VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY NON-MAJOR ENGLISH STUDENTS' WRITING PROBLEMS IN TERMS OF THE FACTORS RELATING TO THEIR META-KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH INFORMATION STRUCTURE

Huỳnh Anh Tuấn*

*Faculty of Graduate Studies, VNU University of Foreign Languages and International Studies,
No.2 Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Abstract: This paper reports the results of a study which investigates the problems Vietnamese university non-major English students of two levels of English proficiency encountered in their English writing in terms of the factors relating to their meta-knowledge of English information structure and the extent to which a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching second language (L2) writing can help the learners overcome their writing problems and develop their written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure. Their problems are conceptualized as being associated with their employing or not employing some writing strategies that can either support or hinder their writing skills development. The analyses of the problems were based on the learners' responses to the questionnaire and interviews, their writing in the writing tasks and classroom-based worksheets and answer sheets. The findings suggested that the learners in the study encountered the writing problems anticipated before, during and after the intervention. The percentages of the learners encountering the problems decreased over time and the extent to which each problem was solved towards the end of the post-teaching phase varied according to each specific problem. Transfer of first language (L1) strategies was reported in all of the writing problems. The influence of L1 transfer was variable with extremely low evidence of topic-prominent structure. In general, there were no big differences between the two groups in their encountering and overcoming the problems investigated.

Keywords: Vietnamese university non-major English students, writing problems, meta-knowledge, information structure, cognitive meta-linguistic approach, English proficiency

---

* Corresponding author.
  Email address: huynhanhtuan@vnu.edu.vn

CÁC VẤN ĐỀ SINH VIÊN TIẾNG ANH KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGƯỜI VIỆT NAM GẶP PHẢI KHI THỰC HÀNH KĨ NĂNG VIẾT XÉT TỪ CÁC YẾU TỐ LIÊN QUAN ĐẾN SIÊU KIẾN THỨC CỦA HỌ VỀ CẤU TRÚC THÔNG TIN TIẾNG ANH

Huỳnh Anh Tuấn

Khoa Sau Đại học, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,
Số 2 Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Bài báo trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu khảo sát các vấn đề sinh viên đại học tiếng Anh không chuyên người Việt Nam ở hai mức năng lực khác nhau gặp phải trong khi thực hành viết tiếng Anh xét đến các yếu tố liên quan đến siêu kiến thức của họ về cấu trúc thông tin tiếng Anh. Bài báo cũng nghiên cứu mức độ khắc phục các vấn đề của họ để phát triển năng lực giao tiếp bằng văn bản sau khi được hướng dẫn kĩ năng viết theo đường hướng nhận thức siêu ngôn ngữ, một đường hướng bắt đầu bằng việc nâng cao siêu kiến thức của họ về cấu trúc thông tin tiếng Anh. Các vấn đề được xem xét liên quan đến việc họ sử dụng hoặc không sử dụng một số chiến lược viết có thể hỗ trợ hoặc cản trở sự phát triển kỹ năng viết của họ. Việc phân tích các vấn đề dựa trên phản hồi của người học đối với bảng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn, bài viết của họ trong các bài tập viết cũng như các bài tập và phiếu trả lời trên lớp. Các phát hiện cho thấy rằng người học trong nghiên cứu gặp phải những vấn đề về viết được dự đoán trước, trong và sau khi can thiệp. Tỷ lệ người học gặp phải vấn đề giảm dần theo thời gian và mức độ giải quyết từng vấn đề ở cuối giai đoạn sau dạy học khác nhau tùy theo từng vấn đề cụ thể. Việc chuyển di chiến lược từ tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh được phát hiện trong tất cả các vấn đề. Ảnh hưởng của việc chuyển di rất khác nhau với mức độ rất thấp về chuyển di cấu trúc thiên chủ đề từ tiếng Việt sang tiếng Anh. Nhìn chung, không có sự khác biệt lớn giữa hai nhóm trong việc gặp phải và khắc phục các vấn đề.

Từ khóa: sinh viên đại học tiếng Anh không chuyên, vấn đề khi thực hành kĩ năng viết, siêu kiến thức, cấu trúc thông tin, đường hướng nhận thức siêu ngôn ngữ nhận thức, năng lực ngôn ngữ

1. Introduction

The study was carried out on three assumptions. First, foreign language or second language learners (referred aggregately to as L2 learners in this study) do not reach a satisfactory level in their writing skills because they encounter some problems while attempting to develop the skills and this might be partially related to their not having a clear understanding of English information structure. This assumption is based on the fact that the quality of L2 writing may be affected by L2 learner's L2 linguistic knowledge (Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Schoonen et al., 2003; Schoonen et al., 2011; Oh, Lee, & Moon, 2015) and that L2 learner's inadequate L2 linguistic knowledge may hinder their expressing thoughts and ideas in L2 (Hinkel, 2004; Oh, Lee, & Moon, 2015), or in more general terms, there is a close link between L2 learners' meta-linguistic knowledge and their English proficiency (Berry, 1997; Borg, 1999; Hu, 2010). This connection is traced down to the potential of meta-language instruction to enhance meta-language awareness and whereby language development (Carter, 2003; Berry, 2005; Swain, 2005; Hu, 2010). Of course, it is undeniable that L2 learners' difficulty with

English writing may also be grounded very simply in their low level of general English proficiency. For example, they do not acquire adequate vocabulary knowledge to apply their writing strategies effectively, or they may not command sufficient sentence grammar knowledge, to be able to think strategically about composition at text level. Second, some of the L2 writers' problems might be related to their being influenced by the meta-knowledge of their L1 information structure and the transfer of L1 information structure related writing strategies to their L2 writing. This assumption is based on the body of research in the field of L1/L2 writing interference and transfer (Clyne, 1987; Connor, 1987, 1996; Hinds, 1987, 1990; Söter, 1988; Mauranen, 1993; Ventola, 1992, 1996; Berman, 1994; Matsumoto, 1995; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hinkel, 1997; 2002; Kamimura & Oi, 1998; Grabe, 2002) and L1/L2 writing differences (Silva, 1992). Third, learner groups of different levels of proficiency might encounter their writing problems at different extents. This assumption is based on studies involving contrasting L2 writers' different levels of performance corresponding to their different levels of L2 proficiency, skill, and experience (Raimes, 1985; Hirose, & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Victori, 1999).

The problems encountered in writing by the students in this study are viewed from 2 perspectives concerning L2 writers' writing activity: writing as social action (or socializing), and writing as process (Flower, 1979; Cumming, 1998, 2001; De Larios, Murphy, & Marín, 2002; Atkinson, 2004; Connor, 2004). Writing as social action involves 1) the writers' being aware of the audiences' background knowledge and expectations (Coulthard, 1994; Swales, 1990, 2004), 2) the writer's conforming to the writing conventions and constraints in a speech community (Swale, 1990, 2004) and 3) the writer's awareness of the potential consequences of their writing on the audiences' beliefs or social actions (Heap, 1989). Writing as process, from cognitivist perspective, involves the writers' mental operations while composing a text including planning for writing (Gabrielatos, 2002).

A cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 writing (Tuan, 2014) is adopted to help the learners overcome their writing problems and develop their written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure (for a detailed discussion of English information structure at sentential level and discourse level, see Tuan 2013a and Tuan 2013b). This cognitive meta-linguistic approach adopts two cognitive models of language learning and teaching: Anderson (1995)'s Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT)* model, and Johnson (1996)'s DECPRO model in which learners are expected to have some declarative knowledge of information structure before they can proceduralize it in writing activities. Anderson's (1995) Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) theory of cognition is mentioned as the theoretical background for Johnson's model. An analytical framework centering on L2 learners' problems in their writing skills is set up based on previous research into the issue, such as Kaplan (1966, 1987); Singer (1984); Hinds (1987, 1990); Clyne (1994); Connor (1996); and Hyland (1990, 2003). The analysis of each problem is both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis encompasses findings showing percentages of the learners in each group, and in the two groups as a whole, who encountered the problem over three phases before, during, and after the execution of the meta-cognitive teaching method to see whether it changed overtime. The qualitative analysis explores the reasons why the learners encountered the problems in the pre-teaching phase. A comparison is made of the findings obtained from the two groups to find out if there were any significant quantitative differences.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English Information Structure

At the sentential level, information structure (of the English language) is the ordering and articulating of communicatively exchanged information bearing given and/or new status constrained by context, signaled by particular devices and brought forwards by the speaker/writer in order for the listener/reader to achieve optimal comprehension, the whole process depending on the shared knowledge between the interlocutors in discourse (adapted from Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Richards et al, 1992; and Quirk et al., 1985). Following from the definition above, there are at least four issues related to English information structure which need to be taken into account at the sentential level: the ordering of the information distributed in the sentence, the given-new status of the information exchanged, the contextual constraints by which the given-new status is defined, and the devices used to signal this status. In my view, the central issue of this definition is the given/new status of information. The other issues are considered to be peripheral to this issue, either as constraints on given/new status, or given/new status signals. At the discourse level, these issues are discussed within the approaches to genre analysis and the clause-relational approach to text analysis in which the clause is viewed as a device of co-relevance constructing and distributing information. Given and new information status, distribution, signals and constraints are embedded in the relations held among the clauses which can be interlocked to create the logical structure of the whole text.

2.2. Meta-knowledge of English Information Structure

Meta-knowledge is knowledge about knowledge (Barr, 1979) or knowledge to use knowledge (Pitrat, 1988). Metaknowledge of the English language refers to an understanding of how the language works, including its structure, rules, and use. Metaknowledge English information structure employed for academic writing consists the following: the rules governing the ordering of the information distributed in the sentence; the given-new status of the information exchanged; the contextual constraints by which the given-new status is defined; the devices used to signal this status; clause relations and related issues (textual segments, textual patterns, cohesion, and coherence), and knowledge of rhetorical structures and features of academic texts and awareness of the audience in writing.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Context

The study was conducted among 48 second year non-English major students at a university in Vietnam. The students had taken a one-year intensive course in general English in preparation for their English as a medium of instruction/English for specific purposes (EMI/ESP) courses in Information Technology (IT).

3.2. Research Questions

This research is carried out to seek answers to the following major questions:

1. To what extent did the learners encounter the anticipated writing problems in terms of the factors related to their meta-knowledge of English information structure?

This question is divided into four sub-questions:

1.1. What were the percentages of the learners reporting encountering the problems caused by their employing/not employing some writing strategies in the pre-teaching phase?

1.2. Why and when did they employ/not employ those writing strategies in the pre-teaching phase?

This sub-question implies a connection between L2 learners' encountering writing problems and their employing/not employing some specific writing strategies.

1.3. To what extent were the learners' beliefs about their tendencies in practicing information structure-related writing strategies reflected in their writing?

1.4. Did any of the problems arise due to transfer of L1 information structure features and L1 writing strategies?

2. Was there any difference among student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their encountering and overcoming the problems?

3. Could a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 writing help the learners overcome their writing problems and develop their written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure?

3.3. Research Approach: Action Research

Action research was taken as the relevant approach to my study because it reflected my ambition to explore a better teaching method leading to a better teaching situation in my institution and it aimed at improving my learners' written communicative ability through a teaching method which focused on enhancing their understanding of English information structure.

3.4. Participants

The 48 participants in the study fell into 2 groups, group one consisting of 22, group two of 26 students. On average, Group 1 learners had spent approximately one year more studying English than Group 2 learners before they joined the intervention teaching phase. In terms of proficiency level, Group 1 students got scores of 8 to 10, Group 2 students 5 to 7 on a 10-point scale in a placement test administered at the beginning of the first semester in their first year by the ESP faculty. The test basically involved only learners' grammatical knowledge. The data from the pre-teaching phase interviews showed no big differences between the two groups in terms of their L1 literacy.

3.5. Data Collection

3.5.1. Pre-teaching Phase Questionnaire

The items in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire covered three major areas: the learners' identity and academic background, their meta-knowledge of English information structure, and their writing strategies in the English language. The questions involved the learners' writing strategies encompassed their tendencies towards the following practices in their writing: 1) producing the thesis statement; 2) introducing the main topic; 3) making an outline for the writing; 4) following the communicative purposes and social functions of the writing. This is to investigate the learners' awareness of the social actions performed and the processes involved in their writing. The validation of this information was promoted by the follow-up interviews in which the learners were asked to give explanation and elaboration for their reported strategies.

3.5.2. Pre-teaching Phase Interview

The interviews, conducted in the pre-teaching phase, were to explore the occasions on

which the strategies were employed/not employed and the reasons underlying the employment/not employment of the strategies reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes each, and were semi-structured, which allowed the researcher to feel free in exploring the issues and topics concerned about along with a short list of predetermined questions. These questions themselves could be developed in different directions depending on the individual informants.

3.5.3. Participants (Informants)' Writings

The informants' writings were collected from three different writing tasks administered in the pre-teaching phase, while-teaching phase and post-teaching phase, respectively. The writing tasks were expected to give clues about the learners' writing practices (their employing/not employing the above-mentioned strategies) and the improvement in their written communicative ability. The aspects of the learners' strategies that were unlikely to be revealed in the tasks (their tendencies to make essay outlines and their awareness of the global aspects of the writing) were obtained from while-teaching phase writing worksheets and post-task retrospective answer-sheets. The time allotted for each task was 40 minutes. In each of the writing tasks, the students were required to write an essay of at least 250 words to express their opinions/agreement or disagreement supported by specific reasons and examples about some statements or questions in the field of information technology or education: 1) "Some people say that computers have made life easier and more convenient. Other people say that computers have made life more complex and stressful" (pre-teaching phase task); 2) "Governments should spend as much money as possible on developing or buying computer technology or the money should be spent on more basic needs" (while-teaching phase task); 3) "What changes in the field of electronics and information technology do you think the 21st century will bring to our life?" (post-teaching phase task).

3.5.4. Writing Task Worksheets and Post-Task Retrospective Answer Sheets

These data collections were administered in the while-teaching phase. The classroom worksheets were collected to find out the learners' tendency towards making global and local plans for the writing (applying their meta-knowledge of information structure such as the textual patterns of the essay). The post-task retrospective answer-sheets were collected to find out their awareness of global aspects of the text such as its communicative purpose or its social functions. The pre-designed answer-sheets were given to the learners after the task asking them whether they had taken into consideration the global aspects of the essay (its communicative purpose and social functions) while performing the task.

3.6. Analytical Framework

The analyses are both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analyses were based on 1) the learners' responses to the multiple-choice questions in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire concerning their claimed/self-perceived writing strategies, 2) the percentages of the students employing/not employing a writing strategy identified in the writing tasks, worksheets and answer sheets. The qualitative analyses were to 1) explore the occasions when and the reasons why they employed/did not employ the writing strategies as claimed/self-perceived in the questionnaire based on the learners' responses in the pre-teaching phase interviews; 2) identify the strategies they practiced in their writings over the three phases. The analyses from the two methods were triangulated for validity.

3.6.1. Quantitative Analyses

The following categories of the data were quantitatively analyzed:

1) The learners' problems in writing in relation to their meta-knowledge of English information structure including evidence of mother tongue interference

The quantitative analyses of the learners' problems in writing over the three phases showed the percentages of the writings in each group and in the two groups as a whole bearing evidence of each of the problems based on qualitative evidence from the writing tasks. An essay was considered as bearing one or more of the problems if it contained at least one sentence showing evidence of the problems. The three major problems investigated are: 1) Lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas; 2) Lack of planning for writing; and 3) Paying too much attention to the local constructions and neglecting the global aspects of the text.

The first major problem (lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas) was viewed in two respects: 1) unclear thesis statement; and 2) Indirectness (delay) in introducing the main topic. Mother tongue interference was to be explored in all of the problems. The quantitative investigation into the learners' practices of planning for writing was based on their responses to a question in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and their practices in the while-teaching phase writing task. At the end of the task, the students' essays were collected together with the drafts for the outlines they had made. The analyses of the learners' tendencies regarding their paying attention to the global aspects of their essays are based on the learners' responses to the question concerning this in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and the two while teaching phase post-task answer sheets.

2) Learners' development in writing skills

The quantitative analyses that led to my conclusion about the learners' development in their writing were based on the differences in the percentages of learners who used strategies or practices recommended as showing traits of well-written essays in terms of factors related to English information structure in the writing tasks.

3.6.2. Qualitative Analyses

The qualitative analyses were to explore the following: 1) The occasions when and the reasons why the students employed/did not employ the strategies based on their responses to the pre-teaching phase questionnaire; 2) the problems they encountered in the three writing tasks. The problems analyzed were the learners' strategies in producing the thesis statements, introducing the main topics, planning for writing, and following the communicative purpose of the writing. Mother tongue interference was to be explored in all of the strategies. The method used was qualitative interpretation.

Following are the analytical criteria with examples taken from the learners' writings in the writing tasks:

- *Unclear thesis statement*

An essay was considered as having no clear thesis statement if it left the reader no obvious clue of the thesis. This might result in the reader finding it difficult or impossible to realize what the essay was about. The following example illustrated instances of unclear thesis statement:

Nowadays, computer has become part of our life. It is used in every aspect of life and has changed the world. Some people say that our life has become more sophisticated and stressful since computer appeared. But in my view, computers have helped us live

more easily and more conveniently. (The thesis was stated; however, the student did not clearly state the main points to be developed in the essay). (Student NTA, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing task)

The following example illustrated instances of a clear thesis statement produced:

The 21st century is the century of electronics and information technology. There will be many important changes in this field. Most of them will be applied to our life but I think the two most effective changes to the 21st century people are the wireless technology and the virtual life on the Internet. (The main points to be developed in the essay are clearly stated. Student NTT, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing task)

- _Indirectness (delay) in introducing the main topic_

Indirectness or delay in introducing the main topic was taken into account if the writer mentioned a lot of sub-points not directly related to the main topic before introducing it. For example:

I still remember the typewriter days when documents were just plain texts and hardly had no mistakes. I also know that there were days when calculations were done by hand, and the American Census had to delay because people were still processing the number from the census several years ago. Now with the help of computer we could publish several hundred-page documents with no mistakes, and know who is the new US President within hours after the election. So I strongly believe that computers have made our life a lot easier and more convenient no matter whether the field is communication or working or entertainment. (The students mentioned the typewriter days, the American Census, and the US election, which are not directly related to the main topic stated in the last sentence of the paragraph). (Student LDH, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing task)

The following example illustrated instances of directness in introducing the main topic:
Computer is one of the most imaginary and powerful machines that people have ever invented. In my opinion, computer has made our life easier and more convenient. It has changed the way we study and work perfectly. (Student TVC, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing task)

Both of the two writing features mentioned above under the heading of lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas were assumed to reflect L1 transfer of strategy. The quantitative analysis of the issue was based on the number of essays showing the qualitative evidence of the features above.

- _Evidence of mother tongue interference_

The analyses of L1 influence in the students' writing were based on the major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure. Vietnamese has been typologically described as a topic-prominent language by such authors as Thompson (1987), Duffield (2007), Hao (1991), Giap (2000), and Con (2008). The view is strongly founded on empirical data analysis by Hao (1991) and Con (2008). Hao (1991)'s data analysis revealed that up to 70% of Vietnamese sentences bear the topic-prominent type and only 30% of them are of subject-prominent type. The percentage of topic-prominent type sentences in Vietnamese is even higher in Con (2008), fluctuating between 75% and 86%. Following are some examples taken from the learners' essays in the writing tests in which there were traces of their L1 topic-prominent feature:

1. First of all, <u>computer technology our country is not ready for.</u> (…) <u>Money the thing it needs we don't have, while low-quality workers the thing it hates we have many</u>. (Student LDH, Group 1, while-teaching phase writing task)
2. <u>Some of them we can name</u>: artificial intelligence, virtual reality and always-on connections. (Student LDH, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing task)
3. <u>Not only robot, we can find the application of automated technology in some other devices such as rockets or airplane without pilot</u>. (Student HTN, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing task)

- *Lack of planning for writing*

The qualitative investigation into the learners' practices of planning for writing was based on their responses to a question in the pre-teaching phase interviews.

- *Paying too much attention to the local constructions and neglecting the global aspects of the text.*

The qualitative analyses of the learners' tendencies regarding their paying attention to the global aspects of their essays are based on the learners' responses to the corresponding questions in the pre-teaching phase interviews, and two while teaching phase post-task answer sheets.

4. L2 Learners' Writing Problems and Their Writing Skills Development in Terms of the Factors Relating to Their Meta-Knowledge of English Information Structure

The problems investigated involve the learners' cognitive and meta-cognitive writing strategies and processes in carrying out a writing task taking into consideration the information structure of the English language.

4.1. Lack of Coherence in Introducing and Developing Ideas

Coherence in writing can be defined from different perspectives (Lee, 2002). The concept of coherence in this study is viewed from information structure perspective in which a piece of writing is considered to be coherent if its information structure guides the reader in understanding and interpreting the text and contributes to the topical development of the text (Firbas, 1986; Lautamatti, 1987; Connor & Farmer, 1990). In other words, effectiveness in communicating with the reader is one important attribute of a good piece of writing. This effectiveness can be ascribed to the cohesion, logic, clear structure, proper organization along with other features of an effective writing such as the appropriate use of a wide range of vocabulary, and the conformation to the conventions of a genre (Jacobs et al., 1981; Hall, 1988).

As a consequence, the process of writing requires different kinds of knowledge shared between the writer and the audience including personal knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, group knowledge, institutional, organizational knowledge, national knowledge, cultural knowledge, and this process is context-dependent (van Dijk, 2005). Writers' underestimating or overestimating their reader's knowledge might cause confusion in the reader's interpretation of the written text. In a writer-responsible language like English, "the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the writer" (Hinds, 1987, p. 141), whereas in reader-responsible language like Chinese and Vietnamese, the writer often does not care enough about the audience's knowledge when elaborating and developing ideas. In terms of information structure, this tendency is revealed through the writer's unclearly stating or totally omitting the thesis statement and/or the topic sentence, indirectly introducing the main topic, concluding without explicitly reinstating the thesis in the introductory paragraph, not contextualizing the

information being presented, elaborating the themes introduced with information considered obvious by the readers in the context (Silva, 1993), diverting from the main idea, inadequately using transitional signals and inappropriately distributing given and new information, some of which fell within the data analysis of this study. In the analytical system of this study with a view to the information structure of a produced text, a piece of the learners' writing was considered to lack coherence in introducing and developing ideas if it showed evidence of either or both of the following features: 1) Unclearly stating or totally omitting the thesis statement; 2) Being indirect in introducing the main topic.

The other indications of incoherence in writing in relation to information structure as mentioned above were not intended to fall within the scope of the data analysis of the study. The analysis of each of the above two problems in general included the quantitative findings showing the evolution of each problem over the three phases, the qualitative interpretations of why it arose and a comparison between the two groups.

Unclearly stating or totally omitting the thesis statement

Thesis statements play an important role in orienting the reader toward the main idea of an essay. A thesis statement "tells the main idea of the whole essay" (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, p. 58). Therefore, a good thesis statement is a strong indicator of a good essay (Flower, Aaron, & Okoomian, 2007; Wirantaka, 2016). Many L2 students encounter difficulties in writing thesis statements (Ahmed, 2010; Cekiso, Tshotsho, & Somniso, 2016). Those difficulties encountered by the learners in this study can be partially revealed in their tendency towards unclearly stating or totally omitting the thesis statement of the essay. The analyses of this tendency were based on the learners' responses to the corresponding questions in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and the interviews, their writing in the pre- and post-teaching and one while teaching phase writing task.

A rather high percentage of Group 1 learners (77.2%; 17/22 students) reported always or usually producing thesis statements in an essay. In the interviews, the most popular reason given (by 14 of the students) involved their taking formal instructions or informal advice from their high school or university English teachers. One of them reported taking the advice from secondary or high school textbooks. Two mentioned their being instructed by their Vietnamese literature teachers and transferred the strategy into English writing. 18.1% (4/22) reported never or rarely exercising the practice. They were among those whose English studying time was the shortest in the group, between 2 or 5 years (while most of the others had been studying English for 7 to 13 years). The reasons given in the interviews involved their having not written essays in the English language before (they had only practiced writing paragraphs), or their not having knowledge of a clear distinction between a topic sentence and a thesis statement. The one student reporting sometimes exercising the strategy ascribed to the time limit or the cognitive difficulty in producing a thesis statement.

However, what the learners in this group reported about their tendency in producing thesis statements was not quite in accordance with what was reflected in their pre- and while teaching phase writing tasks. In the questionnaire, only 18.1% (4/22 students) in the group said that they never, or rarely produced thesis statements, whereas the percentage of students who produced unclear thesis statements was much higher as identified both in their pre- and while teaching phase writing (54.5%, 12/22 students, and 50%, 11/22 students respectively). The findings suggest that most learners in the group were aware of the importance of producing thesis statements, but they failed to make them adequately clear. The percentages went down significantly in the post-teaching phase writing task (22.7%; 5/22 students).

50% (13/26 students) in Group 2 reported always or usually producing thesis statements in their essays. The reasons given in the interviews were varied. 7 of them reported getting instruction from textbooks, or from secondary/high school English teachers, 2 ascribed the exercise of the strategy to the advice from their Vietnamese literature teachers. 4 of them reported taking advice from their university English teachers. The 5 students (19.2%) whose practice was reported as unstable explained that they did not always produce thesis statements because sometimes they could not really distinguish topic sentences from thesis statements, or because sometimes they could not think of anything specific to write about the thesis. The 8 students (30.7%) who reported rarely or never using the strategy said they had never or hardly written essays before, or their practicing writing essays was not long enough for them to be competent at producing thesis statements. In the pre and while teaching phase, the percentage of students in this group whose essays did not show clear thesis statements was 30.7% (8/26 students) and 26.9% (7/26 students). As in the first group, there was a considerable improvement in the post-teaching phase writing task with only 4 out of 26 (15.3%) still not practicing this strategy. On the whole, whereas the learners in Group 1 who were assumed to have higher level of proficiency than those in Group 2, fewer students in Group 1 produced clearly stated thesis statements in all the three phases, although more of them thought they did (as reported in the questionnaire).

In summary, the findings above suggested the following. First, producing thesis statements clearly was a big problem for the learners in the study in the pre- and while teaching phase. Contrary to my anticipation, not many students reported bringing this poor strategy from L1. Second, many of them were not aware of their not practicing the strategies. Third, there was no correspondence between the learners' level of proficiency and their problems with this issue. However, there was a correspondence between the learners' problems with producing thesis statements and their length of English studying time. The learners who encountered the problem were among those whose English studying time was the shortest in the 2 groups, between 2 or 5 years (while most of the others had been studying English for 7 to 13 years). This was related to the opportunities they had for practicing writing in class as well as at home. The substantial decrease in the percentage of learners having problems in the post-teaching phase suggested that meta-knowledge and teachers' instruction may affect their awareness of the problem, especially in pointing out the importance of a clearly stated thesis statement.

Figure 1

Learners' Tendency Towards Unclearly Stating or Totally Omitting the Thesis Statement in the Three Phases
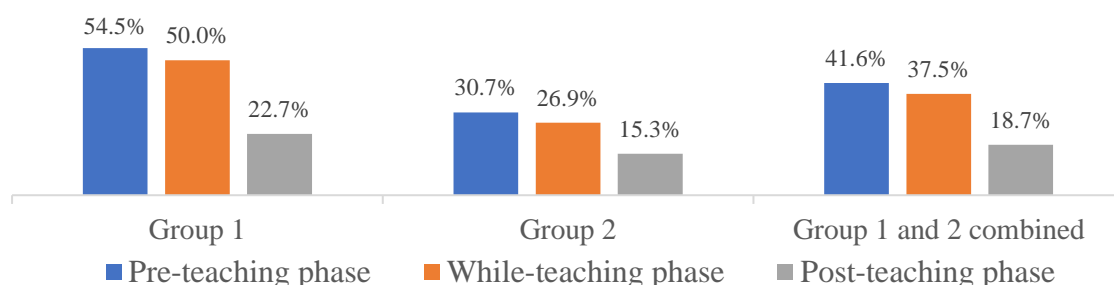
Being indirect in introducing the main topic

English academic writers tend to be direct in expressing ideas whereas writers of some Asian languages like Japanese, Chinese, and Thai tend to be more indirect in their writing style

(Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1987, 1996; Hinds, 1990; and Clyne, 1994). The difference might be due to the fact that Asian writers are not so writer-responsible as native English writers (Hinds, 1987). Kaplan (1966)'s analysis of the organization of paragraphs in ESL student essays showed that 'essays written in Oriental languages use an indirect approach and come to the point only at the end' (cited in Connor, 1996, p. 15). Indirectness in the writing style of English learners from these language backgrounds was shown across their whole essay including introducing and developing the main topic, and in the conclusion. Hinds (1990, p. 98), mentioned the 'delayed introduction of purpose' in many Asian L2 learners' introduction paragraphs. Cam (1991, p. 43) referred to a popular discourse strategy of most Vietnamese speakers called 'rào trước, đón sau', an approximate equivalent of the English 'beat about the bush'. Giap (2000) claimed that in the Vietnamese language sometimes people do not mean what they say and the reason is they would like to guarantee the following: politeness, humbleness, modesty, tolerance, courtesy, and sympathy. The indirectness may result from "a broad statement about a general state of affairs" (Atari, 1983, cited in Silva, 1993, p. 666).

The problem discussed above is closely related to L2 learners' tendency towards indirectness in introducing the main topic of an essay. The analyses of this writing feature were based on the learners' responses to the concerning question in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and the interviews and on their writing in all the three phases.

In the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, 36.3% (8/22 students) in Group 1 and 26.9% (7/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 31.2% (15/48 students) reported always or usually delaying the introduction of the main topic. 20.8% (10/48 students) revealed the following reasons for the strategy in the interviews: the abruptness of providing the topic directly, the potential to attract or to surprise the readers, and the difficulty in introducing the topic directly. 10.4% (5/48) traced the strategy down to their L1 writing. 50% in Group 1 (11/22 students) and 53.8% (14/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 52% (25/48 students) reported in the questionnaire that their practice for this strategy was unstable. In the interviews, 22 of them gave the following reasons for their tendency towards delaying the topic: 1) their awareness of/belief in the necessity of background information for the main topic (they thought that the topic needed some background information so that the introduction would not be so abrupt to the reader, or in other words, when one single sentence was not enough to talk about the topic); 2) their inability to/difficulty in introducing the topic directly (they could not think of a decent way to introduce the topic directly or it would be easier for them to say something around the topic before actually introducing it); 3) the required length of the essay (they practised the strategy in long essays when more details for the topic were necessary before introducing it); 4) their belief in the beneficial impression of a long introduction (a long introduction would give good impression of their writing). The reasons for those 22 students' tendency towards not delaying the topic involved 1) the genre of the essays (when they were required to write scientific essays), 2) the required length of the essays (when they were required to write short essays); 3) the clarity of the essays in their mind (when the topic was clear in their mind and they could easily express the topic verbally). 6.2% (3/48 of the students) traced the strategy down to their L1 writing. However, the percentages of students whose essays were considered as showing obvious indications of the main topic being delayed was much higher in the pre- and even the post-teaching phase writing tests, a total of 64.5% (31/48) and 41.6% (20/48), respectively. What came as a surprise to me was the quite low percentages of students delaying the topic in the while-teaching phase with just 9% (2 students) in Group 1 and 7.6% (2 students) in Group 2, a total of 8.3% (4/48).

There were three issues worth noticing regarding this writing strategy. First, a

remarkably low percentage of the students in both groups delayed the topic in the while teaching phase. It was assumed that the reason lay in the immediate impact of the cognitive meta-linguistic instruction on the learners' awareness of the problem. This may explain why the percentage went up again in the post-teaching phase, presumably because the learners returned to their long-established practice. Second, Group 2 learners made more progress as seen in the post-teaching phase task. Third, no strong claim could be made about the correspondence between L1 and L2 writing in this issue with only 16.6% (8/48 students) reported having the practice in their L1 writing.

Figure 2

Learners' Tendencies Towards Delaying the Topic in the Three Phases
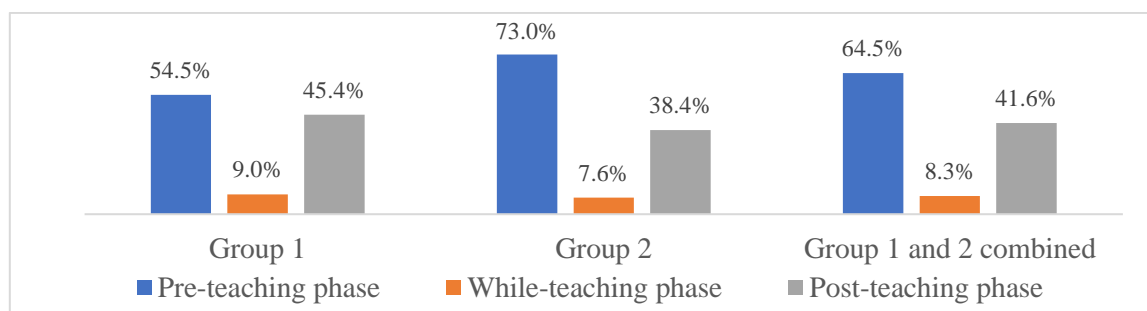
4.2. Lack of Planning for Writing

Planning contributes to the quality of L2 writing (Kellogg, 1988; Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Ong & Zhang, 2010, 2013; Johnson, Mercado, & Acevedo, 2012; Weigle, 2014; Oh, Lee, & Moon, 2015; Munoz-Luna, 2015) as this strategy guarantees the coherence of the macro structure of the writing viewed from information structure perspective. Strategically planning for writing is considered as a trait of a skilled (L1 and L2) writer (Raimes, 1985; Engler et al., 1991; Holiday et al., 1994). Unskilled (L1 and L2) writers, on the contrary, do not spend as much time planning (Pianko, 1979; Silva, 1993), and their plans do not allow for such flexibility as do the plans of skilled writers (Rose, 1980).

22.7% (5/22) of Group 1 and 42.3% (11/26) of Group 2, a total of 33.3% (16/48) of the students reported always or usually practicing the strategy. The reasons given in the interviews involved 1) their receiving instructions from secondary or high school textbooks; 2) advice to use the strategy by their university English teachers; 3) L1 transfer of the strategy; 4) the overall cost-effectiveness of using the strategy; 5) the importance and necessity of the strategy in guiding them throughout the essay writing (redirecting them to/ reminding them of the major issues of the essay, developing the essay without diverting from the main topics, supporting them in getting more specific ideas for the main topic/assisting them in speeding up the process of writing/facilitating them in expressing their ideas); 6) the usefulness of the strategy in guaranteeing the clarity, logic and reader-friendliness of the essay (the essay would be a mess-up written without an outline/the reader can follow their well-planned essays more easily).

Contrary to my anticipation, more students in Group 2 (42.3%, 11/26 students) than in Group 1 (22.7%, 5/22 students) reported always or usually making essay outlines, and more of Group 1 students (40.9%; 9/22 students) said they never or rarely exercised the practice whereas that percentage in Group 2 was 23% (6/26 students). My own explanation for the bigger number of the learners in Group 1 who skipped over the practice was that these learners were more confident of their writing ability and thought they could do the writing well without an outline.

40.9% (9/22 students) in Group 1 and 38.4% (10/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 39.5% (19/48 students) reported sometimes exercising the practice. The reasons given in the interviews for their tendency towards not making outlines involved 1) the simplicity of the requirements of the essay or the familiarity of the essay topics resulting in the unnecessity of outline making (they were required to write a short essay or an essay with a familiar topic/the essay topic was simple with few problems to discuss therefore it was not necessary to make an outline for the essay); 2) the difficulty in realizing the macro-structure and/or the relevant components of the essay (they could not see the overall structure of the essay; they had no clear ideas about the essay); 3) their inadequate practicing of essay writing (they did not often practice writing). The reasons for their tendency towards making essay outlines involved: 1) the required length of the essay (when required to write long essays, they need an outline to guide them throughout the writing so that they would not get lost); 2) the adequacy of time allotment (allowing them sufficient time to make an outline); 3) the complexity of the issues under discussion (there were a lot of problems to mention/discuss); 4) the unfamiliarity/difficulty/complexity of the essay topic; 5) the scaffolding value of the outline (to write more fluently; to avoid making errors and mistakes); 6) formal instruction (it was a strategy they were instructed to use since they studied English at university).

36.3% (8/22) of Group 1 students and 19.2% (5/26) of Group 2 students, a total of 27% (13/48 students), reported never or rarely making outlines for essay writing. The reasons given in the interviews included 1) their negligence of the importance of the practice or their indolence (they were so lazy that they did not attempt to make outlines for the writing); 2) time constraints of test/task completion condition (they often only did the writing in classroom tests or tasks in which the time allotted was limited therefore they would think and write at the same time or visualize the outlines in their minds before writing); 3) L1 practice transference (8 of them said they did not use that strategy in L1 writing). The data from the while teaching phase to some extent reflected the questionnaire data with 31.8% (7/22) of the students in Group 1 and 7.6% (2/26 students), a total of 18.7% (9/48 students) in Group 2 not making essay outlines.

The findings above suggested the following. First, infrequency (never, rarely, or sometimes) in making outlines for essay writing was the tendency for a high percentage of the students in the pre-teaching phase (about two-thirds of them reported not having the practice). Second, there was evidence for the impact of the formal instruction on the learners' practicing the strategy in the while teaching phase (when the percentage went down sharply with only 18.7% of the students not exercising the practice). Third, it was not necessarily the case that students of higher level of proficiency would make outlines for essays. The evidence was that more students in Group 2 practiced the strategy in both pre- and while teaching phase. Finally, with only 8/48 students (16.6%) reported bringing poor strategy from L1 writing, no strong conclusion could be made about L1 strategy transfer in this writing issue among the learners.

Figure 3

Learners' Tendency Toward Not Making Essay Outline in the While-Teaching Phase
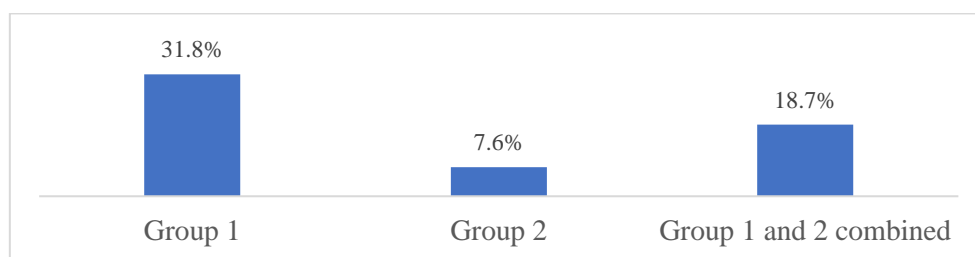
4.3. Paying too Much Attention to the Local Constructions and Neglecting the Global Aspects of the Text

The global aspects of a text cover a wide range of intra-textual features such as the organization, style, flow and presentation of the text as introduced in Swales and Feak (1994) and are constrained by such extra-textual features as the expectations of the audience, the purpose and the social functions of the writing. Because a written text is a form of social interaction (Widdowson, 1980, 2005), writers' awareness of these aspects may affect the organization and distribution of information of the text both at sentential and discourse level. This awareness might give the writer clues about the appropriateness of vocabulary use, speech acts, mood, and modalities (Paltridge, 2001), and about the features that should be avoided in a particular genre of writing such as academic writing, choice of a textual pattern (problem-solution; hypothetical-real; general-particular, etc.,) as categorized in Hoey (1983, 1991, 1994, 2001), and how a theme should be developed.

Setting goal for the writing, being aware of the audience, convincing readers, having the communicative purposes and the social functions of the writing in mind while writing play a crucial role in written communication and contribute to the traits of a good writer (Raimes, 1985; Engler et al., 1991; Holiday et al., 1994; Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2005). Inexperienced and unskilled writers, on the contrary, do not spend an adequate amount of time considering the reader and the clear message they aim to convey to the readers (Flower, 1979). In the meantime, they tend to focus on local aspects of the text (Heuring, 1984) and did less goal setting (Silva, 1993). If the writer does not spend enough time contemplating the communicative purposes and social functions of the writing, this might produce a socially aimless piece of writing on the one hand, and affect the structure of the text concerning its thesis statement production and logical development on the other. Awareness of the audience when composing texts is treated as of crucial importance in academic writing (Holiday et al., 1994; Swales & Feak, 1994; Weigle, 2014). Johns (1993, p. 85) argued, ESL students 'need to develop their understandings of the interaction between their purposes, the interests and values of real audiences, and the genres that are appropriate for specific rhetorical contexts.'

31.8% (7/22) of the students in Group 1 and 23.0% (6/26) of the students in Group 2, a total of 27.0% (13/48) of the students reported always and usually practicing this strategy in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. The most frequently reported reasons elicited in the interviews involved their following advice offered by their school or university teachers and textbooks. 36.3% (8/22) of the students in Group 1 and 53.8% (14/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 45.8% (22/48) reported that they sometimes took this aspect of the writing into consideration. In the interviews, those students said that whether they showed their concern about the issue while writing depended on the text type and the reason for the writing. Specifically, they would not pay attention to the purpose or function of a classroom or exam writing task. They might think about the communicative purpose if it was a personal statement letter to a university, or when writing blogs or when writing about a prominent social issue, when they knew they had some real readers.

31.8% (7/22) of the students in the first group and 23.0% (6/26 students) in the second, a total of 27.0% (13/48) said that they never or rarely followed the communicative purpose and social function of the essay they were writing. The reasons given by those 13 students summarized from the interviews involved 1) the difficulty in realizing, expressing, and following the purpose and function of the essay; 2) their ignorance/negligence of the issue; 3) their not having a real purpose for the writing (they did the writing simply because they were

required to, in class or in the examinations and what they aimed at was to get a good score from the teacher/examiner; the only real reader of their writing was their teacher/examiner and considering the purpose and function of the essay was far-fetched and unnecessary); 4) they did not consider this aspect in their L1 writing. In total, 72.9% (35/48) of the students said they did not frequently (never, rarely or sometimes) think about the issue. The data from the while teaching phase post-task answer sheets showed that the percentages went down in the classroom writing task down with 27.2% (6/22) in Group 1 and 30.7% (8/26) in Group 2, a total of 29.1% (14/48) admitted having not thought about the global aspects of the writing.

The findings suggested the following. First, a high percentage of the learners reported not frequently thinking about the communicative purposes and social functions of essays in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire (nearly three-quarters (73%) although the strategy was formally advised during their learning. Second, there was not necessarily any correspondence between the learners' level of proficiency and their awareness of the issue. Third, there was evidence for the impact of the formal instruction on the learners' practicing the strategy in the while teaching phase.

Figure 4

Learners' Tendencies Towards Not Thinking About the Communicative Purpose and Social Function of Essays in the While-Teaching Phase
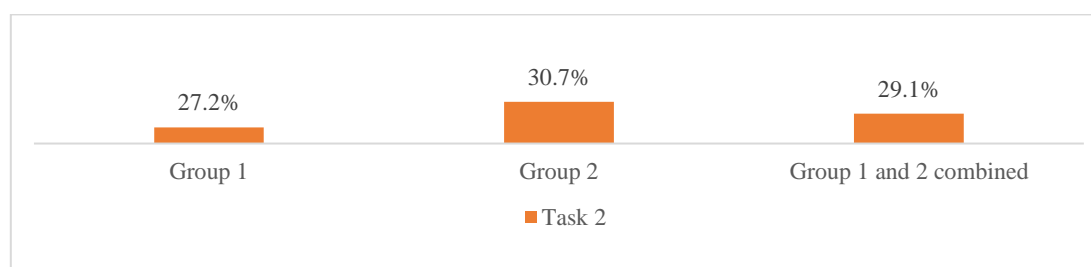
5. Conclusion

The learners in this study encountered writing problems in the features related to their meta-knowledge of information structure over all the three phases of the meta-linguistic approach to teaching writing to L2 learners. The percentages of the learners encountering the problems decreased over time and the extent to which each problem was solved towards the end of the post-teaching phase varied according to each specific problem. Not stating/unclearly stating the thesis was less problematic with 41.6% (20/48) of the students practiced the strategy in the pre-teaching phase and the percentage went down to 18.7% (9/48 students) in the post-teaching phase. More difficult to overcome was the learners' tendencies towards delaying the topic in the introduction (being indirect in introducing the topic) with 41.6% (20/48) of the students still doing this in the post-teaching phase writing task. This suggests on the one hand that there was correspondence between the meta-linguistic approach and the learners' overcoming the problems and the development of their writing skills over time, however, that a percentage of the learners still encountered the problems in the while teaching or post-teaching phase tasks suggested on the other that these problems are quite challenging for L2 writers. This also suggests that formal education (school teachers/textbooks) had an impact on forming the strategies.

L1 transfer was reported in all of the writing problems; the transfer was nevertheless not predominant among the learners judging from the low percentage of those who reported

bringing poor L1 strategies to L2 writing in the interviews. There was extremely low evidence of topic-prominent sentences with only 8% (4/48) of the students using the topic-prominent feature in their writing and only in the while- and post-teaching phase. This was surprising because in my teaching experience, many Vietnamese learners tend to make English sentences bearing topic-prominent feature in their speaking presumably because of their L1 transfer. However, as the study showed, this tendency was not prominent in their L2 writing. The extent to which the transfer showed off in other problems varied according to each specific feature. Most obviously affected by their L1 information structure was their tendency towards indirectness in introducing the main idea of an essay.

Overall, there were no big differences between the two groups in their encountering the problems investigated and their skill development. No strong evidence was found to suggest that there was correspondence between the learners' levels of proficiency, the problems they encountered and their skill development. In some cases, more Group 1 students (the more proficient group) experienced problems than students in Group 2 particularly in the problems related to such writing features as unclearly stating thesis statements. As a consequence, their writing would tend to bear some features considered to be inappropriate in academic writing seen from information structure perspective. The explanations lie in the fact that learners of higher level of proficiency whose grammatical competence is better tend to be tempted to show their own idiosyncrasies in writing resulting in their essays not pertaining to the conventions of academic writing in terms of information structure. However, in general, no generalized conclusions could be made about the correspondence between learners' levels of proficiency and their encountering the problems.

Most of the writing problems encountered were related to one or more of the three causes: the learners' lack of a clear meta-knowledge of English information structure, the interference of L1 information structure features, or the transfer from L1 strategies. For example, their tendency towards delaying the topic was due to both their not fully realizing this requirement in English academic writing and their tendency in their L1 writing. The following two writing problems showed obvious evidence of L1 strategy transfer: unclearly stating thesis statements and indirectness in introducing the main topic. All the above writing features can be seen as related to the learners' L1 indirectness feature, which is related to their reader-responsible tendency.

References

Ahmed, A. (2010). Students' problems with cohesion and coherence in EFL essay writing in Egypt: Different perspectives. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, *1*(4), 211-221.

Anderson, J. R. (1995). *Cognitive Psychology and Its Implications*. W.H. Freeman and Company.

Atari, O. (1983). A contrastive analysis of Arab and American university students' strategies in accomplishing written English discourse functions. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *44*(11), 3307A.

Atkinson, D. (2004). Contrasting rhetorics/contrasting cultures: Why contrastive rhetoric needs a better conceptualization of culture. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *3*, 277-289.

Bachman, L., and Palmer, A. (1996). *Language Testing in Practice*. OUP.

Barr, A. (1979). Meta-knowledge and cognition. *IJCAI'79: Proceedings of the 6th international joint conference on Artificial intelligence, 1*, 31-33.

Berman, R. (1994). Learner's transfer of writing skills between languages. *TESL Canada Journal*, *12*(1), 29-46.

Berry, R. (1997). Teachers' awareness of learners' knowledge: The case of meta-linguistic terminology. *Language Awareness*, *6*, 136-146.

Berry, R. (2005). Making the most of metalanguage. *Language Awareness, 14,* 3-20.

Bhowmik, S. K. (2009). L2 Writing Pedagogy in EFL Contexts: An Exploration of Salient Practices in Teaching and Learning. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, *6*(3), 351-373.

Borg, S. (1999). The use of grammatical terminology in the second language classroom: A qualitative study of teachers' practices and cognitions. *Applied Linguistics, 20*, 95-126.

Cam, N. (1991). Barriers to Communication between Vietnamese and Non-Vietnamese. *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, *1*(4), 40-45.

Casanave, C. P. (2004). *Controversies in second language writing: Dilemmas and decisions in research and instruction*. University of Michigan Press.

Carter, R. (2003). Language awareness. *ELT Journal*, *57*, 64-65.

Cekiso, M., Tshotsho, B., & Somniso, M. (2016). Exploring First-Year University Students' Challenges with Coherence Writing Strategies in Essay Writing in a South African University. *Int J Edu Sci*, *12*(3), 241-246.

Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M. & Snow, M. A. (2014). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (Eds.). Cengage Learning.

Clyne, M. (1987). Cultural Differences in the Organization of Academic Texts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *11*, 211-247.

Clyne, M. (1994). *Inter-cultural Communication at Work*. CUP.

Con, N. H. (2008). Syntactic Structure of Vietnamese Sentence: Subject-Predicate or Theme-Rheme? *Scientific Conference of Vietnamese Studies*.

Connor, U. (1987). Argumentative patterns in student essays: Cross-cultural differences. In U. Connor & R. Kaplan (Ed.) *Writing across languages: Analysis of L2 Text* (pp. 57-71). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-cultural Aspects of Second Language Writing*. CUP.

Connor, U. (2004). Intercultural rhetoric research: Beyond texts. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *3*, 291-304.

Connor, U., & Farmer, M. (1990). The teaching of topical structure analysis as a revision strategy for ESL writers. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second Language Writing: Research insights for the classroom* (pp. 126-139). Cambridge University Press.

Connor, U., & Johns, A. M. (1990). *Coherence in Writing - Research and Pedagogical Perspectives* (Eds.). TESOL.

Connor, U., & Kaplan, R. B. (1987). *Writing across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text* (Eds.). Addison-Wesley.

Coulthard, M. (1994). *Advances in Written Text Analysis* (Eds.). Routledge.

Cumming, A. (1998). Theoretical perspectives on writing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *18*, 61-78.

Cumming, A. (2001). Learning to Write in a Second Language: Two Decades of Research. *International Journal of English Studies*, *1*(2), 1-23.

De Larios, J.R. Murphy, L. & Marín, J. (2002). A critical examination of L2 writing process research. In G. Rijlaarsdam, S. Ransdell & M. L. Barbier (Eds.), *Studies in Writing, Volume 11: New Directions for Research in L2 Writing* (pp. 11-47). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Duffield, N. (2007). *Vietnamese Online Grammar*. Retrieved on 22 August,2007 from http://vietnamese-grammar.group.shef.ac.uk/grammar

Ellis, R., & Yuan, F. (2004). The effects of planning on fluency, complexity and accuracy in second language narrative writing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *26*, 59-84.

Engler, C. S., Raphael, T. E., Anderson, L. M., Anthony, H. M., & Stevens, D. D. (1991). Making strategies and self-talk visible: Writing instruction in regular and special education classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, *28*, 337-372.

Firbas, J. (1986). On the dynamics of written communication in the light of the theory of functional sentence perspective. In C. Cooper & S. Greenbaum (Eds), *Studying writing: Linguistic approaches* (pp. 40-71). Beverly Hills, Sage.

Flower, L. S. (1979). Writer-based prose: a cognitive basis for problems in writing. *College English, 41*(1), 19-37.

Fowler, H. R., Aaron, J. E., & Okoomian, J. (2007). *The Little, Brown Handbook* (10th Ed.) NewYork: Pearson/Longman.

Gabrielatos, C. (2002). EFL writing: Product and process. *ERIC*, ED476839.

Giap, N. T. (2000). *Vietnamese Pragmatics*. Hanoi National University Publisher.

Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. B. (1996). *Theory and Practice of Writing*. Longman.

Grabe, W. (2002). Narrative and Expository Macro-genres. In A. M. Johns (Eds.), *Genre in the Classroom: Multiple Perspectives* (pp. 249-268). LEA.

Hall, D. (1988). *Writing Well*. Little, Brown and Company.

Hao, C. X. (1991). *Vietnamese: An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Social Sciences Publisher.

Heap, J. L. (1989). Writing as Social Action. *Theory into Practice*, *28*(2), 148-153.

Hinds, J. (1987). Reader vs. Writer Responsibility: A New Topology. In U. Connor, & R. B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Writing across Languages: Analysis of L2* Text (pp. 141-152). Addison-Wesley.

Hinds, J. (1990). Inductive, Deductive, Quasi-inductive: Expository Writing in Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Thai. In U. Connor & A. M. Johns (Eds.), *Coherence in Writing - Research and Pedagogical Perspectives* (pp. 97-109). TESOL.

Hinkel, E. (1997). Indirectness in L1 and L2 academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *27*, 361-386.

Hinkel, E. (2002). *Second Language Writers' Text: Linguistic and Rhetorical Features*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hinkel, E. (2004). *Teaching academic ESL writing: Practical techniques in vocabulary and grammar*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hirose, K., & Sasaki, M. (1994). Explanatory variables for Japanese students' expository writing in English: An exploratory study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *3*(3), 203-229.

Hoey, M. (1983). *On the Surface of Discourse*. George Allen and Unwin.

Hoey, M. (1991). *Patterns of Lexis in Text*. OUP.

Hoey, M. (1994). Signalling in Discourse: A Functional Analysis of a Common Discourse Pattern in Written and Spoken English. In M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Advances in Written Text Analysis* (pp. 26-45). Routledge.

Hoey, M. (2001). *Textual interaction*. Routledge.

Hyland, K. (1990). A genre description of the argumentative essay. *RELC Journal*, *21*, 66-78.

Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press.

Hyland, K. (2005). *Meta-discourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.

Heuring, D. L. (1984). The revision strategies of skilled and unskilled ESL writers: five case studies. *Paper presented at the 18th Annual TESOL Convention*. Houston.

Holiday, W. G., Yore, L. D., & Alvermann, D. E. (1994). The reading-science learning-writing connection: Breakthroughs, Barriers, and Promises. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, *31*(9), 877-893.

Hu, G. W. (2010). Revisiting the role of meta-language in L2 teaching and learning. *EA Journal*, *26*(1), 61-70.

Jacobs, H. L., Zinkgraf, S. A., Wormuth, D. R., Hartfiel, V. F., & Hughey, J. B. (1981). *Testing ESL composition: A practical approach*. Newbury House.

Johns, A. M. (1993). Written Argumentation for Real Audiences: Suggestions for Teacher Research and Classroom Practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, *27*(1), 75-90.

Johns, A.M. (2002). *Genre in the Classroom: Multiple Perspectives* (Eds.). LEA.

Johnson, K. (1996). *Language Teaching and Skill Learning*. Blackwell.

Johnson, M. D., Mercado, L., & Acevedo, A. (2012). The effect of planning sub-processes on L2 writing fluency, grammatical complexity, and lexical complexity. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *21*, 264-282.

Johnson, K., & Johnson, H. (1998). *Encylopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics: A Handbook for Language Teaching*. Blackwell.

Kamimura, T., & Oi, K. (1998). Argumentative strategies in American and Japanese English. *World Englishes*, *17*(3), 307–323.

Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education. *Language Learning*, *16*, 1-20.

Kaplan, R. B. (1987). Cultural Thought Patterns Revisited. In U. Connor & R. B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Texts.* Addison-Wesley.

Kellogg, R. T. (1988). Attentional overload and writing performance: Effects of rough draft and outline strategies. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, & Cognition*, *14*, 355-365.

Kroll, B. (1990). *Second Language Writing: Research insights for the classroom* (Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Lautamatti, L. (1987). Observations on the development of the topic of simplified discourse. In U. Connor & R. B. Kaplan (Eds), *Writing across languages: Analysis of L2 texts* (pp. 87-114). Reading, Addison-Wesley.

Lee, I. (2002). Teaching coherence to ESL students: A classroom inquiry. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *11*, 135-159.

Matsumoto, K. (1995). Research paper writing strategies of professional Japanese EFL Writers. *TESL Canada Journal, 13*(1), 17-27.

Mauranen, A. (1993). Contrastive ESP Rhetoric: Metacontext in Finnish-English Economics Texts. *English for Specific Purposes*, *12*, 3-22.

Munoz-Luna, R. (2015). Main Ingredients for Success in L2 Academic Writing: Outlining, Drafting and Proofreading. *PLoS ONE, 10*(6), e0128309. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0128309.

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research Methods in Language Learning*. CUP.

Oh, E., Lee, C. M., & Moon, Y. I. (2015). The Contributions of Planning, L2 Linguistic Knowledge and Individual Differences to L2 Writing. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, *12*(2), 45-85.

Ong, J., & Zhang, L. J. (2010). Effects of task complexity on fluency and lexical complexity in EFL students' argumentative writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *19*, 218-233.

Ong, J., & Zhang, L. J. (2013). Effects of manipulation of cognitive processes on English as a foreign-language (EFL) writers' text quality. *TESOL Quarterly*, *27*, 375-398.

Paltridge, B. (2001). *Genre and the Language Learning Classroom*. The University of Michigan Press.

Pianko, S. (1979). A description of the composing processes of college freshman writers. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *13*(1), 5-22.

Pitrat, J. (1988). Declarative knowledge to use declarative knowledge. *Mathematical and Computer Modelling, 1*, 408-412.

Quirk, R., et al. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman.

Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly*, *19*, 229-258.

Richards, J. C., Platt, J., and Platt, H. (1992). *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. Longman.

Rijlaarsdam, G., Ransdell, S., & Barbier, M.L. (Eds.) (2002). *Studies in Writing, Volume 11: New Directions for Research in L2 Writing*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Rose, M. (1980). Rigid rules, inflexible plans, and the stifling of language: a cognitive analysis of writer's block. *College Composition and Communication*, *31*(4), 389-401.

Sasaki, M., & Hirose, K. (1996). Explanatory variables for EFL students' expository writing. *Language Learning*, *46*(1), 137-174.

Schoonen, R., van Gelderen, A., de Glopper, K., Hulstijn, J., Simis, A., Snellings, P., & Stevenson, M. (2003). First language and second language writing: The role of linguistic knowledge, speed of processing, and metacognitive knowledge. *Language Learning*, *53*(1), 165-202.

Schoonen, R., van Gelderen, A., Stoel, R. D., Hulstijn, J., & de Glopper, K. (2011). Modeling the development of L1 and EFL writing proficiency of secondary school students. *Language Learning*, *61*(1), 31-79.

Silva, T. (1992). L1 vs L2 writing; ESL graduate students' perceptions. *TESL Canada Journal*, *10*(1), 27-47.

Silva, T. (1993). Toward and Understanding of the Distinct Nature of L2 Writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, *27*(4), 657-677.

Singer, H. (1984). Friendly Texts. In E. K. Dishner, T.W. Bean, J.E., Readance, and D.W. Moore (Eds.), *Content and Reading: Improving Classroom Instruction* (pp. 114-127). Kendall Hunt.

Söter, A. O. (1988). The second language learner and cultural transfer in narration. In A. Purves (Ed.), *Writing Across Languages and Cultures: Issues in Contrastive Rhetoric* (pp. 177-205). Sage.

Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 471-483). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Swales, J. M. (1990). Genre analysis. *English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.

Swales, J. M. (2004). *Research genres: Explorations and applications*. Cambridge University Press.

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (1994). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills-A Course for Non-native Speakers of English*. University of Michigan.

Thompson, L. C. (1987). *A Vietnamese Reference Grammar*. University of Hawaii Press.

Tuan, H. A. (2013 a). Fundamental Sentential Level Issues of English Information Structure. *Journal of Foreign Studies - VNU Journal of Science*, *29*(4), 45-62.

Tuan, H. A. (2013 b). Fundamental issues of English information structure at discourse level. *Journal of Foreign Studies - VNU Journal of Science*, *29*(1S), 102-121.

Tuan, H. A. (2014). A Cognitive Metalinguistic Approach to Teaching L2 Learners Reading and Writing Skills. *Journal of Foreign Studies-VNU Journal of Science*, *30*(2), 48-70.

van Dijk, T. A. (2005). Contextual Knowledge Management in Discourse Production: A CDA Perspective. In R., Wodak, & P. Chilton (Eds). *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, methodology and Interdisciplinarity*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Ventola, E. (1992). Writing Scientific English: Overcoming Cultural Problems. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *2*(2), 191-220.

Ventola, E., & Mauranen, A. (Eds.) (1996). *Academic Writing: Intercultural and Textual issues*. John Benjamins.

Victori, M. (1999). An analysis of writing knowledge in EFL composing: A case study of two effective and two less effective writers. *System*, *27*, 537-555.

Weigle, S. C. (2014). Considerations for Teaching Second Language Writing. In M. Celce-Murcia, D.M. Brinton, & M.A. Snow (Eds.) *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (pp.222-237). Cengage Learning.

Widdowson, H. G. (1980). Conceptual and Communicative Functions in Written Discourse, *Applied Linguistics*, *1*(3), 234-243.

Widdowson, H. (2005). *Text, Context, Pretext: Critical Issues in Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell.

Wirantaka, A. (2016). Paragraph Writing of Academic Texts in an EFL Context. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, *1*(2), 34-45.

Wodak, R., & Chilton, P. (2005). *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, methodology and Interdisciplinarity* (Eds). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Zemach, D. E. & Rumisek, L. A. (2003). *Academic Writing: form paragraph to essay*. Macmillan.