



Learning Argument Structure With Calvin and Hobbes

KEYWORDS

C. Ramalakshmi

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.

Learning argument structure with Calvin and Hobbes

Comics are a part of our communication system right from the earliest of civilizations. They are called cave drawings, hieroglyphics, etc. But the present form as we see it appeared only during the last half of the 19th Century in England (Saraceni, 2003). It developed throughout the century introducing various comic characters like Mickey mouse, Tintin, Popeye, Tarzan and super heroes like The Phantom, Superman, Batman, Spiderman, etc. As the popularity grew, it attracted all group of audience alike creating their own favourites in different genres (romantic, thriller, comic, fantasy, etc.).

One of the most important characteristics of a comic is the employment of both words and pictures (Saraceni, 2003). Visual, manual, bodily and facial learning are considered to be some of the interactional and communicative forms of institutional learning (Van dijk, 1980). A comic employ almost a combination of these forms which accredits it to be used in language classrooms. Hence using of the comic Calvin and Hobbes acquires the status of English teaching material.

Calvin and Hobbes by Bill Waterson is one of the favourite comics of people of all ages. Calvin, a boy of six together with his imaginary friend Hobbes (stuffed tiger) and occasionally with his mom or dad or his friend Susie and his teacher Mrs. Wormwood could be seen making fun with his interrogations and inquisitiveness. His arguments with his parents (either mom or dad) remember everyone of their childhood. Sometimes during those arguments, he used to stack his justifiable reasons for his choice, or at some other times, he arrives at some weird conclusions and in some other cases he used to take both side of an argument and arrive at some funny solution. Whatever the case may be, Bill Waterson – the cartoonist presents his ideas in a neat structure.

This perfect structure of argument makes its way in language learning by Second Language Learners. Argument is considered as one of the chief forms of discourse. (The other forms are Narration, description and exposition). It is viewed as a social activity in which two or more people advance, defend, and compare arguments in support of opposing positions. Typically it is seen everywhere around us.

In 2009, the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers put a document on the Internet entitled College and Career Ready: Standards for Reading, Writing, and Communication. It says this of writing argument:

The ability to frame and defend an argument is particu-

larly important to students' readiness for college and careers. The goal of making an argument is to convince an audience of the rightness of the claims being made using logical reasoning and relevant evidence. In some cases, a student will make an argument to gain access to college or to a job, laying out their qualifications or experience. In college, a student might defend an interpretation of a work of literature or of history and, in the workplace, an employee might write to recommend a course of action. Students must frame the debate over a claim, presenting the evidence for the argument and acknowledging and addressing its limitations. This approach allows readers to test the veracity of the claims being made and the reasoning being offered in their defense. (2B) (qtd. in Hillocks)

Learning this strategy out of context makes it boring and uninteresting. But with Calvin and Hobbes, it is really fun and executable.

There are three forms of argument structure – deductive, inductive, thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Deductive argument involves a process of reasoning that moves from the general to the specific, in which a conclusion follows necessarily from the premises presented so that the conclusion cannot be false if the premises are true. Inductive argument is the process of making inferences based upon observed patterns, or simple repetition. It is often used in reference to predictions about what will happen or does happen, based upon what has happened. In thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure, thesis can be seen as a single idea, which in itself is incomplete, so that it gives rise to the antithesis, a conflicting idea. A third point of view, a synthesis, arises from this conflict. It overcomes the conflict by reconciling the truths contained in the thesis and antithesis at a higher level.

Deductive Argument



Fig. 1 is an example of deductive argument where the conclusion follows from the given premises. Calvin is seen arguing with his mother. There are four panels and the first three forms the premises of the argument. In the words of Calvin

- Premise 1: I should not watch "killer prom queen", which is really fun.
- Premise 2: I should eat asparagus which I hate the

most and which mom says is good for health.

- Premise 3: I should not stay up till midnight, which is again a fun.

Conclusion:

There is an inverse relationship between how good something is for you and how much fun it is.

As explained above premises are supporting reasons for any argument. Calvin is sure to arrive at a conclusion after observing a dozen of instances. An everyday instance could explain this type of deductive argument in our life. Dad enters a house and sees that Mom is cooking silently; children are studying and doing their homework; T.V. is switched off; so he comes to a conclusion that there must be something wrong.

Inductive argument:

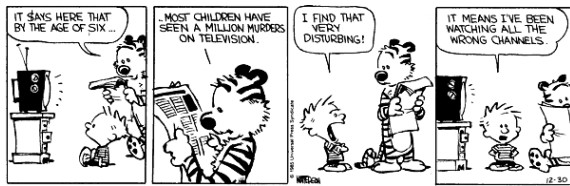


Fig. 2 is an example of how observed pattern can lead to an inference. Hobbes reads a newspaper report to Calvin which says, "By the age of six most children have seen a million murders on television". This report must have been based on a survey which might have interviewed quite a large number of children within 6.

Calvin's Conclusion: I have been watching all the wrong channels. (How?)

Premise (answer to how): A Newspaper report: "By the age of six most children have seen a million murders on television"

Inductive argument is based on observed pattern. Another example could be "whenever the sun shines and rains simultaneously, then there appears a rainbow in the west sky. It is as such now, so I must look out for a rainbow."

Thesis-antithesis-synthesis

As explained already, whenever a proposition is stated, there is always a counter-argument. In Fig. 3, when Calvin's dad says the world is black and white, Calvin is sure to counter argue that the paintings are not so. So his dad opts to offer another proposition, saying that the artists are insane. Calvin does not stop with this explanation. He counter argues that when everything is black and white, then the paints must also be such, for which his dad silences him by saying that like everything else that change into color after 1930s, the paintings too turned such. Calvin never stops. He questions about the black and white photo, which has not turned into colour. But the dad stops him further by saying that they are colour photo of black and white world. So after such a long argument Calvin concludes that, the world is really complicated. He puts together all those statements and counter-statements and comes to such a conclusion.



Fig. 3

Conclusion

Calvin and Hobbes which is an authentic material, could be used as such to introduce the rhetorical strategy argument and its structure. This could be further expanded with relevant tasks which focus on the other parts like linking words, syntactic structures, etc. of framing a complete argument. Comic in language teaching is another level ahead in creating edutainment.

References :

1. Hillocks, Jr., George. 2010. Teaching Argument for Critical Thinking & Writing: An introduction. English Journal 99.6 (2010):24-32.
2. Kelley, Brian. 2010. Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, and Comics. SANE journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education: Vol.1: Iss.1, Article 10.
3. Parsons, Jim and Smith, Kathy. 1993. Using Comic Books to Teach. ED363892. ERIC.
4. Saraceni, Mario. 2003. The Language of Comics. Routledge: London.
5. Williams, Neil. 1995. The Comic Book as Course Book: Why and How. ED390277. ERIC.
6. Van dijk, Teun A. 1980. Discourse Studies and Education.
7. Stories-straight.blogspot.in/2008/12/hegel-thesis-antithesis-synthesis.html?m=1