



Color-code Strategy for Improving Writing Academic Paragraphs in EFL Classes

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Abstract

In this semi quantitative study, the respondents were EFL students in Koya University, Faculty of education, and department of English Language. The aim was to inspect and scrutinize the effect of color-code strategy on their proficiency regarding writing academic paragraphs. They were 60 freshmen students who were studying in their first year levels. Both male and female participants were enrolled in two writing tests about writing descriptive paragraphs. The tests were conducted in the department, during studying writing skills subject in the second semester, and then their writings were analyzed using a rubric. Later, using Independent Samples t-test, the results were processed into numerical datum. The conclusion is that, color-coding strategy has impact on student's advancement in writing a well-structured paragraph in the post-test. Furthermore, students wrote their second paragraph with correct structure and organization. Therefore, the final results maintain that color-code strategy is a beneficial didactical mechanism to be used in the field of EFL and ESL teaching particularly in writing skills courses.

Keywords: color-code, writing academic paragraph, English as a Foreign Language.

1. Introduction

In this study, the researcher tries to focus on organization of academic paragraphs. That is to say, the advancement of writing well-organized paragraphs by using a certain strategy namely, color-mapping is the material of the study experiment. According to Zemach and Rumisek (2012), a paragraph is a group of words that is about one single idea or topic. The writer's main idea is expressed and explained by the logical flow of the sentences coming together. In academic writing, paragraph's length is normally between five to ten sentences, but it can be shorter or longer depending on the topic.

In addition, a paragraph has three basic parts. The first part is called topic sentence which is about the main idea of the paragraph. It is often the first sentence of a paragraph and it denotes the most general idea in a sentence. Then, what comes next is supporting sentences known as body paragraph. These sentences talk about the topic sentence. That is, they explain the main idea and give more detailed ideas that follow the topic sentence. Final part is the concluding sentence. This is found as the last sentence of a paragraph. Usually, conclusion is written by repeating the main idea. That is to say, concluding sentence is written to give similar idea as topic sentence in another way via different choice of vocabulary and sentence style. Sometimes, it is written via giving a final comment about the main topic (Zemach and Rumisek, 2012).

In parallel to Strunk and White (2000), paragraph is the unit of composition and any piece of written text should stick to a suitable design and holding to it. The paragraph is a convenient unit that serves all forms of literary work. Since it holds together, and a paragraph may be of any length that begins with either a sentence suggesting the topic or a sentence that helps the transition.



With reference to Riddell (2003), written language is often more formal than speaking language. And in exams, students need to write at least two different types of answers, such as discursive, descriptive, analytical, letters. In addition, sometimes they might have to complete an application form in English if they live in an English-speaking country or in a country where English is a second language or studied as a foreign language. So, writing should never be neglected totally, if it is an important element of a course, it should be focused on extensively.

2. Significance of the Study

This study is about improving writing academic paragraphs in terms of organization. That is, a well-structured paragraph is comprised of a topic sentence then followed by supporting details and ended with a conclusion. To fulfill such aim, color-coding is used a strategy. In line with this purpose, Becker & Kummer (2020) established that the color-mapping or coding method helps students understand where certain information belongs within a paragraph. So, the researcher carries out this experiment in order to find out the effect of color-code strategy on EFL students when writing academic paragraphs. Furthermore, Geigle (2014) in a qualitative research conducted in United states of America-California concluded that research implications call for broader studies across multiple schools and various demographics. In order to find the effect of color-code strategy integrated with formulaic writing. The study measured the efficacy of color coding for intermediate and secondary grade levels through a qualitative case study and interview process. The current Study however, uses a quantitative approach on the impact on color-code strategy on university EFL students' writing academic paragraph in terms of organization.

3. The Problem of the Study

In the field of English language teaching and learning, writing skills and particularly writing academic paragraphs have been always problematic. This is because writing in EFL or ESL needs accurate knowledge in terms of organization, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. That is, writing as a skill depends on other language input proficiencies such as structure and lexis. It is highly important that strategies for improving writing academic paragraphs to be developed. Working on advancement of such writing skill needs accurate procedures in order to enrich EFL and ESL students' efficiency in how to write well-organized paragraphs. This study carries an endeavor on how to empower students' abilities in writing paragraphs having a well-structured organization. This is due to the fact that EFL students in the department of English Language located in Koya University face the hardship of how to write academic paragraphs with well-organized structure.

4. Background knowledge

4.1 Academic Writing

First of all, academic writing is clear, precise, determined, organized and supported by evidence. The objective of it is to aid the reader's comprehension. It has a formal tone and style, but it is not complicated and does not need the use of long sentences and complex vocabulary. There are some general features of academic writing that are relevant across all disciplines. To begin with, academic writing is planned and focused; answers the question and demonstrates an understanding of the subject. Secondly, it is structured. It is coherent, written in a logical order, and brings together related points and material. Thirdly, it is evidenced; demonstrates knowledge of the subject area, supports opinions and arguments with evidence, and is referenced accurately. Finally, it is formal in tone and style: uses appropriate language and tenses, and is clear, concise and balanced (University of Leeds, 2020).

In addition, a holistic definition of academic writing is any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university. Academic writing is also used for publications that



are read by teacher and researchers or presented at conferences. A very general definition of academic writing could also include any writing assignment given in an academic setting (White, 2018).

4.2 Paragraph

To begin with, a paragraph is a group of sentences that are organized and coherent in a logical order. All the sentences are related to a single topic. Almost every piece of writing that is written and longer than a few sentences should be organized into paragraphs. Also, paragraphs can contain many distinguished types of information. A paragraph could contain a series of short examples or a single long explanation of a general point. It might be description of a place, character, or process. It can narrate a series of events. It might be in the shape of compare or contrast two or more things. It can be in the form of classification of items into categories. Nevertheless, it can describe causes and effects. No matter of the kind of information they contain, all paragraphs share certain features. One of the most pivotal of these features is having a topic sentence. A well-organized paragraph backs up or develops a single controlling idea, which is expressed in a sentence called the topic sentence (Hacker, 2020).

Additionally, most paragraphs in an essay or a standing-alone have a three-part structure. The first part is called introduction. Then, what comes next is body paragraph. Final part is conclusion. You can see this structure in paragraphs whether they are narrating, describing, and comparing, contrasting, or analyzing information. Each part of the paragraph plays a significant role in communicating and delivering writer's' meaning to the readers. To add more, Introduction is the first section of a paragraph; should include the topic sentence and any other sentences at the beginning of the paragraph that give background information or provide a transition. Next part is body paragraph that follows the introduction; discusses the controlling idea, using facts, arguments, analysis, examples, and other information. Conclusion is the final section; summarizes the connections between the information discussed in the body of the paragraph and the paragraph's controlling idea (Hacker, 2020).

4.3 Color-code

With regard to Geigle (2014, P: 5), color coding is defined as "To color according to a key designed to facilitate identification". LMBLiteracy (2019) stated that Graphic organizers were important for writing with students. When writing paragraphs, a graphic organizer can be used to show what a good paragraph should look like and what elements should be included. Color-code or mapping can be applied to the main three elements namely; topic sentence, three details, and conclusion sentence. One can choose whatever colors that would go for these paragraph elements. However, it is highly significant to stay organized and consistent. Color-mapping might be used to highlight by coloring when telling students which elements they are missing. For instance, to show them that adding another detail is needed by yellow color, or telling that do not forget your topic sentence by green color. The color connection makes them stay in their minds while writing.

Furthermore, Becker & Kummer (2020) maintains that the color mapping method helps students understand where certain information belongs within a paragraph. Every good academic paragraph begins with a topic sentence written in the student's own words and contains the main idea. With color-code or mapping, students either write the topic sentence in blue or green or underline it because this visually shows its position and logical order. Basically, the topic sentence directs the reader to the paragraph's insight without uncovering the full view. Moreover, each body paragraph follows the introduction of the paragraph previously stated, but students should order the body paragraphs from least important to most important idea because significance plays a role in organization. Here,



color red can be used to state interesting fact, examples, and explanations. In the concluding paragraph students summarize the concepts and ideas already presented. That is, it is not by using repetitions but with different vocabulary. This means that green color can be used as a code to indicate the idea of restating of topic sentence in the conclusion. Their colors are the same as an analogy of similar meaning, but different wording is used.

By the same token, Ewoldt & Morgan (2017) established that writing a well-structured paragraph is an essential academic skill for students. Writing expression becomes more and more wide-spread in content area instruction, and it is important for college and career preparedness. Proficient written expression will help students be successful in general education classes. Therefore, it is essential to find strategies and techniques to support the written expression of students. Using strategic color-coding helps students see connections between the prewriting and drafting steps. These scaffolds will help students develop rich paragraphs full of details and explanations that display the depth of their understanding of a variety of concepts.

Also, Larson (2019) used color-coding in such a way as topic sentences and conclusion sentences being highlighted in green, as for the body paragraph containing big ideas are yellow and details are red. This reinforces the idea that every paragraph should have a certain organization and this is how the writer organized the paragraph. On the basis of this, researcher in the current study has adopted the color-code idea into a special mechanism to meet the requirements of the experiment. That is, students were familiarized with concept, and then practiced the color-coding inside the classroom.

With regard to Wirk and Wik (2011), it is supposed that cognitive processes operate in an organized, predictable fashion. Thus, incorporating the use of graphic organizers during the learning process helps to enhance the functionality of these processes. Furthermore, the use of graphic organizers is also based on the constructivist theory that says that during learning, the learner uses the existing knowledge and the new information to construct new knowledge.

All in all, Zaini, Mukhtar, and Nawawi (2010) stated that the quality of students' writing will improve through the organizing the thoughts. They also established that graphic organizer is simply a graphical or spatial representation of text concepts. It is an instructional tool that can help students to organize, structured the information and concepts to relate to other concepts.

5. The Method of the Study

The study participants were 60 individuals from Koya University in the Faculty of Education-Department English of Language. The students were freshmen mixed-gender first-year-staged ones who participated in two tests. The tests were done in two different periods. The pre-test was done during the beginning of the first semester of writing subject. That is, they have not been taught any specific subject about writing paragraphs. The test was implemented in order to determine students' proficiencies in writing academic paragraphs. Then, post-test was conducted at the end of the semester. During the semester study, the students were taught how to write academic paragraphs from the scratch. Step-by-step, they were taught different parts of paragraph parts. Before conducting the post-test, color-code strategy adapted from Larson (2019) was introduced to the participants, see table (1) for the color-coding graphic paragraph organizer and table (2) for a color-code paragraph sample. Then, the test was done using a special paper deigned for color-coding strategy in which the participants wrote their paragraphs see appendix (B).



Table (1) color-code graphic paragraph organizer





| | |
|---|--|
|  | Green –topic sentence The main idea of the paragraph |
|  | Yellow-supporting details (big ideas) These big ideas support the topic sentence |
|  | Red-tell more Gives more explanation to the supporting details |
|  | Green-conclusion Closes the paragraph and restates the main idea |

Table (2) color-coded paragraph sample image

Koya City

Koya city is a well-known place for many outstanding features. First, it is noted for the Haibstsultan Mountain, which is very high and amazing. In many areas of this city lots of palm trees can be seen. Also, on the other side of the town is a beautiful place known as Koya University that is located by the side of the mountain. The third amazing feature is the windy weather that keeps air fresh and clean around the city. These three qualities are truly amazing and make Koya city a famous place.

6. Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected from the chosen participants of the study was two written paragraphs from two tests (pre-test and post). Students wrote their first paragraphs in pre-test and observers collected them. Then, in the post-test, the writing subject teacher collected the samples. Afterwards, the samples were evaluated using a special rubric. The rubric was adapted from (Rubric for the Evaluation of the Paragraph, 2020) to meet the criteria of evaluating the paragraphs on the basis of paragraph structure and organization. An academic paragraph structure is comprised of topic sentence, body paragraph (big ideas & supporting details), and conclusion. The rubric evaluates the paragraph organization based on color-code method (topic sentence: green, big ideas: yellow, supporting details: red, conclusion: green). Next, two analyzers read the paragraphs one-by-one for both test using the aforementioned rubric, and a score from one to nine was given to each written paragraph (see appendix A). Quantitative data were gathered and analyzed using Independent Samples T-Test via SPSS program version 20. The data shows how students did in the pre-test and post-test.

7. Results and Discussions

Independent samples t-test is a test that shows a comparison between two groups of mean value of a continuous variable (ratio or interval) that normally distributed. The mean score of the dependent variable according to the model assumption is found because the independent variable has an influence that differentiates the two groups (Statistics solution, 2020). The current study involves two tests that were conducted with 60 students writing



academic paragraphs. The pre-test and post-test show different results depending on the analysis of the tests using the aforementioned rubric. So, the independent samples t-test is used since the study involves repeated measurement of two distinguished tests. The results show that students did very badly in the pre-test session. However, in the post-test session the participants did very well in writing of the paragraph. The data in table (3) tells that mean score for the (group 1) pre-test is (2.1333) with (1.12697 SD). But, the data in post-test (group 2) indicates that mean score is (5.9333) with (0.98921 SD). This mean that the mean score of the post test is higher than the mean score in pre-test. It can be said that the strategy of using color-coding in writing academic paragraphs has been proved effective and influential. In other words, students in the pre-test had no idea about such strategy. Whereas, in the post-test students were taught to write paragraphs using color-coding strategy as a technique to arrange their paragraphs in terms of organization. As a result, their capacities in writing well-structured paragraphs have increased to a great extent.

More significantly, the results in the present study can go in parallel with the previous findings by Geigle (2014) who established that writing in color creates engagement in the writing process. Color lowers their learning affective filter, while drawing out positive emotions for them to become one with their composition. Introducing a color-coded formulaic writing system gives students comfort and structure in their writing. It gives them a frame and a purpose, which a blank page with a prompt does not give them. By giving students colors to write in, you are allowing them to already be successful in the first part of the writing process.

Table (3) Independent Sample T-Test Mean

| | group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------|-------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| score | g1 | 60 | 2.1333 | 1.12697 | .14549 |
| | g2 | 60 | 5.9333 | .98921 | .12771 |

Correspondingly, Imhof (2004) determined that color coding supports students' recognition of the connection between the graphic organizer and sentences within the paragraph, and it provides visual stimulation to guide students' attention. Moreover, Graham and Harris (2009) stated that using color coded graphic organizers makes the writing process more explicit, expands students' comprehending of writing and provides students with a strategic approach to writing. Similarly, Otto (2014) found that adding color to writing strategy instruction significantly improved overall writing achievement, raised their motivations, and increased student confidence levels. Consequently, Gillespie and Graham (2014) proved that to learn and generalize writing skills, students require direct and explicit instruction, scaffolding, and support to develop a strong foundation of writing practices so that they can adapt their writing skills to the specific requirements of writing in academic content environments. In parallel to this, Ewoldt and Morgan (2017) demonstrated that color coding visual organizers provides another dimension of assistance for writing development. Particularly, by adding color to the graphic organizers, students create another level of organization that colorfully displays relationships between undeveloped ideas and complete sentences in the paragraph. Using color coding in combination with strategy instruction has the potential to improve overall understanding of the writing process and production of written thoughts.

In another study, Rahamt (2018) established that scaffolding color codes, selective attention writing, and modeling assist give the learners more confidence as they were able to see how successful the method is carried out by someone else before they attempted to practice the strategy. Additionally, the researcher highlighted that graphic organizers helped learners to improve the quality of their essay content on one hand. On the other, the researcher came to a consensus that interesting activities can help maximize learners' self-confidence in



future learning. Findings of this research supported the claim that the use of graphic organizers facilitate chunking of information and help in learning.

Finally, in another recent study, Asyid, Nurdiansyah, and Parmawati (2019) conducted a classroom action research about using color-coded technique in improving vocabulary. The results of this study revealed that the 7th grade vocabulary potential of students taught using color coding at MTs in Cimahi was better than those who learned without color coding. This finding proposes that a lesson using color coding for vocabulary teaching could capacitate the vocabulary ability of students. Color coding can help the writer in teaching learning process more preferable. Color coding can motivate students more and helped them create ideas and feeling because they knew more vocabulary.

In addition, Asyid, et al (2019) also found that in their teaching-learning phase of vocabulary, the implementation of color coding technique obtained positive responses from students. That is, they like the technique because the technique makes them better in memorizing and doing some entertainment in learning, during teaching-learning activity it was not making them stressed and bothered.

8. Implications

On the basis of what has been gathered as results of the current study, students have taken advantage of the color-coding strategy in their writing. To better state this in other words, they have done very well in the post-test by using color-coding as their paragraph results showed. This means that such strategy can be used in anywhere by anyone in the field of EFL and ESL dealing with language skills such as writing. To maintain the advancement of writing academic paragraphs particularly in how to arrange the structure of it, this technique is absolutely beneficial and helps EFL/ESL students to successfully organize the paragraph. So, teachers in the schools, university lecturers in their colleges, tutors in language centers, curriculum and syllabus designers, and educational institutions can take the following in their programs strategically:

- a. Use color-coding strategy in EFL writing skills courses.
- b. This strategy can also be used with other techniques in writing skills.
- c. It can also be shaped and re-created in another way to see different results.
- d. Introduce students with this technique inside the classroom, and allow them to use it in their self-study.
- e. Material designers can establish textbooks containing color-coding strategy in writing paragraphs.
- f. The coloring can be in any sort and the coding can also be structured with making analogous comparisons between the colors and the parts of a paragraph.

9. Limitations and Future Considerations

Although the number of participants of the current study was large as having sixty students participating in two different tests, larger number of respondents can be enrolled in another study to validate the effect of color-coding strategy on students writing academic paragraphs. It can be conducted in other universities in Kurdistan region both public and private ones. Also, the focus of the study was on paragraph structure and organization. In another study, it is suggested that the effect of color-coding strategy be investigated on students' proficiency in terms of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and more broadly essay writing.

10. Conclusions



Color-coding strategy on EFL students' proficiency regarding writing academic paragraphs was scrutinized. Participants were sixty university-based college students who were studying in English language department as freshmen. Both male and female respondents were enrolled in two writing tests about writing a descriptive paragraph. The testes took place in the department, and the writings were analyzed using a rubric. Then, using SPSS program, the results were processed in quantitative data. It is concluded that, color-coding strategy has impact on student's abilities in writing a well-structured paragraph in the post-test. Furthermore, students wrote their second paragraph with acceptable structure and correct and organization. Hence, the final results confirm that color-code strategy is a useful technique to be used in the field of EFL and ESL teaching particularly in writing skills courses. Finally, it is concluded that the results in the current study can be well-supported by the research findings done in this field. That is, the current study results can be reliable and valid.

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Appendix (A)

Rubric for Evaluation of the Paragraph





Grade: A = 7 - 9 points, B = 5 - 6 points, C = 3 - 4 points, D = 1 - 2 points, F = 0 - 1

| Point Value | 3 points | 2 points | 1 points | 0 points |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| Topic sentence | Interesting, original topic sentence. Has a specific controlling idea. Clear purpose. | Clearly stated topic sentence presents one main idea. | The topic sentence's purpose is unclear. It needs a more specific controlling idea. | Missing, invalid, or inappropriate topic sentence; main idea is missing. There is no controlling idea. |
| Big ideas & Supporting details | Paragraph has enough big ideas with supporting and detail sentences (examples) that relate to the topic sentence. | Paragraph doesn't have enough big ideas with supporting and detail sentences (examples) that relate to the topic sentence. | There are big ideas with supporting and detail sentences (examples) that relate to the topic sentence, but a few are vague/missing/unrelated. | Insufficient, vague, or undeveloped examples. |
| Conclusion | Complete and interesting conclusion builds onto the topic sentence/ restates the idea. It gives a suggestion, some advice/ opinion etc. | A good conclusion but not creative, repeats same pattern of topic sentence. Needs to be more interesting and better paraphrased. | The concluding sentence is too vague. | There is no logical concluding sentence. |

Total Points:

Appendix (B)

Dear Student write a paragraph using the given color-code and the blank table.

| | |
|---|--|
|  | Green –topic sentence The main idea of the paragraph |
|  | Yellow-supporting details (big ideas) These big ideas support the topic sentence |
|  | Red-tell more Gives more explanation to the supporting details |
|  | Green-conclusion Closes the paragraph and restates the main idea |

استراتيجية رمز اللون لتحسين كتابة الفقرات الأكاديمية في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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ملخص

في هذه الدراسة شبه الاحصائية ، كان المشاركون من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة كوية، كلية التربية، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. كان الهدف هو فحص تأثير إستراتيجية كود اللون على كفاءتهم فيما يتعلق بكتابة الفقرات الأكاديمية. كانوا ستين طالباً جديداً كانوا يدرسون في مستويات السنة الأولى. تم تسجيل المشاركين من الذكور والإناث في اختبارين للكتابة حول كتابة الفقرات الوصفية. أجريت الاختبارات في القسم ، أثناء دراسة مادة مهارات الكتابة في الفصل الدراسي الثاني ، ثم تم تحليل كتاباتهم باستخدام نموذج تقييم. لاحقاً ، باستخدام اختبار t-test للعينات المستقلة ، تمت معالجة النتائج في مسند رقمي. الاستنتاج هو أن استراتيجية الترميز اللوني لها تأثير على تقدم الطالب في كتابة فقرة جيدة التنظيم في الاختبار اللاحق. علاوة على ذلك ، كتب الطلاب فقرتهم الثانية بهيكل وتنظيم صحيين. لذلك ، تؤكد النتائج النهائية أن إستراتيجية رمز اللون هي آلية تعليمية مفيدة لاستخدامها في مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، خاصة في دورات مهارات الكتابة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: إستراتيجية كود اللون، كتابة الفقرات الأكاديمية، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

ستراتيژی کۆدی رهنگی بۆ بهرپێدانی نوسینی دارشتنی ئەکادیمی له ناو پۆلی زمانی ئینگلیزی وهک زمانی بیگانه

رېبین عبدالقادر عزيز

کۆلیژی پەرورده-بهشی ئینگلیزی/ زانکۆی سه لاهه دین-ههولێر

پوخته:

له م توێزینه وه نیمچه ئاماریه، به شداربوانی پیکهاتبوون له قوتابیانی زانکۆی کۆیه، فاکهلتی پەرورده، فهشی زمانی ئینگلیزی. ئامانجی توێزینه وه که بریتی بو له دۆزینه وهی کاریگهری میتۆدی کۆدی رهنگی له سهه توانای کارامه یان له نوسینی دارشتنی ئەکادیمی. ژماره یان پیکهاتبو له 60 قوتابی تازه وه رگه یارو له ههردو پهگهزی ئیرو م له سالی په کهمی خوێندنیان. ههردوو پهگهزه که فهاداریان پیکرا له دوو تاقیکردنه وهی نوسین له بوازی نوسینی دارشتنی گوزارشتی. تاقیکردنه وه کان ئەنجامدران له کاتی خوێندنی وانهی نوسین له کۆرسی په که م. پاشان دارشته کانیا ن هه لسه نگیندران له رېگه ی به کاره یئانی خشته په که وه. دواتر له رېگه ی به رنامه ی ت-تیبستی سه ره خو ئەنجامه کان بۆ ئامازه ی ژماره یی گۆردران. ده رته نجامه کان له تاقیکردنه وهی داخراو ئە وه ده رده خه ن که ستراتیژی کۆدی رهنگی کاریگهری هه یه له سه ر پشخستنی قوتابیان له نوسینی دارشتنیکی ریکخراو له روی پیکهاته وه. ههروه ها قوتابه کان دارشته کانیا ن له روی پیکهاته وه ریکخستنه وه به دروستی نوسیوو. له بهرته وه ئەنجامه کان پالېشتی ئە وه ده که نه وه که ستراتیژی کۆدی رهنگی میکانیزمیکی فیکاری کاریگه ره بۆ به کاره یئانی له بواره کانی فیکاری زمانی ئینگلیزی وه ک زمانی بیگانه یا خود دووهم به تابه تی له کۆرسه کانی کارامه ییه کانی نوسینه وه.

وشه ی سه ره کی: کۆدی رهنگی نوسینی دارشتنی ئەکادیمی. ئینگلیزی وه ک زمانی بیگانه