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# TRANSITIVITY AND MOOD RESOURCES REALISING EXPERIENTIAL AND INTERPERSONAL MEANINGS IN "A TALE OF TWO CITIES": A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** This paper examines in depth how transitivity and mood resources are employed to construct experiential and interpersonal meanings in a literary text – a topic that has received limited attention in English literature teaching, learning and research, particularly at tertiary EFL (English as a Foreign Language) departments or faculties. The data for analysis is "Chapter 1 – "The Period" of "Book the First" of the three-book novel "A Tale of Two Cities" by the eminent British novelist Charles Dickens. The theoretical framework adopted for analysis is SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics). The units of analysis are major clause simplexes. Findings of the study exhibit a number of noticeable transitivity and mood features employed in the text. In terms of transitivity resources, the writer represents experiential meanings in "The Period" by employing a very high frequency of material and relational processes, no behavioural process, all represented participants, a relatively small number of Circumstances, and a very high proportion of the past simple tense. As regards mood resources, the writer constructs interpersonal meanings in "The Period" by employing one hundred per cent of declarative mood, a predominant proportion of explicit Subjects, all non-interactive Subjects, and a predominant proportion of first participant Subjects. The study ends with a summary of the salient findings found in the text, a recommendation affirming the relevance of SFL as a theoretical framework for analysing and interpreting experiential and interpersonal meanings of texts in general and literary texts in particular for literature teaching, learning and research, and some suggestions for further study.

*Keywords:* transitivity, mood, experiential meaning, interpersonal meaning, "A Tale of Two Cities"

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# CÁC NGUỒN TÀI NGUYÊN CHUYỂN TÁC VÀ THỨC HIỆN THỰC HÓA Ý NGHĨA TRẢI NGHIỆM VÀ Ý NGHĨA LIÊN NHÂN TRONG "MỘT CÂU CHUYỆN VỀ HAI THÀNH PHỐ": PHÂN TÍCH THEO LÍ THUYẾT CHỨC NĂNG HỆ THỐNG

Hoàng Văn Vân

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài báo này nghiên cứu chuyên sâu về cách các nguồn lực chuyển tác và thức được sử dụng như thế nào để kiến tạo ý nghĩa trải nghiệm và ý nghĩa liên nhân trong một diễn ngôn văn học – một chủ đề thu hút sự chú ý hạn chế trong giảng dạy, học tập và nghiên cứu văn học tiếng Anh, đặc biệt là tại các bộ môn hay các khoa dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ trong các trường đại học. Dữ liệu dùng để phân tích là "Chương 1 – "Thời ấy" của "Tập thứ nhất" trong cuốn tiểu thuyết ba tập "Một câu chuyện về hai thành phố" của tiểu thuyết gia người Anh nổi tiếng Charles Dickens. Khung lí thuyết được áp dụng để phân tích là Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống. Đơn vị phân tích là các cú chính. Các kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy một số đặc điểm chuyển tác và thức đáng lưu ý được sử dụng trong ngôn bản. Về mặt các nguồn tài nguyên chuyển tác, nhà văn thể hiện ý nghĩa trải nghiệm trong "Thời ấy" bằng việc sử dụng một tần suất rất cao các quá trình vật chất và quá trình quan hệ, không sử dụng quá trình hành vi, tất cả các tham thể tái hiện, một số lượng tương đối nhỏ các Chu cảnh, và một tỉ lệ rất cao thì quá khứ đơn. Đối với các nguồn tài nguyên thức, nhà văn kiến tạo các ý nghĩa liên nhân trong "Thời ấy" bằng việc sử dụng một trăm phần trăm thức khẳng định, một tỉ lệ áp đảo các Chủ ngữ hiển ngôn, tất cả các Chủ ngữ không tương tác, và một tỉ lệ áp đảo các Chủ ngữ là tham thể thứ nhất. Nghiên cứu kết thúc bằng việc tóm lược lại các kết quả đã tìm thấy trong ngôn bản, khuyến nghị khẳng định sự phù hợp của Ngôn ngữ học chức năng hệ thống như một khung lí thuyết dùng để phân tích và diễn giải ý nghĩa trải nghiệm và ý nghĩa liên nhân của ngôn bản nói chung và ngôn bản văn học nói riêng để phục vụ cho giảng dạy, học tập và nghiên cứu văn học, và một số gợi ý cho nghiên cứu tiếp theo.

*Từ khoá:* chuyển tác, thức, nghĩa trải nghiệm, nghĩa liên nhân, "Một câu chuyện về hai thành phố"

## 1. Introduction

In this study, an attempt is made to look in detail at how transitivity and mood resources are employed to construct experiential and interpersonal meanings of a literary text – a topic which has received little attention in English literature teaching, learning and research, particularly at tertiary EFL (English as a Foreign Language) departments or faculties. The data for analysis is Chapter 1 – "The Period" in "Book the First" of the three-book novel "A Tale of Two Cities" by the eminent British novelist Charles Dickens. The reason for the choice of the data is that "A Tale of Two Cities" is one of Charles Dickens' best and most exciting and successful literary works, and the novel has been adapted for film, television, radio, and the stage in Britain, and it has been translated into several languages, including Vietnamese. The units of analysis are major clause simplexes. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics) as developed by Halliday (1978, 1985, 1994, 2012, and elsewhere), Matthiessen (1995), Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), and other systemicists. The study is organised around five sections. Section one introduces the topic of the study. Section two is concerned with literature review. Section three deals with research methodology. Section four presents in depth some of the prominent transitivity and mood features employed to realise experiential and interpersonal meanings in the text. Finally, Section five summarises the main points studied, recommends the relevance of SFL to the analysis of transitivity and mood resources to reveal experiential and interpersonal meanings of a literary text for teaching, learning and research purposes, and makes some suggestions for further research.

## 2. Literature Review

SFL is a multidimensional model of language, consisting of six dimensions: stratification, rank, metafunction, delicacy, and axis (see Halliday, 1961, 1976, 2017; Matthiessen, 2001; Hoang, 2021). Within the stratification dimension, SFL conceptualises language as consisting of four strata: context, semantics, lexicogrammar, and phonology/graphology. SFL claims that the relation between these strata is that of realisation, with the lower stratum realising the next higher one; thus, phonology realises lexicogrammar which realises semantics which realises context (Hasan & Perret, 1994; Matthiessen, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hoang, 2012, 2020, 2021). In this review, we will draw attention to only those features of the stratification dimension which appear directly relevant to our research purpose. Specifically, we will focus our review on three headings: (1) context, (2) the experiential metafunction and its realisation through the system of TRANSITIVITY, and (3) the interpersonal metafunction and its realisation through the systems of MOOD and MODALITY.

### *2.1. Context*

Context is the higher-order semiotic system above the linguistic system (Halliday, 1978; Hasan, 2011; Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam, 2010, p. 77). It is a theoretical construct consisting of three categories referred to respectively as **field of discourse**, **tenor of discourse**, and **mode of discourse** (Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens, 1964; Halliday, 1978; Gregory & Carroll, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Matthiessen, 1995; Hasan, 2011). Field of discourse refers to what is going on in the speech situation, to the nature of the social action that is taking place. Tenor of discourse refers to who is taking part, to the role relationships of those involved in the speech situation. Mode of discourse refers to what the language is playing in the speech situation, to the channel of communication (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?). It is concerned with textual features such as point of departure of the clause, rhetoric patterns in the clause complex, and cohesive and coherent features of discourse – with how clauses "hang together" to make discourse a unified whole (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1976, 1989; Martin & Rose, 2013). Field of discourse, tenor of discourse, and mode of discourse constitute what Halliday et al (1964), Halliday (1978), Gregory & Carroll (1978), and Halliday & Hasan (1989) refer to as "register", defined by Halliday (1978, p. 195) as "a set of meanings that is appropriate to a particular function of language, together with the words and structures which express these meanings".

Context plays a very important role in discourse analysis. SFL claims that given an adequate specification of the semiotic properties of the context in terms of field of discourse, tenor of discourse, and mode of discourse, one can predict not everything, but still a great deal about the language that will occur, with reasonable probability of being right (Halliday, 1974, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Hoang, 2012).

### *2.2. The Experiential Metafunction and Its Realisation Through the TRANSITIVITY System*

The experiential metafunction is the means of construing/representing reality in the linguistic system. It is a function of language that expresses the "experiential" meaning through the system of TRANSITIVITY which is concerned with different types of process, different types of participants involved in those types of process, and different types of circumstantial element incumbent on those types of process (Halliday 1985, pp. 101-102; 1994, pp. 106-107; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

#### 2.2.1. Process Types and Their Involved Participants

In its current formulation (Halliday, 1985, 1994 and elsewhere; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), SFG recognises six main types of process: material, behavioural mental, mental, verbal, relational, and existential.

***Material process*** is the process of doing: action and event such as *going, cutting, working, making*. Related to the process itself, there may be one, two or even three participants. When a process has one participant this role is referred to as **Actor** (one that does the deed) as *We* in *We* (Actor) *were going* (Process: material); when it has two participants, these roles are referred to respectively as **Actor** and **Goal** (one that is affected by the action) as *any acknowledgment* in *Nobody* (Actor) *had made* (Process: material), *any acknowledgment* (Goal); and when it has three participants, these roles are referred to respectively as **Actor**, **Goal** and **Receiver** (one that benefits from the process) as *to her* in *I* (Actor) *gave* (Process: material) *it* (Goal) *to her* (Receiver).

***Behavioural process*** is the process of physiological and psychological behaviour such as *breathing, crying, drinking*. Typical of this type of process is that there is usually one participant referred to as **Behaver** (one who behaves) as *The boy* in *The boy* (Behaver) *cried* (Process: behavioural). When a behavioural process has two participants, these roles are referred to respectively as **Behaver** and **Range** (one that specifies the scope of the behavioural process) or **Phenomenon** (one that is behaved) as *a bumper of the punch he had made* in *Sydney* (Behaver) *drank* (Process: behavioural) *a bumper of the punch he had made* (Phenomenon). Typical of behavioural processes is that the Behaver is always realised by a conscious being, not a lifeless thing; except for what is referred to in traditional stylistics as "personification". We usually hear *The boy cried* but not *The tree cried*, *The dog barked* but not *The door barked*, and so forth.

***Mental process*** is the process of sensing such as *thinking, hearing, loving, wanting*. It consists of four main subtypes: cognitive (*thinking, knowing, realising*), perceptive (*hearing, sensing, feeling*), affective or emotive (*loving, hating, adoring, pampering*), and desiderative (*wanting, desiring, hoping*). In a mental process there are usually two participants referred to respectively as **Senser** (one who senses, thinks, loves or wants) and **Phenomenon** (one that is sensed, thought of, loved, or wanted) as in *He* (Senser) *loved* (Process: mental) *his country* (Phenomenon), and *He* (Senser) *wanted* (Process: mental) *a handy fellow* (Phenomenon). As with the Behaver in a behavioural process, the Senser in a mental process is always realised by a conscious being. Except for purposes of "personification", we usually hear, *I have ever loved you truly* but not *The tree has ever loved you truly*, *We hate betrayal* but not *The rice field hates betrayal*, and so forth.

***Verbal process*** is the process of saying such as *saying, telling, speaking, talking*. This type of process also covers any kind of symbolic exchange such as *showing, indicating*. Unlike behavioural and mental processes, a verbal process does not always require a conscious participant. A verbal process can contain one participant referred to as **Sayer** (one that puts out a signal) as *He* in *He* (Sayer) *said* (Process: verbal); two participants referred two respectively, depending on each particular subtype of verbal process, as **Sayer** and **Target** (one that the verbalisation is directed to) as *her achievement* in *He* (Sayer) *praised* (Process: verbal) *her achievement* (Target), and **Sayer** and **Verbiage** (the name of the verbalization itself) as *two big beers* in *They* (Sayer) *ordered* (Process: verbal) *two big beers* (Verbiage); and even three participants referred to respectively as **Sayer**, **Target** and **Receiver** (one that benefits from the verbal process) as *to the tourists* in *The tour guide* (Sayer) *described* (Process: verbal) *the city* (Target) *to the tourists* (Receiver).

***Relational process*** is the processes of being, being at, and having. It comes under two modes of being: attributive and identifying; each of these modes comes under three types of relation: intensive, circumstantial and possessive.

As regards modes of being, when a relational process is in the attributive mode, it has one participant referred to as **Carrier** and the quality or the thing showing that the Carrier belongs to a class of things which is referred to as **Attribute** as *The earth* and *cold and wet* in *The earth* (Carrier) *was* (Process: relational) *cold and wet* (Attribute), and *The highwayman in the dark* and *a City tradesman in the light* in *The highwayman in the dark* (Carrier) *was* (Process: relational) *a City tradesman in the light* (Attribute). When a relational clause is in the identifying mode, it has two equating participants, one being identified – referred to as **Identified,** and the other identifying it – referred to as **Identifier** as *Our relations* and *business relations* in *Our relations* (Identified) *were* (Process: relational) *business relations* (Identifier). Halliday (1967a, 1967b, 1968, 1985, 1994) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) have introduced a more suitable transitivity pair of concepts which can be used as an alternative to the **Identified** + **Identifier** pair to account for the unchanged transitivity functions in identifying relational clauses when the order of the identified and identifier is changed: **Token** + **Value**. Halliday (1985: 115) points out that in any identifying clause, the segment that realises the role Token will always be the “outward sign, name, form, holder or occupant”, and the segment that realises the role Value will always be the “meaning, referent, function, status, or role”. The examples below can serve the point.

*The year of 1775* (Identified/Token) *was* (Process: relational) *the best of times* (Identifier/Value)

*The best of time* (Identified/Value) *was* (Process: relational) *the year of 1775* (Identifier/Token)

Concerning types of being, intensive process is the process which expresses being in terms of “x is an instance of a” (attributive mode) as in *The beach* (Carrier) *was a desert of heaps of sea* (Attribute), and “x is a” (identifying mode) as in *The rattle of the harness* (Identified/Token) *was the chink of money* (Identifier/Value).

Circumstantial process is the process which expresses being in terms of circumstantial elements such as time, place, distance, reason. It consists of attributive and identifying modes as in *The George* (Carrier) *was in other hands at that time, sir* (Attribute), and *Yesterday* (Identified/Token) *was Sunday* (Identifier/Value).

Possessive process expresses being in terms of ownership, the relationship between the two terms can be characterized as Possessor and Possessed, but for generalization purpose they are treated as Carrier and Attribute in the attributive mode as in *We* (Carrier/Possessor) *had* (Process: relational) *nothing* (Attribute/Possessed), and Identified/Token and Identifier/Value in the identifying mode as in *Mr Brown* (Identified/Token/Possessor) *owned* (Process: relational) *that big farm* (Identifier/Value/Possessed).

***Existential process*** is the process of existing, indicating that something or some natural force exists. In this type of process, there is generally a participant referred to as **Existent** as *a king with a large jaw* in *There was* (Process: existential) *a king with a large jaw* (Existent); or *a broken country* in *There remained* (Process: existential) *a broken country* (Existent). (For details of process types in English, see Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The process types, their category of meaning, and their participants involved in the process can be summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Process Types, Their Category of Meaning and Participants (Halliday, 1994, p. 143)*

| **Process Type** | **Category of Meaning** | **Participant** |
|---|---|---|
| material: | 'doing' | Actor, Goal, Recipient |
| action | 'doing' | |
| event | 'happening' | |
| behavioural: | 'behaving' | Behaver, (Phenomenon) |
| mental: | 'sensing' | Sensor, Phenomenon |
| perception | 'seeing' | |
| affection | 'feeling' | |
| cognition | 'thinking' | |
| verbal: | 'saying' | Sayer, Target, Verbiage, Receiver |
| relational: | 'being' | Carrier, Attribute |
| attribution | 'attributing' | Identified, Identifier; Token, Value |
| identification | 'identifying' | |
| existential: | 'existing' | Existent |

### 2.2.2. Circumstantial Elements Incumbent on the Process

In SFG, there are some slight differences with regard to the number of circumstantial elements incumbent on the process (see Halliday, 1985, 1994; Matthiessen, 1995; Hoang, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The present study adopts nine types of circumstantial elements: extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, stance, and matter.

***Extent*** "construes the extent of the unfolding of the process in space-time" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 315). It forms a two-term set referred to respectively as spatial extent and temporal extent. Spatial extent refers to expressions of distance in space as *thirty kilometers* in *They walked thirty kilometers*. Temporal extent, in contrast, is concerned with expressions of duration in time as *for six years* in *She has been working there for six years*.

***Location***, like extent, also forms a two-term set referred to respectively as spatial location and temporal location. Spatial location refers to a place as *In my memory* in *In my memory, he was a kind-hearted man*. Temporal location, in contrast, refers to time as *every night* in *Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night*.

***Manner*** specifies the way the process is performed by some participant. It comprises three subtypes referred to respectively as means, quality, and comparison. Means refers to the means whereby a process takes place as *by car* in *They came here by car*. Quality indicates how the process takes place as *unceasingly* in *They work unceasingly*. And comparison specifies the manner of the process in comparing it to the way it is performed by another entity and this other entity's manner (cf. Matthiessen, 1995; see also Hoang, 2012, p. 306) as *like an English man* in *He spoke English like an Englishman*.

***Cause*** is a highly generalized circumstantial concept. It construes the reason why the process is actualized, and includes three subtypes: reason, purpose, and behalf. Reason represents the reason for which a process takes place, or, to be more specific, it refers to existing conditions leading to the actualization of the process as *due to severe weather condition* in *Their flight was cancelled due to severe weather condition*. Purpose represents the purpose for which an action takes place - the intention behind it as *For the interest of ten years* in *For the interest of ten years, we plan trees*. And behalf refers the entity, typically a person, on whose behalf or for whose sake the action is undertaken as *on his friends' behalf* in *He said something on his friends' behalf.*

***Contingency*** specifies an element on which the actualisation of the process depends. It comprises three subtypes: condition, concession, and default. Condition construes circumstances that have to obtain in order for the process to be actualised as *In case of need* in *In case of need, ring me on 980733359*. Concession represents "frustrated cause" (Matthiessen, 1995, p. 341; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 323) – something that might have led to the non-occurrence of the process but did not as *Despite heavy rain and strong wind* in *Despite heavy rain and strong wind, the boys still managed to come to class in time.* And default specifies the sense of negative condition – 'if not, unless' as *In the absence of* in *In the absence of the teacher, the class meeting was still held*.

***Accompaniment*** refers to "a form of joint participation in the process and represents the meanings 'and', 'or', 'not' as circumstantials" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 324) as *with her two lovely dogs* in *The old lady lived happily with her two lovely dogs*.

***Role*** refers to the role or capacity in which a participant is involved in the process (Hoang, 2012, 314 see also Matthiessen, 1995). This circumstantial element "construes the meanings 'be' and 'become' circumstantially" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 326). It includes two subtypes: guise and product. Guise represents the meaning of being. It construes a meaning close to that construed by a relational attributive process *as an engineer* in *He worked as an engineer*. Product represents the meaning of becoming as *into two equal halves* in *Tear the paper into two equal halves*.

***Stance*** represents the semiotic angle on a process (Matthiessen, 1995; Hoang 2012, p. 316). It provides the point of reference for the process in the clause (cf. Jackson, 1991) as *With me* in *With me, everything is possible* or *In my opinion* in *In my opinion, the war is over*.

***Matter*** specifies the subject matter or topic. Characteristic of a circumstantial matter is that it is always collocated with verbal processes (cf. Hoang, 2012, p. 313) as *about Charles Dickens' novel "A Tale of Two Cities"* in *Let me tell you something about Charles Dickens' novel "A Tale of Two Cities"*.

### *2.3. The Interpersonal Metafunction and Its Realisation Through the Systems of MOOD and MODALITY*

When a speaker interacts with others to exchange information or to influence their behaviour and get things done, he adopts for himself a certain role such as "questioner" and, in so doing, assigns a complementary role, such as "informant", to his addressor. Unless the conversation is very one-sided, the roles of "questioner" and "informant" tend to alternate between the interlocutors engaged in a conversation. Halliday (1985, 1994) characterizes the primary speech roles which can be represented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Primary Speech Roles (Halliday, 1994, p. 69)*

| Role in exchange \ Commodity exchange | (a) goods-&-services | (b) information |
|---|---|---|
| (i) giving | ‘offer’<br>Would you like this teapot? | ‘statement’<br>He’s giving her the teapot |
| (ii) demanding | ‘command’<br>Give me that teapot! | ‘question’<br>Is she giving me the teapot? |

Table 2 can be read as follows: All speech roles in exchange can be traced back to a form of either giving or demanding. These roles are simultaneously related to the two general categories of commodity negotiated between people – goods-&-services, or information. When speech roles interact with types of commodity we have four general speech roles: giving goods-&-services = offer, giving information = statement, demanding goods-&-services = command, and demanding information = question. Giving goods-&-services can be realised either by a declarative clause as in *‘I’ll give you a cup of tea if you like’* or by an interrogative clause as in *‘Would you like a cup of tea?’*; giving information is typically realised by a declarative clause as *‘He has not received the notice yet’;* demanding goods-&-services is typically realised by an imperative clause as *‘Give me your arm, my love’;* and demanding information is typically realised by an interrogative clause as *‘Was he not an emigrant then?’*. Below is a fragment of the MOOD system in English.

**Figure 1**

*A Fragment of the MOOD System in English*

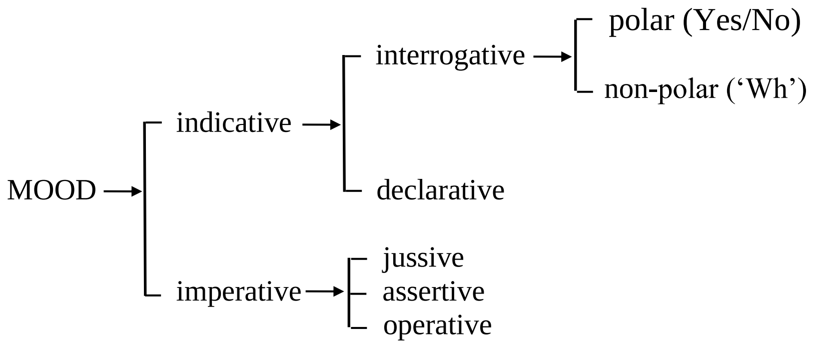


Figure 1 shows that in the MOOD system, there are two choices or subtypes: “indicative” and “imperative”. If “indicative” is chosen, it will allow two more choices: “interrogative” as in *‘Were you travelling alone, Mr Lorry?’,* and “declarative” as in *‘I was travelling with two companions’*; and between “interrogative” and “declarative”, if “interrogative” is chosen, it will open for two more delicate choices: “polar” (requiring the answer “Yes/No”) as *‘Have you no remembrance of the occasion?’,* and “non-polar” (requiring the answer to the missing information) as *‘What o'clock do you make it, Joe?’.* In contrast, if “imperative” is chosen, it will allow three delicate choices: “exhortative” as *‘Come, now’*, “assertive” as *‘You have to kneel to your honoured father’*, and “consultative” as in *‘Can you follow me, Lucie?’*.

As an exchange or interactive event, an English clause consists of two components: **Mood** and **Residue**. The Mood is the component whose function in the clause is to carry the syntactic burden of the exchange and to carry the argument forward. It consists of two functional elements: **Subject** and **Finite**. The Subject is the nominal component of the Mood; it is the thing by reference to which a proposition can be affirmed or denied as *Mrs Southcott* in *'Mrs Southcott had recently attained her five- and-twentieth blessed birthday'* and *No, he hadn't. He hadn't knelt down in the rain*. The Finite is the verbal element in the Mood which has the function of making the proposition finite; that is to say, it brings the proposition down to earth so that something can be argued about as *have* in *'Mere messages have proved more important to the human race'*. The Residue is the remainder of the clause. It consists of three functional components: **Predicator**, **Complement**, and **Adjunct**. Predicator is present in all non-elliptical finite major clauses. It is realised by a verbal element in the verbal group as *going* in *'we were all going direct to Heaven'*. Complement is an element within the Residue which has the potential of being Subject, and like the Subject it is typically realised by a nominal group as *Pamphlets* in *'Pamphlets were burned by the hangman at the door of Westminster Hall'*. And Adjunct is the element also within the Residue which is typically realised by an adverbial group or a prepositional phrase as *In England* in *'In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection'.* Adjuncts fall into three main types: experiential or circumstantial Adjunct, interpersonal or modal Adjunct, and textual or conjunctive Adjunct. Circumstantial Adjuncts are so called because they function as circumstance in the transitivity structure of the clause. Modal Adjuncts fall into two types referred to respectively as Mood Adjuncts and Comment Adjuncts. Mood Adjuncts are those expressing probability, usuality, obligation, inclination or time as *probably* in *'He probably hasn't finished his work'*, and *often* in *'She often visited her grandparents'*. And Comment Adjuncts are like Conjunctive Adjuncts; their order in the clause is not fixed: they can occur clause-initially as *However* in *'However, such young men can't become good citizens'*, clause-finally as *however* in *'Such men can't become good citizens, however'*, or clause-medially (i.e. between the Mood and the Residue) as *however* in *'Such men, however, can't become good citizens'*. (For detail, see Halliday, 1985, 1994, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Below is an example illustrating the functions of the Mood elements in the English interpersonal clause:

| I | 'm | taking | no one | with me |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mood** | | **Residue** | | |
| **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

Expression of the speaker's evaluation, attitude, prediction, and so forth is also an aspect of the interpersonal meaning, which is referred to in SFL as Modality. Modality is "intermediacy expressions" (Matthiessen et al., 2010, p. 141). It refers to "the area of meaning that lies between yes and no – the intermediate ground between negative and positive polarity" (Halliday, 1985, p. 335; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 169). It is a system of interpersonal grammar that realises two basic meanings referred to respectively as modalisation and modulation. Modalisation (or 'epistemic modality' in formal semantics) is a modal system expressing the speaker's assessment of probability, their attitudes and evaluations such as *may be, possible, certain,* and different scales of usuality such as *usually, occasionally, rarely*. In contrast, modulation (or 'deontic modality' in formal semantics) is a system dealing with different degrees of obligation such as *may, should, will, must,* and so forth.

## 3. Research Methodology

### *3.1. Aim of Study and Research Questions*

The overarching aim of this study is to uncover salient transitivity and mood resources realising experiential and interpersonal meanings in the text, using SFL as the analytical framework. To achieve the above aim, the study raises the following questions for exploration:

- What transitivity and mood resources does Charles Dickens utilise in the construction of experiential and interpersonal meanings in his text?
- How does he utilise those transitivity and mood resources to construct these meanings?

### *3.2. Data Collection and Unit of Data Analysis*

The data for the study is taken from Chapter 1 entitled ‘The Period’ in the famous historical novel “A Tale of Two Cities” by the eminent British novelist Charles Dickens. The version of the novel taken for analysis was published in 2003 by CRW Publishing Limited. The units of analysis are major (independent and dependent, finite and non-finite) clause simplexes – those that can be analysed for Transitivity, Mood, and Theme such as ‘*we had nothing before us’*, *‘as the spirits of this very year rapped out theirs’*, *‘making paper money’*, and *to do honour to a dirty procession of monks.* For analytical purposes, the chapter under study is referred to as text.

### *3.3. Procedure Aspects of Data Analysis*

The analysis of the data is limited to the following aspects: (1) analysis of the contextual configuration of the text to lay ground for further analysis and discussion in the subsequent sections; (2) analysis for base-line information of the text which includes the total running words of the text, the number of paragraphs of the text, the number of clause simplexes of the text which include the number of finite clause simplexes and the number of non-finite clause simplexes, the number of clause complexes, and the number of clause simplexes within the clause complexes (see Appendix 1); (3) analysis of transitivity resources realising experiential meanings in the text which includes types of process, types of participant involved in the processes, types of circumstances incumbent on the processes, and types of tenses used in the text (see Appendix 2); and (4) analysis of mood resources realising interpersonal meanings in the text which includes types of mood and types of Subject used in the text (see Appendix 2).

### *3.4. Analytical Procedures and Notational Conventions*

Instances of the analysed aspects are manually counted and the frequency of each feature is obtained by the number and the proportion in relation to its relevant total, and percentage is rounded to the nearest figure. Findings are displayed in figures and tables, and discussion of the salient transitivity and mood resources employed to realise experiential and interpersonal meanings in the text is provided.

The notational conventions used for analysis of the text are provided as follows:

**For Appendix 1**

Clause complex boundary is indicated by three vertical strokes: |||; numbers of clause complexes are indicated by boldface type Roman numerals: **(I)**, **(II)**, **(III)** and so on; clause simplex boundary is indicated by two vertical strokes: ||; and numbers of clause simplexes are indicated by Arabic numerals placed immediately before the clause wording: || (1), || (2), || (3), and so on. For example,

**(II)** ||| (15) – in short, the period was so far like the present period, || (16) that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.|||

**For Appendix 2**

Notational conventions used to analyse Transitivity and Mood resources are provided as follows:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Circ: accomp | = | Circumstance: accompaniment | DP | = | declarative: positive |
| Circ: cau: pur | = | Circumstance: cause: purpose | Imp | = | imperative |
| Circ: cau: rea | = | Circumstance: cause: reason | Inter | = | interrogative |
| Circ: loc: spa | = | Circumstance: location: spatial | PP | = | past perfect tense |
| Circ: loc: tem | = | Circumstance: location: temporal | PPro | = | past progressive tense |
| Circ: man: com | = | Circumstance: manner: comparison | PrP | = | present perfect tense |
| Circ: man: mea | = | Circumstance: manner: means | Proc | = | Process |
| Circ: man: qua | = | Circumstance: manner: quality | PrS | = | present simple tense |
| Circ: role | = | Circumstance of role | PS | = | past simple tense |
| Circ: stan | = | Circumstance: stance | Tran | = | Transitivity |

When there is not enough space, some information in the box analysis is omitted. (For full clause simplexes, readers are referred to Appendix 1). For example,

| **(VI)**\|\|\| (28) | … messages … | had | lately | come | to … People,* | from … America* \|\| |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tran PP | **Actor** | **Process:** | | **material** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Adjunct** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

** to … People = to the English Crown and People*

*from … America = from a congress of British subjects in America*

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### *4.1. Contextual Configuration of the Text*

The text under examination is one of the fifteen chapters in "A Tale of Two Cities", but judging from the contents presented in it we can see "how it springs from its environment [context of situation] and is determined by the specific features of that environment" (Halliday, 1978, p. 150). Thus, the contextual configuration of the text in terms of field of discourse, tenor of discourse, and mode of discourse can be characterised as follows.

**Field of discourse:**

- A part of a long historical (narrative) novel, introducing and depicting things, people and events happening in two capital cities, one in England – London and the other in France London Paris, in the last quarter of the 18$^{th}$ century.
- Participant types: Actor, Carrier, Existent, Sayer, Senser, represented
- Process types: material, relational, existential, verbal, mental
- Tense types: predominant past simple tense

**Tenor of discourse:**

- Writer to readers; writer adopting the role as recounter
- Readers general and unseen
- Subject types: a combination of both human and non-human, non-interactive

- Mood types: declarative: positive

**Mode of discourse:**

- Medium: written to be read
- Channel: verbal
- Self-sufficiency of text: "highly self-sufficient", evident in a considerable number of endophoric references (anaphoric and cataphoric within the text itself)
- Thematic types: marked, unmarked, simple, and multiple
- Thematic pattern: typical of Theme/Given ^ Rheme/New

### *4.2. Base-line Information*

Analysis for base-line information includes: analysis for total running words of the text, number of paragraphs, number of clause simplexes (both finite and non-finite clause simplexes), number of clause complexes, and number of clause simplexes within the clause complexes. Findings are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Base-line Information*

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of total running words: | 1019 |
| Number of paragraphs: | 6 |
| Number of clause simplexes: | 80 |
| - Number of finite clause simplexes: | 63 |
| - Number of non-finite clause simplexes | 17 |
| Number of clause complexes: | 20 |
| Number of clause simplexes within the clause complexes: | 72 |

Table 3 shows that the number of total running words of the text is 1019, the text consists of 6 paragraphs, 80 clause simplexes which consists of 63 finite clause simplexes and 17 non-finite clause simplexes, and 20 clause complexes which contains 72 clause simplexes. Further findings existing in the text which are not shown in the table will be brought out in the analysis of the relevant sections that follow.

### *4.3. Transitivity Resources*

#### 4.3.1. Process Types

Types of process belong to the TRANSITIVITY system; they realise experiential meanings at the semantic level. Based on Halliday (1985, 1994) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the text is analysed in terms of material process, behavioural process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, and existential process. Details of findings are given in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Types of Process Used in the Text*

| Process types | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Material | 43 | 53.7 |
| Behavioural | 0 | 0.0 |
| Mental | 4 | 5.0 |
| Verbal | 8 | 10.0 |
| Relational | 21 | 26.2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Existential | 4 | 5.0 |
| **Total** | **80** | **100%** |

Table 4 shows that of 80 processes (clause simplexes) in the text, the material has the largest number: 43 (53.7%). Ranked second is the relational: 21 (26.2%), followed by the verbal: 8 (10.0%), and by the mental and the existential: 4 (5.0%) and 4 (5.0%) respectively. At the bottom of the list is the behavioural where none is found in the text.

There are four important points to note here. First, the high proportion of material processes found in the text is in accordance with our expectation: material processes "construe figures of doing-&-happening" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 227) in the outer world. The text is the first chapter of a long novel. Its main purpose is to introduce things, people, places relating to the actions and events that happened in the two capital cities of England and France, some of which were taken up in detail in the chapters that follow. It is, therefore, not surprising that its author – Charles Dickens employs a great number of material processes to fulfil this purpose. Below are some examples in point (material processes are in italics; the numbers in round brackets at the ends indicate the numbers of clause simplexes in the text):

Mere messages in the earthly order of events *had* lately *come* to the English Crown and People (28)

France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, *rolled* with exceeding smoothness down hill (30)

he *had not kneeled* down in the rain (34)

Second, the noticeable proportion of relational processes in the text is predictable since relational processes serve to "characterise" or "ascribe" and "identify" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 259). In the text, all 21 relational processes are used to achieve these communicative purposes: they either ascribe "The Period" (Carrier) to some indefinite feature (Attribute), or identify "The Period" (Token) with some definite feature (Value). Some examples in point are provided below.

**To ascribe:**

we *had* everything before us (11)

we *had* nothing before us (12)

Mrs Southcott *had* recently attained her five- and-twentieth blessed birthday (23)

**To identify:**

it *was* the season of Light (7)

it *was* the season of Darkness (8)

It *was* the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five (21)

Third, the number of existential processes is modest (4/80), but they make an important contribution to the text development: experientially, they serve to introduce central participants into the discourse; and textually, the "introducing marker" *there* – the feature of existence, which function as Theme, allows the reader to prepare for something that is about to be introduced, and this something is presented as New information (Fries, 1981, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Halliday, 1985, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 307). In the following clauses, we can see people and things functioning as the central participants (Existents) and carrying New information of the messages.

There were *a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face*, on the throne of England (17)

there were a *king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face*, on the throne of France (18)

there were *growing trees*,… (37)

In England, there was scarcely *an amount of order and protection* (44)

And fourth, the non-existence of behavioural process in the text is in accordance with our expectation. As mentioned above, "The Period" is the introductory chapter of the long historical novel. It is natural that it should be concerned more with people, places, and things in the material and relational worlds – worlds of doing and being – than with the behavioral world – a world of physiological and psychological behaviour which is typically related to human behaviour.

#### 4.3.2. Participant Types

Kress & Leeuwen (2006, p. 48) claimed that there are two types of participants involved in every semiotic act: interactive participant and represented participant. Interactive participants are those involved in the act of communication (discourse) – speaker and listener or writer and reader. Represented participants, in contrast, are those that constitute the subject matter of discourse; that is, the people, places, and things (including abstract "things") represented in and by the speech or writing, the participants about whom or which we are speaking or writing. Analysis of the text shows that only represented participants are present in the text. They are employed in what can be called the "er" function (Carrier, Actor, Senser, Sayer) in the English transitivity clause, related to things, places, and people in the narration. Below are some examples.

*we* had everything before us [Carrier] (11)

*Daring burglaries by armed men, and* … took place in the capital itself every night [Actor] (46)

*nobody* thought any of these occurrences much out of the common way [Senser] (67)

*the spirits of this very year last past* (…) rapped out theirs [Sayer] (27)

#### 4.3.3. Circumstantial Types

The text is analysed for the following types and subtypes of Circumstance: (i) Circumstance of accompaniment, (ii) Circumstance of cause: purpose, (iii) Circumstance of cause: reason, (iv) Circumstance of location: spatial, (v) Circumstance of location: temporal, (vi) Circumstance of manner: comparison, (vii) Circumstance of manner: means, (viii) Circumstance of manner: quality, (ix) Circumstance of role, (x) Circumstance of stance, and (xi) Circumstance of matter. Findings are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Circumstantial Types Employed in the Text*

| Circumstantial types | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Circumstance: accompaniment | 1 | 1.5 |
| Circumstance: cause: purpose | 2 | 3.0 |
| Circumstance: cause: reason | 1 | 1.5 |
| Circumstance: location: spatial | 30 | 44.7 |
| Circumstance: location: temporal | 7 | 10.4 |
| Circumstance: manner: comparison | 1 | 1.5 |
| Circumstance: manner: means | 6 | 8.9 |
| Circumstance: manner: quality | 18 | 26.8 |
| Circumstance of role | 0 | 0.0 |
| Circumstance: stance | 0 | 0.0 |
| Circumstance: matter | 1 | 1.5 |
| **Total** | **67** | **100%** |

There are four important points to note here. First, the number of circumstances per the number of clause simplexes in the text takes up a relatively modest proportion: 67/80 (83.7 %) or 0.83 Circumstance per one clause. Second, of the eleven types of circumstance, nine are employed in the text; Circumstance of role and Circumstance of stance do not feature in the text. Third, of the nine types of Circumstance employed in the text, Circumstance of location: spatial and Circumstance of manner: quality take up the largest proportion: 30/65 (44.7%) and 18/65 (26.8%) respectively. And fourth, Circumstance of accompaniment, Circumstance of cause: reason, Circumstance of manner: comparison, and Circumstance of matter, each occurs only once in the text.

#### 4.3.4. Tenses

Analysis in Appendix 2 shows that of 80 clause simplexes, 63 contain tenses; and among the 12 commonly recognised tenses in English, five are employed in the text: present perfect, present simple, past progressive, past perfect, and past simple. Of these, the past simple tense predominates: 53/63 (84.1%), followed by the past perfect tense: 5/63 (7.9%), and by the past progressive and the present simple tenses: 2/63 (3.1%) and 2/63 (3.1%) respectively. Of striking notice is that the present perfect tense bottoms the list: 1/63 (1.5%). Findings of the types of tense employed in the text are given in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Tense Types Employed in the Text*

| Tense types | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Present perfect | 1 | 1.5 |
| Present simple | 2 | 3.1 |
| Present progressive | 2 | 3.1 |
| Present perfect | 5 | 7.9 |
| Past simple | 53 | 84.1 |
| **Total** | **63** | **100%** |

Three points stand out from the table. First, the high proportion of the past simple tense is in accordance with our expectation: “A Tale of Two Cities” is a historical descriptive-narrative prose. It is therefore natural that the narration of things, people, or events in the past for a ‘tense language’ like English must be narrated in the past simple tense (see Simpson, 1993, Wales, 2001). Second, the occurrence of the present simple tense in (36): *It is likely enough* and (38): *It is likely enough* is explainable. It is employed to express the writer’s prediction (at the moment of his writing – the present simple) about the event(s) that follow which happened before the moment of his prediction (the past simple). Thus, we see the logical sequence of the present simple tense form *is* in (36) and the past simple tense form *were* in (37) and that of the present simple tense form *is* in (38) and the past simple tense form *were* in (39):

||| (36) It *is* likely enough || (37) that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there *were* growing trees, … |||

||| (38) It *is* likely enough || (39) that in the rough outhouses of some tillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there *were* sheltered from the weather… |||

And third, the five clause simplexes: (23), (24), (25), (28), and (34), which contain the past perfect tense, are used to denote the actions or events which accomplished before the given past moments (cf. Kaushanskaya et al., 2008, p. 120). This use of the past perfect tense is commonly found in narration where to understand the occurrence of the past action – the past simple, it is necessary to refer back to the previously accomplished action – the past perfect (cf.

Gordon & Krylova, 1974, p. 37). Clause complex **(VIII)** in the text serves the point.

**(VIII)**||| (33) Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she *entertained* herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, || (34) because he *had not kneeled* down in the rain |||

Here the first clause simplex (33) contains *entertained* – the simple past tense form of the verb "entertain", and the second clause simplex (34) contains *had not kneeled* – the past perfect tense form of the verb "kneel" used to explain why France (referred to in the text as a woman) *entertained* herself with the sentencing of a youth, having his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive.

### *4.4. Mood Resources*

#### 4.4.1. Mood Types

Mood is analysed in terms of declarative, imperative, and interrogative. Findings are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Mood Types Employed in the Text*

| Mood types | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Declarative | 63 | 100 |
| Imperative | 0 | 0.0 |
| Interrogative | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **63** | **100%** |

Table 7 shows that of 63 clause simplexes that are analysed for mood, all (100%) are of declarative mood; and thus, no imperative and interrogative moods stand out. A closer inspection reveals that all 63 declarative clause simplexes are of positive type. It might be argued that nothing is entirely objective in our judgement of reality, and that language acts as a potential for the expression of speakers'/writers' subjectivity: their expression of probability, obligation, or commitment, their attitudes and evaluation (Halliday, 1981; see also Hasan & Perrett, 1994, p. 183), but analysis of the text (Appendix 2) shows that all the 63 events in the text are narrated as if they were facts: the writer acts purely as a camera, recording things and events as they were. The fact that there are no imperative and interrogative clauses further suggests that the text is typical of written monologue mode.

A more detailed analysis of the text reveals that these 63 non-finite clause simplexes are neither modalised nor modulated: there are no markers of probability ("can" or "may"), advice ("'d better" and "should"), certainty ("must"), or obligation ("must" and "have to") occurring in the text. This finding reinforces the claim that the writer tries to show his readers that all events he communicates to them are facts, and he does not intrude his angle into these factual speech events or states of affair. All declarative clauses, no imperative and interrogative clauses, and no modalised and modulated clauses together contribute to the objectivity of the text.

#### 4.4.2. Subject Types

Analysis in Appendix 2 shows that there are 63 Subjects in the text. They are first analysed for (i) explicit Subject, (ii) implicit Subject, (iii) interactive Subject, and (iv) non-interactive Subject. And then they are further analysed for first participant Subject and second participant Subject. Explicit Subject is one that is present in the clause; implicit Subject is one that is inherent but is not present in the clause; interactive Subject is one that is involved in the interaction of the texts (in this case, the writer and the readers); and non-interactive Subject is one that is not involved in the interaction of the text; it is, seen from the point of view of transitivity, a represented participant that constitutes the subject matter of the discourse (see Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p. 48; see also Hoang, 2019, 2020). Details of these Subject types are displayed in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Subject Types Employed in the Text*

| Subject types | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Explicit | 59 | 93.6 |
| Implicit | 4 | 6.3 |
| Interactive | 0 | 0.0 |
| Non-interactive | 63 | 100% |

Table 8 shows that of 63 Subjects found in the text, 59 contain explicit Subject (93.6%), and 4 contain implicit Subject (6.3%). Table 8 also indicates that all 63 Subjects are non-interactive. They all refer to things, places and people in the narration, and constitute an important portion of the content of the text: *it* (referring to “The period”) in (1) to (10), *we* (referring to the writer and, perhaps, the readers of his time) in (11) and (13), *Spiritual revelations* in (22), *woodman and farmer* in (40), *they* in (41), and so forth. Below are some full examples:

*It* was the best of times (1)

*it* was the winter of despair (10)

*we* had everything before us, (11)

*we* had nothing before us (12)

*Spiritual revelations* were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this (22)

But *that woodman and that farmer*, …, work silently (40)

though *they* worked unceasingly (41)

First participant Subject refers to one that functions as Actor in material process, Carrier or Identified in relational process, Sayer in verbal process, Senser in mental process, etc. Second participant Subject refers to one that functions as Goal or Recipient in material process, Receiver in verbal process, Phenomenon in mental process, etc. Findings of these Subject types are provided in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Participant Subject Types Employed in the Text*

| Participant Subject types | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| First participant | 57 | 90.4 |
| Second participant | 6 | 9.5 |
| Total | 63 | 100% |

Table 9 shows that between first participant Subject and second participant Subject, the former type predominates: 57/63 (90.4%) v. 6/63 (9.5%).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

### *5.1. Summary of Research Findings*

In this paper, with the aim to explore how writers represent experiential meanings and construct interpersonal meanings in literary texts, I have made an attempt to look in depth at the novel "A Tale of Two Cities" written by the great British novelist Charles Dickens. The data for analysis is Chapter 1 – "The Period" in "Book the First" of the three-book novel "A Tale of Two Cities". The theoretical framework adopted for the analysis is SFL. The analysis of the text revolves around three major aspects each of which consists of a number of sub-parameters: (1) analysis for the contextual configuration of the text in terms of field of discourse, tenor of discourse, and mode of discourse; (2) analysis for the base-line information of the text in terms of the number of total running words; the number of paragraphs, the number of clause complexes, and the number of ranking clause simplexes which includes the number of finite and non-finite clause simplexes; and (3) analysis for transitivity and mood resources which include types of process, types of participant involved in the processes, types of circumstance incumbent on the processes, types of tense employed in the processes, types of mood, and types of Subject. The findings show that Charles Dickens has employed several transitivity and mood resources to represent the experiential meanings and to construct the interpersonal meanings of the text, among which the following findings are salient:

- A significant number of material processes to depict actions and events occurring during the specified period, accounting for 43 out of 80 instances (53 per cent).
- A noticeable number of relational processes to ascribe the specified period to intended attributes and to identify it with intended values, accounting for 21 out of 80 instances (26.2 per cent).
- One hundred per cent of represented participants, all referring to people, things, and locations to depict what is going on and who is taking part in the specified period.
- A relatively modest proportion of Circumstances to focus on representing the nuclear content or "nuclear TRANSITIVITY", to use Matthiessen's (1995, p. 206) terminology, of the clause which is concerned with construing the process and participants involved in it.
- A relatively high proportion of the past simple tense to depict successions of past actions and events in the text, accounting for 53 out of 63 instances (84.1 per cent).
- One hundred per cent of declarative: positive mood to indicate that all actions and events are depicted as if they were facts.
- A predominant number of explicit Subjects, accounting for 59 out of 63 instances (93.6 per cent), one hundred per cent of non-interactive Subjects (63 out of 63 instances), and a predominant proportion of first participant Subjects, accounting for 57 out of 63 instances (90.4 per cent) v. 6 out of 63 instances (accounting for 9.5 per cent).

### *5.2. Recommendation and Suggestion for Further Research*

This study has provided a remarkable illustration of how SFL can be used to uncover levels of meaning of a literary text. In analysing and discussing the transitivity resources realising experiential meanings and the mood resources realising interpersonal meanings of the text, we have placed them within the compass of the SFL theory. It is clear from our study that SFL is a highly relevant theory for this kind of work: it accommodates an extremely rich pool of tool kits to help us – researchers, EFL teachers and students analyse the text, interpret and talk about its meanings in a sensible way. The relevance of SFL to discourse analysis is obvious, but how far it is possible to use this model of language depends largely on how much the discourse analyst can exploit its appliabilities. It is, therefore, recommended that discourse analysts, EFL language teachers and students explore the model carefully before starting their text-exploring journey (cf. Hoang, 1994, 2021).

In her recent book entitled *Selected Works of Ruqaiya Hasan on Applied Linguistics*, the eminent systemic functional linguist Ruqaiya Hasan (2011, p. 56) suggests that the realisation of the linguistic features that make a text a text is not localized but is likely to be dispersed over the whole text as a whole, and within the meanings of a text there are constellations of meanings which are crucial to the identity of its register. The implication of her suggestion is that to be able to uncover all the meanings characterizing a text of whatever register, the researcher should explore as many constellations of meanings as possible. This is because "The statement of meaning cannot be achieved by one analysis, at one level, in one fell swoop" (Firth, 1957, p. 183). In this study we have focused on examining only two specific constellations of meanings of the text – the experiential meanings realised in transitivity resources and the interpersonal meanings realised in mood resources. Further research, therefore, should focus on examining other constellations of meanings of the text such as the textual meanings realised in theme-rheme and information focus resources, the logical meanings realised in clause-complexing resources, and the texture or textual cohesion meanings realised in textual cohesive or text-forming resources.

As can be seen, the data for analysis of this study has been confined to only one of the forty-five chapters of the novel "A Tale of Two Cities". To uncover all aspects of lexicogrammatical resources Charles Dickens employs to construct meanings of his text, the entire novel should be taken as data for analysis. This can also be an interesting topic for further study.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

## Base-line Information Analysis

**Key:**

| | |
|---|---|
| ‖| | indicate clause complex boundary |
| ‖ | indicate clause simplex boundary |
| **(I), (II)**, **(III)**… | indicate numbers of clause complexes |
| ‖ (1), ‖ (2), ‖ (3) … | indicate numbers of clause simplex |

## The Period

**Paragraph 1**

**(I)**‖| (1) It was the best of times, ‖ (2) it was the worst of times, ‖ (3) it was the age of wisdom, ‖ (4) it was the age of foolishness, ‖ (5) it was the epoch of belief, ‖ (6) it was the epoch of incredulity, ‖ (7) it was the season of Light, ‖ (8) it was the season of Darkness, ‖ (9) it was the spring of hope, ‖ (10) it was the winter of despair, ‖ (11) we had everything before us, ‖ (12) we had nothing before us, ‖ (13) we were all going direct to Heaven, ‖ (14) we were all going direct the other way **(II)**‖| (15) – in short, the period was so far like the present period, ‖ (16) that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. ‖|

**Paragraph 2**

‖ (17) There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; ‖ (18) there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France. **(III)**‖| (19) In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, ‖ (20) that things in general were settled for ever. ‖|

**Paragraph 3**

‖ (21) It was the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. ‖ (22) Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this. **(IV)**‖| (23) Mrs Southcott had recently attained her five- and-twentieth blessed birthday, ‖ (24) of whom a prophetic private in the Life Guards had heralded the sublime appearance by announcing that arrangements were made for the swallowing up of London and Westminster. **(V)**‖| (25) Even the Cock Lane ghost had been laid only a round dozen of years, ‖ (26) after rapping out its messages, ‖ (27) as the spirits of this very year last past (supernaturally deficient in originality) rapped out theirs. **(VI)**‖| (28) Mere messages in the earthly order of events had lately come to the English Crown and People, from a congress of British subjects in America: ‖ (29) which, strange to relate, have proved more important to the human race than any communications yet received through any of the chickens of the Cock Lane brood. ‖|

**Paragraph 4**

**(VII)**‖| (30) France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, ‖ (31) making paper money ‖ (32) and spending it. **(VIII)**‖| (33) Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, ‖ (34) because he had not kneeled down in the rain ‖ (35) to do honour to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards. **(IX)**‖| (36) It is likely enough ‖ (37) that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees, when that sufferer was put to death, already marked by the Woodman, fate, to come down and be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history. **(X)**‖| (38) It is likely enough ‖ (39) that in the rough outhouses of some tillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire, snuffed about by pigs, and roosted in by poultry, which the farmer, death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils of the Revolution. **(XI)**‖| (40) But that woodman and that farmer, ‖ (41) though they worked unceasingly, worked silently, ‖ (42) and no one heard them ‖ (43) as they went about with muffled tread: the rather, forasmuch as to entertain any suspicion that they were awake, was to be atheistical and traitorous. ‖|

**Paragraph 5**

**(XII)**||| (44) In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection || (45) to justify much national boasting. || (46) Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night; **(XIII)**||| (47) families were publicly cautioned || (48) not to go out of town without removing their furniture to upholsterers' warehouses for security; **(XIV)**||| (49) the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, || (50) and, being recognised || (51) and challenged by his fellow-tradesman whom he stopped in his character of 'the Captain', (52) gallantly shot him through the head || (53) and rode away; **(XV)**||| (54) the mail was waylaid by seven robbers, || (55) and the guard shot three dead, || (56) and then got shot dead himself by the other four, 'in consequence of the failure of his ammunition': **(XVI)** ||| (57) after which the mail was robbed in peace; || (58) that magnificent potentate, the Lord Mayor of London, was made || (59) to stand and deliver on Turnham Green, by one highwayman, who despoiled the illustrious creature in sight of all his retinue; **(XVII)**||| (60) prisoners in London gaols fought battles with their turnkeys, || (61) and the majesty of the law fired blunderbusses in among them, loaded with rounds of shot and ball; || (62) thieves snipped off diamond crosses from the necks of noble lords at court drawing-rooms; **(XVIII)**||| (63) musketeers went into St Giles's, || (64) to search for contraband goods, || (65) and the mob fired on the musketeers, || (66) and the musketeers fired on the mob, || (67) and nobody thought any of these occurrences much out of the common way. **(XIX)**||| (68) In the midst of them, the hangman, ever busy and ever worse than useless, was in constant requisition; || (69) now, stringing up long rows of miscellaneous criminals; || (70) now, hanging a housebreaker on Saturday who had been taken on Tuesday; || (71) now, burning people in the hand at Newgate by the dozen, || (72) and now burning pamphlets at the door of Westminster Hall; || (73) today, taking the life of an atrocious murderer, || (74) and tomorrow of a wretched pilferer who had robbed a farmer's boy of sixpence. |||

**Paragraph 6**

|| (75) All these things, and a thousand like them, came to pass in and close upon the dear old year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. **(XX)**||| (76) Environed by them, || (77) while the woodman and the farmer worked unheeded, || (78) those two of the large jaws, and those other two of the plain and the fair faces, trod with stir enough, || (79) and carried their divine rights with a high hand. || (80) Thus did the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five conduct their greatnesses, and myriads of small creatures – the creatures of this chronicle among the rest – along the roads that lay before them. ||

## Appendix 2

## Transitivity and Mood Analysis

**Key**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Circ: accomp | = | Circumstance: accompaniment | DP | = | declarative: positive |
| Circ: cau: pur | = | Circumstance: cause: purpose | Imp | = | imperative |
| Circ: cau: rea | = | Circumstance: cause: reason | Inter | = | interrogative |
| Circ: loc: spa | = | Circumstance: location: spatial | PP | = | past perfect tense |
| Circ: loc: tem | = | Circumstance: location: temporal | PPro | = | past progressive tense |
| Circ: man: com | = | Circumstance: manner: comparison | PrP | = | present perfect tense |
| Circ: man: mea | = | Circumstance: manner: means | Proc | = | Process |
| Circ: man: qua | = | Circumstance: manner: quality | PrS | = | present simple tense |
| Circ: role | = | Circumstance of role | PS | = | past simple tense |
| Circ: stan | = | Circumstance: stance | Tran | = | Transitivity |

**Paragraph 1**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(I)** ||| (1) | *It* | *was* | | *the best of times,* || |
| Tran PS | **Identified/Token** | **Process: relational** | | **Identifier/Value** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| || (2) | *it* | *was* | | *the worst of times,* || |
| Tran PS | **Identified/Token** | **Process: relational** | | **Identifier/Value** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| || (3) | *it* | *was* | | *the age of wisdom,* || |
| Tran PS | **Identified/Token** | **Process: relational** | | **Identifier/Value** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

<table>
<tr><td>|| (4)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the age of foolishness, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (5)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the epoch of belief, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (6)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the epoch of incredulity, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (7)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the season of Light, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (8)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the season of Darkness, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (9)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the spring of hope, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (10)</td><td>it</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>the winter of despair, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Identifier/Value</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (11)</td><td>we</td><td colspan="2">had</td><td>everything</td><td>before us, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Identified/Token</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Attribute</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (12)</td><td>we</td><td colspan="2">had</td><td>nothing</td><td>before us, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Carrier</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Attribute</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (13)</td><td>we</td><td>were</td><td>all</td><td>going</td><td>direct</td><td>to Heaven ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PPro</td><td>Actor</td><td colspan="3">Process: material</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood (DP)</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (14)</td><td>we</td><td>were</td><td>all</td><td>going</td><td>direct</td><td>the other way |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PPro</td><td>Actor</td><td colspan="3">Process: material</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>(II) ||| (15)</td><td>in short,</td><td>the period</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>so far like the period, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Carrier</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Attribute</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (16)</td><td>that</td><td>… authorities</td><td colspan="2">insisted on</td><td>its… received</td><td>in the… only. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Sayer</td><td colspan="2">Process: verbal</td><td>Target</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

**Paragraph 2**

<table>
<tr><td>|| (17)</td><td>There</td><td>was</td><td>king and queen</td><td>on… England; ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Process: existential</td><td>Existent</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
</table>

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (18) | *There* | *was* | | *king and queen* | *on… France.* \|\| |
| Tran PS | | **Process: existential** | | **Existent** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(III)** \|\|\| (19) | *In … countries* | *it* | *was* | | *clearer* | *to … and fishes* \|\| |
| Tran PS | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Carrier** | **Process: relational** | | **Attribute** | **Circ: stan** |
| Mood DP | **Adjunct** | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (20) | *that* | *things …* | *were* | *settled* | *for ever.* \|\|\| |
| Tran PS | | **Goal** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: loc: tem** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

**Paragraph 3**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (21) | *It* | *was* | | *the year of Our Lord … seventy-five.* \|\| |
| Tran PS | **Identified/Token** | **Process: relational** | | **Identified/Token** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (22) | *… revelations* | *were conceded* | | *to England* | *at … period* | *as at this.*\|\| |
| Tran PS | **Goal** | **Process: verbal** | | **Receiver** | **Circ: loc: tem** | **Circ: man: com** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(IV)** \|\|\| (23) | *Mrs Southcott* | *had* | *recently* | *attained* | *her … birthday,* |
| Tran PP | **Carrier** | **Process:** | **Circumstance: loc: tem** | **relational** | **Attribute** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Adjunct** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (24) | *of whom* | *a … Guards* | *had heralded* | | *the … appearance* | *by …Westminster.* \|\|\| |
| Tran PP | **Circ: mat** | **Sayer** | **Process: verbal** | | **Target** | **Circ: man: mea** |
| Mood DP | **Adjunct** | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(V)** \|\|\| (25) | *Even* | *the … ghost* | *had been laid* | | *only,* | *a round … of years* \|\| |
| Tran PP | | **Goal** | **Process: material** | | | **Circ: loc: tem** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (26) | *after* | *rapping out* | *its message* \|\| |
| Tran | | **Process: verbal** | **verbiage** |
| Mood | | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (27) | *as* | *the ……* (… originality) | *rapped out* | *theirs.* \|\|\| |
| Tran PS | | **Sayer** | **Process: verbal** | **verbiage** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(VI)** \|\|\| (28) | *… messages …* | *had* | *lately* | *come* | *to … People,* | *from … America* \|\| |
| Tran PP | **Actor** | **Process:** | | **material** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Adjunct** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (29) | *which, strange…* | *have proved* | | *more important to … brood* \|\|\| |
| Tran PrP | **Carrier** | **Process: relational** | | **Attribute** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

**Paragraph 4**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(VII)** \|\|\| (30) | *France, …,* | *rolled* | | *with … smoothness* | *down hill,* \|\| |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: man: qua** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| \|\| (31) | *making* | *paper money* \|\| |

<table>
<tr><td>Tran</td><td>Process: material</td><td>Goal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (32)</td><td>and</td><td>spending</td><td>it. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran</td><td></td><td>Process: material</td><td>Goal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood</td><td></td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>(VIII) ||| (33)</td><td>Under … pastors</td><td>she</td><td colspan="2">entertained</td><td>with … alive, ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td><td>Senser</td><td colspan="2">Process: mental</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (34)</td><td>because</td><td>he</td><td colspan="2">had not kneeled down</td><td>in the rain ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PP</td><td></td><td>Actor</td><td colspan="2">Process: material</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (35)</td><td>to do</td><td>honour</td><td>to a dirty procession … yards. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran</td><td>Process: material</td><td>Range</td><td>Client</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>(IX) ||| (36)</td><td>It</td><td colspan="2">is</td><td>likely enough ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PrS</td><td>Carrier</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Attribute</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (37)</td><td>that</td><td>rooted in … Norway</td><td>there</td><td colspan="2">were</td><td>growing trees, … history. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Proc: existential</td><td>Existent</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Pred</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>(X) ||| (38)</td><td>It</td><td colspan="2">is</td><td>likely enough ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PrS</td><td>Carrier</td><td colspan="2">Process: relational</td><td>Attribute</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (39)</td><td>that</td><td>in … Paris,</td><td>there</td><td colspan="2">were sheltered</td><td>from … Revolution. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td><td>Goal</td><td colspan="2">Process: material</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>(XI) ||| (40)</td><td>But</td><td>that wood man …</td><td colspan="2">worked</td><td>silently ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Actor</td><td colspan="2">Process: material</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (41)</td><td>though</td><td>they</td><td colspan="2">worked</td><td>unceasingly ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Actor</td><td colspan="2">Process: material</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (42)</td><td>and</td><td>no one</td><td colspan="2">heard</td><td>them ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Senser</td><td colspan="2">Process: mental</td><td>Phenomenon</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (43)</td><td>as</td><td>they</td><td colspan="2">went about</td><td>with muffled … traitorous. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td></td><td>Actor</td><td colspan="2">Process: material</td><td>Circ: man: qua</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td></td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjuncts</td></tr>
</table>

**Paragraph 5**

<table>
<tr><td>(XII) ||| (44)</td><td>In England,</td><td>there</td><td colspan="2">was</td><td>scarcely</td><td>an … protection ||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran PS</td><td>Circ: loc: spa</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Process: existential</td><td></td><td>Existent</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mood DP</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Subject</td><td>Finite</td><td>Predicator</td><td>Adjunct</td><td>Complement</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>|| (45)</td><td>to justify</td><td>much national boasting. |||</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tran</td><td>Process: verbal</td><td>Target</td></tr>
</table>

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mood | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (46) | *… burglaries…* | *took place* | | *in the capital itself* | *every night; \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: loc: tem** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XIII)** \|\|\| (47) | *families* | *were* | *publicly* | *cautioned \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Receiver** | **Process:** | **Circ: man: qua** | **verbal** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Adjunct** | **Predicator** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (48) | *not to go* | *out of town* | *without removing … security; \|\|\|* |
| Tran | **Process: material** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: accomp** |
| Mood | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XIV)** \|\|\| (49) | *the highway … dark* | *was* | | *a city tradesman … light, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Carrier** | **Process: relational** | | **Attribute** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (50) | *and* | *being recognised \|\|* | |
| Tran | | **Process: mental** | |
| Mood | | **Finite** | **Predicator** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (51) | *and,* | *challenged* | *by his … 'the Captain', \|\|* |
| Tran | | **Process: verbal** | **Circ: man: mea** |
| Mood | | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (52) | *gallantly* | *shot* | | *him* | *through the head \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Circ: man: qua** | **Process: material** | | **Goal** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Adjunct** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (53) | *and* | *rode* | | *away; \|\|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Process: material** | | |
| Mood DP | | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XV)** \|\|\| (54) | *the mail* | *was waylaid* | | *by seven robbers \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Goal** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: man: mea** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (55) | *and* | *the guard* | *shot* | | *three* | *dead \|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Goal** | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (56) | *and then* | *got shot* | | *dead* | *by … four* | *in … ammunition: \|\|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Process: material** | | **Circ: man: qua** | **Circ: man: mea** | **Circ: cau: rea** |
| Mood DP | | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XVI)** \|\|\| (57) | *after which* | *the mail* | *was robbed* | | *in peace \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Circ: loc: tem** | **Goal** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (58) | *that magnificent potentate, … of London* | *was made \|\|* | |
| Tran PS | **Goal** | **Process: material** | |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (59) | *to stand and deliver* | *on Turnham Green* | *by one highwayman, … retinue; \|\|\|* |
| Tran | **Process: material** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: man: mea** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mood | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XVII)** \|\|\| (60) | *prisoners in London gaols* | *fought* | | *battles* | *with their turnkeys, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Goal** | **Circ: cau: pur** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (61) | *and* | *the majesty of the law* | *fired* | | *blunderbusses* | *in among them…; \|\|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Actor** | **Proc: material** | | **Goal** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Pred** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (62) | *thieves* | *snipped off* | | *diamond crosses* | *from the neck* | *at … -rooms; \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Goal** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct1** | **Adjunct2** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XVIII)** \|\|\| (63) | *musketeers* | *went* | | *into St Gile's, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| \|\| (64) | *to search* | *for contraband goods, \|\|* |
| Tran | **Process: material** | **Circ: cause: pur** |
| Mood | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (65) | *and* | *the mob* | *fired* | | *on the musketeers, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (66) | *and* | *the musketeers* | *fired* | | *on the mob, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (67) | *and* | *nobody* | *thought* | | *... occurrences* | *much … way. \|\|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Senser** | **Process: mental** | | **Phenomenon** | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(XIX)** \|\|\| (68) | *In the midst of them,* | *the hangman …* | *was* | | *in constant requisition; \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Carrier** | **Process: relational** | | **Attribute** |
| Mood DP | **Adjunct** | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (69) | *now,* | *stringing up* | *long rows of miscellaneous criminals; \|\|* |
| Tran | | **Process: material** | **Goal** |
| Mood | | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (70) | *now,* | *hanging* | *a housebreaker* | *on Saturday…; \|\|* |
| Tran | | **Process: material** | **Goal** | **Circ: loc: tem** |
| Mood | | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct2** |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (71) | *now,* | *burning* | *people* | *in the hand* | *at Newgate* | *by the dozen, \|\|* |
| Tran | | **Proc: material** | **Goal** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: loc: spa** | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood | | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct1** | **Adjunct2** | **Adjunct3** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (72) | *and* | *now* | *burning* | *pamphlets* | *at … Westminster Hall'; \|\|* |
| Tran | | | **Process: material** | **Goal** | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood | | | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (73) | *today,* | *taking* | *the life of an atrocious murderer, \|\|* |
| Tran | | **Process: material** | **Goal** |
| Mood | | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (74) | *and* | *tomorrow* | *(taking)* | *(the life) of a wretched pilferer. \|\|\|* |
| Tran | | | **Process: material** | **Goal** |
| Mood | | | **Predicator** | **Complement** |

**Paragraph 6**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (75) | *all these things, …,* | *came to pass* | | *in and close … seventy-five. \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: loc: spa** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **(XX)** \|\|\| (76) | *Environed* | *by them, \|\|* |
| Tran | **Process: material** | **Circ: man: mea** |
| Mood | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (77) | *while* | *the woodman and the farmer* | *worked* | | *unheeded, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjuncts** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (78) | *those two … fair faces* | *trod* | | *with stir enough, \|\|* |
| Tran PS | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood DP | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (79) | *and* | *carried* | | *their divine rights* | *with a high hand. \|\|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Process: material** | | **Goal** | **Circ: man: qua** |
| Mood DP | | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| \|\| (80) | *Thus* | *did the year … seventy-five* | *conduct* | | *their greatnesses… them. \|\|* |
| Tran PS | | **Actor** | **Process: material** | | **Goal** |
| Mood DP | | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | |

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# UNVEILING TABOO TRANSLATIONS INTO VIETNAMESE: SUBTITLING STRATEGIES IN "THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION"

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**Abstract:** This study explores subtitling strategies employed in translating taboo words within the film The Shawshank Redemption into Vietnamese. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the research systematically collects and categorizes taboo words in the film and evaluates the corresponding translation strategies employed in Vietnamese subtitles. Six strategies, including Taboo for Taboo, Omission, Euphemism, Direct translation, Substitution, and Translation by more general words, are identified. The predominant use of the Taboo for Taboo strategy is highlighted, allowing the translator to preserve the original expressive impact while ensuring comprehension in the target language. Despite its efficacy, the Taboo for Taboo strategy encounters cultural constraints. The research advocates prioritizing this approach to maintain fidelity, acknowledging challenges related to censorship and adherence to target language norms. The study underscores the sophisticated nature of translating taboo expressions, considering contextual factors, translation purpose, and intended message. Emphasizing the underexplored nature of offensive language in Audiovisual Translation, particularly in subtitling, the study underscores the pivotal role of taboo words in character portrayal and emotional expression. The call for further research in Vietnamese subtitled translations aims to provide valuable insights for navigating the challenges posed by low register expressions. The study concludes by advocating for a well-adjusted approach that upholds fidelity while addressing the intricacies of language and cultural sensitivity in subtitling, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in translating taboo words in audiovisual content.

*Keywords:* taboo word, subtitling, translation strategies, source language, target language, The Shawshank Redemption

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https://doi.org/10.63023/2525-2445/jfs.ulis.5227

# TÌM HIỂU VIỆC DỊCH TỪ NGỮ THÔ TỤC SANG TIẾNG VIỆT THÔNG QUA CHIẾN LƯỢC DỊCH PHỤ ĐỀ TRONG BỘ PHIM "NHÀ TÙ SHAWSHANK"

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết tìm hiểu các chiến lược dịch phụ đề được sử dụng để dịch các từ ngữ thô tục trong bộ phim "The Shawshank Redemption". Sử dụng cả phương pháp nghiên cứu định lượng và định tính, nghiên cứu thu thập và phân loại các từ ngữ thô tục trong bộ phim để tìm hiểu và đánh giá chiến lược dịch các biểu ngữ này thông qua phần phụ đề tiếng Việt. Sáu chiến lược dịch được xác định, đó là: Dịch bằng cách sử dụng từ thô tục tương đương; Bỏ qua (không dịch); Sử dụng uyển ngữ; Dịch trực tiếp theo nghĩa đen; Thay thế bằng từ ngữ khác; và Dịch bằng các từ ngữ phổ quát hơn. Phát hiện của nghiên cứu cho thấy việc Dịch bằng cách sử dụng từ thô tục tương đương ở ngôn ngữ đích là chiến lược được sử dụng chủ yếu vì nó giúp người dịch vừa giữ được các sắc thái của biểu cảm gốc trong khi vẫn đảm bảo sản phẩm dịch được hiểu rõ ở ngôn ngữ đích. Mặc dù hiệu quả, song chiến lược dịch này cũng vấp phải các khó khăn do các rào cản văn hóa gây ra. Nghiên cứu đề xuất ưu tiên sử dụng chiến lược này để duy trì tính trung thực mặc dù phải đối mặt với các thách thức liên quan đến kiểm duyệt và tuân thủ các quy tắc trong ngôn ngữ mục tiêu. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra tính phức tạp của việc dịch các từ ngữ thô tục khi phải tính tới các yếu tố ngữ cảnh, mục đích và thông điệp cần truyền tải. Nhấn mạnh tình trạng từ ngữ thô tục ít được nghiên cứu trong Dịch thuật nghe nhìn, đặc biệt là trong dịch phụ đề, bài viết làm nổi bật vai trò quan trọng của loại từ ngữ này trong miêu tả và thể hiện cảm xúc nhân vật. Cần tiếp tục nghiên cứu dịch thuật phụ đề sang tiếng Việt nhằm tìm hiểu thấu đáo vấn đề để xử lí hiệu quả các thách thức mà các từ ngữ thuộc ngữ vực phi chuẩn này đặt ra. Kết luận rút ra là cần có cách tiếp cận linh hoạt, vừa duy trì tính trung thực vừa giải quyết được những vấn đề phức tạp ngôn ngữ và nhạy cảm văn hóa trong dịch thuật phụ đề, qua đó làm dày thêm nền tảng kiến thức chuyên môn để xử lí hiệu quả những khía cạnh phức tạp của việc dịch các từ ngữ thô tục trong các nội dung nghe nhìn.

*Từ khóa:* từ thô tục, dịch phụ đề, chiến lược dịch, ngôn ngữ nguồn, ngôn ngữ đích, bộ phim "Nhà tù Shawshank"

## 1. Introduction

Language, as a communicative tool, is intricately interwoven with culture, defined as "a system of linguistic communication particular to a group" (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 2), serving as a fundamental element within any linguistic system. Human beings employ language to articulate their thoughts, disseminate information, and express emotions in the process of communication. It plays a pivotal role in daily life, facilitating various interpersonal interactions. The existence of language is imperative for both oral and written communication, influencing individuals' mobility and advancement within specific domains. Proficiency in language equips individuals to effectively communicate their desires, needs, and sentiments to others within society, thereby contributing significantly to personal and societal development.

Translation constitutes an integral part in language, involving the transfer of meaning from the source language (SL) to the receptor (target) language (TL). This process involves moving from the linguistic form of the first language to that of the second language through semantic structures, with the emphasis on maintaining the constancy of meaning while allowing for changes in form (Larson, 1998; Munday, 2009). In the realm of cinema, there are two primary methods for translating dialogs: dubbing and subtitling. This study focuses on the subtitling method, a process wherein speech from the film's soundtrack is translated into written language. The translation appears as text on the lower portion of the film screen.

Newmark (1988, p. 94) characterizes culture as "the distinctive way of life and its manifestations inherent to a community utilizing a specific language as its vehicle for expression." Bourdieu's "habitus" conceptualization perceives culture as a collection of enduring and transferrable principles that furnish individuals with a collective identity, encompassing shared beliefs, representations, rules, taboos, symbols, rituals, and practices (Bourdieu, 1980). Similarly, Hofstede (1991) underscores culture's pivotal role in shaping group identity, portraying it as the collective mental programming that distinguishes one group from another. Tran Ngoc Them (2001, p. 27) situates culture within the domain of values, defining it as "an organic system of material and spiritual values created and accumulated by people through practical operations in the interaction between humans and their natural and social environment" (see also Nguyen Viet Khoa, 2023, p. 234-5).

A taboo can be defined as "a proscription of behavior" applicable to a specific community, within a designated context, at a particular location and temporal setting (Allan & Burridge, 2006, p. 27). The incorporation of taboo language as a mode of expression is an enduring aspect within the fabric of language and culture. In contemporary cinema, a prevalent trend involves the utilization of taboo words, irrespective of their contextual relevance. Taboo words represent a distinctive linguistic phenomenon, marked by their prohibition in ordinary discourse, particularly formal settings, due to their potential to evoke repulsion, embarrassment, and contravention of social norms within the respective society. However, these expressions are indispensable in linguistic performance, particularly in instances of strong emotional expression such as anger or swearing aiming at releasing an abnormal psychological state in response to a certain phenomenon, mainly in verbal communication (Phạm Văn Tình, 2013). Indeed, taboo words have become an integral facet of our daily communicative interactions.

This paper centers on the translation of offensive and taboo language in subtitles, particularly emphasizing their function as linguistic elements within a low register (nonstandard). In this role, they function as vehicles for conveying information about a character's personality, mood, and/or social status to the audience. The study extensively analyzes the usage of taboo words in the film *The Shawshank Redemption* to discern the prevailing strategies adopted by translators in subtitling taboo language. Additionally, the article provides recommendations for translators regarding the subtitled rendering of taboo language.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Background

### *2.1. Offensive and Taboo Language*

Offensive and taboo language is pervasive across diverse cultures, with the acceptability of such linguistic registers varying based on factors such as societal norms, cultural nuances, belief systems, and related perspectives.

The etymology of the English term "taboo" can be traced back to the Tongan word "tabu" in the late 18th century, as noted in the Encyclopedia Britannica (2016). Captain James Cook introduced this term into European languages after encountering it during his exploration of Polynesia (Holden, 2001). In the Tongan language, "taboo" translates to "forbidden" (Fromkin et al., 2017, p. 321). Fromkin et al. (2017) assert that taboos serve as reflections of specific customs and societal perspectives. They further contend that taboos predominantly encompass expressions related to sex, sex organs, and bodily functions, constituting a significant aspect of cultural norms in various societies. Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 1) posit that taboos are grounded in social restrictions on behaviors, which, if breached, can lead to discomfort or harm.

In a contemporary context, Suha and Sudarwati (2021) associate taboos with slang used by the youth on platforms like TikTok. They assert that these expressions, largely constituted by swear words, are avoided due to religious, politeness, and behavioral considerations. This perspective highlights the evolving nature of taboos and their connection to societal norms and language use in contemporary contexts.

The relativity of taboos across cultures underscores the dynamic nature of societal norms and values. What is deemed taboo in one culture may not necessarily hold the same status in another, despite the presence of shared cultural elements. This phenomenon reflects the intricate interplay of historical, religious, and socio-cultural factors that shape the perception of certain behaviors, practices, or expressions as forbidden or unacceptable within a given society (Bouchara, 2021). For example, in European cultures, consuming certain animals, such as dogs or insects, may be considered taboo, while other societies like those of Viet Nam and many East Asian countries may have no qualms about including these in their diets.

Cultures, even those sharing commonalities, possess distinct perspectives and value systems that influence their understanding of taboo subjects. Factors such as religious beliefs, historical experiences, and social structures contribute to the divergence in what is considered acceptable or forbidden (Douglas, 1966). Additionally, evolving societal attitudes and globalization can impact the boundaries of taboos as cultures interact and influence each other (McEnery, 2004).

Jay (1992) categorizes ten types of taboo words, each embodying distinct linguistic and societal distinction (p. 4-9). Firstly, cursing involves the deliberate invocation of harm upon others through specific words or phrases, serving as expressions of diverse emotions such as happiness, shock, or anger. Profanity, the second type, derives from a religious distinction, signifying a secular or uninformed comportment towards religious beliefs without necessarily denigrating God, religion, or sacred matters. Thirdly, blasphemy constitutes an explicit attack on religious doctrines. Taboo, the fourth category, functions to suppress or inhibit certain behaviors, thoughts, or speech, aiming to preserve social cohesion by restricting the speaker's conduct. Distinguished from direct offensiveness, obscenity, the fifth taboo word, encompasses highly offensive expressions, particularly those of a sexual nature, rarely utilized in public discourse. Vulgarity, the sixth type, denotes the language of common individuals, lacking sophistication or social refinement and serving no specific communicative purpose beyond common human interaction. Slang, the seventh category, denotes vocabulary developed within specific sub-groups, facilitating communication within those groups with terms such as "pimp" "dweeb" or "cupcakes". Epithets, the subsequent taboo word type, represent brief yet forceful bursts of emotional language, characterized by their intensity and offensiveness. Insults and slurs, constituting the eighth type, involve derogatory terms targeting individuals based on their social deviations or characteristics, exemplified by words like "pig", "dog", "son of a bitch", "whore", "bastard", "homo", "fag", and "queer". Lastly, scatology, the tenth category, encompasses terms related to human waste products or processes, often introduced to children during toilet training.

Jay's taxonomy provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of taboo words, encompassing a range of linguistic forms and social functions within various contexts. Derogatory, abusive, or insulting language falls under the category of offensive words, whereas the acceptability of taboo words hinges on contextual, cultural, and linguistic considerations. These terms are subject to diverse labels, including dirty language, strong language, bad language, foul language, rude language, taboo language, emotionally charged language, and offensive language. To mitigate terminological ambiguity, this study adopts the phrase "taboo language" or "taboo word" as an encompassing descriptor for terms that possess derogatory, insulting, or taboo connotations.

Baker's (1992) and Newmark's (1988) translation procedures serve as a prominent analytical framework for scrutinizing the translation of taboo words. The researchers assert that the translation of "culture words" poses a challenge unless there is a cultural congruence between the SL, TL and their respective readerships. Taboo words, deeply ingrained in socio-cultural contexts, present a formidable task for translators. Among the myriad translation strategies, Newmark (1988) highlights several procedures—functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, cultural equivalent, paraphrase, literal translation, reduction, and through translation - as particularly pertinent for translating taboo words when compared to alternative strategies.

In the domain of subtitling, Ávila-Cabrera (2015) observes a prevalent practice of tempering or omitting offensive and taboo words, driven by constraints in space and time (p. 42). Despite this curtailment, such language serves an exclamatory function, contributing significantly to the audience's comprehension of a speaker's personality, idiosyncrasies, and can, at times, be employed gratuitously for the purpose of insult (Allan, 2015). The removal of these linguistic elements may not always be the optimal solution, considering that taboo words are intricately tied to local traditions and communities, exhibiting diverse contextual interpretations within distinct social and religious environments (Díaz-Cintas, 2018). Recognizing that swearwords play a crucial role in character and setting depiction, contributing to the audience's understanding of specific discourse segments, their omission results in a "loss in communicative effect and social implicature" (Greenall, 2011, p. 60), along with the suppression of linguistic diversity, specifically individuals deviating from standard speech (Díaz-Cintas, 2018).

Swearwords and taboo language substantially contribute to character portrayal and thematic expression in films (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015). However, their translation tends to exhibit variability across mediums, with films intended for cinematic release often adopting a more audacious approach in presenting swearwords or taboo language compared to television broadcasts, where such terms are typically toned down (Díaz-Cintas, 2018).

### *2.2. Subtitling Strategies*

Subtitling, as a mode of Audiovisual Translation (Multimedia Translation), involves the translation of multimedia and multimodal texts into different languages and cultures. Offensive and taboo expressions, when presented in written form, possess the potential to exert a substantial influence on the reader or audience (Fin, 2017). Consequently, when engaged in subtitling, it becomes imperative to employ specific strategies that align with the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target audience.

Linguistically, a systematic taxonomy of subtitling strategies has been formulated and applied as a methodological framework for addressing taboo language. This taxonomy serves as a synthesis of subtitling strategies posited by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), Davoodi (2007), and Lovihandrie et al. (2018).

(1) Omission/Censorship: This strategy involves the removal of specific segments from the source text (ST) during the translation process into the TL. However, it is deemed inappropriate and unacceptable, as in some instances, the taboo term plays a crucial role in the ST, and its omission may distort the intended meaning. In the translation of taboo expressions, omissions serve as a strategy wherein translators may opt to eliminate the taboo elements from the ST, aiming to maintain a similar impact on the readers in the TL. This choice may arise from the translator's attempt to uphold consistent expectations in the TL or due to the excessively vulgar nature of the words in the TL context.

(2) Substitution: Another approach to translating a taboo term or culture-specific expression involves substituting the term with an alternative in the TL (L2). This substitution entails replacing a word, phrase, or larger lexical units in the ST with another term in the TL. While the substituted term may not convey the exact propositional meaning, it is chosen to elicit a similar impact on the target reader. Frequently substituted words encompass those with swearing, insulting, and slurring content, such as the "F-word" and its derivatives, along with expressions like "damn", "bullshit" or terms containing religious cursing like "Jesus Christ," all of which convey strong emotional tones from the speaker. The substitution strategy is often employed when dealing with religious concepts (Abdel-Hafix, 2021, p. 69).

(3) Taboo for taboo: The taboo-for-taboo translation strategy involves substituting a taboo expression in the SL with an equivalent taboo expression in the TL, aiming to maintain both expressive and propositional meanings. This approach, akin to literal translation according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), is viable only in languages with high cultural affinity. It requires strict adherence to the ST's syntax, meaning, and style. Translators employing taboo-for-taboo knowingly choose to convey culturally or socially unacceptable expressions in the TL, seeking equivalence in meaning rather than linguistic form. In cases of extreme offensiveness in the ST, non-literal translation may be chosen to preserve the offensiveness using culturally appropriate terms like Crisafulli (1997). Taboo-for-taboo is the predominant strategy, being the closest to the ST, as noted by scholar Davoodi (2007).

(4) Borrowing: Borrowing, within the context of translation, denotes the incorporation of a word from the SL into the TL with minimal alterations, primarily involving adjustments to pronunciation rules. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) characterize borrowing as a translation procedure wherein the identical word or expression from the ST is retained in the target text (TT). This strategy manifests in two discernible categories, namely pure and naturalized borrowing. While other scholars (Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992) have discussed borrowing in translation, the specific categorization into pure and naturalized borrowing is closely associated with Vinay and Darbelnet's model.

(5) Translation by more general words:

The translator replaces taboo expressions with TL equivalents that convey the intended meaning. This involves using a superordinate term to overcome the TL's lack of specificity, requiring the identification of a more general term aligned with the propositional meaning of the SL word. This strategy addresses cultural and linguistic disparities by employing a broader term to convey the essence of the SL expression. According to Baker (1992), translation using a more general word, specifically a superordinate, stands as one of the prevalent strategies employed to address instances of non-equivalence, particularly within the domain of propositional meaning (p. 26). This strategy reflects the translator's imperative to navigate the challenges posed by diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, seeking a balance between fidelity to the ST and the communicative tones of the TL. For example, “damn” in English is translated into “chết tiệt” in Vietnamese. Instead of translating the English expletive directly, a more general expression like “chết tiệt” might be used, conveying a sense of frustration without reproducing the specific taboo word.

(6) Euphemism: Euphemism involves substituting a more agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may cause discomfort or convey unpleasant connotations (Larson, 1998). Its purpose extends to shielding readers or audiences from potential offense by moderating strong language, offensive expressions, and vulgar descriptions. Euphemistic language serves to avoid “possible loss of face” and enhance politeness and acceptability in communication, particularly when addressing sensitive topics or avoiding impolite and insulting words (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p. 14). The translation of euphemisms frequently requires employing an equivalent euphemism in the TL. The key lies in the translator’s ability to identify the euphemistic quality of the SL expression and subsequently choose a suitable and acceptable expression in the TL, whether it be euphemistic or direct. For example, instead of saying “he died”, Vietnamese people may euphemistically refer to it as “he has been away to meet his ancestors”.

(7) Literal translation (Direct translation):

Literal Translation, abbreviated as LT, involves the direct transfer of words or clusters of words from an SL into a TL. This method adheres strictly to the grammar and idioms of the original language. In other words, the translator attempts to render the text in the TL without embellishment or interpretation, maintaining a one-to-one correspondence between words in the SL and TL (Vinay et al., 1995). For example, “son of a bitch” is translated into “thằng chó” in Vietnamese. While it ensures a certain level of accuracy, this strategy may not always be the most effective approach for conveying the full meaning and nuances of the ST.

In the realm of audiovisual translation, subtitlers navigate the intricacies of employing multiple strategies, extending beyond linguistic challenges to encompass synchronization with visuals and the efficient conveyance of meaning within constrained space. Proficiency demands a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between audio and visual elements, emphasizing the need to capture subtle details for contextually relevant subtitles. Recognizing audiovisual content as dual in nature, presented through both auditory and visual channels, subtitlers decode diverse signification codes, including spoken language, facial expressions, and contextual cues. The overarching objective is to maximize subtitlers’ knowledge, ensuring accurate, culturally sensitive, and contextually fitting subtitles within the dynamic landscape of the audiovisual medium.

### *2.3. Subtitling Challenges*

#### 2.3.1. Social Challenges

The connection between translation and the target culture/society is robust, yet diverse cultural groups operate under distinct cultural and social norms shaping their linguistic conduct. Taboo words are inherently tied to culture and specific to particular languages, susceptible to prohibition in their native context and censorship in public and media domains, especially when crossing linguistic boundaries. In subtitling, the transfer of taboo words may vary. When not transferred, and depending on the chosen strategy, these words can be inaccurately translated, omitted, adjusted, or replaced inappropriately, leading to a shift in meaning and the introduction of errors in the TL. Consequently, delving into translation strategies helps elucidate the decisions made by subtitlers and clarifies discrepancies in the use of taboo words between the ST and TT.

Koolstra et al. (2002) have noted criticisms directed at subtitling, citing concerns about subpar translations of original foreign language texts that could potentially impact viewers' perceptions of films. In alignment with this, Nornes (2004) concurs, asserting that individuals are unlikely to leave a foreign film with admiration for the subtitles. Viewers consistently express dissatisfaction and confusion, attributing these sentiments to issues such as inadequate subtitles, non-equivalence, mistranslations, and challenges associated with literal translation.

Ben-Slamia (2020) discusses Ballester's (1995) assertion regarding the foreign character of American films when viewed by the target audience. Ballester contends that the shift from universality to nationality alters the dynamic between the spectator and the film, leading to the perception of American cinema as foreign. The act of adapting or domesticating the original text to the TL's culture can evoke a sense of foreignness, strangeness, and incongruity. This arises because the translated content is often tailored for a culture different from the source, catering to an audience with its unique convictions, values, and social behaviors.

In essence, each audiovisual creation inherently introduces a set of challenges to comprehension (Diaz-Cintas, 2003). Subtitled films, falling within the realm of audiovisual products, present unique hurdles, with subtitling itself being distinctive by nature. This process is considered polysemiotic par excellence, given the simultaneous presence of various channels - visual, auditory, and written (Gottlieb, 2001). A subtitled film comprises dialogues, sounds, subtitle images, and additional non-linguistic codes, necessitating the condensation of speech due to limitations on the number of characters displayed on-screen (see also Ben-Slamia, 2020).

#### 2.3.2. Technical Restrictions

Subtitling encounters a spectrum of technical restrictions that significantly impact the translation process. Foremost among these constraints are limitations on character count per line and overall on-screen duration, compelling subtitlers to condense translations while upholding readability. Additionally, the synchronization of subtitles with the audio's pace and the audience's natural reading speed poses a challenge, particularly for languages with differing temporal demands. The polysemiotic nature of subtitling, encompassing visual, auditory, and written channels simultaneously, demands careful coordination to maintain coherence (Bogucki, 2004). The recommendation in the field of subtitling suggests that subtitles should be displayed on the screen for a duration ranging from a minimum of one second to a maximum of six seconds, as outlined by Brondeel (1994). Furthermore, the conventional practice involves presenting subtitles in concise formats, either as one-liners or two-liners, ensuring optimal readability and viewer engagement. This guideline acknowledges the need for a balanced temporal presentation and visual layout to enhance the overall effectiveness of subtitling in audiovisual content.

In multilingual scenarios, subtitlers must navigate challenges to ensure seamless comprehension across various languages without interference between subtitles. Considerations such as subtitle positioning, font selection, and size become critical for legibility, adapting to diverse screen sizes and resolutions. The complex interplay of cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and linguistic differences further adds layers of intricacy to the subtitling process. Moreover, subtitlers contend with audio quality issues, technical format requirements, and the need to strike a delicate balance between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring comprehension for the target audience. Navigating these multifaceted technical challenges necessitates the expertise of subtitlers well-versed in the nuances of language, culture, and audiovisual dynamics.

In the world of digital transformation, several subtitling software tools are available to make life easier for subtitlers and translators, with WinCAPS standing out as a professional subtitling preparation software package developed by Screen. This software integration plays a pivotal role in upholding precision and compliance with industry standards when determining suitable duration and character limits for subtitles in audiovisual content.

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. The Film*

*The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont and released in 1994, stands as a critically acclaimed American drama film. Based on Stephen King's novella "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption," the narrative follows Andy Dufresne, a banker sentenced to 19 years in Shawshank State Prison for a crime he claims innocence in - the murder of his wife and her lover. Throughout his incarceration, Andy (Tim Robbins) forms a lasting friendship with fellow inmate and smuggler Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding (Morgan Freeman), who aids him in navigating the harsh realities of prison life. Andy, leveraging his financial acumen, becomes integral to the prison community, assisting both guards and the warden with financial matters.

The film explores themes of hope, friendship, and the potential for redemption, unraveling the journeys of Andy and Red as they grapple with their pasts and search for meaning within the prison's confines. Despite its modest box office reception and the absence of any Oscar awards, the film garnered acclaim from both critics and audiences alike for its exceptional acting and realistic portrayal. Over the years, it has achieved enduring popularity through cable television, DVD, and Blu-ray, streaming service, solidifying its status as a classic of American cinema and one of the greatest films ever made with an IMDb rating of 9.3/10 stars.

*The Shawshank Redemption* presents an opportunity for a descriptive analysis of its English subtitled version into Vietnamese, considering potential differences. Notably, the film stands out for a unique feature where a significant portion of the characters, being inmates, frequently employ offensive and taboo language.

### *3.2. The Objectives*

The study aims to clarify the subtitling translation strategies applied to offensive and taboo language in *The Shawshank Redemption*. A set of research questions constitutes the foundation of the research design, with the overarching objective of providing insights into the handling of offensive/taboo language and the employed subtitling translation strategies. The research methodology employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, utilizing triangulation to enhance the robustness of the findings. The ensuing research questions, which are at the core of the research design, are summarized as follows:

1. What strategies has the subtitler primarily employed in translating taboo words into Vietnamese subtitles?

2. What recommendations can be offered for the translation of taboo words in subtitles into Vietnamese?

### *3.3. Research Instruments*

To address the objectives of this research, a dual approach involving both quantitative analyses, utilizing descriptive statistics, and qualitative analysis, employing translation analysis, will be employed. Quantitative analysis, incorporating figures and frequencies, is applied to address the first research question. Meanwhile, qualitative analysis is employed to answer the second research question, involving the random selection of samples of English-Vietnamese pairs. This analysis delves into various strategies used in subtitling translations of taboo words, offering insights and recommendations for subtitlers and translators.

### *3.4. Data Collection*

Quantitative data for the study has been sourced from the DVD release of the film, while the Vietnamese subtitles were extracted from the Netflix version. To ensure accuracy and consistency, both datasets are cross-validated with their respective versions available on OpenSubtitles, an open-access online repository of subtitles for films and television shows. This approach to data collection and verification enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study's findings.

The data collection and analysis followed a systematic procedure. Initially, a thorough examination of the original films allowed for the extraction and recording of taboo elements. Each English taboo word or expression was systematically compared with its Vietnamese dubbed equivalent. Following a comprehensive review of recorded pairs, the strategies employed for rendering taboo language were identified and categorized into four fundamental types. Subsequently, descriptive statistics, encompassing frequency, percentage, and sum, were calculated for each strategy. To consistently identify words or expressions perceived as taboos within the Vietnamese cultural context in this American movie, the categorizations of taboo language in Vietnamese as proposed by Nguyễn Thị Tuyết Ngân (1993), and Lê Minh Thiện and Trần Thị Phương Thảo (2009), was utilized.

This study has been enriched with qualitative data, capable of validating or challenging some of the findings obtained from the quantitative analysis, employing a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2014).

**Figure 1**

*Collected Datasets of English Subtitles and Their Vietnamese Versions*

| 1 | Row | English text | Numbe | Vietnamese text | Start time | End time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1055 | 1054 | Randall Stevens. | 1053 | Randall Stevens. | 1:22:13.886 | 1:22:15.513 |
| 1056 | 1055 | Who? | 1054 | Ai cơ? | 1:22:16.013 | 1:22:17.014 |
| 1057 | 1056 | The silent" silent partner." | 1055 | Một đối tác câm lặng"." | 1:22:17.181 | 1:22:19.183 |
| 1058 | 1057 | He's the guilty one, the man with the bank account | 1056 | Anh ta mới là kẻ có tội, là người có tài khoản | 1:22:19.392 | 1:22:22.478 |
| 1059 | 1058 | It's where the filtering process starts. | 1057 | Đó là điểm bắt đầu của quá trình rửa tiền. | 1:22:22.687 | 1:22:24.856 |
| 1060 | 1059 | They trace anything, it'll just lead to him. | 1058 | Họ theo bất kì dấu vết nào, cũng chỉ dẫn tới | 1:22:25.022 | 1:22:27.900 |
| 1061 | 1060 | But who is he? | 1059 | Nhưng anh ta là ai? | 1:22:28.526 | 1:22:29.735 |
| 1062 | 1061 | He's a phantom, an apparition. Second cousin to Ha | 1060 | Anh ta là một bóng ma, một con quỷ. Người | 1:22:29.944 | 1:22:33.906 |
| 1063 | 1062 | I conjured him... | 1061 | Tôi tạo ra anh ta... | 1:22:35.032 | 1:22:36.200 |
| 1064 | 1063 | out of thin air. | 1062 | ... từ trong hư không. | 1:22:36.367 | 1:22:37.743 |
| 1065 | 1064 | He doesn't exist, except on paper. | 1063 | Anh ta không tồn tại, chỉ trên giấy tờ. | 1:22:38.536 | 1:22:41.289 |
| 1066 | 1065 | You can't just make a person up. | 1064 | Anh không thể tạo ra một con người. | 1:22:44.375 | 1:22:46.711 |
| 1067 | 1066 | Sure you can, if you know how the system works. | 1065 | Chắc chắn được, nếu anh hiểu cách hệ thống | 1:22:46.919 | 1:22:50.047 |
| 1068 | 1067 | It's amazing what you can accomplish by mail. | 1066 | Thật kỳ diệu khi anh có thể làm mọi thứ qua | 1:22:50.548 | 1:22:53.384 |
| 1069 | 1068 | Mr. Stevens has a birth certificate... | 1067 | Ông Stevens với giấy khai sinh... | 1:22:53.718 | 1:22:56.345 |
| 1070 | 1069 | driver's license, Social Security. | 1068 | ...bằng lái xe, bảo hiểm xã hội. | 1:22:56.554 | 1:22:58.681 |
| 1071 | 1070 | You're shitting me. | 1069 | Anh đùa tôi đấy à. | 1:22:58.931 | 1:22:59.932 |
| 1072 | 1071 | If they trace any accounts, they'll wind up chasing.. | 1070 | Nếu truy tìm bất kỳ tài khoản nào thì họ cũng | 1:23:00.099 | 1:23:03.519 |
| 1073 | 1072 | a figment of my imagination. | 1071 | ...thấy điều tôi tưởng tượng ra mà thôi. | 1:23:03.728 | 1:23:05.438 |
| 1074 | 1073 | Well, I'll be damned! | 1072 | Ồ, Khỉ thật! | 1:23:05.646 | 1:23:07.648 |
| 1075 | 1074 | Did I say you were good? | 1073 | Tôi đã bảo là anh giỏi chưa? | 1:23:08.983 | 1:23:10.735 |
| 1076 | 1075 | Shit, you are Rembrandt. | 1074 | Chết tiệt, anh đúng là Rembrandt đấy. | 1:23:11.068 | 1:23:12.737 |
| 1077 | 1076 | The funny thing is... | 1075 | Điều nực cười là ở chỗ... | 1:23:13.446 | 1:23:15.198 |
| 1078 | 1077 | on the outside, I was an honest man, straight as an | 1076 | ...ở ngoài kia thì tôi là người trung thực và n | 1:23:15.406 | 1:23:19.494 |
| 1079 | 1078 | I had to come to prison to be a crook. | 1077 | Tôi vào tù rồi mới trở thành tội phạm. | 1:23:19.911 | 1:23:22.246 |
| 1080 | 1079 | Ever bother you? | 1078 | Có lúc nào anh phiền không? | 1:23:31.088 | 1:23:32.423 |
| 1081 | 1080 | I don't run the scams. I just process the profits. | 1079 | Tôi không chơi gian lận. Tôi chỉ xử lý nguồn l | 1:23:33.841 | 1:23:36.928 |

In that way, two datasets are gathered into CSV file (en_vi_taboo.csv). They are in fact two subtitle text files with the structures as shown in Figure 1 with a total of 1690 lines of subtitles (23,929 words). Then the dataset of English profanities provided by Surge AI (2023) is employed to categorize all the found taboo words into the following groups:

**Table 1**

*Profanity Categories and Examples Provided by Surg AI (2023)*

| Group | No. | Example |
|---|---|---|
| sexual anatomy / sexual acts | 1 | ass kisser, dick, pigfucker |
| bodily fluids / excrement | 2 | shit, cum |
| sexual orientation / gender | 3 | faggot, tranny, bitch, whore |
| racial / ethnic | 4 | chink, negro |
| mental disability | 5 | retard, dumbass |
| physical disability | 6 | quadriplegic bitch |
| physical attributes | 7 | fatass, ugly whore |
| animal references | 8 | pigfucker, jackass |
| religious offense | 9 | goddamn |
| political | 10 | China virus |

We then use a piece of Python code to first read the words from the Surge AI dataset file into a list. Then, the Python code works as follows: It reads the text from the English subtitle file into a string, then loops through each word in the list and counts its frequency. The code stores the profane words and their frequencies in a dictionary. Next, it writes the results to a new CSV file. For each profane word, it looks up its category and severity information in the original "profanity_en.csv" file and writes that information along with the frequency to a row in another new CSV file.

By this way we manage to compile the data to create two CSV files. The first file holds a bilingual binary corpus (Figure 3), which includes 74 dialogue (subtitle) rows containing pairs of taboo words in English and Vietnamese (profanity_results.csv). The second file contains a list of taboo words and their frequency (Figure 2), which is made up of 108 instances of taboo language in English (frequency.csv).

**Figure 2**

*List of Extracted Taboo Words and Their Frequency*

| 1 | word | frequency | category_1 | category_2 | category_3 | severity | severity_de |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | bitching | 1 | sexual orientation / gender | | | 1 | Mild |
| 10 | bullshit | 1 | bodily fluids / excrement | animal references | | 1.2 | Mild |
| 11 | cocks | 1 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 1.6 | Strong |
| 12 | crow | 3 | animal references | | | 1 | Mild |
| 13 | Fuck | 10 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 2 | Strong |
| 14 | fucked | 2 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | other / general insult | | 1.8 | Strong |
| 15 | fucking | 1 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 2.2 | Strong |
| 16 | goddamn | 11 | religious offense | | | 1.6 | Strong |
| 17 | hoe | 1 | sexual orientation / gender | | | 2 | Strong |
| 18 | jigger | 10 | racial / ethnic slurs | | | 3 | Severe |
| 19 | motherfucker | 1 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | other / general insult | | 3 | Severe |
| 20 | peter | 2 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 1 | Mild |
| 21 | prick | 3 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 1 | Mild |
| 22 | pricks | 1 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 1 | Mild |
| 23 | queers | 2 | sexual orientation / gender | | | 1.8 | Strong |
| 24 | sack | 1 | sexual anatomy / sexual acts | | | 1 | Mild |
| 25 | shat | 1 | bodily fluids / excrement | | | 1.2 | Mild |
| 26 | shit | 20 | bodily fluids / excrement | | | 1.2 | Mild |
| 27 | shithead | 1 | bodily fluids / excrement | | | 1.8 | Strong |
| 28 | shitty | 2 | bodily fluids / excrement | | | 1 | Mild |
| 29 | slit | 2 | sexual orientation / gender | | | 1.6 | Strong |

**Figure 3**

*Bilingual Binary Corpus of Found Taboo Words*

| 1 | English text | Numb | Vietnamese text | Translation strategy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | I'll see you in hell before i see you in Reno. | 7 | Tôi sẽ gặp cô ở địa ngục trước khi gặp ở Reno. | Direct translation |
| 3 | Damn near anything within reason. | 100 | Mọi thứ, miễn là hợp lý. | Censorship |
| 4 | I never seen such a sorry-looking heap of maggot shi | 114 | Tao chưa từng thấy đám tù nào trông lại thiểu n | Censorship |
| 5 | that little sack of shit. | 120 | Thằng bé con bẩn thỉu kia. | Substitution |
| 6 | You shit when we say you shit, and piss when we sa | 155 | Mày ỉa khi bọn tao nói ỉa, và mày đái khi bọn ta | Direct translation |
| 7 | Your ass belongs to me. | 162 | Các anh thuộc sự cai quản của tôi. | Substitution |
| 8 | Poke your ass out, give me a first look! - Keep it do | 197 | Thòi cái mông mày ra để tao coi. Đè nó xuống. | Direct translation |
| 9 | I know a couple of big old bull queers that'd just... | 208 | Tao biết ở đây có những thằng to lớn và đồng t | Direct translation |
| 10 | Especially that big, white, mushy butt of yours. | 210 | Đặc biệt là thằng béo, trắng và ủy mị như mày. | Substitution |
| 11 | And it's fat ass by a nose! | 214 | Chính là thằng béo phị này! | Substitution |
| 12 | What is your malfunction, you fat barrel of monkey | 223 | Có chuyện gì với mày thế hả thằng béo ngu ng | Euphemism |
| 13 | Me neither! They run this place like a fucking prison | 231 | Tao cũng không, cái nhà tù này khốn nạn kinh. | Taboo for taboo |
| 14 | Every last motherfucker in here. | 236 | Từng thằng khốn khiếp ở đây. | Taboo for taboo |
| 15 | Call the trustees. Take that tub of shit down to the in | 237 | Gọi bác sĩ, mang đống phân này xuống bệnh xá | Direct translation |
| 16 | Poor bastard lay there till this morning. | 274 | Thằng khốn đáng thương nằm đó tới sáng. | Taboo for taboo |
| 17 | What the fuck do you care, new fish? | 279 | Mày quan tâm làm quái gì hả, thằng lính mới? | Taboo for taboo |
| 18 | Doesn't fucking matter what his name was. He's dea | 280 | Tên là cái quái gì đi nữa thì nó cũng toi rồi. | Taboo for taboo |
| 19 | What you in here for? - Didn't do it. Lawyer fucked | 300 | Này, sao cậu vào đây? - Tôi vô tội, thằng luật | Euphemism |
| 20 | You think your shit smells sweeter than most. Is that | 302 | Thế cậu nghĩ cậu hơn tất cả bọn tôi à? | Substitution |
| 21 | Bull queers take by force. That's all they want or un | 331 | Bọn chó đấy chỉ dùng bạo lực. Chúng chỉ muốn | Taboo for taboo |
| 22 | Incredible how lucky some assholes get. - You going | 429 | Thằng khốn đó may mắn đến không tưởng. - T | Taboo for taboo |

## 4. Findings and Discussions

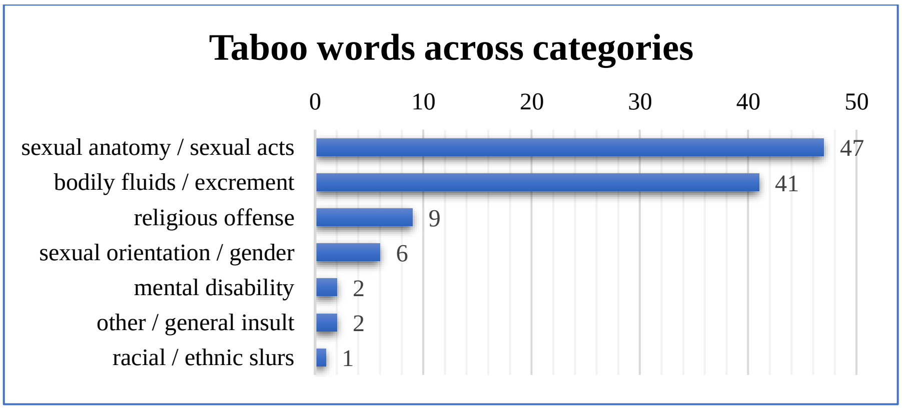
The results of the study are presented in this section. Sub-section 4.1 focuses on the presence of taboo words in the English sub-corpus, indicating their categories and the frequency of the different cases. The next section 4.2. deals with the translation solutions adopted in the whole corpus.

### *4.1. Statistical Findings and Discussions*

The examination of 108 instances of taboo words within the film *The Shawshank Redemption* based on the Surge AI dataset on English profanities, reveals a subtle and diverse distribution across distinct thematic categories.

**Figure 4**

*Counts of Taboo Words Across Profanity Categories*



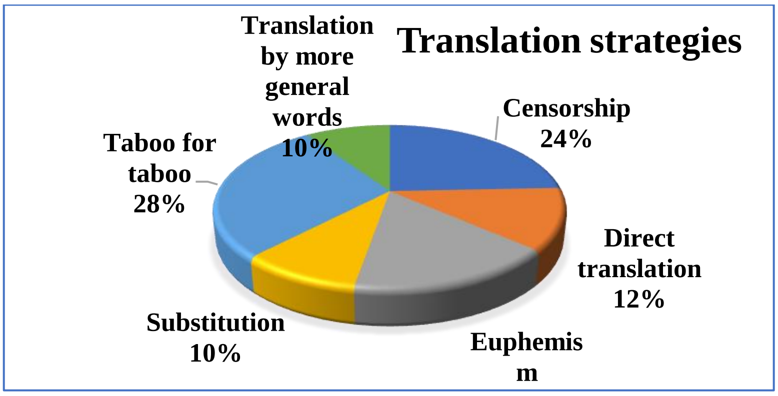

Notably, the most prevalent category encompasses expressions related to sexual anatomy and acts, accounting for 44% of the total instances. This suggests a significant emphasis on content pertaining to sexual themes within the profanity-laden dialogue of the film.

Following closely, bodily fluids and excrement-related profanities constitute 38% of the dataset, indicating a substantial focus on crude and explicit language related to physical functions. The category of religious offense contributes 8% of instances, underlining the presence of profanities associated with religious themes. Additionally, expressions related to sexual orientation and gender account for 6% of instances, reflecting a notable but comparatively smaller proportion in the overall profanity distribution. Mental disability-related profanities constitute a minimal yet discernible 2% of instances, suggesting a limited but existent usage within the film's dialogue. Furthermore, both the categories of other/general insults and racial/ethnic slurs each represent 2% and 1%, respectively, highlighting the relatively infrequent occurrence of these specific forms of offensive language. This comprehensive analysis not only delineates the prevalence of profanities within the film but also provides insights into the thematic dimensions and proportional distribution of such language, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the film's linguistic content.

In the examination of the translation strategies employed in rendering taboo words from the film into Vietnamese, a careful analysis revealed a subtle array of approaches. The translation strategies under consideration encompassed omission/censorship, substitution, euphemism, taboo for taboo, translation by more general words, and direct translation, with the notable absence of the borrowing strategy.

**Figure 5**

*Strategies Employed in Translating Taboo Words*




Among the 74 instances of taboo expressions identified, the most prevalent strategy was taboo for taboo, constituting 28% of cases, wherein translators chose to retain the explicit nature of the offensive terms in the TL. Omission/censorship emerged as the second most frequently employed strategy, accounting for 24% of instances, indicating a deliberate decision to exclude or mute offensive content. Euphemistic strategies were observed in 16% of cases, reflecting a preference for softer or less explicit language choices. Substitution, involving the replacement of taboo words with culturally acceptable alternatives, constituted 10% of instances. Similarly, translation by more general words, where a broader and less explicit vocabulary was chosen, also accounted for 10% of cases. Direct translation, without modification, was employed in 12% of instances. Remarkably, the borrowing strategy was entirely absent in the translation of taboo expressions. This comprehensive statistical analysis sheds light on the diverse and context-dependent decision-making processes undertaken by translators when faced with the challenge of rendering taboo content, providing valuable insights into the intricate balance between fidelity to the source material and cultural sensitivity in making the film accessible to a Vietnamese audience.

### *4.2. Specific Subtitling Strategies*

The dialogues with taboo words uttered by the speakers and its Vietnamese subtitling translation are analyzed by using the theories proposed by the translation researchers aforementioned in Section 2.2.

Translators often cope with a dilemma when attempting to accurately convey the meaning of taboo words. This challenge arises due to various factors, including cultural, religious, and belief-based considerations. The strategies employed in navigating these challenges are revealed in the figures below.

***Taboo for Taboo***

The research findings indicate that the "taboo for taboo" strategy is predominantly utilized, accounting for 28% with 21 instances. In this approach, the translator alters the taboo expression in the SL, rendering it into taboo language in the TL while maintaining both the same expressive and propositional meanings. For example, the word "queers" is translated into "bọn chó" in the Vietnamese language. Those words are taboo both in English and Vietnamese.

**Table 2**

*Examples of Taboo for Taboo translation*

| No. | ST | TT | Start time | End time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 331 | Bull queers take by force. | Bọn chó đấy chỉ dùng bạo lực. | 0:26:59.158 | 0:27:03.538 |
| 1268 | That son of a bitch mailed it. | Thằng khốn nào đó đã gửi nó. | 1:34:40.007 | 1:34:41.550 |

The prevalence of the "taboo for taboo" strategy in translating offensive words from source to TL can be attributed to a commitment to fidelity, preservation of authenticity, and cultural sensitivity. This translation involves directly translating taboo expressions from English into equivalent taboo expressions in Vietnamese, thereby maintaining the original's cultural and emotional impact. The significant use of this strategy highlights the subtitlers' commitment to preserving the authenticity and intensity of the original content, ensuring that the translated material resonates with the Vietnamese audience in a manner similar to the original English context. With this translation approach, the subtitlers of this film show their crucial role in ensuring cultural sensitivity and fidelity, as they must balance linguistic accuracy with retaining the source material's intended effect.

***Omission***

The different scenes sampled where sexual connotations were made primarily left out of the Vietnamese rendition. The findings revealed that the Omission strategy is second most used with 18 instances (accounting for 24%). For instance:

**Table 3**

*Examples of Omission translation*

| No. | ST | TT | Start time | End time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 754 | Calm the fuck down. | Bình tĩnh nào. | 0:57:31.364 | 0:57:33.240 |
| 1126 | I ain't no goddamn loser. | Tôi không phải là kẻ thua cuộc. | 1:26:25.262 | 1:26:27.765 |

The translation was euphemized in Vietnamese so that it turned to *"Bình tĩnh nào"* this not only takes away the meaning but is also difficult for the audience to read the tone of the speaker. This may be a bit compensated for when viewers follow the scenes' actions.

The F-words were omitted or euphemized with terms like "cái quái" or "khốn nạn" that were deemed less impolite. This decision can be justified by considering the cultural norms and sensibilities of the target audience. Vietnamese culture tends to be more conservative regarding explicit sexual content, and preserving such elements could risk alienating viewers or causing discomfort. Additionally, omitting these connotations helps the subtitler maintain appropriateness and accessibility for a wider audience, including younger viewers or those who may find such content objectionable. By prioritizing cultural sensitivity and audience reception, the subtitler ensures that the material remains engaging and respectful of the Vietnamese culture's values.

***Euphemism***

The use of euphemism in the translation is vital in the Vietnamese language because the nature of Vietnamese cultural and societal aspects makes it hard to translate some ST words into Vietnamese. When translating from any SL to a TL, translators usually adhere to the conventions of the TT cultures as well as the social aspects (Almijrab, 2020). The different scenes sampled where sexual connotations were made primarily left out of the Vietnamese rendition. For instance (see Table 3):

*Jigger: (to Brooks): Calm* ***the fuck*** *down.*

By employing this strategy, the subtitlers translate some taboos into euphemistic terms in Vietnamese. In other words, they are translated into their Vietnamese inoffensive taboos. The findings indicated that the Euphemism strategy with a frequency of 12 and a percentage of 16% was the third used strategy by the subtitlers.

**Table 4**

*Examples of Euphemism Translation*

| **No.** | **ST** | **TT** | **Start time** | **End time** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1161 | A lawyer fucked me. | Thằng luật sư nó chơi tôi. | 0:25:14.554 | 0:25:17.765 |
| 1216 | She's fucking this prick. | Con chó cái này đang ngủ với hắn. | 1:31:47.835 | 1:31:50.295 |

***Direct translation***

The findings revealed that the Direct translation strategy with a frequency of 8 and a percentage of 12 % was not quite favored by the translator for subtitling taboo words in the film. Take a look at these examples:

**Table 5**

*Examples of Direct Translation*

| No. | ST | TT | Start time | End time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 447 | Him and this tasty bitch he was with. | Hắn đi cùng con chó cái của hắn. | 1:31:40.661 | 1:31:43.497 |
| 1461 | You shit when we say you shit, and piss when we say you piss. | Mày ỉa khi bọn tao nói ỉa, và mày đái khi bọn tao bảo đái. | 0:13:47.159 | 0:13:50.412 |

In this film subtitling, the reluctance to carry out direct translation can be justified by several factors. Firstly, the cultural differences between English-speaking and Vietnamese-speaking audiences mean that direct translations of taboo words might not carry the same weight or connotations in Vietnamese. Such direct translations could be perceived as overly harsh or inappropriate, disrupting the viewing experience. Secondly, Vietnamese culture generally values indirect and respectful forms of communication, especially in public and media contexts. Direct translations of taboo words could clash with these norms, potentially offending or alienating the audience. Lastly, subtitlers aim to maintain the movie's tone and intent while ensuring it is culturally acceptable. By avoiding direct translations of taboo words, they can use alternative strategies, such as euphemisms or contextually appropriate substitutions, to convey the intended meaning without compromising cultural sensitivity. Obviously, this approach helps in delivering a more nuanced and culturally resonant translation.

***Substitution***

One way to translate a taboo word is to substitute the term with another term in Vietnamese. In the subtitling of the film, Substitution and Translation by more general words are least used with 7 instances each accounting for 10%. Substituting taboo words with less offensive terms cannot always aid in preserving the intended tone and context of the dialogue. The exact shock value of the original language may be toned down, and the essence of the character's emotion or the scene's impact may be less effectively conveyed. For example:

**Table 6**

*Examples of Substitution Translation*

| No. | ST | TT | Start time | End time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 162 | Your ass belongs to me. | Các anh thuộc sự cai quản của tôi. | 0:14:07.429 | 0:14:09.681 |
| 1207 | So, I could case all these big rich pricks that come in. | ...ở đó tao có thể quan sát được những kẻ giàu có vào quán. | 1:31:18.472 | 1:31:22.393 |

***Translation by more general words***

The translation of taboo words by using more general words is least used in this film subtitling, with only 7 instances, accounting for 10%. For example:

**Table 7**

*Examples of Substitution translation*

| No. | ST | TT | Start time | End time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 162 | You're shitting me. | Anh đùa tôi đấy à. | 1:22:58.931 | 1:22:59.932 |
| 1461 | You'd better be sick or dead in there. I shit you not! | Mày tốt nhất nên chết trong đó đi. Không thì tao sẽ làm đấy. | 1:51:36.105 | 1:51:39.400 |

This low frequency of choice may come from the following reasons. First, more general words tend to dilute the specific emotional and cultural impact of the original taboo words. The subtitlers aim to preserve the intensity and nuance of the original dialogue, which can be lost with overly general translations. Also, while direct translations of taboo words can be too harsh or inappropriate for Vietnamese audiences, using more general words may fail to convey the seriousness or the intended effect of the original terms. The subtitlers need to strike a balance between maintaining the original meaning and ensuring cultural appropriateness. Therefore, the subtitlers have employed other strategies that better match the original tone and context.

## 5. Some Recommendations for Subtitling Taboo Words Into Vietnamese

The taboo words serve multiple functions including expressing sympathy, surprise, disappointment, disbelief, fear, annoyance, metaphorical interpretation, reactions to mishaps, emphasis on associated items, intensification as adjectives, name-calling, anaphoric use of epithets, oaths, curses, unfriendly suggestions, and in four instances, employing non-swearing or dysphemistic terms. Despite being typically discouraged in academic, business, or legal contexts, these words constitute an indispensable component of everyday language and communication. They are ubiquitous in literature, film dialogues, and various forms of media as featured in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Translating taboo words in subtitling, particularly into Vietnamese, presents significant challenges due to cultural norms where most Vietnamese individuals are not accustomed to publicly uttering taboo or offensive words. Moreover, watching films is often a social activity, unlike reading, which can amplify the discomfort of encountering taboo expressions in subtitles or spoken dialogue. Based on the aforementioned analysis and discussion, the following strategies for translating taboo expressions can be drawn:

- Taboo for Taboo: Using taboo expressions in the TL that have equivalent meanings to the SL taboo expressions.
- Omission/Censorship: Removing or censoring taboo expressions to avoid conveying inappropriate content or causing offense in the TL.
- Direct Translation: Converting directly from the SL to the TL without altering or softening the original content.
- Euphemism: Using softer and more polite language to replace taboo expressions in a gentle and respectful manner.
- Substitution: Replacing taboo words or phrases with similar expressions that are less offensive or do not carry as much negative meaning.
- Translation by more general words: Using more generalized language to translate taboo expressions, reducing the intensity and negativity of the original language.

The choice of strategy or procedure depends on the context, the purpose of the translation, and the desire to effectively convey the message in the TL. The Taboo for Taboo strategy can be understood as finding the equivalent of that word in the TL. This is the most effective method but cannot be used frequently because swear words often derive from culture and may not have a completely accurate translation. Euphemism, Substitution and Translation by more general words are basically about paraphrasing taboo expressions. This essentially means avoiding taboo words and expressing the meaning of the words around them. However, this method is often not highly effective if the translator wants to preserve the original shades of meaning. Literal translation is another popular option. However, this is the worst way and should be avoided as much as possible. For example, the literal translation of the word “bitch” would be “female dog.” This translation is not entirely accurate and does not truly stay faithful to the original.

It is advisable, whenever feasible, to employ the Taboo for Taboo strategy, as it helps maintain fidelity to the original text during translation. However, there are other issues that can complicate the translation process and make translating swear words more challenging. Translators must contend with censorship, and at times, they must choose between translating the text as it is written or adjusting it to reflect the speech patterns in the TL.

Omitting specific words for ethical reasons is not generally appropriate in translation.

Providing a faithful translation is the most important task. However, when the use of taboo words affects the smooth flow of the translation, or when a text or dialogue originally written in English - a language that often employs swear/taboo words to express emotions - is translated into Vietnamese, a language less prone to using such language, it may sometimes be better to omit those words to preserve the purpose and impact of the original text.

It is certain that this does not happen unilaterally. When translating Vietnamese film dialogue into English, there may be a need to add taboo words that were not present in the original to convey the exact sophistication intended by the original Vietnamese text (see the second example in the previous paragraph on Euphemism).

One can conclude that translating taboo words is a challenging task, but not impossible, especially when the translator is proficient in both the source and TLs. When dealing with this group of vocabulary, it is recommended to retain them in the complete translation, either as equivalent words or phrases or by rephrasing to convey the intended meaning, as the ultimate purpose of translation is to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps to enable communication and comprehension across different languages and cultures (Venuti, 1995).

## 6. Conclusion

The study aims at highlighting subtitling strategies used to translate taboo words in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*. Two conclusions can be drawn in this study.

Firstly, the translator applied six strategies to translate the taboo words, which are Taboo for Taboo, Omission, Euphemism, Direct translation, Substitution and Translation by more general words. Among these strategies, Taboo for Taboo is most used by the translator to maintain the taboo expression contained in the SL, thus the reader in TL not only understands the meaning of what is read, but also gets the expressive impression of the word.

Secondly, the translation of taboo expressions demands a delicate approach, with careful consideration of context, translation purpose, and the intended message in the TL. The Taboo for Taboo strategy emerges as the most effective, yet its applicability is constrained by cultural distinctions. Despite this, the writer advocates for prioritizing this strategy to maintain fidelity to the original, while recognizing challenges posed by censorship and the necessity of adapting to the language norms of the target audience. The emphasis remains on providing a faithful translation, even when incorporating swear words, and the writer cautions against omitting specific words solely for ethical reasons unless it hinders the smooth flow of translation. Acknowledging the inherent complexity of translating swear words, the conclusion underscores the translator's pivotal role in conveying information without personal offense, thereby navigating the intricacies of language and cultural sensitivity.

In conclusion, the use of offensive and taboo language, encompassing abusive swearing, expletives, invectives, and taboo words, is a sensitive and underexplored topic in Audiovisual Translation, particularly in subtitling. Despite its social unacceptability in certain contexts, such language serves as a tool to depict characters' linguistic nuances, emotions, and feelings. Further research on the subtitled translation of this language into Vietnamese is crucial to offer academic and professional circles insights into effectively handling the subtitling of low register expressions.

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# A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MODALITY IN THE VIETNAMESE LAW ON ENTERPRISES AND THE SINGAPORE COMPANIES ACT FROM SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** This paper conducts a contrastive analysis of Modality in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act from Systemic Functional Grammar. Specifically, the article analyses Modalization and Modulation in terms of Probability, Usuality, Obligation and Inclination. The study showed that both Modalization and Modulation have been employed in order to realize Modality system in two surveyed legal texts. Additionally, both legal texts employed the large number of Finite modal operators to realize Obligation in Modulation. However, the Singapore Companies Act tends to employ more Finite modal operators when expressing Modality. Besides, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises employed more high modal operators in expression of Obligation than the Singapore Companies Act.

*Keywords:* discourse analysis, interpersonal meaning, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), applied linguistics, the legal texts

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# PHÂN TÍCH ĐỐI CHIẾU TÌNH THÁI TRONG LUẬT DOANH NGHIỆP VIỆT NAM VÀ ĐẠO LUẬT DOANH NGHIỆP SINGAPORE TỪ QUAN ĐIỂM NGỮ PHÁP CHỨC NĂNG HỆ THỐNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài báo này thực hiện việc so sánh, đối chiếu về Tình thái giữa Luật Doanh nghiệp Việt Nam và Đạo luật Doanh nghiệp Singapore từ ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống. Cụ thể, bài viết phân tích Tình thái hóa và Điều biến theo các khía cạnh: Xác suất, Tính thường lệ, Nghĩa vụ và Thiên hướng. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy cả hai văn bản luật sử dụng cả Tình thái hóa và Điều biến để hiện thực hóa hệ thống Tình thái. Ngoài ra, cả hai văn bản pháp lý đều sử dụng số lượng lớn tác tử tình thái hữu định để hiện thực hóa Nghĩa vụ trong Điều biến. Tuy nhiên, Đạo luật Doanh nghiệp Singapore có xu hướng sử dụng nhiều tác tử tình thái hữu định khi hiện thức hóa Tình thái. Bên cạnh đó, Luật Doanh nghiệp Việt Nam sử dụng nhiều hơn các tác tử tình thái hữu định cao để thể hiện Nghĩa vụ so với Luật Doanh nghiệp Singapore.

*Từ khóa:* phân tích diễn ngôn, nghĩa liên nhân, ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống (SFG), ngôn ngữ học ứng dụng, văn bản luật

## 1. Introduction

The statutory law related to enterprises has been playing such an essential role in regulating aspects associated with the establishment, organizational structure, and operation of kinds of business entities. The legal documents of each country are influenced by factors such as broader institutional environment, legal systems, market and regulatory competition, the broader socioeconomic, political situations. Therefore, an interpersonal analysis of the legal documents in specific context is essential in comprehension of legal documents in general and of enterprises in particular.

According to Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) by Halliday, discourse is analyzed based on three broad Meta-functions: Experiential, Interpersonal and Textual Meta-functions associated to three categories of the context including field, tenor and mode. The Interpersonal Meta-function shows the social relationships, positions of speakers in the discourse and it is concerned with clauses as exchange (Halliday, 2012). This paper aims to conduct a contrastive analysis of modality in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act, focusing on the application of (SFG). Specifically, the analysis examines two key aspects of modality: Modalization (covering Probability and Usuality) and Modulation (covering Obligation and Inclination). The overarching aim of this research is to enhance the understanding of how modality is realized in Vietnamese and English legal texts, thereby contributing to the broader field of legal linguistics.

The specific objectives of the study are:

To identify and describe the realization of modality in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act.

To explore the similarities and differences in their usage of modal expressions.

## 2. Literature Review

Modality is an essential component to realize interpersonal meaning in discourse. Modality involves the negotiation of propositions and propositions between the positive and negative polarity. In particular, Modality refers to a range of different ways in which speakers can adjust their message (Eggins, 2004). Depending on the communication function, the Modality is divided into the Modalization and the Modulation.

Modalization is a component that expresses the speakers' judgment or requires the listeners' assessment of the state of what is being said (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 143). It indicates the possibility that a statement used by the speaker/writer is true and is called Probability. In addition, it also indicates how often a statement used by the speaker/writer is true and is called Usuality. Modalization is realized through Finite modal operators and modal Adjunct. In addition, the Modalization can be also expressed by interpersonal metaphor.

In terms of legal discourse studies, there are numerous studies that focus on understanding the unique features and structures of legal discourse. Specifically, they might include Bhatia's works on legislative writing (1983, 1993, 2004) or studies on the key features of legal language by scholars such as Mellinkoff (1963), Goodrich (1987), and Trosborg (1997). These researches employed traditional grammatical frameworks in order to highlight the formality of legal texts (Bhatia, 1983a, 1993, 2004; Goodrich, 1987; Mellinkoff, 1963; Trosborg, 1997).

Interpersonal meaning analysis has garnered significant attention among linguistic scholars from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This type of linguistic study has been applied to various discourses, including political speeches (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014), advertisements (Mardiyanto, 2009), and literature (Goatly & Studies, 2004; Hoang, 2006). However, the application of interpersonal meaning analysis in legal discourse remains relatively underexplored. Most studies on legal genres have focused on conservation analysis in courtrooms or police offices (Chen & Li, 2019; Cruz & Pariña, 2015; Khoyi & Behnam, 2014; T. Silvana Sinara et al., 2020)

The application of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to legal discourse analysis, however, remains relatively limited. Moreover, the contrastive analysis of linguistic features about modality between Vietnamese and English legal texts still contain a noticeable gap. In other words, there is a need for conducting the research focusing on the comparative analysis of modality in Vietnamese and English legal texts from an SFG perspective. The current study aims to fill this gap by systematically examining the use of modality in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act. This analysis seeks to provide insights into the linguistic, cultural, and legal factors influencing the expression of modality in these texts. The paper is hoped to not only contribute to the field of legal linguistics but also support practical applications such as the teaching of legal English, legal translation, and the drafting of legal documents.

## 3. Research Methodology and Data

### *3.1. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework*

In this contrastive study, we employ a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses. This methodology is chosen to comprehensively examine the modality systems within the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) framework in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act. The qualitative aspect involves a detailed discourse analysis, while the quantitative aspect includes the statistical analysis of modality frequencies and distributions.

#### 3.1.1. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Interpersonal meaning

According to Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) by Halliday, language operates through three meta-functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational function encompasses the representation of experience through the transitivity system and the expression of logical relations through the logico-semantic system. This function allows speakers to construct a picture of reality. The interpersonal function involves the use of language to enact social interactions, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships through systems such as mood and modality. This function is concerned with the speaker's role, attitude, and engagement with the listener. Lastly, the textual function manages the flow of information within a discourse, organizing it into a coherent structure through thematic structure and cohesion (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), in the discourse, the clause plays three main functions including clause as a message, clause as an exchange and clause as an expression. The clause as an exchange is to realize the interpersonal meaning in the discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 106). According to Matthiessen (2013), interpersonal meaning is a linguistic resource expressing interaction, social role, relationship between speaker or writer and listener or receiver (Matthiessen, 2013).

Thus, interpersonal meaning is one of the functions in the speech to establish and maintain social relationships, expressing attitudes about the world of the communicative roles. Interpersonal meaning is realized through the system of Mood, Modality. However, in this paper, we just focus on the Modality analysis.

#### 3.1.2. Modality

Modality is a key component in realizing interpersonal meaning within the framework of SFG. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), modality is an element that expresses the speaker's judgment or solicits the listener's evaluation of the state of the proposition. In other words, through modality, the speaker can express a position and convey their stance. Modality operates within a spectrum between negative and positive polarity, reflecting the speaker's judgments. It construes the uncertain region between affirmation and negation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 691).

In SFG, modality is categorized into two main types: Modalization (also known as epistemic modality) and Modulation (also known as deontic modality).

***Modalization***

Modalization involves the expression of the speaker's assessment of the likelihood or frequency of a particular event or situation. It includes:

*Probability*: This refers to the likelihood of an event occurring and can be expressed through terms such as possibly, probably, certainly. It can be realized by:

A Finite modal operator within verb groups (e.g., "They must have known").

A Modal Adjunct (e.g., "They certainly knew").

*Usuality*: This indicates the frequency with which an event occurs, expressed through terms like seldom, sometimes, usually, always. It can be realized similarly by:

A Finite modal operator (e.g., "It must happen").

A Modal Adjunct (e.g., "It always happens").

***Modulation***

Modulation refers to the expression of degrees of necessity or obligation and inclination or willingness. It includes:

*Obligation*: It represents the speaker's perception of the necessity of an action. It can be expressed through:

A Finite modal operator (e.g., "You must be patient").

A Passive verb Predicator (e.g., "You're required to be patient").

*Inclination*: It expresses the speaker's attitude towards carrying out an action. It can be realized by:

A Finite modal operator (e.g., "I must win!").

An Adjective Predicator (e.g., "I'm determined to win!").

The realization of modality can be systematically summarized in the following tables:

**Table 1**

*Modalization and Modulation*

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Types of intermediacy</th><th>Typical realization</th><th>Example</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Modalization</td><td>Probability<br>(possible<br>/probable<br>/certain)</td><td>- Finite modal operator<br>- Modal Adjunct<br>(both the above)</td><td>They must have known<br>They certainly knew<br>They certainly must have known</td></tr>
<tr><td>Usuality<br>(sometimes<br>/usually<br>/always)</td><td>- Finite modal operator<br>- Modal Adjunct<br>(both the above)</td><td>It must happen<br>It always happen<br>It must always happen</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Modulation</td><td>Obligation<br>(allowed<br>/supposed<br>/required)</td><td>- Finite modal operator<br>- Passive verb Predicator</td><td>You must be patient!<br>You're required to be patient!</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inclination<br>(willing<br>/keen<br>/determined)</td><td>- Finite modal operator<br>- Adjective Predicator</td><td>I must win!<br>I'm determined to win!</td></tr>
</table>

*(Source: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)*

According to Halliday (2004), Finite modal operator has three levels including low, median and high as in the below table:

**Table 2**

*Finite Modal Operators*

| Polarity | Low | Median | High |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Positive** | can, may, could, might (dare) | will, would, should, is/was to | must, ought to, need, has/had to |
| **Negative** | needn't, doesn't/didn't +need to, have to | won't, wouldn't, shouldn't, (isn't/wasn't to) | mustn't, oughtn't to, can't, couldn't (mayn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to) |

*(Source: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)*

Examples of types of Modality can be summarized in the below table:

**Table 3**

*Modality Realization*

| Realization | Subjective: explicit | Subjective: implicit | Objective: implicit | Objective: explicit |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Modalization: Probability | I think [in my opinion] Mary knows | Mary'll know | Mary probably knows [in all Probability] | It's likely that Mary knows [Mary is likely to] |
| Modalization: Usuality | Fred'll sit quite quiet | Fred usually sits quite quiet | It's usual for Fred to sit quite quiet | |
| Modulation: Obligation | I want John to go | John should go | John's supposed to go | It's expected that John goes |
| Modulation: Inclination | Jane'll help | Jane's keen to help | | |

*(Source: Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)*

Table 3 shows that Modality can be realized through grammatical metaphor. In other words, the Modality in the congruent form which was originally expressed by the Finite modal operator is now expressed by the projection clauses in the non-congruent form (metaphor) such as *I think, It's likely that, It's usually, I want.* According to Halliday, it is the Interpersonal metaphor or the Mood metaphor, one of the methods to realize the Mood in the clause.

### *3.2. Data*

The study is based on two sets of data: the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Due to the distinct legal frameworks and content in these two countries, not all parts of the documents were included. Specifically, sections on securities, accounting, and auditing were excluded as they are governed by separate laws in Vietnam. The data for the research is displayed in the below table:

**Table 4**

*Data*

<table>
<tr><th rowspan="3">No<br>(1)</th><th rowspan="3">VIETNAMESE LAW ON ENTERPRISES<br>(2)</th><th colspan="3">SINGAPORE COMPANIES ACT</th></tr>
<tr><th rowspan="2">Data<br>(3)</th><th colspan="2">Removed from the data</th></tr>
<tr><th>Content<br>(4)</th><th>Acts in Vietnam<br>(5)</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>Chapter I<br>General provisions<br>(Articles 1-16)</td><td>Part I. Preliminary<br>Articles 1-7A<br>Part II. Administration of this Act<br>Articles 8, 12A, 12C, 12D</td><td>Part II. Administration of this Act<br>Articles 8A-12, 13-15</td><td>Banking and Finance Law</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Chapter II<br>Business formation<br>(Articles 17-45)</td><td>Part III. Constitution of companies<br>Articles 17-22; Articles 25B-28; Articles 30-41C</td><td>Part III. Constitution of companies<br>Articles 23-25A</td><td>Civil law</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">3</td><td>Chapter III<br>Limited liability company<br>(Articles 46-87)</td><td rowspan="6">- Part IV<br>Shares, debentures and charges<br>Articles 64A; Articles 70, 74; Articles 74A-76D; Articles 76H-76K; Articles 78B-78C; Articles 78K; Articles 88; Articles 121-126<br>- Part V<br>Management and administration<br>Articles 142, 144; Articles 145-154; Articles 157A; Articles 174-189; Articles 190-196A; Articles 215<br>- Part XA. Transfer of registration<br>Articles 355-364</td><td>-Part IV<br>Articles 59-64, 65-68, 71-73B, 76DA-76G, 77-78, 78D-78J, 79-96, 127-141</td><td>Securities Law, Accounting and Auditing Law</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter IV<br>State enterprises<br>(Articles 88-110)</td><td rowspan="3">- Part V<br>Articles 155-157, 157B-173I</td><td rowspan="3">Civil Law, Insurance Law, Securities Law</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter V<br>Joint Stock Company<br>(Articles 111-176)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter VI<br>Partnerships<br>(Articles 177-187)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter VII<br>Sole proprietorship<br>(Articles 188-193)</td><td>- Part VI, VII, IX, X</td><td>Accounting and Auditing Law, Bankruptcy Law</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter VIII<br>Group of companies<br>(Articles 194-197)</td><td rowspan="2">PART XI<br>PART XIA</td><td rowspan="2">Law on Foreign Investment in Vietnam</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>Chapter IX<br>Reorganization, dissolution and bankruptcy of enterprises<br>(Articles 198-214)</td><td>Part X. Dissolution<br>Articles 344A-344H</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>Chapter X<br>Terms enforcement<br>(Articles 215-217)</td><td>Part XII. General<br>Articles 387A- 387C; Articles 395; 409C-411</td><td>PART XII<br>Articles 386-387, 388-394, 396-409B</td><td>Securities Law</td></tr>
</table>

The 2020 Vietnamese Law on Enterprise was passed by Legislature XIV of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at its 9th session on 17 June 2020. The Law was promulgated to replace the 2015 Enterprise Law and is of full force and effect as from 1 January 2021 (Article 217). This law regulates the establishment, organization of management, re-organization, dissolution and related activities of enterprises (Article 2) (Vietnam, 2020).

The Singapore Companies Act, first enacted in 1967, consists of 411 articles and spans 591 pages. However, we have extracted the parts that are closely related and roughly correspond to the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises for appropriate comparisons and contrasts. Specifically, we choose regulations related to Business Registration, Enterprise Charter, Directors and Managers of Enterprises, Business Names, Issuance of Shares, Rights of Shareholders, Summons, voting, passing resolutions at the meeting, Reorganization, and Foreign enterprises in Singapore (Table 1). We chose these sections because of their respective provisions in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises. The regulations related to securities, accounting and auditing we do not choose, because in the Vietnamese legal system, it is prescribed in other specialized legal documents such as the Law on Accounting, the Law on Securities, the Law on Auditing, but not regulated in the Law on Enterprises. (Singapore, 2018).

Traditionally, in English syntax, a clause is defined as a grammatical unit consisting of a subject and a predicate, with the predicate typically containing a verb that expresses an action or state (Quirk & Crystal, 1985). However, in SFG, a clause is considered a multifunctional unit that serves various roles, including representing processes (experiential meaning), enacting social interactions (interpersonal meaning), and organizing information (textual meaning) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The concept of a clause in Vietnamese is quite varied and multifaceted. In this paper, the functional perspective will be applied to analyze the Vietnamese data. Specifically, a clause is a grammatical structure that typically consists of a process (expressed by a verb or verb phrase), participants involved in the process (such as subject and object), and circumstances (providing additional information about the process, such as time, place, and manner) (Hoang, 2002).

**Table 5**

*The Overall Description of two Legal Texts*

| Legal texts | The number of words | The number of sentences | The number of clauses |
|---|---|---|---|
| The Vietnamese Law on Enterprises | 71.093 | 1.225 | 2.143 |
| The Singapore Companies Act | 56.158 | 839 | 2.097 |
| Total | 127.251 | 2.064 | 4.240 |

## 4. Results

The Interpersonal Meta-function of the Law represents the way the addresser (the law maker) and the addressee (the citizen of the country) interact. In this unequal relationship, the government use laws to manage the society in the way they desire (Conley et al., 2019). This paper will conduct a contrastive analysis of Modality between two selected legal texts based on the theoretical framework of SFG. Specifically, in this section, we will compare and contrast the Modality between two Vietnamese and English legal texts as for Modalization and Modulation. Besides, we will discuss the realization of Modality in two selected legal documents.

In this paper, our research focused on analyzing Modality in two legal texts in Vietnamese and English. The difference between these two legal ones can be summarized as follows:

**Table 6**

*Distribution and Frequency of Modality in Two Legal Texts*

| Modality | | The Law on Vietnamese Enterprise | | The Singapore Companies Act | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Frequency** | **Percentage** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| **Modalization** | Probability | 1 | 0.1% | 50 | 3.8% |
| | Usuality | 1 | 0.1% | 2 | 0.2% |
| **Modulation** | Obligation | 730 | 99.2% | 1263 | 95.2% |
| | Inclination | 4 | 0.5% | 3 | 0.2% |
| **Total** | | 736 | 100% | 1326 | 100% |

It can be seen from Table 6 that there are differences between the two legal documents. Specifically, the Singapore Companies Act has a much higher frequency of Probability than the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises. The data also show that the realization of Obligation in Modulation accounts for the highest proportion in both legal documents, at 99.2% and 95.2% respectively. Other forms of realization such as Probability, Usuality and Inclination make up only a small percentage. This can be explained by the fact that the legal document is the place containing the legal legislations to regulate the behavior of the relevant entities in the business activities in accordance with the Law (Yan, 2015).

Modality analysis is essential in comprehension of the Law. According to Halliday, Modality is the expression of Probability or Obligation associated with it. In other words, it means *likely* or *unlikely*, *desirable* or *unexpected* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 116). Therefore, knowledge of the Modality employed in the Law is important for the concerned entities to know whether the legislation is mandatory or not, and then, to know how to behave in accordance with the Law.

### *4.1. Modalization*

#### 4.1.1. Probability

Probability means the possibility that the speaker/writer thinks it is true. Although Finite modal operators appear quite a lot in both legal documents, they are mostly used to express the Obligation in Modulation, not to express the degree of Probability in Modalization. Therefore, Finite modal operators employed to express the Probability are quite low in both legal documents.

The Singapore Companies Act employs Finite modal operators to convey Probability more frequently than the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises. Specifically, there are 50 times that Finite modal operator ***may*** is used to express Probability in the Singapore Companies Act and they usually exist in two forms including *as the case may be* and *as may be prescribed*. For example: *A person desiring the incorporation of a company shall submit to the Registrar the constitution of the proposed company and such other documents* ***as may be prescribed***. (Clause 1, Article 7, the Singapore Companies Act)

In contrast, the expression of Probability in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises is much rarer, with only one occurrence in Article 50: *'Hội đồng thành viên chịu trách nhiệm thanh toán khoản nợ chưa đến hạn trước nguy cơ tài chính* **có thể** *xảy ra đối với công ty'*. (*The Members' Council is responsible for paying the undue debt before the possible financial risk to the company*). (Point c, Clause 5, Article 50, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises). Notably, Vietnamese does not utilize Finite modal operators in the same way as English does. Instead, Vietnamese modality is often expressed through particles, context, and other syntactic means.

In this analysis, we consider the broader concept of modality, encompassing elements that convey necessity, possibility, and permission, regardless of the specific grammatical structures employed. Thus, while 'may' serves as a Finite modal operator in English, similar expressions in Vietnamese may rely on contextual and lexical cues to convey equivalent meanings.

However, in our opinion, Probability can be expressed implicitly (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In the two legal documents, the regulations are mainly in the form of statements to express the attitude, opinion and ideology of the state. For example, in the article 217 of the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises *Luật này có hiệu lực thi hành từ ngày 01 tháng 01 năm 2021*. (*This law takes effect from January 1, 2021*) represents the statement of the legislators about the time when the Law will take effect. According to Halliday, a polar form like above sentence is more certain than other forms of high value modal such as "*certainly*" or "*always*". In other words, "*This law is of full force and effect as from 1 January 2021*" is more determinate than "*This law is certainly of full force and effect as from 1 January 2021*".

#### 4.1.2. Usuality

Usuality means how often a statement used by the speaker/writer is true. It can be expressed by modal Adjuncts such as *usually, sometimes, always*. In both legal texts, the appearance of realization of Usuality is very modest, except for the cases specified in Clause 3, Article 12 of the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises, Clauses 1 and 2, Article 96 of the Singapore Company Law as mentioned below:

"*Doanh nghiệp phải bảo đảm* ***luôn*** *có ít nhất một người đại diện theo pháp luật cư trú tại Việt Nam*." (*An enterprise must ensure that there is* ***always*** *at least one legal representative residing in Vietnam).* (Point 3, Clause 12, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises)

"*The company shall have and shall be deemed* ***always*** *to have had power to reissue the debentures*." (Clause 1, Article 96, the Singapore Companies Act)

The reason why the two texts have relatively modest realization of Usuality is the features of the legal language. Legal language must be precise and certain (Gustafsson, 1975), so law-makers tend to use present tenses to express the highest degree of Usuality rather than using modal operators to realize Usuality. For example: *Any requirement under subsection (4) (b) ceases if the resolution is revoked* (Clause 6, Article 78A, the Singapore Companies Act). The legislation of *Any requirement under subsection (4) (b) ceases if the resolution is revoked* will be more regular than *Any requirement under subsection (4) (b)* ***always*** *ceases if the resolution is revoked*.

### *4.2. Modulation*

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (1994), modulation, a component of modality, includes obligation and inclination (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1994). Obligation refers to the degree to which the speaker puts force on another to carry out the command. Inclination refers to the speakers' willingness to carry out the suggestion.

#### 4.2.1. Obligation

As legal documents, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act regulate the rights and Obligations of business entities. In other words, they contain rules for business and other entities, including prohibitions, mandatory rules, and optional Obligations. The below table shows the number as well as the distribution and frequency of the expression ways of Obligation in the two legal documents:

**Table 7**

*Distribution and Frequency of Obligation in Both Legal Texts*

| Typical realization | | The Vietnamese Law on Enterprises | | | The Singapore Companies Act | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Expression** | **Frequency** | **Percent** | **Expression** | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
| Finite modal operators | low | Có thể (may) | 81 | 11% | Can | 5 | 0.4% |
| | | | | | May | 264 | 20.9% |
| | | | | | Could | 9 | 0.7% |
| | | | | | Might | 1 | 0.1% |
| | | | | | Need not | 17 | 1.3% |
| | median | Sẽ (will) | 10 | 1% | Will/ will not | 5 | 0.4% |
| | | | | | Would/ would not | 29 | 2.3% |
| | | | | | should | 3 | 0.2% |
| | | | | | Is to/are to | 28 | 2.2% |
| | high | Phải (must)/ không được phép/ bị cấm/ bị nghiêm cấm) (must not) | 483 | 66% | Shall/shall not | 734 | 58.1% |
| | | | | | Must / must not | 73 | 5.8% |
| | | | | | Ought to | 1 | 0.1% |
| | | Cần (need) | 16 | 2% | need | 2 | 0.2% |
| | | | | | has/had to | 1 | 0.1% |
| | | | | | Could not | 2 | 0.2% |
| | | | | | May not | 3 | 0.2% |
| Passive verb predicator | | Có quyền/ được (phép) (be allowed to) | 134 | 18% | Be allowed to | 6 | 0.5% |
| | | Có nghĩa vụ/ Có trách nhiệm (13) (be required to) | 6 | 1% | Be required to | 80 | 6.3% |
| **Total** | | | **730** | **100%** | | **1263** | **100%** |

Table 7 indicates that the typical realization of Obligations in the Modulation is shown through two typical realizations of Finite modal operator and Passive verb predicator. Finite modal operators are used variously in the Singapore Companies Act while *can, will, must, need* be the main Finite modal operator in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises. In the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises, high modal operators account for about 68%, medium 1% and low 11%, while the relevant statistics in the Singapore Companies Act are 64.6%, 5.1%, and 23.4% respectively. This demonstrates that the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises has a larger number of high modal operators than the Singapore Companies Act, but the numbers related to Medium and Low modal operators are opposite. Although there is a difference in the selection of Finite modal operators and the frequency of occurrence, this difference is not too large. For examples:

*Doanh nghiệp **phải** đăng ký với Cơ quan đăng ký kinh doanh khi thay đổi nội dung Giấy chứng nhận đăng ký doanh nghiệp quy định tại Điều 28 của Luật này.* (*When an enterprise changes any content of its Contents of enterprise registration certificate as stipulated in article 28 of this law, it **must** register [such change] with the business registration office*). (Point 1, Article 30, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises)

*Every company **shall** have at least one director who is ordinarily resident in Singapore and, where the company only has one member, that sole director may also be the sole member of the company.* (Clause 1 Article 145 the Singapore Companies Act)

Regarding the realization of Obligation in Modulation with Passive verb predicator, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises uses some Passive verb predicators such as *được phép, có quyền (be allowed to), có nghĩa vụ, có trách nhiệm (is obliged to), bị cấm (be prohibited), bị nghiêm cấm (be seriously prohibited)* while the Singapore Companies Act uses *be allowed to* and *be required to*. In this respect, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises has a higher frequency (19%) than the Singapore Companies Act (6.8%). This also shows that the Singapore Companies Act tends to use more Finite modal operators to express Obligations rather than Passive verb predicators. For instance: *Doanh nghiệp **có quyền** thành lập chi nhánh, văn phòng đại diện ở trong nước và nước ngoài*. (*An enterprise **is allowed to** establish branches and representative offices in Vietnam and overseas*.) (Point 1, Article 45, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises)

As for high-level Finite modal operators, the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises tends to use *phải (must)*, while the Singapore Companies Act is often likely to use *Shall or Must*. This is one of the techniques of forming compulsory legislation that is quite popular in legal documents (Krapivkina, 2017). It is worth noting that in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises, in many cases, *phải (must)* is not stated explicitly or implicitly but it still has a mandatory meaning. Those are the terms of the responsibilities of business entities. For example, Article 8 stipulates the obligations of enterprises, the Finite modal operator *must* does not appear, but it is still a regulation that enterprises must follow. In other words, enterprises must "*satisfy business investment conditions*", "*fully and promptly fulfill obligations*"…

When it comes to the realization of Obligations, Finite modal operator *May* plays such an important role in formulating regulations (Hilal Al-Mukhaini, 2008). In both legal texts, *May* is used to express ability, optional obligation. In the text, the speaker (Parliament) has a powerful role in proposing rights and obligations and the receiver (law enforcement, authorities and citizens) have the right to choose to follow these optional regulations. However, in an unequal relationship, by using *May*, legislators can be able to give stakeholders the choice (not) to perform certain duties. The usage of *May* represents one of the characteristics of the flexibility of legal discourse (Al Mukhaini, 2008). This is quite beneficial in cases where the legislator cannot predict all situations that will occur in reality, so this technique provides flexibility so that the Law can be applied in such specific cases in the future (Bhatia et al., 2008). Despite the fact that the usage of *May* can cause ambiguity in the Law because of its flexibility and discretion, it can help generalize situations, enable the Law to apply in all aspects of life in reality (Bhatia, 1994). For example, Clause 1, Article 60 of the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises stipulates that "*Meetings of the Members' Council must be recorded in minutes and **may** be recorded or recorded and stored in other electronic forms*". It means that companies can choose to record their minutes by audio or other electronic forms, but it is optional, not required.

Because both are legal documents containing legal norms, all provisions are imperative, therefore, Obligation in the Modulation can be expressed implicitly (Bhatia, 1983b). In other words, there is not any presence of any Finite modal operator or Passive verb predicator, but it still creates an Obligation between the parties involved. For example:

*Trường hợp Điều lệ công ty không quy định thì Chủ tịch Hội đồng thành viên **là** người đại diện theo pháp luật của công ty*. (*If the company charter does not contain any relevant provision, then the chairman of the Members' Council is the legal representative of the company.)* (Clause 3, Article 54 of the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises)

In the above example, in spite of the fact that there is not any Finite modal operator or Passive verb predicator employed to realize Obligation but it cannot be denied that these legislations are not obligatory.

#### 4.2.2. Inclination

As for Inclination, both selected legal texts have forms that realize Inclination related to the state's commitments to guaranteeing the freedom of business of the involved entities. However, the occurrence of Inclination in the two texts is quite modest. Specifically, in the Singapore Companies Act, this realization only appears in three articles, Clause 4, Article 176, Clause 1, Article 8, and Article 172A. For instance: *The Authority **shall be responsible for** the administration of this Act, subject to the general or special directions of the Minister*. (Clause 1 Article 8, the Singapore Companies Act)

Similarly, in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises, Inclination is not explicitly expressed through modal verbs but can be inferred from the state's commitments to safeguard and support business activities. For instance, provisions in Articles 5, 10, 26, and 215 reflect the state's dedication to ensuring certain rights and protections for enterprises. Article 5 exemplifies this with the statement: *'Nhà nước **công nhận** và **bảo hộ** quyền sở hữu tài sản, vốn đầu tư, thu nhập, quyền và lợi ích hợp pháp khác của doanh nghiệp và chủ sở hữu doanh nghiệp*' (The State **recognizes** and **protects** the ownership of assets, invested capital, income, and other lawful rights and interests of enterprises and their owners) (Point 2, Article 5). While the verbs **công nhận** (recognize) and **bảo hộ** (protect) do not convey modality in the traditional sense, they do imply a commitment from the state to uphold these rights. This commitment can be seen as a form of Inclination, reflecting the state's willingness and responsibility to enforce the provisions outlined in the legal texts. However, it is crucial to distinguish between direct expressions of modality and the broader implications of state commitments in legal language. In this context, Inclination is interpreted more as the underlying intent and assurance provided by the state, rather than explicit modal expressions.

The findings of this study are quite similar to previous research on legal discourse. Bhatia (1993) in his research on legal language, stated that legal documents frequently employ high modality to establish clear obligations as well as reinforce the authoritative nature of legal texts.

Further, the use of Finite modal operators to convey varying degrees of necessity and permission is consistent with Al Mukhaini's (2008) analysis of modality in legal texts. Al Mukhaini highlighted the role of modal operators such as "may" and "can" in offering flexibility and discretion within the legal framework.

The absence of Interpersonal Metaphor in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises may reflect a cultural or systemic inclination towards more explicit and straightforward legal language. This observation resonates with Mellinkoff's (1963) description of legal language's precision, aimed at reducing ambiguity and enhancing clarity. Tiersma (1999) further supports this observation by emphasizing that legal language in different jurisdictions may vary significantly based on cultural, legal, and historical factors. The direct style observed in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises could be attributed to a legal culture that values clear directives over interpretative flexibility, possibly to ensure compliance and reduce interpretive disputes.

In summary, this study's findings on the use of modality in the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises and the Singapore Companies Act are consistent with established research in legal linguistics. The prominent use of high modality to express obligations, the strategic use of finite modal operators to provide flexibility, and the culturally influenced preferences for explicitness or metaphorical expressions all contribute to the unique characteristics of legal language in these texts. These observations provide valuable insights for legal practitioners, translators, and scholars, enhancing their understanding of how legal norms are articulated and interpreted in different legal systems.

## 5. Conclusion

In terms of Modality, both legal texts have had the realization of Probability, Usuality, Obligation and Inclination although the frequency of these realizations is different. Specifically, both legal documents have the highest percentage of Obligation realizations in Modulation (99.2% and 95.2%) respectively, including those using Finite modal operator, Passive verb predicator as well as Metaphor of Modality. However, the difference between these two documents is that the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises does not have the appearance of Interpersonal metaphors to realize Modality. In addition, the Singapore Companies Act has a higher Probability realization rate (3.8%) than the Vietnamese Law on Enterprises (0.1%). This comes from the characteristic of legal documents that contain mandatory legislation (Tiersma & Solan, 2012), so the realization of Obligation is the main device and technique for legislators to apply to draft legal documents.

Regarding Modality analysis, it can be concluded that the use of Finite modal operators is quite useful in formulating regulations related to rights and duties. In addition, through the use of a number of Finite modal operators in the Law, the law-makers have succeeded in drafting regulations on the responsibilities of related entities. This analysis will hopefully be helpful to the reader in determining whether the regulation is mandatory or not, from which appropriate actions will be taken to realize these provisions. As law-makers, skillful use of Finite modal operators seems to help them establish legislation that can be optional or mandatory. At the same time, the application of Finite modal operators also benefits legislators in predicting situations that will occur in the future and thereby making relevant regulations for those situations.

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## Appendix 1

Vietnamese Law on Enterprises:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Rmem8CDyqnB1YnKVzxUsEsNpgrXbqCLM/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=111250453630956244212&rtpof=true&sd=true

## Appendix 2

Singapore Companies Act:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1E55BgSL3t494EaknzQhGeOtPF6x9mP9J/view?usp=drive_link

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# METHODS FOR AMASSING DATA IN CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMATICS RESEARCH

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**Abstract:** This article discusses prevalent and up-to-date data-amassing techniques for cross-cultural pragmatics studies. Based on the distinctive features of data types, the commonly used methods are outlined with their pluses and minuses, along with the author's remarks and recommendations on how to employ them for fulfilling research purposes. Additionally, the paper suggests that an integration of the data-gathering methods proves to be of great value for pragmatics studies in general and cross-cultural pragmatics studies in particular, contributing to ensuring the validity and reliability of these kinds of research.

*Keywords:* cross-cultural research, data, data collection, methodology, pragmatics

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# PHƯƠNG PHÁP THU THẬP DỮ LIỆU CHO NGHIÊN CỨU DỤNG HỌC GIAO VĂN HÓA

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này thảo luận các kỹ thuật thu thập dữ liệu phổ biến và cập nhật cho các nghiên cứu dụng học giao văn hóa. Dựa trên đặc điểm của các loại dữ liệu dùng cho nghiên cứu dụng học giao văn hóa, bài viết cung cấp một cái nhìn tổng quan về các phương pháp thu thập thường được sử dụng, đi kèm với phân tích về những ưu và nhược điểm của từng phương pháp. Từ đó, bài viết đưa ra những nhận xét và khuyến nghị về cách sử dụng các phương pháp nhằm đạt được mục đích nghiên cứu. Đồng thời, bài viết cũng chỉ ra giá trị của việc kết hợp các phương pháp thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu ngữ dụng học nói chung và dụng học giao văn hóa nói riêng nhằm góp phần đảm bảo tính tin cậy và chính xác cho những nghiên cứu này.

*Từ khóa:* nghiên cứu giao văn hóa, dữ liệu, thu thập dữ liệu, phương pháp, ngữ dụng học

## 1. Introduction

House and Kádár (2022) define “cross-cultural pragmatics” as “the field of studying language use in a contrastive way across languages and language varieties.” (2022, p. 151). Cross-cultural pragmatics is distinctively characterized by its cross-disciplinary relevance as it has been employed in studies of applied linguistics, linguistic politeness, and translation. Therefore, the results of these studies feature a high level of implication in various areas, especially language teaching and learning.

Data can be considered of crucial importance in cross-cultural pragmatics studies since the selection of appropriate, reliable, and compatible data sources plays a huge part in ensuring the research’s validity and reliability. The justification for method choice, however, seems not to receive sufficient awareness in conducting research, leaving the procedure of data-gathering normally ignored or unelaborated.

This paper is intended to outline data-amassing methods in cross-cultural pragmatics based on the nature of a variety of data types. Besides, the strengths and weaknesses of each method are discussed with recommendations offered regarding how to take advantage and maximize the benefits and minimize its drawbacks, fulfilling particular aims of research.

## 2. Methods in Cross-Cultural Pragmatics Research

### *2.1. Classification of Data-Amassing Methods in Pragmatics*

Schneider (2018) groups the data collection methods in pragmatics into three categories, including “institution”, “observation”, and “experimentation”. In a similar fashion, these three categories also coincide with the three metaphors, “armchair”, “field”, and “laboratory” as proposed by Clark and Bangerter (2004, p. 25), which are employed by Jucker (2009) in his review of methods for carrying out studies on the speech act of compliment.

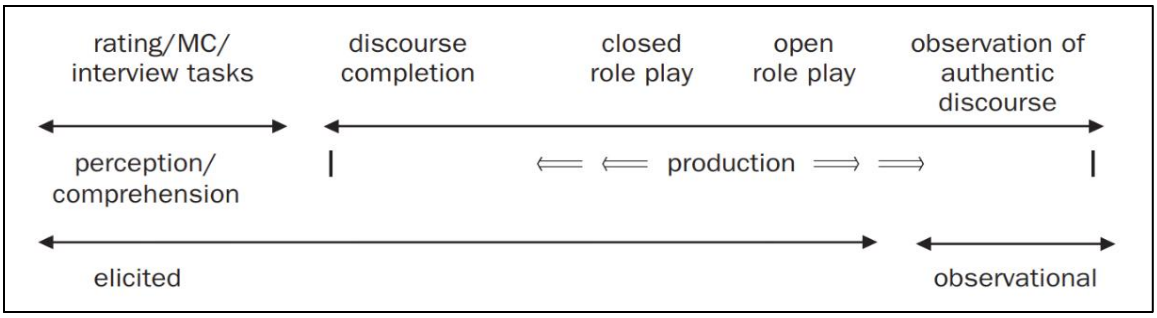
More concretely, preliminary armchair research involves researchers entirely basing on their experience in communication and competence in pragmatics. This is also considered "second-order introspection" (Schneider, 2018, p. 49), and it proves of great use in forming theories and proposing communication principles and maxims. Indeed, the method of armchairing has been put into use by linguists to develop such theories as speech act theory (Austin, 1962), relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1996), politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 2014; Leech, 1983), Co-operative Principle (CP) (Grice, 1975) and Politeness Principle (PP) (Leech, 2014; Leech, 1983), conversational maxims (Grice, 1975) and politeness maxims (Leech, 2014; Leech, 1983). "Armchair method" is not considered an empirical method since the researchers' intuition is not data regarding the sense in which this concept is frequently employed, with no instruments and specific lines of actions adopted by the researchers. On the other hand, "field" methods concern the use of empirical tools of investigation to make analyses of authentic natural language uses as discovered "out in the field", whereas researchers using "laboratory" methods concentrate on conducting experiments in a laboratory for data elicitation from appropriate respondents.

Tracing the origins of the three methods, Hodeib (2021) clarifies that armchair methods have their roots in corpus and descriptive linguistics. In detail, in formal linguistics, armchair linguists rely on their institutions to make evaluations on the standard of language use, whereas they allude to the use of corpora in the context of computer meditation as regards corpus linguistics (Fillmore, 1992). Laboratory linguists make use of the methods from psycholinguistics and experimental linguistics in order to gather data in controlled settings with varied methods of data elicitation such as roleplay. Regarding field methods, which are originally from the domain of sociolinguistics, field linguists embrace the observation of natural authentic language, and bring into service a wide range of data resources namely emails and text messages.

Kasper and Dahl (1991) suggest that research methods in pragmatics can be orderly represented on a scale as in Figure 1. "Elicited" and "observational" are placed at the two extremes of the scale. Each sort of data requires distinct collecting instruments to be employed. To illustrate, rating tasks and multiple-choice questions are the typical tools for obtaining elicited data that concern respondents' awareness and comprehension of the particular pragmatic phenomenon examined, whereas collecting naturally occurring data pertains to observing authentic discourse.

**Figure 1**

*Data Collection Methods, Represented as a Continuum Between Elicitation and Production*

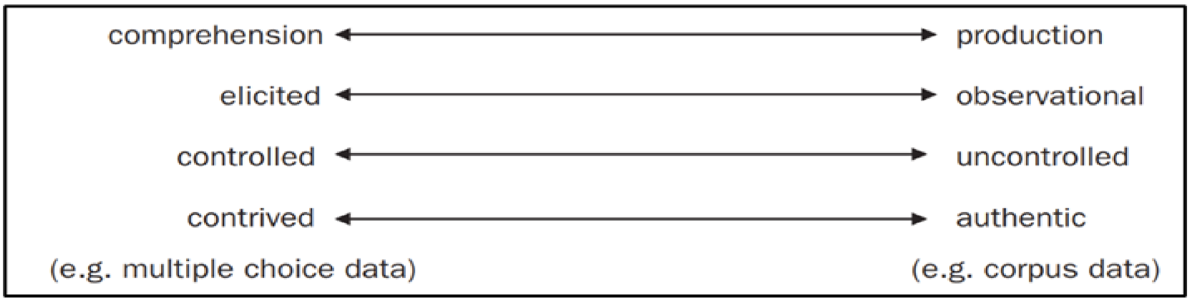



*(Kasper & Dahl, 1991; Leech, 2014)*

Elaborating on the continuum as proposed by Kasper and Dahl (1991), Leech (2014) outlines four ways of portraying the extremes of a methodological continuum as presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Four Ways of Characterizing Poles of Methodological Continuum (Leech, 2014)*




As regards the pair of "controlled" and "uncontrolled" methods, multiple-choice tests and corpora are the two typical types of data-gathering instruments. In detail, while a multiple choice test "constrains" a participant to decide upon one of several possible responses or utterances, leaving out the possibility for other responses, the corpora encompass conversational data gathered with no specified constraints on what the participants are permitted to say to each other. As a result, proof from corpora characterizes the uncontrolled pole of the continuum.

Concerning the extremes of "contrived" and "authentic", corpus data are naturally occurring in real life, whereas the responses in a multiple choice task are considered contrived or unreal since they are grounded on what the respondent thinks or imagine he/she may say in envisaged settings. A multiple-choice questionnaire can be viewed from the perspective of a source for proof of metapragmatic awareness, and this can be mined from the metapragmatic task which requires the participants to pass judgment on the pragmatic properness of the utterances given. Leech (2014) asserts this type of multiple-choice task "is far removed from the real language-use data that pragmatics in principle should investigate" (2014, p. 249)

### *2.2. Types of Data in Pragmatics Research*

According to Jucker (2018), "the data of any pragmatic research is the language used in actual contexts, and language is ever pervasive" (2018, p. 4). He further clarifies that "pragmaticians" (the linguists specializing in pragmatics) have directly or indirectly displayed a preference for particular kinds of data instead of other types, putting much emphasis on unconstrained spoken interaction in authentic environments. On the other hand, written language has frequently been disregarded as inadequate for pragmatic analysis due to its secondary nature. Besides, fictional language has encountered more unwillingness to be employed as a result of its artificiality. Nonetheless, even particular kinds of spoken language created in the classroom or courtroom are highly constrained because, in such circumstances, the allocation of roles and legitimate contributions of the communicators are explicitly made.

Apart from the distinction of spoken versus written language data, according to Jucker (2018), there are other ways of conceptualizing the kinds of data of pragmatics research, namely, online/ digital data, sign language data, and data of nonverbal behavior. He also proposes four dimensions on which the taxonomy of data, particularly observational data, can be established, including situational dimension (constrained versus unconstrained data), fictionality dimension (fictional versus factual data), researcher interference (low interference versus high interference data, as represented in Figure 3) and research perspective (micro versus macro data, as displayed in Figure 4).

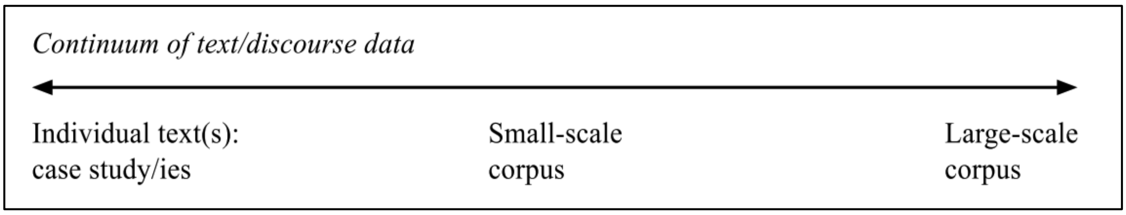
**Figure 1**

*Data Collection as Regards Researcher Interference (Jucker, 2018)*

| Researcher Interference | Control | | Relevant examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low | Low | 1 | Speech recording without researcher involvement |
| | | 2 | Surreptitious recording by researcher |
| | | 3 | Non-surreptitious recording by researcher |
| | | 4 | Participant observation recording |
| | | 5 | Semi-structured interview |
| | | 6 | Role play or role enactment |
| | | 7 | Dialog construction task |
| High | High | 8 | Oral DCTs |

**Figure 2**

*Data Collection as Regards Researcher Perspective (Jucker, 2018)*




The dimension of the researcher's perspective concerns the size of the data examined. As can be seen in Figure 4, at one polar of the scale, a very small amount of normally amply contextualized data is employed, typically a single dialogue or even only a small excerpt of a dialogue with the information regarding the interactants and the setting of the dialogue is well informed. At the other extreme of the scale, the research needs to resort to the use of large corpora of millions or billions of words in search of language use patterns from those corpora.

Bednarek (2011) outlines two categories of data in pragmatics research, namely "attested data" and "non-attested data". She defines "non-attested data" as follows:

> any kind of data that has not been observed or recorded as having been produced by a particular speaker or writer. This covers predominantly the use of introspection - thinking and reasoning about language use based on one's own knowledge and experience of language. (2011, p. 539)

Introspection is deemed to play a vital role in developing theories, and forming hypotheses; however, these theories or hypotheses need to be applied to attested data so that they can be modified, confirmed, or rejected. In fact, it would be contended by many researchers of corpus linguistics that there is no certain correspondence between what is thought about language use and the actual language use. Phrased another way, introspection seems to concentrate more on the possibilities in language use, rather than on the authentic, significant language use.

On the other hand, Bednarek (2011) defines "attested data" as follows:

> Attested data means language data which was actually produced by speakers/ writers on particular occasions. Such data can be elicited (by the researcher) or can have occurred more "naturally", that is, without being produced in a research context. (2011, p. 540)

Attested data is comprised of "elicited data" and "non-elicited data". More concretely, elicited data involves interviews (concerning the researcher), verbal reports, elicited narratives, discourse completion tasks, and experimental data, whereas non-elicited data encompasses observational ethnographic data and diverse types of text/discourse data, including corpora.

Regarding the dichotomy of elicited versus non-elicited data, House and Kádár (2021, p. 43) claim "there has been a strong disagreement between various strands of research favoring one element of the naturally occurring versus elicited binary pair over the other". To illustrate, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) is criticized as the data employed in this project is regarded as elicited and "decontextualized". Even yet, the CCSARP Project found great value in the elicited and decontextualized data since it made it possible to gather, at the time, previously unheard-of levels of pragmatic data, which in turn allowed for a highly quantitative analysis of pragmatic phenomena. Therefore, this kind of data proves to be beneficial to cross-cultural pragmatics research that aims at reaching cross-cultural results that can be replicated and generalized. On the other hand, the non-elicited data seems to be more suitable for "discursive research" and qualitative scrutinization which concern the researchers relying on a small amount of naturally occurring cross-cultural data and are likely to verge on peculiarity rather than replication.

Kirner-Ludwig (2022), in a review of data collection methods applied in the studies in the journal *Intercultural Pragmatics,* summarizes three kinds of data in relation to how they are garnered, namely "observed"/ "observational"/ "naturally-occurring", "extracted", and "elicited". In detail, naturally occurring data is gathered "through external, non-biasing observation of subjects and communicative scenarios" (2022, p. 461). As Jucker (2009) explains, this kind of data "has not been elicited by the researcher for the purpose of his or her research project but that occurs for communicative reasons outside of the research project for which it is used" (2009, p. 1615), which is the principle underlying the field method. However, collecting "observational" data encounters the problems of lack of constraint of the speaker and variables of settings, participants' age, and their social backgrounds. Furthermore, securing the validity and reliability of this sort of data entails taking numerous factors into account, such as whether the recording is taken properly. Another data type that is often used in field methods is "extracted" data, which is characterized as "quantifiable, large sets of materials (available as electronic corpora)" or "individual texts". While observed data is, on the whole, naturally occurring and genuine, extracted data is dynamic on a scale of "naturalness". Schneider (2018) justifies,

> corpus data do not all qualify as observational data. They are naturally occurring to the extent that their existence does not depend on a researcher. Yet there are significant differences between the data types included in machine-readable corpora, sometimes even in the same corpus. (2018, p. 50)

The third type of data as outlined by Kirner-Ludwig (2022) is "elicited" data. This data is obtained through "applying systematically controlled settings, prompts, and variables" (2022, p. 462). Schneider (2018) puts forward a flexible grouping of eliciting tasks as regards low, medium, or high levels of interaction/ collaboration needed. More concretely, he states that tasks of elicitation should be considered on a "continuum [...] decreasing [in] interactionality and, at the same time, increasing [with regard to] researcher control" (2018, p. 58). Low-interaction tasks involve very limited interaction extent to elicit productive data. Examples of low-interaction tasks are closed-ended questionnaires (intuitive tasks to ask for respondents' age, gender, occupation, etc.), diary/verbal reports (gathering participants' relevant anecdotes or self-observations), open-ended questionnaires, or written/oral DCT (Discourse Completion Task). Medium-interaction tasks are typically elicited dialogues in which "researchers specify topics, interactional goals or discourse roles" (Kasper, 2008, p. 287). Interviews are salient examples of medium-interaction tasks, which can be divided into, full versus in-part narrative (unstructured, open-ended), semi-structured versus structured, formal versus informal, and audio- versus video-recorded. Finally, high-interaction tasks are connected with "collaborative learning activities of various kinds employed to elicit productive data" (Kirner-Ludwig, 2022, p. 464). Illustrations of high-interaction data can be found in collaborative writing or translation assignments, video-conferencing sessions, group discussions, peer feedback tasks, and role-play tasks (RPTs).

### *2.3. Empirical Methods for Amassing Data in Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*

Based on examining the observational data in the preceding part, this section serves to dwell on outlining the common experimental data-amassing methods in cross-cultural pragmatics, including "applying a corpus", "recording authentic talk", "delivering production tasks", and "delivering comprehension and judgment tasks" (Schneider, 2018). Each method is presented with the primary contents of its core components coupled with its pluses and minuses as well as suggestions of how it can be appropriately applied according to the researcher's purposes.

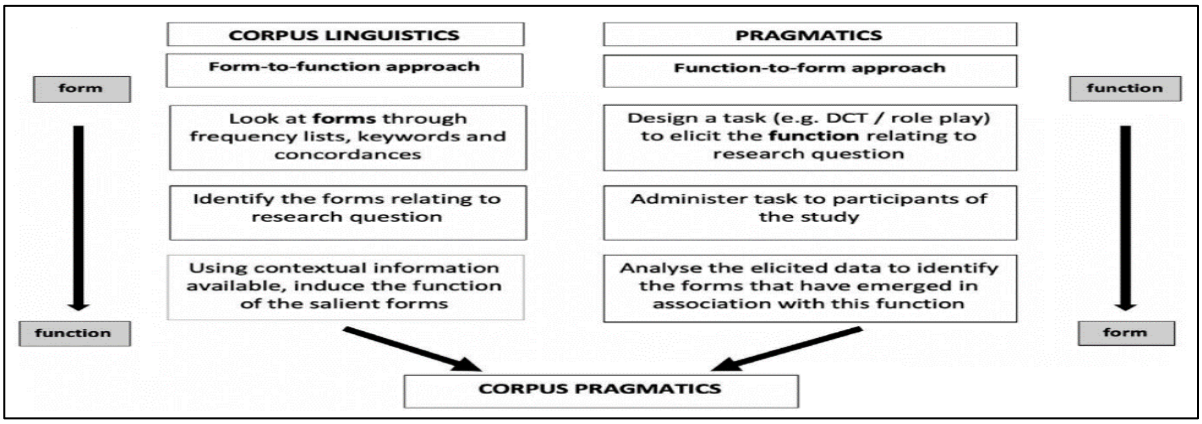
#### 2.3.1. Applying a Corpus

Unlike armchair pragmatics, which merely relies on the researchers' intuitive knowledge to form hypotheses or develop theories, empirical pragmatics requires the use of data corpora. This holds true for both fieldwork and laboratory work, with corpora of observational data and corpora of experimentational data, respectively (Schneider, 2018, p. 50). A corpus can be understood as a very large electronic collection of texts in written or spoken form, compiled not for any research purposes. The British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the national or regional corpora belonging to the International Corpus of English (ICE) are typical examples of corpora. In a broader sense, a corpus can be any collection of texts, no matter how large it is or whether or not it can be read by machines. Therefore, a corpus can be a self-compiled one, which is much smaller than the huge corpora and is adjusted to meet particular research purposes.

Although Kasper and Dahl (1991) do not mention using corpora in the continuum in Figure 1, it is possible to contend that "electronic corpora, as they have developed over the past twenty-five years, provide the most readily available instrument for "observing authentic discourse"." (Leech, 2014, p. 256). As Schneider (2018) states, applying a corpus proves useful when researching micro units, namely discourse markers and similar concepts since form-based corpus can provide researchers with great assistance in promptly and exhaustively searching for such micro units. According to O'Keeffe et al. (2020), while pragmatics has conventionally worked from function to form, corpus linguistics works in the opposite direction, starting from form; corpus pragmatics is the use of corpus linguistics in pragmatics, with the combination of the form-to-function and function-to-form approach. They clarify that "[t]he challenge for the emerging model of CP [corpus pragmatics] research is to avoid assuming that form-to-function processes are the only option and to find ways of addressing the challenges to function-to-form approaches (2020, p. 48). This is characterized through Figure 5.

**Figure 3**

*Approaches in Discourse Pragmatics (O'Keeffe et al., 2020)*




Corpora can be applied to studies of particular speech acts. For these studies, illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), such as performative verbs (e.g. invite, offer, apologize) and other devices are normally employed in realizing the speech acts of corresponding speech acts, namely inviting, offering, and apologizing. However, as O'Keeffe et al. (2020) point out, "[a]n IFID can prove unreliable as a means of recalling all, and only, instances of a speech act" (2020, p. 53). To deal with this issue, it is recommended that researchers search both speech act verbs (e. g. invite, suggest, warn) and speech act nouns (e. g. invitation, suggestion, warning) for speech acts' realizations and speech acts discussion (e. g. reporting, commenting, challenging) (Jucker, 2012).

The obstacles to using corpora for cross-cultural research concern the comparability of corpus data across corpora; the appropriateness of corpus data in comparative studies remains restricted since corpus data are not spontaneously comparable. Another difficulty facing studies employing corpus data is the shortage of information regarding participants' backgrounds, and this is genuinely a problem for studies, especially those of variational pragmatics, targeting the effects of macro-social factors, including respondents' age, gender, or region.

**2.3.2. Recording Authentic Talk**

Data-gathering techniques are also as broad as the wide range of communication technology. Indeed, as for recording authentic talk, the levels of complexity of the recording technique depend on the particular kinds of data. For instance, while text-based computer-mediated interaction data (via emails, discussion groups, chat forms, etc.) can be recorded in a rather straightforward manner, voice or visual access entails recording technology and arrangements being more complex (Markham, 2004). According to Kasper (2008), regarding the study of speech acts, there are three kinds of recording techniques, including "field note", "audio recording" and "video recording" (2008, p. 284). All three kinds of recording techniques can vary in terms of size, scope, and fineness of what is recorded; however, they all adhere to the principle of being "perspectival", "selective" and "partial" (2008, p. 284)

It is widely acknowledged that the consent must be approved by respondents before recording, and the "observer's paradox" emerges, as justified by Labov (1973):

> [...] the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation. (1973, p. 209)

Phrased another way, the talk cannot be recorded without participants being alert, and as a result, they act in a less natural manner. Indeed, as Schneider (2018) points out, "[f]or researchers, "audio- or video-recording naturally occurring conversation in the truest sense of the word is virtually impossible" (2018, p. 53). In the same vein, House and Kádár (2021) warn that "fetishising 'naturally occurring' is a grave error because such data may never be genuinely naturally occurring – this entirely depends on how we define the concept of 'naturally occurring-ness'" (2021, p. 49). However, it is informed by Schneider (2018) that, in some studies, the longer the speech event and recording proceed, the more naturally participants behave and feel relaxed, especially when they are with friends and in familiar surroundings.

One strategy that is commonly used by researchers of conversational analysis or interactional linguistics is concentrating on recording a particular type of discourse and/or a specific kind of setting (Schneider, 2018, p. 54). This can also be related to the technique employed in discourse analysis, in which the researcher records "stretches of discourse, sometimes quite extensive stretches" (Leech, 2014, p. 256), to investigate the discursive aspect of politeness, for instance. By doing this, the researchers are enabled to detect the patterns of interaction examined that are normally left unnoticed. However, the downsides are that few excerpts of discourse can be thoroughly studied, and the selection of excerpts is frequently influenced by the analyst's individual interests. However, the pervasive use of video recording allows for preserving discourse data in visual and sound forms or in transcribed forms, which can greatly assist the researcher in scrutinizing authentic speech.

Whether the analyst participates in the interaction is also an issue that is worth considering. If the researcher plays the role of a participant-observer, it provides him/her with the opportunity to gear the direction of the interaction towards the aims and research questions of the study. Nevertheless, this can diminish the level of naturalness and originality of the interaction. Otherwise, an external observer will not have the opportunity to gain access to pertinent information and will be likely to pass misjudgments regarding the participants' relationship, particularly in daily exchanges. If the researcher is not well informed of who the interactants are and what they have exchanged prior to observation/ recording, it is likely that the researcher fail to comprehend what is communicated. One way to deal with this situation can be to supplement the recording with a follow-up interview with the participants where the transcripts can be discussed so that the researcher can yield a more sufficient comprehension of the interaction and the researched phenomenon.

Another technique for collecting authentic data is "taking field notes" (Kasper, 2008, p. 284) or "the notebook method" (Jucker, 2009, p. 1616). This is a typical technique in ethnographic research, which primarily involves overhearing what other people say and noting it down by hand. One benefit of this approach is that it does not require the consent of those being overheard, thereby avoiding the observer's paradox. Additionally, there is no transcribing work required and no electronic recording equipment required (Schneider, 2018, p. 55). This method has been popular in sociolinguistic research, and thus appropriate to be adopted in speech act research. For instance, Holmes (1986) employed field notes to scrutinize compliments and responses to compliments in New Zealand English. The limitations of applying this instrument include the fact that the researchers focus on the prominent and explicit speech act realizing strategies, leaving more implicit and authentic strategies unregistered. Another shortcoming of taking field notes results from inaccurate hearing and memorizing. Kasper (2008) clarifies, "what can be recorded by researcher's observation and subsequent field notes is constrained by human cognitive capacities". Because attention is selective and memory information degrades swiftly, people's short-term memories are ineffective as a documenting tool for interactions. Consequently, only single-turn, brief, high-frequency "semantic formulae" including greetings, leave-takings, and (certain types of) compliments can be reliably seen through conventional ethnographic investigation. On the other hand, the chronological and prosodic arrangement of a speech act, as well as its consecutive structure, which describes how the main action is prompted, how it is reacted to, and how it evolves over possibly many turns, loses shape in memory. (2008, p. 285).

Furthermore, researchers employing the technique of recording authentic talk may encounter difficulties in accessing the research site over a sufficient period of time for audio- or video- recording. In addition, they may find it hard to gather enough comparable data from participants with diverse features, including languages or language proficiency. Moreover, the practice of transcribing demands a huge amount of time, experience, and even specialized training. The transcription practice in question involves the measurement of pauses, interruptions, overlaps, and concurrent talk, not to mention the transcription of non-verbal behavior.

#### 2.3.3. Delivering Production Tasks

Production tasks refer to the kinds of methods to gather data by having participants produce language. The thread among these methods is that they are experimental methods. As such, they meet the criteria summarized by Schneider (2018) as follows

> (1) The language produced does not occur naturally, i.e. it does not arise from the genuine needs and desires of language users, but occurs on the initiative of a researcher. (2) The language produced is elicited under conditions determined by the researcher, sometimes referred to as "laboratory conditions". That is to say, the researcher usually decides on the time, place, and setting of the data elicitation. (3) All language users serving as informants are consciously aware that they are involved in an experiment and that their language productions are recorded, not necessarily electronically, and then used for research purposes. To this, they have given their consent, and they participate voluntarily. (4) All informants follow instructions and complete a task designed by the researcher. (5) At least in most cases, the language produced does not have any social consequences, unlike naturally occurring discourse. This lack of consequences contributes to the often bemoaned artificiality of the elicitation situations and the language produced therein. (2018, pp. 57-58)

Elicited conversation, role plays, interviews, and discourse completion tasks are among the production tasks covered in this area. They can be viewed as constituting a continuum with growing researcher control and dwindling interactionality.

##### *2.3.3.1. Elicited Conversation*

Elicited conversation engages two participants, who are not asked to take any social roles but essentially be themselves. The topic of conversation is not determined in advance. Kasper (2008, p. 287) considers elicited conversation as tasks whose topics, communicative purposes, and discourse roles are specified by the researchers. Nonetheless, those tasks are synonymous with role-play or role enactment.

Elicited conversation exhibits all prosodic, formal, actional, interactional, organizational, etc. aspects of spontaneously occurring conversation that are pertinent to pragmatics research. As a result, collections of this data type may be used as corpora for researching a variety of phenomena, such as intonation, discourse markers, speech act realization, adjacency pairs, speech act sequences, conversational openings and closings, turn-taking, interruptions, and silence.

Although elicited conversations can provide insight into a variety of interactional resources and practices, some study objectives necessitate that researchers exercise experimental control over participant roles, contextual factors, and communicative activities.

#### *2.3.3.2. Roleplays*

Role plays can be generally understood as mimics of communication encounters that are typically (but not always) carried out in pairs according to role descriptions or guidelines. Role-plays are characterized as "a social or human activity in which participants "take on" and "act out" specified "roles, often within a predefined social framework or situational blueprint (a "scenario")" (Crookall & Saunders, 1989, pp. 15-16).

Félix-Brasdefer (2018, p. 308) summarizes two major kinds of role plays, closed and open role plays. Closed roleplays aim to generate one-turn replies and are fundamentally oral discourse completion tasks. The oral response to the question is captured on tape. These are suggested to elicit longer responses than written DCTs and to obtain verbal and non-verbal characteristics of spoken discourse that a written DCT will not, such as hesitation, backchannels, gestures, etc. An open role-play, on the other hand, is characterized by being two-way. Participants are typically instructed to role-play how they would reply after reading the scenario prompt. The conversation is taped for perusal at a later stage.

O'Keeffe et al. (2020) assert that role plays are frequently employed for data elicitation in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, particularly in making comparisons between native (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) language use in relation to the same task (NS - NS versus NNS - NNS) or within the same task (NSs-NNSs). (2020, pp. 30-31)

Boxer and Cohen (2004, p. 17) claim that under certain circumstances, role-playing data are similar to naturally occurring spoken data, provided that the researcher could provide a setting in which conversation is examined. Demeter (2007), who uses role play to collect data for research on apologies, believes that role play can offer researchers the opportunity to get closer to actual data when examining the speech acts' production. This is confirmed by Rosendale (1989), who employs role plays to elicit data for a study on the speech act of invitation.

Despite being criticized for artificiality, role plays prove a useful instrument in investigating interactional angles of communication (including turn organization, turn taking and overlap, etc.), as well as prosodic characteristics and hints (namely intonations, tone, and stress). Additionally, they can make it possible to investigate macro-social aspects (such as gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position), both within and between languages.

#### *2.3.3.3. Interviews*

Interviews are common in all facets of social life, and since they are such a well-known source of knowledge, they are the most widely used method for gathering qualitative data. (Dörnyei, 2007; Rolland et al., 2020). In applied linguistics and pragmatics research, interviews are highly prevalent, and they are used to capture a wealth of information, including the participants' attitudes about a certain issue and their self-reflections regarding language-related behavior. (Rolland et al., 2020). Kasper (2008) argues that interviews can be implemented as the primary data collection instrument or as a triangulation approach. (2008, p. 296). However, she also advises against treating interviews as precise externalizations of consistent, decontextualized thoughts and knowledge levels; interview responses are co-constructed by nature since interviews are structured as question-answer chains, and interviewees' replies are therefore always impacted by the questions. (2008, p. 296)

According to Dörnyei (2007, pp. 135-136), based on the researchers' objectives, there are three types of interviews to be selected, namely "structured", "unstructured" and "semi-structured" interviews. Researchers often employ structured interviews to elicit concentrated information on a particular area of interest. They are favored when the researcher is aware of their limitations and is able to use inquiries to uncover crucial information. Contrarily, unstructured interviews give the respondents discretion over the conversation's course in an effort to elicit personal narratives. The most common interview type is the semi-structured interview, which allows the interviewee to go off course and produce meaningful material in unexpected places or ways while still following a predetermined set of questions.

Kasper (2008) claims that interviews can serve diverse research purposes. First, researchers can ask participants in meta-pragmatic interviews about their first-order conceptualizations of speech acts or categories including politeness and rudeness. These interviews can be used to compare second-order conceptualizations established in armchair research with first-order conceptualizations (lay people's interpretations), with the goal of improving the completeness of theoretical constructs and definitions. Interviewees may also be prompted to give instances of a specific speech act, such as a complaint or an invitation, for the purpose of data collection. These interviews resemble closed role plays or oral discourse completion tests. Additionally, interviewees can give instances of circumstances in which small talk is probable, compliments are expected, or examples of what they would say in a specific situation. This can be used to create scenarios for discourse completion tasks or role plays, improving their ecological validity. Finally, post-production interviews/retrospective interviews can be used to fully comprehend participants' selections, realizations, and decisions.

In pragmatics research, interviews are a common technique that is frequently combined with other methods of data collecting to examine phenomena. For instance, Blum-Kulka (1992) examined Israeli attitudes and beliefs toward politeness using structured, semi-structured, and open interviews. Japanese and American participants' displays of attentiveness are examined in Fukushima's (2011) cross-cultural study. Both questionnaires and interviews were used to gather the data, with the interview data revealing detailed insights into the participants' decisions and corroborating the questionnaire results. Fukushima (2013) focuses on the numerous aspects determining impoliteness and looks at how attentively participants from Japan and America evaluate it. These issues are addressed thanks to the combination of survey and interview data. Besides, the perceptions of (im)politeness of a naturally occurring apology in Australian English and Taiwanese Mandarin are investigated by Chang and Haugh (2011) and Haugh and Chang (2019) through interviews and rating scales. The follow-up interviews helped to clarify the moral standards and cultural schemata that underpinned the participants' judgments of (im)politeness and the intercultural and intracultural diversity in perceptions that are evident in the respondents' rating choices.

However, interviews should also be conducted with care. There is always a potential that the social desirability bias will impact responses if the interview questions are not stated neutrally enough. Additionally, the participants can be either too shy to provide enough commentary or overly talkative, which would result in lengthy but unusable data. (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). Schneider (2018) adds that in the follow-up interviews of role plays, comments and explanations can be elicited by having the participants read the transcripts or watch the video recordings; however, as a result of the delay, respondents may no longer remember some facts with accuracy or be able to tell the interviewer what they believe they said and why, which can result in inaccurate data. (2018, p. 64)

***2.3.3.4. Discourse Completion Tasks***

In cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics, Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) have been a widely utilized and harshly criticized elicitation method. The format was initially created by Levenston and Blum (1978) to examine lexical simplification, and then it was modified by Blum-Kulka (1982) to look at speech act realization. Kasper and Dahl (1991) define DCTs as tasks that "are written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot for the speech act under study" (1991, p. 221). For this task, participants are requested to provide a response that they believe matches the scenario. As Kasper (1999) explains, it is possible to further restrict the participant's written response by allowing a rejoinder to come after the available slot.

As Ogiermann (2018) points out, DCTs are of great value for cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics studies. She justifies that the DCT seems to be the only data collection tool that can produce sufficiently large corpora of comparable, systematically diverse speech act data, which is necessary for research that aims to identify culture-specific patterns in speech act realization or the pragmatic characteristics of a particular interlanguage (2018, p. 229). DCTs are a useful solution for the contrastive research of speech acts as they can be converted into any language and swiftly delivered to large respondent groups. (Aston, 1995; Barron, 2003, p. 85). Taking the same stance, Schneider (2018) asserts that written DCTs offer the benefit of enabling the gathering of language samples from a large number of respondents in a short amount of time, for instance by delivering a written DCT to a large lecture hall, or by email, social media, or crowdsourcing platforms. Another benefit is that extensive DCT data collection could provide the researcher with valuable metadata for correlation work (e.g. across gender, nationality, first language, age, etc.).

The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), carried out by a multinational team of linguists, is the largest and most significant DCT study to date (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The experiment analyzed requests and apologies in five languages (Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, and English), with the latter one represented by three variations (American, Australian, and British). The CCSARP paradigm has been used recurrently in speech act investigations, yielding a substantial corpus of comparable data from a wide range of additional languages. Numerous DCT studies have concentrated on requests and/or apologies and closely followed the project's design. This is made easier by duplicating the CCSARP DCT, or a modified version of it, and by the fact that the two speech acts generated for the project have a thorough coding scheme available. (Ogiermann, 2018, p. 230)

Multiple researches comparing the validity of DCT data to other elicited data and to naturally occurring discourse have been conducted in the past two decades (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013; Golato, 2003; Yuan, 2001). The findings of these research, which are generally similar, indicate that DCT data are far more suited to inquiries into how much respondents know about what is suitable to say in specific settings as opposed to answering questions about how language is realized spontaneously. Sweeney and Hua (2016, p. 215) summarize the discrepancies between DCT data and other kinds of elicited data and authentic speech acts. More concretely, according to Golato (2003), despite certain parallels between the strategies as found in DCTs and those in the naturally occurring data, other DCT strategies do not appear in the natural data that was recorded, and vice versa. Besides, in DCTs, responses are provided to prompts where in natural data they would not be. Additionally, while replies in elicited data are delivered over one turn, responses in the natural data emerge over multiple turns (Golato, 2003; Yuan, 2001). Moreover, responses to DCTs may not be comparable since they depend on the design of the questionnaire (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000). As regards the types of DCTs, the responses to oral DCTs are more in line with the natural data than written DCTs (Yuan, 2001).

As DCT requires participants to "recall pragmatic information from memory and report rather than use it" (Barron, 2003, p. 85), one of the main criticisms of DCTs has been that the responses do not often match what the speakers would say if they were in the scenarios that are being described, but rather what they believe they would say (Aston, 1995, p. 62; Schneider, 2011, p. 18). However, considering that the goal of cross-cultural pragmatic studies is to demonstrate general, culture-specific patterns of language usage, the potential mismatch between the responses and actual language use does not inherently invalidate DCT findings. It is not important whether the participants would use the same language if they were placed in the scenarios presented, as long as they believe their responses to be socially and culturally acceptable (Ogiermann, 2018, p. 233).

#### 2.3.4. Delivering Comprehension and Judgment Tasks

Generally, studies that use comprehension and judgment tasks focus mostly on individual utterances rather than interactional discourse. As a result, such tasks are typically not appropriate for macro-pragmatic analysis, such as the investigation of discursive sequences or whole speech events. This section discusses multiple choice questions and rating scales, two of the main categories of comprehension and judgment tasks.

##### *2.3.4.1. Multiple Choice Tasks*

According to Kasper (2008), multiple-choice (MC)/multiple-choice tasks (MCTs) have been employed for investigating "people's preferences for speech act strategies and forms, comprehension and metapragmatic judgments" (2008, p. 294). Similar to DCTs, MC items provide a prompt for a response and define the situational background, but instead of requiring the participant to actively create a response, MC gives a number of alternative responses from which one must be opted.

Schneider (2018) states that "MCTs seem particularly suitable to investigations into impoliteness and verbal aggression, e.g. swearing or insults, as informants are often inhibited when they are requested to commit "foul language" to paper" (2018, p. 70). He adds that respondents tend to prefer MCTs to DCTs due to the lower processing demands involving MCTs regarding the cost of cognition than the recalling tasks like DCTs.

However, the reliability of MCTs is also challenged in recent studies concerning speech act production. (Brown, 2001; Röver, 2005; Yamashita, 1996). The unreliability seems to point to the reality that many speech acts can be performed in a multitude of context-appropriate ways, which is a premise of pragmatic life. In addition, unless the research focuses on a very restricted object, identifying potentially suitable combinations of strategies of realization and linguistic forms in a principled manner is a challenging issue for instrument designers.

According to Röver (2005), MCs that examine respondents' comprehension of speech acts and implicature and that require the choice of contextual patterns can be developed with sufficient levels of reliability.

##### *2.3.4.2. Rating Scales*

Rating scales are regarded as a subtype of the questionnaire by Kasper (1999). Leech (2014) asserts that they are a version of multiple-choice tasks. In any case, rating scales require participants to convey their assessment or perception of a particular pragmatic phenomenon by selecting a particular value or label from a variety of alternatives. Participants may also be asked to reorder a group of linguistic expressions in accordance with a particular standard of evaluation, such as appropriateness, politeness, or grammaticality. The use of rating scales is common not only in pragmatics study but also in sociolinguistics research and theoretical linguistics research, particularly experimental syntax, to elicit grammaticality judgments. In general, the purpose of applying rating scales, particularly the Likert scale is to "elicit assessments of utterances or situations in terms of correctness, appropriateness, politeness, formality, and so on" (Schneider, 2018, p. 70). Scales with a typical range of 1 to 5 are used for this purpose. (Dörnyei, 2003, pp. 36-39).

Rating scales are employed in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics to generate pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic evaluations. In the former, participants are asked to assess whether linguistic realizations of a specific speech act are suitable in a particular social setting, while in the latter, participants are questioned about how they interpret and comprehend a situation with regard to aspects such as power, distance, degree of imposition, and severity of offense. The construction of tasks like role plays and discourse completion can greatly benefit from sociopragmatic assessments. In a pre-test, participants may be asked to score the contextual factors included in the scenarios that researchers have sketched out for such tasks. This practice contributes to raising the validity of the study (Kasper, 2008, pp. 295-296)

Rating scales in politeness research are less common now than they were before discursive techniques emerged, which argue that politeness cannot be assessed in isolation and outside of context (Watts, 2010). However, Leech (2014, pp. 250-251) believes that participants' judgments of what he refers to as "pragmalinguistic politeness" represent a default perception and that it can be evaluated outside of context, for example, by ranking alternate realizations of a speech act. Here, it is important to emphasize that these default judgments display first-order conceptualizations of politeness. In addition, Leech disagrees with Kasper and Dahl's (1991, p. 219) critique that, in a judgment exercise, participants must create their own situational context if the researcher fails to do so. He contends that there is no evidence to support their premise and asserts that participants rely on a "generalized context". Think-aloud protocols that are simultaneously recorded while judgment tasks are being completed could provide some evidence.

Rating scales prove helpful in swiftly gathering assessments from a large number of respondents and assigning quantitative values to qualitative data for statistical analysis (Collins et al., 2009). However, choosing the proper kind of scale is contingent on the quantity of values and labeling. As Schütze (2016) argues, too many value points can elicit "spurious distinctions" among participants, while too few can obscure true distinctions. Short scales seem less demanding and more reliable for statistical analyses. Additionally, labeling values on scales should take into account participants' inability to make judgments regarding targeted structure, as labeling "not sure" may leave out valid cases. (Ellis, 1991, as cited in Schütze (2016)).

## 3. Conclusion

Starting from the categorization of types of data in pragmatics research, the paper delves deeper into the classification of data-gathering methods for pragmatics studies in general and cross-cultural studies in particular. Indeed, particular data types concern specific data-collecting instruments chosen, which also justifies the occasional overlaps between data types and data-amassing methods.

The author focuses on the observational data with its four dimensions, laying the foundation for reviewing the major types of empirical data-gathering methods, including "applying a corpus", "recording authentic talk", "delivering production tasks", and "delivering comprehension and judgment tasks". These can be seen as the most commonly adopted methods in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. Besides, other data-amassing methods for pragmatics research, namely the "philological method", "diary method", "verbal reports"/ "self-reports", or "think-aloud protocol", and methods inherited from psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics are out of scope of the current paper.

It is widely acknowledged that studies that pragmatics research in general and cross-cultural pragmatics studies in particular aim at examining language in interaction or a particular context. Therefore, they are multifaceted with a diverse range of data types and data-gathering instruments developed. However, it would be inappropriate to consider that there is only one particular method. All the methods introduced in this paper are feasible ways of collecting empirical data in cross-cultural pragmatics studies, with distinct benefits and drawbacks; the researchers are expected to be open-minded as regards employing more than one approach to create possible triangulation and to increase the validity and reliability of their research. Indeed, cross-cultural pragmatics research commonly calls for "a multi-method approach" or "componential approach" (House & Kádár, 2021, p. 44) featuring the integration of "contrastive" and "ancillary" research. In detail, the ancillary methods, such as utilizing interviews, questionnaires, and translations, can serve in a pilot study prior to the fundamental contrastive research or as a way of verifying the validity of the contrastive analysis (2021, pp. 3–4). Furthermore, it is advisable for the researcher to establish connections between the narrow and detailed cases and the more expansive and generalized hypotheses (Chafe, 1994, p. 10). Similarly, gathering and analyzing data in cross-cultural pragmatics studies involves expanding upon the results of specific cases to generate conclusions regarding wider cross-cultural patterns. After the prevailing cross-cultural patterns are uncovered, studies on particular cases can be carried out for the purpose of validity affirmation. Last but not least, on account of the diverse data types and data-amassing methods, careful consideration should also be taken to ensure the compatibility of the contrastive data sources to yield results regarding similarities and discrepancies of linguistic features and speech acts with a high level of accuracy and persuasiveness.

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# AN INVESTIGATION ON TEACHER-RELATED DEMOTIVATING FACTORS TO STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN THE SECOND-DEGREE PROGRAM AT A UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** This article presents the findings of a study that investigates teacher-related factors demotivating students of the second-degree program at a university from participating in speaking activities. The research examines the perception of 100 students from three classes of the second-degree program towards teacher-related demotivating factors in comparison with that of 15 teachers of the same program. In order to obtain the most accurate results, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches with two primary instruments namely questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews were employed. The study's findings reveal key demotivating factors as perceived by students including: the inauthenticity of speaking tasks; the lack of model speaking; the absence of pronunciation error correction; teachers' unequal attention; and insensitive manner of giving feedback. Besides, there existed a remarkable disparity between teachers' and students' perception of demotivating factors. The results from the interviews suggest ways to assist students in overcoming demotivation in speaking lessons in correlation with the key demotives detected.

*Keywords:* teacher-related, demotivating, speaking, second degree program

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# NHỮNG YẾU TỐ LIÊN QUAN TỚI GIẢNG VIÊN GÂY GIẢM HỨNG THÚ CỦA SINH VIÊN VĂN BẰNG 2 KHI HỌC KỸ NĂNG NÓI

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này trình bày các kết quả nghiên cứu về những yếu tố liên quan đến giảng viên gây giảm hứng thú khi tham gia các hoạt động nói của sinh viên trong chương trình học văn bằng 2 tại một trường đại học. Nghiên cứu này phân tích ý kiến của 100 sinh viên từ 3 lớp học có so sánh với ý kiến của 15 giảng viên giảng dạy chương trình này. Để đạt được kết quả chính xác nhất, nghiên cứu kết hợp phương pháp định lượng và định tính với hai công cụ chính là: khảo sát bằng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy những yếu tố chủ yếu gây giảm hứng thú theo cảm nhận của sinh viên bao gồm: tính không chân thực của các nhiệm vụ nói; thiếu mô hình nói mẫu; thiếu sự sửa lỗi phát âm; sự chú ý không đồng đều của giảng viên đối với sinh viên; và cách thức phản hồi thiếu tế nhị. Ngoài ra, nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra sự khác biệt đáng kể giữa nhận thức của giảng viên và sinh viên về những yếu tố gây giảm hứng thú. Từ đó, nghiên cứu đã đề xuất bốn giải pháp nhằm giúp giảm thiểu tác động của các yếu tố gây giảm hứng thú liên quan đến phương pháp giảng dạy và phong cách giao tiếp của giảng viên.

*Từ khóa*: giảng viên, gây giảm hứng thú, kỹ năng nói, chương trình học văn bằng 2

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1. Rationale*

Since English is deemed to be a global language, the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language has garnered significant popularity and attention worldwide. In Vietnam, English instruction has become obligatory and pervasive across almost all educational levels from primary schools to universities. With a specific emphasis on fostering learners' communication skills and fluency, the communicative-oriented approach is adopted at various schools and institutions nationwide, in which speaking lessons are implemented extensively to enhance learners' proficiency in spoken English. However, despite teachers’ efforts, speaking skill still poses significant challenges to learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Particularly, silence and passive behavior have been a worrisome problem in speaking lessons as pointed out by (Bailey, 2005). The scholar states that despite clearly identifying the importance of the English communication competences and being well aware of the need to actively participate in speaking activities during class time, a large number of students are still relatively passive and reluctant to participate in English speaking activities.

One critical factor affecting students’ participation is motivation. Oxford and Shearin (1994) states that many researchers consider motivation as one of the main elements that determine success in developing a second or foreign language; it determines the extent of active, personal involvement in language learning. Motivated individuals demonstrate initiative and actively strive to achieve tasks in order to attain favorable outcomes. They are energized and engaged throughout the task, driven to take actions (Suslu, 2006). In contrast, those demotivated can easily lose their interest and present reluctance to meaningful involvement in learning activities (Dörnyei, 2001). However, while the subject of learners' motivation has received substantial attention among scholars and researchers, little has been delved on the other size of the coin; that is demotivating factors (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). Like motivating factors, demotivating ones are pointed out to largely impact the learning outcomes, and directly lead to learning failure; yet they are often overlooked or insufficiently addressed in language learning and teaching studies (Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012). Furthermore, within the limited existing research on demotivation, the majority of studies have predominantly examined this phenomenon within the overall context of English learning and teaching. Only a few studies have specifically explored demotivation in relation to particular aspects such as vocabulary, pronunciation, or the four language skills. Furthermore, among the demotivating factors identified in previous research including learning materials, classroom atmosphere, teachers, peers and personal goals and objectives, teachers' influence is postulated to be the leading factor causing a decline in students' motivation (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

As a teacher who has been in charge of teaching English to classes in the second-degree program at university for years, the researcher notices that reticence is a significant phenomenon facing students who attend the program and hindering their progress. All the aforementioned conditions and factors have served as catalysts for the researcher to undertake a study titled "An investigation on teacher-related demotivating factors to students' participation in speaking activities in the second-degree program at a university".

### *1.2. Scope of the Study and Research Questions*

The study aims to investigate teacher-related factors that may result in learners' reticence in English speaking lessons. Due to its minor scope, the research only focuses on investigating students who are currently attending the second-degree program at the university where the researcher works as to their opinion towards teacher-related demotivating factors and compare their perception with that of the teachers of the same program. The study is also expected to examine measures to minimize the demotivation.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aims, the research was carried out to answer three following research questions:

1. *What are the teacher-related demotivating factors to students' participation in English speaking activities as reported by students of the second-degree program?*
2. *What are the teacher-related demotivating factors to students' participation in English speaking activities as reported by EFL teachers of the second-degree program?*
3. *What strategies can be implemented to assist students in overcoming demotivation during the process of learning speaking skill?*

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Speaking in Language Learning*

According to Brown (2007), speaking is defined as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves the production, reception, and processing of information. Nunan (1991) further states that the measure of success in speaking is the ability to engage in conversations in the target language. In fact, many language learners consider speaking ability to be the most crucial skill to acquire, and they gauge their progress based on their achievements in spoken communication. Consequently, if learners do not make progress or lack opportunities to practice speaking in the language classroom, they may quickly become demotivated and lose interest in learning. Conversely, when appropriate activities are taught effectively, speaking in class can be highly enjoyable, significantly boosting overall learner motivation.

**Characteristics of a successful speaking activity**

***a. Learners' talking is prioritized***

Most of the time allotted for the activity is occupied by learners' talk not by teachers.

***b. Participation is even***

Classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants. All get a chance to speak, and contributions are evenly distributed.

***c. Motivation is high***

Learners are eager to speak because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it or because they want to contribute to achieve as task objective.

***d. Language is of an acceptable level***

Learners express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensive to each other, and of an acceptable level of language accuracy.

***e. Goals are oriented***

Encourage learners to reach the objective, they know why they do the activity, the outcome is clear.

*Adapted from Ur (1996)*

### *2.2. Demotivation in Foreign Language Acquisition*

Academic motivation is claimed to be influencing factors on college students' various outcomes. It is an essential component determining the quality and success of their learning outcomes. According to Meece, Anderman, & Anderman (2006), motivation in education can be summarized as a student's willingness to engage in and persevere in challenging assignments, seek assistance, and endeavor to perform in school. Motivation in foreign language learning has been defined as an individual's internal state that influences and directs their actions towards achieving satisfaction. It encompasses a range of needs, preferences, desires, stimuli, and factors that prompt individuals to engage in behavior in a positive manner (Lightbrown & Spada, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Just as there are influences that have a positive effect on motivation, there are also those that have a detrimental effect on motivation. These influences are called demotivating factors, causing learners' demotivation in learning.

Demotivation is defined by Dörnyei (2001) as "*specific forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention of an ongoing action".* According to Dornyei (2001), a demotivated learner is defined as someone who was once motivated but has lost his or her interest for some reasons. Loss of interest can derive from various sources of demotivation. In his research, Dornyei (2001) also excludes 3 negative factors that are not referred as demotivating factors:

- Firstly, an **attractive alternative action** that serves as a powerful distraction (e.g., watching television instead of doing one's homework).
- Secondly, **gradual loss of interest** in a long-lasting, ongoing activity cannot be regarded as a demotivator because demotivators are specific factors or incidents that reduce motivation on a single event.

- Thirdly, the **sudden realization** that the costs of pursuing a goal are too high is raised (e.g., when someone recognizes how demanding it is to attend an evening course while working during the day).

The study identifies nine types of demotivators among students: (1) the teachers (personality, commitment, competence, teaching method); (2) inadequate school facilities (group is too big or not the right level; frequent change of teachers); (3) reduced self-confidence (experience of failure of lack of success); (4) negative attitudes towards the L2; (5) compulsory nature of l2 learning; (6) interference of another foreign language being studied; (7) negative attitudes towards L2 community; (9) attitudes of group members; (10) coursebook used in the language class.

Jomairi (2011) classifies demotivating factors under two main subheadings as internal factors (i.e. reduced self-confidence, attitudes of group members, etc.) and external factors (i.e. textbook/reference, book-related issues, teachers' personalities, etc.). Internal factors are those that are related to the student's self and lead to negative outcomes, whereas external sources of demotivation are those that come from the outside, such as teachers, books, the learning environment, and so on.

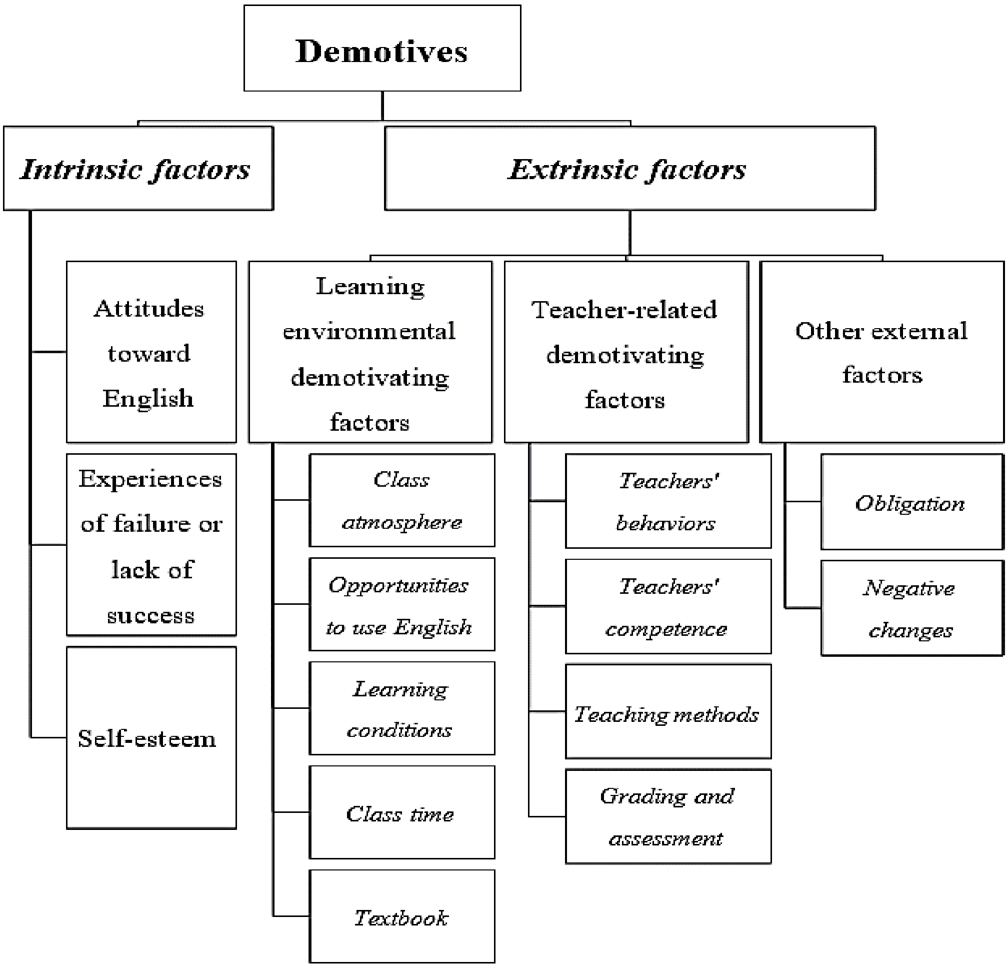
In the study into potential demotivating factors in EFL classes, Trang and Baldauf (2007) provides a comprehensive classification of demotives in English language learning, which is illustrated in Figure 1 below (as cited in Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 43). The demotivating factors listed by Trang and Baldauf (2007) align with the understanding of demotivation as "specific internal and external forces that diminish or reduce the motivational foundation of an intention or ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 39). Additionally, Trang and Baldauf's (2007) study was conducted in Vietnam, which corresponds to the context of this research.

In Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012), various factors that impede students’ motivation in speaking lessons are identified including teachers, peers, and materials. Notably, the findings highlight teachers as a significant source of demotivation when it comes to the students' acquisition of speaking skill. The result corresponds with the findings by Afrough et al. (2014) which reveal several factors that contribute to the demotivation of language learners in speaking skill. These factors include a negative attitude towards learning the second language, teachers' inadequate competence and performance, the absence of technological resources in the classroom, a lack of suitable teaching materials, an unfavorable classroom environment, and a lack of opportunities for speaking practice.

In short, among all the factors that demotivate students in learning English as a foreign language as well the particular speaking activities, teachers are identified as a critical element that can cause a decline in students’ motivation.

**Figure 1**

*Classification of Demotivating Factors in English Language Learning (Trang & Baldauf, 2007)*




***2.3. Teacher-Related Demotivating Factors***

According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2011), "everything teachers say or do and how they communicate and behave in the classroom may potentially influence students' motivation in different ways". Hence, demotivating factors, particularly teacher-related ones, are considered detrimental to students' motivation and their English language learning.

Regarding teacher-related demotives, a number of studies have revealed different aspects in which teachers can demotivate students to actively engage in speaking activities. Dörnyei (1998a) points out three key aspects in which teachers may demotivate students including teachers' competence, teaching methods, style and rapport with students. Besides, reduced self-confidence which is partly due to some classroom events within the teacher's control is the second frequent source of demotivation in the study.

Findings from a number of recent studies by Trang and Baldauf (2007), Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) classify teacher-related demotives into four main categories namely teaching method, teachers' behavior, teachers' competence, and grading and assessment.

➢ **Teaching methods** refers to the way teachers conduct their lessons and organize class activities. According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) the teaching method employed by teachers may exert either positive or negative impact on learners' motivation. Since teachers' role changes in different methods, their influence varies. Basically, teachers' influence on students' class engagement can be classified into four categories, according to Richards and Rodgers (2014), including:

- The types of functions teachers are expected to fulfil: director; counsellor; or model; etc.
- The degree of control teachers have over how learning process takes place.
- The degree to which the teacher is responsible for determining the content of what is taught.
- The interactional patterns that develop between teachers and learners

➢ **Teachers' behavior** is defined as the way he acts and interacts with students. It refers to teachers' communicative style and personality. According to Henson & Chambers (2002), the personality traits of teachers can be observed not just in their classroom performance, particularly in how they choose instructional activities, materials, strategies, and manage their classrooms, but also in how they interact with their students. Findings in different studies postulate a variety of aspects in teachers' behaviors that may demotivate students including unkindness, excessive strictness (Tsang, 2017), negative response to students' mistakes (Han et al, 2019), favoritism (Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012).

➢ **Teachers' competence** as proposed by Bulté and Housen (2012) comprises three domains: language competence, content knowledge about language, and teaching skills. According to European Commission (2013), the concept of competence, in teaching, encompasses the following features:

> - it involves tacit and explicit knowledge, cognitive and practical skills as well as dispositions (motivation, beliefs, value orientations and emotions);
>
> - it enables teachers to meet complex demands, by mobilizing psycho-social resources in context, deploying them in a coherent way;
>
> - it empowers the teacher to act professionally and appropriately in a situation;
>
> - it helps ensure teachers' undertaking of tasks effectively (achieving the desired outcome) and efficiently (optimizing resources and efforts);
>
> - it can be demonstrated to a certain level of achievement along a continuum
>
> *(European Commission, 2013, p. 10)*

➢ **Grading and assessment** refers to the way teachers grade and assess students during class. The current study focuses on teachers' feedback as a demotivating factor to students' learning since feedback plays a crucial role in guiding students' learning and helping them understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Without constructive feedback, students may struggle to see the purpose and value of the assessment. If assessments primarily provide a final score or grade without meaningful feedback, students may feel disengaged and demotivated (Zhang, 2007). This finding aligns with the results in Trang and Baldauf (2007) which postulates that a lack of corrective feedback from teachers can be a critical demotivating factor for EFL students.

The current literature of the classification of teacher-related demotivating factors provides a comprehensive coverage of teachers' influence on students' learning attitudes and motivation. However, there appears to be several overlaps among the categories. Specifically, the teachers' behavior as identified by Henson and Chambers (2002) coincides with what is considered teachers' method in Richards and Rodgers (2014) as they both refer to classroom management, instructional activities and material selection. The most straightforward classification of teachers' influences can be developed based on the classification by Trang and

Baldauf (2007), and Quadir (2017), which is adopted as the framework of this study.

**Table 1**

*Classification of Teacher-Related Demotivating Factor*

| Teaching method | Teachers' behavior | Teachers' competence | Grading and assessment |
|---|---|---|---|
| - Uncreative, boring ways of conveying knowledge.<br>- teaching language skills comprehensively<br>- speed of teaching is too fast<br>- ineffective distribution of L1 & L2 use<br>- lesson limited to textbook<br>- repeated lessons from class to class<br>- different teaching methods among different teachers.<br>- frequently test students<br>- inappropriate workload<br>- too much emphasis on grammar | - critical/ rude/ impatient to students' error<br>- humiliate students in class<br>- busy with good students and neglected the low proficiency ones<br>- spend time telling personal story | - fail to pronounce, difficult to understand<br>- low credibility<br>- speak too much L1 in the class<br>- irrelevant explanation | - no corrective feedback<br>- test outside lessons (does not cover material)<br>- tasks are not compatible with students' level of proficiency |

### *2.4. Previous Studies*

A number of studies have been carried out on the topic of demotivation worldwide and nationwide. Huwari et al. (2023) investigates demotivation factors to English learning among 110 Jordanian undergraduate students. Six different factors namely class characteristics, teachers' attitude, course contents and teaching materials, effects of poor grades, classroom atmosphere, and lack of self-confidence and interest are identified. The results reveal that teachers' attitude ranks fourth out of the 6 demotivation factors as perceived by the students. Muhonen (2004) also explores the primary demotivating factors among Polish EFL students, considering their gender and level of achievement. By analyzing the writings of 91 ninth-grade students, the study identified 5 demotivating factors: (1) the teacher, (2) learning materials, (3) learner characteristics, (4) school environment, and (5) the student's attitude towards English with the most significant demotivating factor being attributed to the teacher, while the least demotivating factor being related to the student's attitude towards the second language. Quadir (2017) points out that English teachers have the strongest influence on the students' demotivation after examining different demotivators at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The demotivating factors are listed in descending order: teachers, students' past experiences, private tutors, attitude of group members, school facilities, textbooks, and students' and their family members' attitude towards English study.

In Vietnam, Trang and Baldauf (2007) investigates different types of demotives that 100 Vietnamese economics undergraduates encountered when learning English. The findings display two groups of demotives: internal attributions and external attributions. The former included students' attitudes towards English, their experiences of failure or lack of success, and incidents related to their self-esteem; the latter consisted of teacher-related factors, the learning environment, and other external factors. Among the teacher-related factors, teaching method was the most critical demotive, followed by teachers' behavior; grading and assessments was the least significant one.

All the previous researches focus on demotivating factors to learning English in general, not to a particular skill. They share common findings about key demotives, especially teachers' influences, which indicate teachers' powerful impact on learners' motivation.

## 3. Research Approach

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to find out factors that demotivate EFL students to participate in speaking activities from both teachers' and students' perspective via two primary research instruments including: survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Thereby, a number of possible solutions are put forward in order to assist students in overcoming their motivation in speaking lessons.

### *3.1. Research Questions*

The research was carried out to answer two following research questions:

1. What are the teacher-related demotivating factors to students' participation in English speaking activities as reported by students of the second-degree program?

2. What are the teacher-related demotivating factors to students' participation in English speaking activities as reported by EFL teachers of the second-degree program?

3. What strategies can be implemented to assist students in overcoming demotivation during the process of learning speaking skill?

### *3.2. Informants*

The informants of the study were 100 students in the second-degree program majoring in English language at a university and 15 English teachers of the same program. The 100 students belonged to 3 classes; they were studying at the third semester of the course with the current English level equivalent to B1 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Such students were chosen to be the subjects of the study because they were the classes to whom the researcher was in charge of teaching English and they frequently showed reluctance to engage in speaking activities. The 15 teachers were EFL teachers who had experience teaching working learners of the second-program for years. Their age ranges from 28 to 50 with working experience with working learners from 2 to 10 years. The disparity in terms of age and working experiences among the teachers was expected to bring comprehensive a view and analysis of the problem.

### *3.3. Research Instruments*

- *Survey questionnaires*

Two sets of survey questionnaire were designed to collect information regarding teacher-related demotivating factors to students' participation in speaking activities, one for the students and one for the teachers. The questionnaire comprised 35 questions that measured teachers' and learners' attitudes towards demotivating factors. The list of factors was adapted from the list of demotivating factors among Bangladesh university students presented in Quarir (2017). Respondents were inquired to express their degree of agreement toward different teacher-related demotivating incidents on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The survey questionnaire for students was conducted in Vietnamese so that survey respondents understood all the questions and gave the exact answers about what were true to themselves.

- *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a group of 10 students and 5 teachers in order to delve deeper into their responses provided in the survey questionnaire. The objective was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and experiences regarding demotivation in speaking activities. Additionally, these interviews aimed to elicit valuable insights and recommendations from the teachers on strategies to help students overcome demotivation in speaking tasks. The interview was carried out in Vietnamese in order to avoid any miscommunication and obtain the most reliable results.

### *3.4. Data Collection Procedure*

The data collection process consisted of two phases: the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. In relation to the questionnaire, the initial step involved the development and design of the questions. To ensure accuracy, a testing phase was conducted with two students to identify and rectify any errors. Subsequently, printed copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 100 students, accompanied by clear and detailed instructions to ensure a thorough understanding of the survey requirements. After the completion of the questionnaire, the collected copies were gathered. Quantitative data from the survey questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS software to examine the patterns in the responses by teachers and students. Following an analysis of the questionnaire responses, 10 students and 5 teachers were selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. These students and teachers were chosen based on their answers in the questionnaire, with the aim of gaining further clarification and elaboration on their responses. Throughout the interviews, detailed notes were taken to facilitate subsequent analysis. Survey responses from teachers and students were coded and analyzed to identify patterns in their answers.

## 4. Major Findings

### *4.1. Students' Attitude Towards Speaking Skills*

**Chart 1**

*The Importance of English Speaking Skill at Work*

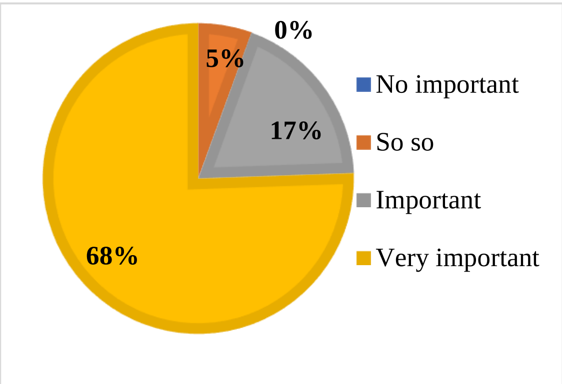
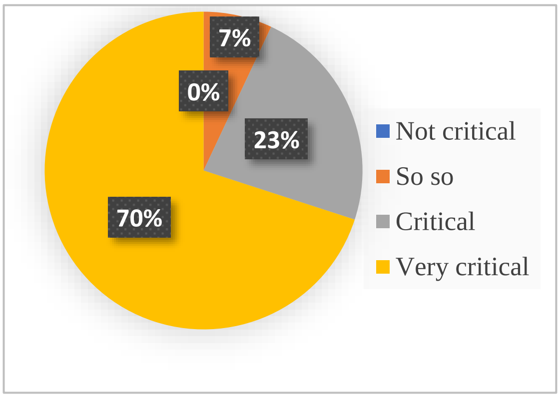



**Chart 2**

*The Need for Improving English Speaking Skill*




The two charts presented in this study depict students' attitudes towards their English speaking abilities. Chart 1 clearly illustrated that possessing a strong command of English speaking skills is deemed crucial by learners in their workplaces. Specifically, 68 percent of the students expressed that being able to speak English well was of utmost importance to their work, while 17 percent considered it important. Only 5 percent of the respondents placed average importance on English communication abilities. These findings aligned well with the responses gathered during the interview sessions. The interviewed students stated that their primary motivation for enrolling in English courses was to obtain a certificate of English proficiency, with particular emphasis on speaking skills, as this was the aspect of English they utilized the most in their professional settings. Some students noted that their jobs did not require regular English speaking, hence they did not feel a strong imperative to improve their speaking ability.

According to Chart 2, the majority of students expressed a keen interest in enhancing their English communication skills during the interviews. Ninety-three percent of the students were classified as being in an extremely critical or critical need to improve their English speaking abilities, while only 7 percent expressed a "so-so" attitude. During the interviews, students provided various reasons for their desire to improve their speaking ability. One interviewee highlighted that speaking English well boosted their confidence and allowed them to stay updated. Additionally, they mentioned that being proficient in English enabled them to communicate in English with their children, setting a good example for them. On the other hand, a student with a "so-so" attitude revealed that although they acknowledged the benefits of effective English communication, they struggled to find time to practice speaking outside of class, as it was not a strict requirement for their work.

### *4.2. Demotivating Factors to Students' Participation in Speaking Lessons According to Students' Perspectives*

Table 2 illustrates students' perceptions on teacher-related demotivating factors to their participation in speaking activities. According to the table, students had quite unanimous answers in their rating of demotivating factor with low deviation score. For the students, teachers' behavior ranked the first out of four with a mean score of 4.03 out of 5, indicating that this was the most demotivating factor. Teaching method stood at the second position with a mean score of 3.93 followed by testing & assessment and teachers' English speaking competence at 3.45 and 3.68 respectively.

**Table 2**

*The Mean Score of the 4 Subgroups of Demotivating Factors as Perceived by Students*

| Variable (Ranging from 1 to 5) | Mean (M) | Std. Deviation (S.D) | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower bound | Upper bound |
| Teaching methods | 3.93 | .27 | 3.60 | 4.26 |
| Testing and assessment | 3.45 | .18 | 3.29 | 4.02 |
| Teachers' behavior | 4.03 | .18 | 3.56 | 4.78 |
| Teachers' competence | 3.68 | .17 | 3.38 | 4.08 |

Among the aspect of teachers' behavior, students felt the most demotivated when teachers did not display equal attention to students (M=4.52), gave few nonverbal expressions like nodding or smiling to encourage students (M= 4.35) and when teachers made fun of students' pronunciation mistakes or ignored students' difficulty in pronunciation (M=4.22). In contrast, teachers' lack of enthusiasm did not count as much as a demotivating factor among working learners (M=2.91). This finding corresponded with results from Kikuchi & Sakai (2009), in which teachers' behavior was pointed out to be the most significant demotive. This indicated that students cared much about teachers' responses to their oral production; hence teachers should be sensitive to their conduct when checking students' speaking.

In terms of teaching method, the most demotivating factor was related to the unreal speaking task (M=4.52). Students felt discouraged when participating in speaking tasks that were not enacted in the real world. Besides, the lack of model speaking provided by the teachers demotivated learners (M=4.13). This was explained by some interviewees that in some cases learners had no idea what kinds of information they should include in their talk or how to elaborate on a problem. In that case, they needed a model talk as an example to follow. This aligned with another finding that students got demotivated when they could not catch what the teachers said or required them to do (M=4.09). Besides, the way teachers dealt with pronunciation again became the most common demotivating factor to students. Specifically, that teachers did not point out or correct students' pronunciation mistakes highly demotivated them in participating speaking activities (M= 4.13).

For teachers' speaking competence, teachers' infrequent mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, cohesive devices when speaking did not appear to be serious demotivating factors to learners with the mean scores ranging from 3.17 to 3.33. However, they did care about teachers' pronunciation. In fact, the incident that teachers' improper pronunciation and intonation made students feel bored and uninterested in speaking activities (M= 4.47). As stated in the interview, students might not notice the minor mistakes in teachers' speaking in terms of grammar, vocabulary use, or linking words because normally, teachers spoke quite fast and they were just able to catch the gist of the instruction without deciphering it word by word. In contrast, it was quite noticeable if the teachers did not have proper intonation and the unnatural or poor pronunciation demotivated them.

Testing and assessment did not receive as high ratings as other factors with the lowest mean score of 3.45. Students were not demotivated much by incidents like speaking activities being in incompatible format with the actual tests (M=3.02), speaking tasks being easier or a little more difficult than students' level (M=3.10), and the ignorance of speaking marking rubrics (M=3.28). However, teachers' failure to give incorrective and informative feedback highly demotivated them (M=4.23). This finding aligned with those from previous studies presented in the literature review (Trang & Baldauf, 2007).

### *4.3. Demotivating Factors to Students' Participation in Speaking Activities According to Teachers' Perspectives*

**Table 3**

*The Mean Score of the 4 Subgroups of Demotivating Factors as Perceived by Teachers*

| Variable (Ranging from 1 to 5) | Mean (M) | Std. Deviation (S.D) | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower bound | Upper bound |
| Teaching methods | 3.93 | .27 | 3.60 | 4.26 |
| Testing and assessment | 3.45 | .18 | 3.29 | 4.02 |
| Teachers' behavior | 4.03 | .18 | 3.56 | 4.78 |
| Teachers' competence | 3.68 | .17 | 3.38 | 4.08 |

**Chart 3.**

*The Comparison of Mean Scores of the 4 Subgroups of Demotivating Factors as Perceived by Students and Teachers*

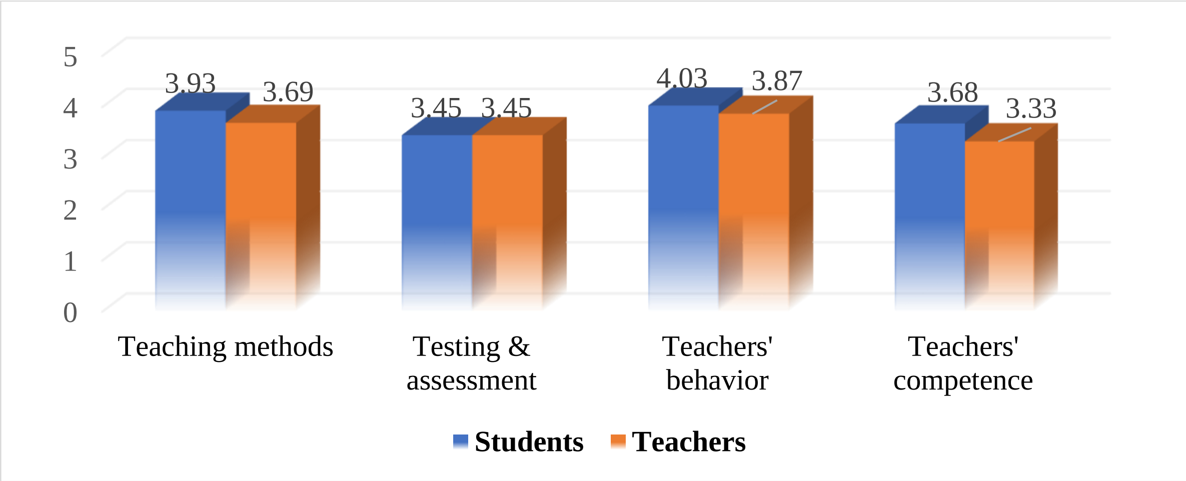



Table 3 represents an overview of teachers' rating of the four subgroups of demotivating factors to students' participation in speaking activities, and Chart 3 provides a comparison between the teachers' rating and that of the students. As can be seen from the chart, teachers' attitude towards the four aspects had the same pattern as students', yet teachers appeared to give an overall lower mean score for all the examined subgroups. Specifically, communicative styles were perceived to be the most critical demotivating factors by teachers with the mean score of 3.87, followed by teaching method and teachers' competence at M= 3.69 and 3.33 respectively. Testing and assessments stood at the list of the ranking chart with 3.45 which was an equivalent figure to the rating by students. However, when it came to individual factors, there were significant disparities between teachers' and students' rating.

Among the teaching method subgroup, while the inauthenticity of speaking tasks (M= 4.53), the lack of model speaking (4.13), teachers' fast speaking rate (4.09) and lack of pronunciation mistake correction (4.13) were the high-scored demotivating factors among students, teachers considered the deficient time devoted to speaking activities (M=4,00) with the inadequate speaking tasks during a lesson (M=4.29) as the most critical demotivating factors. Besides, teachers gave high score for the insufficient instruction for sub-speaking skills (M= 4.00), which was among the lowest-rated factors as perceived by students (M=3.68).

In terms of teachers' behavior, teachers considered being unenthusiastic the biggest demotivating factors (M=4.43) which was in sharp contrast with students' perception since the lack of enthusiasm scored the least in students' survey (M=2.91). Besides, whereas students felt highly demotivated when teachers made fun of their pronunciation mistakes (M=4.22), surprisingly teachers did not find this factor so serious with the lowest mean score of M=3.57. As justified by one teacher in the interview, sometimes teachers made jokes of pronunciation mistakes just with a view to create a more relaxing learning atmosphere and he reckoned that attaching the mistake with something funny could help students remember their mistake better, thus being able to avoid making the same mistakes again.

For teachers' speaking competence, this aspect was not considered as a much serious demotivating factor, which appears to align with students' perception. The highest scored single demotivating factor was teachers' improper pronunciation (M=3.71). Students also considered this the most critical factor but a much higher mean score (M=4.47), indicating a significant difference between teachers and students' perception.

Like students, teachers put testing and assessment at the bottom of the list of demotivating factors. However, they put high emphasis on the incompatibility of the in class speaking tasks with the test format as a demotivating factor (M= 4.43). As teachers shared in the interview, students were so concerned about the speaking midterm and endterm test that they preferred practicing speaking tasks that were somehow related to the tests. Meanwhile, students put down their lack of interest in participating speaking activities to teachers' failure to give incorrective and informative feedback (M=4.23) which achieved the mean score of just 3.34 among teachers.

To recapitulate, despite certain agreement in regard to the overall subgroups of teacher-related demotivating factors, there existed a substantial gap between teachers' and students' perception of individual factors that need to be bridged.

### *4.4. Measures to Help Students Overcome Demotivating Factors*

The measures suggested to assist students in tackling demotivating factors were revealed from the interviews with teachers and students. The suggestions from the responses of the teachers and the students revolves around the four primary factors of demotivation investigated

#### 4.4.1. Teaching Methods

➢ **Varied communicative speaking tasks**

As reviewed from the interview, some learners said that they preferred more exciting activities in speaking lessons. They felt the activities they had were quite monotonous with just some group discussions or pair sharing. Activities that involved real communication in which they could act or role-play were rather limited. This suggestion was shared among the teachers when they said that activities like games or role-play engaged learners more and they created a fun relaxing atmosphere in the class.

*Sometimes we feel demotivated since the class are quite passive. I would love to have learning activities in which I have a chance to move and talk to different friends instead of just sitting in the same seat throughout the lesson. (Student 1)*

*Activities like games, activities, songs, videos highly engage learners and help them feel relaxed and motivated. (Teacher 1)*

*I found my students become more motivated when they participated in competitive vocabulary games in the pre-speaking stage. (Teacher 2)*

This matter is elaborated in Ngoc & Iwashita (2012) that while the communicative approach to language learning has gained widespread adoption, many L2 educators continue to favor traditional grammar-focused methods. However, these grammar-translation methods inherently limit opportunities for authentic communication in the target language, which can be demotivating for students. Research by Kikuchi (2009) suggests that such methods should be used cautiously, and teachers should prioritize student interaction.

➢ **Clear instruction with sufficient guideline**

All the interviewed students expressed their need to be provided with key vocabulary and structures before speaking tasks. Six out ten students said that they would love to have a model speaking especially for dialogues or minitalks since in some cases they did not know how to start or lengthen their conversations/ talks.

*I hope the teachers give us a list of essential vocabulary and structures. In the lesson, words were taught in different sections so it was difficult for us to recall and make use of them easily. An instant list of useful vocabulary and structures helps us soon participate in speaking activities. (Student 3)*

The need for clear instruction and guideline was expressed in the answer of the teachers.

*My students felt more comfortable and confident with speaking tasks when I provided them with speaking cues and an overall speaking framework. (Teacher 3)*

#### 4.4.2. Teachers' Behavior

- **Create a friendly learning atmosphere with equal attention from teachers**

To reduce learning demotivation, it is suggested that teachers organize and manage the classroom as an effective environment with consistent encouragement and support to all students. Ibarra (2014) states that establishing friendly relations with pupils enables teachers to enhance students' willingness to engage in the learning process. As shared by the students, some students who had good speaking ability were highly active and attracted teachers' attention, leaving almost no chance for the worse ones to speak. All the interviewed teachers agreed that equal attention to students was of great importance. This appeared to resonate with the problem highlighted by Tatar (2005) that feeling anxious, stressed, or having a very low level of self-confidence appeared to be some of the reasons that made students unable to use the target language and participate in the classroom. The problem was elaborated in the answers of teachers and students in the interview.

*Teachers often call some good students who raise hand to speak in class. Those reluctant like me had little motivation to speak. (Student 2)*

*Some students don't have the habit to raise their hand to talk, but that doesn't necessarily mean they don't want to speak. Teachers need to divide their attention to both active students and those who seem a little reserved. (Teacher 5).*

#### 4.2.3. Grading and Assessment

- **Be sensitive and encouraging when providing feedback**

According to Van (2023) teachers' feedback helps students to recognize their errors, foster a sense of responsibility for their own learning, and enhance their motivation; however, it should be given in a thoughtful and encouraging manner since feedback marked by negative reviews and criticism can demoralise students' confidence.

The interviewed teachers and students stated that the way teachers gave feedback was very important as it might affect students' feeling and motivation; the negative feedback might hurt students' feeling, especially those with low proficiency. They suggested that teachers should start by giving positive feedback instead of just focusing on the mistakes students make.

*"Some teachers are likely to ignore students' good points in speaking and just focus on their weaknesses in order for them to recognize the mistakes; yet this can make students feel embarrassed and less willing to talk." (Teacher 4)*

*Since my pronunciation is not good. I sometimes feel shy and a little demotivated when teachers point out my mistakes in a funny way and the other classmates laugh. (Student 2)*

One suggested way was to provide students with an opportunity to self-correct. This method was widely agreed among the interviewed teachers.

*I often give students clues or signals by repeating the erroneous utterances and let them figure out the mistakes themselves. By this way students feel more confident and become less dependent on teachers. (Teacher 5)*

Such responsibility transfer method was welcomed by the interviewed students since it gives them the chance to self-explore the language and be more autonomous in their learning.

*I like the way teachers give me some hints about my mistakes without pointing them out explicitly. I feel a bit nervous at first but I also feel more responsible for my speaking. I am glad if I can correct the mistakes myself. (Student 6)*

#### 4.2.4. Teachers' Competence

➢ **Teachers demonstrate their competence confidently in class**

As submitted by Afshari et al. (2014), students are highly evaluative of their instructors, and inadequate proficiency in the language of instruction could have a significant negative impact on students' learning outcomes. When students perceived a barrier to learning due to their teachers' instructional abilities, they might demonstrate decreased academic engagement. This point was elaborated by teachers in the interviews.

*Students do not like teachers with poor English knowledge and teaching ability. Students are so evaluative of their teachers and any flaws are considered a big mistake on the part of teachers. When students feel that they cannot learn satisfactorily due to teachers' lack of teaching ability, they may not follow their studies seriously. (Teacher 2)*

Besides, teachers' confidence in their ability to implement effective teaching methods, manage their classrooms efficiently, and foster student participation was a key factor in promoting student learning. (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015).

In summary, both the students and teachers proposed various suggestions to enhance students' participation in speaking activities and reduce demotivating factors. The most prominent suggestions are related to teaching methods; teachers' behavior and grading and assessment with a heightened emphasis on creating communicative and interactive activities, equal teachers' attention to both high and low proficiency students, providing timely and constructive feedback in a sensitive and encouraging manner as well as demonstrating a good command of English to learners.

## 5. Conclusion

The study investigated the teacher-related demotivating factors in students' participation in the speaking activities among students of the second-degree program at ULS majoring in English language. Based on the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires and the structured interviews, several important findings were withdrawn.

Firstly, as perceived by both the students and teachers, the most significant demotivating factor affecting students' engagement in speaking activities was identified as teachers' behaviors, specifically the unequal attention division to weaker students, followed by teaching methods, testing and assessment practices, and teachers' competence. These findings were in congruence with those identified by Jafari et al. (2017), Muhonen (2004), which indicates a need for psychological and emotional support from teachers.

Secondly, there existed a considerable disparity between teachers' perception of certain individual demotivating factors and that of the students across the four investigated subgroups. According to students' opinion, the most demotivating factors included: the inauthenticity of speaking tasks; the lack of model speaking; the absence of pronunciation error correction; unequal attention; and insensitive manner of giving feedback. In contrast, these factors were not as highly rated by the teachers, indicating a gap between teachers' perception and students' that need to be bridged in order to mitigate the effects of the demotivating factors.

Finally, based on the findings from the interviews with the teachers and the students, several suggestions were put forward to help students overcome teacher-related demotivation. Specifically, the recommendations included incorporating communicative and interactive elements into speaking lessons through activities such as games, group work, and presentations. Following Richards and Rodgers (2014), three key principles that underpin communicative language teaching (CLT) are real-world communication, meaningful tasks which were relevant and engaging for learners. These principles guide the design of activities that promote communicative competence, including: information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction. Additionally, selecting speaking topics based on students' interests, providing constructive and informative feedback, and placing more emphasis on the pre-speaking phase were suggested as adjustments that teachers could consider.

Regarding teachers' behavior, the majority of recommendations focused on enhancing teacher-student rapport through immediacy, which encompassed traits such as friendliness and approachability. Other suggestions included: providing feedback in a sensitive and encouraging manner and demonstrating proper attention to learners of different proficiency levels.

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# IMPACT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE READING ANXIETY FACTORS ON READING PERFORMANCE

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**Abstract:** The impact of reading anxiety on reading performance and the mediating role of reading strategies in the anxiety-performance relationship has not been extensively evaluated, particularly in Vietnamese contexts. This paucity has called for the current quantitative research. A questionnaire survey, including three main scales (reading anxiety, reading strategies, and reading performance), was conducted by 387 English as a foreign language (EFL) students in Information Technology. A Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) method was applied to data analysis. Results showed that anxiety about linguistic text issues (LTI) impacted both support reading strategies (SUP) and reading performance, while reading topic anxiety affected only reading performance but not SUP. Further, linguistic text issues impacted reading performance through SUP, while SUP did not mediate the relationship between reading topic anxiety and reading performance. Implications and suggestions for future research were also discussed.

*Keywords:* foreign language reading anxiety, reading strategies, reading performance, PLS-SEM

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# TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA CÁC YẾU TỐ LO ÂU ĐỌC VĂN BẢN NGOẠI NGỮ ĐẾN HIỆU SUẤT ĐỌC

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**Tóm tắt:** Tác động của lo âu lên hiệu suất đọc và vai trò trung gian của chiến lược đọc hiểu trong mối quan hệ của hai biến trên chưa được đánh giá rộng rãi, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu định lượng này được thực hiện với sự tham gia của 387 sinh viên ngành Công nghệ thông tin trong các lớp học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ (EFL). Bảng khảo sát gồm 3 phần: khảo sát về lo âu đọc, chiến lược đọc hiểu, và hiệu suất đọc. Phương pháp mô hình phương trình cấu trúc bình phương tối thiểu riêng phần (PLS-SEM) được sử dụng để phân tích số liệu. Kết quả cho thấy lo âu đọc liên quan đến các vấn đề văn bản ngôn ngữ ảnh hưởng đến cả chiến lược đọc (cụ thể là chiến lược hỗ trợ đọc) và hiệu suất đọc. Lo âu đọc do chủ đề đọc gây ra chỉ ảnh hưởng đến hiệu suất đọc mà không tác động đến chiến lược hỗ trợ đọc hiểu. Ngoài ra, chiến lược hỗ trợ đọc hiểu đóng vai trò trung gian trong mối quan hệ giữa lo âu đọc do tác động của văn bản ngôn ngữ và hiệu suất đọc. Tuy nhiên, các chiến lược đọc không có tác động có ý nghĩa thống kê trong mối quan hệ giữa lo âu đọc do chủ đề và hiệu suất đọc.

*Từ khóa:* lo âu đọc, chiến lược đọc, hiệu suất đọc, PLS-SEM

## 1. Introduction

Reading is very important in all aspects of life (Heyne et al., 2023). Reading is essential for academic success in scholarly contexts, especially when acquiring a second or foreign language (Habib & Watkins, 2023). However, it is assumed that the successful performance of the reading process might be obstructed by various factors, including readers' psychological states and reading strategies. One of the emotional states suffered by readers is anxiety, which is believed to possibly facilitate or deliberate reading performance (Krashen, 1982; Dörnyei, 2005) while reading strategies function as a bridge linking reading to successful reading performance that is measured through scores, GPA, or language tests (Teimouri et al., 2019). Whether there is a relationship between these variables (reading anxiety, reading strategies, and reading performance) is of concern, leading to delving deeply into the existing literature for further information.

As a result, former research has indicated that reading anxiety (RA) has dynamically affected reading performance (e.g., Kim, 2021; Tsai & Lee, 2018). However, these findings have not been deeply analyzed. Specifically, the authors have merely centred on the summed score of reading anxiety (e.g., Hassaskhah & Joghataeian, 2016) or reading anxiety levels (e.g., Tsai & Lee, 2018) to observe the relationship between reading anxiety and reading performance. Similarly, the summed scores and RA levels have been independent variables in the reading strategy-reading performance relationship (e.g., Mokhtarnia & Ghaffarzadeh, 2020). Furthermore, no studies have examined the mediating role of reading strategies in the anxiety-performance relationship. Other limitation is that these previous studies applied SPSS software to process and analyze data. The SPSS software cannot provide analysis of multivariable relationships like a PLS-SEM approach (Zeng et al., 2021)

To address these gaps, the current investigation employed a PLS-SEM approach to elucidate further the impact of reading anxiety factors, particularly linguistic text issues (LTI) and reading topics (RT), on reading performance rather than using summed scores or RA levels. Additionally, the research examined the mediating role of reading strategies in the relationship between reading anxiety factors and reading performance.

Contributions of the current research lie in both theory and practice. Theoretically, the PLS-SEM approach has not been applied in any prior studies (e.g., Ghaith, 2020; Kim, 2021; Tsai & Lee, 2018). Results revealed from the PLS-SEM model have illuminated the impact of the smallest aspects of reading anxiety on reading performance, which no past studies have at any time effectuated (e.g., Ghaith, 2020). Similarly, our research is also the first to have identified the mediation of reading strategies, specifically Support Strategies (SUP), in the reading anxiety-reading performance relationship. Practically, findings made public from this study might foster instructional methodologies.

## 2. Literature Review

Sub-sections 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 aim to clarify the variables measured in this research by providing definitions of key terms: foreign language reading anxiety, reading strategies, and reading performance. The subsequent sub-sections (2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7) review the relationships among these three variables, which lead to the formulation of the research hypotheses.

### *2.1. Foreign Language Reading Anxiety*

Anxiety is “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system” (Spielberger, 1983, as cited in Horwitz, 2010, p. 113). This psychological state is a natural and common occurrence (Shen, 2022) that may arise in all spheres of life. In second language acquisition, it is believed that a low level of anxiety might be beneficial, while a high level could be a cognitive barrier to learners (Krashen, 1982). More specifically, anxiety emerged as a situation specific. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (McIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). The FLA definition has specified situation-specific anxiety as anxiety in oral-aural skills and learning environments in general, but it is still not considered in literacy skills.

In the reading domain, Saito and colleagues (1999) were the first to investigate anxiety associated with reading in a second language. The authors defined foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) as “a phenomenon related to, but distinct from, general FL anxiety” (Saito et al.,1999. p. 211). It means FLRA is a unique form of anxiety. Furthermore, Saito et al. (1999) ascertained that FLRA is caused by genuine challenges in information processing, other than from reading difficulties originating from anxiety reactions. In the current study, FLRA is defined as a specific form of anxiety linked to cognitive information processing. This anxiety is a subjective sensation where worry plays a dominant role.

### *2.2. Reading Strategies*

Reading strategies are “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 368). It is, implicitly, the readers' intentional, goal-oriented efforts to manage their decoding, understanding and constructing text meanings which lead to a specifically strategic action. Various classifications have been made regarding reading strategy typologies, such as top-down and bottom-up models (Goodman, 2014) and metacognitive reading strategies including global, problem-solving, and support strategies (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002; Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2008). The current research followed Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) reading strategy taxonomy as this group of strategies was designed and validated for usage with students of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) who were also the targeted sample in the present study. However, the research team merely utilized support strategies, which are fundamental tools designed to help readers comprehend text, such as highlighting, underlining, and notetaking (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). This group of strategies are necessary when readers need external aid or single practical strategies for better comprehension (Huo & Cho, 2020). Furthermore, we assume that these strategies play a pivotal role in students engaging actively in reading, recalling text information, better synthesizing information, and improving their critical thinking and assessments.

### *2.3. Reading Performance*

Earlier work did not clearly define the concept of reading performance. Past researchers have shown their inconsistency in defining this concept. They regarded it as reading comprehension (Ghaith, 2020), reading comprehension tests (Fitrisia et al., 2015), and reading comprehension performance (e.g., Halim et al., 2020). For this incongruity, our team proposed a collective definition of reading performance. Based on the definition of reading performance by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2012), it relates to students' abilities to understand, apply, and re-evaluate written texts to achieve objectives and build knowledge and potential for social engagement. In addition, we depended on Alek et al., (2023) definition that reading performance is "the level of reading comprehension proficiency" gained from a specific task (Abba & Mugizi, 2018). We proposed that reading performance is "readers' effective accomplishment or achievement of reading comprehension activities to reach their reading goals". In terms of performance measurements, there have been various variables. McIntyre and Gardner (1994a) held that the most frequently utilized measure of performance is standardized proficiency tests, while Teimouri et al. (2019) contended that performance should be measured by "GPA, self-perceived performance, course grades, and language tests". In the present research, reading performance was measured by learners' self-perceived performance.

### *2.4. Impact of Reading Anxiety Factors on Reading Performance*

Earlier research outcomes have revealed a dynamic relationship between reading anxiety and reading performance. Reading anxiety levels were found to impede reading performance (Guimba & Alico, 2015). As stated otherwise, there was a negative correlation between the two variables. If readers' anxiety levels increase throughout the act of reading, the lower achievements the readers constitute. Similarly, components such as anxiety encountered while engaging in English reading, confidence in reading, and anxiety experienced when deciphering English script were negatively correlated with reading performance (Kim, 2021). In addition, no significant correlation has been observed between reading anxiety and reading performance (e.g., Hassaskhah & Joghataeian, 2016; Kobayashi, 2016). Kobayashi (2016) found that two anxiety components, "Fear of not remembering reading content" and

"Confidence and enjoyment of reading English," did not impact reading performance. The summed scores of reading anxiety in Hassaskhah and Joghataeian's (2016) study also revealed no effect on reading comprehension. Notwithstanding contributory findings from the existing literature, no studies have researched the impact of other reading anxiety factors, such as linguistic text issues (LTI) and reading topics (RT), on reading performance. Thus, we hypothesize as follows:

**H1**: Linguistic text issues have an impact on reading performance.

**H2**: Reading topics have an impact on reading performance.

### *2.5. Impact of Reading Anxiety Factors on Reading Strategy Use*

The literature review shows that the relationship between reading anxiety and reading strategies is malleable. Reading anxiety (RA) was established to be negatively correlated with text feature anxiety, namely unfamiliarity with new words and grammar and long texts (Tsai & Lee, 2018). Regarding the impact of reading anxiety levels, a negative correlation with the utilization of reading strategies was also observed (Tsai & Lee, 2018). Conversely, Mokhtarnia and Ghaffarzadeh (2020) found that these two variables were unrelated. Notably, no statistically significant relationship was found between RA and the subcategories of reading strategies, including support strategies (SUP). Based on these earlier conclusions, we propose the following hypothesis.

**H3**: Linguistic text issues have an impact on support strategies.

Additionally, the correlation between reading topic anxiety and reading strategies has not been explored. Therefore, we propose a hypothesis as follows:

**H4**: Reading topics have an impact on support strategies.

### *2.6. Impact of Reading Strategies on Reading Performance*

Receiving instructions in reading strategies and possessing knowledge of their application do not necessarily ensure successful reading performance. The existing literature review has disclosed a weak relationship between reading strategy usage (RSU) and reading performance (Fitrisia et al., 2015). Further, not all reading strategies were reported to be used frequently. For instance, problem-solving strategies (PROB) were more positively correlated with students' reading comprehension performance than other strategies (Ghaith & El-Sanyoura, 2019). This means the more PROB strategies learners use, the higher their reading performance. In contrast, Dardjito (2019) detected no correlation between these two variables. Depending on these findings, our research team suggests the following hypothesis.

**H5**: Support strategies have an impact on reading performance.

### *2.7. Mediation of Reading Strategies in the Anxiety-Performance Relationship*

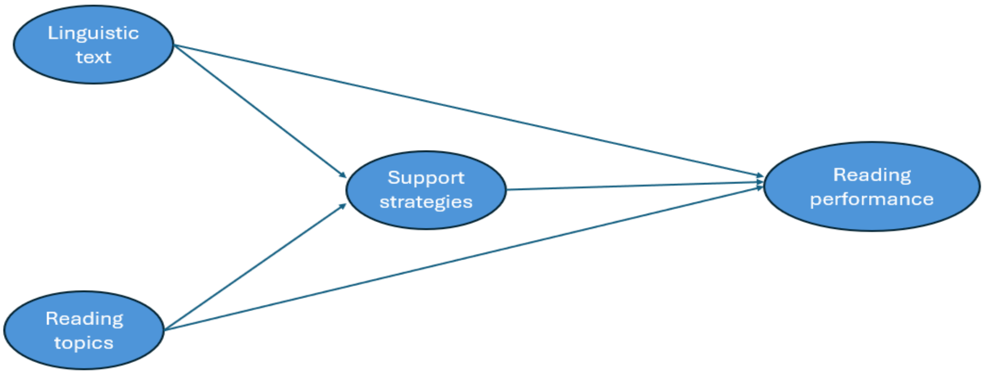
Very few studies have investigated the interplay between reading anxiety, reading performance, and reading strategies. To the author's best knowledge, Ghaith's (2020) study has been, to date, the only one. However, Ghaith (2020) exclusively examined the mediating role of reading anxiety in the relationship between reading strategies and reading performance. In the present study, we propose specific reading anxiety factors (LTI and RT) and RS as a mediator, specifically SUP. We have two following hypotheses:

**H6**: Linguistic text issues affect reading performance through support strategies.

**H7**: Reading topics affect reading performance through support strategies.

**Figure 1**

*Proposed Research Model*




## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Participants and Data Collection*

The researcher contacted an Academic staff member to request the Semester-1 class list. Based on the list, instructors in charge of the targeted classes received an email from the researcher asking their permission to approach students. Emails containing a survey hyperlink were then sent to students majoring in Information Technology, who take up the majority at the research site, which is a leading university in the country's Information and Technology training. A total of 532 students received the survey, and 387 completed it, resulting in 72.7% response rate. The number of respondents exceeded the required 160 samples (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). Among 387 respondents, there were 350 males, 31 females, and 6 students of other gender. In addition, these students had completed their preparational English courses and were studying their specialized majors at the time of the research.

### *3.2. Measurement Instrument*

The authors synthesized and developed the questionnaire items based on the literature review, conceptualized process and validated using Cronbach's Alpha. The questionnaire has three parts. The first part included demographic information such as student gender, level of English proficiency, and reading frequency. The second part contained information on foreign language reading anxiety factors synthesized from previous studies and literature, which led to the adaptation of 11 items. The third part is composed of three items of reading performance. Likert 5 scales, used to describe students' responses about English reading anxiety factors, ranged from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'.

### *3.3. Data Analysis*

Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS version 4.0 software to analyze the collected data. According to Hair et al. (2020), two assessments are required to report the output. The first step is to assess the measurement model. In this step, factor loading should be larger than 0.6, composite reliability should be between 0.7 and 0.95, and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be more than 0.5 to assure convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021). Together with the convergent validity, the discriminant validity can be evaluated using the Fornell and Lacker (1981) or the HTMT proposed by Henseler et al. (2015). The second step is to assess the structural model. This model is evaluated by the VIF values, and the VIF values should be lower than 5 (Hair et al., 2022). Next, the structural model was assessed using the parametric coefficients and the significance of the R square.

## 4. Results

### *4.1. The Profile of the Participants*

**Table 1**

*Respondents' Demographic Information*

| Item | Values | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 350 | 90.4 |
| | Female | 31 | 8 |
| | Other | 6 | 1.6 |
| Level of English proficiency | Elementary | 38 | 9.8 |
| | Pre-intermediate | 55 | 14.2 |
| | Intermediate | 212 | 54.8 |
| | Upper-intermediate | 58 | 15 |
| | Advanced | 24 | 6.2 |
| Frequency of reading English texts | Never | 0 | 0 |
| | Rarely | 52 | 13.4 |
| | Sometimes | 193 | 49.9 |
| | Often | 137 | 35.4 |
| | Always | 5 | 1.3 |

Among 387 students, 350 were male students, accounting for 90.4 %, 31 female students (8%), and 6 of other gender, accounting for 1.6%. Many students were at the intermediate level (54.8%) or higher (21.2%), and about 24% were at the elementary and pre-intermediate levels. Regarding the frequency of reading English texts, nearly half of respondents (49.9%) reported that they sometimes read in English. One hundred and thirty-seven participants, accounting for 35.4%, confirmed that they often immerse themselves in English texts. The third rank goes to 13.4% of those who rarely read in English. Five respondents reported that they always read, while the number of respondents who said they never read is 0%.

### *4.2. Measurement Model Assessment*

The measurement model was assessed to establish the construct's reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of the scale, whereas validity exhibits the correctness of the scale tool. The reliability of each item is assessed by the factor loadings, and the internal consistency is tested by Cronbach's alpha and composition reliability (CR). The measurement validity includes convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity measures the correlation between items of the same dimension, detecting the AVE. Discriminant validity measures the correlation between items with different facets using the square root value of AVE (Huang, 2021). The factor loadings were measured to examine items' reliability (Hair Jr et al., 2021), and all factors were above the value of .60. Table 2 presents factor loadings, alpha coefficient, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The composite reliability (CR) values are higher than the suggested 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values are higher than 0.50. Convergent reliability and validity are, therefore, confirmed.

**Table 2**

*Item Loadings, Reliability, and Convergent Validity*

| Constructs | Items | Loadings | Cα | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Linguistic text issues** | | | **0.763** | **0.849** | **0.586** |
| LTI1 | I am anxious whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English. | 0.794 | | | |
| LTI2 | I am anxious when I cannot recognize the coherence of the text. | 0.776 | | | |
| LTI3 | I am anxious when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear. | 0.794 | | | |
| LTI4 | I am anxious when I cannot figure out the meanings of unknown words. | 0.693 | | | |
| **Reading topics** | | | **0.741** | **0.838** | **0.564** |
| RT1 | I am anxious when I am not familiar with the topic. | 0.724 | | | |
| RT2 | I feel anxious when the title of the text is unfamiliar to me. | 0.763 | | | |
| RT3 | I feel anxious when the topic is complicated. | 0.798 | | | |
| RT4 | I feel anxious when the topic includes unfamiliar terms | 0.716 | | | |
| **Support strategies** | | | **0.678** | **0.825** | **0.613** |
| SUP1 | I underline or circle information in text to help me remember it. | 0.838 | | | |
| SUP2 | I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read. | 0.822 | | | |
| SUP3 | I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading. | 0.679 | | | |
| **Reading performance** | | | **0.88** | **0.926** | **0.806** |
| RP1 | Reading anxiety affects my ability to read accurately. | 0.908 | | | |
| RP2 | Reading anxiety affects my ability to read efficiently | 0.912 | | | |
| RP3 | Reading anxiety affects my reading grades. | 0.873 | | | |

### *4.3. Discriminant Validity*

The discriminant validity was evaluated using Fornell and Larker's criteria and Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Fornell and Larker (1981) posited that the square root of Average variance extracted (AVE) should be higher than other constructs' correlated values. According to Henseler et al. (2015), a threshold of 0.90 ensures that no items were overlapped. When assessed with 95% certainty using 5000 bootstrapping, the results of Table 3 show that the square root value of the diagonal AVE is higher than other correlation coefficient values. The Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) analysis indicates that all values are lower than 0.90, confirming good discriminant validity (Table 4).

**Table 3**

*Fornell and Lacker's Criterion*

| | LTI | RT | SUP | RP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **LTI** | 0.765 | | | |
| **RT** | 0.459 | 0.751 | | |
| **SUP** | 0.281 | 0.116 | 0.783 | |
| **RP** | 0.385 | 0.347 | 0.234 | 0.898 |

**Table 4**

*The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio*

| | LTI | RT | SUP | RP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **LTI** | | | | |
| **RT** | 0.617 | | | |
| **SUP** | 0.389 | 0.163 | | |
| **RP** | 0.470 | 0.427 | 0.301 | |

Model fit was used to examine whether the hypothesized model fits the data collected from the study's respondents. If the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value is less than 0.8, it is considered a good fit (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The output table shows that the estimated model achieves the model fit measure with an SRMR value of 0.074. Hence, the outputs demonstrate that the complete data set achieved construct validity, reliability and discriminant validity (Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Standardized Root Mean Square Residual Values*

| | Saturated model | Estimated model |
|---|---|---|
| **SRMR** | 0.074 | 0.074 |
| **D_ULS** | 0.570 | 0.570 |
| **d_G** | 0.174 | 0.174 |
| **Chi-square** | 678.743 | 678.743 |
| **NFI** | 0.786 | 0.786 |

### *4.4. Structural Model Assessment*

After the measurement model's reliability and validity was assessed, the structural model was evaluated to determine the predicted values of the construct (Table 6). The variance inflation factor (VIF) was analyzed for multicollinearity. All the tested VIF values of the structural model were less than 2, which is lower than the threshold of 5, as Hair et al. (2021) proposed, confirming no collinearity among the predictor constructs.

**Table 6**

*Hypotheses Results*

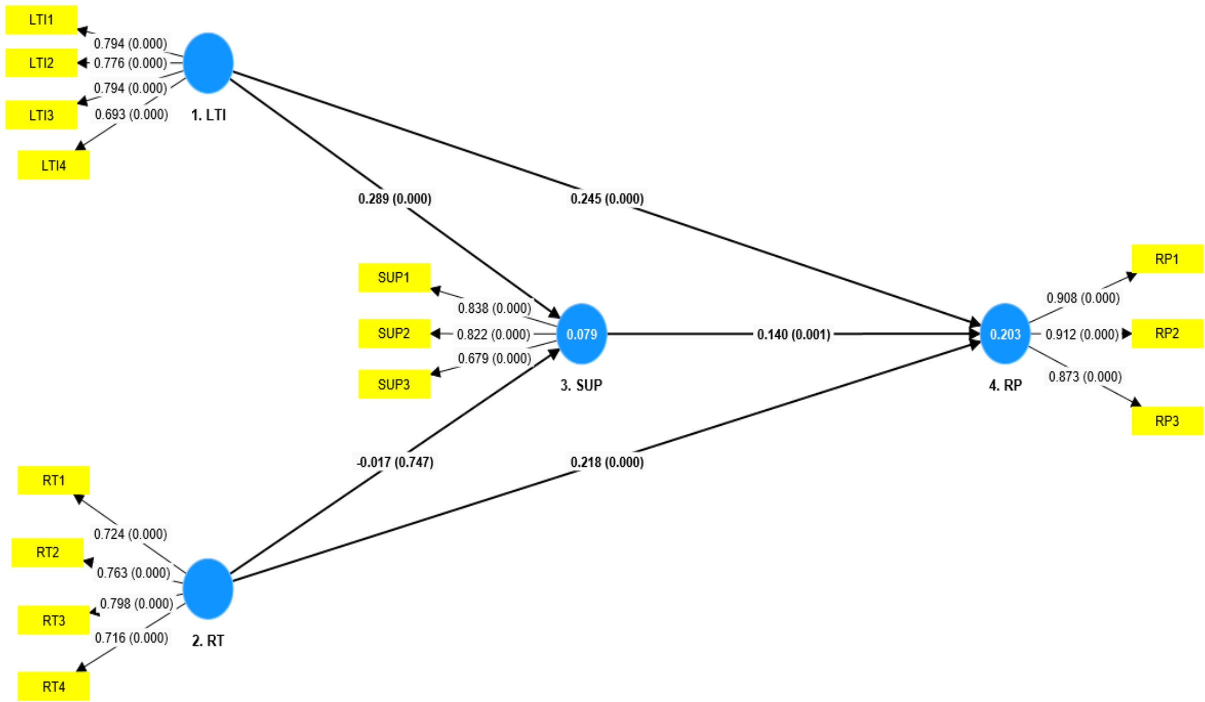
| Hypothesis | Relationship | Coefficient | p-value | Results |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **H1** | LTI ->RP | 0.245 | 0.000 | Supported |
| **H2** | RT -> RP | 0.218 | 0.000 | Supported |
| **H3** | LTI ->SUP | 0.289 | 0.000 | Supported |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **H4** | RT ->SUP | -0.017 | **0.747** | **Rejected** |
| **H5** | SUP ->RP | 0.140 | 0.001 | Supported |
| **H6** | LTI ->SUP -> RP | 0.040 | 0.004 | Supported |
| **H7** | RT ->SUP -> RP | -0.002 | **0.758** | **Rejected** |

The computation results listed in Table 6 show that five hypotheses were supported, and two hypotheses were rejected. The outcomes of the path analysis presented that linguistic text issues influenced reading performance (β = 0.245, p < 0.000) and supporting strategies significantly (β =0.289; p<0.000). Therefore, H1 and H3 are supported. The results also acknowledge the indirect influence of linguistic text issues via supporting strategies on reading performance (β =0.040; p<0.01); thus, H6 is accepted. There are positive and statistically direct significant effects of reading topics and supporting strategies on reading performance (β = 0.218; p<0.000 and β = 0.140; p<0.01). Therefore, H2 and H5 are supported. However, reading topics have no statistically significant influence on supporting strategies (β =-0.017; p> 0.05), and reading topics have no indirect influence on reading performance via supporting strategies (β =-0.002; p>0.05). Hence, H4 and H7 are rejected. The PLS-SEM path analysis model is demonstrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Path Analysis Results*




According to Hair et al. (2022), the R*2* values of 0 to .10, .11 to .30, .30 to .50, and higher than .50 indicate weak, modest, moderate, and strong explanatory power. The R*2* in the outcomes of the path analysis results is 0.203, meaning that the model has modest explanatory power and accounts for 20.3% of the variation in the reading performance.

## 5. Discussion

This section aims to discuss the principal findings related to the impacts of reading anxiety factors (LTI & RT) on reading performance, as well as the mediating role of support strategies in the anxiety-performance relationship. One of the most striking findings is that reading anxiety caused by linguistic text issues (LTI) such as unknown grammar, unfamiliar coherence of text, unclear ideas expressed, and unknown words positively impact both self-perceived reading performance, with a coefficient of 24.5%, and students' usage of support strategies, with a coefficient of 28.8%. This means the more anxious students felt due to linguistic text issues, the higher their reading performance and the higher their use of support strategies. The result proved that anxiety is not always detrimental to performance. The finding also supported Krashen's (1982) theory that low anxiety could facilitate learners' performance. Compared with the existing empirical studies that found a negative anxiety-performance relationship and no connection between the two variables (e.g., Kim, 2021; Kobayashi, 2016), our finding contributes to the current body of literature. Likewise, our findings are also distinguishable from studies by Tsai and Lee (2018) and Mokhtarnia and Ghaffarzadeh (2020) that established a negative correlation or no relationship between reading anxiety factors and the use of reading strategies.

The second result highlights that reading topics (RT) also positively impact reading performance (RP), with a coefficient of 21.8%. Like anxiety about linguistic text issues, reading topic anxiety is a facilitative factor in relation to reading performance as well. However, compared with the LTI-RP impact ($\beta$= 0.245, equivalent to 24.5%), the coefficient magnitude of RT is smaller. As such, complicated and unfamiliar reading topics play a smaller role than linguistics text issues in the anxiety-performance relationship. Referring to the context of the current research, the lack of prior knowledge related to the reading topic could not trouble readers. The anxiety originating from the shortage of background knowledge even facilitates readers' performance. Conversely, the quantitative data analysis revealed insufficient information available to explain how RT influences students' usage of support strategies. This might be explained by the fact that unfamiliarity with reading topics did not affect readers' usage of support reading strategies. Our finding supports Mokhtarnia and Ghaffarzadeh's (2020) result identifying no statistically significant relationship between reading anxiety in general and subcategories of reading strategies, including SUP. However, our contribution to the existing literature is that we clearly pointed out that a specific reading anxiety factor, specifically reading topic anxiety, could not explain the SUP usage. In contrast, our result contradicts Tsai and Lee's (2018) outcome, which uncovered a negative correlation between RA levels and reading strategy usage.

Our third finding is a positive impact of SUP usage on reading performance, with a coefficient of 14%. The increasing use of underlining or circling information, taking notes, and adjusting the reading speed leads to higher reading performance. Nevertheless, the impact size is only 14%. This could be explained by the fact that students might use other reading strategies more frequently than SUP. In the research site, students more frequently engage in computer-based finals and electronic reading practices than paper-based ones. The computerized exams were set with anti-cheating measures as default, including any techniques such as underlining, highlighting, circling, and marking. While these techniques can still be implemented with electronic reading practices, they are not observed as frequently. This might be the reason for the less frequent use of these SUP strategies. In contrast to the discussed techniques, taking notes on scrap paper distributed by proctors is still observed during the exams, but not by many students. The third finding of the present study is aligned with the results of Fitrisia et al. (2015), who also found a weak positive relationship between reading strategy usage and reading performance. Nonetheless, Fitrisia et al. (2015) lacked a deep analysis of the influence of a specific reading strategy type on reading performance. Compared with Ghaith and El-

Sanyoura's (2019) results that found a positive impact of PROB on RP, our finding contributes to the literature by revealing that increasing SUP leads to higher reading performance.

The last remarkable finding in our study is that SUP positively mediated the relationship between linguistic text issues (LTI) and reading performance (RP), but the effect size is only 0.04%. In this case, where the mediation is present, and the direct effect (between LTI and RP) is also significant and positive ($\beta=0.32$, $p<.05$), the type of mediation is complementary mediation, according to Zhao et al. (2010). More precisely, anxiety about linguistic text issues impacts reading performance through the usage of support strategies. Concerning the mediation of SUP in the relationship between reading topic anxiety and reading performance, the mediation type is direct-only non-mediation as RT impacts RP directly, but the indirect effect between RT, SUP, and RP is insignificant, according to Zhao et al. (2010). In comparison with the existing literature, our findings are the first to explore the mediating role of reading strategies, particularly support strategies, in the relationship between reading anxiety factors and reading performance.

## 6. Implications

The research findings on the impacts of reading anxiety on reading performance, as well as the mediating role of support strategies (SUP) in the anxiety-performance relationship, serve as the foundation for teaching practices. First, in the context of this research, reading anxiety factors, namely linguistic text issues and reading topics, are not deliberating contributors to readers' performance. Therefore, attention to these issues is not of much concern. Instead, the integration of SUP into the classroom should be increasingly prioritized. However, as discussed in the previous part, relying solely on SUP is not beneficial for computerized reading assessments. Thus, instruction in additional strategies that can help readers solve problems while reading should be implemented. Suggested strategies include problem-solving strategies such as rereading, visualizing information, guessing the meaning of unknown words, and the like, as well as global reading strategies like overviewing, previewing, and using graphic organizers, among others.

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# EXAMINING VIETNAMESE EFL LECTURERS' PREFERENCE FOR INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USED IN ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE RECEPTIVE SKILLS LECTURES

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the instructional strategies preferred by Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) lecturers in both online and face-to-face teaching environments, focusing on teaching receptive skills. Drawing from Walker's (2008) framework for effective lecturing, which emphasized the creative use of instructional strategies and technology, this research surveyed thirty-eight lecturers regarding their preferences. The survey revealed some strategies that had the same extent of preference and some being disliked in both settings. Additionally, some instructional strategies were preferred in online teaching over face-to-face teaching and vice versa. The interviews also identified some primary reasons for lecturers' preference for instructional strategies and their recommendation of choosing appropriate strategies for teaching receptive skills. These findings underscored the nuanced preferences of EFL lecturers in selecting instructional strategies for different teaching contexts, offering insights into the evolution of English Language Teaching in Vietnam.

*Keywords:* instructional strategies, preference, receptive skills, online and face-to-face teaching environments

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# CÁC CHIẾN LƯỢC GIẢNG DẠY ƯA THÍCH CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN TIẾNG ANH ĐỂ DẠY CÁC KỸ NĂNG TIẾP THU LĨNH HỘI TRONG MÔI TRƯỜNG TRỰC TUYẾN VÀ TRỰC TIẾP

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này điều tra các chiến lược giảng dạy được ưa chuộng bởi giảng viên dạy tiếng Anh người Việt Nam trong cả hai môi trường giảng dạy trực tuyến và trực tiếp, với trọng tâm là giảng dạy kỹ năng tiếp thu lĩnh hội. Dựa trên quan điểm của Walker (2008) về việc giảng dạy hiệu quả thông qua sử dụng sáng tạo các chiến lược giảng dạy và công nghệ, nghiên cứu này đã tiến hành khảo sát 38 giảng viên về mức độ yêu thích của họ đối với các chiến lược giảng dạy. Kết quả khảo sát đã chỉ ra một số chiến lược được yêu thích như nhau và một số chiến lược không được yêu thích trong hai môi trường giảng dạy. Bên cạnh đó, có những chiến lược được yêu thích trong môi trường giảng dạy trực tiếp hơn là trực tuyến và ngược lại. Kết quả phỏng vấn cũng đã xác định được một số lý do cơ bản cho việc yêu thích các chiến lược giảng dạy của giảng viên và một số gợi ý của họ về việc lựa chọn chiến lược phù hợp trong giảng dạy kỹ năng tiếp thu lĩnh hội. Những kết quả này nhấn mạnh sự ưa thích của các giảng viên tiếng Anh trong việc lựa chọn các chiến lược giảng dạy cho các ngữ cảnh khác nhau, đồng thời cung cấp cái nhìn bao quát về việc lựa chọn các chiến lược phù hợp trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh ở một số bối cảnh tại Việt Nam.

*Từ khoá:* chiến lược giảng dạy, sự yêu thích, kỹ năng tiếp thu lĩnh hội, môi trường giảng dạy

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a notable global trend towards implementing substantial educational changes aimed at cultivating students’ English language skills to enhance their ability to participate in the global workforce. Vietnam, like many other countries, has similarly pursued various initiatives directed at augmenting the English proficiency of its populace under governmental policies. Typically, The National Foreign Languages Project, titled "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System, 2008-2020," was officially endorsed and launched on September 30, 2008, by the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Its primary goal was to ensure that most Vietnamese graduates from vocational schools, colleges, and universities could proficiently use a foreign language on their own. On December 22, 2017, the Prime Minister signed Decision No. 2080/QĐ-TTg, which approved modifications and additions to the project from 2017 to 2025. The updated objectives aimed to modernize foreign language instruction and learning within the national education system, introduce new foreign language programs across all educational levels, enhance language skills for academic and professional purposes, and support the nation's development and global competitiveness. Moreover, it aimed to establish a groundwork for making foreign languages accessible to all students in general education by 2025. In addition, on January 24, 2014, Vietnam's Minister of Education and Training issued Circular No.01/2014/TT-BGDĐT, which introduced the Vietnamese version of the Common European Framework of Reference, referred to as CEFR-V standards. This adaptation, akin to the original CEFR established by the Council of Europe in 2001, organizes proficiency into three primary levels: Basic User, Independent User, and Proficient User. Consequently, numerous universities in Vietnam have embraced this framework to set English proficiency benchmarks for tertiary education (Nguyen, 2023). Under current regulations, Vietnamese university students must reach level 3 in the CEFR-V to graduate.

The fourth industrial revolution is increasingly shaping the educational landscape by influencing learning opportunities, policy development, and teaching methods. The rise of the Internet of Things (IoT) has transformed curriculum design, introducing innovative pedagogical strategies for educators (Alakrash & Kazak, 2021). Technologies like blockchain, cloud computing, and cybersecurity are also expected to play a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes and maintaining long-term student engagement (Elayyan, 2021). This revolution also offers learners more flexibility in English language learning regarding when and where they learn, which fosters greater confidence, independence, and motivation. It also encourages educators to integrate technology into their teaching practices (Arsaf, 2020). In Vietnam, online learning has become a key trend, gaining formal recognition from the government. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has issued several directives to regulate online education at both secondary and higher levels. For example, Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT allows up to 30% of university curricula to be delivered online. Similarly, Circular No. 09/2021/TT-BGDĐT outlines guidelines for online education at the secondary level, covering aspects such as lesson delivery, infrastructure requirements, and the responsibilities of stakeholders. These regulations have paved the way for the growing popularity of online learning in Vietnam. However, despite its popularity, online learning presents challenges for both teachers and students. In a literature review of factors influencing student persistence in online programs, Ho and Phan (2024) suggest that while online learning offers convenient opportunities for skill and knowledge improvement, high dropout rates remain a challenge that could be mitigated by fostering a collaborative learning environment.

The impact of social and industrial factors, alongside the rising demand for English proficiency among university students, underscores the need for effective teaching methods that align with institutional goals and promote language proficiency. As a result, educators and researchers are placing greater emphasis on identifying and implementing instructional strategies that boost motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environments. In their teaching practices, educators often experiment with different approaches, gradually favoring methods that resonate with their teaching style. Given the high expectations for EFL teachers to possess strong pedagogical skills and deep content knowledge, identifying preferred strategies is essential. This allows for the generalization of successful techniques, encouraging other EFL instructors to consider integrating them into their own classrooms. To investigate the preferred instructional strategies for teaching receptive skills, this study explored the following questions:

RQ1: What instructional strategies do Vietnamese EFL lecturers prefer for teaching receptive skills in both face-to-face and online environments, and how do these preferences differ between the two settings?

RQ2: Why do Vietnamese EFL lecturers prefer certain instructional strategies for teaching receptive skills online and face-to-face?

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Preference*

The term 'preference' encompasses a variety of definitions, including “a greater liking for one alternative over another or others” as stated in the Oxford Dictionary, or “the stable likes and dislikes that individuals possess” as described by Sullivan (2016). This concept holds significance in both psychological and economic realms, where preference is often deduced from individual choice behavior (Ariely & Norton, 2008; Betsch, 2011; Dyer & Jia, 2013). Rational choice theory and revealed preference theory are two prominent frameworks used to understand preference formation (Ogu, 2013; Demuynck & Hjertstrand, 2019). The rational choice theory posits that individuals act rationally by weighing the benefits of various options to maximize their utility (Ogu, 2013). Conversely, the revealed preference theory suggests that observed choices reflect individuals' underlying preferences, particularly in demand behavior (Demuynck & Hjertstrand, 2019). In this study, we define 'preference' regarding instructional strategies as the degree to which EFL lecturers favor particular instructional strategies and the rational choice for them.

### *2.2. Instructional Strategies*

Various perspectives in the literature offer interpretations of instructional strategies, also known as teaching strategies. One viewpoint defines instructional strategies using specific terms such as instructors' techniques (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Education & Hoskins, 2002; Akdemir & Koszalka, 2008), activities (George et al., 2018), or comprehensive sets of tasks (Hirumi, 2013) chosen by educators for implementation in their classrooms. Conversely, another perspective sees instructional strategies as general approaches selected by educators to deliver learning materials to students within a specific learning environment (Colombo, 2011; Akdeniz, 2016).

Although instructional strategies may be described using different terms ranging from a broad concept like “approach” to a more specific term like “technique”, they share the common goal of promoting learners’ development and achievement. However, in language teaching, approach and technique are two different concepts related to the term “method”. Therefore, to identify instructional strategies in English language teaching, we must clarify the three key terms: approach, method, and technique.

Anthony (1963, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) explained that “approach” is a broad term, “method” is more specific, and “technique” is the most precise term. An approach includes assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning, a method outlines a plan that translates these theories into practical teaching applications for specific skills and content, while a technique is a specific trick, stratagem, or contrivance employed to achieve an immediate objective. In revising Anthony’s conceptualization, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 20-33) used “method” as an umbrella term to specify the relationship between theory and practice. According to them, approach and method determine objectives, syllabus, content, teachers' and learners' roles, and instructional materials at the design level, while the level of technique or implementation is replaced by “procedure”, a more comprehensive term. Theoretically, a method aligns with an approach, organized by design, and identified in practice through procedures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 20). Celce-Murcia (2004, p. 9) summarized that 'approach' is general, while “method” and “technique” are specific. A method refers to a set of procedures relevant to an approach, and a technique is a typical learning activity employed in a method or some methods (Celce-Murcia, 2004, p. 9).

This study focuses on the typical instructional strategies applied by EFL lecturers in their English lessons, thus, instructional strategies are consistent with the specific term that instructional strategies are techniques or activities applied to engage learners in the learning process.

### *2.3. Receptive Skills*

Proficiency in language entails the effective comprehension and expression of ideas, where receptive and productive skills are closely intertwined. Al-Jawi (2010) highlighted that receptive skills, involving understanding spoken or written communication through listening and reading, form a crucial aspect of language proficiency. Al-Jawi also argued that a solid grounding in receptive skills is vital for the development of productive abilities. Essentially, achieving fluency and competence in communication requires substantial engagement with listening and reading activities. In addition, Al-Jawi suggested that considering reading and listening as a combination of top-down and bottom-up processing is particularly advantageous. Sometimes, focusing on specific details aids in understanding the overall message, while other times, a broader perspective helps in comprehending individual elements. Therefore, incorporating both top-down and bottom-up processing strategies is beneficial in teaching receptive skills. Although there are specific strategies tailored for either listening or reading, generally, instructional approaches for teaching both skills share similarities.

### *2.4. Previous Studies on Receptive Skills Teaching*

According to Duong & Pham (2023), one of the skills posing challenges for both educators and learners is listening comprehension. This skill necessitates learners to recognize the importance of pronunciation, stress, and intonation in understanding spoken language, as well as the connected sounds within the language, to fully grasp the speaker's intent or the substance of conversations (Duong & Pham 2023). Teaching listening often involves the utilization of both top-down and bottom-up strategies, as highlighted by several scholars (Nunan, 2001; Li & Renandya, 2012; Nemtchinova, 2013; Ismail & Aziz, 2020; Latupono & Nikijuluw, 2022). Nunan (2001) emphasized the importance of developing both bottom-up and top-down listening skills in EFL learners. Ismail & Aziz (2020) further suggested that three commonly employed listening strategies in teaching include bottom-up, top-down, and interactive strategies, which involve a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches. Bottom-up strategies typically involve deriving meaning from individual lexical, grammatical, and pronunciation elements, whereas top-down strategies rely on pre-existing knowledge, concepts, and context (Nemtchinova, 2013). In essence, bottom-up strategies aid students in identifying vocabulary and grammar, guiding them through the listening process and helping them monitor their comprehension challenges. On the other hand, top-down strategies encourage students to use their background knowledge to predict and understand the content they are listening to (Latupono & Nikijuluw, 2022). Common bottom-up techniques encompass pronunciation instruction, focused activities on phonetic variations, aural-written verification, repeated listening, and dictation (Li & Renandya, 2012). Conversely, typical top-down methods include comprehension questions, prediction exercises, and listing activities (Nemtchinova, 2013). Although there have been a lot of instructional strategies for teaching listening, which ones are appropriate for online teaching has not been widely researched. Tarigan and Pohan (2022) suggested that in online teaching listening lessons, teachers should employ strategies that can achieve fun and motivate students. They recommended utilizing fun learning media like audio, video, films, and songs.

When instructing reading, educators should utilize methods to effectively improve students' comprehension (Nurdianingsih, 2021). Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012) suggested that reciprocal teaching, involving predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing, positively impacts English reading comprehension. This approach was also highlighted by Nurdianingsih (2021), who referenced strategies recommended by Vacca & Vacca (1999), such as scaffolding, think-aloud, reciprocal teaching, SQ3R (surveying, questioning, reading, reciting, and reviewing), and question-answer relationship (QARs). Wibowo et al. (2020) identified questioning (both generating and answering), making predictions, summarizing, using dictionaries, monitoring comprehension, generating text, skimming, and scanning as dominant strategies for teaching reading comprehension. Cooperative methods like think-pair-share (Ugwu, 2019; Ariski et al., 2021) are also believed to enhance students' reading comprehension. Drawing from the insights of ten journal articles, Adawiah & Manurung (2021) proposed a range of strategies for teaching reading, including QARs, scaffolding, memorization, discussion, reading aloud, question generation, promoting dictionary use, evaluating comprehension, brainstorming, and text comprehension. Similarly, Nguyen (2022) found that at a university in Vietnam, the most commonly employed strategies were asking questions, making predictions, retelling stories, and visualizing like maps and picture matching or labeling.

### *2.5. Teaching Environments*

In a traditional classroom setting, educators and students convene in the same physical space, enabling direct interaction between them, as noted by Black (2002). Within this context, instructors deliver lectures directly to students, fostering collaborative discussions around guiding questions, and offering immediate feedback, as highlighted by Redmond (2011). Additionally, students can draw motivation from both their instructors and peers (Black, 2002). According to Wuensch (2008), face-to-face classes offer unique benefits such as enhancing students' social and spatial awareness. They provide ample opportunities for interaction within the physical environment, allowing educators to gauge students' reactions through their facial expressions and body language in real time. Wuensch also emphasizes that collaborative activities in such settings promote active engagement, facilitating deep comprehension as students exchange and respond to each other's ideas.

As educational technology continues to evolve, online learning has become increasingly prevalent, reshaping how instructors and students interact in the classroom (Hsieh, 2010; Luyt, 2013; Kuama, 2016). In online teaching and learning, the physical presence of both students and instructors in the same classroom is not required, but communication technologies, such as digital platforms, are utilized to deliver lessons (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). This is facilitated through two primary modes: asynchronous and synchronous (Hrastinski, 2008; Moore et al., 2011; Afifi & Alamri, 2014). Synchronous learning, with video conferencing tools, allows for real-time interaction, mirroring the immediacy of traditional classrooms (Hrastinski, 2008). Conversely, asynchronous learning offers flexibility, enabling students to access lessons and media-supported activities at their convenience, often via learning management systems (LMS) (Hrastinski, 2008). While asynchronous methods promote independent learning, they may pose challenges for real-time feedback and engagement, which are critical in language learning.

This review of teaching environments, both traditional and online, is essential to understanding the instructional strategies Vietnamese EFL lecturers may favor in teaching receptive skills, such as listening and reading. Given the real-time interaction integral to both face-to-face and synchronous online teaching, this study focuses on how these environments influence lecturers' preferred instructional strategies for teaching receptive skills.

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Research Design*

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the instructional strategies preferred by teachers and the reasons behind their choices. This approach provides fresh perspectives and deeper insights into the research problem (Creswell, 2015). The research process was conducted in two phases.

Phase 1 involved administering a questionnaire to collect baseline quantitative data on the instructional strategies favored by participants for teaching receptive skills. The questionnaire results also helped identify participants for the next phase of the study.

Phase 2 focused on investigating the factors influencing teachers' preferences for these instructional strategies within EFL teaching contexts. Using semi-interviews with open-ended questions, this phase sought to explore why certain strategies are preferred and how teachers' experiences, classroom dynamics, and pedagogical beliefs shape their choices.

### *3.2. Research Setting and Participants*

This study examined the instructional strategies preferred by Vietnamese EFL lecturers for teaching receptive skills in both face-to-face and online settings. The research employed a purposive sampling method to ensure the inclusion of participants with varying teaching experiences and from diverse geographical locations. Lecturers were selected from universities in central cities and provinces across Vietnam, ensuring representation from different educational environments. As the researcher resides in the Mekong Delta, participants from nearby areas such as Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho City, and other Mekong Delta provinces were mainly included for logistical convenience, using convenience sampling for these locations. Participants were categorized into four experience-based groups: Novice (<6 years), Medium experienced (6-15 years), Experienced (16-25 years), and Very experienced (over 25 years). This classification allows the research to examine potential variations in instructional strategies that may arise due to differing levels of teaching experience.

Thirty eight lecturers participated in the survey. Table 1 shows their teaching experience. The majority of participants (63.2%) fall within the "medium experienced" category (6-15 years of teaching experience). Only 7.9% are classified as "very experienced" (>25 years).

**Table 1**

*Participants' Experience*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Valid** | 6-15 years | 24 | 63.2 | 63.2 | 63.2 |
| | 16-25 years | 11 | 28.9 | 28.9 | 92.1 |
| | >25 years | 3 | 7.9 | 7.9 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | **38** | **100.0** | **100.0** | |

In terms of participants' location (Table 2), the participants came from various regions, with the largest groups being from Can Tho (CT) and Tien Giang (TG) (26.3% each), followed by Ho Chi Minh City (HCM) with 18.4% and Dong Thap (DT) with 15.8%. Provinces like An

Giang (AG), Binh Duong (BD), Ben Tre (BT), and Hanoi (HN) are represented by only 1-2 participants each.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Location*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Valid** | AG | 1 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 2.6 |
| | BD | 1 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 5.3 |
| | BT | 2 | 5.3 | 5.3 | 10.5 |
| | CT | 10 | 26.3 | 26.3 | 36.8 |
| | DT | 6 | 15.8 | 15.8 | 52.6 |
| | HCM | 7 | 18.4 | 18.4 | 71.1 |
| | HN | 1 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 73.7 |
| | TG | 10 | 26.3 | 26.3 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | **38** | **100.0** | **100.0** | |

In the second phase, four lecturers were selected from different geographical locations and experience groups for in-depth interviews to explore the reasons behind their instructional preferences. To ensure confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms.

### *3.3. Data Collection Instruments*

The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. Section 1 focused on identifying the instructional strategies for teaching receptive skills preferred by EFL lecturers. This section consisted of 22 closed-ended questions, grouped into two categories to address strategies used in different teaching environments (traditional and online), along with one open-ended question. The closed-ended questions used a Likert scale, where participants rated their preferences on a scale from 1 to 5: (1) Really dislike, (2) Dislike, (3) Neutral, (4) Like, and (5) Really like. The open-ended question asked participants to suggest any additional strategies they prefer to use when teaching receptive skills. Section 2 included five demographic questions (name, age, gender, teaching experience, and workplace). The demographic questions provided background information about the participants.

Following the questionnaire, interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights. Four lecturers from central cities like Ho Chi Minh City and provincial universities participated in these interviews. The interview questions are primarily open-ended, allowing flexibility for deeper exploration and clarification, which helps assess respondents' beliefs more accurately (Cohen et al., 2018, p.512). The questions are structured with main and sub-questions to ensure relevant data collection. The first serves as a warm-up, the second introduces the interview topic, the third explores instructional strategies for face-to-face teaching, and the fourth addresses online synchronous teaching. The fifth asks for recommendations, and the final question invites additional feedback.

### *3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure*

Before commencing data collection, the questionnaire was distributed to two EFL lecturers with extensive experience over 15 years in teaching English at the tertiary level. These lecturers were excluded from later data collection. Subsequently, the researchers conducted interviews with them to explore the criteria guiding their selection of instructional strategies and the rationale behind their preferences. Following a pilot phase, minor adjustments were made to both the questionnaire and interview questions. For the main study, the questionnaire was administered to 50 EFL lecturers using Google Forms, providing a convenient means of gathering data from diverse locations. Of these, 38 lecturers participated in completing the questionnaire. After that, 4 EFL lecturers, selected based on their willingness, were invited to participate in interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes each. With participants' consent, all interviews were recorded for subsequent data analysis.

Regarding data analysis, quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics, and qualitative data from the interviews underwent content analysis.

## 4. Findings

### *4.1. Reliability of the Survey Questionnaire*

Internal reliability of the quantitative item survey was investigated using Cronbach's alpha α and the result indicated that the alpha value of the survey was equal to 0.961. This means the survey was a reliable tool to investigate instructional strategies preferred by Vietnamese EFL lecturers when teaching receptive skills in both traditional and online settings.

### *4.2. Vietnamese EFL Lecturers' Preference for Instructional Strategies*

To examine the preference toward the instructional strategies for teaching receptive skills, the Descriptive Statistics were valued based on the distance among the values of the 5-level Likert scale, which means the following.

1.00 - 1.80: Really dislike

1.81 - 2.60: Dislike

2.61 - 3.40: Neutral

3.41 - 4.20: Like

4.21 - 5.00: Really like

Table 3 below presents the extent to which EFL lecturers like instructional strategies in their teaching receptive skills in different teaching environments.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics of Preference for Instructional Strategies to Teach Receptive Skills in Online and Face-to-Face Environments*

| | | Online | | Face-to-face | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Items** | **N** | **Mean** | **Std. Deviation** | **Mean** | **Std. Deviation** |
| Predicting | 38 | 3.92 | .749 | 3.95 | .804 |
| Pre-teaching Vocabulary | 38 | 3.92 | .850 | 3.79 | .875 |
| Questioning | 38 | 4.00 | .771 | 4.13 | .741 |
| Arranging pictures in the correct order | 38 | 3.87 | .844 | 3.82 | .926 |
| Discussion | 38 | 3.89 | .727 | 4.24 | .820 |
| Retelling after reading or listening | 38 | 3.97 | .822 | 3.97 | .822 |
| Reviewing the vocabulary that was prepared in pre- | 38 | 3.79 | .843 | 3.82 | .865 |
| Helping students identify lexical items | 38 | 3.97 | .822 | 3.89 | .831 |
| Reading while listening | 38 | 3.37 | .883 | 3.58 | .858 |
| Repeated listening | 38 | 3.45 | .950 | 3.58 | .889 |
| Dictation | 38 | 3.03 | .915 | 3.18 | 1.010 |
| Comprehension questions | 38 | 3.97 | .716 | 4.03 | .788 |

| Items | N | Online Mean | Online Std. Deviation | Face-to-face Mean | Face-to-face Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scaffolding | 38 | 3.87 | .844 | 3.95 | .928 |
| Think aloud | 38 | 3.63 | .852 | 3.63 | .942 |
| Asking for clarifying | 38 | 3.97 | .677 | 4.05 | .837 |
| Summarizing | 38 | 3.87 | .704 | 3.95 | .957 |
| Letting students select or create reading texts | 38 | 3.63 | .852 | 3.74 | .950 |
| Monitoring comprehension | 38 | 3.68 | .809 | 3.92 | .818 |
| Scanning and skimming | 38 | 3.92 | .818 | 4.08 | .850 |
| Think-pair –share | 38 | 3.92 | .850 | 4.13 | .741 |
| Recounting stories | 38 | 3.42 | .826 | 3.61 | .823 |
| Visualizing | 38 | 3.89 | .831 | 4.05 | .733 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 38 | | | | |

*(Source: SPSS 20)*

Based on the results presented in Table 3, most of the instructional strategies were generally liked in both teaching environments, with many receiving moderately high ratings. However, there were notable differences between online and face-to-face preferences. Dictation received neutral responses in both contexts, with mean scores of 3.03 for online and 3.18 for face-to-face, suggesting that it was not strongly favored in either setting. Additionally, "reading while listening" was moderately favored in face-to-face teaching (M = 3.58), but less so in online instruction (M = 3.37).

Lecturers favored specific strategies more in face-to-face environments, such as discussion (M = 4.24), questioning (M = 4.13), and think-pair-share (M = 4.13), indicating a preference for interactive and collaborative methods. Other well-liked strategies in face-to-face teaching included repeated listening and recounting stories.

In online environments, strategies such as questioning (M = 4.00), talking after reading or listening (M = 3.97), and reviewing pre-prepared vocabulary (M = 3.79) were the most preferred. Lecturers also favored activities like monitoring comprehension, scaffolding, and helping students identify lexical items in the online setting.

Some strategies, like thinking aloud and retelling after reading or listening, showed consistent popularity across both (M = 3.63) and (M=3.97) respectively in online and face-to-face contexts. Discussion, though used in both environments, was more highly favored in face-to-face settings (M = 4.24 vs. 3.89 for online).

In addition to the instructional strategies listed in Table 1, participants recommended other methods they enjoy using when teaching receptive skills. These include task-based learning, group activities, incorporating music and poetry, role-playing, drama, storytelling, and skits, as well as using videos to prompt discussions on new vocabulary and grammar rules. These strategies were appreciated in both traditional classrooms and online instruction, reflecting the versatility of these methods across different teaching modalities.

### *4.3. Reasons for EFL Lecturers' Preference of Instructional Strategies*

The qualitative data from interviews with EFL lecturers revealed both the instructional strategies they employ and the reasons behind their preferences when teaching receptive skills in different contexts. Through analyzing these strategies pedagogically and contextually, it is possible to understand the factors influencing their choices and recommendations.

#### 4.3.1. Online Teaching Strategies

In online teaching, lecturers consistently favored strategies that empower students to take more control of their learning. Common strategies such as predicting, identifying keywords, skimming, and scanning are valued for their ability to help students process information efficiently and manage their own learning.

For instance, one lecturer stated:

> "I really like metacognitive strategies, including predicting, noticing keywords, and evaluating. These strategies help students control their own learning" (NTA).

The emphasis on metacognitive strategies is aligned with theories of learner autonomy and self-regulation, where students are encouraged to monitor their own comprehension and manage tasks independently. These strategies, particularly in online settings, cater to the need for independent learning, where students are less physically monitored by the teacher. Online platforms inherently demand greater self-management, making these strategies more appropriate.

Another lecturer emphasized how these strategies promote critical thinking and student interaction:

> "I like to utilize strategies that stimulate students to think and interact, such as predicting, skimming, and discussion" (MD).

The importance of student engagement in online environments also surfaced through the use of interactive tools like games, podcasts, and videos. These tools not only make lessons more dynamic but also combat the challenges of keeping students engaged in a virtual space:

> "I love to apply media on the internet like songs, podcasts, and videos or design games through apps such as Kahoot and Quizizz" (MD).

This reflects a key shift in pedagogy for online environments, where technology-enhanced learning becomes central to maintaining student motivation and interaction. These strategies demonstrate an adaptation to the medium, recognizing that the absence of physical presence can be compensated by creating more interactive and multimodal content.

#### 4.3.2. Face-to-Face Teaching Strategies

In face-to-face teaching, many of the same strategies are employed, but lecturers note several differences in how they are implemented. For example, pre-teaching lexical items and grammar rules are considered more convenient in an in-person setting:

> "I find it more convenient to teach students new vocabulary and grammar rules face-to-face" (MD).

This highlights the teacher-centered aspects of face-to-face instruction, where lecturers can more easily deliver direct instruction. The face-to-face environment also allows for more immediate interaction and feedback, making traditional methods like giving different types of exercises more effective in sustaining student motivation:

> "I realize that my students become more motivated when I give them different types of exercises to practice" (MD).

Another key feature in face-to-face instruction is the flexibility to adjust strategies based on student responses. One lecturer mentioned combining strategies such as predicting and eliciting questions to build on students' existing knowledge:

> "I really like predicting, which helps students think of the topic based on their background knowledge. Eliciting questions helps them engage further" (HV).

These strategies are rooted in constructivist approaches, which emphasize the active role of learners in constructing meaning from new information. In face-to-face settings, where there is more room for immediate interaction, these strategies can be more seamlessly integrated into the lesson flow.

#### 4.3.3. Comparative Analysis of Contextual Factors

The differences between online and face-to-face teaching environments significantly influence the choice of instructional strategies. In the online context, learner autonomy and the use of interactive technology are prioritized, driven by the need to maintain engagement in a remote setting. In contrast, face-to-face teaching allows for more teacher-led instruction and immediate feedback, making traditional strategies more effective.

The lecturers' use of similar strategies across both environments (e.g., predicting, skimming, and scanning) suggests that these are foundational approaches to teaching receptive skills. However, the way they are implemented and their effectiveness can vary depending on the mode of delivery. In online teaching, there is a greater need to promote self-directed learning and use technology tools to simulate interaction, whereas face-to-face instruction benefits from direct interaction and immediate feedback.

### *4.4. Recommendations for Strategy Selection*

Lecturers also provided recommendations for instructional strategies in different contexts. In face-to-face settings, strategies like jigsaw reading, pair work, and discussion are highly recommended to increase student interaction:

> “Jigsaw reading is one of the effective strategies in face-to-face teaching” (NTA).
>
> “We should utilize strategies like jigsaw reading, pair work, and discussion to enhance interaction” (MD).

These recommendations align with collaborative learning principles, where students work together to construct knowledge, benefiting from the immediacy of face-to-face communication. The suggestion to use visualizing also adds a multimodal dimension to face-to-face teaching, making abstract concepts easier to grasp through imagery or diagrams.

In online teaching, games were frequently cited as a way to motivate students, leveraging apps like Kahoot and Quizizz to make lessons more engaging:

> “Using games like Kahoot and Quizizz is a good way to motivate students in online lessons” (MD).

However, lecturers emphasized that selecting strategies should be based on the objectives of the lesson:

> “Lecturers should select the appropriate strategies that meet the teaching objectives and bring the best results to learners” (NTH).

This underscores the importance of aligning strategies with learning outcomes, ensuring that the chosen methods are not only engaging but also effective in achieving the educational goals.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to explore EFL lecturers’ preferences for instructional strategies when teaching receptive skills in both face-to-face and online environments. The data analysis revealed several key findings.

### *5.1. Discussion*

#### 5.1.1. Challenges in Teaching Listening Skills

According to Duong & Pham (2023), listening comprehension remains a complex skill for both students and educators. This aligns with the study findings, where the effectiveness of strategies like "dictation" (which received neutral ratings) suggests that lecturers may face difficulties selecting optimal techniques for teaching listening, especially in online environments. This is supported by previous literature suggesting that learners must grasp pronunciation, stress, and intonation to succeed in listening comprehension (Duong & Pham, 2023). It might be worth exploring why dictation, despite being a widely-used bottom-up approach, was not strongly endorsed by lecturers, perhaps due to its passive nature or limited student engagement.

#### 5.1.2. Adaptation of Instructional Strategies in Online and Face-to-Face Settings

The findings highlight distinct preferences for certain strategies depending on the teaching environment. For example, strategies like "discussion" and "think-pair-share" were highly favored in face-to-face contexts, which aligns with traditional interactive teaching approaches. These strategies promote collaboration and engagement, elements more easily facilitated in physical classrooms. This supports previous research by Nemtchinova (2013), who emphasized the importance of interactive strategies like top-down approaches in enhancing listening and reading comprehension. The higher preference for strategies like questioning and scaffolding in online settings reflects the increased need for maintaining engagement and encouraging self-directed learning (Tarigan & Pohan, 2022).

These insights could guide future research on how communication and engagement differ between physical and virtual classrooms, potentially adjusting strategies for online learning.

#### 5.1.3. Role of Technology in Online Learning

The lecturers' preference for technology-driven strategies in online learning (e.g., using podcasts, videos, and gamified tools like Kahoot or Quizizz) emphasizes the shift in pedagogical practices when teaching remotely. As MD mentioned in the interviews, these strategies help maintain motivation in online environments, addressing the frequent challenge of reduced attention spans in virtual learning. This shift toward technology-enhanced learning is consistent with findings from Tarigan & Pohan (2022), who recommend using multimedia and interactive activities to create more engaging online lessons. The reliance on such tools may also highlight the need for further professional development in technology use among EFL lecturers.

#### 5.1.4. The Importance of Metacognitive Strategies

Lecturers' preference for metacognitive strategies in both environments, particularly in online teaching, points to the importance of fostering learner autonomy. The strategies mentioned by NTA (such as predicting, identifying keywords, and evaluating) are closely tied to self-regulation theories, suggesting that students in online environments benefit from developing skills that help them manage their own learning process. This aligns with the findings of Ahmadi & Gilakjani (2012), who argue that teaching strategies encouraging active student participation, like reciprocal teaching, enhance reading comprehension.

In the face-to-face setting, metacognitive strategies like predicting and eliciting questions continue to be valued, though the context allows for more immediate scaffolding from the teacher. The flexibility of these strategies to function across both environments indicates their foundational role in receptive skill instruction.

#### 5.1.5. Implications for Teaching Receptive Skills

The similarities in preferred strategies across both settings, such as thinking aloud, questioning, and predicting, suggest that certain approaches are universally effective in teaching receptive skills. However, the variations in their implementation highlight the importance of contextual adaptation. For instance, while questioning was highly favored in both contexts, the nature of questioning in an online environment may require more structured scaffolding due to the lack of physical presence, as noted by Wibowo et al. (2020).

Additionally, strategies such as task-based learning, storytelling, and role-playing, though not the highest-rated, were recommended by participants for both online and face-to-face instruction. This suggests that lecturers value dynamic, engaging strategies that can be flexibly applied across teaching modalities.

#### 5.1.6. Impact of Experience and Location on Strategy Preference

While the data does not specifically analyze the influence of lecturer experience or geographic location on strategy preference, future studies could explore whether less experienced lecturers are more inclined to adopt newer, technology-driven strategies compared to their more experienced counterparts. Similarly, it would be insightful to analyze whether lecturers from urban areas with better technological infrastructure (e.g., Ho Chi Minh City) favor different strategies than those from more rural provinces.

#### 5.1.7. Limitation

One limitation is the sample size and geographic focus. With 38 participants primarily drawn from universities in central cities and provinces in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam, the sample may not fully represent the diversity of EFL lecturers across the country. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which may introduce response bias. Participants might have reported strategies that they believe align with current teaching trends or institutional expectations, rather than their actual preferences or practices. Furthermore, the study does not empirically measure the effectiveness of these preferred strategies on student outcomes, particularly across the online and face-to-face teaching contexts. As a result, while the research highlights lecturer preferences, it does not provide direct evidence regarding the impact of these strategies on student learning or engagement.

For future research, it would be beneficial to expand the sample size and include participants from a wider range of geographical locations across Vietnam, including more rural and northern regions. This would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the instructional strategies used by EFL lecturers in diverse educational settings, considering the potential influence of local resources, cultural factors, and institutional support. Additionally, future studies could focus on empirically evaluating the effectiveness of various instructional strategies on student learning outcomes, particularly comparing online and face-to-face environments.

### *5.2. Conclusion*

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the instructional strategies preferred by

Vietnamese EFL lecturers for teaching receptive skills in both online and face-to-face environments. While many strategies, such as questioning, predicting, and skimming, were favored in both contexts, there were notable differences in their application. Face-to-face teaching allowed for more interactive, teacher-centered approaches, such as discussion and immediate feedback, whereas online instruction emphasized learner autonomy and the use of digital tools to engage students. These findings highlight the adaptability of lecturers in response to different teaching modalities, yet also underscore the need for tailored strategies that align with the specific demands of each environment.

Despite its valuable insights, the study's geographic and sample limitations suggest that future research should explore a more diverse range of regions and empirically test the effectiveness of these strategies on student outcomes. Nonetheless, this research provides a useful foundation for understanding the evolving landscape of English language instruction in Vietnam, especially in the context of blended learning environments.

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# THE IMPACTS OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT THANH DONG UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** This action research, grounded in Fredrickson and Cohn's (2008) Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotions (PE), investigates the impacts of PE on English Language Learning (ELL) in a language learning context, particularly the relationship between PE, foreign language enjoyment (FLE), and language proficiency. It employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating interventions involving mindfulness practices, collaborative learning strategies, and the integration of gamified elements. The study utilizes various data sources, including a Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) questionnaire adapted from Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), reflective emotion journals, and language proficiency tests. Findings reveal that fostering PE, such as creativity, social interaction, and supportive teaching, contributes significantly to foreign language enjoyment. Moreover, the correlation between FLE and language proficiency underscores the potential benefits of interventions aimed at cultivating PE. This research advocates for pedagogical approaches that prioritize the promotion of PE within the language learning context, ultimately enhancing both enjoyment and proficiency.

*Keywords:* Positive emotions, Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), language proficiency, The Broaden-and-Build Theory of positive emotion by Fredrickson and Cohn (2008)

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# TÁC ĐỘNG CỦA CẢM XÚC TÍCH CỰC ĐẾN VIỆC HỌC TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC THÀNH ĐÔNG

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu hành động này, dựa trên thuyết mở rộng và xây dựng của cảm xúc tích cực của Fredrickson và Cohn (2008), nghiên cứu về tác động của cảm xúc tích cực đối với việc học tiếng Anh trong ngữ cảnh học ngoại ngữ, đặc biệt là mối quan hệ giữa cảm xúc tích cực, niềm đam mê học ngoại ngữ (FLE) và trình độ ngoại ngữ. Nghiên cứu nào áp dụng phương pháp kết hợp, tích hợp các can thiệp liên quan đến việc thực hành chánh niệm, chiến lược học tập cộng tác và tích hợp yếu tố trò chơi công nghệ. Nghiên cứu sử dụng nhiều nguồn dữ liệu khác nhau, bao gồm bảng hỏi về niềm đam mê học ngoại ngữ (FLE) phỏng theo tác giả Dewaele và MacIntyre (2014), nhật ký cảm xúc và bài kiểm tra trình độ ngoại ngữ. Các kết quả cho thấy việc khuyến khích cảm xúc tích cực, như sáng tạo, tương tác xã hội và giáo dục hỗ trợ, điều này đóng góp đáng kể vào sự thích thú của sinh viên khi học ngoại ngữ. Hơn nữa, mối tương quan giữa FLE và trình độ ngoại ngữ nhấn mạnh tiềm năng lợi ích từ các can thiệp nhằm nuôi dưỡng cảm xúc tích cực. Nghiên cứu này làm sáng rõ hơn các phương pháp giảng dạy ưu tiên sự thúc đẩy cảm xúc tích cực trong ngữ cảnh học ngôn ngữ, từ đó nâng cao cả sự thích thú và trình độ của sinh viên

*Từ khoá:* cảm xúc tích cực, niềm đam mê học ngoại ngữ (FLE), trình độ ngoại ngữ, Thuyết mở rộng và xây dựng của cảm xúc tích cực của Fredrickson và Cohn (2008)

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the field of education regarding the role of emotions in the learning process (MacIntyre et al., 2019). According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), Fredrickson and Cohn (2008), Reilly (2021), Sugawara and Sugie (2021), positive emotions (PE), in particular, have gained attention for their potential to enhance various aspects of education, including motivation, engagement, and overall academic achievement. This research is situated within the broader context of positive psychology (PP), which focuses on understanding and promoting positive emotional experiences and well-being. In the realm of education, the influence of PE on learning outcomes has become a subject of investigation across various disciplines and educational settings.

The specific context of this study revolves around ELL, a field that attracts millions of learners worldwide. English is not only a global lingua franca but also a crucial skill for personal and professional development in a globalized world. However, language learning can be challenging and, at times, frustrating. Understanding how PE can affect the process of learning English is of great importance, as it can potentially lead to more effective teaching methodologies and improved language acquisition outcomes (Reilly, 2021; Wang et al., 2023; Zeihofer, 2023). This study aims to delve into the dynamics of PE in the context of ELL, shedding light on how these emotions evolve over time and their impact on language proficiency.

The study aims to investigate the impact of PE on English Language Learning (ELL). Firstly, while there is a growing body of research on emotions in education, there remains a relative paucity of studies that track the emotional experiences of learners over an extended period. This study seeks to address this gap by offering insights into the long-term dynamics of PE during the ELL journey. Secondly, the study is grounded in the belief that understanding the role of PE in ELL can have practical implications for educators, language instructors, and policymakers. If PE are found to correlate with improved language proficiency and sustained motivation, it may pave the way for the development of teaching strategies that intentionally cultivate positive emotional experiences in the classroom. Moreover, this research aligns with the broader goals of enhancing the quality of education and fostering an environment that promotes not only academic achievement but also the emotional well-being of learners.

The objectives of this study are designed to provide a clear framework for investigating the impact of PE on ELL. Firstly, one of the primary objectives is to examine the trajectory of PE experienced by English language learners over an extended period. By tracking emotional experiences, this study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these emotions evolve throughout the ELL journey. Secondly, the study seeks to explore the relationship between PE and English language proficiency, particularly whether there is a correlation between the presence of PE , and the learners' proficiency levels. To achieve the objectives outlined above, this research poses two research questions.

- To what extent do PE evolve over time during the ELL process?
- Is there a statistically significant correlation between the presence of PE and English language proficiency among learners?

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. The Importance of Positive Emotions*

PE, as understood in the field of psychology, encompass a range of uplifting feelings, including joy, happiness, gratitude, and contentment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008; Reilly, 2021; Sugawara & Sugie, 2021; Tahirbegi, 2023). They are characterized by their positive or pleasant nature, distinguishing them from negative emotions like fear or anger. Beyond mere pleasure, PE have a broader impact on one's mental state and behavior, as they are known to expand cognitive and behavioral repertoires, enabling individuals to explore new ideas, build connections, and develop personal resources.

The importance of PE in human life is profound, touching various aspects of mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Reilly, 2021). Specifically, PE can either enable individuals’ happiness and contentment or build psychological resilience against pressure and adversity. Furthermore, PE has effectively been proved to promote physical health, enhance immune function and reduce the risk of chronic illnesses. It is additionally said that individual with PE could promote social interactions and relationships as well as enhance stimulation and cognitive functioning, namely creativity, better problem-solving abilities, and higher levels of productivity. Moreover, experiencing PE can prevent people from being overwhelmed by negativity and counterbalance negative emotions. In the context of ELL, PE are particularly significant. They can enhance motivation to learn, promote engagement in the learning process, and contribute to improved academic performance. Additionally, PE in the classroom can create a supportive and conducive learning environment, where students feel encouraged and inspired to explore and excel in their studies. Recognizing and cultivating PE in educational settings can, thus, lead to more effective and fulfilling learning experiences.

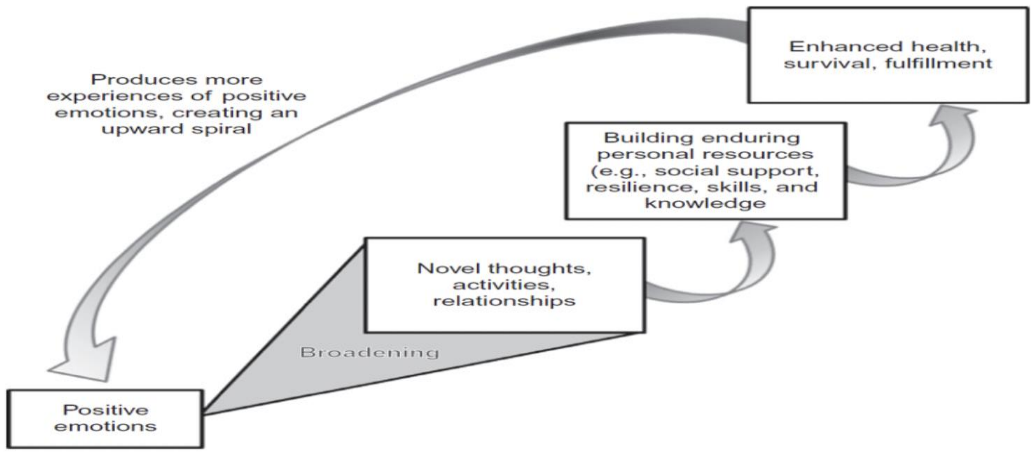
### *2.2. The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions*

The Broaden-and-Build Theory of PE, proposed by Fredrickson (2001) has significantly shaped our understanding of how PE impact individuals' psychological and cognitive functioning. This theory posits that "PE broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and build their psychological resource" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 5). Accordingly, PE, such as joy, gratitude, and amusement, serve as catalysts for cognitive and behavioral expansion. Fredrickson argues that when individuals experience PE, their awareness and attention broaden, enabling them to see a wider range of possibilities and ideas. This broadening effect fosters creativity, problem-solving, and cognitive flexibility. Consequently, in the context of ELL, the Broaden-and-Build Theory suggests that PE can lead to a more open and receptive mindset to enhance their language acquisition abilities (Fredrickson, 2001).

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) further developed the theory by emphasizing the role of PE in social interactions and relationships. They argue that PE not only broaden individual cognitive resources but also build social resources. In the context of ELL, PE can foster stronger bonds between learners and language instructors or among learners themselves. These positive social connections can facilitate language practice, peer collaboration, and the exchange of linguistic knowledge. Learners who experience PE in a supportive social environment may feel more motivated to engage in language-related activities, such as group discussions, language exchange programs, or collaborative projects (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

**Figure 1**

*The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions by Fredrickson and Cohn (2008) (cited in Mohammadipour et al., 2018, p. 88)*




Fredrickson and Cohn's (2008) rendition of the Broaden-and-Build Theory of PE extends the comprehension of how PE initiate a transformative sequence of events that elevates well-being and augments various facets of human functioning. These emotions stimulate individuals to explore novel ideas, engage in previously uncharted activities, and establish meaningful relationships. Importantly, the broadening effect goes beyond immediate experiences to encompass the expansion of enduring personal resources. These cognitive attributes, including creativity and problem-solving skills, behavioral traits such as resilience, and the acquisition of new knowledge. One of the central propositions of this theory is that this process triggers an upward spiral of well-being, where the PE engendered by broadening experiences contribute to better health, increased resilience, and an overall sense of life fulfillment. Crucially, this process forms a self-perpetuating cycle in which the experience of

PE generates more PE, creating a reinforcing loop that continually augments well-being and functioning. In the context of ELL, this perspective implies that the experience of PE during language acquisition, such as the joy of successful communication or the satisfaction of mastering new language skills, can motivate individuals to seek out additional language-related experiences, further fueling their language learning motivation and success.

Reilly (2021) extends the application of the Broaden-and-Build Theory to education and language learning specifically. This research highlights that PE have the potential to broaden students' language learning strategies and increase their willingness to engage with the language, for instance, seeking out additional opportunities for language use and practice. Moreover, the theory suggests that the PE experienced during ELL can build psychological resources over time, leading to greater language proficiency, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation (Reilly, 2021).

### *2.3. Intervention Strategies to Promote Positive Emotions*

In the realm of language learning and the cultivation of PE among students, several intervention strategies have been examined in previous research. This discussion will focus on three specific strategies: mindfulness and relaxation techniques, collaborative learning, and gamified learning platforms.

#### 2.3.1. Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness practices have gained attention for their potential to reduce stress and anxiety while fostering positive emotional states in language learners. A study by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2014) explored the impact of mindfulness training on foreign language anxiety and found that learners who engaged in mindfulness exercises reported decreased anxiety levels and increased PE. These techniques typically involve activities like meditation, deep breathing, and mindfulness-based stress reduction programs. The cultivation of mindfulness may help students manage their emotional responses during language learning, promoting a more positive and relaxed state of mind (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Morgan and Katz (2021) aimed to investigate the impact of mindfulness on foreign language classroom anxiety. They conducted a comparative study in a postsecondary learning environment, with experimental and control groups. They found a negative correlation between mindfulness scores and foreign language classroom anxiety at the beginning of the study, but there were mixed findings between groups after a 13-week series of mindfulness practices. Experimental participants expressed strongly positive opinions toward mindfulness in their open-ended responses. Zeilhofer (2023) focused on the implementation of meditative practices in a German foreign language setting. Two distinct varieties of meditation were introduced to different classes over a year, while a third class served as a comparison group. Results indicated that the treatment conditions showed marked signs of academic achievement and increased awareness compared to the comparison group. Differences were found between the two meditation methods in terms of various aspects of mindfulness. Students also showed a positive disposition toward meditative practices in general. Wang and Liu (2016) investigated how mindfulness influenced college English as a foreign language (EFL) students' learning. They explored mindful learning strategies and their impact on competence, memory, creativity, and positive affect. The study involved 24 undergraduate freshmen in China, and data collection included pre-surveys, post-surveys, work samples, observation notes, and reflective journal entries. The findings highlighted that mindfulness strategies helped students create a comfortable learning environment, enhanced their writing and thinking abilities, facilitated the learning process, and promoted cooperative learning. Zeilhofer and Sasao (2022) examined the relationship between mindfulness levels and the ability to learn new third language words in German among Japanese undergraduates. They explored different dimensions of mindfulness and their associations with vocabulary learning. The study found that higher mindfulness was linked to better vocabulary retention, with the dimension "Acting with Awareness" playing a key role. Notably, different mindfulness dimensions were related to productive and receptive vocabulary learning.

#### 2.3.2. Collaborative Learning Strategies

Collaborative learning strategies have been widely investigated in language education, emphasizing the role of social interaction in language acquisition and emotional well-being. Collaborative learning often involves group discussions, peer tutoring, and cooperative projects, providing learners with opportunities to interact and support one another in their language learning journey (Hoang & Nooy, 2020). This approach fosters a sense of belonging and positively influences learners' emotional experiences (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Hoang and Nooy (2020) discussed the effectiveness of group work in learning but highlighted concerns about its applicability in the Vietnamese context. They focused on aligning group work with Vietnamese students' preferences while respecting their cultural nuances. The study utilized three data sources: students' expressed preferences, their performance in a group task, and their reflections on the task while watching its recording. The findings revealed a tension between the traditional belief in hierarchical social relations and the desire for more egalitarian group interactions. Nguyen and Bui (2023) conducted a study focusing on Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of group work. Their research revealed that most students in this context considered group work to be an effective strategy for enhancing their language skills, promoting healthy interdependence, and ensuring emotional stability. However, the study also identified some challenges, including unfair contributions, reduced autonomy, and concerns related to maintaining group harmony and personal preferences for peers. In essence, this study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of collaborative working in language learning. In a similar vein, Nguyen and Nguyen (2022) investigated the implementation of technology to foster student participation in EFL classes. The findings from this study indicated that both teachers and students embraced a wide range of digital techniques for information sharing and collaborative learning. The study underscores the significance of technology as a means to encourage interaction and enhance students' active involvement in the learning process. Tran and Nguyen (2021) adopted an action research design to explore the impact of technology-based communication on students' writing performances and perceptions. Their research revealed that the integration of technology tools led to a more collaborative learning environment. Additionally, it reduced difficulties students faced regarding cognitive, emotional, and socio-cultural aspects, ultimately fostering a more positive learning experience.

#### 2.3.3. The Integration of Gamified Elements

The integration of gamified elements into language learning has gained popularity, as it can engage and motivate students while promoting PE. Research by Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014) explored the effects of gamification on various aspects of user engagement and found that gamified learning platforms positively influenced learners' motivation and enjoyment. Gamification often includes elements such as rewards, challenges, and progress tracking, which can create a sense of achievement and enjoyment in language learners. The use of gamified learning platforms may contribute to more positive emotional experiences and increased motivation in the language learning process (Zainuddin, 2018). In the realm of gamified learning platforms, Nguyen et al. (2021) examined the influence of Quizizz on EFL students' vocabulary achievement and their perceptions of using this digital app. Their research highlighted that Quizizz significantly improved students' vocabulary, demonstrating the positive impact of gamified learning tools on language acquisition. Furthermore, qualitative data revealed that students held optimistic attitudes toward technology-enhanced vocabulary learning. Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) investigated the effects of Mobile–Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on freshmen's vocabulary acquisition and their perspectives on this approach. Their study found that MALL-integrated classrooms not only enriched vocabulary achievement but also motivated students to engage with technology for improving their lexical knowledge. This research emphasizes the potential of digital tools in enhancing language learning outcomes.

In summary, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, collaborative learning, and gamified learning platforms have been investigated in language learning contexts and have shown promise in fostering PE among students. These strategies not only contribute to emotional well-being but also enhance motivation and engagement, ultimately benefiting language acquisition. While previous research provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of these interventions, further exploration within the specific context of the current study can offer tailored guidance on selecting the most suitable strategies to achieve its objectives.

### *2.4. The Impacts of Positive Emotions in English Language Learning*

Numerous academic studies have rigorously explored the multifaceted implications of PE across various domains, shedding light on their cognitive, psychological, and educational ramifications. These studies contribute significantly to our understanding of the broader construct of well-being and the ways in which PE influence human experiences.

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) conducted seminal research supporting the broaden hypothesis, which posits that PE expand cognitive processes. Experiment 1 provided empirical evidence by demonstrating that PE widen the scope of attention compared to a neutral emotional state. Experiment 2 further strengthened this hypothesis by revealing that PE lead to a more extensive array of thought-action urges. These findings substantiated the idea that PE broaden cognitive functions, providing critical support for the broaden-and-build theory. Gong's (2018) study ventured into the realm of positive emotional state interventions among employees and their implications for mental health. Employing PE diaries, the research unveiled that such interventions significantly elevated employees' PE while concurrently mitigating negative emotions and emotional exhaustion. These findings underscore the instrumental role of PEinterventions within workplace contexts, highlighting their potential to bolster mental well-being and overall employee satisfaction. Kaap-Deeder et al. (2023) introduced the concept of emotion crafting, which involves proactively fostering PE through awareness and action components. They developed the Emotion Crafting Scale to quantify emotion crafting, showing its validity in predicting psychological well-being and mental health outcomes. This inquiry underscores the pragmatic value of active emotional management in enhancing overall psychological functioning and highlights the potential for proactive emotional regulation. Phan et al. (2019) delved into the predictors of PE among university students, considering both social and personal influences. Structural equation modeling confirmed the direct predictive effects of the social milieu, personal resolve, relationships with others, and academic liking experience on PE. This highlights the multifaceted nature of emotions and their intricate interplay with contextual determinants, providing insights into enhancing emotional well-being among students. Reilly's (2020) action research project explored the emergence of various achievement emotions during the process of second language acquisition. The study revealed that a plethora of achievement emotions surface throughout the course, emphasizing the significance of understanding and nurturing PE within the realm of second language acquisition. This research extends our knowledge of the emotional dimensions of language learning. Sugawara and Sugie's (2021) study aimed to discover the influence of varying arousal levels engendered by PE on thought-action repertoires. The findings discerned that high-arousal PE elicited a more pronounced broadening effect on thought-action repertoires compared to low-arousal PE and neutral emotional states. This nuanced exploration highlights the intricate interplay between arousal levels and cognitive processes, contributing to our understanding of the relationship between affect and cognition. Wang and Marecki's (2021) qualitative study, based on students' and teachers' experiences within EFL classrooms in China, advocated the adoption of PP 2.0 (PP 2.0) principles to deepen comprehension of learners' emotional experiences in second language acquisition. It underscored the influential role played by PE in shaping student engagement within educational settings, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to language education. Finally, Wang et al.'s (2023) research delved into the interconnections among learners' emotions, engagement, and English achievement among EFL learners in China. The findings divulged correlations between these emotions and accentuated the mediating function of engagement in the relationship between emotions and academic achievement. This research offers valuable insights into the realm of EFL teaching and learning, providing a comprehensive view of the role of emotions in educational contexts.

In short, PE significantly enhance ELL by expanding cognitive abilities and increasing engagement. They improve motivation and satisfaction, reducing emotional exhaustion. Interventions that boost PE promote mental well-being and academic achievement. The application of PP principles highlights their role in shaping effective learning environments.

### *2.5. Research Gaps*

While the aforementioned studies have made substantial contributions to our understanding of the role of PE in various contexts, they also highlight several research gaps and areas where further investigation is warranted.

A significant research gap in the field of ELL is the limited number of studies that track the development of PE in language learners over an extended period. While existing research provides valuable insights into the immediate impact of PE, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that follow learners' emotional trajectories throughout their language learning journey. An investigation in the study can bridge this gap by observing participants' emotional experiences, such as enjoyment and motivation, from the beginning of their language learning endeavor and tracking these emotions over months or even years. This will offer a deeper understanding of how these emotions evolve, fluctuate, and impact language proficiency over time, aligning perfectly with your action research approach focused on intervention and improvement. Another research gap within the context of ELL is the scarcity of research that systematically tests the effectiveness of specific intervention strategies designed to enhance PE among language learners. While it is recognized that PE can contribute to more effective language learning, there is a need for targeted interventions that can deliberately cultivate these emotions. This action research can address this gap by developing and implementing intervention strategies aimed at fostering PE in language learners. These strategies can be designed, implemented, and assessed in a real classroom setting, providing practical insights into their feasibility and impact. By rigorously evaluating the outcomes of these interventions, the researcher can contribute valuable evidence-based practices to the field of ELL and guide language educators in creating more emotionally supportive learning environments.

By focusing on these two research gaps - conducting an investigation of PE in ELL and developing and testing intervention strategies - the action research study can offer a comprehensive understanding of how PE evolve over time and how they can be deliberately cultivated to enhance language learning outcomes.

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Research Design*

The action research design was selected for its effectiveness in meeting the research objectives within the EFL classroom. This approach is particularly suitable as it emphasizes collaboration, engagement, and intervention, allowing researchers, educators, and students to actively participate in the study. As Elliott (1991) notes, action research is ideal for developing and implementing targeted strategies that enhance PE and language learning.

This design supports the practical application of PP principles by encouraging a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Day et al., 2002).

- In the planning phase, the researcher designed lesson plans with different activities related to mindfulness practices, collaborative strategies, and integration of gamified elements to enhance PE and language learning.
- During the acting phase, these strategies were implemented in the classroom setting. Educators and students actively engaged in activities designed to foster PE and improve language acquisition. The researcher attempted to manage that interventions were applied consistently and effectively.
- In the observing phase, the researcher collected data on the interventions' impact to monitor changes in students' emotional and educational outcomes. This step involved gathering feedback from both students and the researcher-teacher himself to assess the effectiveness of the strategies employed.
- Finally, the reflecting phase allowed the researcher to analyze the data collected, evaluated the success of the interventions and identified areas for further improvement. This reflection informed subsequent cycles of planning and action to enable continuous refinement of strategies based on real-time feedback and outcomes.

### *3.2. Participants*

The study was conducted in a specific setting, involving 27 pre-intermediate level sophomores at Thanh Dong University, who were not pursuing English as their major. Thanh Dong University, located in Hai Duong Province, provided an ideal context for this research due to its diverse student body and the presence of learners from various academic backgrounds. These 27 participants represented a significant sample size, considering the specific level and major of interest, and were chosen due to their pre-intermediate language proficiency level, ensuring a certain level of language competence while still allowing for substantial improvement.

The choice of non-English majors among the participants is noteworthy, as it reflects the broader applicability of the study's findings beyond specialized language programs. Their diverse academic interests and career goals make them a suitable group for investigating the impact of PE on language learning outcomes, as these students may have varying degrees of intrinsic motivation and enjoyment when learning English. Thanh Dong University's academic environment provides valuable insights into the role of PE in language learning across disciplines and is representative of similar higher education institutions.

### *3.3. Data Collection Instruments*

#### 3.3.1. Questionnaire

FLE is the pivotal emotional construct in the context of second language acquisition. FLE, as adapted by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), pertains to the PE experienced by language learners during the process of learning a foreign language. It encompasses feelings of joy, engagement, and satisfaction that students derive from their language learning experiences. FLE is crucial because it not only signifies learners' intrinsic motivation but also contributes to their overall language proficiency and willingness to engage in language-related activities. It is typically assessed through self-report questionnaires that gauge students' self-perceived enjoyment levels during language learning.

The FLE framework further delineates two dimensions of enjoyment: social and private. The social dimension pertains to the gratification derived from interpersonal interactions while employing the foreign language. This encompasses activities like engaging in conversations with peers, instructors, or native speakers. Conversely, the private dimension delves into individualized experiences of enjoyment, including the contentment derived from comprehending the language, discovering cultural intricacies, or accomplishing language-related milestones. Additionally, the FLE framework acknowledges the dynamic interplay between emotions and motivation. PE, such as enjoyment, function as intrinsic motivators, propelling learners to willingly partake in language-related activities. In this regard, the framework aligns with self-determination theory, underscoring the pivotal role of intrinsic motivation in facilitating effective and sustainable learning.

Furthermore, research rooted in the FLE framework, which employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” to assess 21 items, demonstrating that learners who report higher levels of enjoyment concurrently exhibit heightened motivation, increased engagement, and an enhanced overall proficiency in the foreign language. This empirical basis reaffirms the credibility and practical relevance of the FLE framework.

#### 3.3.2. Emotion Journals

Emotion journals are a qualitative data collection instrument that can provide rich insights into the emotional experiences of language learners (Billups, 2021; Rose et al., 2019). Emotion journals, also known as affective diaries, are essential tools for researching individuals' emotional experiences, particularly in educational settings. They serve to collect and analyze emotional responses over time, offering insights into learners' emotional dynamics during their educational journeys.

Students are encouraged to maintain journals or diaries where they document their daily experiences, including their emotional states, within the language learning context. The students have to complete seven emotion journals which are equivalent to seven topics throughout the intervention. They are required to focus on themes such as mindfulness practice, collaborative learning, and gamified elements. They reflect on how mindfulness activities impacted their emotions and stress levels, the effect of peer interactions and group dynamics on their learning, and how gamified elements influenced their motivation and engagement. Additionally, students are asked to document their overall emotional experiences, with positive and negative emotions and their attitudes toward learning.

#### 3.3.3. Language Proficiency Tests

Language proficiency tests, such as the Preliminary English Test (PET) offered by Cambridge, hold a distinct relevance in the context of the current study on PE in language learning. These tests serve as crucial instruments for evaluating individuals' language skills, encompassing both their reading and listening capabilities, which are intricately tied to emotional experiences in language acquisition.

The PET reading test, designed to assess reading comprehension, aligns with the study's focus on PE by examining how learners engage with written texts. As individuals interact with reading and listening materials, the experience can evoke PE, particularly when they understand the content, find it enjoyable, or achieve a sense of accomplishment. Therefore, this test's outcomes not only gauge reading and listening proficiency but also indirectly reflect the emotional aspects of learning, shedding light on how PE may influence learners' reading comprehension.

Similarly, the PET listening test is closely intertwined with emotional experiences during language acquisition. This assessment delves into candidates' ability to comprehend spoken language, mirroring the real-world encounters where learners engage in conversations or listen to audio content. Successful performance on the listening test can elicit PE like satisfaction, confidence, and motivation, as it signifies the effectiveness of their language skills in practical contexts. Conversely, difficulties in listening comprehension may trigger emotions such as frustration or anxiety, showcasing the intricate relationship between emotions and language proficiency.

Furthermore, the structured scoring systems employed in these tests provide a quantitative measure of language proficiency. In the context of the current study, this quantitative data can be valuable for assessing whether PE, such as enjoyment, play a role in improving language proficiency. For instance, learners who report positive emotional experiences during reading and listening tasks may exhibit higher scores on the PET, suggesting a potential link between PE and language skill development.

### *3.4. The Procedure of the Intervention*

The intervention in the study was meticulously designed to promote PE and enhance language learning outcomes among the 27 pre-intermediate level sophomores at Thanh Dong University. The intervention spanned 12 weeks, commencing on September 5th, 2022, and concluding on November 11, 2022. During this period, participants attended two language learning periods per week, focusing on reading and listening skills, with the selected topics drawn from the "New Cutting Edge Pre-intermediate" course materials. These topics included a diverse range of engaging subjects such as unusual ways of keeping fit, TV firsts, training to be a circus performer, birthday traditions around the world, New Year celebrations in different cultures, interviews with notable figures like Ewan McGregor, and explorations into various aspects of the world, including the historical context of the 1900s and health-related discussions like a health helpline.

Each language learning period within the 12-week intervention was meticulously planned and designed to incorporate techniques aimed at fostering PE among the participants. These techniques were strategically integrated into the syllabus to create an environment that would enhance enjoyment and motivation for language learning.

- *Mindfulness Practices:* The intervention incorporated mindfulness practices, including meditation, deep breathing exercises, and elements from mindfulness-based stress reduction programs. These practices aimed to help students manage stress, reduce anxiety, and improve their overall emotional well-being. By cultivating mindfulness, participants were encouraged to stay present and engaged during language learning activities.
- *Collaborative Learning Strategies:* Collaborative learning was a central component of the intervention. Participants engaged in various collaborative activities such as group discussions, peer tutoring, and cooperative projects. These strategies fostered a sense of community and encouraged students to work together, share insights, and support one another in their language learning journey. Collaborative learning not only enriched the learning experience but also contributed to a positive emotional climate within the classroom.
- *Integration of Gamified Elements:* To further enhance PE, gamified elements were integrated into the intervention. This included incorporating rewards, challenges, and progress tracking mechanisms into the language learning process. Gamified learning platforms were utilized to create an interactive and engaging learning environment. By earning rewards, tackling challenges, and tracking their progress, participants experienced a heightened sense of achievement and motivation.

In summary, the 12-week intervention period was designed with meticulous attention to detail, incorporating mindfulness practices, collaborative learning strategies, and gamified elements to create a positive and engaging language learning environment. These techniques aimed to enhance PE, boost motivation, and ultimately contribute to improved language learning outcomes among the participants. The carefully selected topics from the course materials added relevance and interest to the learning experience, making it a holistic and effective approach to language acquisition.

### *3.5. Data Analysis*

The data analysis for the questionnaire and language proficiency tests in this study was conducted using the statistical software SPSS 22.0. In the case of the questionnaire data, SPSS facilitated the computation of descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency and variability, which provided an overview of participants' responses to items related to FLE. Moreover, SPSS allowed for the examination of correlations and regression analyses to explore the relationships between FLE, language proficiency test scores, and other relevant variables. By employing inferential statistical tests, such as t-tests, the researcher was able to determine whether observed differences between groups were statistically significant. For the language proficiency test data, SPSS was utilized to calculate participants' scores on both the listening and reading tests formatted in PET by Cambridge. Descriptive statistics helped summarize the overall performance of participants on these tests, while inferential statistics, like paired-samples t-tests, could be employed to assess the impact of PE, as measured by FLE, on language test scores.

Emotion journals, in the context of research on language learning and PE, are structured diaries where participants record their emotional experiences related to language acquisition. These journals served as valuable tools for gathering qualitative data about learners' emotional states, providing insights into the impact of PE on language learning processes. Participants regularly documented their feelings, such as enjoyment, enthusiasm, or frustration, along with contextual information like the language activities involved, the learning environment, and any social interactions. Emotion journals offered a detailed and nuanced perspective on how learners experienced PE during language learning, shedding light on the interplay between affective experiences and educational outcomes. Analyzing these journals can reveal patterns, triggers, and the role of PE in motivating learners and enhancing their language acquisition journey.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

### *4.1. The Differences Between the Pre- and Post-Proficiency Tests Achieved by the Students After the Intervention*

The statistical analysis conducted on the pre-test and post-test scores after the intervention aimed at promoting PE reveals important insights into the effectiveness of the intervention. The following academic paragraphs provide a detailed discussion of the analysis, including statistics.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample T-Test*

**Paired Samples Statistics**

| | | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | Post-test | 6.481 | 27 | .7530 | .1449 |
| | Pre-test | 6.278 | 27 | .8243 | .1586 |

**Paired Samples Correlations**

| | | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | Post-test & Pre-test | 27 | .814 | .000 |

**Paired Samples Test**

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | Post-test - Pre-test | .2037 | .4855 | .0934 | .0116 | .3958 | 2.180 | 26 | .039 |

To assess the impact of the intervention, the means of the pre-test and post-test scores were compared. The mean score for the pre-test was 6.278 (M = 6.278, SD = 0.8243), while the mean score for the post-test was slightly higher at 6.481 (M = 6.481, SD = 0.7530). This suggests that, on average, students' language proficiency scores improved slightly after the intervention. Secondly, the correlation coefficient between the pre-test and post-test scores was found to be 0.814 ($r = 0.814$, $p < 0.001$). This strong positive correlation indicates a significant relationship between the two sets of scores. It implies that students who performed well on the pre-test also tended to perform well on the post-test after the intervention, and vice versa.

Thirdly, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the differences in scores between the pre-test and post-test were statistically significant. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the two sets of scores, $t = 2.180$, $p = 0.039$ (two-tailed). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from 0.0116 to 0.3958. The statistically significant difference in scores suggests that the intervention aimed at promoting PE had a discernible impact on students' language proficiency. The mean improvement of approximately 0.2037 points on a scale of 1 to 10, while seemingly modest, is statistically significant given the sample size. This indicates that the intervention was effective in enhancing language learning outcomes.

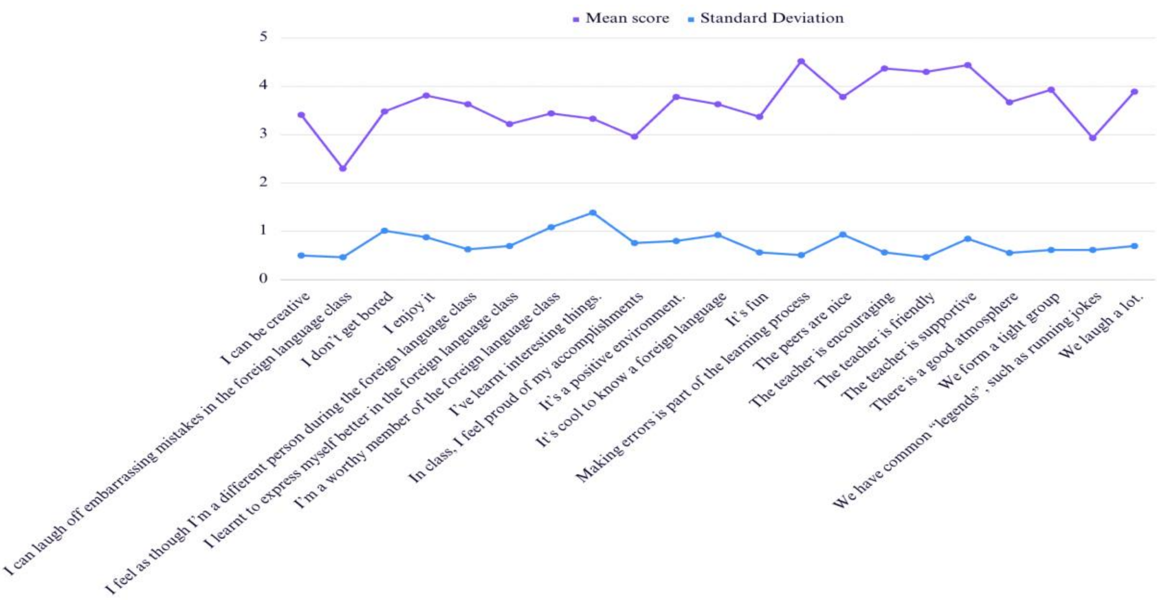
These findings have practical implications for language educators. They suggest that incorporating positive-emotion-promoting techniques into language learning can lead to measurable improvements in students' language proficiency. The strong positive correlation between pre-test and post-test scores also highlights the importance of pre-intervention assessment to identify students' initial proficiency levels accurately.

### *4.2. Students' Foreign Language Enjoyment*

The data provided offers insights into students' foreign language enjoyment across various dimensions, revealing their perceptions and experiences within the language learning context. Figure 2 illustrates their level of foreign language enjoyment

**Figure 2**

*Students' Levels of Foreign Language Enjoyment*




One notable aspect of students' FLE was their openness to creativity, as indicated by M= 3.41. This suggests that students felt encouraged to express themselves creatively within the foreign language class. Furthermore, the data reflected a high degree of acceptance of making errors as a part of the learning process (M=4.52). This indicates a positive learning environment that embraced mistakes as opportunities for growth. The qualitative data from the journals underscored the students' desire for creative expression. Many students shared how they felt a sense of liberation in experimenting with language use, trying out new phrases, and exploring their linguistic abilities during activities like role plays or creative discussions.

> "…*Today during the role-play activity, I tried to use some phrases we learned last week, and my classmates applauded me. I felt amazed to creatively apply what I learnt*…" (EFL.St.3)

> "… *In our language game, we had to come up with sentences using new vocabulary. I loved the challenge of creating sentences that made sense and were grammatically correct. It was like a language puzzle, and I enjoyed the moment of it*…" (EFL.St.21)

They expressed joy in being able to communicate their thoughts in a way that felt more authentic and individualized.

> "*…Our discussion about cultural differences was enlightening. I expressed my opinions freely, and my friends appreciated my unique viewpoint. Language learning isn't just about words; it's about sharing your perspectives*" (EFL.St.17)

Students also seemed to derive enjoyment from the social aspects of the foreign language class. The mean scores for statements related to peer interactions, such as "The peers are nice" (M=3.78) and "We laugh a lot" (M=3.89), suggest that students perceived their classmates as supportive and that humor played a role in fostering a positive classroom atmosphere. The reflective journals illuminated the significance of positive peer interactions. Students often described the joy they experienced when working collaboratively with their peers during group activities or games like Kahoot. They found these interactions to be engaging and mentioned how the positive camaraderie among classmates created an enjoyable and supportive learning atmosphere. Here are some extractions from students' emotion journals.

> "*...During our group discussion, everyone was actively engaged, sharing ideas and helping each other. It felt like a small community where we were all supporting each other's learning journey*" (EFL.St.8)

> "*...I was nervous to speak up at first, but my classmates were encouraging. They patiently listened to me, corrected my mistakes gently, and cheered for every attempt. It boosted my confidence to participate more…*" (EFL.St.13)

Additionally, the high mean scores for statements related to the teacher, such as "The teacher is encouraging" (M= 4.37) and "The teacher is supportive" (M= 4.44), reflected students' positive perceptions of the teaching style and support provided by their instructor. In addition, the qualitative data from emotion journals affirmed the positive influence of the teacher in enhancing enjoyment. Students appreciated the teacher's encouragement during challenging tasks, where the teacher's positive feedback or guidance instilled confidence, such as "*...our teacher always encouraged us, even when we made mistakes. It made me less afraid of being wrong and more willing to try…., I was nervous to present, but my teacher gave me a reassuring smile and it eased my anxiety…..*" The journals also highlighted instances where the teacher's support and understanding motivated them to actively participate and engage in classroom activities.

The data also indicated that students find the foreign language class to be a positive and enjoyable environment, with high mean scores for statements like "It's fun" (M= 3.37), "It's a positive environment" (M= 3.78), and "There is a good atmosphere" (M= 3.67). These findings highlighted the importance of creating a conducive and enjoyable learning atmosphere to enhance students' foreign language enjoyment. The journals consistently portrayed the classroom as a fun and positive environment. Students often shared anecdotes of laughter, engaging learning activities, and a sense of comfort and support within the class. They described how these elements collectively contributed to an enjoyable learning experience, for example, "*... the atmosphere is positive and encouraging…., the classroom feels so welcoming…., the ambiance in the class is uplifting…"*

By emerging the quantitative insights from the FEL with the qualitative perspective from emotion journals, it is observed a rich tapestry of experiences that validate the questionnaire's findings. The students' reflections affirmed the importance of creativity, positive social interactions, and a supportive teaching in shaping a positive and enjoyable language learning environment. These aspects collectively emphasized the need for holistic strategies that encompass pedagogical approaches fostering creativity, a supportive learning atmosphere, and collaborative learning to optimize foreign language enjoyment and, subsequently, language learning outcomes. Overall, the data reveals that students experienced FLE through various facets, including creativity, acceptance of errors, positive peer interactions, and supportive teaching.

### *4.3. The Correlation Between Students' Proficiency Tests and Their Foreign Language Enjoyment*

The correlation analysis between the results of proficiency tests (PT) and students' FLE reveals interesting insights into the relationship between emotional experiences and language learning outcomes in the current study.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Between Students' Proficiency Tests and Their FLE*

| | | PT | FLE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PT** | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .374 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .055 |
| | N | 27 | 27 |
| **FLE** | Pearson Correlation | .374 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .055 | |
| | N | 27 | 27 |

The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.374 indicates a positive but moderately weak correlation between PT and FLE. While the correlation is not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level ($p = 0.055$), it suggests a noteworthy trend worth exploring further.

This finding aligns with previous research that has demonstrated a positive association between students' PE, particularly enjoyment, and their language learning achievements. According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), PE foster a conducive learning environment by boosting learners' motivation, willingness to engage in language-related activities, and overall well-being. When students derive enjoyment from the language learning process, it often translates into improved language proficiency.

While the correlation in this study is not strong enough to establish a definitive relationship, it hints at the potential impact of PE on language learning outcomes. The moderately positive correlation suggests that students who reported higher levels of FLE might have achieved better results in the proficiency tests. However, the absence of statistical significance could be attributed to various factors, including the sample size or the specific dynamics of the study.

## 5. Discussions

In examining the findings of the current study and aligning them with previous research, a multidimensional perspective on ELL, encompassing proficiency outcomes and emotional experiences, comes to light. The investigation examined the impact of an intervention targeting PE on language proficiency and explored students' FLE within a positive emotional learning environment.

In terms of proficiency outcomes after the intervention, the statistical analysis indicated a modest but significant improvement in language proficiency, when the post-test scores were compared to their pre-test scores. This improvement, though seemingly slight, holds significance given the statistical significance ($p = 0.039$). The findings resonate with previous research suggesting that fostering PE can contribute to enhanced language learning outcomes (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). The positive correlation between pre-test and post-test scores ($r = 0.814$) underlines the importance of understanding students' initial proficiency levels to tailor interventions effectively (Zeihofer & Sasao, 2022).

Crucially, qualitative insights from the emotion journals supported the quantitative findings, offering a richer understanding of students' experiences. Students highlighted the positive impact of creativity and acceptance of errors in enhancing their language learning journey. This mirrors the construct of positive psychological capital fostering creativity and embracing mistakes are pivotal aspects. The journals also shed light on the positive social interaction students experienced during collaborative activities, affirming the significance of social interaction in language learning (Murad & Hussin, 2016). Furthermore, the supportive role of the teacher was underscored in both the quantitative and qualitative data, aligning with previous studies emphasizing the teacher's influence on students' emotional experiences and overall enjoyment (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Examining the relationship between PT and FLE, a moderately weak positive correlation ($r = 0.374$) was found, although not statistically significant at $p = 0.055$. This trend aligns with Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who emphasize the influence of PE on learners' motivation and engagement, potentially impacting language learning achievements. However, the need for further investigation with larger sample sizes and refined methodologies was highlighted. The current findings contribute to the broader discussion on the connection between PE and language proficiency, inviting future research to delve deeper into this relationship.

While the current study yielded valuable insights into the relationship between PE, language proficiency, and FLE, several limitations need to be acknowledged and addressed in future research to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. One of the restraints is the small sample size, which may not be sufficient to generalize the findings on a broader scale. This limitation should be explicitly acknowledged in the research, as it affects the extent to which the results can be confidently applied to other contexts. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to validate these findings and enhance their generalizability. Additionally, expanding the sample size in subsequent studies could provide more evidence and insights into the relationship between PE and language learning outcomes.

Secondly, the duration and intensity of the intervention may have influenced the observed effects. The present study implemented a relatively short-term intervention, and a more extended or varied intervention duration might yield different outcomes. Additionally, the intensity and consistency of the intervention were uniform across participants. Future studies could explore varying levels of intensity to discern potential dose-response relationships and optimize the intervention for different learners. Thirdly, the study relied on self-report measures, including questionnaires and emotion journals, which are subject to self-report biases. Social desirability bias may influence how participants respond to questions, potentially skewing the results. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach that incorporates objective measures, such as behavioral observations or physiological data, could complement the self-reported data and enhance the validity of the findings. Last but not least, although the study's results are statistically significant, the changes observed after the intervention and the correlations between variables are not particularly pronounced. This suggests a need for further implementation plans or additional strategies to make classroom activities truly effective and positively impactful for learners. Future efforts should focus on refining these interventions to enhance their efficacy and ensure that they contribute meaningfully to the educational experience.

## 6. Conclusions

The present study illuminates important connections between PE, language proficiency, and foreign language enjoyment in the context of language learning. The findings underscore the significance of fostering PE within the language classroom to enhance both the learning experience and language outcomes. Students' enjoyment and positive feelings were linked to increased language proficiency, showcasing the potential of creating a conducive emotional atmosphere for improved learning. Notably, the study identified that students valued creativity, acceptance of errors, positive social interactions, and supportive teaching, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of PE in language learning.

One of the key conclusions drawn from this study is the essential role of creativity and individual expression in promoting PE. Encouraging students to creatively use the language, experiment with vocabulary and grammar, and express themselves contributes significantly to their enjoyment and engagement in the learning process. The study also highlights the importance of a positive classroom atmosphere, facilitated by supportive teachers and amiable peers, in creating an environment conducive to PE and heightened foreign language enjoyment. Additionally, the correlation between foreign language enjoyment and language proficiency offers practical implications for language educators. Fostering an enjoyable and supportive learning environment can indirectly contribute to improved language proficiency. While the correlation is moderately weak, it suggests that enhancing students' enjoyment and positive emotional experiences in the language classroom can potentially lead to better language learning outcomes. This implies that educators should not only focus on instructional methods but also prioritize creating an emotionally positive atmosphere that motivates and engages students. Moreover, considering the positive impact of the intervention in promoting PE and its subsequent effect on language proficiency, future language education should integrate strategies to enhance PE systematically. Techniques such as mindfulness practices, collaborative learning, and gamified platforms should be incorporated into language curricula to promote a positive emotional climate. Educators should be trained in applying these techniques effectively, considering the diverse needs and preferences of learners.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that PE play a vital role in language learning. Fostering an environment that encourages creativity, embraces errors as opportunities for growth, and promotes positive social interactions and supportive teaching can significantly enhance students' foreign language enjoyment. Consequently, this enjoyment correlates with language proficiency, emphasizing the need to integrate strategies that foster PE within language education. Moving forward, educational approaches should aim to create enriching and enjoyable language learning experiences, acknowledging the pivotal role of emotions in the journey to language proficiency.

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# TASK-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN VIETNAMESE EFL HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS: TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE DURING-TASK PHASE AND THEIR BELIEFS

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**Abstract:** This article explored the roles the Vietnamese English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers performed during students' task work. Data were collected over the course of 10 weeks in a Vietnamese high school where nine Vietnamese EFL teachers and their nine respective classes were observed and audio and video recorded. The teachers were also interviewed after the observed lessons. For the present paper, the teacher's talks during student-student task execution in normal classroom schedules were audio recorded and analysed by microgenesis method. The results demonstrated a wide array of emerging fluid pedagogical roles the teachers played in response to the unfolding task work at hand. The different roles the teachers adopted were underpinned by their beliefs, awareness and thoughts. The study offers practical implications for how teachers could mediate task-based learning in EFL classroom contexts and perhaps in similar settings.

*Keywords:* tasked-based language learning, Vietnamese EFL teachers, teacher roles, beliefs

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# VIỆC HỌC NGÔN NGỮ QUA NHIỆM VỤ Ở CÁC LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH THPT Ở VIỆT NAM: VAI TRÒ VÀ NIỀM TIN CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRONG QUÁ TRÌNH HỌC SINH THỰC HIỆN NHIỆM VỤ

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài báo này tìm hiểu vai trò sư phạm của giáo viên tiếng Anh thể hiện trong quá trình học sinh thực hiện các nhiệm vụ nói trên lớp học. Số liệu được thu trong khoảng thời gian 10 tuần ở một trường THPT ở Việt Nam, bao gồm 9 giáo viên được dự giờ, thu âm và thu hình ở 9 lớp học của họ, và sau đó được phỏng vấn. Đối với bài báo này, tương tác giữa giáo viên và học sinh trong quá trình học sinh thực hiện nhiệm vụ nói được thu âm và phân tích dùng phương pháp tạm dịch là phân tích chi tiết (microgenesis method). Kết quả cho thấy giáo viên phản hồi linh hoạt với nhiều vai trò khác nhau trong quá trình học sinh thực hiện các nhiệm vụ nói theo nhóm/cặp nhằm hỗ trợ học sinh học tiếng Anh tốt nhất theo suy nghĩ và nhận thức của họ. Dựa trên các kết quả này, bài báo thảo luận các gợi ý sư phạm liên quan đến vai trò của giáo viên trong việc dạy học qua nhiệm vụ ở các ngữ cảnh lớp học tiếng Anh là ngoại ngữ.

*Từ khóa:* học ngôn ngữ qua nhiệm vụ, giáo viên tiếng Anh, vai trò của giáo viên, nhận thức của giáo viên

## 1. Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has recently received increasing attention from researchers and practitioners as it allows learning to occur through tasks (Jackson, 2022). A task is a meaning-focused activity with a 'non-linguistic outcome' that students use whatever linguistic means to achieve (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). In essence, TBLT posits that "the performance of functional tasks involving meaningful language use is the starting point, primary mechanism, and final goal of educational activity" (Van den Branden, et al., 2009, p. 6). In other words, by doing tasks, learners engage in naturalistic processes of acquisition that drive language development (Skehan, 2003).

The value of interaction through tasks has been well recognised regardless of any theoretical stances one might adopt (VanPatten et al., 2020). Teacher help in the form of different types of corrective feedback (Ellis et al., 2006; Loewen & Sato, 2018) has provided useful insights into how to push learners to attend to language forms in task-based interaction. However, corrective feedback represents only part of what the teacher can actually do to support student task work (Philp, 2016; Samuda, 2001). How teachers help through task execution in the pre-task, during-task and post-task stages is useful to inform pedagogical planning for second language (L2) development (Van den Branden, 2016). Some research has explored teacher assistance with language-related or task-related issues when the task is in action, though in English as a second language (ESL) settings (e.g., Dao & Iwashita, 2018; van Compernolle, 2015). This line of research has pointed to the indispensable role of the teacher in creating opportunities for learning through task interaction. However, the tasks used in these studies are often designed in accordance with the researcher' intentions and purposes. Little research has further documented what the teachers reason about their displayed roles in real life classrooms. Understanding how teachers perform different pedagogical roles during students' task-based interaction in the during-task phase and their underlying beliefs is highly necessary. Such an analysis is likely to reveal important elements of teacher practice and thinking that could inform a "researched pedagogy" (Samuda et al., 2018, p. 15) with a view of bridging the gap between theory and classroom practice. The present study thus fills these gaps by exploring teacher roles in the wider context of student-student task work and their underlying beliefs in Vietnamese EFL high school classrooms, a setting that is underrepresented in research of this kind. In so doing, it hopes to contribute to our understanding of how the teacher navigates the "pedagogical spaces" that tasks allow (Samuda, 2015, p. 278) and address the pressing call for more classroom-based research (Samuda et al., 2018). It seeks to answer these two research questions:

1) What roles do teachers play during students' task work in pairs/groups?

2) What are the teachers' beliefs underlying the roles they perform during students' task work in pairs/groups?

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. The Roles of the Teacher in TBLT*

Teacher roles are quite often described in practical guidebooks for English teaching in general (Harmer, 2012) or for doing TBLT in particular (Samuda, 2015; Van den Branden, 2016; Willis & Willis, 2007). For example, Harmer (2012) describes a range of teacher roles such as controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, organiser, performer, role model, comprehensible input provider, feedback giver, assessor, and motivator. Depending on the stages of the lesson, the teacher can relax their control and undertake appropriate roles. In the particular field of TBLT, Willis (1996) proposed a framework in three stages: pre-task (introducing task, and topic), task cycle (task, planning and report), and language focus (language analysis, practice). Viewing task implementation in this way, each stage might involve different teacher roles from *leader, organiser, motivator, co-converser* and *language teacher* (Willis & Willis, 2007, pp. 149-150). Van den Branden (2016) further defines the role of the teacher as "the decisions and actions that teachers can (and should) take to optimally promote students' learning from the task-based work they engage in" (p. 167). In particular, he describes the role of the teacher as a "mediator for language learning" (p. 167) in the three phases of task implementation. In the pre-task phase, the teacher is in charge of "selecting content and determining the focus of the classroom activity" (Van den Branden, 2016, p. 167), which requires them to make decisions on what task to engage students in, what kind of input to provide, how much time to allocate for task performance, etc. In the during-task phase when the task is in action, according to Van den Branden, the teacher performs three main roles: a *motivator, organiser,* and *conversational partner and supporter* (pp. 168-169). These three roles are captured in Van den Branden's (2009) words:

> The teacher remains a crucial interactional partner in task-based language classrooms, by taking the role of *motivator* (i.e., launching the students into action by constructing joint projects), *organizer* (making sure that students know what they are expected to do and organizing temporal and spatial aspects of task performance), and, last but not least, *conversational partner and supporter*, as the more proficient, knowledgeable

interlocutor who can feed the language-learning needs of different students in a wide variety of ways. (italics added, p. 284)

While teachers play a key role in learner success (Hattie & Anderman, 2020), surprisingly, the role of the teacher has not received sufficient research attention in TBLT (Van den Branden, 2016; Xu & Fan, 2022) as it should in comparison to burgeoning research on task features and learner factors (e.g., Bygate, 2016; Choi & Iwashita, 2016; García Mayo & Azkarai, 2016; Skehan, 2016).

It is assumedly challenging for the teacher to take on different roles in class work. In the words of Griffiths (2021), “it is not always easy, for instance, to be both a controller and a facilitator, a performer and a participant, but these kinds of sometimes rapid role-swaps are part of what is required of a teacher” (p. 2). This could be even more challenging in TBLT, as TBLT allows for individual (re)interpretations of the target tasks and thus requires the teacher to be ready to respond to the unpredictability that arises while students are doing a task at hand (Skehan, 2003). Unpredictability here denotes that the designed task might not turn out as planned and it depends on how students interpret and realise it. As Skehan argues, this uncertainty can be difficult for some teachers to adjust to, and may cause many of them to avoid task-based teaching. As the nature of teacher roles in TBLT is evolving and dynamic (Han, 2018), performing multiple roles is daunting. It is important to understand how teachers in real world classrooms take on their roles in student task work and why they do so.

### *2.2. Sociocultural Theory*

From a sociocultural theory (SCT) perspective, the role of the teacher could be viewed in terms of the mediation or scaffolding they provide to the learners to induce mediated learning (Lantolf, 2012). SCT, drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978), among others, proposes that human cognition development is mediated by means of social interaction with others, self and artefacts. Human cognition develops and evolves first and most importantly in the interpsychological mode through interaction between people (Vygotsky, 1978). One key concept is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which was originally defined as the level of development that one can attain with assistance which otherwise cannot be achieved without being guided and assisted (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD requires social interaction, especially with a more capable interlocutor such as a teacher, an adult or a more proficient learner. In the SCT lens, the teacher plays the role of not only a more capable learner but also a creator of social environments for L2 development that, according to, Poehner and Leontjev (2022) might not necessarily involve teacher direct input.

Research has shown mediation helps learners internalise target items and construct knowledge starting from other regulation to self-regulation (Lantolf, 2012). Particularly viewed from a SCT perspective, *collaborative dialogue* (Swain, 2000) emphasises the output process as both a cognitive and social activity where interlocutors (teachers and students) use language to mediate learning. As such, according to Lantolf (2000), the ZPD should be “more appropriately conceived of as the *collaborative construction of opportunities*” (italics added, p. 17). In this regard, the SCT is additionally relevant in that how the teacher provides support or mediated learning in the different roles they perform for the co-construction of the learning opportunities in peer interaction is important. Assumedly, the teacher acts upon and responds to a sequence of utterances that come about in students’ work and undertakes multiple roles that extend the much-focused role of language mediator in existing literature (Dao & Iwashita, 2018). That said, the SCT aligns with the microanalysis method employed to conduct utterance-by-utterance analysis in the present study, with additional attention paid to “what happened before and what happened next" (van Compernolle, 2016, p. 176) within episodes of relevance.

### *2.3. Related Studies*

A number of researchers have explored teacher assistance by focusing exclusively on teacher-student (whole-class) interaction in ESL contexts. For example, Samuda (2001) examined how a teacher in one intact ESL university classroom of nine students in North America, created 'a need to mean' first through a task focusing on modality (e.g., may, might, must, can, could). Through the teacher's skilful eliciting and scaffolding, students were able to forge links between form and meaning and use the targeted items more naturally. Also targeting teacher interaction with the whole class, Gibbons (2003, 2006) explored how a teacher mediated language learning from a socio-cultural perspective. Her study was conducted in two content-based ESL classrooms with primary school students in Australia. She found that the teachers mediated language learning through recasting and eliciting clarification. Through subsequent students' clarifications and explanations, the teachers were able to scaffold the learning of science concepts (magnetism) and associated English forms.

In a more recent study, Dao and Iwashita (2018) focused on Chinese L2 learners of English living in Canada and two experienced teachers (one native speaker and one ESL teacher). They drew on sociocultural theory to explain two forms of teacher support given during student interaction: task-related support and language support or mediation. The findings show that teacher support in terms of task management and language mediation through different forms such as recast or repetition helped students in many ways in the process of task execution and realisation.

Researchers in Flanders have investigated how primary school teachers implement tasks developed by professionals, from setting up the task to monitoring and providing interactional support throughout student task performance (Berben, et al., 2007; Van Gorp & Bogaert, 2006; Van den Branden, 2009). For example, Berben et al. (2007) studied how the teachers and primary school students in three schools in Flanders re-interpreted the intended tasks. Gorp and Bogaert (2006) emphasised how teachers supported students in an interactional manner played a role in enabling students to solve problems themselves. Similarly, the teachers in Van den Branden's (2009) study were found to mediate between "order and chaos" (p. 264) as they sought to accommodate students' re-construing of tasks in relation to task requirements and their teaching beliefs. He contended that it is within the complexity and unpredictability of students' task (re)construal that the role of the teacher as supporter, organiser, and social conversation maker is called for to lead and help learners "move about the pedagogical spaces" (Samuda, 2015, p. 278) that tasks provide. This has shown the teacher plays the role of a mediator who supports students' task work in different ways at different stages of task implementation.

Though set in different contexts, and with varying purposes, these studies reviewed here are the important contributions of the teacher in assisting students' learning through tasks. In general, research into TBLT to date has tended to document teacher support in task-based interaction largely in ESL contexts where students use English outside the classroom, and mostly either in teacher-student interaction or student-student interaction or at the most teacher roles in isolation. Little research has explicitly analysed teachers' interactional moves and their intertwined roles in the context of student-student interaction in EFL environments where students share their first language and limited out-of-class communication in the target language.

TBLT has been adopted at different levels of foreign language education in Vietnam (Cao, 2018), with the aims of developing school students' communicative competence and ability to use the target foreign language to achieve real life purposes (MOET, 2010, 2018). TBLT research in Vietnam has largely explored the TBLT implementation in general and found limited uptake of TBLT in the classroom due to students' shared L1, mismatch between the curriculum and high-stakes tests learners' low English proficiency, teacher resistance, thus rendering teachers to revert to the traditional role of knowledge transmitter that focuses on language forms (e.g., Barnard & Nguyen, 2010; Tran et al., 2020). Other studies (e.g., Duong & Nguyen, 2021) demonstrated that the Vietnamese EFL secondary school teachers encountered a wide range of challenges in implementing TBLT in their classrooms. Class size, preparation time, teachers' uncertainty of their role as a facilitator were among additional cited problems. Indeed, these numerous contextual factors have also been found to hinder TBLT implementation in wider Asian EFL contexts (Butler, 2017).

The question of how Vietnamese EFL teachers enact their roles in task-based lessons has been largely neglected. Nguyen et al. (2015) focused on the pre-task phase, and found that the teachers in a high school in Vietnam prepared students for the upcoming tasks in different ways which imply the different roles including controller, organiser initiator, and language input provider. In order to implement TBLT, how to sensitively manage the learning environment is crucial (Willis, 2005). In this respect, research that explores the roles that the teacher undertakes in the during-task phase and teacher beliefs underpinning their roles is highly warranted. The present study thus examines the roles that teachers perform in student-student task interaction in a Vietnamese high school context and the beliefs underpinning their classroom practices.

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1. Participants*

Nine teachers of English (three at each grade level: 10, 11, and 12) from a high school in Vietnam and their nine respective classes participated in the present study on a voluntary basis. They all gave their written consent for the data to be collected and used for the purpose of this research. As summarised in Table 1, the teachers were aged between 22 and 47 and most of them were female. Five held a bachelor's degree and four a master's degree in Applied Linguistics or TESOL. All had between 11 to 23 years of teaching experience except two new teachers who were recent graduates. Student participants were 15-18 years old and had been studying English as a compulsory subject since grade 6. *Tieng Anh* books for high school students by Hoang Van Van and colleagues were used in these classes to guide EFL teaching and learning.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographic Information*

| | Teachers | Gender | Age | Years of EFL teaching experience | Class size | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 10 (n = 3) | Teacher 1 | F | 34 | 11 | 31 | Mixed (16F/15M) |
| | Teacher 1 | F | 43 | 17 | 32 | 32F |
| | Teacher 3 | F | 22 | 2 months | 28 | Mixed (14F/14M) |
| Grade 11 | Teacher 4 | F | 25 | 3 | 46 | Mixed (32F/14M) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (n = 3) | Teacher 5 | F | 24 | Two months | 28 | Mixed (9F/19M) |
| | Teacher 6 | F | 42 | 11 | 29 | Mixed (8F/11M) |
| Grade 12 (n = 3) | Teacher 7 | M | 38 | 15 | 40 | Mixed (19F/21M) |
| | Teacher 8 | F | 39 | 17 | 27 | Mixed (5F/22M) |
| | Teacher 9 | F | 47 | 23 | 26 | Mixed (7F/19M) |

*Note: F: female; M: male*

### *3.2. Data Set*

The larger research project (Nguyen, 2013) shows that the teachers in this context first had students carry out the task in pairs/groups (task rehearsal) and then invited as many groups of students to perform the task in front of the class as time allowed (task performance). For the present paper, student task rehearsals in pairs or groups were audio recorded in the wider context of 45 classroom observations made to the nine teachers mentioned above (five per teacher). Different audio recorders were placed in different pairs/groups to gather the data in different positions of the lessons where the teachers used oral tasks. In total, 48 recordings were reliably audible to be transcribed and thus used for the current analysis of the roles that the teachers performed during student-student interaction. The transcribed rehearsals totalled 247.97 minutes, ranging from 4.08 to 9.07 minutes (M = 5.16; SD = 1.09). Students were involved in mostly open-ended tasks that the teachers created themselves or adapted from the textbooks (see Nguyen et al., 2018). Some examples of these tasks are as follows:

- Work in pairs, discussing a plan for a picnic for the next three days off.
- Work in pairs, discussing your future jobs, why you like that job, and why.
- Work in groups, discussing five essential things to bring on an overnight camping trip.
- Work in groups, discussing causes of overpopulation.
- Work in pairs, doing a role-play between a person who seeks advice to attend a job interview and an advisor who gives advice.

Field notes and video-recordings were additionally employed to further describe the context for the during-task phase and annotate the roles that the teachers performed alongside the audio recordings.

The audio/video recordings were used in subsequent stimulated recall sessions with the teachers (cf. Gass & Mackey, 2000). The recall sessions did not focus closely on teachers' moment-to-moment thinking but aimed to provide a starting point for the teachers to talk about what underpinned their displayed roles as observed. The teachers were interviewed as soon as practical after the recorded lessons. The Vietnamese language was used in all these sessions to establish rapport and prevent misunderstanding. Borg (2009) voiced a concern that teachers might provide post-hoc rationales that might not necessarily govern their practice. To minimise this, multiple-session interviews (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 135) were used to elicit teachers' confirmation and elaboration on what they said. Each teacher was interviewed twice: once after the observed lesson and one follow-up for the teachers to explain and elaborate, totaling 18 interviews for the current analysis. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes and was audio recorded with the teachers' prior consent.

### *3.3. Data Analysis*

The 48 audio recordings of student-student group interaction that contained teacher talk were transcribed and closely analysed for teacher roles in different forms (see the transcription symbols in the appendix). Their roles were qualitatively identified as they emerged from the data and analysis was guided by the taxonomy of teacher roles identified in the literature (e.g., monitor, motivator, resource, conversational partner). The microgenesis method that involves utterance-by-utterance analysis (Guitiérrez, 2008) was further employed to analyse how teacher roles mediated students' task enactment. Each sequence of interaction that involved teacher mediation and student-student interaction was analysed in great detail, turn by turn; each turn was analysed by reference to the preceding and subsequent turns to uncover what was revealed from the teacher talk and their embedded teacher roles with the aim of understanding "what happened before and what happened next" (van Compernolle, 2016, p. 176). Due to space constraints, for illustration, three excerpts that contained teacher talk in student-student task work were randomly selected to showcase teacher roles and how students responded to the teacher's responsive support and mediation to capture the before and after happenings, a distinct feature of the microgenesis approach (van Compernolle, 2016).

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed in its entirety, and double-checked by an EFL teacher researcher for accuracy. All the interview texts were analysed in the source language of Vietnamese in an iterative open manner for themes that appeared. The themes that were mentioned were prepared in a Microsoft Excel sheet for further analysis. Transcripts of interaction between the teacher and student groups, not the whole task interaction were analysed, and selective excerpts were presented to illustrate the points being made. Each role that the teacher performed was analysed in relation to other roles in the wider context of the interaction which unfolded. As such, excerpts of extended discourse with multiple roles were presented instead of individual episodes that focus on one single role as quite often portrayed in existing research (e.g., Dao & Iwashita, 2018). Due to the space limit, only the translated versions of the interview quotes were reported. They were re-checked for accuracy of translation by an EFL teacher and researcher.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The findings show that the teachers constructed a wide range of roles in the process of students enacting oral classroom tasks in their private pairs or groups. Notably, these roles include facilitator, mediator, feedback provider, monitor, mediator, resource provider and motivator, among others, and were displayed simultaneously in a conversational manner and responsively to the task in progress. It was further found that the teachers navigated their roles fluidly, leading behind and mediating students' task enactment. In addition, the teachers' classroom practices were driven by their well-articulated beliefs about how to enhance oral task engagement in TBLT. Due to space constraints, the following excerpts representatively reveal how the teachers adopted these roles, in response to student task work underway by different groups of students.

Excerpt 1 indicates how a grade 11 teacher, after introducing the task and putting students into groups, moved between groups to manipulate her roles in an oral task where students worked in groups, discussing causes of overpopulation.

<u>Excerpt 1</u>

01 S1: Truyền thống lạc hậu là chi là old traditional à? [Self-translating 'old tradition?]
02 T: Tradition, old tradition
03 S2: Because of old tradition, they don't know family planning. Women have more children ….(…)

*In another group*

04 T: Speak up! Speak up! Any ideas?
05 S1: The first is old tradition
06 T: Uh uh, because of the old tradition. Old tradition, can you clarify?
07 S2: Because they think they will have more happiness if they have many children
08 T: Really? Anything else?
09 S3: erm… the more the better
(…)

*In another group*

10 S1: Teacher! Teacher!
11 T: Yes?
12 S2: Y tế là medical phải không cô? (‘Y tế’ is medical, teacher?)
13 T: Medical service
14 S2: Not good medical service. Chi nữa? (What else?)
(…)

*In another group*

15 S1: Làm chi rứa? (What are we doing?)
16 S2: Đâu, làm chi rứa đâu? (What, what are we supposed to do?)
17 S3: Lý do vì sao bùng nổ dân số (Discuss why overpopulation occurs)
18 T: English, please. Try to speak in English.
(…)

*In another group*

19 S2: Help please, Teacher!
20 S4: Làm mới được ba cái chơ mấy (we have just got three ideas)
21 S3: Please three ideas
22 S4: Three reasons
23 T: Ok, tell me the first reason
24 S1: The first tề (Focus on the first (reason)!)
25 S4: Erm family planning
26 T: Family planning?
27 S3: There are not
28 S4: don’t have
29 S2: Không có *[translating S4]*
30 S3: There are not
31 S5: Enough a (enough)
32 S3: Families haven’t
33 S4: Hiệu quả là chi? (How to say ‘hiệu quả’ in English?)
34 S1: Effect
35 S3: haven’t family planning
36 T: Uhuh … uhuh
37 S3: And second erm
38 S4: Want to have many children,
39 T: Want to have many children
40 S3: Especially sons, many sons
41 T: Yeah, that’s right.
42 S3: And three and three … medical
43 S1: Service
44 S3: medical service is more and more developed *[stressing the first syllable of the word ‘developed’]*
45 S4: Everyday
46 S5: Developed [*correcting pronunciation error, stressing the second syllable of the word ‘developed’*]

47 S1: Developed

…

In her moves in the pedagogical spaces (Samuda, 2015) that the task allows, the teacher performs a wide array of roles in a fluid and responsive manner. For example, as a feedback provider, she drops in one group and gives unrequested feedback 'old tradition' (line 02) in response to the student's use of the incorrect form 'traditional' (line 01). Sensing one student group are silent, the teacher approaches and encourages talk (line 04), thus playing the role of a prompter. She asks for clarification (line 06) and elicits more ideas (line 08). When students begin to talk (line 09), the teacher continues her circulation between other groups as a monitor. Responding to a call for help (an explicit request for an English expression (medical service) (lines 10-13) from another group, she drops in as a resource provider and the provided form is subsequently used in the student's turn (line 14). Her moves within the pedagogical spaces the task allows continue. She also acts as a monitor through reminding and encouraging students to use English (line 18). Then, her manoeuvring keeps operating responsively to another group who explicitly call for assistance (lines 19) by stopping in and kicking the ball rolling by eliciting the first reason (line 23). When students resume and join back in, she then withdraws by taking a less directing role (co-communicator) by co-conversing with students throughout the subsequent chunk of interaction (lines 26, 36, 39, 41). Interestingly, the teacher' repetition (questioning/back channeling) (line 26) triggers multiple turns (lines 27-35) of student co-construction as they resource their performance, though occasionally using Vietnamese L1. Also, by being simply a co-communicator (line 41-*Yes, that's right*.), students have gained an impetus, and continue their task work independently of the teacher's support from line 42 onwards while the teacher continues her pedagogical moves between other groups. Now students fill in each other's speech (lines 43, 45) and correct others (line 46) and their task execution just carries on. Clearly, the teacher leads behind student task rehearsal in a way that, above all, enables "students to say what they want to say" (Ellis, 2006, p. 30). The teacher takes up the mediational role through "*conversational interweaves"* (Samuda, 2001, p. 130) to motivate students to overcome certain impasses during the meaning-making process of task execution. Importantly, the teacher responds to both the message and language being conveyed, though more on the former. She drops in as needed, responds as appropriate and withdraws in a way that facilitates student task enactment. In other words, the teacher tunes in the lead of students and responds to their task work without disrupting the communication flow. Still, the excerpt is illuminating in demonstrating how the teacher flexibly adopts a variety of roles, not linearly but interwovenly, emergently and fluidly. Talking about how her roles, the teacher in Excerpt 1 commented:

> *"I always walk around from group to group or from pair to pair to help students with things they might need, a word or a phrase to mean something; or just some suggestions on task performance if they ask. Otherwise, I monitor by encouraging students to use English, encourage group members to make contributions because usually there might be some lazy or shy students in the group or sometimes just check how far they have done the given task."* (Teacher 4, Grade 11)

Clearly, this teacher is well aware of a multitude of roles to readily take on and these include from being a resource providing the lexical resource that was asked for to a manager reminding students to use English, encouraging participation from reticent or less responsible students or observing behind. Other teachers are well articulated about their responsivity to act upon the evolving and unpredictable nature of the task work:

> *"I am there, ready to help students with things they want to ask. Although you have to be*

*prepared for things related to the task that students might ask, you don't really know what they are going to ask. They often ask you questions as they come along with the task, with what they want to express."* (Teacher 2, Grade 10)

*"I move around to see how students are doing and students might need you there to feel 'secure' that there's somebody who follows them, though for any help to move along the task or not."* (Teacher 3, Grade 10)

These comments distinctly illustrate that the teachers are anticipating the variability involved in task work and their readiness to simply 'lead' behind, from being a mental supporter to responding to language-related or task-related issues. Another teacher well identified the source of difficulty and was ready to provide support:

*"Students do not necessarily like doing language exercises more than communicative tasks. Speaking is hard for them, this is true. So the teacher's guidance, support and encouragement are needed."* (Teacher 7, Grade 12)

In Excerpt 2, a grade 10 student group were discussing their plans for a picnic in groups of four. It further demonstrates other aspects of unpredictability of the unfolding task where students renegotiate the task requirements that showcase the teacher's multiple roles.

<u>Excerpt 2</u>

(…)

01 S1: Biển X rác nhiều (A lot of garbage at X beach!)
02 S4: Lên núi đi! (Let's go to the mountains!)
03 S2: Y Hill! *[(Y is name of the hill]*
04 S1: Đi cắm trại! (Let's go camping!), camping!
05 T: Try to speak in English!
06 S2: Mấy đứa mình đừng làm hội thoại nữa (Hey, our group should not be doing a dialogue!)
07 S3: Cô ơi, cô ơi (Madam! Madam!)
08 S4: Excuse me! Đừng làm hội thoại được không cô? (Teacher! Is it possible that our group is not doing a dialogue?)
09 T: Erm, in what way?
10 S2: To make erm … a report
11 T: A report? Yeah *[Nodding]*
12 S2: Được *[Teacher said it's ok to do a report]*
13 T: Try to speak in English!
14 S2: Now it's very cold, and we have erm … too much homework, too much have to do at school nowadays, so erm …. today we're very … Nowadays ….
15 S3: Today! *[Correcting]*
16 S2: Today we're very tired with our homework, because erm … we have too much homework, too much have to do at school so we often feel tired. What should we do? ….. My group, include me, P, V, T decide to go to a place, an interesting place to relax, it is Old city X, ah Y hill.
17 S3: Y hill
18 S2: …Y Hill, we're going erm … with some classmates. We are going to… to …
19 S1: go camping
20 S3: Đi với ai? (Who to go with?)
21 S4: Friends
22 S1: Family
23 S2: We are going together with our family. Erm …because … when you go out with parents is safely and you are erm…. an tâm (secure). You … erm … Make sure that …pleased, pleasure được không? (pleasure is OK?)
24 S4: Pleasure là vui vẻ hả? *[Checking the meaning of 'pleasure']*
25 S3: Cũng cố tinh thần gia đình (to consolidate family spirits)

26 S4: Thư giãn đi (to relax)
27 S2: Safely and enjoyable. And erm …we erm ... have a lot of … activities at Y hill, …Y hill is very … erm … is very wonderful, it's very beautiful …. with a river
(…)

Here students start the task with a few turns in mostly Vietnamese (lines 01-04) and feel like doing a report instead of a conversation between members about their plan for a picnic (line 06). After S2 initiated a change of the task genre (line 06), the other members appeared to agree by calling out to the teacher and explicitly re-negotiate the task outcome (a report) with her (lines 07-12). Accordingly, the teacher undertakes the role of an immediate decision maker, allowing flexibility for students to construe the task in their own way and this flexibility or the acquired space students proactively reach out for appears to take effect in the subsequent turns in the students' talk. Lines 14-27 show that a spate of talk is generated as students are beginning to resource their report, even though S2 seems to be dominant and L1 use occasionally occurs. A new boost was observed in students' happy voices as an apparent effect of the fact that the teacher allowed them to perform the task in their own way. Apparently, by responding to students' negotiation, the teacher created opportunities for learning. Concerning her role in this case, the teacher justified:

"*A group report or a conversation is ok with me in this case. The purpose is speaking, as long as students produce the target language, it doesn't matter. I should let students do the task in the way they want, because if they prefer this way, they will do better*." (Teacher 2, Grade 10)

The teacher appears ready to accommodate different interpretations of the target tasks. She was driven by the perceived key aim of helping students to produce English talk. Accompanying was a central concern with students' preferences and engagement that guided teachers to act. In this case, these students wanted to assign someone from the group to report what they planned to do in the given three days off, instead of all performing a conversation in front of the class audience. Clearly, the role of the teacher here is important in timely giving a go-ahead for students to proceed with the task in the way they renegotiate.

Excerpt 3 below, very much describes the responsivity of the teacher during the course of students' task execution. The teacher was diverging from a textbook speaking task, converting a textbook discussion task into an information gap task, where she split the class into two big groups, one of which discussed problems associated with overpopulation while the other made a list of solutions to overpopulation. After that, she merged some students from each group to form a new group to discuss solutions to problems. When students were doing the task in their private groups, the teacher began to circulate between groups and this piece of interaction follows. Again, she performed varying roles in a responsive fashion.

<u>Excerpt 3</u>
01 S1: Punishment
02 S2: Sinh nhiều con là tăng thuế (Increase tax for those who give birth to so many children!)
03 S1: Thuế là chi rứa cô (What is 'thuế' in English, Teacher?)
04 T: Tax, t-a-x
05 S1: tax … erm increase tax
*In another group*
06 T: One or two solutions are ok!
07 S1: Sinh nhiều con gây nguy hiểm erm (Giving birth to so many children causes danger)
08 T: Danger
09 S1: Đúng rồi danger (Yeah, danger!). What else?
(…)
*(In another group)*

10 T: Speak in English! One or two problems are fine!
(…)
*In another group*
11 T: First of all, you listen to the problems from this group and then offer solutions
12 S1: Rồi, để bạn nêu vấn đề (Ok. I'll raise problems)
13 S2: Cô, có nghĩa là hội thoại hả cô? Cô! có nghĩa là hội thoại hả cô? (Teacher! are we supposed to do a conversation? Teacher, are we supposed to do a conversation?)
14 T: Uhuh
15 S1: P tề, hội thoại! Chọn một vấn đề thôi hi (Hey, P, a conversation! Choose one problem!)
16 S2: Chọn một vấn đề thôi (Choose only one problem)
17 S1: Ô nhiễm môi trường đi (Let's do environmental pollution)
18 S4: Chọn một vấn đề cho dễ… (It's easy to do one problem)
19 S1: Overpopulation causes environmental pollution
20 S3: Faster and faster
21 S2: Đầu tiên là raise awareness of people, với là … (First, raise awareness of people and …)
22 S1: Make a lot of new sources, source and future sources such as …
23 S2: Chi hè, đầu tiên là tìm ra nguồn năng lượng sạch (Well, first find fresh sources of energy)
24 S1: Năng lượng là energy *[Self-translating]*
25 S2: Find out erm a lot of new energy sources, energy of wind, năng lượng của gió (wind energy)
26 S3: Thiếu đất, shortage of land *[self-translating]*
*In another group*
27 T: Speak in English! One or two problems are fine!
(…)

We can see that the teacher functions as a resource in response to an explicit request (line 03) for an English equivalent word (line 04) and to an implicit difficulty (line 06) in mobilizing the English form by using Vietnamese (lines 07-08). The word 'tax' is then taken up and the word 'danger' is confirmed in the subsequent turns (lines 05, and 08 respectively). In other lines (06, 10 and 27), the teacher swaps her roles into a prompter and a motivator by clarifying the task requirements (lines 11-14) and repeatedly prompting and encouraging students from different groups by explicitly reducing the task demand, '*One or two solutions are ok.'* (Line 06), *'Speak in English! One or two problems are fine!'* (Lines 10, 27). Relating to these pedagogical moves, the teacher commented:

> *"The students did not seem to be producing much, possibly because the task was still hard for them; so I intervened, and reduced the requirements. May be confining the discussion to one or two problems or solutions will make them feel lighter. It's good to enable them to speak in English, even less is better than none."* (Teacher 5, Grade 11)

The teacher makes an informed responsive move upon perceiving a limited amount of talk was being produced during that particular task execution. Again, in her belief, students producing oral English output is the ultimate goal that drives her different responsive acts including adjusting the requirements, or reducing the cognitive burden ('make them feel lighter'). It was not only about the amount of English output, but also the naturalness of student talk that the teachers attended to. For this, many teachers were attentive to discourage excessive writing during task execution, as "*Note-taking is good, writing is not what speaking is. I always tell them to speak as naturally as they can." (Teacher 9, Grade 12)*. Evidently, "the teacher's role is not, in the first place, to solve the pupil's problems, but rather should take the form of *interactional support* in which the teacher mediates between task demands, and the learner's current abilities" (Van Gorp & Bogaert, 2006, p. 102, emphasis added). The teaching process is a "socially negotiated one" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 401) where through social interaction between the teacher and groups, student task execution is mediated in different forms. Lines 10 and 13 again reveal how the teacher responds to each individual group. For this group, she re-explains task instructions (line 10) and responds to students' confirmation checks (line 13). With the teacher's mediation between the task demand and students' difficulty, in lines 15-17, students begin to re-conceptualise the task demand by deciding to discuss one problem only. From line 17 onwards, students seem to be in fuller swing, and communication in English carries on, though with intermittent Vietnamese.

Taken together, the data have vividly shown the multiple roles taken by the teachers during students' oral task work. The process is, in fact, a social activity where all the participants (the teacher and students) interact and co-construct learning opportunities (Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Swain, 2001). The findings broadly echo previous research on teacher mediation (e.g., Berben, et a., 2007; Dao &Iwashita, 2018; Samuda, 2001; Van den Branden, 2009) which show the teacher provided language-related and task-related support. Yet the present study additionally essentialises teacher roles not in static predicted but concurrent responsive and fluid forms. Importantly, the teachers were well aware of the space wherein they should move and realise their roles in supportively accompanying students through the unfolding task execution and mediating it. In the words of Nunan (2004), "giving the learners a more active role in the classroom requires the teacher to adopt a different role" (p. 67). That is a reactive role, responding to how students do the task at hand. This points to the complementary function of the task and the teacher, with the former providing opportunities for meaning-making while the latter 'leading behind' and providing support (Samuda, 2001).

Note that the different roles the teachers adopted were justified to be guided by their beliefs, awareness and thoughts. Indeed, in their classroom practices they realised the roles that they aspired to perform as they believed in what worked for students in their teaching context. It becomes salient that tasks might involve unpredictability due to their holistic nature (Skehan, 2003; Van den Branden, 2009), thus calling for the responsiveness of the teacher as students (re)construe the intended task. Each student task execution in progress presents different territories for the teachers to carry out their roles as monitor, resource provider, mediator, co-communicator, consultant, and motivator, etc. It is these roles appropriately set in that mediate task enactment and language learning through tasks. While the reality of task-based language teaching in Asian EFL classrooms presents not so much a strong uptake of what TBLT claims to promote (e.g., Barnard, & Nguyen, 2010; Deng & Carless, 2009; Hood, et al., 2009; Tran et al., 2020), this study empirically provides insights into the practical roles of the teachers to impact upon student-student task-based interaction. "The relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization, can only be realised within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 30). Significantly, the present study has explored this relationship by documenting teacher roles in light of how teachers created, stepped in and manoeuvred the pedagogical task spaces supposed to be for both themselves and their students to enrich experiential learning through tasks. In addition, teachers' classroom role performances were informed by their beliefs in TBLT specific to their EFL teaching context that interactional support matters to engage students in task work and mediate English language production and learning.

**5. Pedagogical Implications and Conclusions**

The present research aimed to explore the different roles the Vietnamese EFL teachers performed during student task execution. The findings have shown a wide array of pedagogical moves the teachers made in response to the unfolding task enactment. Their timely response and linguistic assistance allowed students to engage and progress in their task work, creating favourable conditions for task completion, and importantly for students' task (re)constructions. Given that students might re-interpret an intended task in different ways (Coughlan & Duff, 1994), responsive pedagogical moves, not necessarily any constant heavy direct intervention should not be underestimated. Equipping teachers with a range of strategies and examples of different types of roles to perform would be useful in TBLT training workshops to benefit teachers.

The task might unfold in different ways as students work on it necessitates teachers to be attentive and sensitive to their students' needs. It is challenging as these needs are not always explicit in the form of requested assistance but they could be implicit via unsolicited help. This requires sensitivity, alertness, flexibility and skillfulness on the part of the teachers to identify what students need at given time points during their task work and fluidly manage their interdependent roles. Timely provision of mediated support (Lantolf, 2012; Poehner & Leontjev, 2022) could move the task forward for language knowledge to be co-constructed as well as learning opportunities to be created. As such they would render themselves *change agents* (Van den Branden, 2016) in the classroom, who will add more positive notes to the feasibility of TBLT in real life classrooms. It follows that teachers' classroom practices guided by their cognition are important for professional development (Borg, 2009; Borg & Sanchez, 2020). Thus teachers should be aware of the importance of the different roles they could perform, and how they should be fluid and responsive. Practical demonstrations through workshops and training would also benefit teachers to grow professionally.

Of course, it is not always practically possible to guarantee students' constant access to teacher expertise, especially in a large-sized EFL class which is not uncommon in many Asian EFL contexts. In this regard, it is important to train more capable learners or group leaders to be mediators who play the different roles of negotiators, facilitators, and language providers among others. Equipping them with a taxonomy of implicit and explicit moves for mediation and support (Poehner & Leontjev, 2022) could be a preliminary step so that students could play a complementary role alongside the teacher as creators of opportunities for learning.

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, it explored the teacher's roles during student-student interaction in EFL classes at only one high school in Vietnam, thus limiting the generalisability of the findings. Research of this kind should continue in other contexts to further understand the role of the teacher. Secondly, the study did not provide evidence of how teacher support helps language development beyond moment-to-moment task discussion in private groups, though the data from the larger project (Nguyen, 2013) demonstrated that these students transferred what they were able to achieve in groups (rehearsal) to their subsequent public performance. Future research could also consider incorporating post-task tests to measure learning transfer from teacher-mediated language/task support in peer interaction. Next, the present study used simple transcriptions of the interaction, further research might consider using conversational analysis (Hall, 2022; van Compernolle, 2015) as a more fine-grained tool of analysis to yield richer insights; video recordings of individual group interaction would also be insightful to explore non-verbal support. Despite these limitations, the original contributions of the present study lie in its central focus on the multiple emerging roles that teachers take on in facilitating classroom task execution and student interaction, a research area that has remained underexplored in TBLT research. It has brought together not only what the teacher can do to create opportunities for learning but also their cognition and beliefs, highlighting the necessity to examine teacher roles in the wider context of student task enactment and the underlying beliefs that guided their practices.

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# Appendix

*Transcription Symbols Used in the Paper*

| **Symbol** | **Meaning** |
|---|---|
| ( ) | English translation of Vietnamese L1 utterances |
| [ ] | The researcher’s comments/explanations |
| (.) | Short pause (.05-3 seconds) |
| … | Long pause (>= 4 seconds) |
| (…) | Deleted texts |
| [ | Overlapping |
| a-b-c-d | The speaker is spelling out the word. |
| ? | The speaker is asking a question or raising the intonation. |
| . | Falling intonation |
| , | Continuing intonation |
| ! | Emotional emphasis at the end of a phrase/sentence |
| T | Teacher |
| S1 | Student 1 |
| S2 | Student 2 |

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

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**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

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# 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

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**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. <u>But in my view, computers have helped us live</u>*

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

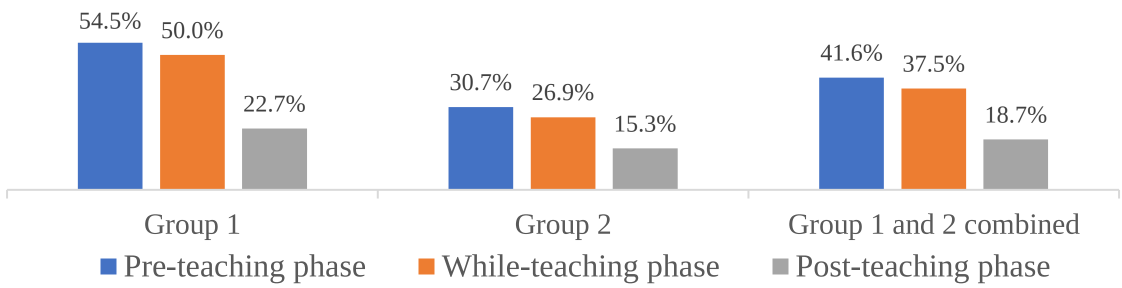
However, what the learners in this group reported about their tendency in producing thesis statements was not quite in accordance with what was reflected in their pre- and while teaching phase writing tasks. In the questionnaire, only 18.1% (4/22 students) in the group said that they never, or rarely 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).

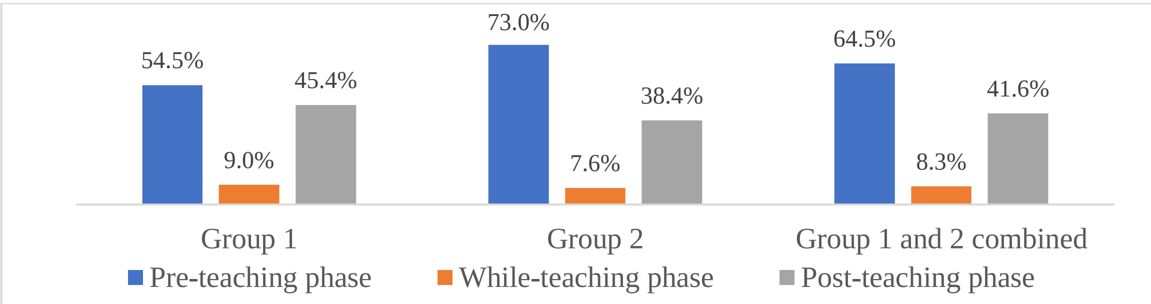
The problem discussed above is closely related to L2 learners' tendency towards indirectness in introducing the main topic of an essay. The analyses of this writing feature were based on the learners' responses to the concerning question in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and the interviews and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

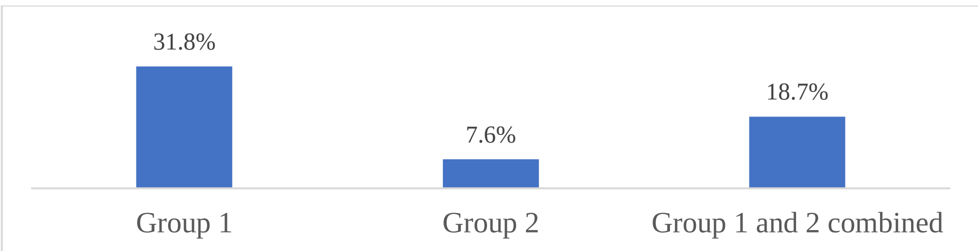
40.9% (9/22 students) in Group 1 and 38.4% (10/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 39.5% (19/48 students) reported sometimes exercising the practice. The reasons given in the interviews for their tendency towards not making outlines involved 1) the simplicity of the requirements of the essay or the familiarity 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.'

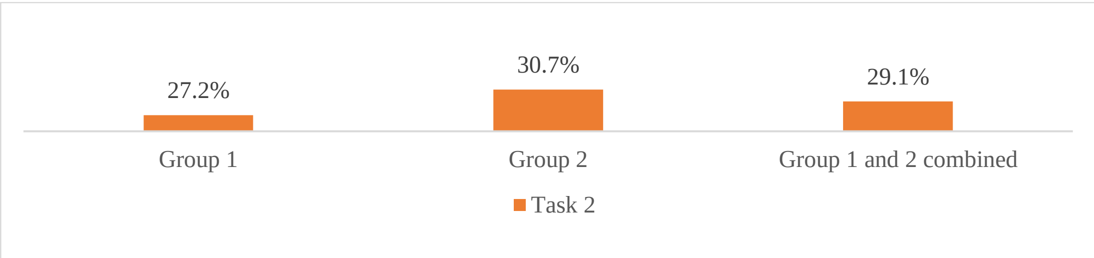
31.8% (7/22) of the students in Group 1 and 23.0% (6/26) of the students in Group 2, a total of 27.0% (13/48) of the students reported always and usually practicing this strategy in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. The most frequently reported reasons elicited in the interviews involved their following 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.

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# THE REBELLIOUS IMAGE OF SUN WUKONG IN "HAVOC IN HEAVEN" OF "JOURNEY TO THE WEST"

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**Abstract:** Wu Cheng'en's "Journey to the West" is one of the four great novels of ancient China, which has a great influence in East Asian countries including Vietnam. In its first part, it tells the story of a Monkey King, Sun Wukong, who engages in "Havoc in Heaven" and portrays a rebellious image in it. This article elaborates on the formation and significance of this image through analysis and synthesis, providing a useful reference for Vietnamese teachers and students to teach and study ancient Chinese literature.

*Keywords:* Sun Wukong, "Journey to the West", rebellious image, ancient Chinese literature

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# HÌNH ẢNH NỔI LOẠN CỦA TÔN NGỘ KHÔNG TRONG "ĐẠI NÁO THIÊN CUNG" CỦA "TÂY DU KÝ"

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**Tóm tắt:** "Tây Du Ký" của Ngô Thừa Ân là một trong bốn tiểu thuyết kinh điển của Trung Quốc cổ đại, có ảnh hưởng lớn đến các quốc gia Đông Á, trong đó có Việt Nam. Phần đầu tiên của "Tây Du Ký" kể về vua khỉ Tôn Ngộ Không với một hình ảnh nổi loạn trong "Đại náo thiên cung". Bài viết này trình bày sự hình thành và ý nghĩa của hình ảnh nổi loạn này thông qua phương pháp phân tích và tổng hợp, qua đó cung cấp một tài liệu tham khảo hữu ích cho giảng viên và sinh viên Việt Nam khi giảng dạy và nghiên cứu về văn học cổ Trung Quốc.

*Từ khóa:* Tôn Ngộ Không, "Tây Du Ký", hình ảnh nổi loạn, văn học cổ đại Trung Quốc

## 1. Introduction

*Wu Cheng'en* (吴承恩)'s *"Journey to the West"* (西游记) is one of "the four ancient Chinese novels", which has a strong influence in East Asia, including Vietnam, and even the world. Among them, the first seven chapters of this novel serve as a relatively independent part, telling the story of Monkey King, *Sun Wukong* (孙悟空), who engages in "Havoc in heaven". Among them, *Sun Wukong* is portrayed as a "Byronic hero", specifically a hero image that emphasizes rebellion against reality (Wang, 2015, p. 299). Obviously, this contradicts the conclusion that "comedy is more developed and distinctive than tragedy in Chinese literature" (Hanan, 1981). This also attracts people to explore this unique image.

In traditional literary interpretation, the main theme of "*Journey to the West*" and the interpretation of *Sun Wukong*'s character images change with different perspectives. Ancient Chinese interpreters interpreted "*Journey to the West*" as "a book that explores human nature", with the main theme of "exploring *Zen* and Taoist thought" (Wu, 2002, p. 317). Therefore, traditional interpretations of the image of *Sun Wukong* regard it as the "inner spirit, consciousness, and thinking" (心之神) (Chen, 2002, p. 225-226). This interpretation has always been the mainstream view, until the transformation of modern Chinese literary concepts and the translation of the entire novel into other languages led to an increase in research in other countries, thereby diversifying related interpretations. Among them, there are three most typical statements: The first viewpoint views *Sun Wukong* as a symbol of guiding and leading to "another world"; The second viewpoint holds that *Sun Wukong* is the romanticism incarnation of the civic ideal of resisting feudal society; The third viewpoint holds that *Sun Wukong* is a representative of those who pursue life values such as "freedom and equality" (Chūbachi, 1983; Zhu, 1978; Zhou, 1997). It is worth noting that the diversity of these interpretations largely stems from the diversity of the text in "*Journey to the West*". "The extreme fantasy of its events and the extreme secrecy of its meaning" in the text of "*Journey to the West*" often leads readers to have a characteristic of "understanding those wonderful truths that can only be understood with the soul and cannot be conveyed through language" - this also makes the interpretation related to the reader's own knowledge background (Zhang, 2002; Liu, 2002). A feasible approach to this is to regress to the text itself and seamlessly integrate the explanatory perspective into the intended meaning of the text - this can effectively avoid subjectivity in interpretation. This approach is also referred to by sinologist Glen Dudbridge (2005) as the "internal identification of stories" in Chinese classical novels.

This article follows this approach, which is the analysis of the text. In addition, some inspiring literature was combined and these ideas were integrated on this basis. Especially when there are multiple prototypes of the image of *Sun Wukong*, it is necessary to examine various cultural texts (Dudbridge, 1970). This article explores the rebellious image of *Sun Wukong* in “*Journey to the West*” through these methods, especially exploring how this image is portrayed and the meanings it carries. These discussions will provide reference for Vietnamese teachers and students to teach ancient Chinese literature.

## 2. Background

*Wu Cheng'en*'s *"Journey to the West"* was written during the *Wanli* (萬曆) period of the Ming Dynasty. It is a comprehensive work on “the literary creation of the past *Xuanzang*'s study abroad in India and taking away Buddhist classics", and it is also a peak. Unlike previous literary creations, it provides a more complete plot, more distinctive language, and more realistic meaning. Moreover, the protagonist of the entire novel is no longer *Xuanzang* (玄奘), but *Sun Wukong*.

*Wu Cheng'en* designed *Sun Wukong* as a monkey demon, but its image combines both monkey and human characteristics, especially in terms of appearance. "Monkey" has multiple meanings in ancient Chinese culture, such as sensitivity, intelligence, auspiciousness, and wealth. Among them, wealth and status are due to its pronunciation in Chinese being the same as "marquis". At the same time as the book "*Journey to the West*" was written, Chinese novels and dramas were popular with the image of the "righteous monkey" who had the quality of repaying kindness. This design not only contains various cultural metaphors, but also endows this character with richer and more complex symbolism - for example, this character retains the instincts and impulses of monkeys, but also possesses human intelligence and abilities, which gives it a duality of wildness and civilization. In addition, the most primitive image of Sun Wukong is related to Buddhist literature and folk mythology, such as the macaque who offered honey to the Buddha in “*Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*” (大唐西域記）and Sun Wukong who used skin drums to spread knowledge in Qiang (羌) mythology - this means that the image of *Sun Wukong* contains Buddhist symbolic meanings represented by “*Buddha's previous life tale*” (Jātaka, 本生經) records and certain folk mythological meanings (Xuanzang, 2005, pp. 75-76; Graham, 1958, p. 42).

The first seven chapters of “*Journey to the West*” tell the story of *Sun Wukong*'s "Havoc in Heaven", even though a large part of it seems unrelated to "Havoc in Heaven" - in fact, they are actually strongly related to "Havoc in Heaven". For example, *Sun Wukong*'s birth plot showcases the extraordinary identity of this character and suggests that unusual events will occur in the future, that is, "Havoc in Heaven". This section is relatively independent, and the rebellious image of *Sun Wukong* in this section is in sharp contrast to the image of obedience in the later "Journey to the West to Obtain Buddhist Classics", which makes the rebellious image of *Sun Wukong* in this section a very noteworthy research subject.

## 3. Expression of Rebellious Images

### *3.1. The Rebellious Image in Rebellion*

In fact, the essence of the entire "Havoc in Heaven" section is the struggle between *Sun Wukong* and the Heavenly Court, and in this struggle, *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image is shaped.

The most superficial character portrayal is the rebellion against the “Heavenly Court” (天庭) and the damage caused to it. For example, *Wu Cheng'en*'s positive description of "Havoc in Heaven" reads: "... The Monkey King (*Sun Wukong*) swung an iron rod and struck and destroyed it in any direction, all the way to the place where the Jade Emperor lived and worked." (Wu, 1987, p. 45). In the later memories of “*Monk Sha*” (**沙僧**), *Wu Cheng'en* designed a line that used a side profile description to illustrate how terrifying this rebellion was for the Heavenly Court: "He (*Sun Wukong*) once ‘Havoc in Heaven’", waving a golden cudgel. Among the 100,000 Heavenly Soldiers, none were his opponents. This rebellion frightened the *Taishang laojun* and the Jade Emperor." (Wu, 1987, p. 481). One piece of evidence can reflect the Heavenly Court's fear of *Sun Wukong*'s "Havoc in Heaven" - after *Sun Wukong* was defeated by the Tathagata (**如来**), he endured the imprisonment and punishment of " eating iron pills when hungry, drinking copper juice when thirsty. From the past to the present, he was both cold and hungry, without death" (Wu, 1987, p. 98). These descriptions portray *Sun Wukong* as a rebellious character.

In addition, *Wu Cheng'en*'s portrayal of *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image is not limited to what was previously mentioned, but also includes *Sun Wukong*'s attitude towards the Heavenly Court and the spirit of struggle embodied therein. *Sun Wukong*'s attitude towards the Heavenly Court (the authority of the world) is fearless, dissatisfied, and angry. This is perfectly reflected in his statement to *Yanwang*, "Done deal! Done deal! This time, it's out of your hands!" (Wu, 1987, p. 21). After being arrested by the “*Erlang Shen*” (二郎神), *Sun Wukong* continued to resist and persevere while being punished, attempting to fight his own rebellious behavior to the end and repeatedly mocking the executioners in the Heavenly Court. This also means that there is a spirit of struggle in his resistance to the Heavenly Court, which runs through his fearlessness, dissatisfaction, and anger towards the Heavenly Court.

### *3.2. Motivation for Resistance Behavior*

The author of “*Journey to the West*” reveals the motives behind *Sun Wukong*'s "Havoc in Heaven", which actually largely shapes *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image.

The most direct motivation for *Sun Wukong*'s "Havoc in Heaven" was his dissatisfaction with the official positions (mainly the size) granted by the Heavenly Court. *Sun Wukong* was granted official positions by the Heavenly Court twice, the first being the "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court" (弼马温), and the second being the "great sage equal to the heavens" (齐天大圣). But *Sun Wukong* was dissatisfied with both of the official positions awarded. This is already reflected in the title of Chapter 4, "(*Sun Wukong*) still dissatisfied with being granted the position of 'official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court', and still cannot obtain peace even after being registered as' great sage equal to the gods'.". Especially for the first time being awarded as a "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court", the fact that the official position was so small that it did “not enter the ranking of official ranks” made Sun Wukong very dissatisfied with this - which also led to *Zhu Bajie*（猪八戒）frequently using this official position to mock, ridicule, and anger Sun Wukong in the subsequent "Journey to the West to Obtain Buddhist Classics" process.

The most direct reason why *Sun Wukong* hopes to obtain an official position in the Heavenly Court is that he hopes to obtain "eternal life". This is actually why he initially chose to go elsewhere to learn how to cultivate himself - he once said, "Learn to 'eternal life' to avoid death." (Wu, 1987, p. 4). But his way of obtaining 'eternal life' seems to be unrecognized by the heavens. After a banquet, *Sun Wukong* was taken to the underworld, and the ghost in charge of soul seduction gave the reason that "your life should end today. The two of us lead the approval to seduce your soul." (Wu, 1987, p. 20). For *Sun Wukong*, this is naturally unacceptable - it is also the most primitive reason for his aversion to the Heavenly Court.

It is worth noting that *Sun Wukong*'s persistence in "eternal life" is essentially a pursuit of freedom - a freedom to escape the cycle created by the order of life and death, as well as the freedom to pursue self-worth. For *Sun Wukong*, this is an absolute freedom, more precisely, it is the freedom to live freely after breaking free from the cycle of life and death - this is also the self-worth he pursues. This pursuit of self-worth creates an irreconcilable conflict with the restrictive order symbolized by the Heavenly Court. That is to say, the essence of "Havoc in Heaven" is the contradiction between two values, namely whether to "follow - rebel" the order due to freedom (Cui, 2008). For *Sun Wukong*, breaking free from the cycle of life and death, he could continue to maintain his life of "walking and jumping, eating plants, drinking spring water, collecting flowers in the mountains, and searching for fruit from trees. teamed up with wolves and insects, tigers and leopards, made friends with deer, and became relatives with macaques and apes. lived under rocky cliffs at night and visited peaks and caves in the morning." (Wu, 1987, p. 2). The depiction of this kind of life is very similar to the traditional Chinese concept of "carefree". Before overseeing the "Peach Garden"（蟠桃园）, *Sun Wukong* also lived a similar life in the sky. *Wu Cheng'en* describes it:

> The home of "great sage equal to the gods" with personnel from two institutions serving as attendants. (*Sun Wukong*) only knows how to eat three meals a day, sleep in the same bed at night, and live a carefree life. During this free time, (*Sun Wukong*) meets friends, visits palaces, makes friends, and builds friendships. When they see Sanqing, they call them "elders", and when they meet four emperors, they call them "Your Majesty". Be brothers with nine bright stars, five generals, twenty-eight constellations, four heavenly kings, twelve heavenly masters, five elders, all celestial stars, and the river god, and call each other by their names. They are going east today and west tomorrow, their movements are unpredictable. (Wu, 1987, p. 30)

In addition, the defense of self-dignity was also a motivation for *Sun Wukong* to engage in "Havoc in Heaven". As mentioned earlier, the size of an official position essentially represents the Heavenly Court's view on its abilities, especially in the context of Chinese culture emphasizing that "name and strength match". For *Sun Wukong*, the mistake made by the Heavenly Court in granting him official positions was a disrespect, contempt, and misjudgment of his strength. For example, when *Sun Wukong* learned about the size of the "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court", he said, "(The Jade Emperor) despises me so much! I am in *Huaguoshan*, known as the Great King and Ancestor. How could I be deceived into raising horses for him? The people who raise horses are all ordinary people and have lowly jobs. How could they treat me like this? I won't do this official anymore! I won't do this official anymore! I will leave!" (Wu, 1987, p. 25). For the Heavenly Court, *Sun Wukong* is just a life ruled by him - in the absolute dominance relationship considered by the Heavenly Court, *Sun Wukong*, like other ordinary lives, is in a lowly position. When the *Sun Wukong* was born, his attitude towards this was "the following creatures are produced by the essence of the world, which is not surprising" (Wu, 1987, p. 2). Even if *Sun Wukong* was granted an official position by the Heavenly Court, it was out of "granting him an official position, giving him a name, and binding him in heaven. If he obeys the Heavenly Court's orders, he will be promoted and rewarded later. If he violates the Heavenly Court's orders, he can be arrested here directly." (Wu, 1987, p. 22). In *Sun Wukong*'s view, the Heavenly Court and its system regarding talents are "disrespectful" - *Sun Wukong*'s understanding is correct, because *Erlang Shen*, who was able to capture him in the end, was only a "mortal sacrifice" rather than a celestial offering. The rebellion against the Heavenly Court and its talent system became his way to awaken and maintain his own dignity - by proving through struggle that the Heavenly Court's attitude towards him was wrong, thus proving his extraordinary abilities. Here is evidence that after he learned of the lowliness of the "official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court" and left, a monkey suggested that he self-proclaimed his official position. The monkey said, "King, why do you have such abilities to raise horses for him? Why not do 'great sage equal to the gods'? What's not allowed?" (Wu, 1987, p. 25). For the Heavenly Court, "Havoc in Heaven" is also a negation of its talent system, at least to a large extent subverting the understanding of the rulers of the Heavenly Court. For example, *Juling Shen* (巨灵神) once lamented, "The official who raised the horses of the Heavenly Court has great abilities! After being defeated by him, I came to apologize." (Wu, 1987, p. 27). The Jade Emperor, on the other hand, said with a questioning attitude, "What is the ability and means of this monkey demon to defeat 100,000 Heavenly Soldiers!" (Wu, 1987, p. 39).

The aforementioned motivations reveal the deeper reasons behind *Sun Wukong*'s "Havoc in Heaven". More precisely, the entire behavior of "Havoc in Heaven" is no longer a simple rebellion, but a concentrated expression of *Sun Wukong*'s personality, strength, and pursuit of certain values (such as freedom and dignity) as a rebel. It is no longer just a rebellion against the authority of the Heavenly Court, but more of a pursuit of self-identity and a longing for a more reasonable world. And *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image has also been enriched by the revelation of these motives. *Sun Wukong*'s rebellion is a manifestation of independence and unwillingness to be mediocre, a manifestation of the spirit of resistance for justice and fairness (such as the desire for Heavenly Court to truly affirm talents), and a pursuit of individual liberation, faith, and ideals.

### ***3.3. Supplement: Description of Personality***

The character image of *Sun Wukong* is very complex, which makes it not only have a rebellious side, but other aspects of his character image are closely related to the rebellious image. The other aspects of these images are expressed by *Wu Cheng'en* in the form of personality descriptions.

A very typical characteristic of *Sun Wukong*'s personality is his aversion to constraints. This personality is actually a manifestation of Arthur Schopenhauer's instinct for the survival and reproduction of the will to self-life. In addition to the description of his love for life mentioned earlier, it seems that he also chooses not to comply with all authorities and existing rules (including etiquette). When facing the “Dragon King” (龙王) in charge of the ocean, *Sun Wukong* said, "I am *Sun Wukong*, a natural saint of *Huaguoshan* and a close neighbor of the Dragon King. Why don't you know me?" (Wu, 1987, p. 17). Another piece of evidence is that when *Sun Wukong* first met the Jade Emperor, who ruled the world, he did not make ceremonial visits. At that time, the officials of the Heavenly Court were very frightened and said, "This wild monkey! Why didn't he pay homage to the Jade Emperor and dare to answer here, 'I am!' Damn it! Damn it!" (Wu, 1987, p. 24). This personality makes *Sun Wukong* not interested in things unrelated to his will to life. *Wu Cheng'en* once commented, "Speaking of 'great sage equal to the gods', it is a monster who does not know the official position, title, rank, and affiliation, nor does it care about the salary, as long as there is a name on the list of officials!"

(Wu, 1987, p. 30). Therefore, *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image is merely an extension of his aversion to constraints, and also an instinctive act of survival and reproduction of his own life will. If viewed from this perspective, *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image is actually driven by his instincts.

Another noteworthy personality is mischievous. The formation of this personality is not only related to *Sun Wukong*'s own monkey characteristics, but also to his upbringing environment - *Sun Wukong* is surrounded by monkeys, which strengthens his mischievous nature. For example, a monkey beside him once said, "If the king's eldest surname is *Sun*, then we will be the second surname *Sun*, the third surname *Sun*, the youngest surname *Sun*, and the youngest surname *Sun* - a family with all surnames *Sun*, a country with all surnames *Sun*, and a nest with all surnames *Sun*." (Wu, 1987, p. 15). This kind of humorous and witty language can only be spoken by characters with mischievous characteristics. *Sun Wukong* also clearly has a similar personality. In the *Doushuai gong* (兜率宫), he said, "While *Taishang Laojun* is not around, I will eat some of his elixirs, which often have fresh flavors." (Wu, 1987, p. 33). This personality led *Sun Wukong* to choose different ways to express his emotions and demands, that is, to choose to engage in "Havoc in Heaven" as a rebel.

## 4. The Significance of Image

In the previous section, *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image in "Havoc in Heaven" was extensively explored. Journey to the West is mainly set against the backdrop of Buddhism, and in cultures that are based on Buddhism, any image carries its symbolic meaning.[1] So, what is the significance of this image? Here, we can explore the main themes of "*Journey to the West*" from two perspectives, namely the sharp satire on society and the fable on life (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

One obvious meaning is its social reality. The Heavenly Court in "*Journey to the West*" is actually a metaphor for the ancient Chinese government. The derogatory term used by the Heavenly Court to refer to *Sun Wukong* as a rebel, also known as "Monster Monkey," is consistent with the derogatory term used by ancient Chinese governments to refer to rebels, such as "Dao zhe," (盗跖) which is a discriminatory term combined with certain characteristics of the rebels. In addition, after the historical event of "Factional Struggles between Niu and Li Parties", the image of monkeys in Chinese culture has taken on the meaning of "causing trouble to the court" (Li, 2005). *Wu Cheng'en*'s portrayal of *Sun Wukong* as a rebellious figure with noble character is largely a subversion of the ethics advocated by the rulers at that time. The Heavenly Court is portrayed by *Wu Cheng'en* as a corrupt government, for example, after suppressing *Sun Wukong*, *Wu Cheng'en* describes the "Antian Dahui" (安天大会) as follows:

> The peach banquet was disrupted by monkeys, while *Antian dahui* was far superior to the peach banquet. In the gentle and auspicious light, there are flags and carriages of nobles and nobles, and in the auspicious atmosphere, there are artifacts and banners. With beautiful music and singing, accompanied by beautiful lyrics, singing loudly amidst exquisite instruments. The fragrance enveloped a group of gathered

[1] The symbols in Buddhism are the material objects represented by karmic activities at the external level and the psychological experience of the highest understanding of the essence of all existence, see (Choskyi, 1988). For example, the monkey symbol symbolizes "auspiciousness" and the understanding of auspiciousness in Buddhist culture, which means avoiding disasters. such as the amulet named Yantra Diagram in Tibet, and the integral part of Mthin, is a concrete expression of this meaning and understanding. The monkey images in Vietnamese culture also follow this path, including monkey statues reflecting the relationship between language and ritual in Buddhism and depicting Vinitarucci's sublime meditation techniques as images, see (TTXVN, 2016; Ban Nghiên cứu Văn hóa, 2024).

> immortals, and the entire universe seemed peaceful to celebrate their wisdom (Wu, 1987, p. 48).

Sun Wukong's rebellious image in "Havoc in Heaven" is not only a rebellion against the Heavenly Court, but also an attempt to establish a new Heavenly Court and its order - this is a metaphor for the rebellion in ancient China. Sun Wukong said:

> Although he (the Jade Emperor) has been practicing for many years, he should not occupy a position for so long. They all say, 'The emperor takes turns and will come to my house next year.' (You) just let him move out of the Heavenly Court and give it to me. If not, I will definitely continue to rebel and (let the Heavenly Court not obtain) eternal peace (Wu, 1987, p. 46).

In addition, *Sun Wukong* attempted to construct an order that truly determined its position based on its strength. He said, "The place where the Jade Emperor lived and worked cannot be given to others for too long. In the past, emperors in the human world had different inheritances. The supremacy of the strong should be given to me, and only in this way can heroes be willing to compete first." (Wu, 1987, p. 46)

It is not easy to detect that Sun Wukong's rebellious image is an anti-identity construction of the monkey image in Buddhist literature, which also hides the attitude of Confucian intellectuals represented by the author towards the ancient Chinese government. On the one hand, Sun Wukong's rebellious image is a departure from the traditional monkey image in Buddhist literature. The monkey image in Buddhist literary tradition, represented by the 129th fable in "*The Dispute Story*" (Garahita-jātaka, 諍訟譬喻經), symbolizes the special status bestowed upon bodhisattvas by kings and the lovable emotions of rulers, which is opposite to the relationship between Sun Wukong and Jade Emperor in "Havoc in Heaven". Moreover, Sun Wukong's leading role in the narrative is in sharp contrast to the memory of supporting role in the Buddhist art tradition represented by Kizil Grottoes (Zhu, 2012); On the other hand, Sun Wukong's rebellious image also follows the spiritual connotation of the monkey image in the Buddhist literary tradition. For example, Sun Wukong led the monkey's rebellion and attack on Heaven, following the virtue of the monkey playing the role of a beloved leader in the 407th story of "*Commentary of Jātaka*" (Jātakaṭṭhakathā, 本生經注) and the human king placing the needs of the people above his own in the 27th story of "*Wreath of the Bodhisattva's Past Lives*" (Jātakamālā, 菩薩本生鬘論). For example, Sun Wukong is not afraid of Heaven's judgment and punishment, and follows the image of self-sacrifice in the 56th story of the "*Six paramitas*" (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, 六度集經). This anti-identity construction and the reflected attitude towards the ancient Chinese government lead to another viewpoint discussed later.

Another perspective is actually to view "*Journey to the West*" including "Havoc in Heaven" as a fable, so *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image during "Havoc in Heaven" is actually a metaphor for childhood rebellion. Interpreters in ancient China tended to explore this from the perspective of personal cultivation, namely "the clarity of the mind and the manifestation of nature" (明心见性). This concept is reflected in the mockery of "common sense" based on nature, and is rooted in the playful meaning of monkey images in Chinese culture - this is reflected in Liezi's (列子) fable of 'morning three and evening four' (朝三暮四) and Shiji's (史记) metaphor of 'a monkey dressed up in a human's clothes' (沐猴而冠). In '*Journey to the West*', 'play monkey' is used as a unique expression of this concept: "Teach him to jump through hoops, perform acrobatics, do somersaults, and stand on his hands like a dragonfly. In the streets, he plays with all sorts of tricks, beating drums and ringing gongs, doing everything imaginable." (Wu, 1987, p. 296). The ancient Chinese scholar Li Zhi (李贽) once used "Tongxin shuo" (童心说) to analyze the image of *Sun Wukong*, especially his "cursing Buddha and ancestors" (呵佛骂祖) behavior, and regarded it as a category of life - this also follows the analytical path of "the claim of the mind and the manifestation of nature". This kind of exploration is obviously reasonable - *Sun Wukong*'s name itself has a philosophical meaning about life, that is, "When the world was just founded, there was no surname. To break this stubborn emptiness, one must be able to awaken to a realm beyond material things." (Wu, 1987, p. 8). Similarly, in Buddhist literature such as the no. 12 story in "*Storehouse of Sundry Valuables*" (Sajyukta ratna pitaka sūtra, 雜寶藏經) enlightened individuals are referred to as "kind macaques". The title of the first chapter about the birth of *Sun Wukong* is "Natural talent nurtures a source, and only through the cultivation of the mind can the Tao be born", which further confirms the rationality of this exploration. *Sun Wukong* has become a symbol of personal self-actualization and growth in his early years - as mentioned earlier in the article, and the personality associated with the rebellious image also points to the image of a child. Here, a comparative analysis can be conducted: in the myths of Chuanmiao (川苗) region lacking the plot of "Havoc in Heaven", the image of Sun Wukong has not undergone any changes related to "growth" (Graham, 1954, p. 211).

As a comparison, Hanumān in Indian literature is also considered one of the sources of Sun Wukong - although this claim is still controversial, it still provides a reference for thinking about the prototype of the "monkey" metaphor for human growth in the collective subconscious of culture.[2] In "*Ramayana*", Hanumān also symbolizes strength, loyalty, bravery, and justice, but it is also mischievous. In this work, Hanumān gradually transforms from a Rama assistant to a deity (Lutgendorf, 2007).

So, "Havoc in Heaven" can be interpreted as a tragedy of individuals in their early years who conflicted with collective rules in order to seek self-actualization, which is in stark contrast to the obedience and collective rule image in the later "*Journey to the West* to Obtain Buddhists Classics" process, as well as the resulting "achieving positive results" (修成正果). It can be said that the two stages actually symbolize the two stages of an individual, and humans need to find the meaning of life and pursue their own value in the balance of "freedom order". Furthermore, "*Journey to the West*" is a fable about the relationship between human "freedom - order", and it uses a distinction similar to Isaiah Berlin's "positive - negative" distinction of freedom to interpret this fable in advance. In addition, if we return to the discussion of "Havoc in Heaven", *Sun Wukong*'s rebellious image is no longer just an example for the survival and reproduction of the will to self-life, but also a pursuit of higher spiritual realms and values (including freedom) - this is also a fable about humanity (whether individual or collective), that is, humans continuously improve and move towards higher stages in progress.

## 5. Conclusions

*Sun Wukong* is a core character created by the author of "*Journey to the West*", and his rebellious image in "Havoc in Heaven" has become the main impression on the public - and also the most soulful part of "*Journey to the West*". *Wu Cheng'en* combines the tradition of "the literary creation of the past Xuanzang's study on road in India and taking away Buddhist classes" with the imagery of "Monkey" in Chinese culture, and shapes this profound image by depicting the rebellion and the spirit of struggle in "Havoc in Heaven". He also designs a series of motivations to rationalize and complicate the image and the events involved. In addition,

[2] About the temporal and spatial differences of Hanumān imagery in Indian literature and the unity of character representation, see (Nager, 2004) Generally speaking, it appears as deities and epic heroes, see (Narula, 2005).

some of *Sun Wukong*'s personality traits also make his rebellious image more concrete. *Wu Cheng'en*'s portrayal of the rebellious image of this character is actually intended to showcase two meanings. On the one hand, in the exploration of reality, *Sun Wukong* is a metaphor for ancient Chinese rebels; On the other hand, in the exploration of human beings themselves, *Sun Wukong* symbolizes the pursuit of self by humans in their early years, but inevitably conflicts with order. Perhaps this is also why "*Journey to the West*" has been enduring - its rich and diverse expressions have yielded abundant benefits for readers. For students and teachers who are immersed in Vietnamese culture that integrates Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Western cultures, Sun Wukong's image not only has significance in understanding Chinese classical literature and culture, but also inspires critical thinking on Vietnamese culture, especially in the process of learning about "*Journey to the West*" and related cultures (Nguyen, 2020).

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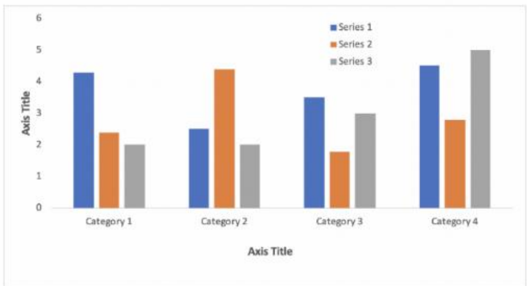
# THỂ LỆ GỬI BÀI

1. **Tạp chí Nghiên cứu nước ngoài** là ấn phẩm khoa học chính thức của Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội, kế thừa và phát triển *Chuyên san Nghiên cứu Nước ngoài* của Tạp chí Khoa học, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội. Tạp chí xuất bản định kỳ 06 số/năm (02 số tiếng Việt/năm và 04 số tiếng Anh/năm từ năm 2019 trở đi), công bố các công trình nghiên cứu có nội dung khoa học mới, chưa đăng và chưa được gửi đăng ở bất kỳ tạp chí nào, thuộc các lĩnh vực: *ngôn ngữ học, giáo dục ngoại ngữ/ngôn ngữ, quốc tế học hoặc các ngành khoa học xã hội và nhân văn có liên quan.*
2. Bài gửi đăng cần trích dẫn ÍT NHẤT 01 bài đã đăng trên Tạp chí Nghiên cứu nước ngoài.
3. Bài báo sẽ được gửi tới phản biện kín, vì vậy tác giả cần tránh tiết lộ danh tính trong nội dung bài một cách không cần thiết.
4. Bài báo có thể viết bằng tiếng Việt hoặc tiếng Anh (*tối thiểu* 10 trang/khoảng 4.000 từ đối với bài nghiên cứu và 5 trang/khoảng 2.000 từ đối với bài thông tin-trao đổi) được soạn trên máy vi tính, khổ giấy A4, cách lề trái 2,5cm, lề phải 2,5cm, trên 3,5cm, dưới 3cm, font chữ Times New Roman, cỡ chữ 12, cách dòng Single.
5. Hình ảnh, sơ đồ, biểu đồ trong bài viết phải đảm bảo rõ nét và được đánh số thứ tự theo trình tự xuất hiện trong bài viết. Nguồn của các hình ảnh, sơ đồ trong bài viết cũng phải được chỉ rõ. Tên ảnh, sơ đồ, biểu đồ trong bài viết phải được cung cấp trên ảnh, sơ đồ, biểu đồ.

*Ví dụ:*

**Figure 1**

*Sample Figure Title*




*Note.* A note describing content in the figure would appear here.

6. Bảng biểu trong bài viết được đánh số thứ tự theo trình tự xuất hiện trong bài viết. Tên bảng trong bài phải được cung cấp trên bảng. Yêu cầu bảng không có đường kẻ sọc.

*Ví dụ:*

**Table 3**

*Sample Table Showing Decked Heads and P Value Note*

| Variable | Visual | | Infrared | | *F* | η |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | |
| Row 1 | 3.6 | .49 | 9.2 | 1.02 | 69.9*** | .12 |
| Row 2 | 2.4 | .67 | 10.1 | .08 | 42.7*** | .23 |
| Row 3 | 1.2 | .78 | 3.6 | .46 | 53.9*** | .34 |
| Row 4 | 0.8 | .93 | 4.7 | .71 | 21.1*** | .45 |

***p < .01.

**7. Quy cách trích dẫn:** Các tài liệu, nội dung được trích dẫn trong bài báo và phần tài liệu tham khảo cần phải được **trình bày theo APA7** (vui lòng tham khảo trang web: https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines hoặc hướng dẫn của Tạp chí trên trang web https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/index.php/fs/about/submissions )

8. Bản thảo xin gửi đến website của Tạp chí tại https://jfs.ulis.vnu.edu.vn/. Tòa soạn không trả lại bản thảo nếu bài không được đăng. Tác giả chịu hoàn toàn trách nhiệm trước pháp luật về nội dung bài viết và xuất xứ tài liệu trích dẫn.

# MẪU TRÌNH BÀY BỐ CỤC CỦA MỘT BÀI VIẾT

## TIÊU ĐỀ BÀI BÁO

(bằng tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, in hoa, cỡ chữ: 16,
giãn dòng: single, căn lề: giữa)

Tên tác giả (cỡ 13)*

*Tên cơ quan / trường đại học (cỡ 10, in nghiêng)*
*Địa chỉ cơ quan / trường đại học (cỡ 10, in nghiêng)*

**Tóm tắt:** Tóm tắt bằng tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, không quá 250 từ, cỡ chữ: 11

*Từ khóa:* Không quá 5 từ, cỡ chữ: 11

Phần nội dung chính của bài báo thường bao gồm các phần sau:

**1. Đặt vấn đề**

**2. Mục tiêu**

**3. Cơ sở lý thuyết**

**3.1. …**

**3.2. ….**

**4. Phương pháp nghiên cứu**

**4.1. …**

**4.2. …**

**5. Kết quả nghiên cứu**

**6. Thảo luận**

**7. Kết luận và khuyến nghị**

**Lời cảm ơn (nếu có)**

**Tài liệu tham khảo**

**Phụ lục (nếu có)**

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* ĐT.: (Sđt của tác giả liên hệ)
Email: (Email của tác giả liên hệ)