts an exhibition of Jean–Michel Basquiat's work showing the most important moments of his short life (he died at the age of 27).
> The curators are Jeffrey Deitch and Gianni Mercurio.
> The exhibition traces Basquiat's artistic journey through more than 100 works, including paintings, drawings and objects, all in chronological order from 1980 to 1987.

Here is an example of a proper (correct) paragraph:

A 100–word paragraph based on the pattern "comparison and contrast", that focuses on similarities between the two authors.

The similarities between Henry David Thoreau and Gilbert White are many. Neither one wrote about wild and unknown places, but about a place near home. Both used scientific data derived from their direct experience of nature, together with classical and scientific knowledge gleaned from books. They both loved to spend time — nowadays most people would say "waste time" — walking through the woods and writing their daily journals. The journal is a point of reference for many natural history writers. Not by coincidence, *The Natural History of Selborne* constitutes a collection of letters that were most likely based on White's journal.

Here is another example offered by Strunk with a detailed explanation of the composition of a paragraph:

> *1.* Now, to be properly enjoyed, a walking tour should be gone upon alone. *2.* If you go in a company, or even in pairs, it is no longer a walking tour in anything but name; it is something else and more in the nature of a picnic. *3.* A walking tour should be gone upon alone, because freedom is of the essence; because you should be able to stop and go on, and follow this way or that, as the freak takes you; and because you must have your own pace, and neither trot alongside a champion walker, nor mince in time with a girl. *4.* And you must be open to all impressions and let your thoughts take color from what you see. *5.* You should be as a pipe for any wind to play upon. *6.* "I cannot see the wit", says Hazlitt, "of walking and talking at the same time. *7.* When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country", which is the gist of all that can be said upon the matter. *8.* There should be no cackle of voices at your elbow, to jar on the meditative silence of the morning. *9.* And so long as a man is reasoning he cannot surrender himself to that fine intoxication that comes of much motion in the open air, that begins in a sort of dazzle and sluggishness of the brain, and ends in a peace that passes comprehension.
>
> Stevenson, *Walking Tours*.

> *1.* Topic sentence. *2.* The meaning made clearer by denial of the contrary. *3.* The topic sentence repeated, in abridged form, and supported by three reasons; the meaning of the third ("you must have your own pace") made clearer by denying the contrary. *4.* A fourth reason, stated in two forms. *5.* The same reason, stated in still another form. *6.–7.* The same reason as stated by Hazlitt. *8.* Repetition, in paraphrase, of the quotation from Hazlitt. *9.* Final statement of the fourth reason, in language amplified and heightened to form a strong conclusion.[8]

1.1.3. *Concise Sentences*

In the economy of words, remember that a sentence should contain nothing unnecessary. Wasted words, wasted space[9]. A writer should keep his sentences short. Omit all words that add nothing to the meaning. However, long sentences are not necessarily wordy, nor are short sentences always concise. A sentence is wordy when its meaning can be conveyed in fewer words. As Sylvan Barnet suggests: «Short sentences are not always concise: *The picture is small in size*. The sentence is short but wordy because *in size* adds nothing to the meaning. Say everything relevant, but say it in the fewest words possible»[10].

Consider the following sentence:

> There are a few unclear elements in the painting that give it a weird quality.

A more economical version could be:

> A few unclear elements make the picture weird.

Nothing has been lost. And the central message is emphasized in the revised version.

Here some wordy phrases and their concise equivalents:

> the reason of the fact is → because
> because of the fact that → because
> due to the fact that → because
> for the reason that → because
> in spite of the fact that → although

And here are some words that you can almost always cut: *definitely*, *truly*, *really*, *very*, *extremely*, etc[11].

8. Strunk W. Jr., *The Elements of Style*, cit., pos. 297–313.

9. Cfr. Cappon R.J., *Guide to News Writing: The Resource for Professional Journalists*, cit., p.7.

10. Barnet S., *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, Global Edition, Pearson Education Limited, Edizione del Kindle, p. 208.

11. Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 209.