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A Cognitive Meta-linguistic Approach to Teaching English Information Structure for the Development of Communicative Language Ability among Learners of English as a Second Language

By

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Doctor of Philosophy

A COGNITIVE META-LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH INFORMATION STRUCTURE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE ABILITY AMONG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

By Tuan Anh Huynh

In the realization that second language learners' grammatical competence does not always guarantee their communicative language ability and that meta-knowledge of English information structure might play an important role in developing their communicative language ability, I carried out a project in which the learners in the study, who were considered to have adequate grammatical competence but unsatisfactory communicative language ability, were given explicit instructions enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure as an initial step towards the development of their reading and writing skills and ultimately their communicative language ability. The approach adopted in the study is action research aiming at improving the teaching of academic reading and writing skills to undergraduate students for their communicative development and at the same time contributing the clarity of theories of language transfer, and the role of cognitive approaches in communicative language teaching.

Answers to the following major research questions were to be sought. First, what problems do L2 learners have in their reading and writing in relation to their not having a clear and systematic understanding of English information structure? Second, to what extent are their problems influenced by their L1 meta-knowledge of information structure, and L1 strategies? Third, can a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching information structure improve L2 learners' understanding of English academic texts and structuring of written communication through which they might improve their communicative language ability? My teaching method is both knowledge-oriented and skill-oriented with each lesson being divided into two phases: meta-knowledge introduction and the follow-up skill development.

Four data collection methods were applied: questionnaire, interview, test, and classroom-based methods. The data analysis suggests that the learners in the study encountered the reading and writing problems investigated and that they showed development in their reading and writing skills during and after the teaching phase. My conclusion is that there is a causal relationship between a meta-linguistic approach to teaching information structure to L2 learners and their communicative ability development.

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Tuan Anh Huynh

declare that the thesis entitled:

A cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching English information structure for the development of communicative language ability among learners of English as a second Language

and the work presented in this thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself.

Signed:

Date:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Rationale

The ambition in doing this research began with my concerns about the current situation of English language learning and teaching in Vietnam and the problems many university Vietnamese learners of English encountered in their reading and writing in the English language leading to their not having reached a satisfactory level of communicative language ability.

Since communicative language teaching (CLT) was first introduced in Vietnam in the late 1980s, there has been some recognizable progress in the field of English language learning and teaching not only in the school or university system but also in many English language teaching centres all over the country (Ministry of Education and Training, 1993; Quang, 1993). A number of Vietnamese learners of English have reached international standards of communicative language ability as revealed in their scores in IELTS tests. Statistic figures released by IELTS^{TM} (2011) show that among academic module Vietnamese candidates, in the years 2007 to 2009, there was an increase in the mean band scores from 5.70 to 5.84, and in the above 6.0 band scores from 48% to 55%. However, Vietnamese mean band score is still lower than those of many other countries in the world and in the region. IELTS^{TM} (2011) shows that Vietnamese academic module candidates' mean band score in 2009 was ranked 24th among the 40 most frequent countries or regions of origin reported. In Southeast Asia, Vietnamese academic mean band score was lower than that of Malaysia (6.76), the Philippines (6.73), Indonesia (6.10), and Myanmar (6.00). Moreover, some current studies in the communicative language ability among Vietnamese learners reported that many Vietnamese learners of English could not communicate satisfactorily in the English language (Hoa, 2008).

There are geographical, historical, political, social, economic, and pedagogic reasons why the development of English in general and of CLT in particular in Vietnam is still slow in comparison to that in some other countries in the world or even in South East Asia.

It can be said that Vietnam does not have a long history of English language learning and teaching and that 'Vietnam's linguistic history reflects its political history' (Denham, 1992: 61). For political reasons, in the years before 1990, the predominant foreign languages taught

in Vietnam were at different periods of time either French, or Chinese, or Russian. The collapse of the Eastern block in the early 1990s has shifted the popularity of Russian to English as the most important foreign language in the whole country (Alter & Moreau, 1995; Wilson, 1993). Vietnamese government's policy of foreign languages showed obvious inclination to English in an Order[1] signed by the Prime Minister on August, 15, 1994 in which 'government officials would be required to study foreign languages, mainly and favorably English' (Thinh, 2006). Brown (1995) reported a decree issued by the Vietnamese government that all state employees under the age of 45 must be conversant in English. It was in this period that Vietnam witnessed a phenomenal explosion of English language teaching and learning (Denham, 1992; Griffith, 1991).

Although English has preserved its predominance until now and there have been huge efforts from the government, language researchers and educators, Vietnamese learners of English still encounter many problems in their communication in the English language, particularly in intercultural communication irrespective of their satisfactory grammatical competence (Hoa, 2008). Thinh (2006:8-9) though acknowledging the development of the English language movement in Vietnam since 1990 commented that 'as a result of a lack of regular inspection and assessment', the movement 'has also revealed various problems not only in management but in quality assurance as well'.

Innovations in communicative teaching methods have become constant concern of both education policy makers and language teachers (Hiep, 2005). Hiep (2006:2) pointed out that 'policy makers and teachers have been looking for new teaching methods that aim to equip students with a good command of English to satisfy various communicative needs in their future work.' Frequent CLT seminars and conferences been held throughout the country not only targeting university undergraduates but also high school and secondary school students. Among those conferences are the National Vietnam English Teacher and Trainer Network (VTTN) conferences, which are held annually. The majority of the agenda in these conferences is improving L2 learners' communicative language ability. In spite of there having been a shift in focus in most tertiary language teaching institutions from teaching grammar to teaching skills, learner's communicative ability seems to develop not in a

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[1] Government of Vietnam (1994, August 15). Prime Minister's Order No. 442/TTg to consolidate and improve foreign language training for government officials. Hanoi, Vietnam.

satisfactory proportion to their grammatical knowledge, and this knowledge of grammar has proved not to be sufficient for them to get targeted scores in skill proficiency or achievement tests. Hiep (2006:2) stated that 'the shift to the communicative approach does not seem to be successful in many contexts in Vietnam.'

Current studies in CLT have suggested several reasons why CLT has not been very successful in the Vietnamese contexts: large class sizes (between 40 and 105) of mixed levels students and lack of teaching facilities (Canh, 2009), lack of professional development among teachers (Canh, 2002), and the gap between teachers' beliefs and knowledge about CLT and their actual implementation of these beliefs in the classroom (Canh, 2002). Some other studies related the difficulty of implementing CLT in Vietnam to learners' motivation. Bock (2000), Viet (2008) and Huong and Hiep (2010) reported that a percentage of Vietnamese university students were more motivated to pass examinations than to achieve communicative competence. Trang and Baldauf (2007:100) based on the responses of 100 Vietnamese university students in a survey concluded that 'teachers and teaching methods provided the largest source of demotives.'

This situation has driven me into constant preoccupations with finding a feasible solution to the problem. Among the many solutions suggested, most of which involved how to improve our learners' communicative language ability, I felt most inspired by the realization that L2 learners' grammatical competence does not always guarantee their communicative language ability, which also suggests that something has been left unfocussed in our teaching method that might have indirectly broadened the gap between these two kinds of competencies. Anecdotal accounts of my colleagues' opinions and beliefs revealed that the current teaching methods applied in our university had not helped our learners much with their communicative ability development and that there must be a method with more specific techniques and classroom activities to help them solve this problem.

At the same time, formal and informal discussions among my colleagues about our learners' writing strategies showed a broad consensus that their written texts show obvious traces of their L1 writing practices such as delay in introducing the topic of the writing piece or ambiguity in stating the purpose of the writing. And I felt tentatively that it was this feature of their writing practices that had influenced their reading patterns in which they rarely paid attention to the structure of the whole text or to the topic sentence of a paragraph. This has become one of the reasons for my belief that meta-knowledge of English information structure plays a role in our learners' reading and writing problems and affects their reading

and writing skills. By stating my belief in the role of meta-knowledge of English information structure, I do not deny the effects of other factors on their overall skill development such their not fully mastering English grammar or vocabulary, or not having appropriate learning strategies, or not receiving relevant teaching methods, etc. Individual learners have various ways to develop their skills and different teachers could apply different methods to develop their learners' skills. However, I argue that discourse knowledge of English information structure might play an important role in helping them overcome the problems and develop their skills.

In the light of that belief, my study was a research into the interaction between a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing skills by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure (a brief introduction of this approach was presented in section 1.3 in this chapter, and detailed descriptions of the approach were discussed in chapter 3). The kind of texts of which issues of information structures are investigated is academic texts because this is the kind of texts that my learners are most likely to work with in their academic studies. It is hoped that the approach can bring some changes to the teaching and learning of reading and writing skills for students in Vietnamese universities, and ultimately to the communicative language ability of L2 learners.

1.2. Aims and objectives of the study

The study aimed at the following two objectives: improving L2 learners' reading comprehension and written communicative ability, and improving our teaching method leading to a better teaching situation in our institution in particular and in the Vietnamese university system in general. The immediate aim of the study was to improve our learners' communicative ability by adopting a cognitive meta-linguistic teaching method which focused on enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure. As stated in the rationale, our aim in improving L2 learners' communicative language ability had not been quite achieved and we were still struggling in finding a more appropriate and efficient teaching method which can guarantee higher levels of communicative ability among our learners. It would be ideal if I could set as the aim in the study to improve all the four skills, however, due to the time constraint of a PhD, I have decided to focus on the development of the two skills of reading and writing which more fell within my interest.

In the study, I would also like to clarify the following theoretical aspects in the field of second language teaching and learning: the role of meta-linguistic cognitivism in developing L2 learners' skills, the role of discourse knowledge (of which knowledge of information structure is one component) in L2 learners' communicative language ability, and language transfer theory in the sense of whether L1 meta-knowledge can be transferred to L2 skills causing problems for L2 learners in their skill development. I also hoped to clarify the role of teaching information structure knowledge in particular and teaching discourse knowledge in general in the skill development of L2 learners.

As concerns the first aspect, I attempted to see whether and how a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing can fit within CLT in its aim of developing their communicative ability in particular and how cognitivism works within CLT in general. I would like to place my cognitive meta-linguistic approach in the context of CLT because CLT is now widely adopted and highly plausible in all Vietnamese university institutions. Most English teachers in Vietnam are strongly recommended to be committed to CLT for the sake of L2 learners' communicative development. That is to say any innovations in our teaching method should not go against the general principles of CLT. In terms of the second issue, my concern is grounded on Bachman (1990)' framework of communicative language ability in which knowledge of information structure is viewed as one sub-component of language competence, a component of communicative language ability). Until now, there has not yet been any research into the role of teaching information structure in developing L2 learners' communicative language ability. As regards the third aspect, based on the analyses of my learners' reading and writing problems, I tried to see whether any of the problems were caused by the differences in information structure between English and Vietnamese. The findings in this aspect would help clarify theory of language transfer with respect to whether L1 meta-knowledge can be transferred to L2 skills.

1.3. Cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching reading and writing

My teaching method is cognitive meta-linguistic in approach, adopting Johnson (1996)'s DECPRO (declarative knowledge followed by procedural knowledge) sequence. In this sequence, learners, after being given meta-knowledge of information structure, store the knowledge in their memory as a database. When engaged in reading and writing activities in

which they are required to perform a certain task, part of the knowledge stored in their memory is triggered and retrieved to support them in performing the task. For example, they might resort to their knowledge of textual patterns to find out the pattern of a particular text to help them grasp the main idea of the text. The DECPRO sequence, in my view, is more relevant to L2 learners, who do not have sufficient opportunities to acquire initial procedural knowledge in a naturalistic way. I agree that not all declarative knowledge comes through conscious study. However, with respect to the teaching of information structure knowledge, my hypothesis in this study is that giving L2 learners explicit instruction enhancing their declarative knowledge is beneficial because such knowledge does not come unconsciously to learners in non-native speaking environment.

1.4. University Vietnamese learners of English and the current Communicative Language Teaching situation in Vietnam

Most Vietnamese learners begin learning English at the age of 12 when they start their secondary school. By the time they enter university, they have studied English for 7 years and many of them have gained some fundamental knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. However, their other competencies such as socio-linguistic or discourse knowledge are rather poor (Hoa, 2008). There are pedagogic, economic, and social reasons for this. First, in secondary and high school English lessons, students are largely given instruction in grammar and vocabulary (Van, 2004; Hiep, 2006; Le, 2000), although attempts have been made recently by the Ministry of Education and Training in encouraging teachers to shift focus to improving learners' communicative skills. Hiep (2006) and Le (2000) reported that a great number of secondary school teachers, after leaving their training courses in which they are trained and encouraged to use CLT, continue to use grammar translation teaching method. Van (2004) claimed that the teaching of foreign languages in secondary schools in Vietnam still encounters a big challenge due to the use of traditional teaching methods of the majority of secondary school teachers in which the teaching method is still teacher-centred. Canh (2009: 25) commented: 'CLT innovation was not being implemented in the way outlined in the official curriculum document. Classroom teaching remained traditional, teacher-fronted, and textbook-centered'.

Second, due to our economic condition, the typical class size now ranges from 40 to 50, or even more (Canh, 2009). In this situation, it is very difficult for teachers to pay attention to each individual learner. Third, learners' attitude and motivation is a big challenge. According to a survey done by Huong and Hiep (2010), 25% of the 250 informants questioned reported that they studied English because it was a compulsory subject at university or school and only 12% reported learning English for the purpose of communicating with non-Vietnamese speakers.

These claims are more applicable to ESP, EAP, or EOP students. I do not deny the huge progress in skill development made in secondary and high schools and universities where talented students in English are trained in intensive courses. Those students are specially trained to become teachers of English or interpreters. The communicative skills of those students are very high.

As concerns Vietnamese L2 learners' L1 reading and writing skills background, in secondary and high school, students are often required to read extracts for literacy criticism. Not many reading techniques or strategies are given. In writing lessons, learners are introduced to all the major genres. However, writing is often given as homework. Learners are often encouraged to make their writing more graceful by diversifying their writing styles or vocabulary usage. Ly (2007: 160) claimed that 'creativity is valued in Vietnamese writing, and the nature of creativity is more towards emotional expression and imaginary richness embedded in metaphoric expression with poetic and figurative word usage and flow of thinking, rather than associated with the logic of constructing arguments as in Western tradition.' I believed that these features have interfered with their reading and writing in the English language to some extent.

1.5. Research methodology

1.5.1. Research questions

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

1. What problems and difficulties (if any) do L2 learners encounter in their reading and writing in English as the result of their lack of a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure?

2. Which among these problems arises because of the interference of their mother tongue information structure features and their L1 reading and writing strategies?

3. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their problems?

4. Can a cognitive meta-linguistic approach help the learners overcome their reading and writing problems and develop their reading comprehension and written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure?

5. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their reading and writing skill development?

6. Is the approach relevant and feasible in the Vietnamese university system?

The first three questions were concerned about L2 learners' reading and writing problems. Question 1 was raised on my assumption that many L2 learners do not have a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure and this has led to some problems with their reading and writing negatively affecting their skill development. In question 2, my assumption was that some of the problems my learners encounter arise because the meta-knowledge of their mother tongue information structure features and some strategies formed on the ground of that meta-knowledge have transferred to their L2 reading and writing skills. Question 3 emerges because of the fact that my learners fall into different levels of proficiency and I assumed that because of this difference, the extent to which they encounter the problems might vary. Consequently, my teaching method may affect them to different extents. In the study, the teaching method was applied to two groups of learners of different levels of proficiency. Assessment of their levels was based on a placement test done at the beginning of their academic year. The test, however, only showed the learners' grammatical knowledge.

The last three questions involved the impact of my cognitive meta-linguistic approach on learners' reading and writing skill development. Question 4 aimed at finding out whether the approach could help learners overcome their problems and improve their skills by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure. In question 5, I assumed that learners of different levels of proficiency would show some differences in their skill development. Answers to this question would offer me implications in adjusting my teaching so that it can fit learners of different levels of proficiency. Question 6 is an important issue in

my study because my method was expected to be executed not only in my institution but also in many other tertiary institutions in Vietnam. The feasibility and relevance of the approach depends on whether it can fit within the CLT now widely adopted in my country. Answers to this question would help me in my negotiations for changes in teaching method in my university.

1.5.2. Research approach

As stated above, the study aimed at improving our L2 learners' reading comprehension and written communicative ability in particular and the practice of teaching English for communication in the Vietnamese university system in general. The study therefore involved an ambition for changing in practice by applying a teaching method hoped to bring about the change. To obtain my aims, I adopted an action research approach to the study because of the following reasons. First, it reflected my ambition for a better teaching situation leading to better learners' communicative skills in our institution. Second, it required the involvement of my learners and my colleagues in evaluating the method. Thirdly, it allowed flexibility in research questions and methods.

1.5.3. Data collection methods

Two kinds of data: product and process were collected to help me seek answers to the research questions. The product data included informants' responses to questionnaires, their reading, writing, and meta-linguistic knowledge test scores, their answers to reading and writing worksheets and retrospective post-task answer-sheets. All the data were obtained from the learners except for one questionnaire designed to get my colleagues' opinion of the teaching method. As my aim was to investigate learners' problems and development in their reading and writing skills over all the three phases of the research, some data (the questionnaires, and the reading and writing tests) were administered twice, before and after the teaching phase, and the others (the reading and writing worksheets and post-task answer-sheets) were collected in the while teaching phase. The interviews were carried out only in the pre-teaching phase and the meta-linguistic knowledge test was administered only in the post-teaching phase. The reasons were given in sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3 in chapter 4.

The following four methods of data collection were used: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, tests (reading, writing, and meta-linguistic knowledge), and classroom-based

methods (reading and writing task worksheet, post-task retrospective answer sheets, and diaries).

1.5.4. Analytical framework

Based on the data collected and on the research questions, I have built up the following framework on which the data were analyzed:

- Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure before and after the teaching phase

- Learners' problems and difficulties in reading comprehension and written communicative language ability in terms of the factors related to their meta-knowledge of English information structure

- Evidence of mother tongue meta-knowledge of information structure interference in learners' reading and writing strategies

- Differences in features related to the problems between the two groups

- Learners' reading and writing skill development

- Differences in learners' skill development

- Learners' adoption of reading and writing skill-developing suggestions

- Learners and colleagues' opinions of the teaching method

1.6. Application of the study

The teaching approach can be applied in many kinds of English language teaching institutions in Vietnam and in some other Asian countries like Thailand, China, Japan, and Korea. My hope in the application of the approach in other Asian countries is grounded on the similarities in L2 learners of the region in encountering their reading and writing problems, for example in their tendency towards indirectness in writing as mentioned in Hinds (1987). Within the context of English language teaching institutions in Vietnam, it is hoped that the method can be applied where obtaining an IELTS or TOEFL certificate is in high demand or where English is a compulsory learning unit. English language centers where a high number of learners are attending to improve their skills to get the certificate or to prepare for their abroad studies is huge in number in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and in many

other big cities. Besides, in all Vietnamese university institutions, General English, ESP, EAP, or EOP is required as a compulsory unit and as an important tool for their future career development. The level of communicative language ability of students in this situation is quite similar to that of the students in my study, i.e. not reaching a satisfactory level. The approach, however, is not relevant to colleges and universities where English is taught as a major subject, for example in teachers' training colleges or institutes of international diplomatic relations. Language communicative ability of the students of these institutions, as stated in the rationale, is generally not a problem for most of their students.

In my plan for the execution of the teaching method, I will first apply the method as a model of teaching within several schools in my university (School of Information Technology, School of Business Management, School of Economics, School of Laws, School of Humanities and Social Sciences). The method is then hoped to multiply in many other English language teaching institutions in the Vietnamese university system where English is a compulsory unit in their curriculum and in many English language centers in Hanoi and HCM cities where most of the learners are desperately trying to pass IELTS and TOEFLS as a requirement to get their abroad education. It is also my ambition for the method to be applied in many other EFL and ESL contexts in the world particularly in several Asian countries where the learners share similar characteristics with the learners in my study.

1.7. Limitations of the study

There are limitations to the study and to the application of my teaching approach. As the study aimed first at bringing about changes in the teaching and learning situation in my institution and the targeted learners of the study are ESP, EAP, or EOP students who have studied English for at least seven years, its potential application in wider teaching contexts can be limited in some of the following aspects depending on the targeted learners' ethnic background, their level of English proficiency, and the nature of their English study. The approach is best applicable to L2 learners whose level of proficiency is intermediate or above and who are in the second year of their university level onwards. This is because learners of lower levels may find our meta-linguistic lessons difficult and beyond their comprehension. On the other hand, the method is not relevant to students whose major subject study is English because their language communicative ability is not a big problem. Students whose major study subject is the English language, for example, in foreign languages teachers'

training colleges, or institutions of international diplomatic relations were not the targets of the study. The level of communicative language ability of these students is generally considered as satisfactory because they all have to take part in a very rigid English test before being accepted students of the institutions. Moreover, the method may not be applied to non-Asian students of English who do not share the same problems with the students in my study. The problems they encounter might be typical only of students who speak languages rather similar to the Vietnamese language in such aspects as indirectness in writing. That is to say, whereas my method can be applied to students of many Asian countries like Thai, Japanese, or Chinese, it might not be quite readily applied to students of other languages like Spanish or French.

Another limitation of my study is the subjectivity in my interpretation of some of the qualitative data. These data include my learners and colleagues' responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires and their responses in the interviews, my scoring of the learners' writing, and my reflective accounts of the learners' reactions and attitudes to my teaching method documented in my diaries. The ways in which these data were documented and interpreted might be biased by my personal engagement with the informants. In full awareness of this pitfall, I have taken several measures to diminish the subjectivity of this data analysis such as prolonged engagement in the data collection process and triangulation in data interpretation in which the analysis of qualitative data was triangulated with findings from the quantitative data.

1.8. Thesis outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, I state the rationale for carrying out my project, the aims of the study, a brief introduction of my teaching method, a short description of Vietnamese university learners of English, the current CLT situation in Vietnam, the research methodology including the research questions, research approach, data collection methods, analytical framework, the application of the study, the limitations of the study, and the outline of the study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical preliminaries and review of the literature of studies in English information structure

The chapter is an investigation into the central issues of English information structure at sentential and discourse levels to see what aspects of English information structure are essential for my learners' discourse knowledge which will help them improve their communicative language ability. At the sentential level, four issues central to English information structure are discussed: the order in which information is distributed within the sentence, the given/new status of information exchanged, the contextual constraints on given/new status, and the syntactical devices used to indicate the given/new status. At the discourse level, information structure is seen from genre analysis perspective and the clause relational approach to text analysis. Also in this chapter I discuss some major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure in the assumption that these differences might cause Vietnamese learners some problems with their reading and writing in the English language.

Chapter 3: Cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing skills

Chapter 3 is an introduction of my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing skills in which knowledge of information structure is considered as the initial step into learners' skill development. The introduction covers the principles, techniques, and classroom activities of my approach in comparison to the currently applied method of teaching reading and writing skills in the Vietnamese university system. Information structure knowledge is discussed in its relationship with L2 learners' skill development and with pragmatic competence in Bachman (1990)'s model of communicative language ability. Also in the chapter, I discuss the interference of L1 strategies with learners' L2 skill development and the necessity of giving L2 learners meta-knowledge of English information structure in developing their skills.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

In this chapter I introduce the research questions, research approach, data collection methods, and data analysis framework. The research questions center around my learners' problems in reading and writing and the impact of my teaching method on their skill development. The approach adopted is action research based on the aims of the study. The four data collection

methods are questionnaire, interview, test, and classroom-based methods (reading and writing task work-sheets, post-task retrospective answer-sheets, and diaries). The data analytical framework encompasses the two major issues of our study: L2 learners' problems in reading and writing in relation to their meta-knowledge of English information structure and the interaction between my teaching approach and the learners' skill development including their overcoming the problems.

Chapter 5: Data analysis and discussion: Learners' problems in reading and writing skills

In this chapter the data collected in the field studies are analyzed to seek answers to the first three research questions involving my learners' problems with their reading and writing in the English language. The major issues analyzed include the problems the learners encountered as the result of their lack of a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure, the interference of their mother tongue information structure features and their L1 reading and writing strategies, and quantitative differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their problems.

Chapter 6: Data analysis and discussion: The impact of cognitive meta-linguistic approach on learners' reading and writing skills development

The chapter analyzes the data obtained to seek answers to research questions 4, 5, and 6 stated in chapter 4 centering on three major issues: the impact of my cognitive meta-linguistic method on my learners' reading and writing skills development, the differences between students groups of different English proficiency in terms of their skill development, and the relevance of my teaching approach in the Vietnamese university system. Data analyses in this chapter encompass the learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure before and after the teaching phase, their development in reading and writing skills during and after the teaching phase, their attitudes towards my teaching method, and my colleagues' opinions of the teaching approach.

Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, in the light of the findings and discussions in previous chapters, I come to conclusions about the whole study concerning the following major issues: whether and how

much the study answers my research questions, the application of my approach in wider teaching contexts, and the limitations of the study. Answers to the research questions involve problems my learners encountered in reading and writing and the interaction between my cognitive meta-linguistic approach and their skill development. With respect to the feasibility and relevance of implementing my teaching method in wider teaching contexts, my conclusion has been made concerning whether and how my teaching method and its elements would be accepted and implemented in the Vietnamese university system in particular and in second language teaching institutions in general. Conclusions about the limitations of the study mention groups of L2 learners to whom my approach might not be applicable and the subjectivity of my interpretations of some of the qualitative data obtained in the study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Preliminaries and Literature Review of Studies in English Information Structure

2.1. Introduction

In the introduction I stated my assumption that meta-knowledge of English information structure might play a role in developing Vietnamese learners of English's reading and writing skills in particular and their communicative language ability in general. In this chapter I report an investigation into the central issues of English information structure at sentential and discourse levels. The kind of texts selected to investigate is academic texts because it is this kind of texts that my learners are most likely to work with in their academic studies. The investigation gives me guidance in selecting meta-linguistic aspects of information structure to be incorporated into my cognitive meta-linguistic teaching method on the ground that they could be beneficial to the development of L2 learners. My teaching approach will be discussed in the next chapter. The transformation of the academic treatment of information structure in this chapter into a pedagogic treatment within the teaching program is presented in appendix H1 (p. 289).

The chapter falls into four main sections: sentential-level issues of English information structure, information structure viewed from genre analysis perspective, the clause-relational approach to text analysis, and a contrastive rhetoric of English and Vietnamese information structure. The first section is an exploration into the following issues of information structure at sentential level: the order in which information is distributed within the sentence, the given/new status of information exchanged, the contextual constraints on given/new status, and the syntactical devices used to indicate the given/new status. Based on the studies of Birner and Ward (1998), Ward and Birner (2001), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Erteschik-Shir (2007), and others I might conclude that these issues are fundamental to sentential level English information structure. The second section of the chapter discusses information structure from genre analysis perspective and explains how information structure can be viewed as one layer of genre analysis. Also in this section, information structure in terms of features and rhetorical structures of academic texts are highlighted. My discussions in this section are based on the work of such authors as Swales (1981, 1990), Bhatia (1993, 2002), Paltridge (2001), Johns (2002), Dudley-Evans (2002), and Hyland (2004). The role of teaching genre knowledge to L2 learners is discussed in chapter 3. The third section of the

chapter is an investigation into the clause-relational approach to text analysis in which clause relations are viewed as information structure at discourse level. The major concepts reviewed are clause relations, textual segments, textual patterns, and how they are related to the cohesion and coherence of text organization. My discussions in this section are based on Winter (1971, 1994), Hoey (1983, 2001), McCarthy (1991), and McCarthy and Carter (1994). The relevance of the approach to my teaching method is dealt with in chapter 3. Genre analysis perspective and the clause-relational approach to text analysis are seen as interrelated in such a way that both are concerned about the macro-structure of textual organization and both involve information structure as ways in which texts are constructed. The fourth section discusses major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure assuming that these differences might cause Vietnamese learners some problems with their reading and writing in the English language. Discussions in this section are based on studies by both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese researchers in the field such as Thompson (1987), Duffield (2007), Hao (1991), Giap (2000), and Con (2008). The discussions in this section are used for pedagogical purposes rather than as a research approach. In the conclusion, I summarize the main issues discussed in the chapter prioritizing and revaluating the points discussed with explanations of why and how they provide the theoretical background to the whole study.

2.2. Definition of information structure

Language users engaged in an act of communication in particular or in the whole process of discourse in general in order to express or negotiate their ideas and beliefs have to make myriads of decisions in terms of both intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic constraints if they wish to assure the success of the communication. Among the many decisions that language users have to make and which may determine their effectiveness as discourse participants is how they distribute information in a message. Information distribution, together with information exchange and processing, is part of a larger aspect of language use theory, which is often known as information structure. It is almost impossible to reach a comprehensive definition which encompasses every feature of information structure. The definition I offer below shows what I consider as important components of the term and which are further investigated in the study. It is also my ambition to bring forward a definition which not only is syntactic but also functional and pragmatic so that the learners in my study could have a panoramic view of the term and use it for further understanding and acquisition.

The term can be briefly described as follows:

> Information structure 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, 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 will be 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.

2.3. Sentential-level issues of English information structure

2.3.1. The order in which information is distributed in the sentence

Erteschik-Shir (2007: 1), while discussing the order in which information is distributed in the sentence in particular and word order in general pointed out, 'optional divergence' from the norm is inherent in every 'natural language.' This feature of word order information distribution has pushed language users into a vexed situation in which a fully justifiable explanation for one possibility of divergence in a specific context is never completely clear-cut. Pragmatically, how information is distributed is important in that it may affect the newsworthiness status of the information, directing the hearer/reader to the highpoint of the message. By saying so, I imply that there always exists two kind of information, the given and the new in a sentence. However, according to Bloor and Bloor (1995) or Prince (1981), there are certain exceptions to this rule in different text types or genres in which information

units consist of only the new. One is often found at the beginning of a text (or a certain section of a text) or the opening of a topic of conversation. The second is the outcome of ellipsis, when the given (e.g. the pronominal subject) is omitted. Even so, as Bloor and Bloor (1995) pointed out, there must be some assumed shared given prerequisite knowledge among interlocutors. So, whenever I mention information distribution in this study, I assume that any utterance consists of both the given and the new.

On the whole, information distribution in English is constrained by three principles and tendencies: the principle of end-weight and end-focus, communicative dynamism and non-canonical constructions.

Principle of end-weight and end-focus

The principle of end-weight and end-focus generally stipulates that clausal or sentential units bearing the most important information should be postponed towards the end of the clause or sentence for communication to be achieved effectively (Quirk et al, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In other words, more important information-bearing syntactic phrases are disfavored in subject position in canonical constructions (Ward and Birner, 2001; Erteschik-Shir, 2007; Bloor and Bloor, 1995; Van Valin and Lapolla, 1997). From the given/new distribution perspective, this is the tendency in which the given is placed before the new. For example, in the sentence, 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian' (McCarthy, 1991: 51), 'the Guardian' is believed by the speaker to be the new information in the sentence to the listener and is intended by the speaker to be the most important information for the listener. The tendency is considered to be unmarked as opposed to the marked or non-canonical constructions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Quirk et al, 1985; Bloor and Bloor, 1995).

Communicative dynamism (CD)

Information status tends not to be static but dynamic. Different parts of an utterance or different elements in a sentence might vary in their communicative value and the variation is really dynamic in real-time communication. This dynamism is called Communicative Dynamism (CD), a term originally created by the Prague School Linguists. In Firbas (1974), Werth (1984), Quirk et al. (1985), Bloor and Bloor (1995), Crystal (1997), CD is defined as the actual and contextual semantic contribution of each major element in a sentence and rated with respect to the dynamic role it plays in communication. The contribution of the elements to the CD is ranked in a scale which can range from very low, through medium, to very high.

Normally, information exchangers process the information in a message so as to achieve a linear presentation from low to high information value, which is somehow related to the principle of end-focus (Quirk et al, 1985). This value is contextually dependent and highlighted by some phonological devices such as stress and intonation in spoken discourse and by word order in written discourse. Bloor and Bloor (1995) pointed out that in an unmarked declarative clause, a syntactic unit bearing new information (normally final-positioned in the clause) has the most communicative dynamism. In the example 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian' above, 'sometimes' is lowest, and 'the Guardian' is highest in information value as intended by the speaker's linear presentation.

Non-canonical constructions

Parallel to these two principles and tendencies are some constructions such as fronting or right-dislocation in which some items of information are dislocated from their normal position towards either the initial or final position of the sentence to perform a certain pragmatic function like linking with previous discourse or compensating for unclear information, as illustrated in the following two examples:

> *The cheese* they sold mainly to the miners (Brown, 1983:322).

In the above example, 'the cheese', which normally occupies post-verbal position, is pushed to the sentential initial position to provide a link with previous discourse, the construction thus being termed 'fronting'.

> She reads the Guardian, Joyce (McCarthy, 1991: 52).

In this sentence, 'Joyce' is pushed towards the end of the sentence after being substituted by the pronominal subject 'she'. 'Joyce' is said to be right dislocated, and the construction is termed 'right-dislocation'. The function of 'Joyce' in this position is to compensate for the pronominal subject which the speaker, in his or her afterthought, believes to be unclear to the listener.

Non-canonical constructions are marked and highly contextually dependent. Detailed discussions about non-canonical constructions were presented in section 2.3.4, which dealt with devices used to signal information status.

The tension of order distribution tendencies and principles

There exists some tension among these tendencies and principles. While the principle of end-weight stipulates that the more important information should be postponed towards the end of the sentence, non-canonical constructions like inversion or fronting have it the other way round. This means that information can get prominence by occupying either the 'head' (left) or the 'tail' (right) position (Renkema, 1993:142) in the sentence. It is language users who have to decide which principle and tendency to apply in each specific communicative situation.

2.3.2. Given-new status of the information exchanged

Givenness-newness distinction

In the studies of such authors as Kuno (1978) and Prince (1981), the distinction between givenness and newness with regard to the status of information depends on either its recoverability or predictability or both. According to Kuno (1978: 282-283), 'an element in a sentence represents old, predictable information if it is recoverable from the preceding context; if it is not recoverable, it represents new, unpredictable information.' Prince (1981: 226) claimed if 'the speaker assumes that the hearer can predict or could have predicted that a particular linguistic item will or would occur in a particular position within a sentence', the item might have givenness status. Prince (1981) also argued that recoverability and deletability are in a correlative relationship, i.e. if an item is recoverable, it can be deletable. In the pragmatic and syntactic interface, the given/new status is seen as simultaneously affected by two parameters: the order of distribution, as earlier discussed and the knowledge shared between discourse participants, which Paprotté & Sinha (1987) calls discourse knowledge. Information, which may be new to a particular hearer, can be quite old to others. This status therefore is highly contextualized, dynamic, and flexible. In the example 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian', generally, 'Joyce' is given information, whereas 'the Guardian' is new as assumed by the speaker, i.e., the speaker believes that 'Joyce' has been mentioned in previous discourse, while 'the Guardian' is mentioned for the first time in the same discourse. However, different listeners in the discourse would treat 'Joyce' and 'the Guardian' with different statuses, i.e., some would see 'Joyce' as new information; some would see 'the Guardian' as old information.

Given-new and theme-rheme

Most authors discussing information structure, for example Dressler (1978), Werth (1984), Quirk et al (1985), Paprotté and Sinha (1987), Richards et al (1992), and Crystal (1997) mention the Praguean Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) which takes as its central concepts the sequencing and organization of information-conveying sentential units in terms of their *Topic-Comment Articulation (TCA)*. TCA is a functional approach which views the sentence as being divided into two parts, Topic and Comment, often referred to in several notational variants (though this conflation is not always universally approved of): theme (topic, known/given information, presupposition, basis); rheme (focus, comment, unknown/new information). The theme exists to create topic continuity by providing a linkage with prior discourse, while the rheme is the real reason for communication. Halliday (1970) metaphorically compared theme to a "peg" on which the message (i.e. the rheme) is hung. Speakers tend to start the conversation with something new in their mind (potentially becoming the rheme) which they wish to communicate and they use the theme as the 'point of departure' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:64).

Werth (1984:219) considered it important to give a reason for TCA and offered a two-sided explanation for the process. The first reason is psychological and expresses speakers' wish to construct a message in a 'maximally effective' way when conveying its meaning. The second reason is a pragmatic one with in which speakers should try to avoid ambiguity by speaking in an orderly and unambiguous way.

Some researchers e.g. Clark and Clark (1977) and Paprotté and Sinha (1987) have either implicitly or explicitly conflated the notion of given and new in the notion of theme-rheme and topic-comment; however, this is not universally advocated. Halliday (1967), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Fries (1994) and Lyons (1970) point out that though related and both being textual functions, given-new and theme-rheme are not homogeneous. Theme and rheme are speaker-oriented whereas given and new are listener-oriented. 'The Theme is what I, the speaker, choose to take as my point of departure. The Given is what you, the listener, already know about or have accessible to you' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:93). Fries (1994) claimed that it would be a fallacy to assume some absoluteness in the correlation between new and rheme and given and theme despite the fact that in general, rheme tends to be new information and theme given information. Many themes, especially marked themes are intended as new information. Similarly, not all rhemes are presented as bearing new

information. Moreover, some new information may encompass the theme and some given information the rheme. These distinctions can be explained in the following examples taken from Halliday (1967: 200) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:94) respectively:

John [saw the play yesterday].

Supposing the above utterance is a direct response to a previous question in the discourse, say 'Who saw the play yesterday?' in that case, 'John' bears the new information though being the theme.

I haven't seen you for ages.

If used as a counter-attack against some prior complaint made by another interlocutor of one's absence, 'I haven't seen' may be treated as new which includes the thematic grammatical subject 'I'.

The changeability of discourse participants' knowledge

Given or new information does not preserve its status permanently, i.e. it can be changed by time and by the participants. Chafe (1976), therefore, emphasized the real time an utterance is introduced into discourse and the status quo consciousness of the addressee when distinguishing given and new information. In his view, given information is 'that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee' when the utterance is being made and new information is 'what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what he says' (Chafe, 1976:30). That is to say, the same utterance addressed to the same interlocutor in the same place but at different times can have different given-new distribution.

The relativity of the given-new status

It is almost axiomatic that a new item is only relatively new (or unpredictable). Lambrecht (1994) identified as one of the categories of information structure the 'relative predictability of relations among propositions' (cited in Ward and Birner, 2001: 120). This is why many researchers use other terms rather than 'given' and 'new' while discussing information status.

Gee (1999), for example, used the term 'informationally salient' to refer to new information and 'informationally less salient' to refer to already known or predictable information. Meanwhile, some other researchers claim that a simple binary distinction between given and new will not suffice, suggesting more refined taxonomies. Chafe (1976; 1987) and Prince

(1981) suggested a three-part division, each using their own terms for the distinctions, and there is some overlapping in the referential meaning of the terms. In Chafe (1987:22)'s taxonomy, information can be 'active, semi-active (or accessible/inferable) and inactive' on the given and new scale. Inactive information, which can be brand new or unused, is 'neither focally nor peripherally active'. Active information, which can be given or evoked in the listener's consciousness, is the information 'that is currently lit up…in a person's focus of consciousness at a particular moment'. Semi-active (or inferable/accessible) information is already stored in the listener's knowledge and can be 'quickly activated'. This process can proceed in two ways, either 'through deactivation from an earlier state, typically by having been active at an early point in the discourse,' or by linking to 'the set of expectations associated with a schema' which is 'a cluster of interrelated expectations' (Chafe, 1987:29).

Prince (1981)'s division overlaps somewhat with Chafe's in the following finer distinctions with more gradations within the scale of given-new. Brand new items are those unknown in the listener's consciousness. Unused items are those whose concept is known but not yet activated. Inferable status is somewhere between new and given, having not been mentioned before, but inferable from participants' prior knowledge concerning its concept. Given elements can be either situationally or textually evoked. Situationally evoked are elements already present in the situation, e.g., the first person narrator. Textually evoked refers to those elements that have already been mentioned in the discourse.

Ward and Birner (2001) plotted a three-dimensional interacting pragmatic interface along which information structure can vary: old vs. new information, discourse-familiarity vs. hearer-familiarity, and relative familiarity vs. absolute familiarity. The authors then used a pair of inter-crossing dichotomies for the first two interfaces in which information is divided into either discourse-old or discourse-new and either hearer-old or hearer-new. Discourse-old information is what has been introduced, evoked or is inferable based on prior discourse, while, by contrast, discourse-new information is what has not been evoked in previous discourse or not inferable based on prior discourse. 'Discourse-familiarity' is determined by prior evocation in the discourse. The familiarity of discourse-old information might vary according to the degree of recency of being mentioned of the information. Treated as more familiar and thus being more salient is information mentioned more recently. Hearer-old information is what the speaker believes to be already available in the hearer's knowledge. The point here is that what is new to the discourse need not be new to the hearer. In general, therefore, in their scale, there can be four specific cases of old-new division: discourse-

new/hearer-old, discourse-new/hearer-new, discourse-old/hearer-old, and discourse-old/hearer-new.

The relativity of the given/new status suggests that in communication, for better mutual understanding, the speaker should make sure that an item of information he assumes to be given is really given to the listener. Otherwise, the process of exchanging information may break down when the listener does not really have the background knowledge the speaker assumes that he should have.

2.3.3. Contextual constraints on given-new status

It is almost impossible to define the given-new status of an information item when it is isolated from its context. Whether an item should be treated as given or new is constrained by the context in which it occurs. Prior discourse and cataphoric links are strong clues for status and they are especially important when the borderline of the given-new status is blurred. Furthermore much of this distinction depends on the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. Haviland and Clark (1974), while investigating syntactic devices used in English for explicitly marking information types, propose that when speaker and listener expectations match with respect to the identification of given and new information, communication occurs most expeditiously. In order for this to occur, interlocutors are supposed to make an implicit agreement in which the speakers are committed to refer to information they believe the listeners can uniquely identify from their background knowledge as given information and to refer to information they believe to be true but new to the listeners as new information. Clark & Clark (1977) called this the given-new contract. Renkema (1993) emphasizes the crucial importance of accuracy of assumptions and judgments made by the writer about the extent of the reader's previous knowledge of the subject matter on maintaining the given-new contract. In particular, she warns that inaccurate judgments may result in a violation of the contract and subsequently, a breakdown in communication between writer and reader.

2.3.4. Syntactical devices as information status indicators

In English, devices utilized to encode information and indicate its saliency status can be phonological or syntactical or a mixture of both. Relevant phonological units are stress placement and intonation, which are used to imply that information is new or given by giving some contrast with one word being stressed and not the other (Richards et al, 1992).

Syntactical devices include canonical and non-canonical constructions (Quirk et al, 1985; and Ward and Birner, 2001). In this theoretical background study, I focus on syntactical devices because my aim is to develop L2 learners' reading and writing skills.

Linking relations, canonical and non-canonical constructions

The status of being given or new information is, as earlier discussed, encoded by word order, which can be either canonical or non-canonical. There are in English 7 canonical sentential clause patterns (Quirk et al, 1985) and 7 non-canonical constructions (Ward and Birner, 2001). The selection of a canonical or non-canonical construction affects the word order and thus the given-new status. Ward and Birner (2001) argue that non-canonical constructions of English are resorted to by speakers for the sake of felicity in terms of relating information in a current context with previously evoked information in prior context. In such constructions, an item is inverted or pre-posed thus being itself a link connecting the current utterance with previous ones semantically. In other words, when an item of information is included in an utterance, it automatically falls within a linking relation, a term used to describe the relationship between elements of the current sentence and the prior context by such authors as Reinhart (1981), Fraurud (1990), Garrod and Sanford (1994), Strand (1996), and Hawkins (1978).

Canonical constructions

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), functionally, there are three different kinds of subject in a sentence: grammatical, psychological, and logical. When a sentence is viewed as consisting of a subject and a predicate, grammatical subject is part of the sentence followed by the predicate. The relationship between the subject and the predicate is purely grammatical. Psychological subject is what the speaker has in his mind to start with when producing a sentence. Logical subject means the doer of the action. The three kinds of subjects are exemplified as in the following sentence:

this teapot	my aunt	was given by	the Duke
psychological subject	grammatical subject		logical subject

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:56)

Canonical constructions in English are those beginning with a grammatical subject. Otherwise, they are non-canonical.

The 7 canonical clause patterns are introduced in Quirk et al (1985: 721) as follows:

Pattern	Examples
1. SV	The sun is shining.
2. SVC	Your dinner seems ready.
3. SVO	That lecture bored me.
4. SVA	My office is in the next building.
5. SVOO	I must send my parents an anniversary card.
6. SVOC	Most students have found her reasonably helpful.
7. SVOA	You can put the dish on the table.

Non-canonical constructions of English

Non-canonical constructions in English are those which do not begin with a grammatical subject except for conversing. Conversing is a process by which nominal clause elements can equally take either initial or final position in the sentence. This is the reason why a convertible sentence is considered as non-canonical although it begins with a grammatical subject. Following are examples of a convertible sentence with both acceptable orders:

An uncle, three cousins, and two brothers benefited from the will.

The will benefited an uncle, three cousins, and two brothers.

Non-canonical constructions undergo either leftward movement (fronting, left-dislocation, argument reversal, it-cleft sentences), or rightward movement (post-posing, right-dislocation) or both (conversing). For example, in fronting, an item which normally occupies another position in the sentence is pushed toward initial position, as in the following sentence:

This latter topic we have examined in Chapter 3 and need not reconsider. (Quirk et al, 1985:1377)

In the above example, 'this latter topic', which is normally positioned after 'examined', is pushed toward the beginning of the sentence.

Functionally, non-canonical constructions are used to perform such functions as focusing, contrasting, thematizing, topicalizing, or discourse linking. Focusing is the most typical function of non-canonical constructions except for fronting and left-dislocation. The function is performed by putting an element in a striking position in the sentence, e.g., after the 'it + to be' structure in the 'it-cleft'. For example:

I've always had morning stiffness, I accept that's part of my life. By the time I've had my pills for two hours in the morning, the stiffness eases and I'd sooner have a bit of stiffness than I'd have the pain. *It's the pain I can't cope with* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:785).

In the example, 'the pain' is the focus.

Contrasting is performed using 'it-cleft' and 'wh-cleft' structures to rectify interlocutors' wrong assumptions or propositions about an item previously brought into the discourse. For example:

And, say the authors, it was Mary Magdalen, not Mary the Mother of Jesus, who has been the real, if secret, object of Mariolatry cults down the ages (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:96).

In the example, 'Mary Magdalen' is contrasted with 'Mary the Mother of Jesus' to rectify a wrong assumption about 'Mary the Mother of Jesus'.

Topicalizing and thematizing are performed through fronting and left-dislocation to make an item the topic or marked theme of the sentence by pushing it to the sentential initial position. This is to orientate the listeners towards the main topic of the sentence. For example:

That new motorway they were building, is it open yet? (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:194)

In the example, 'that new motorway' was left-dislocated to signal its topical status.

Thematizing is also used in passivization to make the sentential initial phrase the theme of the sentence. For example,

Peterson would have been approved of by Tatum. (Werth, 1984: 12)

'Peterson' in the example is put in initial position to mark its status as the theme of the sentence and also to link it with previous discourse as mentioned below.

Discourse linking is performed through inversion and passivization to create a link between the passivized or inverted item with previous discourse. For example,

We have complimentary soft drinks, coffee, Sanka, tea, and milk. *Also complimentary is red and white wine*. We have cocktails available for $2.00. (Ward and Birner, 2001:129)

In the example, 'also complimentary' is inverted to provide a link between it and what has been mentioned in previous discourse.

Fronting

Fronting (Quirk et al, 1985), which is also referred to as pre-posing (Ward and Birner, 2001) or topicalization (Erteschik-Shir, 2007; Brown, 1983), is typically the pushing into initial position of an item which normally occupies another position in the sentence/clause to make it a marked theme. The item is in most cases an entire sentence/clause element. Often it is the context that urges the speaker to resort to fronting, either to thematize an item previously brought into the discourse providing direct linkage with what has gone before, or to initially introduce what the context most requires. Although English is a subject-prominent language (Li and Thompson, 1976), sentences with fronted elements are very common both in colloquial speech and in formal written style, particularly in journalism (Quirk et al, 1985). The fronted parts may be prosodically marked as marked themes and may be any of a wide range of grammatical units such as direct object, prepositional complement, subject complement, object complement, predication adjunct and predication, e.g.: (the italicized are fronted elements)

Od: *The cheese* they sold mainly to the miners. (Brown, 1983:322)

Cprep: *Others* I have only that nodding acquaintance with and some are total strangers. (Birner and Ward, 1998: 4)

Cs: *Rare* indeed is the individual who does not belong to one of these groups. (Sinclair, 1990: 429)

Co: … and *traitor* we shall call him. (Quirk et al, 1985: 1378)

Left-dislocation (LD)

Superficially, left-dislocation is rather similar to pre-posing in that an item is pre-posed, i.e. moved leftwards in the construction, e.g.:

The cheese they made there, they sold most of *it* to the miners. (Brown, 1983:321)

The canonically constructed sentence would have been:

They sold most of the cheese they made there to the miners.

Ward and Birner (2001), Erteschic-shir (2007), and Prince (1997) pointed out the following structural and functional differences between the two constructions:

Structurally, while in pre-posing the canonical position of the item is left unoccupied, in left-dislocation a resumptive co-referential pronoun appears in the marked constituent's canonical position. In the above example, co-referential with the sentence-initial item *the cheese they made there* is the direct object pronoun *it*.

In terms of function, left-dislocation is also distinct from pre-posing. In pre-posing, the pre-posed constituent consistently represents information standing in a contextual relationship with information either discourse-old or evoked or inferable based on prior discourse. However, left-dislocated item introduces discourse-new (or maybe hearer-new) information. In the above example, 'the cheese they made there' has never before appeared in the discourse.

Argument reversal

Argument is a structural-functional term used to indicate a phrase (mainly but not exclusively nominal) required by a verb as it complementation (Ward and Birner, 2001). In the reversing process, one clause element is pushed to the sentential initial position resulting in another element normally occupying that position being pushed towards the sentential final position. Argument reversal exists in two constructions: inversion and by-phrase passives, both subject to the same discourse constraint in that they both place relatively familiar information before unfamiliar information while performing a linking function. That is, the pre-verbal constituent conveys information interlocked in a linking relationship with a previously evoked or inferable item in the discourse. While comparing the two constructions, Ward and Birner (2001:130) claim that 'passivization and inversion represent distinct syntactic means for performing the same discourse function in different syntactic environments'. The two constructions with examples are presented below.

Inversion

The inversion process involves the logical subject appearing after the main verb, while other elements, canonically appearing after the main verb occupy preverbal position. Birner (1994) while examining 1778 naturally occurring inversions found out that in 78% of the tokens, the pre-posed constituent represented discourse-old information while the post-posed constituent represented discourse-new information. He also argued that felicitous inversion in English

depends on the 'discourse-familiar' status of the information represented by the pre-posed and post-posed constituents, e.g.:

We have complimentary soft drinks, coffee, Sanka, tea, and milk. *Also complimentary is red and white wine*. We have cocktails available for $2.00. (Ward and Birner, 2001:129)

In the italicized part of the example, the discourse-old item 'complimentary' is pre-posed to provide linkage with the previously mentioned 'complimentary'. However, there are cases in which both the pre-posed and post-posed constituents represent discourse-old information. In these cases it is the recency of being mentioned that appoints which element to be pre-posed, e.g.:

Each of the characters is the centerpiece of a book, doll and clothing collection. The story of each character is told in a series of six slim books, each $12.95 hardcover and $5.95 in paperback, and in bookstores and libraries across the country. More than 1 million copies have been sold; and in late 1989 a series of activity kits was introduced for retail sale. *Complementing the relatively affordable books are the dolls, one for each fictional heroine and each with a comparably pricey historically accurate wardrobe and accessories*. (Ward and Birner, 2001:129)

Though the dolls have been evoked in prior discourse, the reason for their being post-posed is that they are less recently evoked than the books.

Passivization

English *by*-phrase passives are sub-categorized with inversion as argument reversal because both constructions involve the reversing of the canonical order of two arguments. In such sentences, the logical subject is mentioned in a by-phrase, e.g.:

The device was tested by the manufacturers. (Quirk et al, 1985: 1389)

In this example, 'the device' is pre-posed for linking purpose, 'the manufactures', according to Quirk et al (1985) is the focus.

The discourse constraint for *by*-phrase passives, according to Ward and Birner (2001), is that for the sake of felicity, the syntactic subject must represent relatively familiar information leaving relatively unfamiliar information to be presented by the noun-phrase in the *by*-phrase, e.g.:

The Mayor's present term of office expires Jan.1. *He will be succeeded by Ivan Allen Jr.*

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In the italicized part of the example, 'he' ('the Mayor' in the previous sentence) is discourse-familiar and 'Ivan Allen Jr.' is discourse-new, and the sentence is felicitous.

If the information status of the relevant NPs is reversed, such *by*-phrases will be seen as infelicitous, e.g.:

Ivan Allen Jr. will take office Jan.1. # *The mayor will be succeeded by him*.

The italicized sentence is taken as infelicitous because 'the mayor' is discourse-new, whereas, 'him' is discourse-old. The given-new status of the sentence initial noun phrase and the by-phrase is not always clear because it is governed at the same time by both the syntactic determiner of the noun phrase (the articles) and the context. Consider the following example as analyzed in Renkema (1993:149):

A passer-by was hit by the falling debris.

The articles suggest that 'passer-by' is new and 'falling debris' is given. If so, an active sentence would sound more felicitous by linking the given with prior discourse. However, the passive is absolutely acceptable if the speaker wishes to put an end-focus on the 'debris'. In solving this contradiction, Renkema (1993) suggests subdividing the given/new into 'conceptually' given or new and 'relationally' given. Conceptually given or new items are ruled by prior discourse, whereas relationally given items are governed by the relationship between the predicate (i.e. the verb) and the agent (the by- phrase) or the patient (the sentence initial noun phrase). In her analysis, 'passer-by' is 'conceptually new', but 'relationally given', which justifies the discourse acceptability of the passive sentence.

In the case of agents or patients realized by proper nouns, the given/new status goes through a different distinction. Consider the following example:

Peterson would have been approved of by Tatum. (Werth, 1984: 12)

In this case, for felicity's sake, 'Peterson' is pre-posed, however; both noun phrases must be discourse-old and hearer-old.

Graver (1971) gave the following pragmatic reasons for using the passives:

- To avoid weak impersonal subjects

- To maintain the same subject in the discourse

- To disclaim responsibility or to evade personal involvement

- To promote the predicates

- To focus on objects of interest.

Cleft structure

The cleft structure (Quirk et al, 1985), or focus construction (Brown, 1983), is a construction aimed giving an item more prominence by cleaving the sentence into two parts. The outcome of this process is a cleft sentence, which is the general term for both 'it-cleft' and 'wh-cleft' (or 'pseudo-cleft'). Cleft structure can be said to have two simultaneous functions: focusing and contrasting, the contrasting one often rectifying participants' wrong assumptions or propositions, e.g.:

It-cleft: It was *the rain* that destroyed the crops. (Widdowson, 1978:35)

Wh-cleft: What I need is a good holiday. (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:75)

A loaf of bread is what we chiefly need. (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004:70)

What happened to the crops was that they were destroyed by the rain. (Widdowson (1978:38)

As shown in the examples above *it*-cleft involves the pushing of an item towards the front of the sentence after the structure "it + to be'. A wh-cleft consists of a wh-nominal clause which can come first or second in the sentence. The other part of a wh-cleft can be a nominal phrase or clause (e.g. that-clause or wh-clause).

The difference between the two is in their structural features. While the focused item is always in the first part of the sentence after 'it + to be' in 'it-cleft', in the pseudo-cleft, it can be in either sentence initial or final position. For this reason, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:70) call the pseudo-cleft construction a 'thematic equative' because in this construction, there is the equated proportion of the two parts of information in the sentence: the Theme and the Rheme. (Other constructions, e.g. fronting are non-equative, in which elements rather than the subject can be the theme).

Cleft structure (it-cleft and wh-cleft) differs from other non-canonical structures as follows:

Whereas the cleft structure functions as a means of focusing, the others (fronting, e.g. with the exception of existential there-sentences) functions as a means of topicalizing (Erteschik-Shir, 2007). In terms of the given/new distribution, while most of the other constructions (fronting, e.g.) set their items a very clear status, it is not so fixed with the cleft structure when viewed in the whole discourse, though it is always explicitly clear within the sentence.

Lock (1996) claims that cleft sentences are particularly useful in written English, where there is not the freedom to put the focus on different parts of a message with the assistance of the nuclear stress as in spoken form. In discourse level, they can be used to highlight a piece of information central to a particular stage in the development of a text. Widdowson (1978) calls this a way of achieving cohesion by developing propositions.

Post-posing

As opposed to pre-posing, post-posing is an information movement tendency in which an item is dislocated from its canonical position towards the typically (but not exclusively) final position in the sentence, either emptying its canonical position or allowing it to be occupied by 'there' (Birner and Ward, 1996). In terms of the given-new contrast, post-posing distinguishes itself from pre-posing in that while pre-posing enables the marked constituent to represent discourse-old information; post-posing enables the marked element to represent new information. There are two frequent post-posing constructions with the logical subject post-posed, leaving the expletive *there* in the canonical subject position, traditionally known as existential *there* and presentational-*there* sentences, e.g.:

Existential there-sentence:

"*There's a warm relationship, a great respect and trust*" between [United Airline]'s chairman, Stephen M. Wolf, and Sir Colin Marshall, British Air's chief executive officer, according to a person familiar with both sides. (Ward and Birner, 2001:126)

Presentational-there sentences:

Not far from Avenue de Villiers there lived a foreign doctor, a specialist, I understood, in midwifery and gynecology. He was a coarse and cynical fellow who had called me in consultation a couple of times, not so much to be enlightened by my superior knowledge as to shift some of his responsibility on my shoulders. (Ward and Birner, 2001:126)

While sharing the same feature of requiring the information represented by the post-verbal noun phrase (PVNP) to be discourse-new, there are two major differences between existential *there*-sentences and presentational *there*-sentences. The first involves the main verb used in each type of sentence. While in existential *there*-sentences, the main verb is *be*, verbs other than *be* function as the main verb in presentational *there*-sentences. The second difference lies in the nature of the unfamiliarity of the PVNP in each construction as to whether the information must be (or believed to be) new to the hearer or new to the discourse.

Existential there-sentences

As noted by Prince (1988,1992) and Ward and Birner (1995), the PVNP of existential *there*-sentences must represent information that the speaker believes to be unfamiliar to the hearer, otherwise, i.e. if the PVNP represents information which is hearer-old or both hearer-old and discourse-old, the post-posing construction would be unacceptable or infelicitous, e.g.:

a. I have some news you're going to find very interesting. *# There was on the panel your good friend Jim Alterman*. (Cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:127)

b. President Clinton appeared at the podium accompanied by three senators and the vice president. *# There was behind him the vice president*. (Cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:127)

The PVNP in (a) represents hearer-old information and that in (b) both hearer-old and discourse-old, thus disallowed because of their infelicity.

Presentational there-sentences

One feature that makes presentational *there*-sentences differentiated from existential *there*-sentences is that their PVNPs are discourse-sensitive, more specifically, the referent of the PVNPs can be both hearer-new and discourse-new or it can be hearer-old but discourse-new, e.g.:

a. And so as voters tomorrow begin the process of replacing Mr. Wright, forced from the speaker's chair and the House by charges of ethical violations, *there remains a political vacuum in the stockyards, barrios, high-tech workshops and defense plants of Tarrant County*. (AP Newswire 1989), (cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:128)

b. *Suddenly there ran out of the woods the man we had seen at the picnic*. ex.12), cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:128)

In (a) the referent is new to the readership and simultaneously to the discourse, while in (b) it is hearer-old, yet discourse-new.

Right-dislocation (RD)

As we have seen and as suggested by the terms used to indicate the constructions, left-dislocation (LD) stands in a close relationship with pre-posing, in terms of their structural and functional features, especially when it comes to the discourse constraints that regulate their communicative operations. The same scenarios of similarities and differences exist between right-dislocation and post-posing. Structurally, both constructions involve the non-canonical

placement of a complement of the verb in post verbal position. The difference lies in the given-new status of the information expressed by those non-canonically positioned elements, specifically, in right-dislocation, the post-verbal noun phrase bears no requirement to represent new information. In other words, the right-dislocated constituent represents information that has been either explicitly or implicitly evoked in the prior discourse, e.g.:

It bothered her for weeks, *John's smile.* (Brown, 1983:322)

In this example, 'John's smile' has been previously mentioned in the discourse, and so can be right-dislocated in sentential final position. The example also suggests that LD and RD are syntactically and semantically identical except for their clausal initial or final position (Culicover and Jackendoff, 2005).

Some researchers other than Ward and Birner (2001), though agreed on the given or inferable status of information in the dislocated noun phrase, associated it with some degree of newness, either as a topic (Davison, 1984), or as the most salient entity available for subsequent reference (Ziv and Grosz, 1994) or as a repair device for self-correcting potentially unclear references (Tomlin, 1986; Geluykens, 1987). Ward and Birner (2001:133), based on their corpus-based study however, argue strongly that 'right-dislocation cannot be viewed as marking information that is new in any sense'. In fact, also according to the authors, the dislocated noun phrase represents information that is both hearer-old and discourse-old, thus functionally differentiating RD from post-posing.

Conversing

Conversing is a process by which nominal clause elements can equally take either initial or final position in the sentence. The process is made possible due to the reciprocal meaning of some verbal, prepositional, or adjectival phrases. Often it is the context e.g., the given-new status of information that decides which position is optimal. In the following examples, the second order is generally preferred (Quirk et al, 1985) because it conforms to the given-new distribution constraints:

An uncle, three cousins, and two brothers benefited from the will.

The will benefited an uncle, three cousins, and two brothers.

In the second sentence, the definite article suggests that 'the will' is either discourse-old, or hearer-old, or both, and the initial position of 'the will' is assumed to provide a direct linkage with prior discourse, and is thus preferred.

Some of the verbs, prepositions and adjectives that support conversing can be found in (Quirk et al, 1985): benefit (from), rent (to/from), lend (to)/ borrow (from)/ give (to), receive (from), sell (to), buy (from), contain, behind/in front of, opposite, near (to), far (from), similar (to), different (from), married (to).

2.3.5. Summary of sentential-level issues of English information structure

In this section, I have discussed four major issues of English information structure at sentential level: the order in which information is distributed in the sentence, the given/new status of the information exchanged, the contextual constraints on the given/new status, and the syntactical devices used as information status indicators. The order in which information is distributed in an English sentence is constrained by three principles and tendencies: the principle of end-weight and end-focus, communicative dynamism and non-canonical constructions. An item of information in the sentence can be given or new depending on its recoverability or predictability. This status is relative depending on the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener in a discourse and on the context in which it occurs. There are different canonical and non-canonical syntactical constructions to indicate the given/new status. Each construction performs a specific function by placing an item in a particular position in the sentence.

2.4. Information structure of academic texts from genre analysis perspective

In the previous section, major issues of English information structure have been investigated at sentential level. In this section and the following section, information structure is discussed from a broader and deeper view of language description: genre analysis perspective and clause-relational approach to text analysis.

2.4.1. Information structure from genre analysis perspective

Genre analysis in language teaching and learning is an area of discourse studies in which attempts have been made into bringing about deeper descriptions of language use in professional and academic discourse, especially in the teaching of ESP. Bhatia (2002:21) viewed genre analysis as the outcome of a quest for 'thicker descriptions of language use' and of a shift of focus of language analysis and description from 'surface structure to deep

structure of discourse, from discourse to genre.' The term genre was first introduced in Tarone (1981) and Swales (1981). Three major approaches to genre analysis are mentioned and discussed in Paltridge (2001), Johns (2002), Grabe (2002), and Hyland (2004): the Australian work in the tradition of Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the New Rhetoric (NR) studies in North American composition contexts, and the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Grabe (2002:250), summarized the concept of genre conceptualized from the SFL, the New Rhetoric or the ESP perspective as 'a central concept determining how discourse is organized and used for various purposes-how it both constitutes and is constituted by recurring social situations that lead to recognizable and shared conventions and expectations.' Bhatia (2002) pointed out that among the features of genre theory, the three most important are: emphasis on conventions, propensity for innovation, and versatility. The most crucial feature of genre theory is the emphasis on conventions. Genres are essentially conventions on language use in conventionalized communicative settings. These conventions are socio-culturally constructed based on a specific set of communicative goals set up by specialized disciplinary and social groups, and thus establish relatively stable structural forms and constrain the use of lexico-grammatical resources (Bhatia, 2002). The second important aspect of genre theory is the propensity for innovation of genres. Genres are flexible, dynamic, changeable and negotiable. The third important aspect of genre theory is the versatility of genres due to the versatility of communicative purposes, and of the variations across various disciplines.

Given that the central concept of genre is the socio-cultural conventions that determine how a discourse is organized to reach a communicative purpose, information structure in the sense of ways in which information is distributed in discourse can be seen as the underlying operations of genre conventions realized in a text or a type of texts. These conventions operate at various levels including the information structure level, and constrain the choice of rhetorical structures as well as the choice of lexico-grammatical resources of a language to construct a text. The conventions evolve from various factors of the social settings in which a text occurs and regulate the way in which the information of a text is organized. These factors are inherently part of the socio-cultural context in which the text is constructed including the communicative purpose of the text, and the shared expectations between the writer and the audience. When many texts share the same features they form a kind of genre. Each kind of genre has a set of conventions that regulate how information can be constructed in that genre. These conventions are dynamic and new conventions might evolve as required by the

changeability of socio-cultural contexts. There are overlapping conventions across different types of genres and there are variations in a particular genre in various disciplines.

2.4.2. Rhetorical structures of academic texts

What can be inferred from the discussions above is that different genres require different information structures although there are variations of conventions in each genre and there is some overlapping across genres of various disciplines. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the kind of text or genre selected to investigate in our study is academic texts because it is the genre that my learners would be required to have some basic knowledge of to incorporate into their reading and writing skill development of their academic activities.

Rhetorical structures of academic texts can be described from several perspectives. Hyland (1990, 2004) viewed rhetorical structures as encompassing stages and within each stage there are a number of moves. For example, in an argumentative essay, there are three stages: thesis, argument, and conclusion. Each stage is composed of several moves, some of which are optional. For example in the thesis stage, the following moves can be included: gambit (controversial or dramatic statement), information (background material), proposition (writer's position and delimit of the topic), evaluation (brief support of proposition), and markers (introduction and/or identification of a list). Some other researchers views rhetorical structures as consisting of spans of texts bearing such linking relations as claim and evidence, and cause and result (O'Brien, 1995). Young (1994:165) saw discourse structures as being composed of phases which he described as 'strands of discourse that recur discontinuously throughout a particular language event and, taken together structure that event. These strands recur and are interspersed with others resulting in an interweaving of threads as the discourse progresses.' Hoey (1983; 2001), Coulthard (1994), and Winter (1994) talked of rhetorical structures in terms of such textual patterns as problem-solution, general-particular, hypothetical-real, question-answer, and goal-achievement. In each of the above-mentioned rhetorical structure, there are discourse elements such as situation, problem, response (solution), and evaluation in the problem-solution pattern. These rhetorical structures are discussed in more details in the next section within the clause-relational approach to text analysis.

2.4.3. Features of academic texts

Features of academic texts can be described at lexico-grammar level and discourse level. At the level of lexico-grammar, Dudley-Evans (2002), Swales (1994) pointed out the following features of academic writing which in most cases involve the formalities in lexical and grammatical usage:

1. The preference for more formal verbs/single verbs (rather than phrasal verbs/prepositional verbs or more colloquial verbs), for example, *investigate* rather than *look into*, *fluctuate* rather than *go up and down*, *offer*, rather than *come up with*, *obtain* rather than *get*, and so on;

2. The need to avoid colloquial expressions such as *sort of negative*, *the future is up in the air*, *pretty good*; stuff, things, bunch, a whole lot of (more formal expressions are preferred if one exists)

3. The need to avoid contracted forms such as *isn't*, *can't*, and so on;

4. The preference for nominalized forms, for example, *the cooperative of IBM and Apple led to the establishment of a new factory* rather than *IBM and Apple have been cooperating, and this has led to the setting up of a new factory*;

5. The avoidance of 'run on' expressions such as *etc.*, and *and so forth*;

6. Avoid addressing the readers as you (except in instructional materials). Use passivization instead.

7. Place adverbs within the verbs (avoid using adverbs at the beginning or end of sentences wherever possible)

8. Avoid using split infinitives (e.g., to sharply rise) unless in case of potential awkwardness or ambiguity caused by not splitting. Not splitting sometimes caused the adverb used to be understood as modifying another verb in the sentence rather than the infinitive itself (e.g., We need to adequately meet the needs of those enrolled in the program.) Not splitting in this case might cause the reader to think that the adverb modifies 'need' or 'enrolled'.

9. Avoid redundancies in using vocabulary

10. The careful and selective use of the personal forms *I*, *we*, and *you* and the avoidance of *one*;

11. The avoidance of direct questions and the preference for indirect questions

Following are some features of English academic texts at discourse level:

- The tendency to be writer-responsible

  Hinds (1987:143) claimed that in English 'the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the speaker.'

- The writer's awareness of the audience's expectations and prior knowledge is of crucial importance.

  Audience's expectations and prior knowledge affect the content of the writing to a large extent (Swales, 1994).

- Tendency to directness in expressing ideas among native English writers (Kaplan, 1987; Connor, 1996).

  Kaplan (1987:10) claimed that in English directness and specificity are 'highly valued'.

- The explicitness in revealing the logical development of ideas

  Connor (1996:167) said that English writers 'move from generalizations to specific examples and expect explicit links between main topics and subtopics'. Clyne (1994: 171) remarked: 'the English essays end with an identifiable concluding section encompassing a restatement and predictions of future implications'.

- Specific exemplifications while supporting the main ideas

  Leki (1991, 1992) pointed out that facts, statistics, and illustration in arguments are normally expected by English speaking readers.

2.5. Information structure at discourse level: Clause-relational approach to text analysis

The clause-relational approach is an approach in text analysis that emphasizes the role of the reader in interpreting relations existing among clauses in a text. In this approach, a text is seen as coherent if the reader can recognize the semantic links between its clauses. This cognitive process depends much on the knowledge shared between the writer and the reader. The approach was first mentioned in Winter (1971) and has received increasing attention

from such other advocates as Hoey (1983; 1991; 1994; 2001), McCarthy (1991), McCarthy and Carter (1994). As McCarthy (1991:155) defined it, in clause-relational approach, units of written discourse are seen as functional segments which 'could be related to one another by a finite set of cognitive relations'. These segments (which these authors refer to as textual segments) might vary in their structural length, i.e. they could be phrases, clauses, sentences, groups of sentences or whole paragraphs. The relations held among the segments can be of cause and consequence or contrast, etc. When these segments are combined together, they form the logical structure of the whole text referred to as textual patterns, which can be situation-evaluation, hypothetical-real, or general-particular. The interaction between the reader's comprehension and the writer's intentions depends on how the reader interprets the relations among the clauses and what pattern the whole text bears. McCarthy (1991) pointed out that the act of interpretation on the part of the reader takes place at two levels, procedural and textual pattern recognizing. At the first level, the reader needs to activate his knowledge of the world to make the best sense of the segments of the text. At the second level, he has to ask himself questions guiding him to the recognition of the relationships held among textual segments to identify the macro-level structure of the text.

The approach has clear applications in language learning and teaching in which the role of interpretation of the learner is emphasized. McCarthy (1991), McCarthy and Carter (1994), and Hoey (2001) have all developed the approach in designing cognitive tasks and activities in language teaching. As my meta-linguistic approach involves to a great extent the cognitive process in the part of L2 learners in understanding and writing coherent texts, this clause-relational approach should help us in designing methods which will bring them closer to a full understanding of discourse-level information structure. It is extremely useful, in my view, for L2 learners to be equipped with meta-knowledge about clause relations. On the one hand, as concerning writing, learners who have a clear understanding of clause relations will potentially produce more meaningful, well-structured and reader-responsible compositions. On the other hand, their reading comprehension will be faster and more effective when they are able to interpret semantic relations appropriately.

We can now see that there is an interface between genre analysis and the clause relational approach to text analysis in the sense that both are concerned about the macro-structure of textual organization. Information structure is seen as lying on this interface as ways in which information is organized in discourse to construct texts by conforming to conventions and patterns specified by a particular context.

2.5.1. Clause relations

The central concept of the approach is the clause relation, which was first defined in Winter (1971) as follows:

> A clause relation is the cognitive process whereby we interpret the meaning of a sentence or group of sentences in the light of its adjoining sentence or group of sentences. (Winter, 1971)

Hoey (1983) claimed that this definition has the following important implications:

- A relation involves interpreted meaning. Any grammatical cohesion existing among clauses is only treated as a relation if it has gone through the act of interpretation of the discourse decoder, i.e. the reader or the listener. Consequently, the relation might vary according to how a reader/listener interprets it.

- Joined together, clauses create some other meaning in addition to the meaning generated by individual clauses, by which a relation is born among clauses.

- The interpretation of a clause relation is possible only when the clauses are placed in a context.

There is some confusion of the term 'clause' and 'sentence' in Winter's (1971) definition of clause relations. Hoey (1983) suggested that the two terms should be taken as conflated. In his view, 'the clause relation is not so called because it relates only clauses. Rather it is so described because all systems for signaling relations are rooted in the grammar of the clause.' (Hoey, 1983:18). In this sense, a relation between units smaller or larger than a clause can be viewed as a clause relation. That is to say, a clause relation can be a relation between phrases that make up a clause, or between paragraphs that are formed by more than one clause. I would advocate this view of Hoey's as it is compatible with what McCarthy (1991) termed 'units of written discourse' and 'textual segments' above mentioned.

The distinction between clause and sentence was made clearer in later versions of the definition. In Winter (1977, 1994), a clause relation is defined as follows:

> A clause relation is the cognitive process whereby the reader interprets the meaning of a clause, sentence, or groups of sentences in the context of one or more preceding clauses, sentences, or groups of sentences in the same text. (Winter, 1977)

> A Clause Relation is the shared cognitive process whereby we interpret the meaning of a Clause or group of clauses in the light of their adjoining clauses or group of

clauses. Where the clauses are independent, we speak of 'sentence relation'. (Winter, 1994:49)

Winter (1994:66-67) claimed that the quintessential idea of the clause-relational approach to text analysis is the view of 'the clause as a device of co-relevance, once it communicates as a member of a clause relation in a text.' Thus the clause can be said to bear the nuclear status in the sentence and in the whole text where semantic relations as interpreted by the reader are borne among them through cohesive devices. The clause is viewed as 'the largest unit of meaning in the sentence, so that relations between sentences are really the synthesized sum of the relations between their constituent clauses' (Winter, 1994:49). The relevance of the existence of each clause is constrained and determined by its neighboring clauses in terms of their semantics brought about by grammatical and lexical choices. In other words, the existence of one clause in the whole text is taken as meaningful if it brings about the coherence of the whole text in the light of its adjoining clauses.

2.5.2. Clause relation cohesive devices

The relations between one clause with other clauses in its sentence and adjoining sentences can be signaled by cohesive devices such as conjunctions, repetition structures (systematic repetition), and the replacement of the clause within the repetition structure. Conjunctions which include coordinators (and/or/but) and subordinators (because/although, etc.) can create surface links between clauses. A comprehensive list of conjunctions may be found in Quirk (1985) or Hasan (1985). There are also lexical items acting as cohesive devices, e.g. 'the reason is…' might be used instead of the subordinator 'because'. A repetition structure may be words, phrases, or structures being repeated in adjoining clauses. Winter (1974, 1979, 1994) used the term repetition structure to encompass ellipsis, and substitution as used by Hasan (1985), Cook (1989) or Quirk (1985). Winter (1994) gave the following examples to illustrate what he meant by repetition and replacement in clause relations.

a. 'What we have still not forgiven him for', she says, is that he [Mozart] *reasoned*.' 'Miss Brophy, whose spiritual home is the eighteen century enlightenment, also *reasons*.

b. The symbols *seem easy to the point of glibness*. *So does* the scepticism that repeatedly informed them.

In the above examples, the italicized parts of the examples show repetition structure, and the remainders of the clauses are viewed as replacement change. In each example, the predications of the clauses are repeated, and are thus termed clause constants. In example a, the lexical item 'reason' is repeated. In example b, the repetition structure is realized by the substitution inversion structure 'so does'. The replacement takes place in the subjects bringing about change in the semantics of the clauses.

Winter (1979:101) commented on the important function of systematic repetition and replacement in constructing new information in discourse as follows: 'This repetition provides a clause constant whereby the nature of new information is recognized and its importance to the context assessed. In such repetition, there are obligatory changes or additions to the repeated clause structure which give it new meaning as clause.' In more specific terms, in clause relations, new information is found in the changes made within the repetition structure where background information is given.

2.5.3. Basic clause relations

Hoey (1983) and Winter (1971, 1994)) pointed out the two basic categories of clause relations: matching and logical sequence. In Winter (1994) there is the addition of the third category '*multiple clause relation*', in which both matching and logical sequence relation are present.

The matching relation

Clauses in which attributes, people, actions, events, things, etc are compared or contrasted with one another concerning their similarities or differences can be said to hold the matching relation (Winter, 1994). The relation as introduced in Hoey (1983; 2001) and Winter (1994) might be comparison, alternative, general-particular (preview-detail), similarity, exemplification, exception, apposition, contrast, or contradiction (denial and correction). In the following examples given by Winter (1994:51), we can se a matching contrast, denial, or correction between two clauses.

1. No Russian wants to conquer the world. Some Americans do, on the best crusading ground.

2. The bee didn't get *tired* – it got *dead.*

3. *Little boys* don't play with dolls, *girls* play with dolls.

In example 1, a matching contrast was realized by the repetition structure 'do' repeating the old information 'wants to conquer the world'. 'Some American' is viewed as the replacement bearing the new information. Example 2 illustrates a correction made by the replacement of 'dead' for 'tired'. In example 3, 'girls' denies 'little boys'.

The logical sequence relation

The logical sequence relation is held among clauses where there exists a temporal, spatial, causal or deductive sequence. The relations, in Hoey's view can be actual or potential. Hoey (2001:30) pointed out that logical sequence relation and the matching relation differ from each other in that the former involves 'putting propositions in some order of priority in time, space or logic', while the latter does not. The following are types of logical relation as listed in Winter (1994) and Hoey (1983; 2001): phenomenon-reason, phenomenon-example, cause-consequence, condition-consequence, instrument-achievement, means-purpose, premise-deduction, preview-detail, and temporal sequence. In the following example, an instrument-achievement relation between the clauses is revealed by the conjunction 'thereby':

> Once on this page I announced 'I am no warped spinster waving the feminist flag', and thereby gravely offended some spinster readers. (Winter, 1994:53)

Multiple clause relations

These can be found where both logical sequence and matching relations are present. In the following example, we can see the contradiction matching relation (denial and correction) as well as the logical sequence relation of condition-consequence as revealed by the correlative subordinators 'if'… 'then', and the repetition structure 'must be', which partially substitutes 'were not to blame'. The replacement 'the Americans' is the new information:

> If the Russians were not to blame, then the Americans must be. (Winter, 1994:54)

Matching and logical sequence relations can embrace the local semantic relations forming a web of complex relationship throughout the whole text. And again, to some extent, it is the reader who interprets the relations; therefore the degree of clarification of the relationship might vary from reader to reader.

2.5.4. *Clause relations and their signals as important factors in textual coherence*

In the clause-relational approach, the sequencing and matching of textual segments and how the relations between them are signaled are considered important factors in textual coherence (Winter, 1977; Hoey, 1983; and McCarthy, 1991). In other words, a text is seen as coherent if there are evident signals showing that textual segments are matched or sequenced. The presence of cohesive devices can bring about the surface cohesion of the segments. However, how coherent the whole text is depends on the reader who has to interpret for himself the semantic links between textual segments. That is to say there is an interaction between the cohesion and coherence of a text. Hoey assumes that while cohesion 'is a property of the text', outside the reader's judgment, coherence is, on the other hand, reader-dependent. Hoey (1991:11) posited three questions involving the contribution of cohesion to the coherence of a text, the effect of cohesion on the perception of related sentences 'as complete propositions' and the contribution of cohesion to larger text organization.

The relationship between textual segments, clause relations, and the devices used to signal these relations are illustrated in Figure 2.1 below:
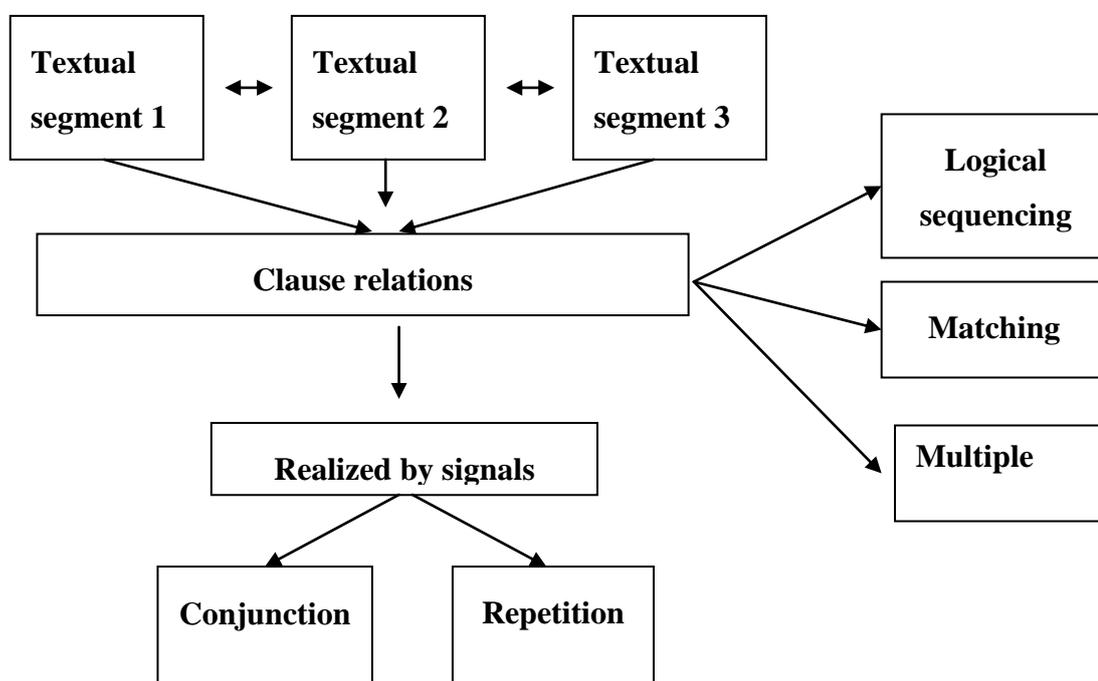
Figure 2.1: Textual segments, clause relations and their signals (adapted from Hoey 1983, 2001; Winter 1974, 1994)

2.5.5. Basic textual patterns

When functional textual segments combine, they form the logical structure of the whole text called textual patterns (McCarthy, 1991; McCarthy and Carter, 1994) or text/discourse structure (Winter, 1994). There are common macro-structure organizational patterns of text, some of them are more popular, more typical, and more frequently occurring than others. There are 9 patterns mentioned in Winter (1977, 1978), Hoey (1983, 2001), McCarthy (1991), and McCarthy & Carter (1994): problem-solution, hypothetical-real, general-particular, question-answer, goal-achievement, narrative, opportunity-taking, desire arousal-fulfillment, gap in knowledge filling. Some patterns are given different names by different authors, e.g., the problem-solution (Hoey, 1983) is called 'situation-evaluation' in Winter (1994).

McCarthy (1991), Winter (1994), and Coulthard (1994) pointed out that a given text may contain more than one of the common patterns, either following one another or embedded in one another, e.g., the problem-solution pattern can be embedded in a hypothetical-real pattern.

Textual patterns and cognitive relations are not two separate concepts. They overlap each other and are intertwined with each other. Some of the terms used to refer to clause relations might be justifiably used to indicate a textual pattern. There may be more than one relation within one pattern, and there may be more than one pattern in a text. For example, the counterclaim (the real element in the pattern hypothetical-real) may consist of a preview and some details. The details may encompass a situation, a problem, a response, and an evaluation.

Descriptions of the patterns can be found in appendix H1 (unit 2, lesson 2, p. 305). Examples of the patterns can be found in appendix H2 (p.313).

The patterns, according to Hoey (2001) and McCarthy (1991), share the following common characteristics:

- They are culture-specific and culturally ingrained, forming part of native

  speakers' knowledge.

- They begin with some initiation which logically or sequentially provokes some reaction. The initiation can be a situation, a problem, a hypothesis, a claim, a

generalized statement, or a question. The reaction can be an evaluation, a solution, an affirmation/denial, a response, an example, or an answer.

- They end with a conclusion characterized by a positive or negative evaluation and/or result.

- There are grammatical and lexical devices signaling the patterns.

Out of the 9 patterns mentioned by these authors, I discuss only the 5 patterns that are more likely to appear in academic texts, and which have been therefore selected to be used in my meta-linguistic lessons. The three most common and most frequently used patterns are problem-solution, hypothetical-real, and general-particular. The other two herein mentioned (question-answer and goal-achievement) to some extent are a reflection of the problem-solution pattern with some distinctive differences. Other less frequently used patterns: narrative, opportunity-taking, desire arousal-fulfillment, gap in knowledge filling as presented in Hoey (2001) and McCarthy (1994) were presented in appendix H3 (p.315) for reference purposes.

Problem-solution (situation-evaluation)

The expanded version of this pattern might include the following elements: situation-problem-responses (possible solutions)-evaluation of responses (positive or negative). McCarthy and Carter (1994: 55) claimed that in this pattern, the key element is a 'positive evaluation of at least one of the possible solutions offered'. 'A text which ends with no positive solution offered leaves the reader with a feeling of unease'. Coulthard (1994) pointed out that the pattern can be complicated in several ways, e.g. when the evaluation of the solution is negative, which is itself a problem, there is an alternative suggested solution followed by evaluation.

Hypothetical-real (Claim-counterclaim/response)

This pattern consists of two elements: the hypothetical, which reports what has been said or written, and the real, which states the writer's affirmation or denial of the hypothetical. The hypothetical reports somebody else's statement, the truth-value of which is unknown or controversial. The real states whether the hypothetical is true or not true. Winter (1994) commented that unlike the problem-solution pattern in which the problem can be implicit, in the hypothetical-real pattern, the hypothesis must be explicitly signaled as hypothetical.

General-particular

In this pattern, a generalization is followed by specific statements. The patterns can be in the form of a generalization followed by examples or a preview followed by details. In the particular element (examples or details), there can be an embedded matching relation, i.e. the examples or details may contain two clauses or more holding a matching relation. Hoey (1983) pointed out that definition is one of the most typical examples of the detail in the preview-detail relation. There can be at least three types of detail: composition, structure, and function.

Question-answer

This pattern is similar to the problem-solution patern. The difference is that there is an explicitly posed question followed by a satisfactory answer. The main elements are question, answer and positive/negative evaluation. The evaluation is obligatory when the answer is ascribed to someone rather than the author. When the answer is made by the author, the evaluation can be optional. Question-answer differs from the other patterns in that there is no intermediate stage between question and answer and there is no logical sequence relationship between question and answer (Hoey, 2001).

Goal-achievement

Hoey (2001) commented that this pattern is similar to the problem-solution pattern in almost every respect. Mapped onto the problem-solution pattern, the goal in the pattern is like the problem, and the achievement the solution. The major difference is that the goal element in the pattern is defined as 'an intended change in situation', i.e. instead of suggesting a possible solution to the problem, in this pattern, the writer tends to make it explicit that something must be done for the goal to be achieved. The expanded version of the pattern is: situation-goal-method of achievement-evaluation/result. As may happen in other patterns, we can see another pattern, e.g. problem-solution embedded in this pattern.

2.5.6. Summary of the clause relational approach to text analysis

In this section, I have discussed the clause relational approach to text analysis. In this approach, a text is seen as coherent if the reader can recognize the semantic links between its clauses. The five related issues discussed included the definition of clause relations, clause relation cohesive devices, basic clause relations, clause relations and their signals as

important factors of textual coherence, and basic textual patterns. A clause relation is the cognitive process whereby the reader interprets the meaning of a sentence or group of sentences in the light of its adjoining sentence or group of sentences. Clause relation cohesive devices can be conjunctions, repetition structures (systematic repetition), and the replacement of the clause within the repetition structure. Clause relations and their signals are important factors in textual coherence. Textual patterns are the logical structure of one whole text. There are five popular patterns: problem-solution, hypothetical-real, general-particular, question-answer, and goal-achievement.

2.6. Major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure

In this section I discuss some major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure in relation to my learners' reading and writing problems. It was my assumption that the differences might cause difficulties or confusion in L2 learners' reading and writing in the English language. The assumption of potential interference was made partially from my experience as a second language learner and instructor. In my experience, although many utterances made by Vietnamese learners of English (and in fact, by many other L2 learners) are grammatically correct, not all of which sound natural in terms of their information structure at both sentential and discourse level.

Several considerations need to be taken into account concerning my assumption that differences in language and culture might lead to L2 learners' difficulty in L2 acquisition. Firstly, difference and difficulty are not identical concepts (Littlewood, 1984). In other words, not all differences cause difficulty. On the other hand, some differences might help rather than interfere with learners' language acquisition (Mohan and Lo, 1985). Moreover, acknowledging that linguistic and cultural differences might cause problems and difficulty, other factors involving learners' general development should not be ignored. Learners might overcome their problems when they reach a higher level of development in composition (Mohan and Lo, 1985). Secondly, learners' individuality should also be considered as important in the sense that there are differences in writing characteristics between them and any conclusion made about one group of learners as a whole should allow variation in the group (Spack, 1997). Thirdly, differences in language and culture should be equally treated so that English should not be seen as superior to other languages (Kubota, 1999; Spack,

1997). What can be inferred from Kubota (1999) and Spack (1997) is that the idea of CR should be to see what can be done to help L2 learners overcome difficulty presumably caused by linguistic and cultural differences and not to put them in a disadvantageous stance by compelling them to strictly conform to English native writing standard and causing them to lose their own cultural and linguistic identities.

Based on my learning and teaching experience, I assumed that the following differences might lead to L2 learners' problems: word order differences due to the difference in typological features of the two languages and the differences in writing styles concerning strategies of constructing information in the two languages, i.e., directness in English and indirectness in Vietnamese. The discussions in the section will be made part of my lessons designed to enhance L2 learners' understanding of English information structure. The discussions were used for pedagogical purposes rather than as a research approach. Learners' awareness of the differences in my opinions can to some extent help L2 learners overcome their reading and writing problems related to meta-knowledge of information structure.

2.6.1. Typological difference

Li and Thompson (1976) divided languages into four types according to their subject-predicate or topic-comment relations. Of interest here are the subject-prominent and topic-prominent types. The distinction between a subject-prominent language and a topic-prominent language, according to Li and Thompson is as follows:

> In subject-prominent (Sp) languages, the structure of sentences favors a description in which the grammatical relation subject-predicate plays a major role; in topic-prominent (Tp) languages, the basic structure of sentences favors a description in which the grammatical relation topic-comment plays a major role.

(Li and Thompson, 1976: 459)

English is widely acknowledged as a subject-prominent language, whereas whether Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language is still under debate. This is because of the fact that Vietnamese sentences include both topic-prominent type and subject-prominent type. In principle, the topic-prominent structure is used when the topic has been evoked (or is thought to have been evoked by the speaker) in prior discourse. Sentences with the grammatical subject coming first, i.e. the non-topicalized versions, are utilized when, for example, it is the

speaker who initiates the topic. Traditionally, Vietnamese was acknowledged as a subject-prominent type. However, recently, Vietnamese has been typologically described as a topic-prominent language by such authors as Thompson (1987), Duffield (2007), Hao (1991), Giap (2000), Con (2008) and others. 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-prominet 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%. Due to this dual existence of both subject-prominent and topic-prominent sentences in the language, some of these researchers, e.g. Con (2008) have suggested an approach to analyzing Vietnamese sentences in which both the subject-predicate distinction and topic-comment distinction are applied. Con's suggestion, in my view, should be advocated because it highlights the differences between subject-predicate and theme/rheme perspectives in viewing Vietnamese sentences and clauses, and thus helps us to a great extent in helping our learners understand Vietnamese sentences and how to best analyze them.

There are two important points concerning this typological feature of the Vietnamese language that we would like to bring into discussions. First, it was my assumption that the topic-prominent feature of the Vietnamese language may be transferred into L2 learners' reading and writing in the English language. In reading, for example, as the majority of Vietnamese sentences begin with a topic followed by a comment, they might get into difficulty in realizing the main idea in English sentences typically beginning with a grammatical subject. In writing, some Vietnamese learners of English might produce topic-comment sentences in English which might sound clumsy and not very comprehensible to some native readers such as 'Not only robots, we can find the application of automated technology in some other devices such as rockets or airplane without pilots' (learner's writing in post-teaching phase writing test).

2.6.2. Directness in English and indirectness in Vietnamese writing style

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 (Connor, 1996; Kaplan; 1966,1987; 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, 1996:15). 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 (1990:98), mentioned the 'delayed introduction of purpose' in many Asian L2 learners' introduction paragraphs. Cam (1991:43) referred to a popular discourse strategy of most Vietnamese speakers called 'rao truoc, don 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.

2.7. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated central issues of English information structure at sentential and discourse levels as well as the major differences in information structure between English and Vietnamese. The kind of texts selected is academic texts because it is the kind of texts my learners are most likely to work with in their academic studies. The investigation aims at building up a theoretical framework for my action research in which a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching information structure is applied to develop L2 learners' reading and writing skills through which they might develop their communicative language ability. The discussions about the issues presented in the chapter are incorporated into my meta-linguistic lessons designed for that purpose. Fundamental issues of information structure at sentential level included the order in which information is distributed, the given/new status of the information exchanged, the devices used to indicate the given/new status, and the contextual constraints on the given/new status. Concerning the order in which information is distributed, I have mentioned the principle of end focus, communicative dynamism, and non-canonical constructions in English as the three most striking tendencies of information distribution in English. I claim that the tension among these tendencies is one of the problems that L2 learners might encounter while constructing text and comprehending reading passages. As concerns the given/new status of information, I have pointed out the relativity of the status and claimed that knowledge of the status might help L2 learners understand texts more effectively and construct information more coherently. Discussions about the contextual constraints on given/new status are intended to bring to L2 learners better understanding of the pragmatic reasons underlying the distribution so that they could

see the coherence of academic texts and could create texts as coherent as required. The investigation into the syntactical devices to indicate the given/new status including canonical and non-canonical constructions is drawn upon to provide learners with both syntactic and pragmatic knowledge of how to organize and comprehend information.

At the discourse level, I have discussed how information structure is defined from genre analysis perspective and in the clause relational approach to text analysis. Information structure from genre analysis perspective can be seen as the underlying operations of genre conventions realized in a text or a type of texts. Also in this section, some rhetorical structures and features of academic texts are highlighted. In the clause-relational approach to text analysis, clause relations are viewed as information structure. The basic concepts of this approach encompass clause relations, textual segment, and textual patterns. I have presented the matching relation and logical sequence relation as the two most typical relations in clause relations. Out of the nine textual patterns introduced in the approach, the five most popular have been selected to be discussed as they are more likely to occur in academic reading and writing. Clause relations and textual patterns are seen as bringing about the cohesion and coherence of the whole structure of a text.

As concerns the major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure which might cause Vietnamese learners problems in their reading and writing in the English language, I have discussed the two most remarkable differences in the two languages in terms of their information structure. The first is the difference in word order as the result of their typological features. The difference lies in the fact that Vietnamese is at least partly a topic-prominent language whereas English is a subject-prominent language. I assume that Vietnamese learners of English might produce English sentences bearing their mother tongue topic-prominent features. The discourse-level difference is the bias toward directness in English and indirectness in Vietnamese. I believe that this is one problem my learners would encounter in their writing in the English language.

All the above-mentioned issues are considered to contribute beneficial meta-knowledge of information structure which L2 learners might use to enhance their discourse competence as an initial step towards their reading and writing skill development. How this knowledge could be incorporated into my teaching method and what approach is appropriate in bringing this knowledge most effectively to L2 learners will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: A Cognitive Meta-linguistic Approach to Teaching L2 Learners Reading and Writing Skills

3.1. Chapter outline

In the last chapter, I discussed fundamental issues of English information structure at both sentential and discourse levels based on previous studies in the field. The discussions aimed at finding out what features of English information structure could be beneficial to the enhancement of L2 learners' meta-knowledge in the field as an initial step towards their reading and writing skill development. In this chapter I introduce my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to the teaching of reading and writing skills to L2 learners. My assumption is that improvement in these skills could lead to their communicative language ability development, which as stated in the rationale, is the ultimate aim of my action research. In my approach, which is both knowledge-oriented and skill-oriented, knowledge of information structure is to be explicitly given to L2 learners on the assumption that they can use it for their skill development. In the chapter, I therefore will explain why and how giving L2 learners explicit instruction enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure might improve their reading and writing skills, and ultimately their communicative language ability.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, I introduce Bachman (1990)'s framework of communicative language ability in terms of its pedagogical implications in the field of language teaching and testing and explain why I have adopted the model for my teaching approach. The section begins with a description of the components of communicative language ability in Bachman (1990)'s model, followed by discussions about the position of information structure competence in the model, the relationship between information structure knowledge and skill development and the relationship between information structure competence and pragmatic competence. In the second section, I discuss the interference of L1 strategies in comprehending and constructing information in L2 learners' reading and writing. The third section discusses the necessity of giving L2 learners meta-knowledge of English information structure in developing their skills. This includes the role of genre in writing, learners' awareness of the audience in writing and learners' awareness of differences in information structure between Vietnamese and English on the assumption that this awareness can help them overcome their problems and develop their

skills. The fourth section is a brief account of the method of teaching reading and writing skills currently applied in the Vietnamese university system. The account explains why despite tremendous effort in innovating our teaching methods, our learners' development in communicative skills has not reached a satisfactory level. The fifth section is the introduction of my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing skills, its principles, techniques, and classroom activities. In the section introducing my teaching approach, I present two cognitive models of language learning and teaching which I adopted: Anderson (1983,1985,1990,1995)'s Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT)* model, and Johnson (1996)'s DECPRO model. Based on the models I will explain how giving L2 learners explicit instruction enhancing their knowledge of information structure might develop their reading and writing skills. Teaching principles set up which are grounded in the two above-mentioned models are cognitive meta-linguistic in perspective. Classroom activities used in the method were designed based on suggestions made by authors of the clause-relational approach to text-analysis such as Although McCarthy (1991) and McCarthy and Carter (1994). Although those authors did not offer complete guidance on this, their ideas of using meta-knowledge of such aspects as clause relations and textual patterns in helping L2 learners develop their reading skill had given us insightful implications in building up the activities. In the conclusion, I summarize the main issues discussed in the chapter.

3.2. Bachman (1990)'s theoretical framework of communicative language ability

My aim in the study is to develop L2 learners' communicative language ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of information structure so as to improve their reading and writing skills. In order to achieve that aim, I have to solve the following problems:

- Selecting a theoretical framework of communicative language ability that is most relevant to the aim

- Locating the position of information structure meta-knowledge in that framework

- Explaining how knowledge of information structure interacts with other components in the framework

- Explaining the relationship between knowledge and skill in the framework

In the field of language teaching and testing, one highly influential model concerning the measurement of L2 learners' communicative knowledge and skill is Bachman (1990)'s framework of communicative language ability. Although the framework was first established to serve the purpose of language testing, its pedagogical implications are extremely rich and powerful. In the following section, I will discuss the framework in terms of its definition and components to locate the position of information structure knowledge in the framework. I will also mention Bachman and Palmer (1996) to clarify what was left unclear in Bachman (1990) and to introduce some of their changes and additions to the first framework, which are important to the aim of my study.

Bachman (1990:84) defined communicative language ability as follows:

> Communicative language ability (CLA) can be described as consisting of both knowledge, or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use.

In the definition, as Bachman (1990:108) pointed out, the terms 'knowledge' and 'competence' are treated as synonymous and 'ability' includes both knowledge or competence and the capability for implementing that competence in language use.' Furthermore, such activities as listening, speaking, reading, writing, producing, interpreting, receiving, understanding, and comprehending, etc, are subsumed under 'use' or 'perform', which are also synonymous referring to the execution of abilities. The usage of those terms in my study conforms to these distinctions.

3.2.1. Components of Bachman (1990)'s theoretical framework of communicative language ability

The three components of communicative language ability described in the framework are: *language competence*, *strategic competence* and *psycho-physiological competence*.

Language competence (see table 3.1 below) is subdivided into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. *Organizational competence* consists of two subcomponents: grammatical competence and textual competence.

Pragmatic competence is further subdivided into illocutionary competence and socio-linguistic competence.

Grammatical competence includes knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology/graphology involved in language use, as described by Widdowson (1978).

Textual competence includes knowledge of conventions for ***cohesion*** and ***rhetorical organization*** of text. The conventions might cover rules of combining utterances or sentences together to form a unified spoken or written text.

Cohesion comprises ways of explicitly marking semantic relationships and conventions such as those governing the ordering of old and new information in discourse. Cohesive devices include those described by Halliday and Hasan (1976) such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

Rhetorical organization competence (relabeled as rhetorical or conventional organization competence in Bachman and Palmer, 1996) includes knowledge of conventions of textual development such as narration, description, comparison, and classification, etc. The knowledge might involve how to distribute information in a paragraph or an essay of some kind. In an expository essay, for example, the knowledge involves conventions of ordering information in a paragraph: topic sentence followed by primary and secondary supporting sentences with illustrations, exemplifications, statistics, etc.

Illocutionary competence (relabeled as functional knowledge in Bachman and Palmer, 1996) encompasses ***knowledge of speech acts*** and ***language functions***. There is some overlap of these two concepts in the model.

Knowledge of speech acts as described in Austin (1962) or Searle (1969) is the knowledge of the distinction between form and function in language use. In the theory of speech acts introduced by those two authors, an utterance may perform different functions such as assertion, warning, or request and a function may be expressed in different formal forms such as an imperative or a declarative.

Description of language functions in the model follows Halliday (1973, 1976).

Knowledge of language functions includes knowledge of how to use language to express, present, or exchange information (ideational functions), to affect the world around us by getting things done or by manipulating others to get their help for example (manipulative functions), to extend our knowledge of the world by such acts as teaching and learning (heuristic functions), as well as knowledge of how to create or extend our environment for humorous or esthetic by telling jokes and creating metaphors, for example (imaginative functions). Bachman (1990) pointed out that naturally, a language user often performs several language functions at the same time over several connected utterances and 'it is the connections among these functions that provide coherence to discourse' (p.94).

Socio-linguistic competence is the knowledge of how to use language to react sensitively and appropriately to different socio-cultural contexts of language use constrained by variations in dialect or variety (language conventions belonging to different geographical regions or social groups), register (language conventions in a single dialect or variety), naturalness (language conventions of speakers native to the culture of a particular dialect or variety), cultural references (referential meanings connoted in the lexicon of a language), and figures of speech (metaphorical meanings attached to the literal meanings of such figurative expressions as simile, metaphor, or hyperboles).

Table 3.1 below summarizes the language competence component in Bachman (1990)'s framework of communicative language ability.

Language Competence			
Organizational Competence		**Pragmatic Competence**	
Grammatical **Competence**	**Textual** **Competence**	**Illocutionary** **Competence**	**Socio-linguistic** **Competence**
Vocabulary Morphology Syntax Phonology Graphology	Cohesion Rhetorical organization	Ideational functions Manipulative functions Heuristic functions Imaginative functions	Sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety Sensitivity to differences in register Sensitivity to naturalness Ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech

Table 3.1: Language competence component in Bachman (1990)'s framework of communicative language ability

As we can see, coherence is not explicitly mentioned in the framework, but subsumed under rhetorical organization competence (knowledge of conventions of textual development methods) and illocutionary competence (when language users know how to perform several language functions simultaneously in several connected utterances in discourse). From my point of view, this is not the best way to treat coherence in the model. As coherence is an important concept and closely related to cohesion in discourse, knowledge of coherence should stand on its own and be subsumed in the same division with cohesion under textual competence.

The other two components in the framework are *strategic competence* and *psycho-physiological mechanisms*.

Strategic competence, (re-conceptualized as 'a set of meta-cognitive components, or strategies' in Bachman and Palmer, 1996:70), is the knowledge of how best to achieve a communicative goal. This knowledge includes the assessment of a particular situation based on which a plan of language use is formulated and executed.

Psycho-physiological mechanisms refer to the knowledge of how to employ different channels (visual or auditory) and modes (productive or receptive) of language use.

Until now I have summarized Bachman (1990)' view of the three components in his framework of communicative language ability: language competence, strategic competence, and psycho-physiological mechanisms. According to the author, pivotal and central in the framework is strategic competence because it provides 'the means for relating language competencies to features of the context of situation in which language use takes place and to the language user's knowledge structures' (Bachman, 1990:84). The two factors that encompass language users' communicative language ability mentioned here are language user's knowledge structures and context of situation of language use.

Language user's knowledge structures refer to their socio-cultural knowledge or 'real world' knowledge. The importance of real world knowledge in the framework is more clearly stated in Bachman and Palmer (1996) in which the term is relabeled as 'topical knowledge' or 'knowledge schemata'. Language users' topical knowledge in communicative language use is necessarily considered in the framework because it 'provides the information base that enables them to use language with reference to the world in which they live, and hence is involved in all language use' (p.65). The authors' pedagogical and testing implication of considering language users' world knowledge is that a text richly encoded with specific cultural information might be more difficult for learners who do not have that relevant cultural knowledge.

Language use is defined by Bachman and Palmer (1996:61) as 'the creation or interpretation of intended meanings in discourse by an individual, or as the dynamic and interactive negotiation of intended meanings between two or more individuals in a particular situation.' The basic concept of language use according to the authors is the interactions between characteristics of individual language users and the characteristics of the language use situation. Affective (non-cognitive) factors including language users' individual characteristics that might affect their language use are introduced into the updated (1996) framework.

In summary, in this framework, language users' process of communication can be described as follows. Language users resort to their strategic competence to set up a goal and a plan for their language communication. To achieve this goal, they use their language knowledge as well as knowledge of the real world to engage in communication taking into consideration the most appropriate channel and mode of language use to employ. What and how they communicate to achieve their communicative goal is constrained by the context of situation in which they have to negotiate with other interlocutors who like themselves bring into the communication all their own individual characteristics. We can see that there exists the role of conscious meta-linguistic knowledge in these processes although Bachman and Palmer did not explicitly mention it while introducing and discussing the model. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the interactions of communicative language ability components with language use context of situation and language user's knowledge structures.
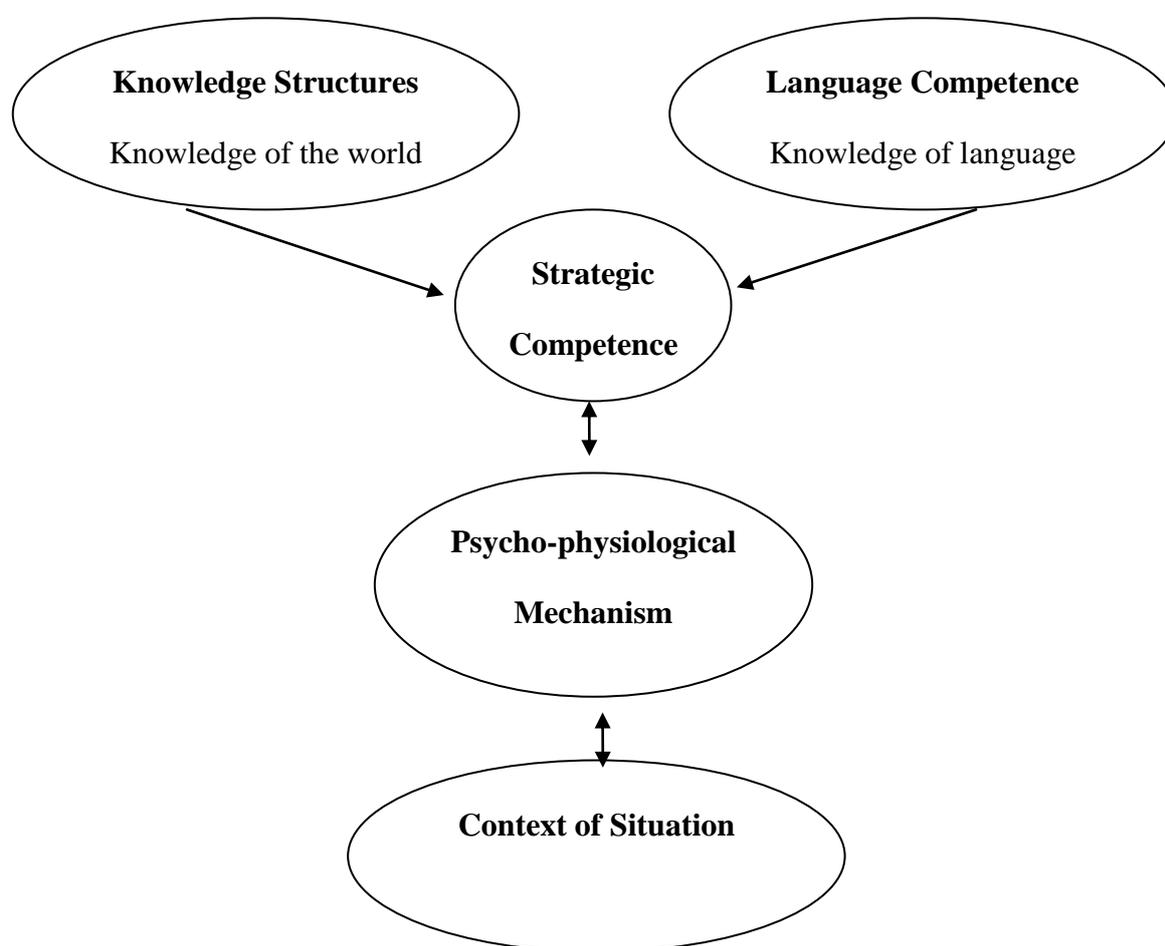
Figure 3.1: Components of communicative language ability in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990:85)

3.2.2. Information structure competence and language skills in Bachman (1990)'s framework

Based on Bachman's views of language competence presented in the above section and on my discussions on information structure in chapter 2, it can be said that information structure competence is part of organizational competence and pragmatic competence. More specifically, sentential-level issues of information structure can be seen as part of cohesion, and knowledge of clause relations and of rhetorical structures and features of academic texts can be seen as part of rhetorical organization and pragmatic competence.

Information structure competence in my study is viewed as consisting of knowledge of 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)

- Knowledge of rhetorical structures and features of academic texts and awareness of the audience in writing

It is my hope that L2 learners would develop their reading and writing skills after they were given explicit instruction enhancing their knowledge of these aspects of information structure.

My discussions now turn to the relationship between knowledge of information structure and reading/writing skill development. In Bachman (1990)'s model, learners' reading and writing are viewed as the implementing or executing of language communicative knowledge in communicative language use. Bachman and Palmer (1996:75-76) gave a clearer concept of skill, which is 'a specific combination of language ability and task characteristics'. The authors consider language skills 'to be the contextualized realization of the ability to use language in the performance of specific language use tasks.' Thus, learners' development in reading and writing skills can be viewed as their development in performing a given specific reading or writing task.

Based on Bachman (1990)'s discussions, the process of L2 learners' skill development in relation to their information structure competence can be described to follow the following steps. First, learners are given explicit instruction enhancing their knowledge of information structure. Then, they are supposed use this knowledge in performing reading and writing tasks, through which they might develop their reading and writing skills.

3.2.3. Information structure competence and pragmatic competence in Bachman (1990)'s framework

The last two aspects of information structure competence mentioned in section 3.2.1 above (knowledge of clause relations and knowledge of rhetorical structures and features of academic texts and awareness of the audience in writing) can be viewed as part of pragmatic competence (illocutionary and socio-linguistic competence) in Bachman (1990)'s model. These competencies are seen as supportive in bringing about knowledge of coherence of text organization. Knowledge of clause relations including such issues as textual segments and textual patterns can help learners reach a macro-structure view of a text and bring about their ability to comprehend the text at is macro-structure level and their ability to create a coherent piece of writing. Knowledge of rhetorical structures and features of academic texts and awareness of the audience in writing can help learners interpret and create contextually appropriate texts as instances of a particular genre (Bhatia, 2000).

Awareness of the audience when composing texts is treated as of crucial importance in academic writing. Johns (1993:85) 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.' Swales and Christine (1994) presented an overview of academic writing characteristics in which audience is placed at the top of a list of such considerations as audience, purpose and strategies, organization, style, flow and presentation. Paltridge (2001) pointed out that audience could affect writers' language choices in vocabulary, speech acts, mood, and modalities. Dudley-Evans (1995) suggested that students in academic writing settings should be able to distinguish between general and particular expectations of audience. If audience's expectations are general, patterns of textual organization of one field of study might be used for another. If audience's expectations are particular, adaptation in general patterns must be made to meet the specific requirements of a particular field of study. Knowledge of the audience might guide them in selecting appropriate vocabulary and avoiding using features

that are not accepted for academic writing such as being indirect, using contracted forms. Pedagogically, in the classroom, students should be encouraged to imagine they were writing for a particular audience because this might give them important clues concerning both the form and content of their writing.

3.3. The interference of L1 strategies in comprehending and constructing information in L2 learners' reading and writing

In section 2.6, chapter 2, I discussed some major differences in information structure between English and Vietnamese on the assumption that these differences might cause problems to my learners in their reading and writing. To be more specific, I assumed that some of my learners' reading and writing strategies formed in their L1 might negatively influence their L2 skill development.

Transfer of written discourse strategies has drawn the attention of contrastive rhetoric, the study of the similarities and differences in written discourse between two languages and how these similarities and differences may affect the way learners express themselves in the L2. While the approach has been subjected to criticism e.g. by Kachru (2000); Mohan (1985); and Scollon (1997), it has been advocated by many others, e.g. Clyne (1987); Connor (1996); Hinds (1987); Mauranen (1993); Ventola (1992, 1996). Grabe (1996:109) explained the pedagogic rationale for contrastive rhetoric as follows:

> What is clear is that there are rhetorical differences in the written discourses of various languages, and that those differences need to be brought to consciousness before a writer can begin to understand what he or she must do in order to write in a more native-like manner (or in a manner that is more acceptable to native speakers of the target language).

What can be inferred from Grable's comments above is that there is a place for meta-linguistic knowledge in terms of contrastive rhetoric in L2 learning and teaching. It is therefore my ambition while carrying out this cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing to enhance not only learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure but also their awareness of the differences in information structure between the English and Vietnamese languages. The awareness is hoped to help them recognize how their L1 reading and writing strategies can interfere with their L2 skill

development. Once recognizing the interference, learners can make attempts to develop alternative strategies. I would hereby make it clear that contrastive rhetoric in my study was used for pedagogical purpose rather than as a research approach. Conclusions concerning contrastive rhetoric in the study therefore should be treated as pedagogical implications rather than claims made about theories of contrastive rhetoric.

3.4. Teaching information structure to L2 learners for communicative language ability development

3.4.1. Teaching information structure

In this part, I will discuss the necessity for teaching information structure to L2 learners. The teaching of knowledge of information structure is hoped to help learners overcome difficulties in their reading and writing as an initial step into developing their communicative language ability. It is my assumption that L2 learners might encounter some problems and difficulties in their L2 reading and writing as the result of not having a clear and systematic understanding of information structure and also as the consequence of their L2 reading and writing strategies, some of which are assumed to transfer from their L1. Based on previous studies of such authors as Canagrarajah (2002), Silva (1993), Johns (1990), Meyer (1977), Singer (1984) and Hinds (1987), and on my own teaching experience and beliefs, I expected that L2 learners might encounter the following reading and writing problems. Reading problems might include their difficulty in recognizing the main idea of a text, and struggling with non-canonical constructions. Problems with their reading strategies might be setting no goal for reading, and overlooking the significance of cohesive devices. Learners' writing problems, strategies and tendencies might include their not stating or unclearly stating thesis statements and topic sentences, developing ideas illogically, 'beating about the bush' (indirectness in introducing the topic, diverting from the main idea), lack of coherence, concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question, inadequately using transitional signals, lack of planning for writing at, paying too much attention to local constructions and forgetting the global aspects of the text such as its communicative purposes or its social functions. These assumptions and beliefs will be studied against the data analyses in chapter 5 to bring about conclusions as concerns whether or not the students in my study encountered these problems. Of course, it is undeniable that such reading and writing problems as well as lack of effective reading and writing strategies can be grounded in

students' low levels of grammatical and lexical knowledge of the L2. Students cannot process a text normally unless they recognize most of its vocabulary or it becomes very difficult for them to attend to more strategic aspects of composition if they are struggling with basic grammar and vocabulary. However, the students selected to take part in my study were considered to be of intermediate level of proficiency and having good grammatical competence, I would exclude the possibility of their low levels of grammatical and vocabulary knowledge from the causes leading to these reading and writing problems. (The selection of the students in my study is discussed in section 4.3.2, chapter 4).

It can be argued that learners can overcome their problems by their own learning strategies, such as self-study and naturalistic exposure. However, they are not submerged in a native-speaking environment, which means that they are not actually exposed to aspects of information structure imbedded in everyday language use. With my teaching method, they can accumulate knowledge of information structure in a more systematic and panoramic way. They are also instructed in how to use this knowledge which includes suggestions to overcome their problems to develop their reading and writing skills. Of course, there is more to skill development than just teaching, and most importantly, it is the learners who can actively promote their own learning process from the initial step of cognitively inputting language items, making them part of their inter-language competence, activating it in actual use and sharpening their skills. In other words, the learners themselves are part of the transferring process from competence to skills and this process can be positively impacted by language teachers who can apply some effective method to give an impetus to the process.

Most communicative language teaching theorists have always seen some place for the development of meta-language. In my study, I would advocate some authors like Bialystok (1982), Widdowson (1990), and McCarthy and Carter (1994) who propose an integration of meta-language and communicative language learning and teaching. Widdowson (1990) claimed that conscious learning, which might involve comparing features of L1 and L2, would suit some learners' cognitive style and enhance their learning. Bialystok (1982:97) thought that some 'uses of a language involved in reading, writing, lecturing, explaining depend on greater analysis in linguistic structure.' In this view of language teaching and learning there is an integration of explicit and implicit language learning, of conscious and unconscious learning, of declarative and procedural knowledge, of form-focused and meaning-focused learning, of learning as a product and learning as a process, and of accuracy and fluency (McCarthy and Carter, 1994).

3.4.2. The role of genre in teaching academic writing

Many researchers in genre analysis such as Bhatia (2002), Hyland (2004), Paltridge (2001), Johns (2002), and Dudley-Evans (2002) have argued in support of the role of genre in language learning programs in general and in the context of teaching and learning genre in academic writing in particular. Dudley-Evans (2002: 225) viewed 'the increased prominence of genre-based approaches to the teaching of academic or professional writing' as 'a feature of English for Specific Purposes courses in the last ten years.' Giving L2 learners knowledge of genre can help them more clearly recognize the rhetorical structures of groups of texts which bear similar communicative purposes, textual organizations, and expected audience. Grabe (2002:266) confirmed that 'there is now sufficient supporting evidence that both graphic representations of text structure and awareness raising of text organization and its signaling improve students' learning from texts'.

Hyland (2004:56) introduced the following main components of knowledge of a particular genre, which can support learners in their writing:

- Knowledge of the communicative purpose that the genre is commonly used to achieve

- Knowledge of the appropriate forms that are needed to construct and interpret texts

- Knowledge of content and register (which includes *field*-the social activity in which people are involved and what the text is about; *tenor*-the relationships of the participants in the interaction; and *mode*-the role of language), (Hyland, 2004:26)

- Knowledge of the contexts in which a genre is regularly found

In terms of genre pedagogy in the classroom, the SFL approach acknowledges the central role teachers in scaffolding learners' development through a cyclical process in which learners are engaged in such tasks as genre prediction and problem-solving activities. The cyclical process is described in Hyland (2004: 34) as follows:

- Contextualizing the genre through activities such as prediction tasks, problem-solving activities, site visits, etc., that reveal the purpose of the genre and the situations in which it is found

- Modeling appropriate rhetorical patterns of the genre to reveal its stages and their functions (comparing texts, sequencing activities, etc.)

- Providing guided practice in writing the genre through role plays, information-gap tasks, group construction or completion activities, etc.

- Withdrawing to allow students to write independently (planning, drafting, and editing texts; peer critiques) in realistic contexts

Several suggestions have been made concerning teachers' awareness of some misconceptions about genre-based approaches to language teaching. Paltridge (2001) suggested that teachers should recognize that they are offering students tendencies rather than fixed patterns (in other words, genre analysis should be descriptive and not prescriptive). Dudley-Evans (1993) warned that a genre-based approach to teaching academic writing should avoid making students believe that common textual patterns of organization can be applied in all fields of studies.

3.5. Current methods of teaching reading and writing skill in the Vietnamese university system

It has been a formal requirement in the Vietnamese university system to apply a communicative language teaching approach in every foreign language lesson (Hiep, 2005, 2006; Viet, 2008). The lesson plans must basically conform to the principles of communicative language teaching taking development in learners' communicative skills as the ultimately crucial aim. Classroom activities are designed to serve that aim with such important guidelines as adopting a learner-centered perspective, increasing authentic communicative activities in the classroom between learners and learners and learners and teachers, reducing teacher's talking time, avoiding using L1, and reducing grammatical explanations (Hiep, 2005, 2007; Viet, 2008).

However, current studies in the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese university system show that CLT has not been as successful as targeted in many aspects and for various reasons. There are physical reasons such as class sizes and lack of facilities (Canh, 2009). Some studies suggest that the reason for CLT not working quite effectively in the Vietnamese context is because many learners do not have the real need to communicative in the English language (Bock, 2000; Viet, 2008; Huong and Hiep, 2010). Hiep (2000, 2001) viewed inadequacy in teacher training and retraining as one of the causes leading to the infectiveness of the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese university system. According to Hiep

(2000), many university teachers of English are not well trained in teaching methodology and many do not have opportunity for further training in their career development. Among those were young and inexperienced teachers, teachers of Russians who were retrained to become teachers of English, teachers who got their English teaching qualification before 1986 when the most popular method was grammar-translation. Viet (2008) mentioned teachers' misconception of CLT as one of the reasons why the implementation of CLT has not very successful in the Vietnamese university system. According to Viet (2008), many university teachers in his study believed that teaching English in CLT is teaching communicative skills only resulting in teachers focusing on developing language skills at the expense of giving instruction in language knowledge.

In teaching writing, Ly (2007) claimed that teaching writing approach in Vietnamese universities seems to be mostly product-based and the process of writing may not be made explicit to students although currently, some Vietnamese EFL teachers have begun integrating the process genre-based and communicative approach into their writing classes. Ly (2007) also pointed out that writing lessons, it is very often that writing has been conducted as an individual activity and the teachers is the only real audience in the classroom.

Conferences and workshops on teaching innovations have been frequently held and teachers are still dissatisfied with learners' achievement (Hoa, 2008). In my view, the teaching of reading and writing skills in the Vietnamese tertiary institutions has not yielded noticeable results for the following reasons:

There is no clear method with specifications based on learners' needs and characteristics. There are no systematic formal instruction and explicit explanations of the initial declarative knowledge required for the development of learners' reading and writing skills. For example, learners are not explicitly directed towards knowledge of the contextual constraints of the given-new distribution regulating non-canonical constructions and how this knowledge might affect their reading comprehension and academic writing. Consequently, learners might take for granted a construction they encounter in their reading without realizing the underlying pragmatic reason for the information distribution in that context. Without this knowledge, they are unlikely to be able to construct messages in their writing being aware of why they use one construction but not another.

At the level of syllabus design, there is no specific focus in teaching syllabuses to concentrate on areas of knowledge and skills that require more attention for development. At the level of classroom delivery, teacher's activities lack specific techniques drawing learners' attentions towards areas of knowledge and skill they should be aware of to overcome their reading and writing problems. For example, there are no eliciting questions helping learners recognize the cognitive semantic relations between two clauses, which could be beneficial in their interpretation of the text. Learners' reading activities largely and frequently involve skimming to get the general idea of a reading passage without the teaching giving them any meta-knowledge of textual patterns, which could support them in performing the task successfully. Classroom writing is often skipped over and deferred as homework. Thus the teacher rarely has a chance to observe the cognitive process underlying learners' writing so as to make an analytical diagnosis and help them overcome their writing problems.

3.6. Cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching reading and writing skills

In this section I present my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners' reading and writing skills in which learners are first explicitly given formal knowledge of information structure which they can apply to develop their reading and writing skills in academic contexts. The presentation includes the approach's method, principles, classroom tasks and activities. The cognitive model I advocate in my approach is DECPRO introduced by Johnson (1996) in which learners are expected to have some declarative knowledge of information structure before they can proceduralize it in reading and writing activities. Anderson's (1983, 1985, 1990, 1995) Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) theory of cognition is mentioned as the theoretical background for Johnson's model. Finally I show how this model reflects my learners' skill acquisition.

3.6.1. Targeted knowledge and skills

The teaching approach aims at developing L2 learners' communicative language ability as understood in Bachman's (1990) model in which ability is viewed as consisting of both explicit/analyzed knowledge and the implementing of this knowledge in language use. The meta-linguistic knowledge learners are expected to have concerns English information

structure at both sentential and discourse levels. The targeted skills are reading and writing in academic contexts.

The selection of information structure meta-knowledge is based on my assumption of what is essential in helping L2 learners understand more about the constructing of academic written texts, which then will help them in their reading and writing in academic contexts. Based on my discussions in chapter 2, I have designed 4 units, each consisting of two lessons. Depending on the content load of the lessons, some lessons are divided into two parts.

Following are the title of each unit and lesson. The contents of each lesson, the lesson plans including the meta-linguistic exercises following the meta-linguistic lessons, as well as the activities in the skill development phase are all based on my discussions in chapter 2. The detailed syllabus is introduced in appendix D (p.256). A sample lesson plan for unit 2, lesson 2, and the handouts for students' activities in this lesson can be found in appendix I1 (p.317) and I2 (p.323). Pedagogic treatment of English information structure is presented in appendix H1 (p.289). Reading and writing tasks worksheets are presented in appendix E (pp.259-276).

Unit 1: Sentential level issues of English information structure

Lesson 1: The given/new status of the information exchanged

Part 1: Introduction of information structure

In this part of lesson 1, learners were introduced to the concept of information structure, and how meta-knowledge of information structure might help them develop their reading and writing skills, and communicative language ability.

Part 2: The given/new status distinction and the contextual constraints on the given/new status

In this part of the lesson, learners were introduced to the concepts of given and new status of information in the sentence and related issues such as its relative nature. The concepts of theme/rheme and the distinction between theme/rheme and givenness/newness were then presented to help learners understand more about the distribution of the new and the given in a specific contextualised sentence in relation to the theme/rheme framework. Learners were also supposed to realize the importance of context in assigning the given/new status of information. Related issues such as shared knowledge between interlocutors, prior discourse, and cataphoric links were also mentioned to help learners understand more about the

dependency of the given/new status of information in a sentence on the context in which it occurs.

Lesson 2: The order in which information is distributed in the sentence

This lesson fell into 2 parts.

Part 1: Information distributing principles and tendencies

In this part of the lesson, learners were introduced to the principles and tendencies of distributing information in the sentence: the principles of end-weight, communicative dynamism, and non-canonical constructions. Knowledge in this part and lesson 1 was a background for learners' exploration into the given/new distribution in canonical and non-canonical constructions presented in part 2 of this lesson.

Part 2: Canonical constructions (7 major clause types) and non-canonical constructions

In this part of the lesson, learners were introduced to the canonical constructions (the 7 major clause types) as well as the non-canonical constructions in English. Presumably, some learners had previously been introduced to some or all of the patterns and constructions. However, I believed that knowledge of the issue was not given to them systematically. The part of the lesson therefore was intended to help them systemize their meta-knowledge of clause structures and non-canonical constrictions. Within the introduction of the 7 clause structures, learners were supposed to explore the unmarked ordering of information distribution with the pronominal subject bearing old information and the other clause elements (verb, object, complement, and adverbial) bearing the new. Marked ordering was presented within the non-canonical constructions with both their syntactical and pragmatic features explained. In my anticipation this part of the lesson would be more challenging to learners because most of them presumably were not familiar with the constructions particularly in terms of their pragmatic implications. Although they may have got to know the syntactical features of one or more of the constructions, they may have rarely been taught about the underlying reasons why a particular construction rather than another is used in a specific context. For instance, learners might have been instructed how to invert an element of a sentence but not all of them have been given explanations why such an inverted sentence would be more acceptable in a given context. Therefore, I tried to briefly put in the lesson the essential discussions made in chapter 2 so that learners could understand more about each construction with emphasis on the given-new distribution embedded in it.

Unit 2: Discourse-level issues of information structure

In unit 2, learners were introduced to discourse level issues of information structure: clause relations and related issues such as relational types (logical sequence and matching relations), textual segments, and rhetorical structures of academic essays. The unit was divided into 2 lessons:

Lesson 1: Clause relations and types of clause relations

Learners were expected to grasp the concept of clause relations and types of clause relations to assist them in approaching their reading and writing from a global view of text. Knowledge of clause relations was expected to draw learners' attention to the need to interpret the relations of clauses in comprehending and constructing text at discourse level.

Lesson 2: Rhetorical structures of academic texts (textual patterns)

The concept of textual patterns and five most common patterns were introduced to learners. The knowledge was intended to help learners visualize the whole logical structure of text in reading and writing. Learners could use this knowledge to recognize the pattern of a reading passage or select an appropriate pattern for an essay.

Unit 3: A comparison of English and Vietnamese information structure

The content of unit 3 was based on my discussions in chapter 2 on the similarities and differences in some aspects of information structure of the English and Vietnamese languages. The unit aimed at developing our learners' writing skill rather than their reading skill. The two issues selected to be introduced to the students were firstly the topic-prominent feature of the Vietnamese language and the subject-prominent feature of the English language, and secondly directness in the writing style of English native speakers and indirectness in the writing style of Vietnamese people. The selection depends on my assumption that these two features were most likely to be transferred from their mother tongue into English.

Lesson 1: Topic-prominent and subject-prominent languages

In this lesson, learners' awareness was drawn towards the fact that Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language whereas English is a subject-prominent language. My aim in giving learners this knowledge was to raise their awareness of avoiding creating infelicitous topic-prominent sentences in English writing.

Lesson 2: Directness in English and indirectness in Vietnamese writing style

In this lesson, learners were explicitly told about the expected directness in English academic writing as a warning against their use of indirectness in L2 writing. Also in this lesson, learners were introduced some features and requirements of English academic writing. Awareness of the audience in writing was emphasized and learners were encouraged to imagine that they were writing for academic audience.

Unit 4: Incorporating meta-knowledge of English information structure into L2 reading and writing strategies

Lesson 1: L2 learners' problems in reading and writing

In this lesson, learners had the chance to discuss the problems they might encounter in reading and writing in relation to their meta-knowledge of English information structure. Learners were then advised on how to incorporate knowledge of English information structure they had gained in previous lessons into their reading and writing skill development.

Lesson 2: Suggestions for L2 learners' development of reading and writing skills

Following on lesson 1, in this lesson, learners were given suggestions for the development of their reading and writing skills. The suggestions were made based on some problems and strategies that might negatively affect their L2 reading and writing on the one hand and on what was considered as good L2 reading and writing practice on the other hand. All the suggestions drew on learners' meta-knowledge of information structure.

3.6.2. Teaching approach

My teaching is cognitive meta-linguistic in approach, adopting Anderson's (1983, 1985, 1990, 1995) Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT*) model, and Johnson's (1996) DECPRO model.

Anderson's ACT* model

In Anderson's ACT*'s theory, knowledge required and processed for cognitive activities like problem solving is viewed as of two kinds: declarative and procedural. Declarative knowledge is 'knowledge about facts and things'; procedural knowledge refers to 'knowledge about how to perform various cognitive activities' (Anderson, 1995:236). Also according to Anderson (1995), declarative knowledge is explicit, i.e., we are consciously aware of it, whereas procedural knowledge is often implicit, i.e. it is stored in our memory without our being consciously aware of it. Learning in this model is complete only when declarative

knowledge becomes procedural, i.e., when learners move from the stage of 'know that' into the stage of 'know how.' Practice is seen as the means for declarative knowledge to be proceduralized. Learners' process of acquiring a skill in Anderson's view, undergoes three stages:

> a cognitive stage, in which a description of the procedure is learned, an associative stage, in which a method for performing the skill is worked out and an autonomous stage, in which the skill becomes more and more rapid and automatic. (Anderson, 1985:232, cited in Towell and Hawkins, 1994:203)

In the light of the ACT*'s model, learners' expected development in reading and writing skills as the result of the cognitive meta-linguistic method can be described as follows: first, learners are given explicit formal instruction enhancing their declarative knowledge of information structure. Then learners are instructed in how to use this knowledge in reading and writing activities. Through practice, their skills which are initially supported by this knowledge becomes proceduralized, resulting in their reading and writing more efficiently and fluently without their consciously resorting to the declarative knowledge.

Johnson's (1996) DECPRO model

Based on Anderson's theory, Johnson (1996) proposed two models of language learning and teaching: PRODEC and DECPRO. Johnson (1996:104) pointed out the differences between the PRODEC and DECPRO models as follows.

In the DECPRO sequence, declarative knowledge has the role of being 'a starting point for proceduralization', and needs to be 'simple, uncluttered, concrete, and easily convertible into a 'plan for action'. In case of my teaching method, in this sequence, learners are given meta-knowledge of information structure, and will then store the knowledge in their memory as a database in 'the form of a set of semantic networks' (Johnson, 1996:82). When engaged in reading and writing activities in which learners are required to perform a certain task, part of the knowledge stored in their memory is triggered and retrieved to support them in performing the task. The idea was tested in my fieldwork and seemed very effective in helping learners solve some of their reading and writing problems. For example, in the reading activity following the meta-linguistic lesson on textual patterns, the learners resorted to their knowledge of textual patterns introduced to them previously to find out the pattern of a given text to help them grasp the main idea of the text. The percentage of learners who

could perform the task increased in comparison to the pre-teaching phase test result (see section 6.4.1, chapter 6).

In the PRODEC sequence, procedural knowledge is the initial point for declarative knowledge development. In this sequence, learners do not need explicit formal meta-knowledge of information structure to perform a reading and writing task, for example, to get the main idea of a passage. Knowledge of how to grasp the main idea of the passage is imbedded in procedures for task performance.

The DECPRO sequence, in my view, is more relevant to L2 learners, who do not have sufficient opportunities to acquire initial procedural knowledge in a naturalistic way. I agree that not all declarative knowledge comes through conscious study. However, with respect to the teaching of information structure knowledge, my hypothesis in this study is that giving L2 learners explicit instruction enhancing their declarative knowledge is beneficial because such knowledge does not come unconsciously to learners in non-native speaking environment.

3.6.3. Teaching materials

The content of the meta-linguistic lessons used for the meta-linguistic phase was designed based on my discussions about English information structure in chapter 2. Full details of the lessons are presented in appendix H1 (p.289). Meta-linguistic exercises were designed based on activities suggested by Crombie (1985 a, b). Some exercises were taken from Quirk (1972). An example of a meta-linguistic exercise was presented in appendix I3 (p.333). Writing topics were selected from IELTS textbooks. The selection of topic depended on my learners' interest and motivation in information technology. Writing activities were designed based on some suggestions made by clause relational approach authors like McCarthy and Carter (1994). An example of writing topic and writing activities can be found in the sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1 (p.317). Reading passages used for the skill-developing phase were taken from a teaching material officially used for students of Information Technology in my university. The material was compiled by my colleagues by selecting reading passages from the internet and designing reading tasks for each passage. Most of the reading tasks used in my teaching method were designed based on the suggestions of McCarthy and Carter (1994). Some of the tasks designed by my colleagues were also used because they could serve my analytical purposes. Examples of the reading tasks can be found in the sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1 (p.317).

3.6.4. *Teaching principles*

The following principles reflect the cognitive meta-linguistic approach adopted for my teaching. They are established on the basis of Anderson's ACT* model, and Johnson's DECPRO model. They involve both teachers' and learners' activities. Conformity to the principles is reflected in my sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, presented in appendix I1 (p.317).

- Explicit formal instruction in introducing meta-knowledge of information structure to learners is strongly advocated

  The teaching should help enhance learners' both meta-language and skills involving recognizing and understanding English information structure. Therefore, explicit explanations of English information structure are strongly approved of both in the meta-linguistic phase and the skill-developing phase.

- Learners' engagement in cognitive process

  Learners should be engaged in cognitive processes while attempting to understand meta-linguistic aspects of English information structure both in the meta-linguistic phase and in the course of a reading or writing task. These cognitive processes might involve the learners exploring features of English information structure such as the distribution of the given and the new in a sentence or the textual pattern of a whole text.

- A balance between the meta-knowledge phase and skill-developing phase

  The amount of time allocated to the teaching of information structure and to the development of writing and reading skill should be kept in balance. In order to guarantee this balance, it is advisable to simplify the meta-knowledge introduced to learners in the cognitive stage. I believe that I achieved this in my pedagogic materials. (The pedagogic treatment of English information structure is presented in appendix H1, p.289). The amount of time for learners' cognitive activities, the number of questions asked by the teacher, etc, must be carefully weighed to ensure balance of all the activities. In the sample lesson plan for lesson2, unit 2 (appendix I1, p.317), the time allocated for each phase is equally 90 minutes in a 180-minute lesson. Based on my actual teaching in the fieldwork, it is suggested that this balance should be observed in all lessons.

- Knowledge-oriented activities followed by skill-oriented activities

This sequence should be applied in every lesson to conform to my acknowledgement in the role of declarative knowledge in proceduralization.

- Teachers' assisting in learners' cognitive process

Teachers are encouraged to help learners with any difficulty they might encounter while cognitively struggling with many aspects of English information structure both in expanding their meta-language and improving their skills. Teachers can apply such techniques as using eliciting questions. Examples of eliciting questions used in reading activities can be found in the sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1 (p.317).

- A balance between individual work, pair-work and group-work

Learners might differ in their mental capacity. Some can be more quick-minded than others. Too much pair-work or group-work can lessen the amount of time required for full understanding by some learners. All pair-work and group-work activities should therefore be strictly monitored to ensure the equal cognitive participation of all members of the class. The use of group-work and pair-work is illustrated in the sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1 (p.317).

- L1's usage is approved of when necessary

With the involvement of meta-language, an all-English explanation might not ensure a high percentage of learners' comprehensibility, so L1 usage can be acceptable as a means of double-checking students' understanding. This applies only to teachers' oral explanations. However, this practice should be kept down to a minimum and only used as the last resort when the teacher strongly believes that learners do not fully understand the meta-language. In my teaching experience, realizing the moments when learners do not understand something is not a difficult job. There are always some learners in the class who would explicitly say they have not understood something. This can also be inferred from their facial expressions. Another reasons for the teachers minimizing L1 explanations is that learners tend to be annoyed when teachers use L1 in English classes. They might question the teacher's ability in making him/herself understood in the English language. Moreover, teachers' abuse of L1 in class might encourage some learners to switch to L1 when they do not

necessarily have to, for example when they can attempt to find alternative ways to express their ideas in English. In my belief, the use of L1 in written materials is generally objected by both teachers and learners. The belief was founded in everyday conversations with my learners and colleagues.

- Homework

The teaching should help learners build up their own strategies and independent understanding of English information structure, therefore homework writing and reading tasks are of equal importance as classroom engagement (see appendix I1, p.317 for examples of homework assigned for students in unit 2, lesson 2).

3.6.5. Classroom tasks and activities

When designing tasks for each lesson, I took into consideration the following requirements:

- The tasks could help me obtain data for my analytical purpose

- The tasks require cognitive activities from learners

- Make use of the tasks designed by my colleagues which could serve my study

Classroom tasks and activities utilized in my teaching method were designed based on some teaching suggestions made by authors of the clause relational approach to text analysis e.g., McCarthy (1991), McCarthy and Carter (1994), Widdowson (1978), Hoey (1983, 1991, 1994, 2001), Crombie (1985 a, b). (For examples of the activities used in a specific lesson, see my sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1, (p.317) and students' handouts used in the lesson in appendix I2 (p.325). Specific tasks used in each lessons are presented in appendix E, pp.259-276). In general the suggestions reveal the importance of teaching learners how sentences are combined in discourse to produce discourse meaning and how to identify the organizational patterns in texts as well as the linguistic means by which these patterns are signaled. The activities on the whole involve students' cognitively recognizing or identifying features of English information structure at both sentential and discourse level. At the sentential level, learners can be engaged in such activities as recognizing the function of non-canonical constructions in a given sentence or using an appropriate non-canonical construction to distribute information so that the felicity of the given and the new information is guaranteed. At discourse level, they can take part in such activities as identifying the clause relations in a given paragraph or the textual patterns of one whole text.

My lessons took place in two phases: a meta-linguistic phase and a skill- developing phase. The suggestions were used for activities in both phases. In the meta-linguistic phase, after learners were given explicit instruction enhancing their meta-knowledge of information structure, they were asked to do meta-linguistic tasks to guarantee and strengthen their understanding of the meta-knowledge which they would need to use in the skill developing phase. An example of the meta-linguistic exercises used was given in appendix I3, p.333. The tasks might involve, for example, learners' identifying the clause pattern of a given sentence or the textual pattern of a text. Teaching materials were taken from Quirk (1985) and authors of clause relational approach like McCarthy (1991), McCarthy and Carter (1994), and Crombie (1985 a, b). The tasks were repeated in the skill-developing phase. However, in this phase, learners were asked to do reading and writing tasks from prescribed university textbook. In principle, reading activities took place before writing activities as the latter were based on the knowledge and skill promoted in learners in the former.

Several techniques were used to support learners' activities such as eliciting questions. This technique proved to be quite helpful in getting learners through their reading and writing activities. In reading activities, for example, for a reading task in which learners had to find out the topic of a paragraph, the following questions were asked to support learners' cognitive process of finding out the answer:

- Is the topic introduced in the first sentence of the paragraph?

- Which words/phrases in the sentence do you think are most important in bringing about the topic of the paragraph?

- How are the first two sentences in the paragraph related? Which cohesive device is used to show this relationship?

- What are the functions of the other sentences in the paragraph?

In writing activities, think-aloud protocols were quite often used to help me know what was going on in learners' mind while they were doing their writing (see section 2.2 in the sample lesson plan, appendix I1, p. 317).

Reading tasks and activities

Using the reading passages given in their textbook, learners were engaged in several cognitive tasks incorporating the meta-knowledge given to them in the meta-linguistic phase. The tasks involved exploring features of information structure at sentential and discourse

level. More attention was paid to the discourse level structure as this could help learners grasp the main idea of the text. Sentential level structure was to be explored when the reading tasks required them to get some specific information or when learners could not understand the meaning of an important sentence which might block their comprehension of one whole paragraph or even the whole text. When getting stuck in understanding the meaning of a sentence, learners were encouraged to try the following meta-linguistic techniques:

- Judging whether the sentence bore a canonical or non-canonical construction. If the construction was canonical, analyzing it to see which clause pattern it had. This helped the learners to get the information required after realizing the subject, verb, object, complement, or adverbial of the sentence. Knowledge of the principle of end-weight and communicative dynamism helped them find out the most important information in the sentence. This technique seemed more useful in case of long sentences with imbedded relative clauses, which might distract learners' attention away from some important information. If the construction was non-canonical, they would analyze it to see which non-canonical construction it had. Because each non-canonical construction is rather specific in its function (topicalizing, providing link with previous discourse, focusing, contrasting, etc) and in the way it distributes the given and the new information, meta-knowledge in this aspect helped learners pick out the important information in the sentence.

Several other techniques and activities were used to help learners understand the main idea of a text.

- Recognizing textual patterns

The simplest form of the activities involved learners being asked to identify the pattern of a given text. There were techniques to support these activities, for example, using text-frames, the terms Hewings & McCarthy (1988) and McCarthy & Carter (1994) use to refer to diagrams representing textual patterns. Recognizing textual patterns by using diagrammatic representations of the patterns according to these authors is 'one of the skills of efficient readers of English'. Classroom activities involving the use of text frames were presented in a sample lesson plan designed for lesson 2, unit 2 in Appendix I1 (p.317). The suggestions for the activities are made by McCarthy & Carter (1994:60-61). In these activities, students were given the text, the text frame, and a blank frame, which is a copy of the text frame without any entries (labels and line numbers). Students were asked to make brief notes in the blank

frame that would answers questions such as 'what is the basis for the claim in sentences 1-3?', or 'what claim is made in sentences 4-6?'

- Recognizing textual segments/elements of a textual pattern

The activities involved the teacher giving the students a suggested pattern of a text and the students' task being to find out the textual segments. Students were asked to rewrite some textual segments to strengthen or soften their functions (denying, correcting, etc.) They were asked to identify, e.g., the problem, the situation, the solution, and the evaluation of a text bearing solution-problem pattern.

- Recognizing cognitive relations among clauses

This technique was used to help learners better understand local semantic relationships among the clauses using the meta-knowledge of such relations as cause-consequence and the cohesive devices signalling these relationships.

Writing tasks and activities

The writing activities were designed to develop learners' sentential and discourse writing skill. At the sentential level, learners were expected to use their meta-knowledge of sentential level features of information structure to construct a message with respect to how the information should be distributed most appropriately in the light of adjoining sentences. Some activities involved learners deciding on the most appropriate canonical or non-canonical construction to maintain text coherence.

Discourse level writing activities aimed at helping learners incorporating discourse knowledge of information structure in constructing larger units of discourse organization. Using their knowledge of rhetorical structures and features of academic writing, clause relations, types of clause relations, clause relation signals, textual segments (discourse elements), and textual patterns, they were engaged in such activities as using appropriate cohesive devices to create a possible clause relation between two textual segments, reorganizing jumbled textual segments to make a coherent text, deciding on the most appropriate textual pattern for a given topic or constructing a text-frame for an assigned essay. In all the writing activities, learners were encouraged to imagine they were writing for academic audience to raise their awareness of the communicative purposes, and conform to the requirements of both form and content of their essays. Some of these activities were illustrated in the sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1, (p.317).

3.6.6. Teaching and learning modes

The most preferable and most suitable teaching and learning modes used in my method were pair-work and group-work, which encouraged mutual cognitive labor when solving tasks requiring shared knowledge, e.g., when learners were asked to read and answer questions involving the meta-knowledge of information structure. This was applied even in the meta-linguistic phase even though this phase was more teacher-led than in the skill-developing phase. Individual characteristics were taken into consideration when forming pairs or groups based on such factors as learners' level of proficiency, their emotions towards other students in the class. Some students were reluctant to be in the same pair or groups with one or the other of the students in the class and this could affect their cooperation in the pair-work or group-work. Learners were encouraged to form their own groups. The teacher only intervened when there was a problem with the grouping e.g., when strong students (students of higher levels of proficiency) grouped together leaving weaker students working together and there was no-one in the group to lead the activities.

Another thing to consider is the balance between individual work and pair-work/group-work. Learners should be allowed to have some time of their own to be engaged in cognitive tasks to ensure they understand what they are to do without being suppressed by other students in the group.

3.7. Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners' reading and writing skills for their communicative language ability development. The model adopted in the teaching approach is Bachman's (1990) framework of communicative language ability. In Bachman's framework, information structure competence is part of textual competence including cohesion and rhetorical organization competence and pragmatic competence. Reading and writing skills are seen as the implementation of language communicative knowledge in contextualized language use while performing a specific task. There are two major reasons why I adopted Bachman's model. First, the distinction between knowledge and skill is clearly stated in the model. Second, the interaction between the components in the model is explicitly indicated. Bachman's framework gave a comprehensive view of the relationship between the enhancement of L2 learners' meta-knowledge of information structure and their reading and writing skill development as well as

the interaction between information structure competence and other components in the model such as learners' world knowledge and the context of language use.

Our approach to learning is theoretically based on Anderson's (1983, 1985, 1900, 1995) ACT* model, and Johnson's (1996) DECPRO model. The general concept of the models is that learners need some initial declarative knowledge and proceduralize this knowledge through practice to develop their skill once the knowledge has become automatic. The sequence rather than the PRODEC was advocated in my study because it was assumed to be more relevant to L2 learners who are not submerged in native speaking environment to develop their procedural knowledge in a natural way. My teaching principles emphasized the role of cognitive processes while learners were given knowledge of information structure and while they used this knowledge in their skill developing activities. The activities presented in this chapter were largely drawn from suggestions made by authors of the clause relational approach to text analysis such as McCarthy (1991), McCarthy and Carter (1994), and Crombie (1985a,b) aiming at getting learners engaged in cognitive processes while exploring features of information structure and incorporating this knowledge to develop their reading and writing skills.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is an explanation of the research methods employed to seek the answers to my research questions and at the same time a justification of the research approach adopted in the study. In general, the chapter aims at the following:

- Addressing the research questions

- Justifying the reasonableness of adopting action approach in the research including a discussion of my particular role in this kind of research

- Explaining the data collection methods and data collection procedures

- Introducing the analytical framework, analytical categories, and analytical tools used in the data analysis

My research questions centre on two major issues. Firstly, I would like to find out what problems the learners in the study encountered in their reading and writing in relation to their meta-knowledge of English information structure. Secondly, I would like to see whether my cognitive meta-linguistic approach in which the learners were given explicit instruction enhancing their knowledge of information structure could help them overcome their problems and develop their skills. As concerns my research approach, based on my aim of bringing about changes in teaching practices, I have adopted an action research approach in which I was at the same time the researcher, the practitioner, the observer, and the evaluator. Four data collection methods were employed to help me seek the answers to the research questions: questionnaires, interviews, tests, and classroom-based methods (reading and writing task worksheet, post-task retrospective answer-sheets, and diaries). The data collection took place over a period of two months and a half and the procedures fell into three phases: before, during, and after the execution of my teaching method. The analytical framework for the data analysis encompasses the problems my learners encountered over the three phases, the relationship between their problems and their meta-knowledge of English information structure, any mother tongue interference in their problems, and the correspondence between my teaching method and the learners' overcoming their problems and developing their skills. Each major issue in the framework was analyzed based on specific analytical tools.

4.2. Research Questions

As stated earlier, this research was carried out to seek answers in two areas. First, I would like to find out whether there is a relationship between L2 learners' problems and difficulties in reading and writing and their lack of meta-knowledge of information structure as well as the possible influence of L1 features of information structure or L1 reading and writing strategies. Second, I would like to see whether a teaching approach which focuses on enhancing L2 learners' meta-knowledge of information structure could help them overcome their problems and improve their reading and writing skills. As mentioned in chapter 1, my teaching method was applied to two groups of learners whose levels of proficiency were taken as different based on a placement test done at the beginning of their academic year. Therefore, for each of the above two research foci, I would also like to find out whether there were any differences between the two groups in terms of the problems they encountered and in terms of the development they made.

More specifically, I attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What problems and difficulties (if any) do L2 learners encounter in their reading and writing in English as the result of their lack of a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure?

2. Which among these problems arises because of the interference of their mother tongue information structure features and their L1 reading and writing strategies?

3. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their problems?

4. Can a cognitive meta-linguistic approach help the learners overcome their reading and writing problems and develop their reading comprehension and written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure?

5. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their skill development?

6. Is the approach relevant and feasible in the Vietnamese university system?

As concerns the first two research questions, it is my hypothesis that L2 learners do not reach a satisfactory level in their reading and 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, and to their being influenced by the meta-knowledge of their L1 information structure. The selection of this area also much depends on my interest and experience in the subject matter.

As concerns the fourth research question, while attempting to find out the relationship between a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching reading and writing skills and learners' skill development, I would also like to see whether the approach can reduce the impact of the transfer of my learners' L1 meta-knowledge and strategies into their reading and writing in English.

Questions 3 and 5 arose from my assumption that learner groups of different levels of proficiency might encounter their reading and writing problems at different extents and the percentage of learners who show development in their reading and writing skill (if any) after receiving my teaching method might differ from one group to another.

In the sixth research question, I would like to see whether my method is feasible in the Vietnamese university system with respect to the following sub-questions. First, can the approach fit within the communicative language teaching approach required in my institution? Second, what is an appropriate balance between the teaching of meta-linguistic knowledge of English information structure and the development of communicative practices within this teaching situation? These questions arose because of the general requirement of applying communicative language teaching in my university, and could be best answered through a flexible action research approach.

4.3. Action Research Approach

In this section I explained why I have adopted an action research approach to my study. The section focuses on the following:

- The definition of action research

- Its essential features and what it basically involves

- The reason why action research is adopted in the study

- Other approaches which could have been adopted but were not

- The potential weaknesses of action research and how these were overcome

- The place of theory in action research and how action research could contribute to the development of theory

4.3.1. Action research: rationale

The definition of action research (also called teacher-research, collaborative research, or practitioner research in Mackey & Gass, 2005, or Johnson & Chen, 1992, e.g.) and what is entailed in this approach might vary from researcher to researcher and from discipline to discipline. Wallace (1998:4), for example, viewed action research as 'basically a way of reflecting on your teaching…by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analyzing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be'. What can be inferred from Wallace's view is that action research can be understood as a kind of teacher-initiated enquiry aiming at better practice in the teaching of the teachers themselves, and more importantly a better situation in the language teaching scenario of an institution resulting in the improvement of the learners in certain learning aspects. Action research often originates from the dissatisfaction of one individual or one group of language teachers who are not quite satisfied with either the current teaching method applied in their institution or the level of competence of their learners.

According to Carr & Kemmis (1986), researchers who adopt action research wish to achieve two aims: to improve and to involve:

> Action research aims at improvement in three areas: firstly, the improvement of a *practice*; secondly, the improvement of the *understanding* of the practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the *situation* in which the practice takes place. The aim of *involvement* stands shoulder to shoulder with the aim of *improvement*. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:165, original italics, cited in Richards, 2003:24)

Nunan (1992) and Burns (1999) pointed out the following typical characteristics of action research: It is carried out by practitioners (i.e., classroom teachers). It is participatory as it provides for collaborative investigation by teams of colleagues, practitioners and researchers. It is contextual, small-scale and localized, i.e., it identifies and investigates problems within a specific situation. It is evaluative and reflective as it aims to bring about change and improvement in practice. Changes in practice are based on the collection of information or data which provide the impetus for changes (Burns, 1999: 30, cited in McKay, 2006:30).

The characteristics of action research can also be described in more generalized terms as in Stringer (2007: 20): it is phenomenological (focusing on people's actual lived experience/reality). It is interpretive (focusing on their interpretation of acts and activities). It is hermeneutic (incorporating the meaning people make of events in their lives).

In general, as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:28) pointed out, typical action research encompasses the following features: practice, participation/collaboration, reflection, interpretation and emancipation in which reflection is viewed as 'the most salient underlying feature' and collaboration as 'a significant feature'.

The definitions given above also clearly locate action research in the qualitative tradition of research, where research questions and methods are not necessarily fixed in advance but evolve in response to the particularities of the situation being researched. This is an important positive reason to adopt action research on pedagogy, where any methodology, etc has to be adapted to a particular context.

In the light of these features, action research was taken as the best approach to my study because of the following reasons. First, 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' reading comprehension and written communicative ability through a teaching method which focused on enhancing their understanding of English information structure. Second, it required the involvement of my learners and my colleagues in evaluating the method, and thirdly, it allowed flexibility in research questions and methods if required by changes in research situations.

4.3.2. Potential weaknesses of action research

Though receiving increasing support for its practical contribution to the understanding of specific problematic issues, action research has often been questioned for its legitimacy as a form of inquiry, its limitation in generalizability, the subjectivity of the researcher in interpreting data, and database biased by personal engagement with informants. Another important issue is the limitation of action research in helping us link cause and effect, as formal experimental designs are intended to do.

Legitimacy

As far as its legitimacy is concerned, Stringer (2007:192) who strongly advocates action research acknowledged that it (action research) 'does not follow the carefully prescribed

experimental procedures that have become inscribed as scientific method'. However, I would argue that action research is 'emphatically scientific' (Levin and Greenwood 2001, cited in Stringer, 2007:192) provided that researchers follow a carefully designed cycle prescribed for action research with findings supported by meticulously analyzed data and driven by grounded theories in the field of studies.

Generalizability

The second potential weakness of action research, which is shared by other types of qualitative research, is its limitation in generalizability (its external validity). Carried out by one practitioner or a group of practitioners in a small-scale setting aiming at changes pertaining to a group of learners with their own problems means that suggestions made by action researchers might be seen as inapplicable to other settings. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006: 573) argue that 'one cannot recommend using a practice found to be effective in only one classroom!' However, in my opinion, we can increase the generalizability of applicability of action research if we can assure the following:

First, the problems encountered by students chosen to study should be those likely to affect a large population of different levels of proficiency and ethnic groups and in various settings. In my research, learners' problems in understanding English information structure are expected to be those faced by a large number of L2 learners at least of Asian cultural background.

Second, the proposed method for changes of situation should not violate the traditional method adopted in an institution. In my research, the meta-linguistic approach to teaching reading and writing must fit within the CLT approach widely adopted in the Vietnamese university system.

Thirdly, the theories underlying the practice should be well established. In my research, the three theories that guide my studies are language transfer and comparative rhetoric, cognitivism in language learning and teaching, and the CLT approach in language teaching, all of them are well established in the field of second language education research.

Subjectivity and data collector bias

Data in the form of personal experience and data involving participants' self-reflections in action research in particular and in qualitative research in general can be subjective to various extents, and this can affect the validity and credibility of the data interpretation. The

subjectivity of the researcher in reflecting and interpreting data is due to the fact that 'multiple realities exist and multiple interpretations are available from different individuals that are equally valid' (Newman and Benz, 1998:2; Douglas, 1976; and Geertz, 1983). Data collected might be biased by the practitioner's personal engagement with the informants. As the practitioner, the observer, and the evaluator of the research at the same time, his or her reflection and evaluation of the study could be biased because of their full awareness of 'the intent of the study', which therefore might 'unwittingly distort the results of a study' (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006:573). Bailey (1978: 243) mentioned the 'selective perception' in qualitative research and remarked 'it is clear that one can easily see what one expects to see even if it's not there, thus causing bias; this is an example of selective perception'. Newman and Benz (1998) claimed that the observer's sense perceptions are not always accurate. Mouly (1970: 289) warned the pitfall of losing objectivity of the researcher who gets personally engaged in the research and consequently is likely 'to lose his objectivity, and, along with it, his accuracy in rating things as they are.'

Realizing that the interpretations of my informants' responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires and interviews, my scoring the learners' writing, and the diaries in my research would most likely to be subjective both in the way they were documented and interpreted, I have taken several measures to overcome and diminish the subjectivity and enhance the validity of my qualitative data analysis. First, I adopted the 'reflexive critique', which is 'the process of becoming aware of our own perceptional biases' Winter (1996:13) throughout the whole process of collecting and interpreting data. In the process of making claims from data interpretation, I attempted to make it clear that possible interpretations of my experiences can be negotiated and examples used in making my judgments 'will be analyzed, but no analysis will be final or complete' (Winter, 1996:19). Second, I took care 'not to overlook results or responses' I did not want to see (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006:573) and was committed to reporting reality as I found it, rather than as I wished it to be (Shaker, 1990). Taking Stringer (2007)'s and Newman and Benz (1998: 52)'s suggestions that 'the more sources one looks at the more likely one is to have a complete perception of the phenomenon', I carried out prolonged engagement in data collection and triangulation in interpreting the data. In my research, triangulation was based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses of a varied database. Finally, as Anderson (1998: 134) suggested, 'qualitative researchers declare any personal bias which may impact on their role as a researcher.' By making explicit declarations of the personal bias of some data collection and

interpretation, I would like to warn readers of the subjectivity in the interpretation of the data and am open to negotiation in making claims about the data.

4.3.3. Place of theory in action research

The place of theory in action research is controversial and 'is far from clear and differs from its place in experimental or quantitative research' Stringer (2007:187). Supporting Gustavsen's ideas (2001), Stringer pointed out that in the former, 'theory can inform or influence practice' while in the latter, 'established theory "drives" the process of inquiries, and the hypotheses to be tested are drawn from established theory' (2007:187). Some researchers agree that there exists a link between theory and practice in action research but hold that it is not a 'direct logical connection' (Stringer, 2007:187) but a "discursive" link 'where ideas, notions, and elements from the theory can be considered in the development of practice but with no claims to being automatically applicable' (Gustavsen, 2001:18). That is, the function of theory in action research is to 'inform a process of enlightenment' (Gustavsen, 2001:18) out of which new practices can emerge. It can be said that action research is a combination of action and theorizing, which Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:28) regard as 'the essential ingredient' of action research.

These claims about the link between theory and practice suggest that 'the boundaries between theory and practice dissolve and fade away, because theory is lived in practice and practice becomes a form of living theory' (McNiff, 2002:35). In action research, 'theory is used to bring more order to complex phenomena, with a goal of parsimonious description so that it is also of use to the community of enquiry. A new theory enables us to 're-see' the world, or to see through taken-for-guaranteed conceptual categories that are oppressive or no longer helpful.' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:451)

For some other authors, like Griffiths and Davies (1993), the place of theory in action research is even more vague and subordinate to practice. In their view, action research 'is not seeking to contribute to large-scale explanations of events. Nor is it seeking to discover grounded theory by meticulous analysis of data. The purpose is always to improve practice, rather than to find truths, universal or particular' (Griffiths and Davies, 1993:45).

In my study, theory has guided my process of inquiry in such a way that gathering the data helped clarify some aspects of the theories that played important roles in my research, viz. the theory of language transfer and comparative rhetoric, the role of cognitivism in language

learning and teaching, and how CLT actually worked in a specific constitutionized setting with all its requirements for a CLT class.

4.4. The researcher, the participants, and the data

4.4.1. The Researcher

In this teacher-initiated research, I was at the same time the researcher, the practitioner, the observer, and the evaluator, aiming simultaneously at enhancing my learners' knowledge and skills and improving my teaching experience. In other words, I played the role of a teacher-researcher 'who observes, questions, and learns in the context of his or her own classroom and who, as a result, becomes a better teacher' (Bissex, 1986, cited in Johnson & Chen, 1992:215). This particular multi-role status gave me both advantages and disadvantages.

The first advantage, as in any teacher research, is that I could link 'theory and practice in ways that are meaningful to teachers' (Johnson & Chen, 1992:214) by practising what I believed to be good for my learners and for my profession. In this study, inspired by my belief in the cognitive theory of learning and teaching in general and in the DECPRO model as earlier stated, I would like to see if the adoption of this meta-linguistic approach fitted my learners and the teaching situation in my institution. Thus, there was a combination of researching and teaching in my study. From the perspective in which research is considered a 'type of contemplation' and teaching is a 'type of action' and 'there is a particularly strong contradictory pull' between the two (Brumfit and Mitchell, 1989:10), my role of researcher and practitioner could be merged to bridge 'the gap between understanding and action' (Nunan, 1989: 17).

The second advantage I had as practitioner and researcher at the same time was that I could be actively engaged in the research, making everyday adjustments to the new instructional program by resorting to documented experiences, for example the contents of each lesson as well as the lesson plans after each session, to best suit learners' needs and motivation. In this way the potential of the new instructional method could be explored more fully. McDonough & McDonough (1997:21) claimed that 'teachers are therefore more in control in such a perspective, closer to the sources of decision-making and - in the current jargon - have greater 'ownership' of their own professional environment.'

The observer role on the other hand allowed me to recognize classroom reactions from learners in every lesson, or in Nunan's expression 'the subtle organic process of classroom life' (1989:17), through which I could get a better understanding of learners' attitudes towards my teaching method and the contents of the lessons. This role gave me opportunities to collect valuable process data in addition to the product data from the questionnaires or the tests. This was where, however, as I have mentioned in the section discussing potential weaknesses of action research, the risk of having data biased by my personal engagement might occur. As the data collector and evaluator at the same time, I may 'unconsciously distort the data in such a way as to make certain outcomes…more likely' (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006:173). Under full awareness of this pitfall, in my data collection process, I have tried to 'standardize all procedures' (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006:174) in all methods of data gathering: the questionnaires, the interviews, the tests, and the classroom-based methods (reading and writing task work-sheets, post-task answer-sheets, and diaries). In the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, which focused on my learners' understanding of English information structure and their reading and writing strategies, I did not introduce the questionnaire and design the questions in such a way that the learners might recognize my intent and might have selected options or answers that they thought might satisfy my expectations. In order to make sure that the answers in the questionnaire were trustworthy, I carried out follow-up interviews to validate the answers. In the interviews, I applied the 'planned ignorance' technique (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006:174) by which designed questions expressed neutral expectations, so as not to be biased by my assumptions of learners' reading or writing strategies or their meta-knowledge of information structure prior to the teaching phase. In the tests, time allocation was strictly adhered to and no discussions were allowed, to ensure the trustworthiness of the results. In the classroom-based methods, I distributed handouts at the end of the sessions rather than at the beginning so that learners would not preconceive our intention and try to do the task in such a way that would meet my pre-designed requirements.

The fact that I was an insider and local researcher within the teaching context also gave me some advantages. I had easy access to my colleagues' view of my teaching method or their consent in slotting us into their curriculum schedule in carrying out my teaching method. My colleagues themselves were not satisfied with the current teaching and learning situation and were really looking forward to any innovative teaching method, and this offered me a very good impetus in doing my research. Besides, due to the cultural features of Vietnamese

students who often wish to hold a close relationship with their teachers, I could easily organize informal talks with them after each lesson or during break time to have their reflections and opinions on the lesson and the whole teaching method. (Information obtained from these conversations was later recorded in my diaries). In fact, what I was able to get from these conversations was as valuable as what was obtained from other highly structured methods of data collection like questionnaires or tests.

I did, on the other hand, experience some disadvantages in this stance. Action research requires a large amount of time to negotiate its effectiveness including finding its way to be compatible with the authoritative power within the institution in which its result needs to be replicated or generalized, whereas a PhD does not offer a sufficient amount of time for this. Furthermore, as the only observer and evaluator of the teaching method (apart from the learners), I could not have a really objective evaluation of the method. It would be ideal if some of my colleagues could have attended all the lessons and made comments on them. Observation notes and reflections on the lessons made by them could have offered me quite a number of useful hints for the adjustments to the method. However, due to the constraints of time and teaching schedule of my colleagues, such contributions could not be made. To increase the reliability of the data, therefore, I have triangulated data from all the four methods. Besides, I carried out a questionnaire to get my colleagues' comments about the effectiveness of the teaching methods as well as the lesson plans. I also arranged informal conversations with them to elicit their opinions about the project. There were some other constraints in the process of inquiry, e.g. I had to use the university's textbook, which most of our students thought not very suitable for them. The reading passages chosen, in my learners' view, were not very relevant to their studies, which to some extent, lessened their motivation. Furthermore, the time constraints limited the insights and observational information which could be gained from participants. My not currently working with the students did not allow me to have more contacts with them before and after the data collection period, which would be very valuable in giving me more information about their progress in reading and writing and the changes in their learning strategies.

4.4.2. The Participants

Selection and division

The 48 participants in my study were second year students of Information Technology (IT) in their second semester of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) studies, at a Vietnamese

university. The participants fell into 2 groups, group one consisting of 22, group two of 26 students.

There were two reasons for this selection of informants. The first reason involved my familiarity with students of IT. They were the students of the faculty where I had been and will be teaching, which gave me a suitable stance of being accustomed to their level of proficiency, their motivations and needs, as well as the material that had been used for their course. The second reason involved their level of proficiency. Students of IT in the faculty are divided into three different proficiency levels. The students who were selected to take part in my study were assessed as having the higher levels of proficiency based on the aforementioned placement test (which primarily focused on their grammatical knowledge). This selection was due to the following two reasons. Firstly, it was to fit my rationale that L2 learners might not have satisfactory communicative language ability although they possessed grammatical competence. Secondly, it was to serve my intention of giving them meta-knowledge of English information structure, which I believed was beyond the comprehension ability of first year students who were assumed not to have had any English lessons at university level and were expected not to have been exposed previously to communicative language teaching.

Informants' L2 reading and writing skill level

My informants' level of English proficiency was considered as intermediate, as assessed by the Faculty of ESP. However, due to the information I got from the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews, and in terms of their reading and writing, they could be described as novice writers and inexperienced readers in spite of the fact that most of them had been studying English for 9 years. This description was based on the fact that they had received little or no formal and systematic instruction in reading and writing.

Informants' L1 literacy

As far as their L1 literacy is concerned, they had been studying Vietnamese for 12 years in which they had been given meta-knowledge of Vietnamese grammar and literature analysis for 7 years in secondary and high school. In terms of L1 writing, Vietnamese students are trained in different styles of writing such as argumentative, expository, descriptive, narrative, etc, in which the generally required structure of a text is explicitly given. Students are also given feedback on how to make their writing more coherent by following the main topic, and more graceful by diversifying grammatical structure or vocabulary. This sounds like a good

basis for their L2 writing, however, it is also this requirement of their L1 writing that may make them more indirect in L2 writing. In terms of their L1 reading skill, in the Vietnamese educational system, students are not trained in reading skill for itself but for literary criticism only. That is to say students are not given explicit instruction in how to read a text by using such techniques as skimming or scanning. The typical purpose of a reading activity in a literature lesson is related to writing criticism of the text.

Group differences in L2 learning background

On average, Group 1 learners had spent approximately one year more studying English than Group 2 learners before they joined my classes. The average time of English study among Group 1 learners was 9.0 years, whereas it was 7.8 years among Group 2 learners. 72% of Group 1 learners had studied English for 8 years or more, and that percentage among group 2 was 69%. However, many more of Group 1 learners had studied English for 10 years or more, 45% (8/22 learners), whereas that percentage in Group 2 was 4% (1/26).

In terms of proficiency level, Group one students got scores of 8 to 10 on a 10-point scale in a placement test done at the beginning of the first semester in their first year by our ESP faculty. Students in Group 2 got scores of 5 to 7 on the same test. The test basically involved only learners' grammatical knowledge.

As concerns their L2 reading skill, results from the pre-teaching phase reading test showed that Group 1 learners were better at reading comprehension. Group 1 learners' mean score was 6.7, whereas that of Group 2 was 5.0. As concerns writing skill, Group 1 learners were on the whole better than group 2 in terms of grammatical usage. However, in terms of features of English information structure, and based on the scoring system as introduced in section 4.5.3 below, Group 2 learners were more proficient. Group 1 learners' mean score was 5.2, whereas that of group 2 learners was 6.2.

As informed by the two colleagues who had been in charge of the two groups, Group 2 learners (the less proficient group) were more motivated and showed a more positive and cooperative attitude to learning in the class. Data from the pre-teaching phase interview showed no big differences between the two groups in terms of their L1 literacy.

4.4.3. The Data

Two kinds of data: product and process were collected to help us seek answers to the research questions. The product data include informants' responses to questionnaires, their reading,

writing, and meta-linguistic knowledge test scores, their answers to reading and writing worksheets and retrospective post-task answer-sheets. All the data were obtained from the learners except for one questionnaire designed to get my colleagues' opinion of the teaching method. As my aim is to investigate learners' problems and development in their reading and writing skills over all the three phases of the research, some instruments (the questionnaires, and the reading and writing tests) were administered twice, before and after the teaching phase, and the others (the reading and writing worksheets and post-task answer-sheets) were collected in the while teaching phase. The interviews were carried out only in the pre-teaching phase and the meta-linguistic knowledge test was administered only in the post-teaching phase, for reasons explained in sections 4.5.2 and 4.5.3 below. The design and content of the questionnaires, the interviews, the tests, the worksheets, and the answer-sheets were introduced in section 4.5.

Process data were collected to get information I could not have obtained or derived from the product data and were gained during the teaching phase. The data were my reflective accounts of what was going on in each lesson including learners' reactions and attitudes to the lessons and documented in my daily diaries.

Data validity

Some participants might provide untrustworthy data consciously or unconsciously. In my anticipation, the questionnaires might render the least valid information, because informants might be less serious in answering the questionnaires than they are in the tests knowing that their answers in the questionnaires would not impact on their assessment. As a result, some students might try to please me by giving answers that they think I might expect, especially for questions concerning their reading and writing strategies. There were two measures that I applied to ensure the validity of the data obtained from the questionnaires. The first measure was used in the design of the questionnaires themselves, where questions that were likely to elicit untrustworthy responses from informants would be followed up by other questions to double check the validity (Mackey and Gass, 2005). For example, in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire (appendix A1, p.189), there is one question involving the learners' knowledge of the term 'textual pattern', - if an informant believed that he or she knew the term quite well and could use this meta-knowledge in his or her writing or reading, he would have to give a brief explanation of the term. The second measure was the interview in which I could have opportunities to double-check the information given in the questionnaire and special attention

was given to questions where informants were expected to be unsure of the answers, e.g., questions concerning how frequently they produced a topic sentence.

As concerns the tests, I tried to include all that is relevant and necessary to get closer to the data required for answering our research questions. For example, in the meta-linguistic test, I included what I believed to be the most essential knowledge of English information structure our learners need for reading and writing skill development. Besides, strict invigilation ensured that students did their tests seriously without exchanging ideas or copying others' work.

4.5. Data Collection Methods

The following four methods of data collection have been used: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, tests (reading, writing, and meta-linguistic knowledge), and classroom-based methods (reading and writing task worksheet, post-task retrospective answer sheets, and diaries).

4.5.1. Questionnaires

When designing the questionnaires, I adhered to the following principles:

- Questionnaire items should be 'answerable' and 'unambiguous' (Mackey and Gass, 2005:96).

- One question item should contain only one idea (Nunan, 1992; Johnson, 1992).

- Do not reveal researchers' attitudes through leading questions (Nunan, 1992).

- Questionnaires should be piloted in advance (Mackey and Gass, 2005; Johnson, 1992).

There were altogether three questionnaires, two for the learners, and one for my colleagues. The two questionnaires for the learners were administered before and after the teaching phase. The questionnaire for my colleagues was administered in the post-teaching period.

Pre-teaching phase questionnaire for the learners (appendix A1, p. 222)

A pilot questionnaire was given to a group of 5 students of the School of Electronics and Telecommunication in my institution. Those students were considered to have the same level of proficiency and assumed to share some other characteristics (e.g., their reading and writing

problems and strategies) as the students in the study. The pilot test was to help me to realize if there were any unnecessary questions or if any other questions were required. After the piloting, as no problems occurred in terms of the number of items and the types of questions, I decided to keep the questionnaire as previously designed.

The 23 items in the questionnaire covered three major areas: learners' identity and academic background, learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure, and learners' reading and writing strategies in the English language. One additional question aiming at getting clues about the teaching mode students most prefer was intended to help me to make some adjustments (if needed) to our pre-designed lesson plans.

Question 1, 2, and 3 are open-ended. Questions 1 and 2 were to get the informants' identification and the group they belonged to. Questions 3 focused on the time they had spent studying English formally in school or university.

Question 4 investigated their motivations, in the form of a multiple-choice and open-ended question. (Learners could choose one among the given options or state their own motivation). The assumption was that there might be a relationship between their motivation and their reading and writing practices, e.g. those whose study English principally to read technical books might pay more attention to the development of their reading skill or those who want to pass IELTS or TOEFL might have developed their own strategies of improving the skills.

Questions 5 to 9 aimed at finding out whether students had any explicit declarative knowledge of information structure, e.g. of the distinction between theme and rheme or given and new information in a sentence or of such information structure-related terms as information focus or problem-solution pattern. The questions explored not only their knowledge of terminology but also of the concepts, i.e. how they understood the terms and if they could distinguish them in a specific sentence. I believed that the number of items selected was adequate for us to conclude if they had had any meta-knowledge of English information structure prior to our teaching phase. The selection of the questions was based on my literature review of the fundamental issues in English information structure. Questions 5 and 6 are open-ended, exploring learners' meta-knowledge of theme/rheme and given/new distinction. Question 7 is multiple-choice, investigating how well learners understood some information structure related terms. Question 8 is open-ended in which learners were required to provide explanations for their choice in question 7. This was to make sure they would give reliable answers. Question 9 consisted of 10 yes-no sub-questions. For this question, I

postponed the explanations to the follow-up interviews as we expected that a full explanation of each item would be very time consuming.

Questions 10 to 16 explored my learners' writing strategies and questions 17 to 22 explored their reading strategies. These were expected to give me information on the reading and writing practices assumed to be affected by meta-knowledge of English information structure and mother tongue information structure features. The questions explored such reading and writing strategies as the delay of the introductory sentence in the introductory paragraph, the production of topic sentences and thesis statements, the reinstating of the thesis in the conclusion, the anticipation of the pattern of a reading text, etc. The question types were either multiple choice or yes-no questions.

Question 22 is multiple choice, aiming at finding out the teaching and studying mode the learners most preferred.

The validation of this information was promoted by the follow-up interviews in which learners were asked to give full explanations for their choices.

Post-teaching phase questionnaire for the learners (appendix A2, p. 227)

The post-teaching phase questionnaire explored my learners' reading and writing strategies and characteristics in the English language after receiving formal instruction enhancing their knowledge of information structure and skill development suggestions. The questionnaire also investigated their attitudes towards the suggestions for their skill development. My expectation was that a certain percentage of the learners would partially or completely stop using some of the mother tongue-transferred strategies in terms of information structure in their reading or writing after the instruction phase. There are several hypotheses underlying the questionnaire. First, after receiving formal instruction enhancing their knowledge of information structure, my learners would develop strategies that could better their reading comprehension and written communicative language ability. Second, the learners would show their preference for the reading and writing skill development suggestions. Third, those whose strategies had changed would be more willing to adopt suggestions. Finally, not all mother tongue affected strategies could be changed.

There are seven questions in the questionnaire. Question 1 and 2 involved the informants' identification and the group they belonged to. Question 3 and 5 involved their writing and reading strategies after the instruction phase. The questions are in the form of multiple-choice

questions. In these questions, the informants were asked to select one of the four situations described which they believed would best indicate their current tendencies towards negative writing and reading strategies mentioned. The situations described included their realizing the negative side of the strategies, their wish to get rid of the strategies, and their partial or complete abandoning the strategies. Question 4 involved the learners' writing characteristics after the instruction phase. The question is in the form of yes-no question. In this question, the informants were asked to say whether or not the seven statements given were applicable to them. Question 6 and 7 involved their attitudes towards some reading and writing suggestions. The questions are in the form of yes-no questions. The informants were asked to say whether or not they would adopt the suggestions.

Post-teaching phase questionnaire for the colleagues (appendix A3, p. 232)

The third questionnaire was to obtain my colleagues' opinions and comments on the feasibility and relevance of the teaching method in the Vietnamese university system. Attached to the questionnaire was a brief description of my teaching approach, the meta-linguistic lessons (pedagogic treatment of English information structure, appendix H1, p.289), students' activity handout (for lesson 2, unit 2, appendix I1, p.317), and the sample lesson plan for lesson 2, unit 2 (appendix I2, p.323).

There are 14 questions altogether. Questions 1 and 2 are open-ended, involving the school where the informants were working at and how long they had been teaching English for. Question 3, 4, 5, 6, and 12 are yes-no questions followed by open-ended questions in which informants were required to say either 'yes' or 'no' to the questions and then give their explanations. Question 3 involved the informants' satisfaction with the current teaching method applied in their institutions in terms of its effectiveness in bringing about learners' communicative language ability. Question 4 was concerned about their belief of the learners' satisfaction with the reading and writing classroom activities applied in the method they were adopting. Questions 5 to 14 explored their opinions of my teaching method. Questions 5 and 6 involved their opinions about two aspects of the sample lesson plan (for lesson 2, unit 2). Question 5 was concerned about the relevance of the time allocation for the meta-linguistic phase and the skill-developing phase. Question 6 involved the relevance of the amount of meta-linguistic instruction input in the meta-linguistic phase. Question 7, 8, and 9 involved their opinion of the necessity of some meta-linguistic aspects used in our lessons. Questions 7 and 9 are multiple-choice in which informants were asked to say which aspects of meta-

linguistic lessons among the lists given are necessary. Question 8 is open-ended in which informants were asked to specify any meta-linguistic aspects they think are NOT necessary. Question 10 and 11 are multiple-choice, in which informants would show their opinion of the overall feasibility and relevance of our approach on a six-grade scale from extremely feasible/relevant to extremely infeasible/irrelevant. Question 12 involved their opinion of whether or not teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge to apply the method. In question 13, informants would show the likeliness of their applying my method in the future on a six-grade scale from extremely likely to extremely unlikely. Question 14 involves any other comments concerning the meta-linguistic lessons, the skill-developing activities in the handouts, and the sample lesson plan.

4.5.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to validate the information given in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. A sample pre-designed interview sheet, a sample interview transcription, and a sample interview summary can be found in appendices B1, B2, and B2, pp. 236, 239, and 243).

There are two reasons why I was not quite confident about the reliability of the questionnaire information. First, I thought that learners might 'try to please the researcher by giving the answers or responses they think are expected' (Mackey & Gass, 2005: 114). Second, I was not absolutely sure of informants' full understanding of all the questions in the questionnaires. Apart from that, the interviews were intended to give me an opportunity to understand my learners better not only in terms of their information structure knowledge and learning strategies but also their motivations, needs, and preferences for teaching and learning modes.

The interviews lasted around 30 minutes each, were run in an informal atmosphere in a small-sized classroom in our institution, and were semi-structured, which allowed me to feel free in exploring the issues and topics I was concerned about along with a short list of predetermined questions. These questions themselves could be developed in different directions depending on the individual informants.

With 48 learners to be interviewed, and each interview lasting 30 minutes, I had to run 8 separate sessions, each dealing with 6 learners a session. The sessions had to be done in the first week of my data collection trip. The time slots were to be chosen by each student in the time spans available. Right after our first meeting, which was for the project introduction, I

did two pilot interviews to re-estimate the actual time limit for each interview and to re-evaluate our questions. The pilot showed that the time limit was adequate; however, I came to realize that some questions required longer time than others and I made some adjustment to the way each question would be asked to ensure that I could get what I wanted and skip over information that had already been obtained in the questionnaire and needed no more clarification.

I decided the language used in the interviews should be English rather than Vietnamese because in my experience Vietnamese students of English usually prefer to be interviewed in the English language expecting it to be a chance for them to practice their speaking skill. To run the interview in Vietnamese, in my anticipation, would have spoiled the learners' motivation. In fact, the use of English in the interviews proved to be more efficient because I had tried to use Vietnamese with the first two students and they both seemed very annoyed. After leaving the interview room, one of them was overheard saying in a very annoyed tone of voice to the other students who were waiting outside for their turn that I only asked them in Vietnamese. This made me believe that they did not want to be interviewed in Vietnamese.

4.5.3. Tests (appendix C, pp 244-255)

When designing and constructing the tests, I took the following into consideration:

- Minimize variations in test task characteristics (setting, participants, structure, format, time allotment, scoring method, input language, etc.) (Bachman and Palmer, 1996)

- Equivalence between tests (Mackey and Gass, 2005). The levels of difficulty in the tests should be strictly controlled to ensure that improvement found (if any) is valid.

- Pilot the tests in advance

Altogether, I carried out two writing tests and two reading tests (pre and post-teaching phase), and one meta-linguistic test (post-teaching phase). My purpose in doing the tests at two different phases was to find out the learners' on-going development (if any). Measurements taken to ensure the similar levels of difficulties of the pre- and post-tests were discussed below. Some of the learners' reading and writing problems (e.g., their reading patterns, their making outlines) were obtained from while-teaching phase reading and writing worksheets and post-task answer-sheets. The meta-linguistic test was done once only after the teaching phase because I assumed that in the pre-teaching phase, it was irrelevant to test formal knowledge the learners had not received formally and systematically. My assumption about

the learners' meta-knowledge of the subject was double-checked through the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews.

The two groups of students were equally treated in the test in terms of the level of difficulty and the time for doing the tests. In other words, the tasks and the questions were not aimed at putting either group at a disadvantageous status against the other. The test degree of difficulty was based on learners' level of proficiency in terms of grammatical structure, vocabulary and specialist knowledge in information technology. The tests were piloted on five students of Electronics and Telecommunication. As no major problems occurred with the piloted tests, I decided to leave them as previously constructed.

Reading and writing tests

The design of the tests was controlled by the following factors: learners' assumed levels of English proficiency, learners' motivation and interest, and the features of their reading and writing that need to be investigated, and similarity in the levels of difficulty. The contents of the reading passages in the reading tests and the tasks required in the writing tasks all involved learners' general knowledge of information technology, which was their field of study. This selection of content was to motivate learners' effort in solving problems more familiar and interesting to them. The topics selected should not be too specific because some learners might be more familiar with one specific topic than another. The level of difficulty of the tests (in vocabulary, structure, format, types of questions, etc.) was based on my self-judgment.

The reading tests (appendices C1 and C2, pp 244 and 248) aimed at seeing if there was any improvement in learners' reading comprehension after receiving formal instruction enhancing their meta-knowledge of information structure and reading skill development suggestions. In assuming there might be a causal relationship between learners' understanding of information structure and their reading comprehension, I did not deny the role of other factors in their improvement (if there was any), e.g. their own learning strategies. Meta-knowledge of information structure could only be counted as a contributory factor; of course, it is undeniable that the passage of time and additional hours of instruction could also lead to improvement. However, I argue that the meta-linguistic instruction played a major role in this development as the main instructional focus during the period. The time allotted for each test was 40 minutes.

Each reading test consisted of one reading passage, taken from Unit 22, and Unit 24 in Glendinning and McEwan (2006). (There were 25 units in this material). Because the two reading passages were used in the last units, I believed that the levels of difficulty in vocabulary and grammar were similar. I did not want to use the reading passage in unit 23 because it was about 'Blue-tooth', which was a little bit specific. There was no reading passage in unit 25. To ensure the content validity of the reading tests, I adhered to Fulcher and Davidson (2007)'s suggestions in selecting text types and testing items. The text types selected were typical of texts used by learners in their academic studies. Testing items were chosen in such a way as to help us make inferences about learners' ability to process texts in expected features in their academic courses, i.e. to get the main idea and key specific information of a text. There were five sections testing both learners' ability to get specific information and their general comprehension. Learners' general comprehension was inferred from their ability to recognize the main idea and textual pattern of the texts. This was administered through a multiple-choice question, and a cloze test. Their ability to get specific information was based on an open-ended question, a true-false question, and a matching information question. The total score was 34 for the pre-test and 28 for the post-test, depending on the number of specific questions in each test. Learners' achievement was scored by the number of correct answers and converted into a percentage. For example, if a learner got 17 correct answers in the pre-test, his achievement was scored as 50%. Their ability to get the main idea of the passages is either yes or no, based on their response to first question, which is a multiple-choice question. Their ability to get specific information is based on the number of correct answers out of 32 questions in the pre-test and 26 questions in the post-test. In each test, there was one question involving their recognizing the textual pattern of the reading passage. So, for example if a student got 26/28 (93%) in total in the post-test, his or her scoring for getting specific information is 24/28 (86%).

In each of the writing tests (appendices C3 and C4, p.251), students were engaged in one activity only: writing an essay of at least 250 words to express their opinions about some statements in the field of IT. The two topics were about the role of computers in our life, and the future of information technology and electronics. The topic selection was again due to my learners' familiarity with and interest in the field. And, again, as with the reading topics, the writing topics should not be too specific. There was no choice of topic in each test. The purpose was to simplify our scoring and analysis. Different topics might lead to different ways of introducing and developing the topic. The time allotted for each test was 40 minutes.

Learners' essays were marked on a scale of 10 points. The scoring system was as follows:

- Clear thesis statement: 1 point

- Directness in introducing thesis statement: 1 point

- Clear topic for each paragraph: 2 points

- Directness in introducing the topic of each paragraph: 1 point

- Supporting sentences do not divert from the main idea: 1 point

- Appropriateness in given/new information distribution: 1 point

- Contextualizing information presented: 1 point

- Concluding with explicit answers to the previously raised questions in the introduction paragraph: 1 point

- Using transitional signals adequately: 1 point

The writing tests were expected to give me not only clues about learners' improvement in their written communicative ability but also a wide range of information including their practices of constructing information and evidence of mother tongue interference in information distribution and construction. Several aspects of the learners' strategies that were unlikely to be revealed in the tests, such as their making outlines for the writing or their reading strategies, were to be documented from the questionnaires, interviews or classroom writing worksheets and answer-sheets. Detailed features to be investigated in the learners' reading and writing are introduced in section 4.7.

The meta-linguistic test (appendix C5, p. 252)

The meta-linguistic test was administered at the post-teaching phase. It consists of 7 open-ended questions each aiming at giving information about our learners' understanding of aspects of English information structure assumed to assist in their skill development, in their understanding the global and local structure of an academic text and in structuring a piece of academic writing. The time limit for the test was 50 minutes. The questions in the test were based on the meta-linguistic lessons given to the learners in the teaching phase. Learners were tested on their ability to do the following: identifying clause types, identifying non-canonical constructions and the new information in each construction, rephrasing given sentences using subject-verb inversion and identifying the given/new information of the

original and rephrased sentences, using cleft structure to give focus to some elements of the given sentences, recognizing the discourse patterns, discourse elements, and discourse relations of a given passage, combining pairs of sentences to make one sentence and recognizing the local semantic relationships holding between them, and recognizing the cohesive devices used in a given paragraph. The total score is 45 depending on the number of specific questions. Learners' achievement was scored by the number of correct answers and converted into a percentage. So, for example, a student who got 38 correct answers scored 38/45 of the total, which was 84% in percentage.

4.5.4. Classroom-based methods

These methods include reading and writing task worksheets, post-task retrospective answer sheets, and diaries. The methods were applied to get data that could not be obtained from the tests, the questionnaires, and the interviews or to get data that can help triangulate with other data. All these methods were administered in the while-teaching phase. Details of the methods can be found in appendices E (pp. 259-276) and F (pp 277-284).

Classroom reading and writing worksheets and post-task retrospective answer -sheets (Appendices E1-E10, pp. 259-276)

The following data involving learner's reading and writing strategies were collected through classroom worksheets: recognizing the main idea, recognize semantic relations between sentences/paragraphs and the whole text, their appreciation of semantic relations between sentences/paragraphs and the whole text, their understanding of information embedded in non-canonical constructions, and their tendency towards making global and local plans for the writing.

The following data involving learner's reading and writing strategies were collected through post-task retrospective answer-sheets: reading patterns, consulting cohesive devices, setting of global/local goals for the reading, and their awareness of global aspects of the text such as its communicative purpose or its social functions. Pre-designed answer-sheets were given to the learners after each activity asking them about the strategies they had used in their reading and writing. The answer-sheets were given after the reading because I thought some questions in the answer-sheets might affect the learners' practice, for example, in case of reading patterns, some of them might follow the pattern that they had been recommended in the previous meta-linguistic session if they were given the sheets beforehand. The questions

were in the form of multiple-choice or yes/no because I was worried that some students might not be able to express the answers in their own words.

Researcher diaries (Appendix F, pp.277-284)

Diary entries were my retrospective accounts of what learners liked and disliked about the meta-linguistic knowledge exploration phase, meta-linguistic exercises, and the reading and writing activities in each lesson. The diary entries included learners' verbal and non-verbal reactions to each phase of the lessons, which were important for analysis involving the relevance of my teaching method in the Vietnamese university system. Learners' verbal expressions taken notice of and summarized as negative or positive reactions were such expressions as 'I'm tired', 'I don't understand', 'It's difficult', 'It's interesting', etc. These included their verbal expressions during break times of each lesson. Non-verbal features included their eyebrow raising, their facial expressions (showing fatigue, excitement, interest or enthusiasm), their deep engagement or indifference in a lesson. Special attention was paid to parts of the meta-linguistic lessons I expected would receive negative reactions from learners, like theme/rheme, or communicative dynamism. Most of the expressions I could notice were from a small group of four or five male students in each group who were more competent in English. One of the male students in Group 1 got 7.5 in an IELTS (administered by the British Council in Hanoi). He was the one that often spoke overtly about what he still did not understand in each lesson. The girls and most of the other males were a bit more reserved. They rarely showed their feelings. When they did not understand something, one or some of them often turned their heads to the more competent male students, which in my subjective interpretation, was a hint to demand some more explanations from the teacher. For financial and technical reasons, I could not afford to use audio or video recorders to support my accounts.

Based on this information, I made some ongoing adjustment to the content of the lessons. For example, I decided to simplify the meta-linguistic lesson on theme and rheme because most of the learners found that the distinction was not clear and was difficult to apply in their reading and writing. On the contrary, I noticed that most of the learners found the distinction between given and new information and the contextual constraints on this distinction helpful in guiding them through a reading and writing task. Also I found out that learners were exceptionally keen on the lessons on cohesive devices and on the differences between native and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies.

The following table summarizes the methods used in my study including the research question numbers for which the methods were used, the purposes of each method, and the phases in which they were applied.

Research questions	Research methods	Purposes	Phase
1 & 3	Questionnaire & interviews	Learners' reading and writing strategies in the pre-teaching phase Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure in the pre-teaching phase	Pre-teaching
	Reading & writing tests	Learners' reading and writing problems before and after the teaching phase	Pre- & post-teaching
	Reading & writing worksheets & answer-sheets	Learners' reading and writing problems not to be shown in the tests	While-teaching
2	Interview	Learners' self-report of their L1 reading & writing strategies	Pre-teaching
4 & 5	Reading and writing tests	Learners' development in reading and writing skills in the pre- and post-teaching phase	Pre- & post-teaching
	Reading & writing worksheets & answer-sheets	Learners' skill development in the while-teaching phase Learners' reading and writing strategies in the while-teaching phase	While-teaching
6	Questionnaire for colleagues	Opinions of the current teaching methods applied in their institutions and their learners' satisfaction with the methods Opinions of the teaching method (meta-linguistic lessons/skill developing activities/ the time balance between the meta-linguistic and skill developing phase, the relevance and feasibility of the method in the Vietnamese university system)	Post-teaching
	Questionnaire for learners	Learners' attitudes to the reading and writing suggestions	Post-teaching
	Diaries	Learners' reactions to the teaching method	While-teaching

Table 4.1: Methods used in the research and their purposes

4.6. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection took place from February 25th to May 2nd 2008, and fell into three phases: pre-teaching, while teaching, and post-teaching.

4.6.1. Pre-teaching phase

The following steps were taken before I carried out the teaching method: introducing the study to the informants, getting informants' informed consents, having informants answer the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and do the reading and writing tests, interviewing informants to validate the information obtained in the questionnaire, analysing information in the questionnaire, the interview and the tests to get clues for update or adaptation of the teaching method.

Introducing the study

In the introductory session, I briefly introduced my project to the informants. The introduction included the aims of the study, what the informants would have to do, how long it would take them to get involved, and how the study would benefit them as well as my teaching practice. The fact that the project had been designed in the UK whose educational standard has gained an established reputation among Vietnamese university students seemed to have a very good impact on the informants' motivation in participating in the project. In fact, this was the first time they had ever taken part in a study in which their voices, their motivations, etc, were taken into consideration. There were two other reasons why the students were willing to take part in the project. The first reason was that they were bored with the current teaching method which they thought did not help them improve their communicative ability. The second reason was that they would have to take part in a TOEFL test toward the end of their English study period the following year, as required by the University of Information Technology. They hoped this project would give them an opportunity to develop their skills. In general, the introduction gave our data collection a very promising start. This extra enthusiasm on the part of the informants gave me confidence and encouragement in knowing that my teaching method was warmly welcome.

Getting informants' informed consents

All the terms and conditions in the informed consent forms (appendix G, p. 285) were fully explained. Informants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the project so as to

take another course taking place at same time. In fact, one student who was worried that taking part in the project would affect his studying time did not sign the consent form. However, he still attended the lessons and did all the tests.

Apart from this single exception, all the other students showed clear interest in the project, hoping that they could benefit in ways which would add to their knowledge and skill development.

Pre-teaching phase questionnaire

The pre-teaching phase questionnaire was introduced in my first meeting with the informants. The following principles were followed to ensure the validity of the data: allowing sufficient time for participants completing the questionnaire, and explaining whatever the informants were not certain about. Explanations were given both before and during the time informants gave their answers. I was worried that some students might not fully understand the English-medium questions. However, I did not give any explanations of the terms related to English information structure because I wanted to find out whether they had had any knowledge of this area before the teaching phase. There were follow-up in-depth interviews to check the reliability and validity of the answers spelt out in the questionnaire.

Pre-teaching phase reading test and writing test

Each test took 40 minutes. Although learners had been informed that the results of the tests would not count towards their end-of-term assessment, the tests were completed very seriously with obvious effort and without discussion.

Semi-structured interviews

Each student was interviewed for approximately 30 minutes, and all interviews were audio-recorded. The main terms and conditions of the informed consent were repeated, especially the fact that the interview would be recorded and analyzed. Informants seemed very excited about the interview because it gave them an opportunity to talk about their problems, difficulties and strategies in reading and writing. Informants were advised to express their ideas in Vietnamese when they were not able to do so in English. In general, the questions in the interviews echoed those in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. Variants depended on how learners gave their answers in the questionnaire.

Students were asked about the reasons for the statements made about their reading and writing strategies. The questions aimed at both validating the reported frequency of their practices and the reasons for that frequency, e.g. why the learners reported often or never delaying the introductory sentence in the introduction paragraph. The following features were the main focus: writing the topic sentence, the thesis statement, introductions and conclusions, essay outlines, communicative purpose, social function of the essay, setting up goals for reading, cohesive devices and textual patterns, reader or writer's responsibility in making their written products understood, learners' preferred teaching/studying modes, short-term/long term goals of their English studies. Explanations and examples were required of those who claimed they had come across the meta-linguistic terminology of information structure.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of informants' answers as well as to explore most of their inner voices, I adopted the following principles, rules, and techniques, suggested in Richards (2003) and Mackey and Gass (2005). First, avoid interruption as much as possible. Second, use encouraging verbal and non-verbal feedback to encourage informants to speak more confidently. This is extremely useful in case of L2 learners who are not always confident of their language ability. Third, elicit as much information as possible and use eliciting questions when informants face difficulties making themselves understood. Fourth, create a relaxing interviewing environment, making the interview a conversation, and using no power on informants (e.g. by showing that you are more linguistically competent than them). Finally, 'always seek the particular' (Richards, 2003: 53). Place the key questions in the middle of the interview, because the interviewee maybe nervous in the beginning and tired by the end (Mackey, and Gass, 2005). Allow the informants a chance to discover and explore things through the interview as well. Informants were expected to use this chance to understand more about our study so that they would participate in the project more willingly and voluntarily. When I reviewed my own interviews, I believed that these principles were strictly followed, which gave me more confidence in the reliability of the data.

4.6.2. While-teaching phase

All the process data and some of the product data were collected in this period when I carried out the meta-linguistic teaching method. The following steps were taken in this phase: giving learners meta-linguistic lessons, having learners perform meta-linguistic and skill

development tasks, getting learners' reading and writing worksheets and post-task answer-sheets, keeping reflective accounts of their reactions to the lessons.

In total, over a period of 2 months, I carried out 4 units. Each unit was divided into two lessons. Some lessons were divided into 2 parts depending on the content load of each lesson. Descriptions of each lesson were presented in chapter 3. Details of a sample lesson plan, and the handouts for students' activities in this lesson can be found in appendices I1 (p.317) and I2 (p.323). The text used for the reading was presented in appendix E6 (p.268). Each teaching session lasted for three hours, and began with a meta-linguistic phase in which learners were introduced to the meta-knowledge they were supposed to manipulate in the follow-up skill development phase. The meta-linguistic phase consisted of 2 sub-sections: an introduction and exploration of the meta-knowledge and exercises designed to help learners fully understand and master the knowledge before manipulating it in the skill development phase. The skill development phase was often divided into reading and writing phases. Depending on the density of the meta-linguistic knowledge which determined the time learners needed to explore the meta-linguistic concepts, I sometimes decided to carry out a reading-only or writing-only phase.

4.6.3. Post-teaching phase

The following actions were undertaken after the teaching phase: having learners answer the second questionnaire, having learners do the meta-linguistic test, having learners do progress reading and writing tests, having colleagues answer the post-teaching phase questionnaire. The questionnaire, meta-linguistic test, and reading and writing tests for the learners were done in one session. The questionnaire for the colleagues were given to them electronically and collected a few days later. This was to allow them to have enough time to look through our academic treatment of information structure and the lesson plans.

4.6.4. Data collection timeline

The following table summarizes the procedures taken in each phase in chronological order:

Phase	Procedures	Period
Pre-teaching Phase	Introducing the study to the informants Getting informants' informed consent Administering the pre-teaching phase questionnaire	03- 08/03 2008

		Administering the reading and writing tests	
		Interviewing informants	
While-teaching Phase	Giving learners meta-linguistic lessons	10/03-22/04 2008
	Having learners perform meta-linguistic and skill development tasks	
	Getting learners' reading and writing worksheets and post-task answer-sheets	
	Keeping reflective accounts of their reactions to the lessons	
Post-teaching Phase	Having learners answer the second questionnaire	23/04-02/05 2008
	Having learners do the meta-linguistic test	
	Having learners do progress reading and writing tests	
	Having colleagues answer the post-teaching phase questionnaire.	

Table 4.2: Data collection timeline

4.7. Analytical framework

In chapters 5 and 6, I analyze the data collected in an attempt to answer the research questions earlier stated in this chapter. The analyses are both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analyses were based on the multiple-choice and yes/no questions in the questionnaires, the test scores, the answer sheets, and the worksheets. Qualitative analyses were based on the open-ended questions in the questionnaires, learners' responses in the pre-teaching phase interviews, and reflective accounts in the diaries. Analyses from the two methods were triangulated for validity.

4.7.1. Quantitative analyses

The following categories were quantitatively analyzed:

Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure in the pre-teaching phase

Quantitative analyses of the learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure before the teaching phase were based on learners' responses to questions 5 to 9 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. The following aspects of this meta-knowledge were asked of the learners:

- Theme/rheme distinction (question 5)

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- Given/new information distinction (question 6)

- Understanding of some information structure-related terms (question 7 and 8)

- Judgement of the grammaticality of some non-canonical sentences (question 9)

My conclusion about learners' having or not having a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure was based on the following accounts:

1. The percentage of learners leaving a question or part of a question unanswered

2. The percentage of learners giving a completely correct answer to a question, (e.g., they could identify both the given and the new information in question 6 and could briefly explain their answers)

3. The percentage of learners giving a partially correct answer to a question, (e.g., they could only identify the new information in question 6)

Their responses in the questionnaire would be triangulated with the qualitative analyses of their responses in the interviews. For example, their leaving some questions unanswered in the questionnaire might imply that they could not answer the questions because they did not have any knowledge of the subject. However, there might be cases in which learners had some knowledge of the aspect but their language was not adequate for them to express their minds.

In my criteria, if 50% or more of the learners could not answer 50% or more of the questions, I concluded that they did not have a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure.

Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure in the post-teaching phase

Quantitative analyses of learner gains in understanding English information structure were based on the scores they got in the post-teaching phase meta-linguistic test. The aspects tested were introduced earlier in section 4.4.3. The total score is 45 points, which is the number of specific questions used in the test. A learner' achievement was scored by the number of correct answers out of the 45 questions and converted into a percentage. So, for example, a student who got 38 correct answers, scored 38/45 of the total, which was 84% in percentage. In my criteria, if more than 50% of the learners could score more than 50% of the questions, I

concluded that the learners in the study gained adequate meta-knowledge of English information structure for their skill development.

Learners' problems and difficulties in reading and writing in relation to their meta-knowledge of English information structure

Quantitative analyses of learners' problems in reading over the three phases were based on evidence from the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, the two reading tests, classroom reading worksheets, and post-task retrospective answer-sheets. The following problems the learners encountered over the three phases were quantitatively analyzed:

- Failing to recognize the main ideas of reading passages (reading tests and classroom reading worksheets multiple-choice questions)

- Having inappropriate reading patterns (pre-teaching phase questionnaire and post-task retrospective answer-sheets multiple choice questions)

- Failing to recognize the semantic relations between a sentence or a paragraph and the whole text (classroom reading worksheets matching tasks)

- Recognizing semantic implications of cohesive devices (post-task retrospective answer-sheets open-ended questions). A student must get all of the 7 or 10 question items right to be considered as having managed to perform the tasks.

- Having difficulty in recognizing the meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions (classroom reading worksheets open-ended questions). A student must get all the 6 questions right in each task to be considered as having no difficulty doing the tasks.

- Not setting goals for their reading (post-task retrospective answer-sheets yes-no questions)

Quantitative analyses of learners' problems in writing over the three phases were based on evidence from the two writing tests and one writing task. An essay was considered as bearing one or more of the problems if it contained at least one sentence showing evidence of the problems except for the thesis statement/topic sentence and the conclusion problems where more than one sentence had to be taken into consideration. Following are my analytical criteria with examples taken from my learners' writing in the writing tests (see also appendix J, p.336 for the examples):

- Unclear thesis statement and topic sentence

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

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

In my opinion, computers have made life easier and more convenient. I don't think that computers have made life more complex and stressful. <u>With a computer, we can play games or listen to music to relax after a stressful working day. We can see computers everywhere for examples universities, supermarkets, companies, and stations because they are very useful.</u> (The student did not clearly signal where each topic began). (LVD, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

- 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 things not directly related to the main topic before introducing it. For example:

<u>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.</u> 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). (LDH, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

- Diverting from the main idea

Supporting sentences were considered as diverting from the main idea if no clearly related semantic links could be seen between the sentences and the main topic. For example:

The quality of human life is higher and higher. It requires improvements in all fields in life. In fact, there are many changes in the field of electronics that 21st century will bring to our life. People will not use wire to broadcast electrical signals. The wireless technology has been widened. The speed of machine will not be a problem in the future. The trend of machine is to save electricity and money for people. (The main topic is changes in the field of electronics and information technology in the 21st century) (NTH, Group 2, post-teaching phase writing test)

- Inappropriate given/new distribution

Inappropriateness in distributing given/new information was the placement of the given or the new in a position in the sentence that was not approved of as relevant according to the context, for example, the breakage in topic continuity by using a passive or active sentence inappropriately. For example:

Firstly, with the applications of computers, we can work and relax easily In schools, teachers can… In our home, computers help us… (There was breakage in topic continuity, from 'computer' to 'we'). (NTA, group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

- No contextualizing information presented

No contextualizing information presented was mentioning something new to the reader without placing it in a context. For example:

Firstly, computers help people to store human and nature data which are bigger and bigger with time. Computers sort and separate them by special algorithm to make the easiest and fastest way to access them. (The audience might need to be given some explanations of 'special algorithm'). (NTK, group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

- Concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question

Evidence of concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question was based on learners' not reinstating the main topic in the conclusion and not saying what the writer thought about the question. For example:

These are the basic features of computers. Computers are not only a machine but also like a friend who help you manage your schedule. With the developing of technology, computers are smarter and smarter. And they bring many utilities to people's life. (The question raised in the introduction is whether computers have made life easier and more convenient or they have made life more complex and stressful). (NTK, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

- Inadequately using transitional signals

Inadequately using transitional signals was accounted for when no clear transitional signals were used to indicate the transition. For example:

So I strongly believe that computers have made our life a lot easier and more convenient no matter whether the field is communication as working or entertainment. There has been a blooming era of communication since the birth of computer and the Internet. My friend's parents can talk with him, who is in the USA, by using an instant messaging software such as Yahoo! Messenger. (There was no signal between the first sentence, which is in the introduction paragraph, and the second sentence, which is intended to be the topic sentence of the second paragraph.) (LDH, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Evidence of mother tongue interference

L1 interference with the learners' reading skill was based on responses to the pre-teaching interview questions. Problems assumed to arise from their L1 reading strategies included their reading patterns, their setting up goals for reading, and their consulting cohesive devices. The analyses of L1 influence in students' writing were based on the discussions about major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure in chapter 2. Following are some examples taken from my learners' essays in the writing tests in which there were traces of their L1 topic-prominent feature:

1. First of all, <u>computer technology our country is not ready for.</u> (…) <u>Money the thing it needs we don't have, while low-quality workers the thing it hates we have many</u>. (LDH, Group 1, while-teaching phase writing task)

2. Some of them we can name: artificial intelligence, virtual reality and always-on connections. (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. (HTN, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing test)

All the writing features mentioned above under the heading of lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas were assumed to reflect a transfer element (unclear thesis statement and topic sentence, indirectness or delay in introducing the main topic, diverting from the main idea, inappropriate given/new distribution, not contextualizing information presented, concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question, and inadequately using transitional signals). My analysis of the issue was based on the number of essays showing the evidence of the features above.

Learners' adoption of reading and writing suggestions

The suggestions (presented in appendix H, unit 4, lesson 2, p.312) were given in three contexts: in several meta-linguistic phases of the lessons when the learners were given meta-knowledge of English information structure, while they were engaged in their skill developing activities, and in one whole lesson devoted to giving suggestions. The suggestions basically dealt with what the learners should do to overcome their problems and develop their skills. Quantitative analyses of learners' adoption were based on their responses to the post-teaching phase questionnaire from which I counted the percentage of learners who reported adopting a specific suggestion.

Learners' development in reading and writing skills

Quantitative analyses that inferred learners' development in reading relied on the differences in percentages of learners who managed to get the main ideas and specific information of reading passages and overcome reading problems. The scoring system was introduced in 4.5.3.

Quantitative analyses that led to my conclusion about learners' development in their writing were based on the differences in percentages of learners who used positive strategies or practices in the two writing tests and one while teaching phase writing task. For example, if the percentage of learners who produced a clear thesis statement was 58% in the pre-test and

81% in the post-test, I concluded that there was development because 23% more of them used this strategy in the post-test as opposed to the pre-test.

Colleagues' opinions

Quantitative analyses of my colleagues' opinions were based on their responses to the multiple-choice questions 7, 9, 10, 11 and 13, to the open-ended question 8, and to the yes/no part of questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 12 in the post-teaching phase questionnaire concerning the following issues:

- Their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the teaching approach currently applied in their institutions (how many of them reported being satisfied or dissatisfied)

- Their belief about their learners' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the reading and writing classroom activities applied in the current teaching method

- Their opinion of the relevance of the time allocation for the meta-linguistic and skill-developing phase

- Their opinion of the relevance of the amount of meta-linguistic instruction input in the meta-linguistic phase (based on the sample lesson plan)

- Their opinion of the necessity of some meta-linguistic aspects used in the lessons

- Their opinion of the overall feasibility and relevance of my teaching method

- Their opinion of the necessity for teachers to be equipped with meta-knowledge of information structure to apply the method

- Their willingness to apply the method in the future

4.7.2. Qualitative analyses

The following categories were qualitatively analyzed (to validate the quantitative analyses or because the quantitative analyses could not answer the research questions). The method used was qualitative interpretation.

Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure in the pre-teaching phase

This was based on learners' responses in the pre-teaching phase interviews (questions 5 to 9).

Interpretation conventions:

1. Learners' understanding of a meta-linguistic aspect was judged from their responses. For example, in response to my question involving the grammaticality of a non-canonical sentence: 'why do you think that this sentence is not grammatically correct?' (In fact, the sentence is grammatically correct) a student replied: 'I think it's not correct. The object must be here.' I reported that the student did not have a clear meta-knowledge of non-canonical construction.

2. In some specific cases, the actual meaning of informants' utterances was interpreted based on my language experience, for example, in response to my remark: 'But it seems that you don't know anything about theme and rheme', the informant replied: 'yes', this was understood as he did not know anything about theme and rheme. This is because in Vietnamese, people would say 'yes' to show their agreement with a statement irrespective of the negative/positive proposition of the statement.

This qualitative analysis was to validate learners' responses to the questionnaire in case they left the questions unanswered but they could still answer the corresponding question in the interview, or on the contrary they had answered a question in the questionnaire but could not justify their answers in the interview.

Learners' reading and writing strategies in the pre-teaching phase

This analysis was based on learners' responses to the pre-teaching phase interviews and explored learners' explanations for their responses in the pre-teaching phase questionnaires. In reading, the three problems qualitatively analyzed were learners' strategies in: reading patterns (question 20), cohesive device consulting (question 18), and setting goals for reading (question 17). In writing, the problems qualitatively analyzed were learners' strategies in: treating the introduction (question 10), producing topic sentences and thesis statements (questions 11 and 12), reinstating thesis statements (question 13), making outlines (question 14), attitudes towards the reader-responsible tendency (question 15), and following the communicative purpose of an essay (question 16).

Interpretation conventions were as follows:

1. Indirectly reporting informants' responses. For example, in response to the question: 'when do you read the text from beginning to end?' an informant replied: 'When I

read quite a long text, a story'. My report was: 'Some students reported that they used the strategy when they read a long text or a story.'

2. Grammatical mistakes were corrected, and main ideas were summarized. A student's reply: 'It' s hardly to hold the main idea' in response to my question why he/she did not use the strategy mentioned, was summarized as 'some students reported that he/she did not use the first strategy because it was difficult for him/her to get the main idea of a reading passage'. Some information was interpreted based on my inference of learners' responses to my 'yes-no' question, for example: 'Do you do the same in Vietnamese, in your mother tongue?' and the student answered 'yes', I reported that the student had the strategy in his or her mother tongue.

3. My misunderstanding of informants' replies, which sometimes led to wrong assumptions in my questions and their responses, was rectified. For example, when an informant replied: 'Because I have learn way to produce the essay er not long enough and sometimes I forget thesis statement', and I remarked: 'So when the essay is not a very long essay, you tend to forget to the thesis statement', and the informant said: 'yes.' In fact, based on the students' responses to other questions, I realized that what the student wanted to say in the first place was sometimes he forgot to produce thesis statements because his experience in writing essays was not long enough for him to remember about producing thesis statements.

4. Learners' responses in Vietnamese were translated into English (when learners could not express themselves in English).

My summarized findings about each strategy were both quantitative and qualitative, for example, based on the number of learners giving similar responses through my interpretation, I reported: among the 25% (12/48) students who reported in the questionnaire that they would tend to read the text through from beginning to end first, 1 (2%) said that he/she used this strategy in his or her L1 reading.

Learners' reactions and attitudes to the lessons

Analysis of my learners' reactions and attitudes to each of the lesson was based on my retrospective accounts of what went on in each lesson kept in my daily dairies. My conclusion about whether learners liked or disliked an aspect of a lesson was based on both their verbal and non-verbal expressions as noticed in the classroom. For example, if more

than one of them said 'It's difficult to understand' or they showed lack of involvement in an activity, I concluded that some students did not like this part of the lesson.

Colleagues' opinions

Qualitative analyses of my colleagues' opinions were based on their responses to question 14 (general comments on the meta-linguistic lessons and the skill developing activities in the sample lesson plan), and to the open-ended part of questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 12 (explanations for their responses to my yes-no questions) in the post-teaching phase questionnaire.

Informants' comments were interpreted as either positive or negative. The comments were summarized based on the key words and phrases in their responses. For example, positive remarks on the relevance of the amount of meta-linguistic input in the sample lesson plan (question 6) included such phrases as 'relevant, not too much', or 'enough'. Negative remarks on this aspect included such phrases as 'too much knowledge'. The summarized finding was then made both quantitative and qualitative, for example, 14 out of 15 colleagues (93%) gave positive comments on the relevance of the amount of meta-linguistic input in the sample lesson plan. One of them (7%) thought that the knowledge input was too much.

4.8. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the research questions of the study which centre on the problems and difficulties L2 learners have in their reading comprehension and written communicative ability in factors related to their meta-knowledge of English information structure and how a teaching method focusing on enhancing this knowledge might help them overcome those problems and improve their reading and writing skills. I have demonstrated that action research was the most appropriate approach to the study because it reflected my ambition for a better teaching method leading to a better teaching situation in my institution and it could encompass my learners and colleagues in evaluating the method.

Four methods of data collection: questionnaire, interview, test, and classroom-based methods (task worksheets and answer-sheets, and diaries) were selected to seek answers to the research questions. For questions 1, 2, and 3 involving learners' problems and difficulties in their reading comprehension and written communicative language ability in terms of the factors related to English information structure, I resorted to the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, pre-teaching phase interviews and while-teaching phase classroom-based

worksheets and answer-sheets. For questions 4 and 5 involving the interrelationship between our teaching method and learners' improvement in their reading comprehension and written communicative language ability, I analyzed the pre-and post-teaching phase reading and writing tests, one while-teaching phase writing task, and one meta-linguistic test. For question 6 involving the feasibility and relevance of our teaching method in the Vietnamese university system, I analyzed my colleagues' opinions in the post-teaching phase questionnaire and the learners' reactions to each lesson documented in my diaries.

Finally, I have devised an analytical framework and categories for the data analyses. The analytical framework focuses on the following: the learners' enhancement in meta-knowledge of English information structure, their reading and writing problems in relation to this knowledge, L1 information structure features and L1 influence on reading and writing problems, their reactions to our lessons, their development in reading and writing skills, and our colleagues' opinions of the teaching method. The analytical methods were both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analyses were based on the multiple-choice and yes/no questions in the questionnaires, the test scores, the answer-sheets, and the worksheets. Qualitative analyses were based on the open-ended questions in the questionnaires, learners' responses in the pre-teaching phase interviews, and reflective accounts in the diaries. Analyses from the two methods were triangulated for validity.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion: Learners' Problems in Reading and Writing Skills

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the data collected in the field studies are analyzed to seek answers to the first three research questions involving my learners' problems and difficulties with their reading and writing in the English language. The chapter begins with the analytical framework for my analysis centering on my learners' problems and difficulties in their reading and writing skills. 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 my teaching method to see whether it changed overtime. Qualitative analysis explores the reasons why the learners encountered the problems in the pre-teaching phase. I will then make a comparison of the findings obtained from the two groups to find out if there were any significant quantitative differences. In the conclusion, I summarize the findings discussing whether and to what extent they answered the research questions.

5.2. Analytical framework

This chapter focused on the first three research questions, which are herein restated as follows:

1. What problems and difficulties (if any) do L2 learners encounter in their reading and writing in English as the result of their lack of a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure?

2. Which among these problems arises because of the interference of their mother tongue information structure features and their L1 reading and writing strategies?

3. Are there any quantitative differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their problems?

Analyses of the problems including L1 interference were based on learners' responses to the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews, their pre- and post-teaching phase reading and writing tests and while teaching phase classroom worksheets and answer-sheets.

5.3. Learners' reading problems in terms of the factors relating to their meta-knowledge of English information structure

The reasons for the selection of the problems to be analyzed were introduced in 3.4, chapter 3. The six reading problems explored in this chapter relating to learners' meta-knowledge of information structure are:

1. Failing to recognize main ideas of reading passages

2. Having inappropriate reading patterns

3. Failing to recognize semantic relations between a sentence or a paragraph and the whole text

4. Overlooking cohesive devices

5. Having difficulty in recognizing focal meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions

6. Not setting goals for reading

Each of the problems is seen as either directly or indirectly related to learners' meta-knowledge of information structure. The problems were assumed to belong to two types: one arising because of the learners' not fully understanding English information structure, and one in the form of their reading strategies. The first type included problems 1, 3, and 5 from the above list. Strategy problems included numbers 2, 4, and 6. Problem 6 is related to learners' meta-knowledge of information structure in such a way that the strategy might affect learners' getting the main idea of a reading passage. Data from the pre- and post-teaching phase tests and while-teaching tasks were compared with questionnaire and interview data to find out whether what the learners thought about their strategies were actually reflected in the tests and tasks. The while teaching phase classroom worksheets and answer-sheets were a source of supplementary information which could not be obtained from other methods of data collection.

5.3.1. Failing to recognize the main idea of a reading passage

Analyses of this issue were based on the pre- and post-teaching phase reading tests and two while-teaching phase reading tasks. The analyses were to find out the following: first,

whether the learners encountered the problem over the three stages; second, whether there was any change in the percentage of learners who encountered the problem over time; third, whether there were any significant quantitative differences between the two groups of learners in encountering the problem.

As we can see in Figure 5.1 below, in the pre-teaching phase, 64% (14/22) of the students in Group 1 and 65% (17/26) in Group 2, a total of 64.5% (31/48) of the students failed to get the main idea of the text. In the two while-teaching phase reading tasks, the percentages of Group 1 students who failed to get the main ideas of the texts fluctuated between 45% (10/22) in the first task and 36% (8/22) in the second. The percentages of students in Group 2 who could not get the main ideas in the two tasks in group 2 were between 46% (12/26) and 35% (9/26). The percentages fell to 23% (5/22 students) of group 1 and 12% (3/26 students) of Group 2, i.e. 17% (8/48 students) in total in the post-teaching phase.
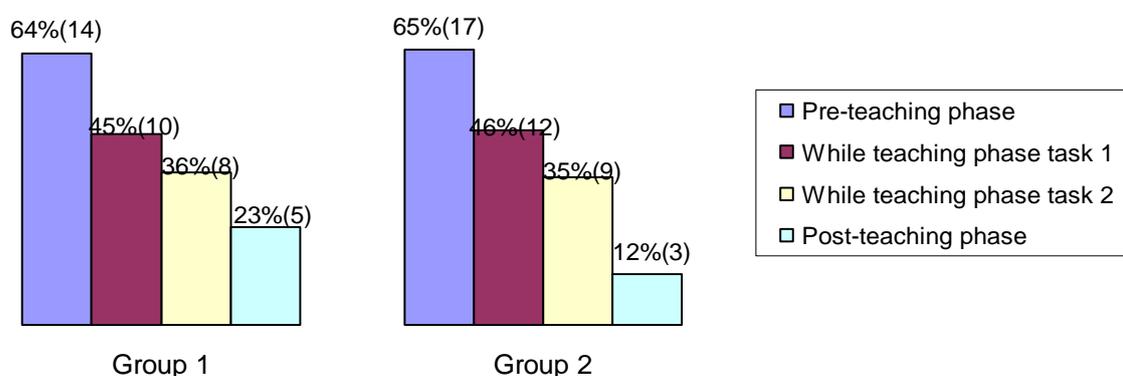
Figure 5.1: Learners' failure to get the main ideas of reading texts over the three phases

The findings suggested that a certain percentage of the learners did encounter the problem over the three phases and that there was a decrease in the percentages over time. Surprisingly a slightly lower percentage in the post-teaching phase was found in Group 2 learners who still encountered the problem because this group learners' level of proficiency was assumed to be lower than that of Group 1. However, on the whole, there was not much difference in the percentages of students in the two groups over the phases.

That a high percentage of the learners in the study (nearly two-thirds) encountered difficulty in getting the main idea of the reading passage in the pre-teaching phase test and some of them (17%; 8/48 students) (see Figure 5.2) still encountered the problem in the post-teaching phase suggests that the task is quite challenging to many L2 learners.
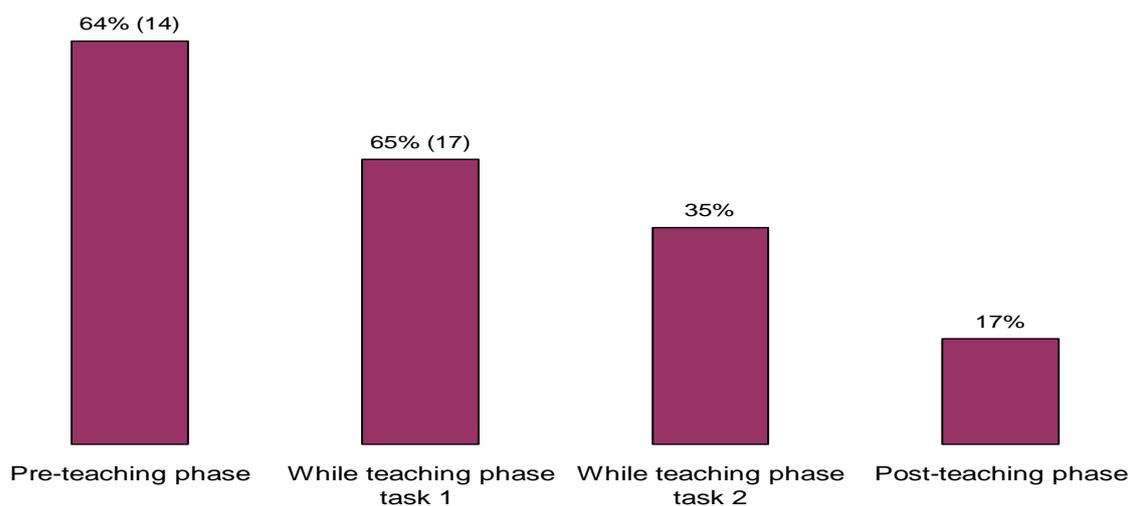
Figure 5.2: Learners' failure to get the main ideas over the three phases (Group 1 and Group 2 combined)

5. 3.2. Having inappropriate reading patterns

Learners' having an inappropriate reading pattern, in my description, is their tendency to read a text from beginning to end without scanning it for main ideas first. The appropriate pattern, in my view, involves learners looking for the main idea as an initial step and then following its logical development. Analyses of the learners' reading patterns were to find out the following: first, which of the two above-mentioned patterns they followed in the pre-teaching phase and the reasons for the practice including L1 reading strategy transfer; second, whether any among the learners changed or attempted to change this reading strategy in the while teaching phase. Third, whether there was any difference in the percentages of learners in the two groups in using each pattern. Quantitative analyses of the issue in the pre-teaching phase were based on learners' responses to question 20 in the questionnaire. Qualitative analyses were based on their explanations for the practice obtained from the interviews. Quantitative analysis of learners' change in the strategy was based on their responses to the two multiple-choice questions in the while teaching phase post-task retrospective answer-sheets. The answer-sheets were given to learners after each reading session in which they had to get the main idea as well as some specific information. In the answer-sheets, the learners were asked to say which of the two reading patterns they followed in the reading tasks and which of the two descriptions given best described their reading patterns in the tasks (see appendices E1, p.225 and E9, p.240). Up to this point, the students had been advised to do some scanning first to get the main idea of a passage rather than reading texts from beginning to end

although they had not been given any formal advice in a meta-linguistic lesson about what reading pattern they should follow.

Figure 5.3 below illustrates learners in both groups' reading patterns reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire.

27% (6/22) of Group 1 students and 23% (6/26) in Group 2, a total of 25% (12/48) reported that they would always read a text through from beginning to end first. In the interviews, most of the reasons given were: it was easier for them (they found it difficult to get the main idea through scanning), and with beginning-to-end reading, if they got stuck somewhere they could look up new words in the dictionary. One Group 1 student said it was because he used the strategy in L1 reading.

23% (5/22) of the students in Group 1 and 19% (5/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 21% (10/48) reported in the questionnaire they used the scanning strategy. In the interviews, the following reasons were given for their using the strategy: to follow the text easily, to get important information, because it was the main idea that helped them to understand the text, reading from beginning to end was a waste of time because there was information they did not really need, it was difficult to get the main idea by reading from beginning to end, it was quicker to get the general meaning of the text, or they were advised to use the strategy by their English teachers at university.

Half of the Group 1 learners (50%; 11/22) and more than half of the group 2 learners (58%; 15/26), a total of 54% (26/48) reported that they used both strategies in their reading. In the interviews, the following reasons were given by those students for their tendency towards reading a text from beginning to end: when they could not see the structure of the text, when they read for fun or for entertainment, when they were looking for some specific information, when they read a story (like Harry Porter) to feel the emotions of the characters, when they read a very long text, when they were taking a reading test (like CAE). The student who reported using the strategy when taking a CAE reading text explained that if he used scanning for main idea first in the text, he would not have enough time to look back at the text for some specific information. The following reasons were given for their tendency towards scanning a text: when they read a newspaper or a short story, when they read a book on a specific problem or issue, when they read academic, ESP, scientific, or technical books, when they wanted to know the purpose of the author, to understand or follow the text easily, to get important information, to realize the main topic or idea quickly, when they realized the topic

sentence, when they read seriously, it was the strategy they used from high school or in their mother tongue. Among those students, two of them, unlike most of the others, reported that they used the beginning-to-end reading strategy for short texts and the scanning strategy for long texts. There was not much difference in the percentage of learners between the two groups in their reported reading patterns.
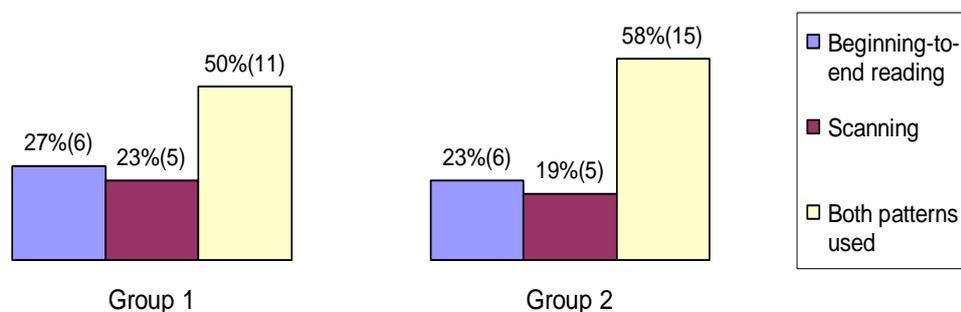
Figure 5.3: Learners' pre-teaching phase reading patterns (based on the pre-teaching phase questionnaire)

In the first while teaching phase reading task, all of the students reported using the scanning strategy. 68% (15/22 students) in the first group and 69% (18/26 students) in the second, i.e. 69% (33/48 students in total) said in the post-task answer-sheets that they tried to use scanning first to get the main idea and believed that they had managed to do so. 32% (7/22 students) in the first group and 31% (8/26 students) in the second, i.e. 31% (15/48 students) said that they had tried to use scanning but they could not get the main idea and went back to the beginning of the text and did the reading line by line. In the second while teaching phase reading task, again, among 100% of the students reported scanning, 86% (19/22 students) in the first group and 81% (21/26 students) in the second, a total of 83% (40/48 students) claimed to understand the main idea. The other students (3 in Group 1 and 5 in Group 2, 17%; 8/48 in total) reported they had tried to use scanning first but hardly understood what the passages were about after the scanning and had to read the text again line by line (see Figure 5.4 below).

32%(7)   **31%(8)**

14%(3)   **19%(5)**

Task 1

Task 2

Group 1   Group 2
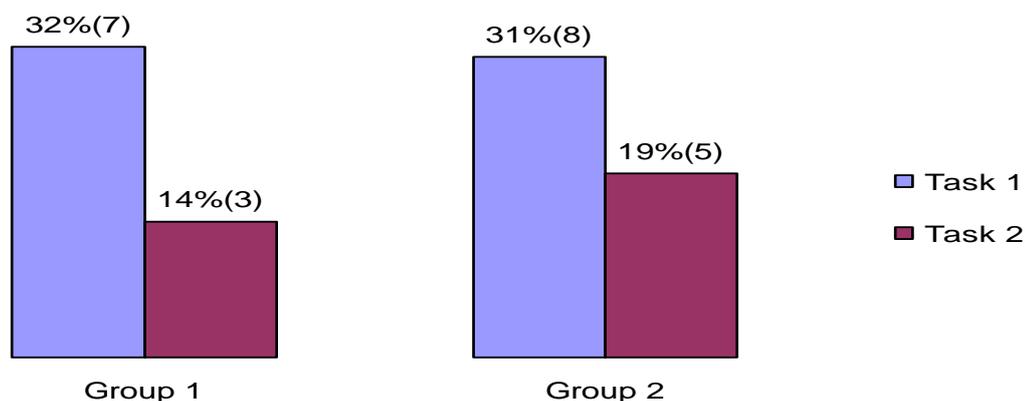
Figure 5.4: Percentages of learners' reported failure to get the main idea through scanning in the while-teaching phase reading tasks (data from students' post-task answer-sheets)

The data analysis in this reading strategy among the learners revealed the following. First, many learners used both reading patterns depending on the kinds of text they read or depending on the purpose of their reading. Second, although some learners acknowledged the efficiency of scanning, not all of   could employ it successfully. Third, the difficulty still existed among some students towards the end of the teaching phase. Fourth, there was little correspondence between learners' level of proficiency and their reading patterns, i.e. it was not necessarily the case that learners of higher levels of proficiency had a more appropriate reading pattern. Finally, with only one student (2%) reported bringing a poor strategy from L1 to L2 reading, I concluded that there was no substantial evidence for L1 reading strategy interference in this reading problem among L2 learners.

5.3.3. *Failing to recognize the semantic relations between a sentence or a paragraph and the whole text*

The findings presented in Figures 5.5a and 5.5b below were based on analyses of learners' worksheets done in four reading tasks. In the tasks students did the following:

1. Choose the most suitable heading for each of five numbered paragraphs (2 tasks, see appendices E2, p. 227, and E4, p.231 for the detailed tasks).

2. Choose the most suitable sentence among the five sentences taken from a reading passage for each numbered blank in the passage (2 tasks, see appendices E5, p.232, and E8, p.238 for the detailed tasks).

Students' success in solving the tasks was counted when they got all the five headings or sentences correct.

In the first while teaching phase tasks, findings from the worksheets showed that in total, 63% (30/48) of the students could not see the semantic relations between a sentence and the whole text and 50% (24/48) could not see the relations between a paragraph and the text. The total percentages in the second while teaching phase tasks were 31% (15/48) and 29% (14/48).

The findings suggested that the percentages of students in both groups who could not recognize the semantic relations between a given sentence and a paragraph with the whole text in the first while teaching phase tasks were quite high, and the tasks seemed difficult for more Group 2 students.
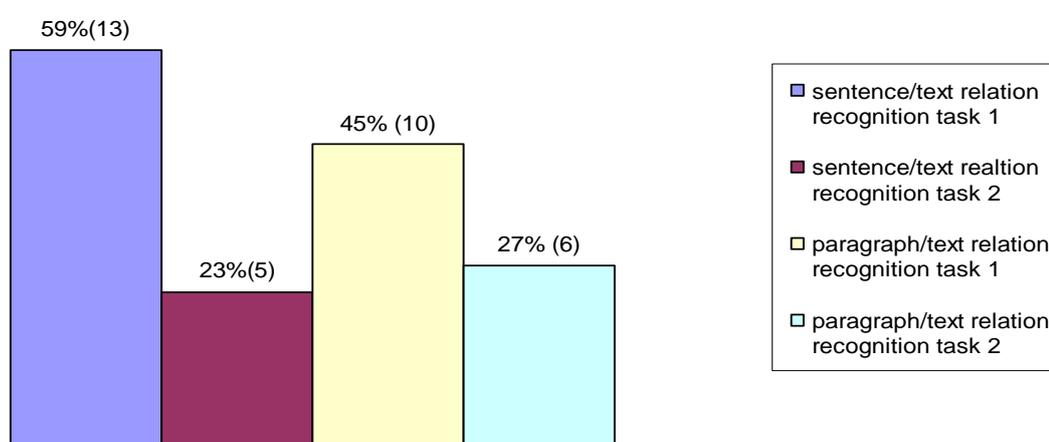
Figure 5.5a: Group 1 learners' failure to recognize the semantic relations between a sentence and a paragraph with the whole text
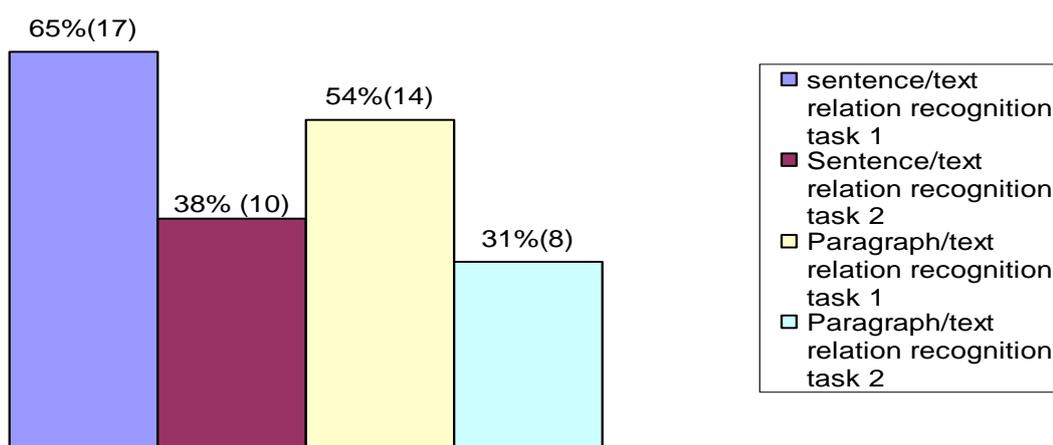
Figure 5.5b: Group 2 learners' failure to recognize the semantic relations between a sentence and a paragraph with the whole text

That nearly one-third of the students still failed to recognize sentence/text and paragraph/text links in the second two tasks suggests that the tasks are quite challenging for many L2

learners. The findings also suggested that there was some correspondence between learners' level of proficiency and their difficulty in realizing these semantic relations. The evidence was that more Group 2 students experienced this problem than Group 1 students in all the three phases.

5. 3.4. Overlooking cohesive devices

It was my assumption that some L2 learners would tend to overlook the significance of cohesive devices and pay more attention to the content words of a reading passage. Consequently, they might have difficulty in recognizing the semantic implications of some cohesive devices in their reading.

Analyses of this issue in the study were to find out the following: first, whether there was enough evidence for my assumption about L2 learners' overlooking cohesive devices in their reading; second, what reasons lay behind this tendency; third, whether the learners had difficulty in recognizing semantic implications of some cohesive devices in a reading passage; fourth, whether a percentage of the learners changed their strategy after receiving our meta-linguistic instruction and overcame their problem; fifth, where there were any differences between learners of the two groups in encountering and overcoming the problem.

Answers to the above questions were based on the learners' responses to question 18 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews and on their worksheets and post-task answer-sheets in two while-teaching phase reading tasks (appendices E3 and E8). The answer-sheets were given to the learners after they had done some other reading tasks like scanning for main ideas or recognizing the semantic relationships between some sentences and the whole text. The question on the answer-sheets involved whether the learners had paid attention to the cohesive devices in the reading passage. They were then asked to do a reading task in which they had to recognize the semantic implications of some cohesive devices.

In the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, 45% (10/22 students) in the first group and 42% (11/26 students) in the second, a total of 44% (21/48 students) reported that they did not pay much attention to cohesive devices. The most common reasons (given by 18 of the students) in the interviews were among the following: they would pay more attention to the content or the main idea of the text rather than to the cohesive devices, they thought cohesive devices were not important particularly in technical texts, they thought cohesive devices did not change the content of the text, or they believed understanding the main idea of the text was enough. Less common reasons (given by 2 of the students) included: they were inexperienced

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in reading, or they did not have much understanding of the meaning of some cohesive devices. One of them said he/she did not pay attention to cohesive devices in L1 reading.

In the while teaching phase, the percentages of students who reported in the post-task answer-sheets that they consulted the cohesive devices in the texts increased, (100% in both groups) but data from the work-sheets showed that some of them, 35% (17/48) and 23% (11/48) failed to identify the semantic implications of the cohesive devices in question in the first and second tasks respectively (see Figure 5.6). This made me believe that these students either had not fully consulted the devices or had had some difficulty in understanding the cohesive role of the devices. Not much difference was found between the two groups in this aspect.
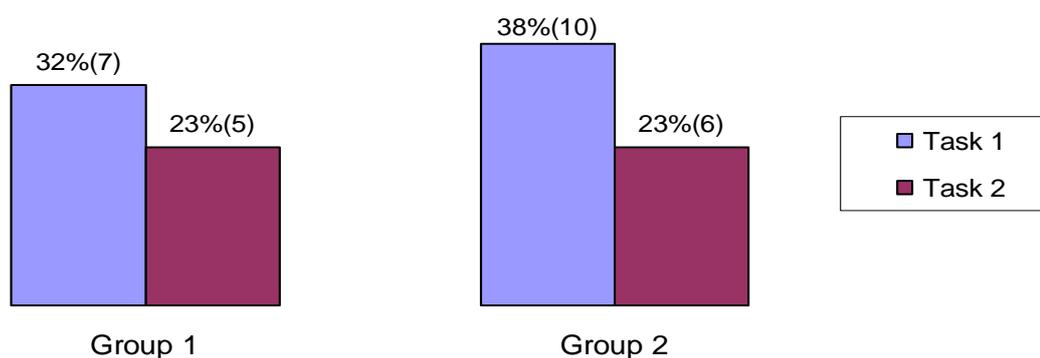
Figure 5.6: Learners' failure to recognize the semantic implication of cohesive devices in while-teaching reading comprehension tasks (data obtained from reading work-sheets)

The findings suggested the following: first, overlooking cohesive devices was a tendency among nearly half the students in the pre-teaching phase, the most common reason was that they did not think cohesive devices were important for their understanding a text; second, their strategy changed significantly in the while teaching phase with 100% of them reporting consulting cohesive devices while reading; third, realizing the semantic implications of cohesive devices could be an ongoing problem for some students; fourth, there was no correspondence between learners' level of proficiency and their tendency to consult cohesive devices. Finally, with only one student who reported bringing the strategy from mother tongue reading into L2 reading, no conclusion could be reached about mother tongue transfer in this reading strategy.

5. 3.5. *Having difficulty in recognizing the meanings embedded in non-canonical constructions*

Data analyzed for this reading problem were drawn from learners' worksheets obtained in the two reading tasks administered in the while teaching phase (appendices E5, p.232 and E7, p.235). Non-canonical sentences used in the tasks were selected from several reading passages in the students' book and some further reading passages. The percentages of learners in each group who could not perform the tasks were presented in Figures 5.7a and 5.7b. The agglomerated percentages are shown in Figure 5.7c. In most cases, the percentage of students with problems was similar in both groups, though slightly higher in the second group for it-cleft and there-sentences. On the whole, more students found it hard to recognize what was the information focus in there-existential, there-presentational sentences and inversions than in other constructions. Some of them (21%-29%, Figure 5.7c) still encountered problems with these constructions in the second task. Not many students had difficulty in understanding the focus of other non-canonical constructions, the percentage fluctuating between 19% and 27% in the first task and between 8% and 10% in the second.
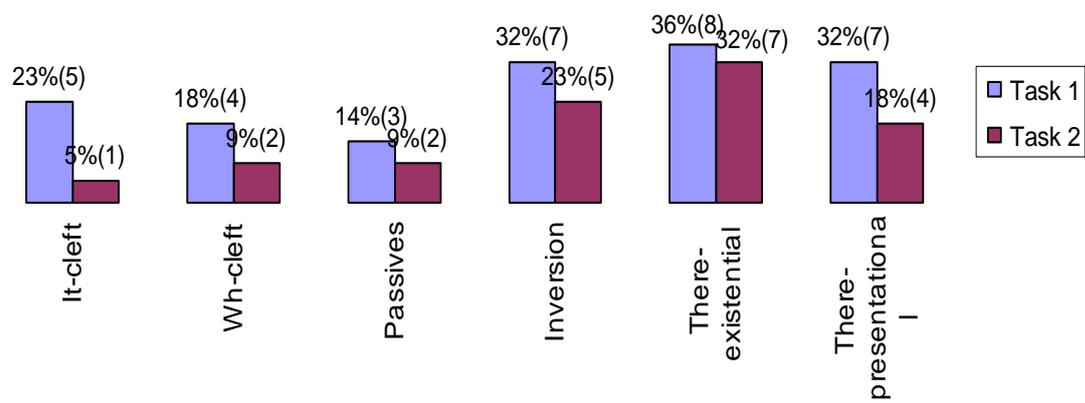
Figure 5.7a: Group 1 learners' failure to recognize the focal meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions in the while-teaching phase (data drawn from learners' work-sheets)
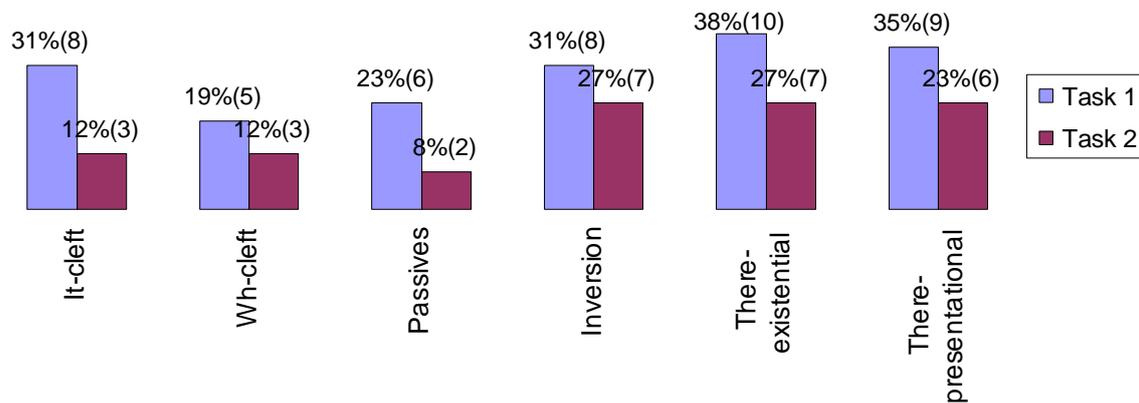
Figure 5.7b: Group 2 learners' failure to recognize the focal meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions in the while-teaching phase (data drawn from learners' work-sheets)
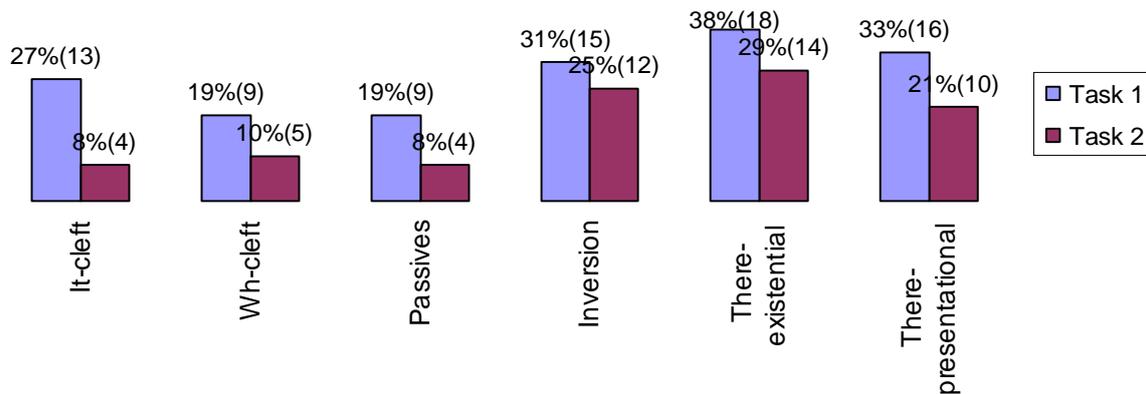
Figure 5.7c: Learners' failure to recognize the focal meanings embedded in non-canonical constructions (Group 1 and Group 2 combined)

The findings suggested the following. First, recognizing the focal meanings embedded in some non-canonical constructions is a problem for some L2 learners. Second, the information focus of cleft structure and passives were clearer to more learners than inversion, and there-sentences. Third, there was no big difference between learners of different levels of proficiency in this issue.

5. 3.6. Setting no goals before reading

In my assumption, many L2 learners do not set up goals for their reading, for example, they do not ask themselves what kind of information they need to get from the text they are going to read. Assumed potential impacts of not having this practice, in my opinion, might include learners' difficulty in getting the main idea and some specific information of a reading passage or their losing track of the main idea.

Analyses of this reading strategy among my learners were to find out the following. First, what was the tendency among the learners in using the strategy in the pre-teaching phase and

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what reasons lay behind this tendency? Second, was there any change in this tendency in the while teaching phase? Third, was there enough evidence for L1 reading strategy transfer in this problem?

The analyses were based on the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews and two post-task answer-sheets. In the answer-sheets, the learners were asked whether they had set up a goal before reading the passage. The first post-task answer-sheet was administered in the first lesson when learners had not been given any formal advice about using the strategy for their reading although some of them may have been aware of the strategy while answering question 18 in the questionnaire and the interviews. The second answer-sheet was administered towards the end of the while teaching phase when the learners had been explicitly given suggestions for using the strategy.

In the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, as we can see in Figures 5.8a and 5.8b below, the percentages of students who reported rarely or never using the strategy were 32% (7 students) in the first group and 15% (4 students) in the second, a total of 23% (11/48) in both groups. In the interviews, the following reasons were given: they did not think that a goal was important for the reading, they did not realize that there should be a goal for the reading, they would tend to read any text with an interesting title, they thought every kind of knowledge in a text was necessary for the reader. For some students, not using the strategy was simply habitual, they would only surf the Internet and they would read anything that caught their eyes, they would just open a book and read without thinking of any goal or purpose. One of them explained that a reader's whole reading process might be affected by the goal he set up, his understanding of the main idea of the text might be changed, and that the goal might make his reading perspective subjective.

The 40%; 19/48 students (36%; 8 students in Group 1 and 43%; 11 students in Group 2), who reported sometimes using the strategy in the questionnaire gave the following reasons in the interviews: when reading for what they liked or for what they were interested in, when reading for their ESP studies, when reading English books to improve their reading or to learn new vocabulary, when what they were going to read was a long text (they would only choose information that they could remember for their purpose), or because they got instruction from their University English teachers. At other times, they would tend not to use the strategy, for example when reading for fun, for entertainment, for relaxation, to kill the time, when reading newspaper or surfing on the Internet.
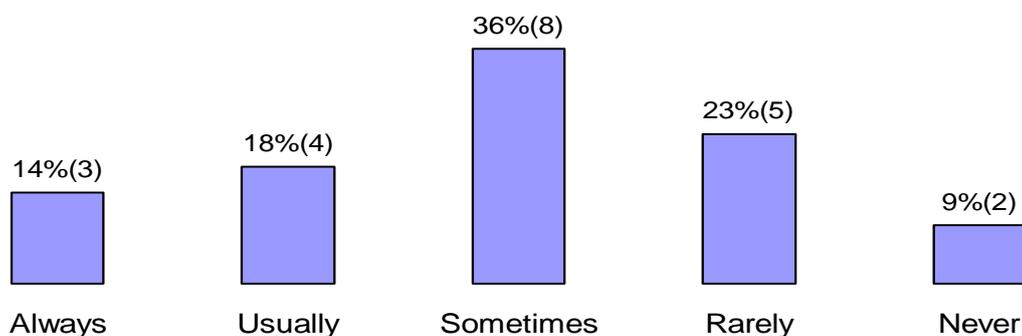
Figure 5.8a: Group 1 learners' tendency of setting reading goals in the pre-teaching phase, based on pre-teaching phase questionnaire responses
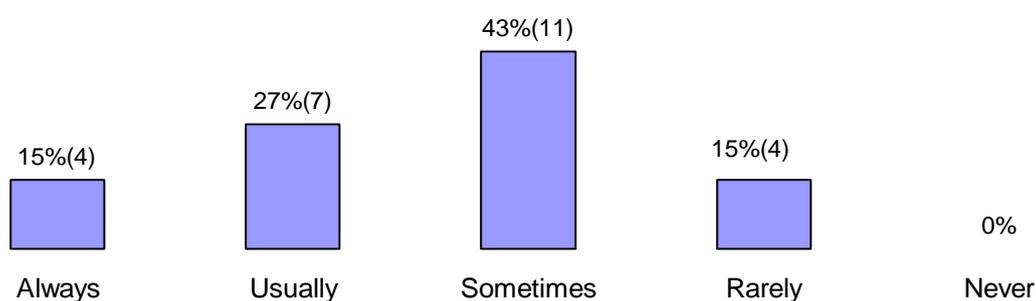
Figure 5.8b: Group 2 learners' tendency of setting reading goals in the pre-teaching phase, based on pre-teaching phase questionnaire responses

In the while teaching phase, 91% (20/22) of Group 1 students and 88% (23/26) of Group 2 students, a total of 90% (43/48) reported in the post-task answer-sheets that they did set a goal for reading the text given. In the second task, the percentages reporting using the strategy in both groups were 100%.

On the whole, the data showed that nearly a quarter of the learners did not frequently (never or rarely) use the strategy in the pre-teaching phase. The most common reason was that they were not aware of the importance of goal setting for reading. For nearly half of them, the practice was dependent on what they read. Setting up a goal was practiced when they read texts in their major studies. In the second while teaching phase reading task, after receiving instruction about the strategy, all of them reported using the strategy. There was little difference between the two groups on this issue. With no student who reported not practicing the strategy in L1 reading, I concluded that there was no evidence for L1 strategy transfer in this problem.

5.3.7. Summary of learners' reading problems

The data showed that the students in the study did encounter the six expected problems in their reading comprehension related to their meta-knowledge of English information structure. The percentage of students encountering and overcoming the problems varied according to each problem and changed through time. The only problem solved by 100% of the students at the end of the teaching phase was that of setting goals for their reading. Difficulty in recognizing the semantic relations between a specific sentence or a paragraph and the whole text was the problem that was least solved. Figures 5.10a and 5.10b below give an overview of the extent to which most students' other reading problems were resolved in the course of the study. Difficulty in getting the main ideas of reading passages, and having an inefficient reading pattern, were largely resolved towards or at the end of the teaching phase. Students' difficulty in recognizing the meanings embedded in non-canonical constructions is presented in Figure 5.7c.
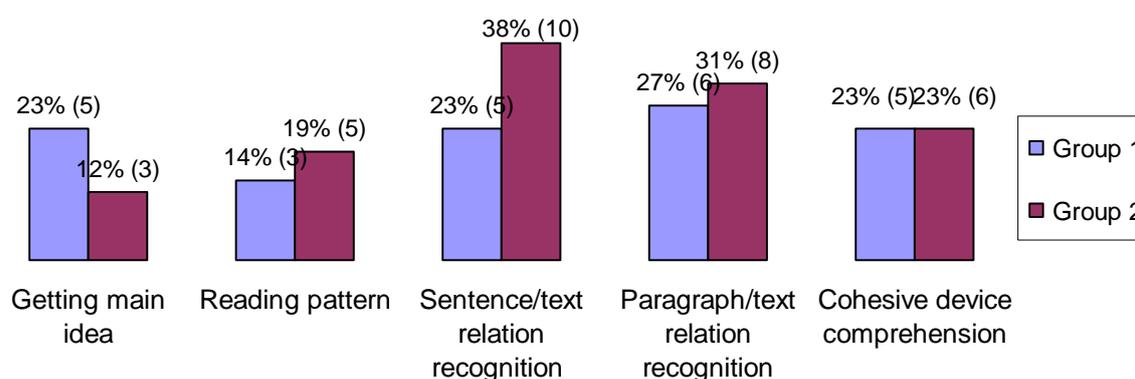
Figure 5.9a: Percentages of learners in each group whose problems were not resolved in the while or post-teaching phase based on while teaching phase work-sheets/post-task answer-sheets and post-teaching phase reading test
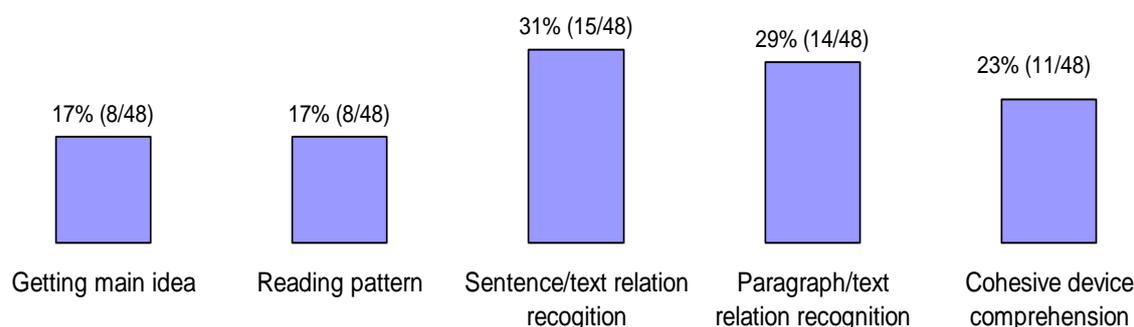
Figure 5.9b: Percentages of learners in both groups whose problems were not resolved in the while or post-teaching phase based on the while teaching phase work-sheets/post-task answer-sheets and post-teaching phase reading test

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I could not find strong evidence of mother tongue reading strategy interference in any of the reading problems. The fall in experience of problems in the while and post-teaching phase suggests there was a positive relationship between my teaching method and the learners' overcoming the problems. There were no big differences between the two groups in their encountering and solving the problems. The insignificant differences in percentages varied according to each specific problem, however, no generalization could be made with respect to the relationship between the learners' levels of proficiency and their problems.

5.4. Learners' writing problems in terms of the factors relating to their meta-knowledge of English information structure

The writing problems my learners encountered which were analyzed in this section were those assumed to be related to their not having a clear meta-knowledge of English information structure or to the interference of L1 information structure features and their L1 writing strategies. The data included findings from the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews, learners' writing in the pre- and post-teaching phase writing tests, one while teaching phase writing task, and their responses to some post-task answer-sheets. The three major problems investigated involve the following writing issues which L2 learners are assumed to encounter:

1. Lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas
2. Lack of planning for essay writing
3. Paying too much attention to local constructions and forgetting the global aspects of the text such as its communicative purposes or its social functions

The problems analyzed were believed to be prominent and obvious and I by no means suggested that no other problems were encountered in terms of learners' meta-knowledge of information structure.

5. 4.1. Lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas

In my analytical system, a piece of learners' writing was considered to lack coherence in introducing and developing ideas if it showed evidence of one or more of the following features:

- Unclearly stating or totally omitting the topic sentence and/or the thesis statement

- Indirectness in introducing the main topic

- Diverting from the main idea

- Inappropriate distribution of given and new information

- Not contextualizing the information presented

- Concluding without explicitly answering previously raised questions in the introductory paragraph

- Inadequate use of transitional signals

The analytical tools for each feature were presented in section 4.6.2, chapter 4. In the following section, I analyzed each of the above problems in turn. The analysis in general included quantitative findings showing the evolution of each problem over the three phases, interpretations of why it arose and a comparison between the two groups.

Unclearly stating or totally omitting topic sentence and thesis statement

Based on my teaching experience, I assumed that many L2 learners have the tendency towards unclearly stating or totally omitting the topic sentence of a paragraph or the thesis statement of an essay. Analyses of this tendency were based on learners' responses to questions 11 and 12 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews, their writing in the pre and post-teaching phase tests and one while teaching phase writing task.

The analyses were to answer the following: First, what were learners' beliefs about their tendency in practicing these strategies in the pre-teaching phase? Second, were their beliefs actually reflected in their writing; third, was there any change in the tendency in the while and post-teaching phase; fourth, was there any difference between the two groups in this issue; and finally was there enough evidence for L1 information structure features and writing strategy transfer in this issue?

Figure 5.10 below presents Group 1 learners' beliefs about their tendencies in producing topic sentences as obtained from the pre-teaching phase questionnaire.

A very high percentage of the students in this group (95%; 21/22 students) claimed to have always or usually included these in their essays. In the interviews, 16 among these students said they were advised to use the strategy by their university English teachers. 2 said that they got instruction from their secondary or high school English teachers. 2 said they got instruction from textbooks. 2 said they got advice from Vietnamese literature teachers and practiced this in L1 writing. The one student who reported sometimes including topic sentences in essays said that he believed a paragraph with supporting sentences only could still make the reader see the topic. As a result, when he could not think of how to create a topic sentence, he would leave the paragraph without one.
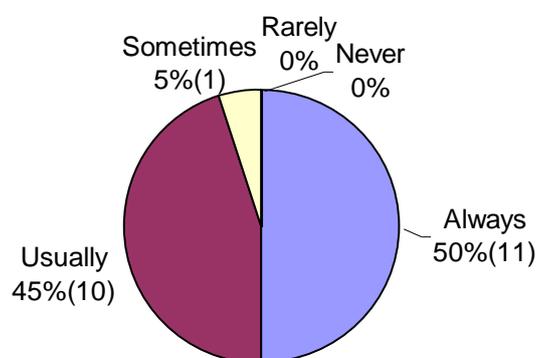
Figure 5.10: Group 1 learners' frequency of producing topic sentences as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

In Figure 5.11 below, we can see a rather high percentage of Group 1 learners (77%; 17/22 students) who thought they always or usually produced thesis statements. In the interviews, the most popular reason given (by 14 of the students) was that they got the advice from their high school or university English teachers. One said that he got advice from textbooks. 2 said they were instructed by their Vietnamese literature teachers and transferred the strategy into English writing. 18% (4/22) of them said they never or rarely exercised 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 interview were that they had never written essays in the English language before (only practiced writing paragraphs), or they did not clearly know the difference between a topic sentence and a thesis statement. The one student who reported sometimes doing this

said that due to the time limit, there were times when he could not think of how to produce a thesis statement.
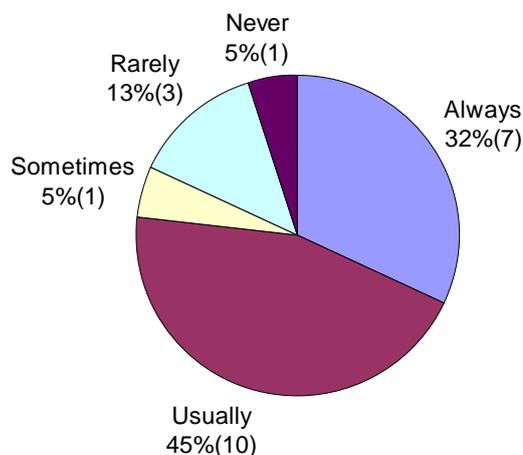
Figure 5.11: Group 1 learners' frequency of producing thesis statements as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

However, what the learners in this group reported about their tendency in producing topic sentences and thesis statements was not quite in accordance with what was reflected in their pre- and while teaching phase writing tests and tasks (see Figure 5.12 below). In the questionnaire, only 5% (1/22 students) and 18% (4/22 students) in the group said that they never, or rarely produced topic sentences and thesis statements respectively, whereas the percentage of students who produced unclear topic sentences and thesis statements was much higher as identified in the pre- and while teaching phase writing: 55% (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 and topic sentences, but they failed to make them adequately clear. The percentages went down significantly in the post-teaching phase writing test, fluctuating between 23% and 27%.
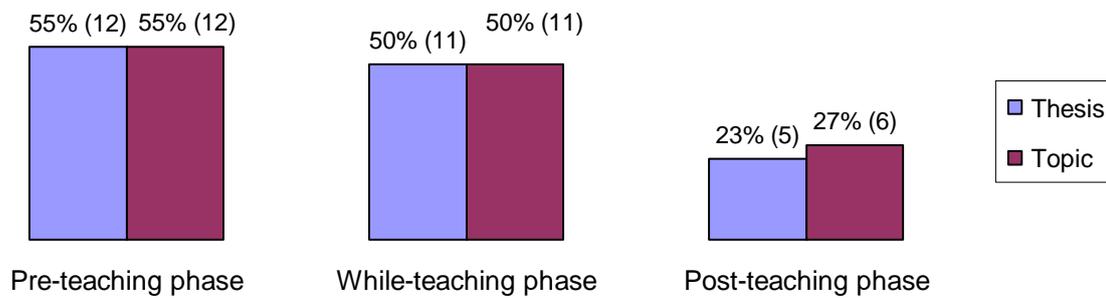
Figure 5.12: Percentages of Group 1 learners who did not state or unclearly stated thesis statements and topic sentences in the writing tests or tasks for each phase

In the second group the percentage of students who claimed in the questionnaire that they always or usually produced topic sentences (Figure 5.13) was 65% (17/26 students). In the interviews, 7 of them said they got advice from textbooks or from secondary/high school English teachers. 3 said they got instruction from high school Vietnamese literature teachers and transferred the strategy into L2 writing. 7 said they did not use the strategy until they studied English at university. The 27% (7/26) whose practice was unstable gave the following reasons for when they produced topic sentences: when practicing writing paragraphs in class, when they had a clear idea of the topic, when they felt that the thesis statement they made was not clear enough, when they thought the topic sentence was useful for the reader. The two students who reported rarely or never producing topic sentences said that they had not practiced writing essays before and that they did not have a clear knowledge of topic sentences.
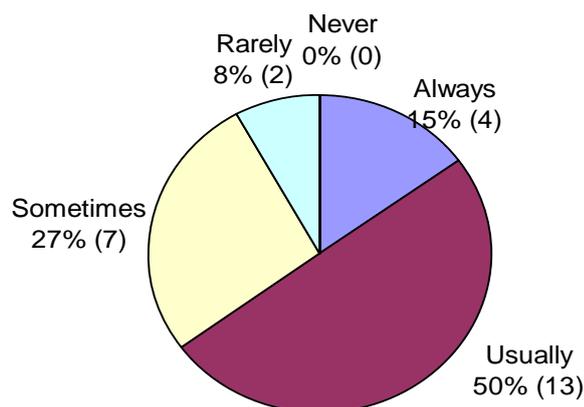
Figure 5.13: Group 2 learners' frequency of producing topic sentences as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

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50% (13/26 students) reported producing thesis statements (Figure 5.14 below). The reasons were quite similar to those given for their tendency in producing topic sentences: 7 of them got instruction from textbooks, or from secondary/high school English teachers, 2 said they got advice from Vietnamese literature teachers. 4 of them got advice from University English teachers. The 5 students (19%) 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 (31%) 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.
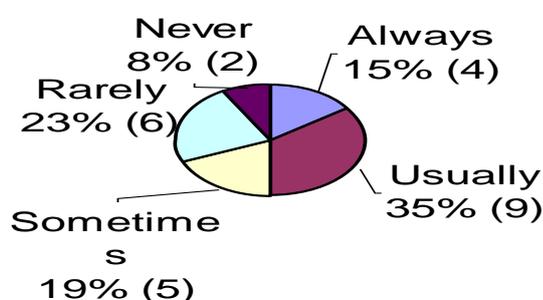
Figure 5.14: Group 2 learners' frequency of producing thesis statements as reported in pre-teaching phase questionnaire
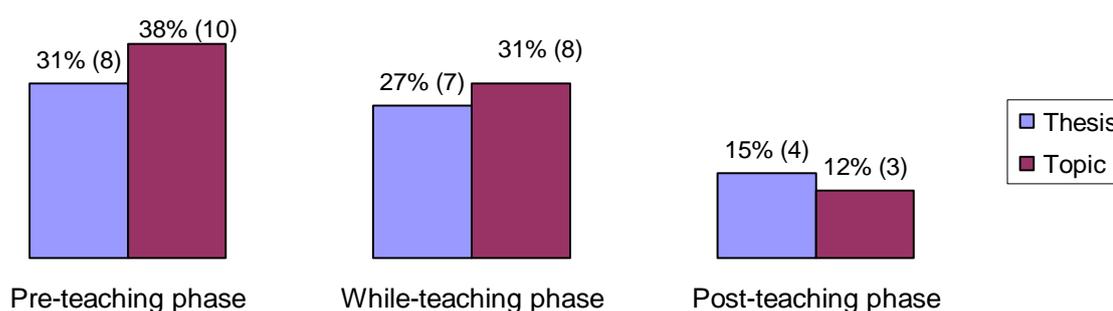
Figure 5.15: Percentages of Group 2 learners who did not state or unclearly stated thesis statements and topic sentences in the writing tests or tasks for each phase

In the pre and while teaching phase (Figure 5.15 above), the percentage of students in this group whose essays did not show clear thesis statements and topic sentences fluctuated

between 27% (7/26) and 38% (10/26) students. As in the first group, there was a considerable improvement in the post-teaching phase writing test.

Learners in Group 1 were assumed to have a longer time of study, and higher level of proficiency than learners in Group 2. Nevertheless, fewer students in Group 1 produced clearly stated thesis statements or topic sentences in all three phases, although more of them thought they did (as reported in the questionnaire).

In summary, the findings above suggested the following. First, producing topic sentences and thesis statements clearly was a big problem for the learners in my study in the pre- and while teaching phase. Contrary to our anticipation, no 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 learners' level of proficiency and their problems with this issue. However, there was a correspondence between problems with thesis/topic statements and the learners' length of English studying time. The learners who had most problems 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). 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 meta-knowledge and teachers' instruction may affect their awareness of the problem, especially in pointing out the importance of a clearly stated thesis statement and topic sentence.

Indirectness in introducing the main topic

The problem just discussed above is, in my view, closely related to L2 learners' tendency towards indirectness in introducing the main topic of an essay. Analyses of this writing feature were based on learners' responses to question 10 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews and on their writing in all three phases.

The analyses were to answer the following. First, what were the tendencies among the learners towards being indirect in introducing the essay topic in the pre-teaching phase? Second, what reasons lay behind these tendencies and what was the percentage of learners associated the tendencies with their L1 writing practice? Third, were there any changes in the tendencies over the phases? Fourth, were there any differences between the two groups in this issue?

As we can see in Figures 5.16a and 5.16b below, in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire, 36% (8/22 students) in the first group and 27% (7/26 students) in the second group, a total of 31% (15/48 students) reported always or usually delaying the introduction of the main topic. 10 of them gave the following reasons in the interviews: they thought it abrupt to provide the topic directly, in their beliefs by delaying the topic they could attract the reader's attention, they would like to introduce the topic in a surprising way, or they delayed when they could not think of a good way to introduce the topic. 5 of them (10%) said because they always or usually practiced this in their L1 writing.

50% in the first group (11/22 students) and 54% (14/26 students) in the second, a total of 52% (25/48 students) reported in the questionnaire that their practice for this feature was unstable. In the interviews, 22 of them gave the following reasons for when they would delay the topic: when 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 a sentence was not enough to talk about the topic), when they could not think of a good way to introduce the topic directly (it would be easier for them to say something around the topic before actually introducing it), they practised the strategy in long essays (when more details for the topic were necessary before introducing it), or in their belief a long introduction would give good impression of their writing. They would not delay the topic when writing scientific essays, when the topic was clear in their minds (they could easily express the topic), or in short essays. 3 of them (6%) said it was a strategy they used in their L1 writing.
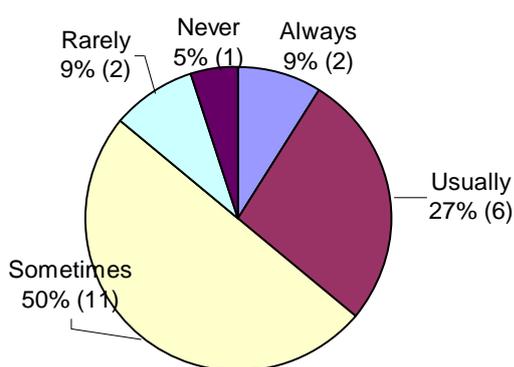
Figure 5.16a: Group 1 learners' tendency of delaying the topic as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire
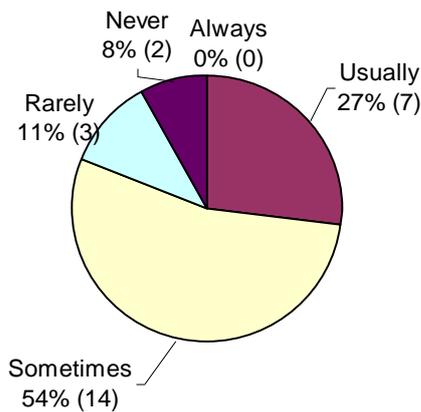
Figure 5.16b: Group 2 learners' tendency of delaying the topic as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

However, the percentages of students whose essays were counted 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 65% (31/48) and 42% (20/48) respectively, (see Figure 5.18 below). 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 the first group and 8% (2 students) in the second group, a total of 8% (4/48).

There were three issues worth noting regarding this writing feature. First, a remarkably low percentage of students in both groups delayed the topic in the while teaching phase. I assumed that the reason lay in the immediate impact of my 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 learners returned to their long-established practice. Second, learners of the second group made more progress as seen in the post-teaching phase test. Third, no claim could be made about the correspondence between L1 and L2 writing in this issue with only 17% (8/48 students) reported having the practice in their L1 writing.
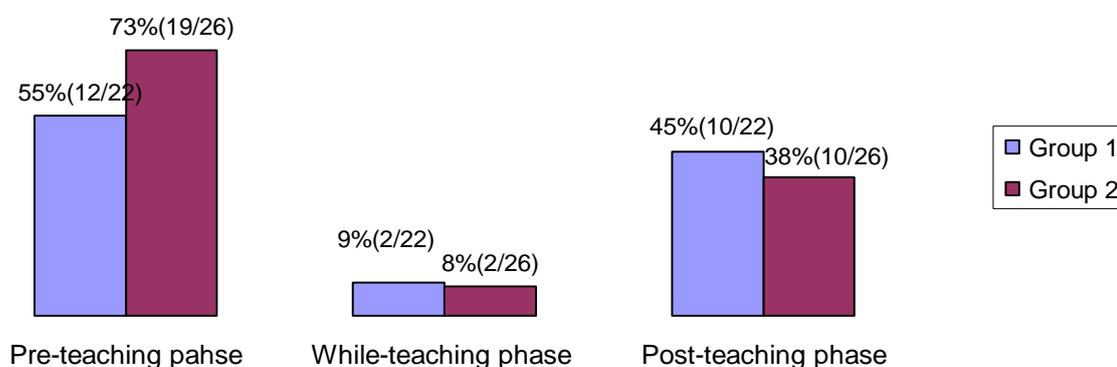
Figure 5.17: Learners' delaying the topic in three writing tests/tasks

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Diverting from the main idea

Analyses of learners' writing in the three phases showed that the percentage of learners producing supporting sentences which diverted from the main topic was quite high in the pre and while teaching phase. The percentages did go down, but were still high in the post-teaching phase. As shown in Figure 5.18 below, the percentages found in the first group were 68% (15/22 students), 50% (11/22 students), and 36% (8/22 students) in the three phases respectively. The percentages were lower in the second group with 38% (10/26 students), 31% (8/26 students), and 19% (5/26 students) showing evidence of the feature in their essays. For all students, the percentages over the three phases were 52% (25/48), 40% (19/48) and 27% (13/48).

I had expected that the percentage of students experiencing this problem would be higher in the second group whose level of proficiency was lower. However, the results suggested that diverting from the main topic was not proportional to L2 learners' level of proficiency. Presumably, this tendency in students of higher proficiency might be due to their better knowledge of grammatical structure and their wider reservoir of vocabulary which allow them to write more freely and showing their idiosyncrasies while supporting the main idea.
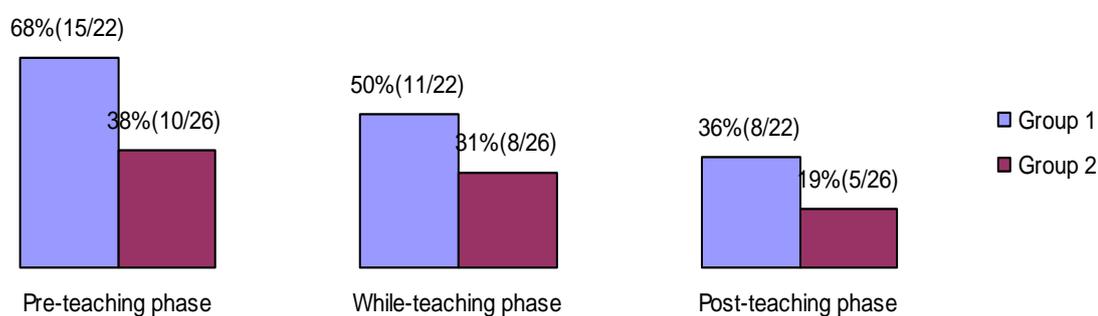
Figure 5.18: Learners' tendency of diverting from the main topic in the writing tests/tasks

Inappropriate given/new distribution

Distributing information is a big problem for many L2 learners because this ability depends not only on their grammatical but also their discourse knowledge.

Figure 5.20 below shows that the percentage of students whose essays bore evidence of inappropriate information distribution was quite high in the pre-teaching phase writing test (69%; 33/48 students). The percentages went down over time, with 52% (25/48) and 38% (18/48) of the students' essays seen as inappropriate in the while and post-teaching phase

respectively, which were rather high in comparison to the post-teaching phase percentages for other writing problems. There was no big difference between the two groups.
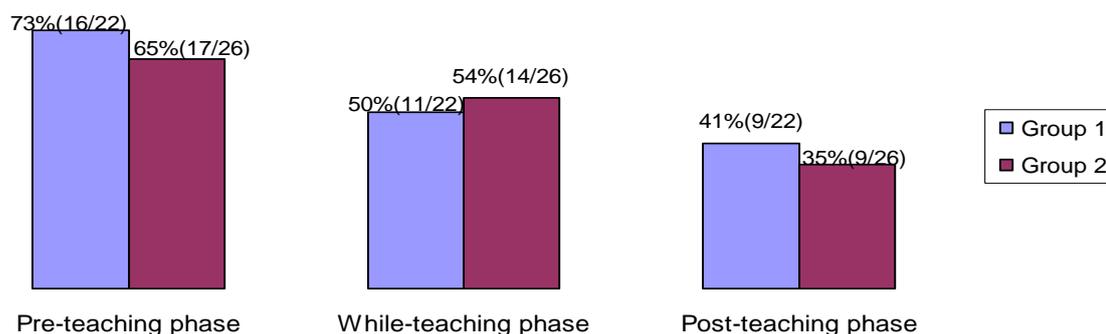
Figure 5.19: Learners' inappropriateness in given/new distribution (writing tasks/tests, all phases)

Not contextualizing information presented

In my teaching experience, many L2 learners have the tendency towards presenting information without placing it in a context. In my assumption, this practice is related to their mother tongue writing style, which is rather reader-responsible, as discussed in section 2.5.1, chapter 2. The findings showed that 73% (16/22) of the students in the first group and 54% (14/26) of the students in the second groups produced essays considered to bear evidence of the tendency in the pre-teaching phase writing test (see Figures 5.20 below). The tendency did go down in the while- and post-teaching phase, but was still high with 50% (11/22) and 36% (8/22) of the students in the first group and 42% (11/26) and 27% (7/26) of the students in the second group demonstrating the tendency in the while- and post-teaching phase respectively. There was no big difference between the two groups. In total, the percentages in the three phases were 63% (30/48), 46% (22/48) and 31% (15/48).
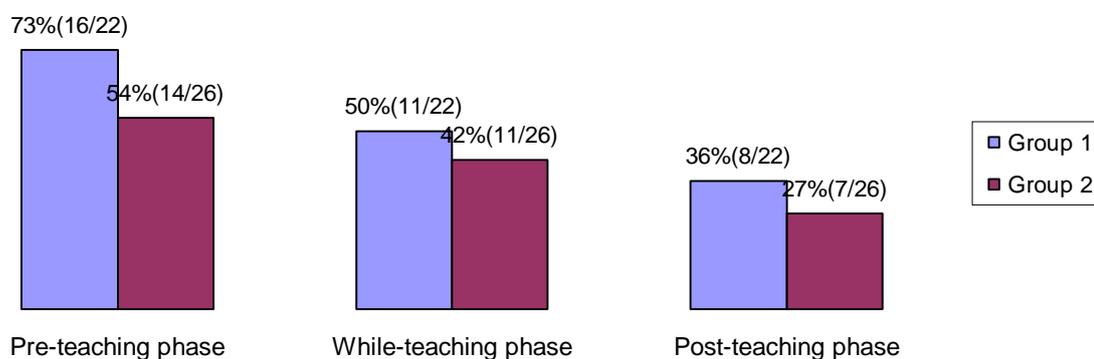
Figure 5.20: Learners' tendency in not contextualizing information presented (writing tasks/tests, all phases)

Concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question

Analyses of this issue were based on learners' responses to question 13 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews and their writing in all three phases.

Pre-teaching phase questionnaire data (Figures 5.21a and 5.21b below) show that 9% (2/22) of Group 1 students and 31% (8/26) of Group 2 students, a total of 21% (10/48) reported never or rarely practicing this writing strategy. Most of the reasons given in the interviews involved their belief that reinstating the thesis was merely a repetition of the main idea and that it could make the introduction and conclusion sound similar. One of them said he would prefer an open-ended conclusion in which he would mention some new ideas to the reader. Other reasons included their not often practicing writing essays, their lack of clear understanding about the structure of an essay, their poor English writing ability, or the difficulty in reinstating the thesis in a different way.

36% (8/22) students of Group 1 and 27% (7/26) of Group 2 students, a total of 31% (15/48) reported sometimes using the strategy. The reasons for their not using the strategy were among the following: they did not know how to reinstate the thesis in a different way, they thought it was unnecessary or redundant, they did not want to repeat the thesis statement, they thought it would make the conclusion sound boring, they forgot to, they thought the thesis had been clearly made in the introduction, or they believed they should mention something different in the conclusion. None of them mentioned bringing the practice from L1 writing.
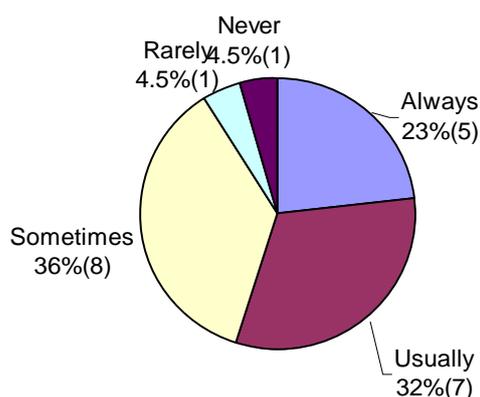
Figure 5.21a: Group 1 learners' frequency of reinstating the introduction as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire
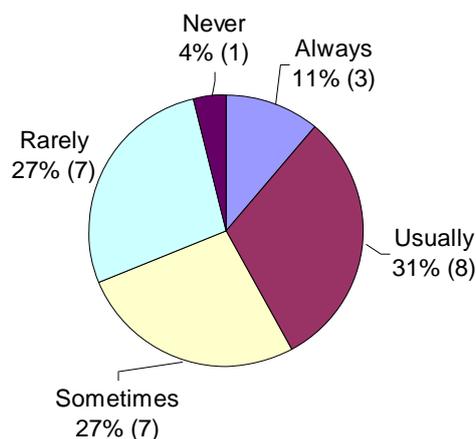
Figure 5.21b: Group 2 learners' frequency of reinstating the introduction as reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

55% (12/22) of the students in the first group and 42% (11/26) of the students in the second, a total of 46% (22/48) reported always or usually reinstating the thesis in the conclusion. In general, those who reported frequently using the strategy seemed to realize the reasons why they did it. The reasons given in the interviews were among the following: to help the reader recall the main ideas, to emphasize the main ideas in a different way, to make a good impression of the essay, to make the essay clear, they did the same in Vietnamese as instructed by Vietnamese literature teachers, it was a rule to end a essay as instructed by English teachers, it was an indispensable/important/necessary part of the essay, it was important to the success of the essay, it was a way to suggest further development of the topic, it was a good way to summarize the essay, or there are ideas that need to be reinstated.

In the pre-teaching phase test (see Figure 5.22 below), the percentages of students who did not show the practice were high in both groups (68%; 15/22 students in the first group, and 50%; 13/26 students in the second, a total of 58%; 28/48 students). The percentage went down sharply in the while and post teaching phase with only 17% (8/48) and 13% (6/48) of the students not following this practice.

68% (15)

50% (13)

23% (5)   **18% (4)**

12% (3)   **8% (2)**

☐ Pre-teaching phase
■ While-teaching phase
☐ Post-teaching phase

Group 1   Group 2
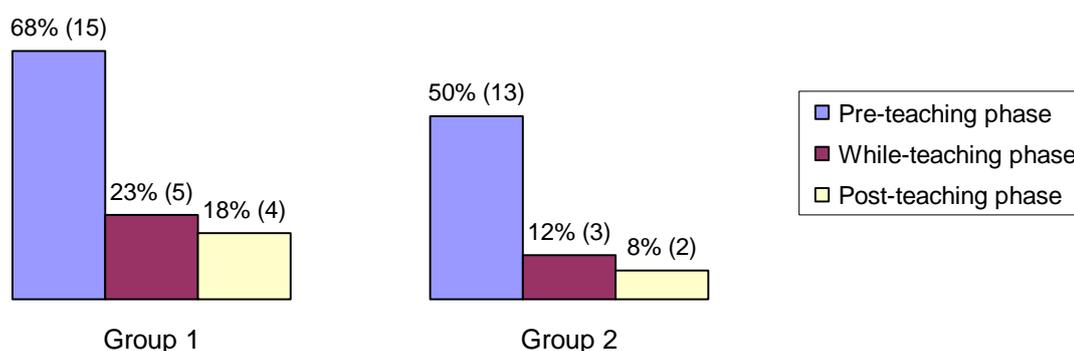
Figure 5.22: Learners' tendencies towards not reinstating the topic question in the conclusion (writing tasks/tests, all phases)

The findings above suggested the following. First, in the pre-teaching phase, many students (58%) concluded their essays without explicitly answering the question raised in the introduction (some of them were not aware of this as reported in the interviews). It was my assumption that some learners would tend not to reinstate the thesis because of an L1-derived belief that it was the reader who is responsible for using their own retrospective power to remind themselves of the topic. This was confirmed by responses to the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews, where 64% (14/22) students of Group 1 and 50% (13/26) students Group 2, (56% in total) said that they believed it was the reader' responsibility to try to understand what is written in their essays. Second, the percentages of learners having the tendency went sharply down in the while and post-teaching phase. Third, the percentages were lower in the second group in all the phases, which suggested that in this issue, it was not necessarily the case that learners of higher level of proficiency would practice the better strategy.

Inadequately using transitional signals

Although L2 learners are often reminded of the importance of transitional signals in essays, I have found in my teaching experience that they do not always use them adequately to make their idea transition clear enough to the reader.

Figure 5.23 below reports analysis of students' essays in all phases for this problem. In the pre- and while teaching phase, the percentages were rather high in both groups with 59% (13/22) and 46% (10/22) of Group 1 students and 65% (17/26) and 50% (13/26) of Group 2 students whose essays were considered as inadequate in using transitional signals. In total, the percentages were 63% (30/48) and 48% (23/48). In the post-teaching phase test, 36%

(8/22) of the students in the first group and 42% (11/26) of the students in the second group, a total of 40% (19/48), produced essays which were seen as showing evidence of the feature.
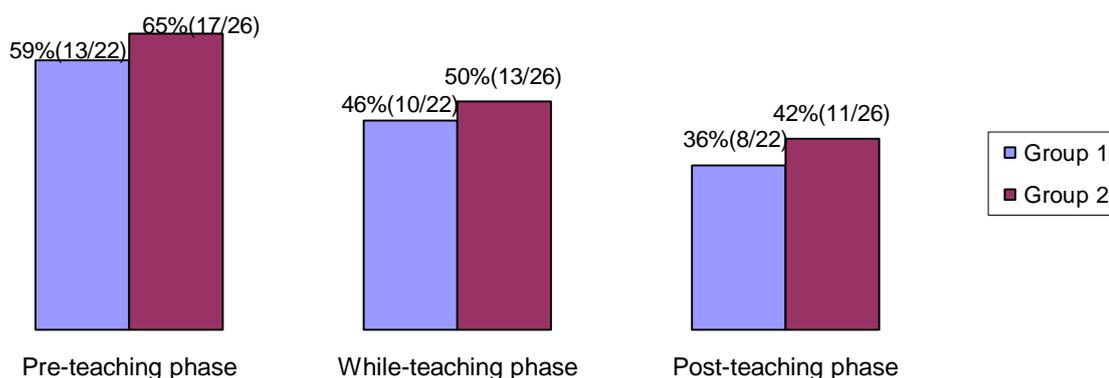
Figure 5.23: Percentage of learners in the 2 groups who did not use transitional signals adequately (writing tests/tasks, all phases)

5. 4.2. Lack of planning for essay writing

My studies into this aspect of our learners' practices were based on the learners' responses to question 14 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews and one while-teaching phase writing task. At the end of the task, I collected students' essays together with the drafts for outlines they had made.

Figures 5.24a and 5.24b below illustrate this tendency among the learners in the study in the pre-teaching phase as obtained from the questionnaire.

36% (8/22) of Group 1 students and 19% (5/26) of Group 2 students, a total of 27% (13/48 students), reported never or rarely making outlines for essays. The reasons given in the interviews were: they thought it was not important, they were lazy, they often only did the writing in classroom tests or tasks in which the time allotted was limited, they would think and write at the same time or visualize the outlines in their minds before writing. 8 of them said they did not use that strategy in L1 writing.
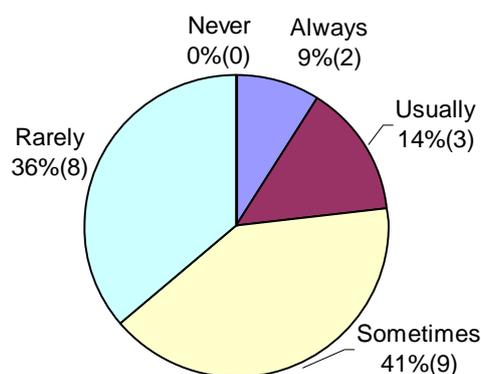
Figure 5.24a: Group 1 learners' habit of making essay outline in pre-teaching phase questionnaire
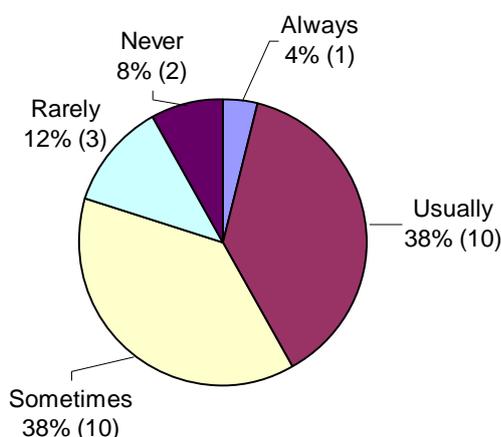
Figure 5.24b: Group 2 learners' habit of making essay outline in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

41% (9/22 students) in the first and 38% (10/26 students) in the second, a total of 40% (19/48 students) reported sometimes exercising the practice. The reasons given in the interviews for when they did not make outlines were: in short essays or when the essay was simple with few problems to discuss, when writing essays with familiar topics (it was not necessary to make outline for those essays), when they could not see the structure of the essay, when they had no clear ideas about the essay, or because they did not practice writing often. The reasons for when they would make outlines were: when writing long essays (to guide the writing so that they would not get lost), when having enough time, when there were a lot of problems to mention, when writing essays with difficult or unfamiliar topics, to write more fluently, to avoid making errors and mistakes, or it was a strategy they were instructed to use since they studied English at university.

23% (5/22) of Group 1 and 42% (11/26) of Group 2, a total of 33% (16/48) of the students reported always or usually practicing the strategy. The reasons given in the interviews

included: when they became university students and were advised to use the strategy by their English teachers, they got instructions from textbooks at secondary or high school, they did the same in their L1, it saved time, it was important and necessary, it would make their essays clear and logic, it could remind them when they forgot some ideas, the essays would be a mess-up written without an outline, they could express ideas more easily, they could follow the development of the essay, it would be quicker when writing, so that the reader can follow their essays easily.

Contrary to my anticipation, more students in the second group (42%, 11/26 students) than in the first (28%, 6/22 students) reported always or usually making essay outlines, and more of Group1 students (40%; 9/22 students) said they never or rarely exercised the practice whereas that percentage in the second group was 23% (6/26 students). My own explanation for the bigger number of learners in the first group 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.

The data from while teaching phase outline drafts to some extent reflected the questionnaire data with 32% (7/22) of the students in the first group and 8% (2/26 students), a total of 19% (9/48 students) in the other not making essay outlines.
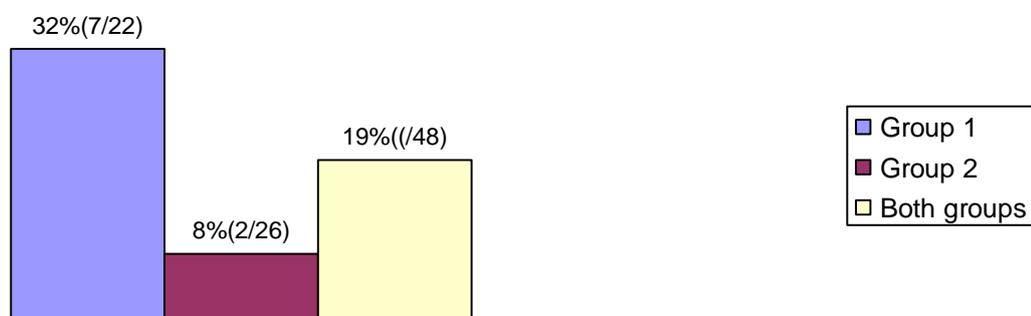
Figure 5.24c: Learners' tendency toward not making essay outline in the while-teaching phase
The findings above suggested the following. First, not frequently (never, rarely, or just sometimes) making outlines for essay writing was the tendency for a high percentage of the students in the pre-teaching phase (about two-thirds of them reported not having the practice). Second, there was evidence for the impact of my formal instruction on learners' practicing the strategy in the while teaching phase (when the percentage went down sharply with only 19% 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 (17%) reported bringing poor strategy from L1 writing, no conclusion could be made about L1 strategy transfer in this writing issue among the learners.

5. 4.3. *Paying too much attention to local constructions and forgetting global aspects of the text*

If the writer does not think hard enough about 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 and topic production and logical development on the other.

Data analyses of this issue in our learners' writing strategies aimed to find out the following. First, what were the tendencies of considering this issue among our learners in the pre-teaching phase? Second, was there any change in the tendencies in the while teaching phase? Third, were there any differences between the two groups in this issue? The analyses are based on learners' responses to question 16 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews, and two while teaching phase post-task answer sheets.

Figures 5.25a and 5.25b below illustrate the tendencies among the learners in this issue in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire. 32% (7/22) of the students in the first group and 24% (6/26 students) in the second, a total of 27% (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 were that they found it difficult to realize and follow the purpose and function of the essay, they had never really thought about the issue, they did not care much about the issue, they did the writing simply because they were required to, in class or in exams and what they aimed at was to get a good score from the teachers. Some of them said that the only potential reader of their writing was their teacher and thinking about things like its function was far-fetched and unnecessary.

36% (8/22) of the students in the first group and 53% (14/26 students) of the second, a total of 46% (22/48) reported that they sometimes thought about the issue. In the interviews, those students said that whether they took this aspect of the writing into consideration 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 letter to a foreign university, or when writing

blogs or when writing about a prominent social issue, when they knew they had some real readers. In total, 73% (35/48) of the students said they did not frequently (never, rarely or sometimes) think about the issue.
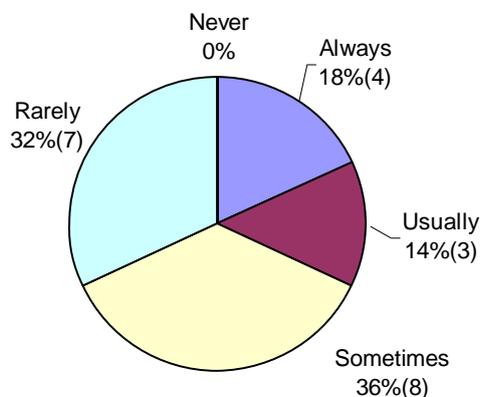
Figure 5.25a: Group 1 learners' tendencies of adhering to communicative purpose and social function of essays based on pre-teaching phase questionnaire
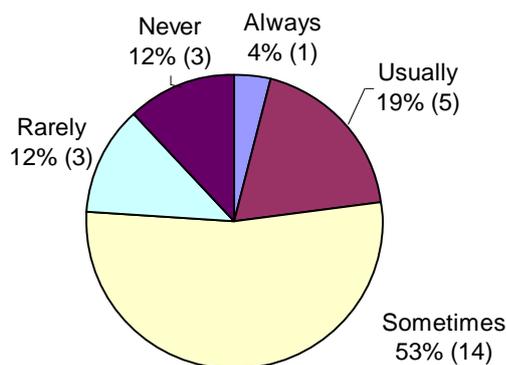
Figure 5.25b: Group 2 learners' tendencies of adhering to communicative purpose and social function of essays based on pre-teaching phase questionnaire

Data from the while teaching phase post-task answer sheets showed that the percentages went down in the first classroom writing task with 41% (9/22) of the first group students and 54% (14/26) of the second, a total of 48% (23/48) admitted having not thought about this. In the second task, the percentages went further down with 27% (6/22) in Group 1 and 31% (8/26) in Group 2 exercising the practice, a total of 29% (14/48).

Figure 5.25c: Percentages of learners who reported not thinking about and not adhering to the communicative purpose and social function of essays in the while-teaching phase (data obtained from learners' post-task answer-sheets)

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 (nearly three-quarters; 73%). Second, there was not necessarily any correspondence between learners' level of proficiency and their awareness of the issue. Third, there was evidence for the impact of our formal instruction on the learners' practicing the strategy in the while teaching phase.
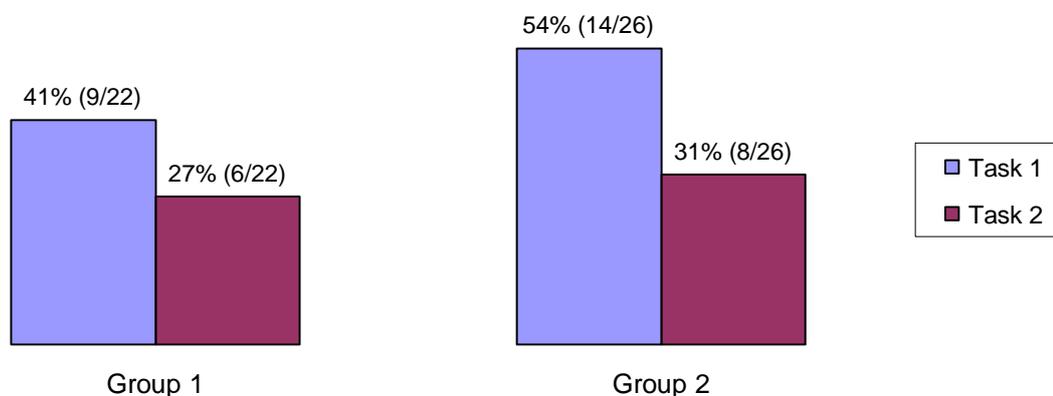
Figure 5.26: Learners' tendency of not paying attention to communicative purpose and social function of essays in while-teaching phase based on two classroom post-task answer sheets.

5. 4.4. Summary of learners' writing problems

The findings in this chapter showed that the learners in our study did encounter writing problems and difficulties in features related to their meta-knowledge of information structure over all the three phases. The extent to which each problem was overcome in the while and post-teaching phase varied (see Figures 5.27a, 5.27b, and 5.27c below). Reinstating thesis statements in the conclusion paragraph saw the most remarkable change with the percentage

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of learners who did not exercise the practice being 58% (28/48 students) in the pre-teaching phase going down to 12% (6/48 students) in the post-teaching phase. Least overcome was learners' practice of delaying the topic in the introduction with 42% (20/48) of the students still doing this in the post-teaching phase writing test.

Interview data showed that there was not enough evidence for L1 transfer in any of the writing problems judging from the low percentage of learners who reported bringing poor L1 strategies to L2 writing. In addition, 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.

There were no big differences between the two groups in encountering and solving the problems overall. In some cases, more students of lower level groups showed evidence of exercising good writing strategies such as in clearly stating thesis statements and topic sentences, and not diverting from the main topic. In my own view, the explanations might 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.
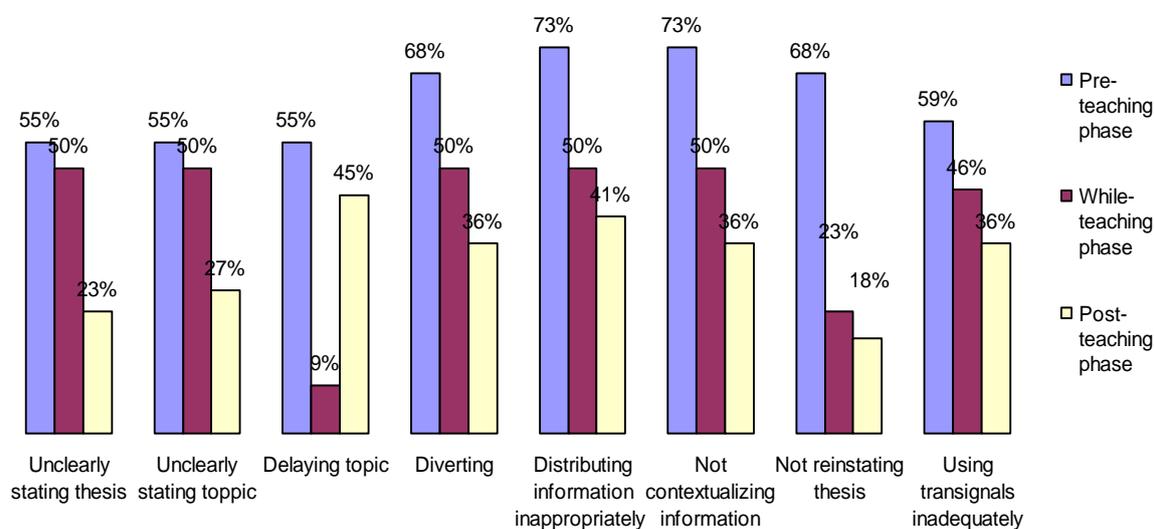
Figure 5.27a: Group 1 learners' writing problems over three phases
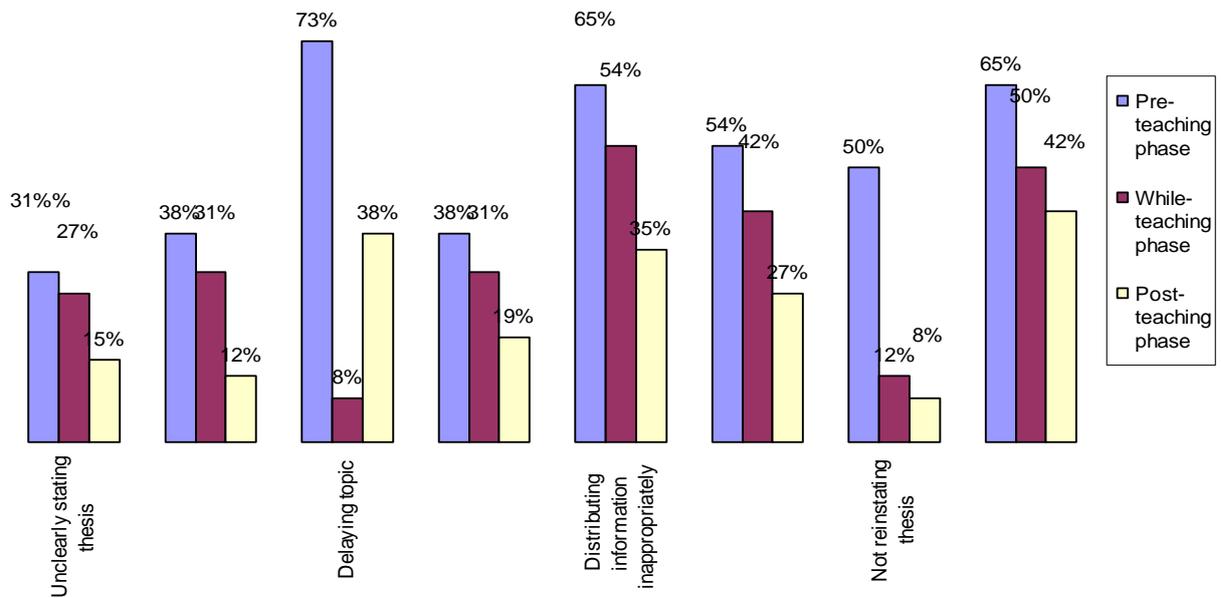
Figure 5.27b: Group 2 learners' writing problems over three phases
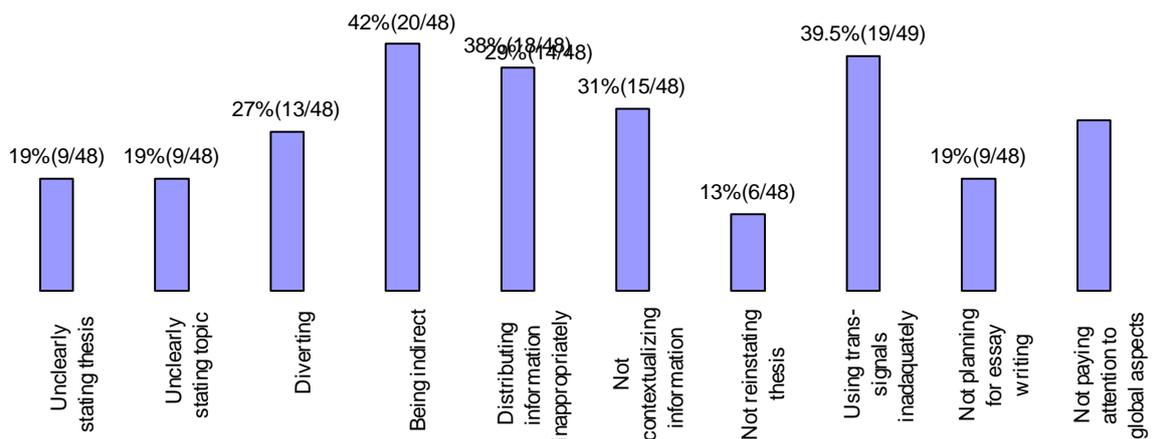
Figure 5.27c: Percentage of learners whose writing problems were not solved in the while or post-teaching phase (all analyses combined)

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the data gained in my field studies to seek the answers to the first three research questions centering on my learners' problems and difficulties in reading and writing in areas related to their meta-knowledge of information structure. The findings suggested that the learners in the study did encounter the reading and writing problems anticipated before, during and after the teaching phase. The percentages of 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. Most of the reading problems seemed to be caused by the learners' not having a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure (difficulty in getting main ideas of reading passages, recognizing semantic relations between sentences/paragraphs and the whole text, and having trouble understanding information embedded in non-canonical constructions). However, I could not find enough evidence for the transfer from L1 to L2 reading strategies in any of the reading problems investigated.

There was evidence for the correspondence between L1 and L2 writing strategies in all the writing problems. The influence of L1 transfer was variable with extremely low evidence of topic-prominent sentences, only 8% (4/48) of the students used the topic-prominent feature in their writing and this only happened in the while-teaching phase. In general, there were no big differences between the two groups in their encountering the problems which were investigated. In some cases, more Group 1 students experienced problems than students in Group 2 particularly in problems related to their writing strategies such as unclearly stating thesis statements and topic sentences and diverting from the main topic. The reason might lie in the fact that learners of higher level of proficiency would tend to show their idiosyncrasies in writing.

In the next chapter I will analyze how my meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing was helping the learners overcome their problems and thereby improve their skills.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Discussion: The Impact of Cognitive Meta-linguistic Approach on Learners' Reading and Writing Skills Development

6.1. Introduction

The present chapter seeks answers to research questions 4, 5, and 6 stated in chapter 4 as follows:

1. Can a cognitive meta-linguistic approach help L2 learners overcome their reading and writing problems and develop their reading comprehension and written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure?

2. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their skill development?

3. Is the approach relevant and feasible in the Vietnamese university system?

The chapter begins with the analytical framework for my data analysis in which units of analysis are stated along with the three above-mentioned research questions. In the first section dealing with my learners' meta-knowledge of information structure, I try to find out how much of this knowledge the learners had before the teaching phase and how much they gained after the teaching phase. The second section is to see whether the learners had made any development in their reading and writing skills during and after the teaching phase. Analyses of the first two sections are to reach some conclusions about the interrelationship between my teaching approach and the learners' skill development. Two t-tests are run to see whether the learners' pre- and post-teaching phase reading and writing tests scores are significantly different. The next section analyzes the learners' reactions towards the content of each lesson in particular and to my teaching method in general. This includes their attitudes towards my skill developing suggestions. The final section is the analysis of my colleagues' opinions of my teaching method in term of its relevance in the Vietnamese university system and the relevance of the meta-linguistic aspects and classroom activities. Analyses in the last two sections are to find out whether my approach fits within and enhances the communicative approach required in the Vietnamese university system and what is the appropriate balance between the teaching of meta-linguistic knowledge of English

information structure and the development of communicative practices within this teaching situation. Analyses of the differences between the two groups of learners are to gain insightful implications for my future application of the approach to learners of different levels of proficiency. Units of analysis will be presented in the analytical framework (section 6.2 below).

6.2. Analytical framework

Data analyses in this chapter encompass the following:

- Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure before and after the teaching phase

- Learners' development in reading and writing skills during and after the teaching phase

- Learners' reactions to my teaching method

- Colleagues' opinions of my teaching approach

The learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure before and after the teaching phase is analyzed based on the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews and a post-teaching phase meta-linguistic test. Their improvement in their reading and writing skill are analyzed based on their pre-, while- and post-teaching phase writing and reading tests and tasks. The learners' attitudes to the teaching method are based on reflective accounts in my field trip diaries and on the post-teaching phase questionnaire for the learners. My colleagues' opinions of the teaching method are based on the post-teaching phase questionnaire for the colleagues. Analytical tools for these analyses are introduced in section 4.7, chapter 4.

6.3. Learners' pre- and post-teaching phase meta-knowledge of English information structure

The data used for this analytical purpose comprise learners' responses to questions 5 to 9 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire (appendix A1, p.191) and interviews (see appendices B2, p.206 and B3, p. 210 for a sample interview transcription and a sample summary of the interview), and a post-teaching phase meta-linguistic test (appendix C5, 218). The reason why I did not use a meta-linguistic test in the pre-teaching phase, as explained in chapter 4, is

because I believed a test would be irrelevant in this phase when my participants were assumed not to have a systematic knowledge of information structure.

6.3.2. Learners' pre-teaching phase meta-knowledge of English information structure

Analyses of the pre-teaching phase questionnaire and interviews show that nearly all the learners did not have a clear systematic knowledge of English information structure. The conclusion is based on the following analyses.

Learners' meta-knowledge of theme/rheme (question 5)

In Group 1, 73% (16/22) of the students left question 5 in the questionnaire unanswered. In the interviews most of them said that they could not do the task because they had never come across the terms of theme and rheme and could not make out what they meant. Two of them said they thought the theme was the subject. One said that he just had a vague idea of the definitions and concepts of the terms. The 6 students (27%) who answered the question or part of the question said in the interviews that they tried to do the task by looking up the terms theme and rheme in the English-Vietnamese dictionary and made guesses. However, they said that even the Vietnamese equivalents of the terms were rather vague to them. Among these 6 students, only one (5%) could identify both the theme and the rheme of the sentence. One student could identify the theme, but not the rheme. Neither of the two could give a clear explanation for their choices, saying in the interview that they thought the theme was the subject of the sentence, the rheme the predicate, using their knowledge of Vietnamese literature that they acquired in their secondary and high school.

In Group 2, 23% (6/26) of the students left the question unanswered. 38% (10/26 students) could identify both the theme and rheme of the sentence. 23% (6/26 students) could identify the theme but unsure of the rheme or where the rheme started and ended. 15% (4/26 students) gave wrong answers of the theme/rheme distinction.

In comparison with the situation in Group 1, more students in Group 2 could identify both the theme and the rheme of the sentence, a high percentage of 38% (10/26 students) while that percentage was only 5% (1 student) in Group 1. However, in fact this did not show that these students in Group 2 had better understanding of theme and rheme. In the interviews, they admitted that they had asked about the terms from Group 1 students the day before the session in which they were asked to do the questionnaire and they had come to know vaguely

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that the theme was somewhat like the subject of the sentence. This gave the explanation why 6 of them could identify the theme but were unsure of the theme or where the theme started or ended. The 10 students who left the question unanswered or gave wrong answers said that they did not know at all about the terms and they did not ask students of the other group about the terms.

Learners' ability in given/new information distinguishing (question 6)

In Group 1, 18% (4/22) of the students left the question unanswered. Among the 82% (18/22) students who answered the question or part of the question, 68% (15/22) gave wrong answers. None of the 14% (3/22) students who were able to identify the given and new information of the sentence were able to justify their choices properly. In the interviews, those students who managed to answer the question said that they had some vague idea about given and new information. Two of them said old information was something mentioned in the previous sentence. Some of them made the distinction on the belief that action conjugated in past perfect tense was old information and action in past simple was new information. Some thought that the adverb 'suddenly' indicated that the action following was new information.

In Group 2, 19% (5/26) of the students left the question unanswered. 58% (15 students) gave wrong answers of either the new, the given, or both. 23% (6 students) could identify both the given and the new. However none of them were able to justify their choices properly. Two of them said they thought the adverb 'suddenly' indicated that the action following was new information, and past perfect tense implied that the action was old information. The explanation why a higher number of students in this group could identify the given/new information was the same as for the theme/rheme distinction question. They had asked some students in the other group of the content of the questionnaire the day before and had come to vaguely understand the given-new distinction. The fact that none of them could justify their choices suggests that they only vaguely understood the terms.

Learners' understanding of information structure-related terms (questions 7 and 8)

95% (21/22) of Group 1 students said that they had never come across the terms before. One said that he/she knew the terms in Vietnamese but did not really understand what they meant or how they were used in English. In the interviews, most of them said that they had used or

come across the cleft structure before but they did not get to know it by the term. 35% (9/26) of the students in the second group said they had no idea of the terms. 11% (3) students said they knew their Vietnamese equivalents but did not really understand what they meant. 54% (14 students) said they knew one or the other of the terms in Vietnamese but they did not really understand them. 2 students said they clearly understand the term 'information focus'. One said that he/she knew what is meant by 'problem-solution pattern'. Most students could not give any explanations for the terms. In fact, only one of them could actually explain the term 'information focus' to a satisfactory extent. Again, more students in Group 2 said they had known one or more of the terms, and this knowledge was acquired the day before the questionnaire session through their conversations with some of Group 1 students.

Learners' judgment of non-canonical sentences' grammaticality (question 9)

In Group 1, none of the students could give 100% correct judgment. 73% (16/22) got it right from 50-80% and 27% (6 students) got less than 50%. In Group 1, 62% (16/26) of the students got it right from 50-80%, and 27% (7/26) got less than 50%. 3% (1 student) left the question unanswered. 8% (2 students) got 100% correct. In the interviews, most of them said they had never come across any of the structure before. They just made sensible guess of the grammaticality and were unsure of their choices. None of them could give proper explanations for sentences they thought grammatically correct or incorrect. The reasons given for their thinking a sentence was not grammatically correct included the wrong position of verb/subject, lack of verb/subject, wrong use of verb/subject. This suggests that their meta-knowledge of non-canonical construction was very vague.

Summary of learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure in the pre-teaching phase

In general, most of the learners did not have a clear and systematic understanding of English information structure in the pre-teaching phase. Although more students in Group 2 showed that they had come to know one or other aspects of this meta-knowledge, it was revealed that their partial understanding came from the discussions with Group 1 students. I may argue that the meta-knowledge of the field that they might have had in the while- and post-teaching phase should have come from our teaching lessons and the development in their reading and writing skills during and after the teaching phase might be related to the meta-knowledge they might have gained in that period.

6.3.3. Learners' post-teaching phase meta-knowledge of English information structure

This data analysis, which is based on a post-teaching phase meta-linguistic test (appendix C5, p.218), aims to find out whether and how much the learners acquired the meta-knowledge of information structure after the teaching phase when they had received formal instruction enhancing their understanding of English information structure. The findings of this analysis will then be used to make conclusions about the interrelationship between their better understanding of information structure and the development of their reading and writing skills during and after the teaching phase. The features of English information structure meta-knowledge the learners were expected to acquire, which are introduced below, were drawn from the content of the lessons they had been given. The selection of the test tasks was based on my assumption that these features of English information structure are essential in helping L2 learners in their understanding the global and local structure of an academic text and in structuring a piece of academic writing. (As stated in chapter 4, by assuming so, I would not exclude the other factors that might have contributed to their overall development.) The learners were supposed to be able to do the following in the test if they had had some understanding of English information structure:

- Identifying clause types

- Identifying non-canonical constructions and the new information in each construction

- Rephrasing given sentences using subject-verb inversion and identifying the given/new information of the original and rephrased sentences

- Using cleft structure to give focus on some elements of the given sentences

- Recognizing the discourse patterns, discourse elements, and discourse relations of a given passage

- Combining pairs of sentences to make one sentence and recognizing the local semantic relationships held between them

- Recognizing the cohesive devices used in a given paragraph

As we can see in Figure 6.1a below, in the first group 5% (1/22) of the students scored less than 50% of the tasks required, i.e. 95% (21/22) of them got 50% or more. Among those who scored above the average, 18% (4 students) scored 90%-100% and more than one-third (8/22)

of them scored 70%-79%. The other 14% (9 students) divided themselves equally into three sub-groups of three each, scoring 50%-59%, 60%-69%, and 80-89%.

The situation in Group 2 (Figure 6.1b below) showed slight differences in the lowest and highest scoring sub-groups when no student in the group scored less than 50% and 8% (2/26) of them scored 90-100%. The percentage of those scoring 80%-90% was 42% (11/22) students, higher than that in Group 1. The percentages of students who scored 50%-59%, 60%-69%, and 70%-79% respectively were quite similar to those in Group 1.
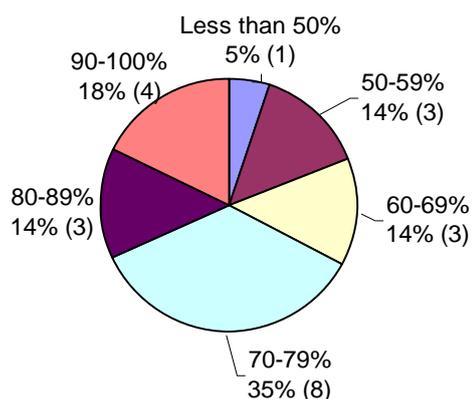
Figure 6.1a: Group 1 learners' post-teaching phase meta-knowledge of English information structure
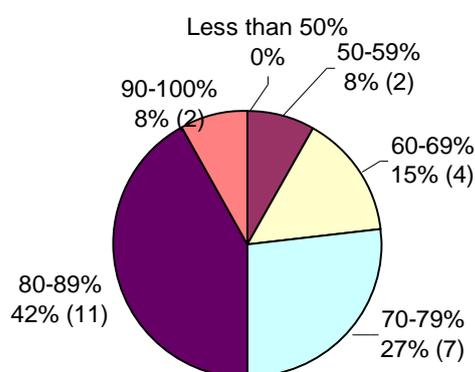
Figure 6.1b: Group 2 learners' post-teaching phase meta-knowledge of English information structure

On the whole, there was not much difference in the post-teaching phase meta-linguistic scores between the two groups. Some slight differences could be noticed, and these differences were not quite in agreement with my assumption that Group 1 learners would score higher in the test because most of them entered the course as students of higher level of proficiency. In fact, as we can see more students in Group 2 (42%) scored 80%-90% than in

Group 1 (14%) and surprisingly enough, only 5% (1/22 students) in Group 1 scored less than 50% whereas that percentage in Group 2 was 0%.

In summary I concluded that the learners in the study had gained some meta-knowledge of English information structure assumed to be essential in helping them to develop their reading and writing skills. The level of knowledge gaining varied in the two groups and within each group. The next step of my analyses was to find out whether this knowledge was correspondent to their development in the while- and post-teaching phase reading and writing tests.

6.4. Learners' reading ability development

My learners' development in reading ability was analyzed based on the pre-, while, and post-teaching phase reading tests and tasks. The reading tasks covered learners' getting the main idea and some specific information of a text. Their ability in these two areas was agglomerated to find out their general comprehension.

6.4.1. Getting main ideas

Figures 6.2a and 6.2b below show that the percentages of learners in the two groups who managed to get the main ideas of reading passages increased slightly and gradually over the phases. The increase in the second while teaching phase reading task and post-teaching phase test was more remarkable in Group 1 than in Group 2. The pre/post teaching phase increase was 41% (9/22 students) in Group 1 and 30% (8/26 students) in Group 2, a total of 35% (17/48 students). The data analysis reveals that there was correspondence between learners' level of proficiency and their ability in this aspect.
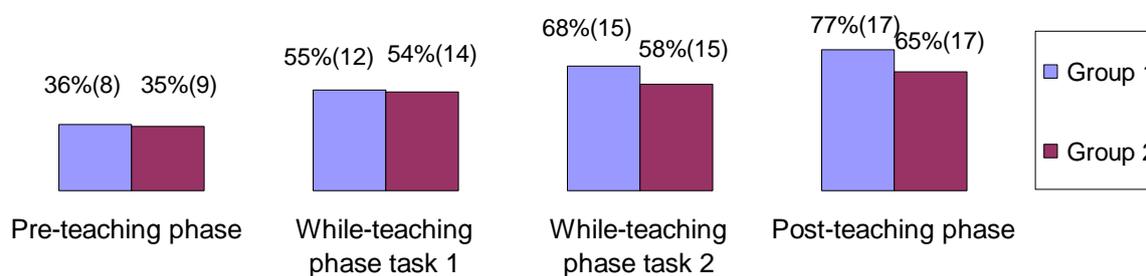
Figure 6.2a: Group 1 and 2 learners' achievement in getting main ideas of reading passages over three phases (data obtained from reading tests/tasks)

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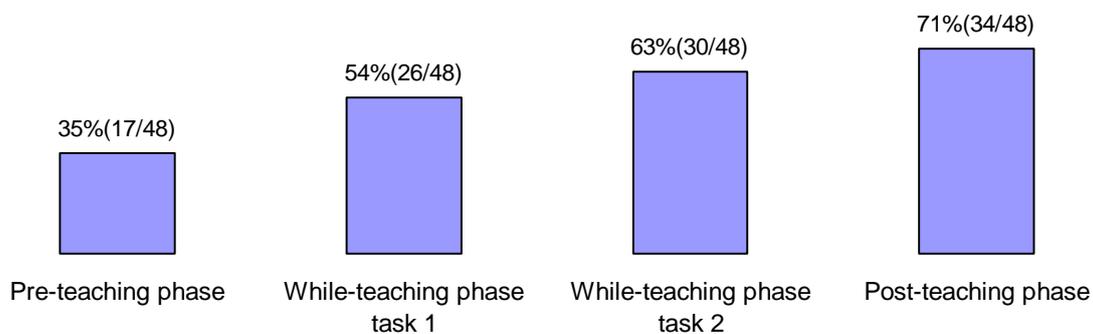
Figure 6.2b: Learners' ability to get main ideas of reading passages over the phases (Group 1 and 2 learners combined, data obtained from reading tests/tasks)

6.4.2. Getting specific information

The findings below show that there was significant improvement in my learners' ability to get the required specific information of a text over the whole period.

Pre and post-teaching phase

As we can see in Figure 6.3a below, no students in Group 1 scored less than 60% in the post-teaching phase whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 41% (9/22 students). The number of students who scored higher than 80% was quite high in the post-teaching phase with the percentage of 91% (20/22 students) while that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 37% (8/22 students), thus an increase of 54% (12/22 students).
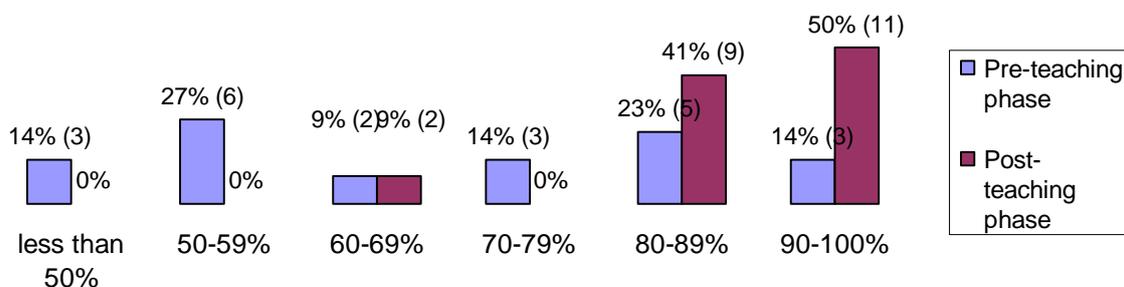
Figure 6.3a: Group 1 learners' success in getting specific information in pre- and post teaching phase reading tests

In Group 2 (see Figure 6.3b below), no students scored less than 60% in the post-teaching phase whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 81% (21/26 students). A very high percentage of 73% (19/26 students) scored higher than 80% in the post-teaching phase, whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 4% (1 student, who scored 80-89%).

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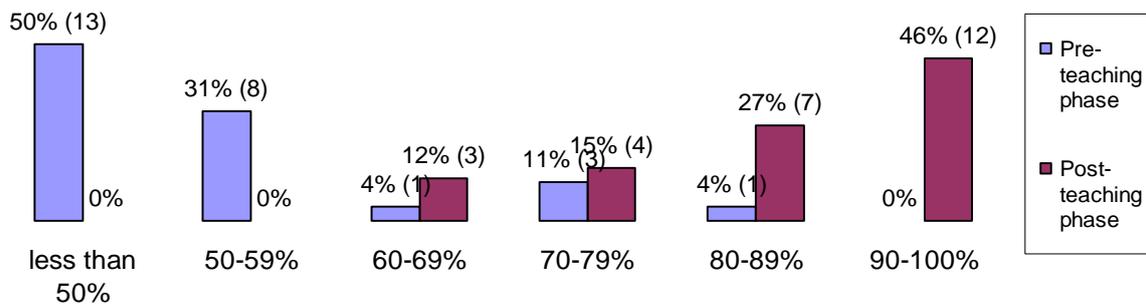
Figure 6.3b: Group 2 learners' success in getting specific information in pre- and post teaching phase reading tests

In comparison to the situation in Group 1, we can see a sharper decrease in the percentage of the students in the second group who scored less than 60%, and a higher increase of the number of the students who scored higher than 90% in the post-teaching phase, 46% while that increasing percentage in the first group was 36%.

The situation in the two groups as a whole is presented in Figure 6.3c below.
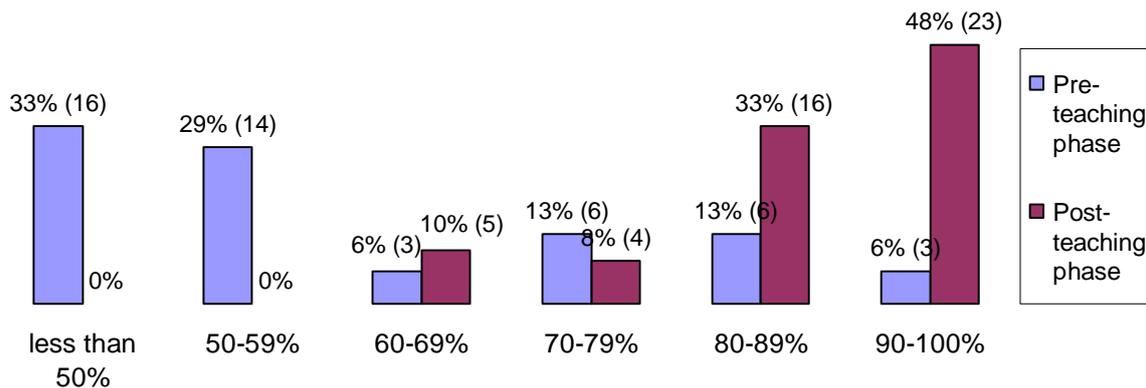
Figure 6.3c: Learners' success in getting specific information in pre- and post teaching phase reading tests

While teaching phase

In Group 1 (Figure 6.4a below), the percentage of learners who got 70% to 100% of the required specific information of the text in the two classroom reading tasks was 86% (19/22 students) whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase test was 50% (11/22 students). On the other end of the scoring grade, we can see that the percentage of learners who got less than 50% of the specific information in the while-teaching phase was 0% while that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 14% (3 students). The percentage of learners who got an above average but not so high score of 50% to 69% was therefore lower in the while

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teaching phase (14%, 3 students in both tasks) as opposed to 36% (8 students) in the pre-teaching phase.

A similar situation (Figure 6.4b) was found in Group 2 learners' ability to get specific information in the while-teaching phase reading tasks with 81% (21/26 students) and 89% (23/26 students) of the students getting the specific information in the first and second reading tasks respectively. The percentage of students who got less than 50% was also 0%, whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was quite high (50%, 13/26 students).

There was more development in this ability among Group 2 students than in Group 1 (the situation was the reverse as concerns learners' development in getting main ideas with more learners of Group 1 showing development in the ability).
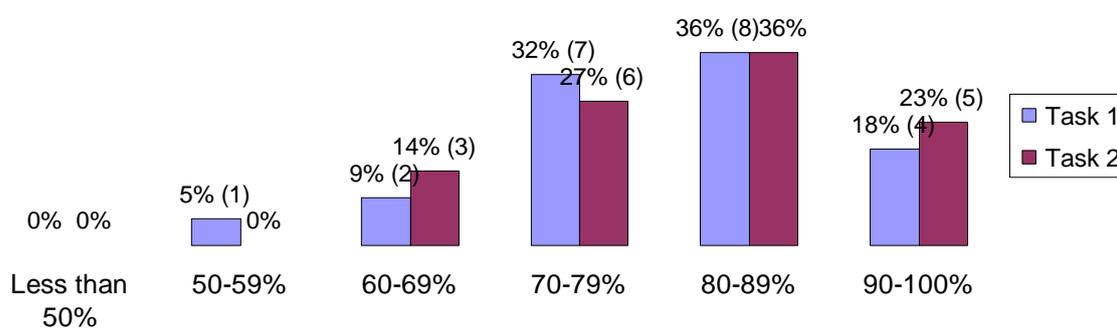
Figure 6.4.a: Group 1 learners' success in getting specific information in while-teaching phase reading tasks
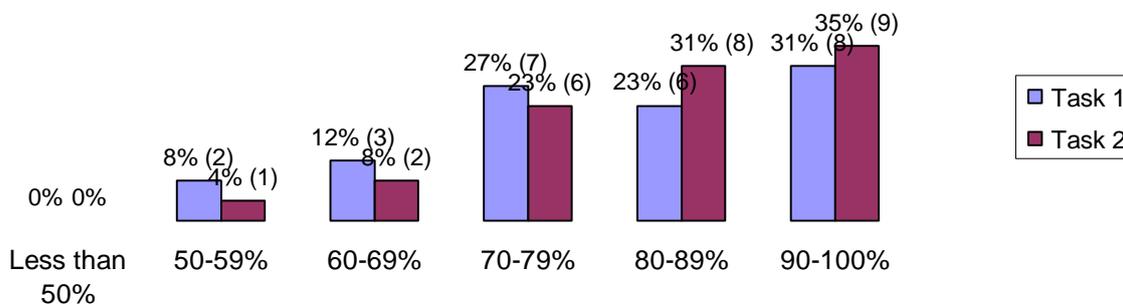
Figure 6.4.b: Group 2 learners' success in getting specific information in while-teaching phase reading tasks

Learners from both groups' combined results were illustrated in Figure 6.4c below:

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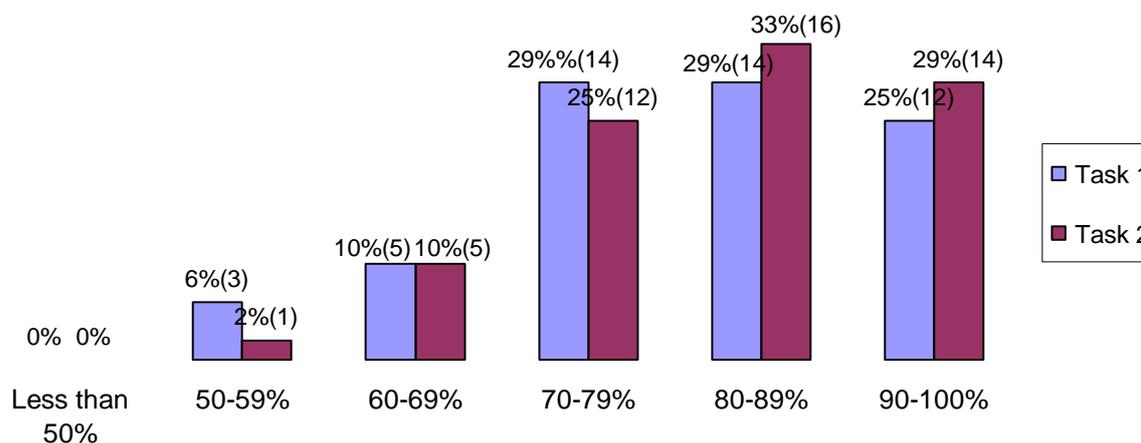
Figure 6.4c: Learners' success in getting specific information in while-teaching phase reading tasks (Group 1 and 2 learners combined)

The findings above suggested the following. First, there was a chronological development in the learners' ability to get specific information of reading texts over the phases. Second, there was no correspondence between learners' level of proficiency and their development in this ability. Third, it was not necessarily the case that learners who managed to get the main ideas could obtain some specific information of a reading text.

6.4.3. General comprehension

The scores achieved in the two reading components presented above were agglomerated to calculate the learners' general reading comprehension in the three phases. For the sake of presentation, I presented the pre and post teaching phase findings as opposed to each other to best illustrate the development before and after the teaching phase. Analyses of the two while-teaching phase reading tasks were to investigate the learners' chronological ongoing development. Findings in each group were presented separately followed by representations of both groups as a whole.

Pre and post-teaching phase

Figure 6.5a below shows a sharp increase in Group 1 learner's score in their general comprehension of the reading tasks, with 50% of them (11/22 students) scoring 90% to 100% and the other 50% scoring 70% to 89% in the post-teaching phase reading test, which means none of them scored less than 60%. In other words, 100% of the students scored higher than 70% whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 44%, thus an increase of 56%.
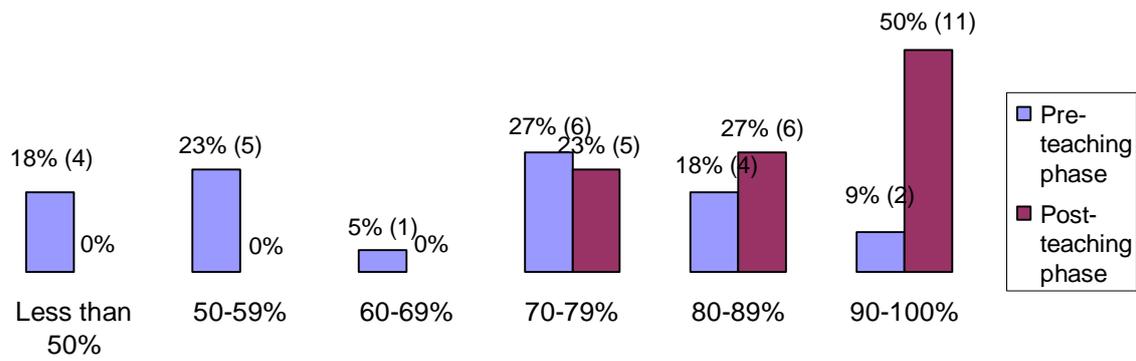
Figure 6.5a: Group 1 learners' general comprehension in pre- and post teaching phase reading tests

A similar picture (Figure 6.4b) was seen in the improvement of reading skill among the learners of the second group in comparison to that of the first group. 88% (23/26 students) scored higher than 70%, slightly lower than that percentage in the first, which was 100%. However, whereas the percentage of the learners who scored less than 70% in the pre-teaching phase in Group 1 was 46%, it was 85% in Group 2. I can say that in general learners of Group 2 made more development in their reading than in Group 1 although the percentage of learners who scored higher (90%-100%) in Group 1 was higher than that in Group 2, 50% as opposed to 38%.
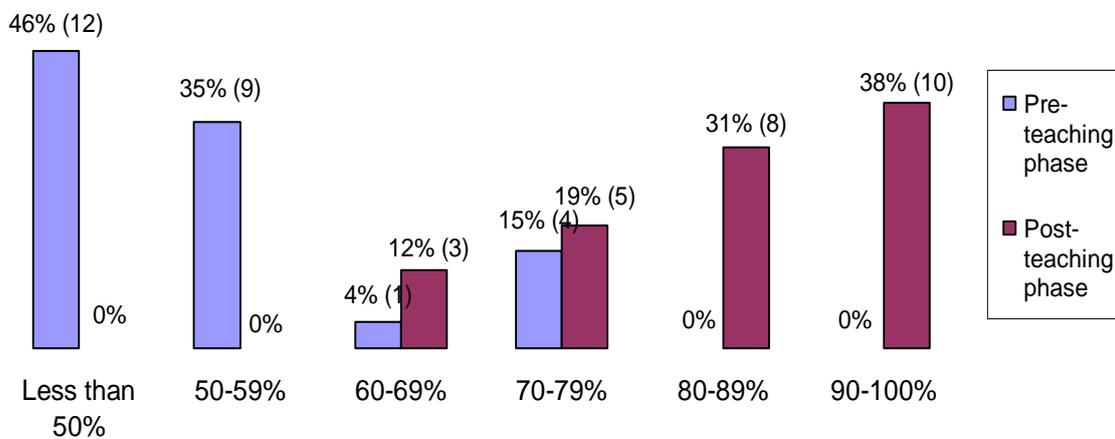
Figure 6.5b: Group 2 learners' general comprehension in pre- and post teaching phase reading tests

In summary (Figure 6.5c), the learners in both groups showed development in their reading skill in the post-teaching phase in terms of their getting the main idea and specific information of the text. More development was seen in their getting specific information than in their getting the main idea.

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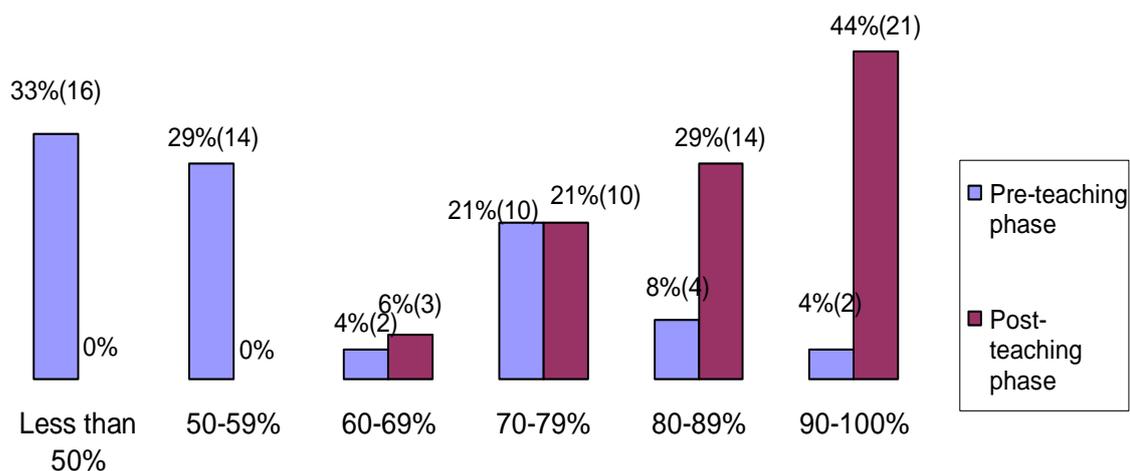
Figure 6.5c: Learners' general comprehension in pre- and post teaching phase reading tests

Difference in learners' pre- and post-teaching phase general reading comprehension scores

A paired samples t-test was run to see whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores among the learners of both groups in the pre- and post-teaching phase reading tests. My hypothesis was that the post-teaching phase mean score would be higher than that of the pre-teaching phase. The t-test gave the following results as shown in table 6.1a, and 6.1b:

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre	5.7427	48	1.85342	.26752
	Post	8.7010	48	1.00659	.14529

Table 6.1a: Paired samples statistics of learners' reading scores in the pre- and post-teaching phase reading tests (Group 1 & 2 combined)

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre - Post	-2.95833	1.72399	.24884	-3.45893	-2.45774	-11.889	47	.000

Table 6.1b: Paired samples test of learners' reading scores in the pre- and post-teaching phase reading tests (Group 1 & 2 combined)

The t-test shows that there was a significant difference between the means of the writing scores of the learners in both groups in the pre-teaching phase and post-teaching phase writing tests (p=< .001). This suggests there is a correspondence between my teaching method and the development in the learners' reading skill.

Group differences

Two independent t-tests were run to see whether there were any significant differences between Group 1 and 2 learners' reading scores in the pre- and post-teaching phase respectively. Group 1 learners were considered to have higher level of proficiency based on a placement test done prior to my teaching by the colleagues in my faculty. My hypothesis was that Group 1 learners would score higher in the tests. Tables 6.2a, 6.2b, 6.3a, and 6.3b below show the results of the tests:

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group12preR	1	22	6.6532	1.97742	.42159
	2	26	4.9723	1.35160	.26507

Table 6.2a: Group statistics of Group 1 and Group 2 learners' reading comprehension scores in the pre-teaching phase reading test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
										95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Group12 preR	Equal variances assumed	7.484	.009	3.481	46	.001	1.68087	.48282	.70901	2.65274
	Equal variances not assumed			3.375	36.141	.002	1.68087	.49799	.67103	2.69072

Table 6.2b: Independent samples test of Group 1 and Group 2 learners' reading comprehension scores in the pre-teaching phase reading test

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group12postR	1	22	8.9405	.90653	.19327
	2	26	8.4985	1.05898	.20768

Table 6.3.a: Group statistics of Group 1 and 2 learners' reading scores in the post-teaching phase

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Group12 postR	Equal variances assumed	.901	.348	1.538	46	.131	.44199	.28745	-.13661	1.02060
	Equal variances not assumed			1.558	45.989	.126	.44199	.28370	-.12907	1.01306

Table 6.3.b: Independent samples test of Group 1 and 2 learners' reading scores in the post-teaching phase

Group 1 learners had higher mean scores both in the pre-teaching and post-teaching phase reading tests. There was a significant difference in the reading scores between the two groups in the pre-teaching phase (p < 0.05). However, the difference in the post-teaching phase is insignificant (p> 0.05). Furthermore, the increase in the mean score is higher among Group 2 learners, 3.5 as against 2.3 among Group 1 learners. This suggests that on average, Group 2 learners made more progress in their reading skill than Group 1 learners. Data from my diaries show that this might be because Group 2 learners were more motivated and were more willing to change some of their reading strategies.

While teaching phase

Development in general comprehension in the while teaching phase was found with learners of both groups (Figures 6.6.a and 6.6b) with none of them scoring less than 50% whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 18% (4/22 students) in Group 1 and 46% (12/26

students) in Group 2. In Group 1 the percentage of learners who scored from 70% to 100% was 73% (16/22 students) and 82% (18/22 students) in the two tasks respectively whereas that percentage in the pre-teaching phase was 54% (12/22 students). In Group 2 the percentage was 73% (19/26 students) and 81% (21/26 students) whereas the pre-teaching phase percentage was 15% (4/26 students) who scored from 70-79% (no students in this group score higher than 80% in the pre-teaching phase test).
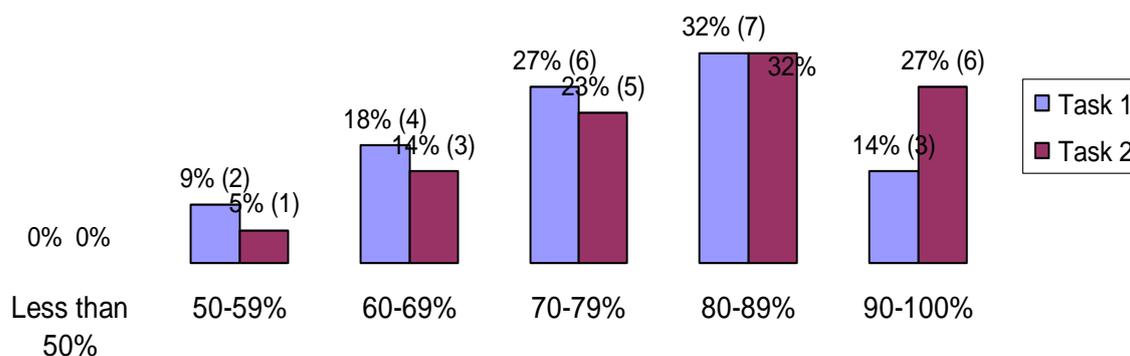
Figure 6.6.a: Group 1 learners' general comprehension in while-teaching phase reading tasks
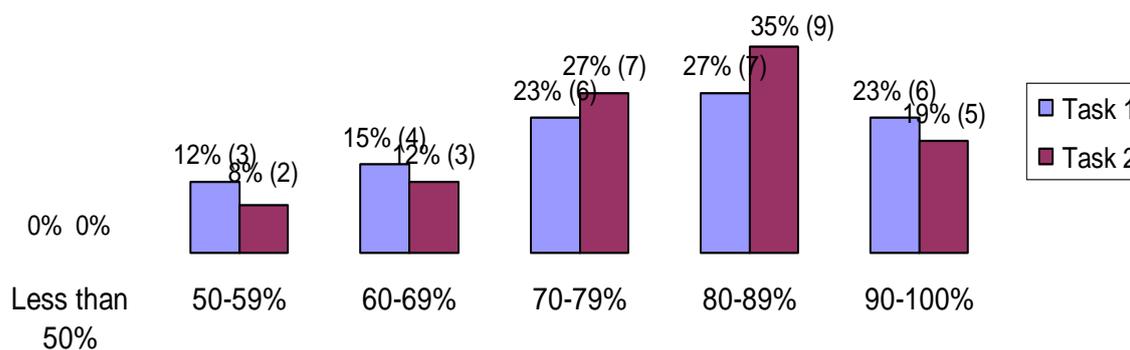
Figure 6.6b: Group 2 learners' general comprehension in while-teaching phase reading tasks

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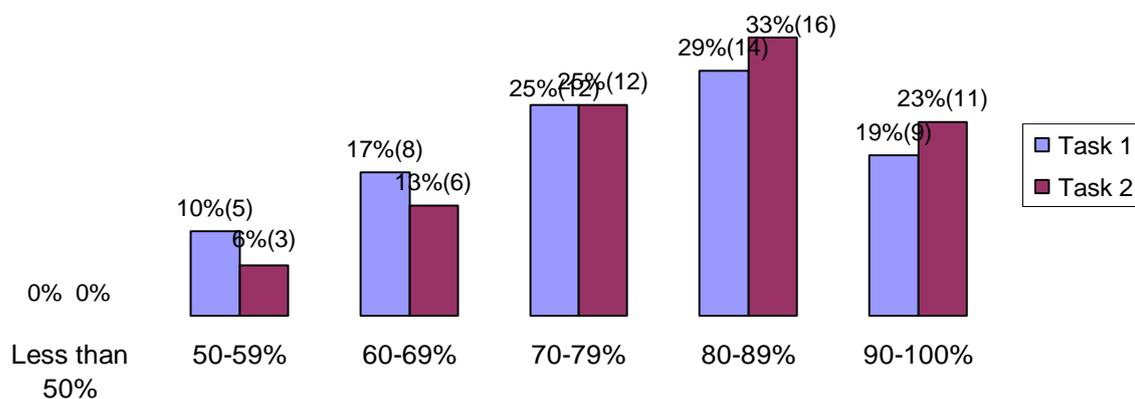
Figure 6.6c: Learners' general comprehension in while-teaching phase reading tasks (Group 1 and 2 combined)

On the whole, most of the learners showed development in their reading skill throughout the teaching phase and in the post-teaching phase and this suggests a correspondence between their being equipped with the meta-knowledge of information structure and the development of their reading skill.

6.5. Learners' writing ability development

Analysis of the learners' development in their writing skill was based on their writing in the pre- and post-teaching phase writing tests, one while teaching phase writing task, and two post-task answer-sheets. The writing features to be analyzed were their treatment of writing requirements considered as good practices of L2 writers in relation to academic features of English information structure. The analytical units encompassed the following information structure-related writing features among L2 learners: producing thesis statements and topic sentences, treatment of the introduction in introductory paragraphs, developing ideas, distributing given/new information, contextualizing information, reinstating thesis statements in conclusion paragraphs, using transitional signals, making outlines for essay writing, and paying attention to the communicative purposes and social functions of essays.

As we can see in Figures 6.7c, 6.8 and 6.9 below, improvement could be seen in all the writing features investigated. On the whole, this improvement was proportional with time except for the change in learners' being indirect in which the post-teaching phase percentage was higher than that in the while teaching phase. I assumed that this was because of my frequent reminding of the feature in the while teaching phase. The going down of the percentage in the post-teaching phase test suggested some learners got back to their long-termed strategy in the test when they did not get the reminding. The fact that this did not

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happen with other features might suggest being indirect in introducing the main topic was a very deep-rooted practice among the learners.

In Group 1 (Figures 6.7a, 6.8 and 6.9 below), the most remarkable improvement which was made was seen in the learners' reinstating thesis statements in conclusion paragraphs, paying attention to the communicative purposes and social functions of essays, and making essay outlines with 50%, 46%, and 41% more of them respectively attempting to exercise the practices in the post-teaching phase test or in the while teaching phase task. Improvement was also highly recognizable in other 4 features with the increase in percentages ranging from 32% to 37% (contextualizing information: 37%, clearly stating thesis statements; distributing given/new information appropriately, not diverting when developing ideas: 32%).
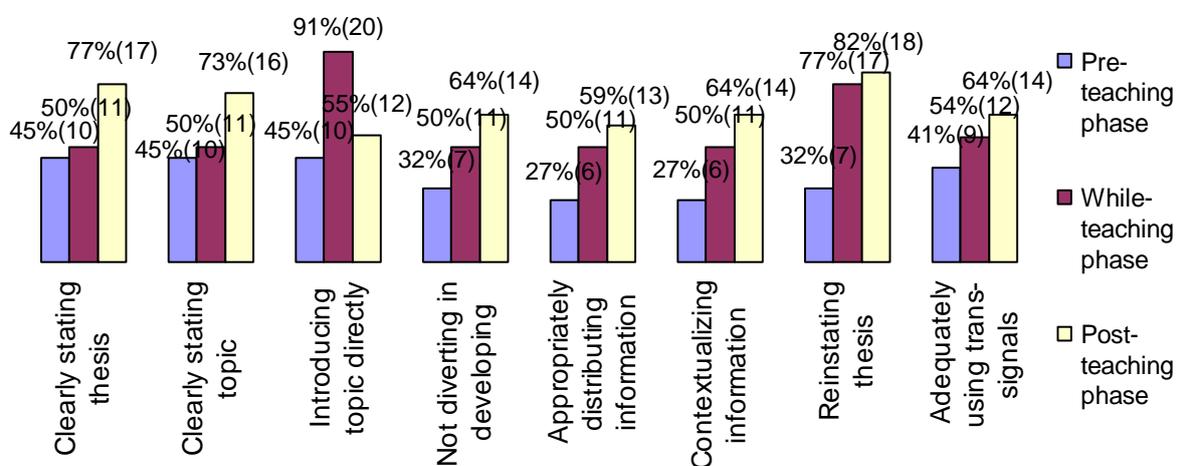
Figure 6.7a: Group 1 learners' writing features in three phases (data obtained from writing tests and task)

In Group 2, the percentages of improvement made (Figure 6.7b, 6.8, and 6.9), in general, were lower than that in Group 1. Most remarkably lower was the tendency towards stating thesis clearly with the increase percentage being 16%, whereas the increase in Group 1 was 32%. However, this was because the pre-teaching phase percentage in this group was much higher than in the other, 69% as opposed to 45%. The features in which we could see higher percentages of increase in this group than the other were the tendency to introducing the topic directly (35% as opposed to 10%), and making essay outlines (50% as opposed to 41%).

85%(22)
73%(19)
69%(18)
88%23) 92%(24)
69%(18)
62%(16)
81%(21)
69%(18)
92%(24)
88%(23)
62%(16) 62%(16)
73%(19)
65%(17)
58%(15)
58%(15)
27%(7)
46%(12) 46%(12)
50%(13)
35%(9)
35%(9)
50%(13)

Pre-teaching phase

While-teaching phase

Post-teaching phase

Clearly stating thesis | Clearly stating topic | Introducing topic directly | Not diverting in developing | Appropriately distributing information | Contextualizing information | Reinstating thesis | Adequately using transignals

Figure 6.7b: Group 2 learners' writing features in the three phases (data obtained from writing tests and task)

As concerns the tendency to introducing the thesis directly, I assume that this was because the students of Group 1 were of higher level of proficiency and due to their master of grammar and vocabulary, they would tend to be more indirect to show their idiosyncrasies by diversifying both structure and content of their essays. This might suggest that learners of higher level of proficiency would find it more difficult to get rid of their indirectness. In terms of making outlines, I assumed that learners of higher level of proficiency would tend to be more confident of their writing and resort to no outline making.

The following conclusions were made about our learners' writing all over the three phases. First, more learners of Group 1 showed development in most writing features than Group 2. The two exceptions were their stating thesis statements directly and making essay outlines. Second, there was development of different extents in learners' writing features.
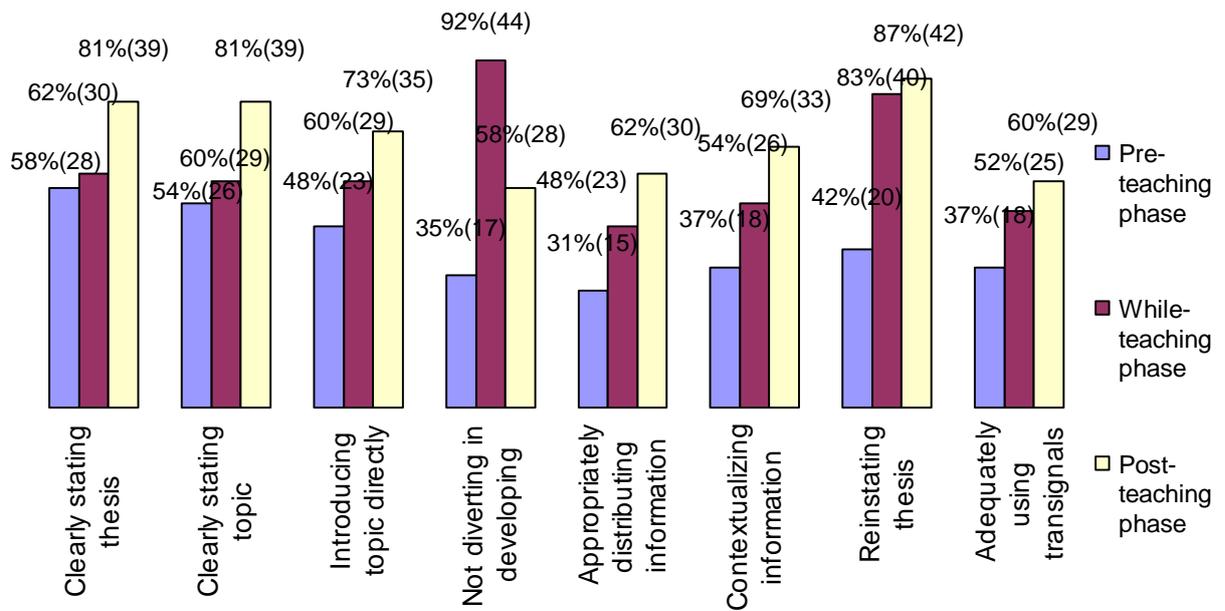
Figure 6.7c: Learners' writing features over the three phases (writing tests and task, Group 1 and 2 combined)
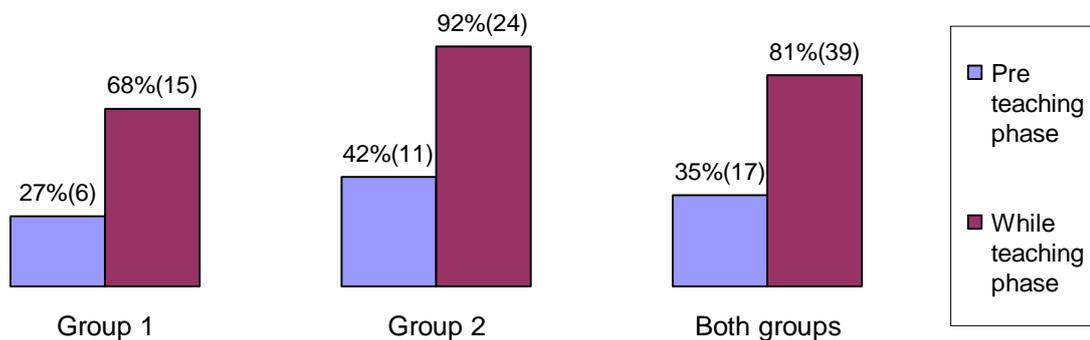
Figure 6.8: Learners' tendency to making essay outlines (data obtained from pre-teaching phase questionnaire and while teaching phase writing task)
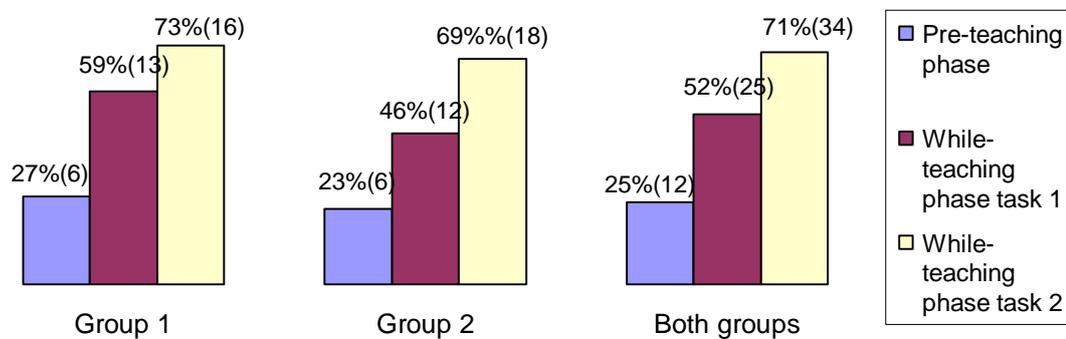
Figure 6.9: Learners' tendency to paying attention to purposes and functions of essays (data obtained from pre-teaching phase questionnaire and while teaching phase post-task answer-sheets)

In summary, data analyses in sections 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5 suggested that there was correspondence between our learners' enhancement in their meta-knowledge of English information structure and the development in their reading and writing skill over the phases.

Differences in learners' pre- and post-teaching phase writing scores

Tables 6.2a and 6.2b below show the results of a t-test comparing the learners mean scores in their pre- and post-teaching phase writing tests. There was significant difference between the means in the pre- and post-teaching phase (p=<.005). This suggests there was a correspondence between my teaching method and the learners' development in their writing skill.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre	5.7083	48	2.39644	.34590
	Post	7.4167	48	2.48256	.35833

Table 6.4a: Paired samples statistics of the learners' writing scores in the pre- and post-teaching phase (Group 1 and 2 combined)

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre - Post	-1.70833	2.79024	.40274	-2.51854	-.89813	-4.242	47	.000

Table 6.4b: Paired samples test of the learners' writing scores in the pre- and post-teaching phase (Group 1 and 2 combined)

Group differences

Two independent t-tests were run to see whether there was any difference between the two groups in their writing scores in the pre and post-teaching phase respectively. My hypothesis was that Group 1 learners would score higher both in the pre- and post-teaching phase tests. The two t-tests gave the following results as shown in tables 6.5a, 6.5b, 6.6a, and 6.6b below:

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group12preW	1	22	5.1818	2.50022	.53305
	2	26	6.1538	2.25730	.44269

Table 6.5a: Group statistics of Group 1 & 2 learners' writing scores in the pre-teaching phase

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Group12 preW	Equal variances assumed	.019	.890	-1.415	46	.164	-.97203	.68692		-2.35473	.41067
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.403	42.840	.168	-.97203	.69290		-2.36955	.42550

Table 6.5b: Independent sample test of Group 1 & 2 learners' writing scores in the pre-teaching phase

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Group12postW	1	22	6.7273	2.49154	.53120
	2	26	8.0000	2.36643	.46410

Table 6.6a: Group statistics of Group 1 and 2 learners' writing scores in the post-teaching phase

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Group12 postW	Equal variances assumed	.478	.493	-1.812	46	.076	-1.27273	.70229	-2.68637	.14091
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.804	43.839	.078	-1.27273	.70538	-2.69447	.14901

Table 6.6b: Independent samples test of Group 1 and 2 learners' writing scores in the post-teaching phase

Group 2 learners had higher mean scores in both the pre- and post-teaching phase writing tests. Nevertheless, the differences were insignificant in both phases (p > 0.05). Group 1 learners' essays show better mastery of grammatical knowledge, however, in terms of writing features related to information structure such as clearly stating thesis statements and topic sentences and not diverting from the main ideas, Group 2 learners show better strategies. I tentatively feel that learners of higher level of proficiency tend to show their idiosyncrasies in

writing and not conform to the conventions of academic writing in terms of information structure. The increase in the mean score of Group 2 learners (1.8) is also slightly higher than that of Group 1 learners (1.5). Data from my diaries suggest that this might be due to the fact that Group 2 learners were more motivated and were more willing to change their writing strategies.

6.6. Learners' reactions and attitudes to the teaching method

Analyses of the learners' reactions and attitudes to the teaching method were based on my entries documented in the field trip diaries (appendix F, pp. 243-250). The analyses encompassed their reactions to the meta-linguistic lessons, the meta-linguistic exercises, and the skill-developing reading and writing activities. Findings from the analyses aimed to make conclusions about the relevance of my teaching method in the Vietnamese university system as well as to give me insightful implications for future executions of the method.

6.6.1. Meta-linguistic lessons

Learners of both groups showed preference to the following aspects of the meta-linguistic lessons: definition and basic concepts of English information structure, ordering of information distribution in English canonical and non-canonical constructions, text organization (cohesion and coherence) and textual patterns, comparison of English and Vietnamese information structure (topic-prominent and subject-prominent language/ directness and indirectness), incorporating meta-knowledge of English information structure into reading and writing skill development (comparison of L1 and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies), and suggestions for L2 learners' development of reading and writing skills.

As for the exploration of the term 'information structure', most of the learners were very eager to discuss the term and what the term involved. In general, more of Group 2 learners and some weaker Group 1 students showed difficulty in understanding the term and required more explanations from the teacher. After being given explanations, those students seemed to understand the term better and showed more interest in the term by asking me questions about information distribution and the shared knowledge between the writer and the reader. Most of the learners found the idea of how to distribute information relevantly and resorting

to this shared knowledge interesting. Some of them admitted that when writing they did not often think about the reader and what the potential readers might know or not know about the topic they were delivering. After the discussions, some said they would attempt to change some of their writing strategies by paying more attention to how the information should be best distributed and by filtering the information they were going to present so that they could make themselves better understood by their potential readers. One of them (the student who got 7.5 in IELTS) seemed very competent in explaining the term in his own expressions. He did show his first understanding of information structure by saying what was old and what was new information in the definition. In the discussion, he sounded very clear when explaining the term to other students in the group.

With respect to the exploration of English canonical constructions, learners of both groups seemed quite interested in the issue. Most of them said that some patterns like SVC were new to them, and that they found it difficult to distinguish between C (complement) and O (object). Some of the weaker students were still confused of this difference after the explanations were given.

The learners' reactions to the non-canonical constructions lesson were two-folded. On the one hand, most of them found the constructions quite interesting to know. Some of them said this was the first time they had been introduced to the pragmatic reasons for using a specific construction like passivization, cleft structure, inversion, and there-sentences in terms of the given-new constraints of information. Previously they had been introduced only to the structural aspects of the constructions. Particularly, they found fronting very interesting because it was very much like the topic-prominent feature of the Vietnamese language. On the other hand, most of them complained that the lesson was overwhelming and that they had to struggle in order to understand the explanations of the given-new distribution in some constructions, especially in case of the difference between existential-there and presentational there-sentences. Some learners found that such non-canonical constructions as left-dislocation and right-dislocation were quite new to them and they seemed not very interested in them because they had never used the constructions before and said that they would not think they would use them in their writing.

The lesson on textual organization (cohesion and coherence) was one of the most successful when most of the learners showed obvious eagerness in exploring the terms, especially with cohesive devices. Most of them seemed to understand the lesson. Some seemed very happy when they understood more about cohesive devices, which they thought would help them to a

great extent in their reading and writing. In general, Group 2 students seemed more interested in the lesson.

The lesson on textual patterns was another success. Most learners were very pleased when they could understand what textual patterns were and how they could help them understand a text better. Most of them found the section about clause relations useful and applicable to their skill development.

The comparison between English and Vietnamese information structure was another success when most learners were eager to know the difference in information structure between the two languages. Most of them agreed on their indirectness in stating the thesis or topic or when supporting the main idea.

The lesson on the comparison between L1 and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies received attention from most of the learners. Even those students who were considered to have higher level of proficiency in the class showed agreement with statements of the differences in L1 and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies and admitted that they often or sometimes exercised the practices ascribed to L2 writers or readers. Many of them said they would try to get rid of poor strategies though knowing that it might take some time before they could. Some of them said it would be difficult for them to change some of their strategies.

The lesson on suggestions for L2 learners' development of reading and writing skills went on in a very cooperative atmosphere. The students were asked to work in pairs or groups of three and discuss all the suggestions. In the discussions, they were encouraged to show their attitudes as whether or not they thought the suggestions relevant to their needs and above all whether or not the suggestions would help them in their skill development. Most of the students got really involved in the discussions. Most of them found the suggestions useful and beneficial and said they would adopt them in their future reading and writing activities. However some of them seemed not so enthusiastic with one or two of the suggestions which they thought hard to follow and irrelevant to L2 learners like them, for example the one suggesting them familiarizing unfamiliar structured discourse.

The lessons on Topic-Comment Articulation (TCA) and Communicative Dynamism (CD) were the two lessons most of the learners found boring or difficult to understand. The lesson on TCA was a failure because most of my learners found it extremely difficult to understand the terms theme and rheme. They thought that the definitions of the terms were rather vague.

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Many of them found it hard to grasp the meaning of the temrs even in Vietnamese. More importantly they could not associate their understanding of the terms with thier reading and writing tasks. The lesson on CD fell short of my expectation when many of the learners found the CD rank vague and hard to grasp.

6.3.2. Meta-linguistic exercises

The learners were most interested in the meta-linguistic exercises in which they were required to recognize the following: clause patterns, focus and given/new distribution of non-canonical constructions, semantic implications of cohesive devices, and textual patterns.

The clause patterns exercises aimed at helping my learners to understand more clearly about and be able to recognize all the clause patterns they might encounter in their reading or might need to use them in their writing. The students were encouraged to do one of the exercises in the class when they could get some clarification from the teacher or their classmates. The other one was intent as homework when they would take some time revising the meta-knowledge of clause patterns and used the knowledge to solve the problem. All of the students of both groups were eager to do the exercise. Some of them still could not distinguish SVO from SVC.

In the non-canonical constructions exercises, most learners managed to recognize most of the non-canonical constructions in given passages and were able to identify the foci or explain the reasons for the given-new distribution in some constructions. They seemed to experience more difficulty with there-sentences than with cleft structure, passivization, and inversion.

Recognizing the semantic implications of cohesive devices was one of the exercises that my learners found most interesting and beneficial. Students of both group seemed very much engaged in doing the exercises in pairs or groups and they were really happy when they could find out and explain the semantic relations implied by the devices.

In the textual patterns exercises, the students were asked to find out the textual patterns of some given passages. Students in both groups showed clear enthusiasm in solving the problems together and the discussion went on in a very cooperative manner. Some learners were really pleased when succeeding in recognizing the patterns of some passages and said that this recognition really helped them understand the passages better.

The exercise involving theme/rheme distinguishing seemed to be the most boring exercise to most students. They could easily distinguish the theme and rheme in canonical constructions

but found it difficult with non-canonical constructions. Many of them could not explain the pragmatic constraints on distribution the information in most constructions.

6.6.3. Skill developing activities

Reading tasks

The learners were obviously engaged in the following reading activities: clause relations and textual patterns recognizing, and adopting suggestions in their reading. In the clause relations recognizing activities, the learners were expected to manipulate their meta-knowledge of clause relations to find out the semantic relations existing in a given reading passage and to see how this realization might help them with the reading comprehension. Most learners enjoyed this part of the lesson and were deeply engaged in the activities, showing enthusiasm in pair-work or group-work discussions on solving the problem. In the textual patterns recognizing activities, their task was to recognize the textual pattern of a text and see if this could help them understand the text more easily. Most of the learners were extremely happy with their achievement in the task and said that they were eager to use the knowledge gained in the meta-linguistic phase into these activities. In general I believe that this was one of the most successful lessons of my teaching. In the suggestion adopting activities, the students were expected to adopt the suggestions they had been offered in their reading.

Writing tasks

The learners were obviously engaged in the following writing activities: diversifying essays by using more non-canonical constructions, using clause relation signals, building up and following an appropriate textual pattern, and adopting writing suggestions.

In the construction diversifying activity, the learners were asked to write an essay in which they were encouraged to use as many non-canonical constructions as possible in an appropriate way. Some learners managed to diversify the constructions reasonably. However, some others seemed to have abused fronting (in their writing, we could not see the linkage between the fronted item and previous discourse).

In the clause relation signals activity, priority was given to learners' usage of clause relation signals in their writing. Most learners enjoyed this part of the lesson as they found out how much coherent their essays were when more attention was paid to signaling clause relations. In the textual pattern meta-knowledge-based activity, the students were required to decide on

an appropriate pattern for the essay before the writing. Most of the learners were extremely happy when they realized how much the pre-designed pattern guided them throughout the writing, helping them not to divert from the main topic and avoid their indirectness.

In the suggestion adopting activity, the learners were warned not to 'beat about the bush' the topic, the thesis and the development of the essay. Most of the students showed obvious attempt not to be indirect, especially in the introductory paragraph. Some students took it too far and went so directly into the thesis statement. The most obviously adopted suggestion was reinstating thesis statements in the conclusion.

As this was the last lesson in my teaching phase and learners had been informed of a progress test that they were going to take the following week, all of them showed a real eagerness in trying to apply both the reading and writing suggestions.

6.6.4. Summary of learners' reactions

In general, most of the learners showed positive reactions to most of the lessons both in meta-linguistic and skill developing phase. There were differences in the level of positive reactions to the teaching method between learners of the two groups and among the content of each lesson or activity. In general, more Group 2 learners seemed interested in the lessons. More learners of Group 2 showed willingness to change their writing strategies as well. This might suggests a link between learners' levels of proficiency and their motivation and willingness to change. In my interpretation, learners of higher level of proficiency tend to keep their own strategies and find it more difficult to adopt newly developed strategies. The tendency to attempting to show individual idiosyncrasies in writing is more noticeable in this group. However, students of Group 2 showed more difficulty in comprehending the meta-linguistic sections of some lessons although there were indications of their endeavor to understand. The lessons on Topic-Comment Articulation and Communicative Dynamism were the two lessons to which most learners did not show positive reactions. The lesson on non-canonical constructions seemed too long to most learners.

6.7. Learners' attitudes towards skill-developing suggestions

The suggestions (presented in appendix H1, unit 4, lesson 2, p.277) were given in three contexts: in several meta-linguistic phases of the lessons when the learners were given meta-

knowledge of English information structure, while they were engaged in their skill developing activities, and in one whole lesson devoted to giving suggestions. Analyses of learners' attitudes towards the suggestions were based on their responses to the post-teaching phase questionnaire for the learners.

6.7.1. Learners' attitudes towards reading skill developing suggestions

In the questionnaire, the learners were asked to give their attitudes towards the reading skill developing suggestions by indicating their tendency as to whether they would adopt them or not in the future. Most of the students in both groups showed their wish to adopt most of the suggestions with their tendency towards future adoption fluctuating between 75% and 100% (Figures 6.10a and 6.10b below). The two suggestions receiving less approval from the students in both groups involved their asking questions to find out textual frames of reading passages and their familiarizing with textual discourse structures. The former was approved by 77% (17/22) of Group 1 students and 73% (19/26 students) of Group 2 students, a total of 75% (36/48 students). The latter received approval from 82% (18/22 students) and 69% (18/26 students) of Group 1 and 2 respectively, a total of 75% (36/48 students). I found this rather surprising because most of them seemed very interested in the textual pattern and textual organization lessons. I assumed that reasons might be they found it difficult to ask themselves questions or to familiarize themselves with unfamiliar discourse structures. However, the students who did not approve of the suggestions accounted for just one quarter of the students. The suggestion most approved of involves their setting a goal before reading, which received approval from 100% of the students in both groups.

Percentages of students who showed their willingness to adopt other suggestions were quite high ranging between 82% (18/22 students) and 95% (21/22 students) in Group 1 and between 81% (21/26 students) and 92% (24/26 students) in Group 2. There was one slight difference between the opinions of two groups involving their attitudes towards finding out how text topics are developed. In Group 1 the suggestion was appraised by 100% of the students, whereas in Group 1 the appraisal percentage was 81% (21/26 students).
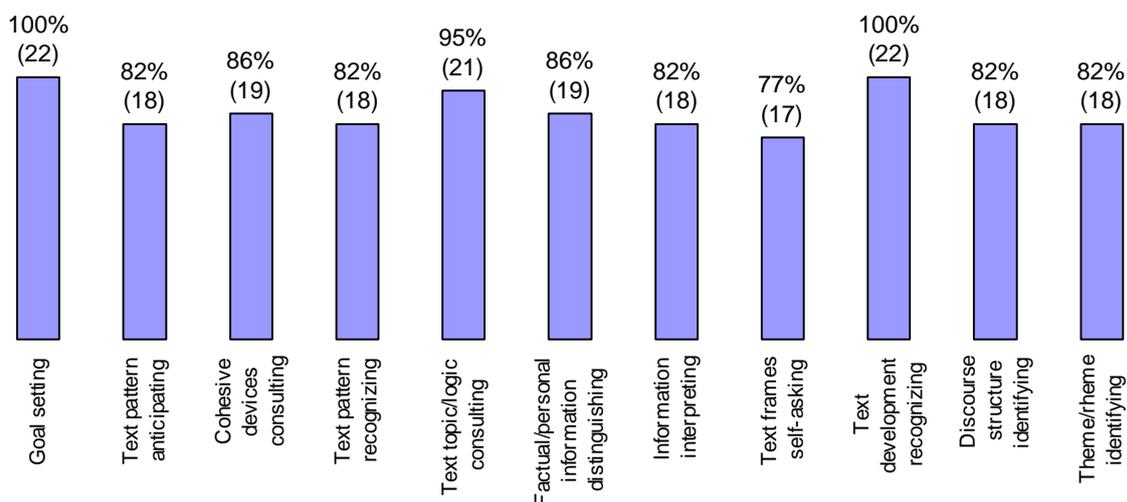
Figure 6.10a: Group 1 Learners' positive attitudes towards reading suggestions (data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for the learners)
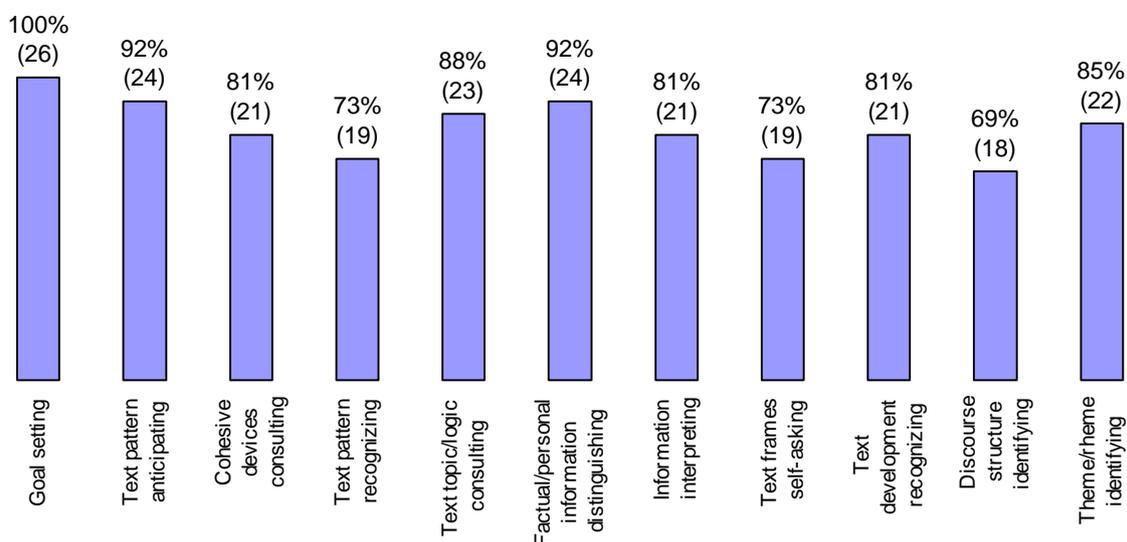
Figure 6.10b: Group 2 Learners' positive attitudes towards reading suggestions (data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for the learners)

6.7.2. Learners' attitudes towards writing skill developing suggestions

Data analyses based on the questionnaire showed that the percentage of learners in both groups who wished to adopt our suggestion was very high with slight differences in percentages towards each specific suggestion and between learners of two groups.

In Group 1 (Figure 6.11a below), from 91% (20/22 students) to 95% (21/22 students) showed their approval to 8 out of the 12 writing suggestions. The percentage of students who wished to adopt the other 4 suggestions was also high, from 73% (16/22 students) to 86% (19/22

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students). Most approved of by the students (95%) were suggestions 1, 3, and 9. Least approved of were suggestions 5 and 11 (73%; 16/22 students and 77%; 17/22 students).

In Group 2 (Figure 6.11b), the situation was quite similar to that in Group 1 but with slight differences. The percentage of learners who showed their future adoption was very high with 6 out of 12 of the suggestions receiving approval from 92% (24/26 students) to 96% (25/26 students). Most approved of were suggestions 1, 4, and 7 with 96% of learners' approval each. Least approved of were suggestions 6 and 10 with 69% (18/26 students)' approval each.

In general more students in Group 1 showed their approval to more suggestions. More than 90% of those in this group approved of 8 out of 12 suggestions, whereas the number of suggestions receiving approval from more than 90% of Group 2 students was 6 out of 12. :
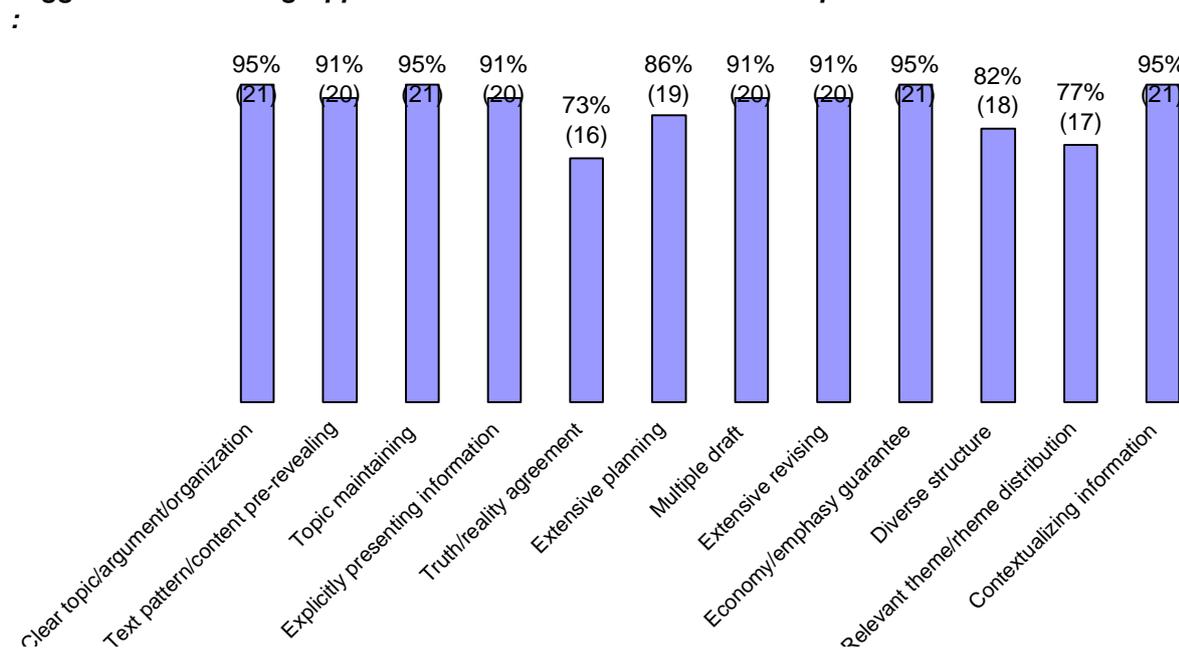
Figure 6.11a: Group 1 learners' positive attitudes towards writing suggestions (data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for learners)
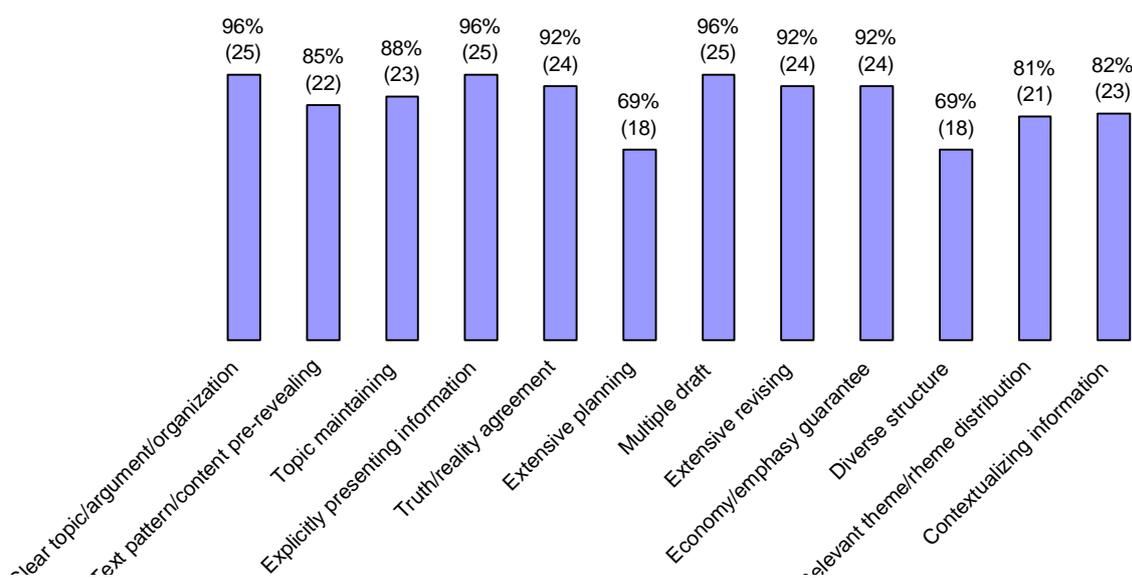
Figure 6.11b: Group 2 learners' positive attitudes towards writing suggestions (data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for learners)

Bigger differences among the attitudes between the two groups were in suggestions 5, 6, 10, and 12 with the percentage of difference being between 13% and 19%. To my surprise, more students in Group 2 wished to adopt suggestion 5. However, attitudes towards suggestions 6, 10, and 12 fell within our anticipation when more students in Group 1 wished to adopt them.

Similarities in the attitudes were found with 6 of the suggestions (1, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11) with the percentage of difference fluctuating between 1% and 5%. More than 90% of the students from both groups show approval of suggestions 1, 4, 7, 8, and 9.

6.7.3. Summary of learners' attitudes towards skill-developing suggestions

Most of the learners reported that they would adopt the suggestions in the future. The percentage of approval varied from suggestion to suggestion. Not all the approval percentages fell within our anticipation or assumption in terms of the differences between the two groups of learners and in terms of the benefits of the suggestions.

There was correspondence between the findings in the questionnaire and what my learners showed in their reading and writing tests and tasks. In general, the percentage of students who reported they would adopt the suggestions was higher than the percentage showing their practices in the tests and tasks. For example, whereas 95% (21/22) Group 1 students and 96% (25/26) Group 2 students reported in the questionnaire that they would approve of the suggestion that they should make their topics, their arguments, their organization, and transitions clear to the reader, the percentage of students who showed this feature in their writing was much lower. In the post-teaching phase writing test, only 59% (17/22) of Group 1 students and 85% (22/26) of Group 2 students made their thesis statements adequately clear.

6.8. Colleagues' opinions

My colleagues' opinions on the teaching approach were analyzed based on the post-teaching phase questionnaire for colleagues (appendix A3, p.200). The selection of the participants was discussed in chapter 4. The questionnaire encompassed two major issues. The first issue dealt with my colleagues' opinions on the current teaching method applied in their institutions in terms of their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with its effectiveness in bringing about learners' communicative language ability, and their beliefs of their learners'

satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the reading and writing activities applied in the method. The second issue involved their opinions on my teaching approach in terms of the following: the time allocation for the meta-linguistic phase and skill-developing phase, the amount of meta-linguistic instruction input, the necessity of some meta-linguistic aspects, their overall opinion of the feasibility and relevance of the approach in the Vietnamese university system, the necessity of equipping teachers with meta-knowledge of information structure to carry out the method, and their willingness to apply the method in the future.

6.8.1. Current teaching method in the Vietnamese university system

All of the 15 colleagues (100%) reported that they were not satisfied with the effectiveness of the teaching method currently applied in their institutions in bringing about learners' communicative language ability. The reasons were summarized as follows:

- Teachers used largely test-oriented instruction and consequently learners failed to use language in real life communication.

- There was not enough meta-linguistic instruction on language rules and learning strategies. Learners had to work out the rules and strategies for themselves. This process cost them a lot of time, and the progress in their communicative language ability was insubstantial.

- Learners were given mostly knowledge of grammar and vocabulary which could develop only their grammatical competence.

- There was a mismatch between teachers' teaching methods and learners' learning strategies. Many of the learners came from the countryside and were therefore very passive in classroom communicative activities, and teachers have not been able to deal with this problem effectively.

- There was no specific method.

- There were not enough facilities/teaching aids to support their teaching method.

- Learners were unable to communicative effectively and comfortably with English speaking people.

100% of them reported that they believed their learners were not satisfied with the classroom reading and writing activities used in their teaching methods. The belief was established on some informal conversations with their students, or on their judgments of their own teaching

methods. Specifically, in writing lessons, their students were not provided with adequate meta-discourse language (academic features of academic essays, for example), which could support their writing. Besides, due to time constraint in classroom, most writing tasks were made home assignments. In reading sessions, teachers depended too much on activities pre-designed for them in teachers' guidebooks. There was no adequate focus on meta-linguistic aspects to support learners' reading. The activities were not interesting and motivating enough. Reading activities were too simple in which learners just read and answer questions.

6.8.2. Meta-linguistic teaching approach

The time allocation for the meta-linguistic phase and skill-developing phase

14/15 (93%) of them thought that the time allocated for the meta-linguistic and skill-developing phase in each session is relevant (90 minutes for the meta-linguistic phase and 90 minutes for the skill-developing phase). The reasons given are as follows.

- It is realistic and fits within the time schedules in their institutions in which each English lesson lasts 180 minutes.

- Neither of the two phases should be given more time than the other.

- Students need that amount of time in the meta-linguistic phase to discuss among themselves, to absorb the meta-knowledge, and to be meta-linguistically prepared for the skill-developing phase.

- The time in the skill-developing phase is adequate for the skill developing activities.

The reason given by the colleague who questioned this time allocation in fact involved the amount of meta-linguistic input in the sample lesson. In her opinion, 90 minutes is not enough for learners to grasp all the meta-knowledge.

The amount of meta-linguistic instruction input

14/15 (93%) thought that the amount of meta-linguistic knowledge input in the sample lesson plan is relevant. The reasons given were among the following. The amount of knowledge is just right, not too much and provides students with necessary understanding of meta-linguistic and meta-discourse for academic reading and writing. It is well oriented to the objectives of the lesson.

One of them suggested breaking down the lesson into smaller parts, each part dealing with only one discourse pattern (instead of introducing five patterns in one lesson). In her opinion, a three-hour lesson with such amount of meta-knowledge and skills to be practiced might be a little bit too much for students of intermediate level. However, in response to questions 10 and 11, she still reported that overall, the approach was feasible and relevant in the Vietnamese university system.

The necessity of some meta-linguistic aspects

Figure 6.12 below shows our colleagues' opinions on the necessity of introducing to L2 learners the following meta-linguistic aspects:

- Communicative Dynamism (CD)
- Theme/rheme distinction
- Clause relation cohesive devices
- Textual organization (cohesion and coherence of texts)
- Topic-prominent and subject-prominent languages distinction
- Comparison of L1 and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies
- L2 learners' problems in reading and writing
- Skill developing suggestions
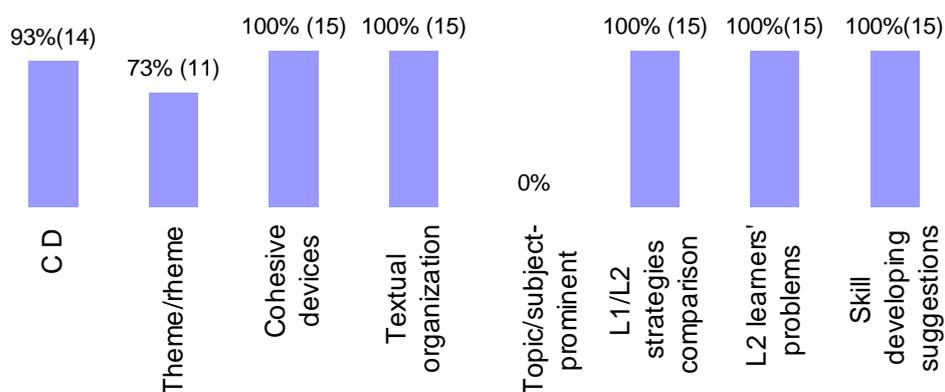
Figure 6.12: Necessity of introducing meta-linguistic aspects to L2 learners (data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for colleagues)

As we can see in the figure, all of the colleagues thought it was necessary to give L2 learners' meta-knowledge of the following aspects: clause relation cohesive devices, textual organization (cohesion and coherence of texts), comparison of L1 and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies, L2 learners' problems in reading and writing, and skill developing suggestions. None of them thought it was necessary to teach L2 learners the differences

between topic- and subject-prominent languages. Four of them (27%) considered the introduction of theme/rheme to L2 learners as unnecessary. CD was thought as necessary by 93% (14/15) of the colleagues.

As regards the necessity of giving L2 learners meta-knowledge of English non-canonical constructions (Figure 6.13 below), the 4 constructions thought as necessary by 100% of our colleagues were there-sentences (existential and presentational), inversion, passivization, and cleft structure (it- and wh-cleft). Fronting, right-dislocation, and left-dislocation were considered as necessary by 47% (7/15), 40% (6/15), and 33% (5/15) of the colleagues respectively.
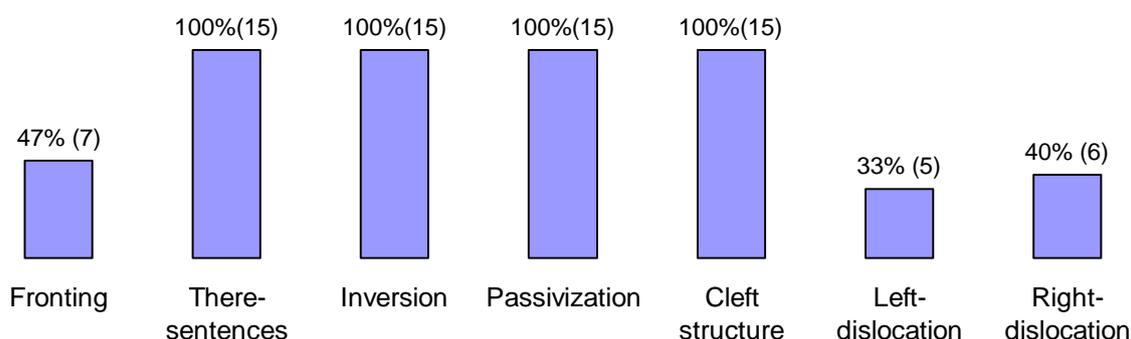
Figure 6.13: The necessity of introducing English non-canonical constructions to L2 learners (Data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for colleagues)

Overall opinion of the feasibility and relevance of the approach in the Vietnamese university system

100% of the colleagues thought that the approach was feasible/relevant (26.5%; 4/15), very feasible/relevant (26.5%; 4/15) or extremely feasible/relevant (47%; 7/15) in the Vietnamese university system. In other words, none of the colleagues thought negatively about the feasibility and relevance of the approach.
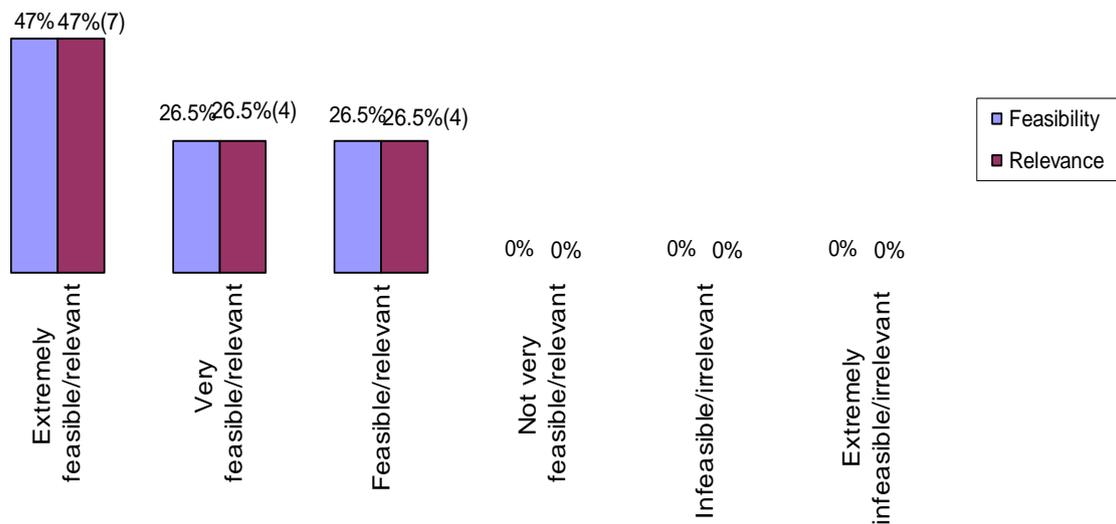
Figure 6.14: Feasibility and relevance of the approach in the Vietnamese university system (based on colleagues' opinion in post-teaching phase questionnaire)

The necessity of equipping teachers with meta-knowledge of information structure

100% of the colleagues considered it necessary to equip teachers with this knowledge. The reasons were as follows.

- Teachers cannot apply the method without this meta-knowledge. The knowledge is the basics for them to comprehend the nature of the activities they organize in the classroom and will help them orientate classroom activities and work more effectively in their teaching.

- Teachers may not be fully aware of the meta-knowledge, although they may be familiar with some aspects. Many teachers were not equipped with this knowledge in their undergraduate or post-graduate studies.

Willingness to apply the method in the future

100% of the colleagues reported that it was extremely likely (47%; 7/15), very likely (26.5%; 4/15), or likely 26.5%; 4/15) for them to apply the method in the future.
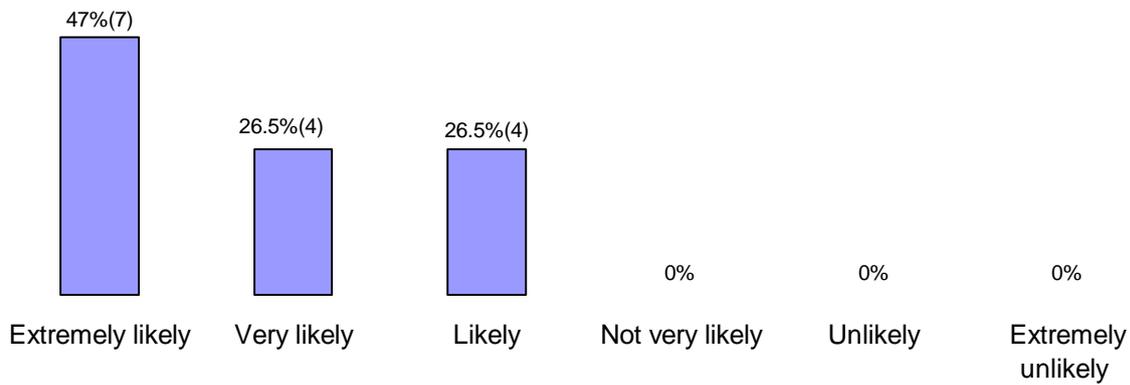
Figure 6.15: Colleagues' willingness to apply the method (data obtained from post-teaching phase questionnaire for colleagues)

General comments on the sample lesson plan

Following is the summary of our colleagues' opinions on the meta-linguistic lesson and the skill developing activities in the student's handout and the sample lesson plan.

- The lesson plan is designed in a very careful manner. All the steps are quite obvious and logical. The group-work gives students more opportunities to express their opinions and is an extremely effective way for shy and timid students to be more confident when engaged in discussions. The class size is suitable for this kind of class management.

- The meta-knowledge is comprehensible to intermediate-level students. The meta-linguistic lesson gives students the reasons why they use some features of language, and therefore help them use their language knowledge more effectively and more sophisticatedly. The meta-linguistic and skill-developing activities and tasks are brief and clear, interesting and motivating. The skill-developing activities are organized in accordance with the meta-knowledge.

Two of the colleagues made the following suggestions. To make the discussion more fruitful and interesting, students should work in different groups at different times. There should be more fun in the meta-linguistic phase by using a lot of illustrations, examples, and activities.

6.8.3. Summary of colleagues' opinions

In general, data from the questionnaire suggest that all our colleagues were not satisfied with the teaching methods currently applied in their institutions and they all believed that their students were not satisfied with the classroom reading and writing activities used in the

methods. Nearly all of them (93%; 14/15) gave positive comments on the amount of meta-linguistic input and on the time allocation for the meta-linguistic and skill developing phase. All of them thought that the approach was feasible and relevant in the Vietnamese university system and showed their willingness to apply the method in the future.

6.9. Summary and conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the data obtained in our field studies to seek answers to research questions 4, 5, and 6 involving three major issues: the impact of our meta-linguistic teaching approach on the development of our learners' reading and writing skills, the differences between learners from two groups in terms of their skill development, and the relevance of the approach in the Vietnamese university system.

As concerns the first issue, the findings show that the learners did not have a clear and systematic knowledge of English information structure in the pre-teaching phase and had gained this knowledge at some levels during and after the teaching phase. In the meanwhile, they had achieved development in their communicative skills, which was viewed as the combination of their overcoming their reading and writing problems, their getting higher scores, and their practicing better strategies in the while and post-teaching phase tests and tasks. This suggests that there was correspondence between our meta-linguistic approach and the development of the learners' reading and writing skills.

As concerns the second issue, no strong evidence was found to suggest that there was correspondence between learners' levels of proficiency and their skill development. The percentage of learners showing development varies according to each reading and writing feature. Group 1 learners had higher scores in both pre- and post-teaching phase reading tests. However, Group 2 learners scored higher in the pre- and post-writing tests. Furthermore, the increase in the mean score is higher among Group 2 learners both in reading and writing. Data analysis from my diaries suggests the reason that Group 2 learners were more motivated and willing to change.

As concerns the third issue, analyses based on our learners' reactions to my method indicate that most of the learners showed positive reactions to both the meta-linguistic lessons and the skill developing activities. Analyses based on my colleagues' opinions revealed that on the one hand, all of them were not satisfied with the current teaching methods applied in their institutions in bringing about learners' communicative language ability. On the other hand,

most of them gave positive comments on our teaching method concerning the balance between the meta-linguistic and skill developing phase, the amount of meta-linguistic instruction input, and the necessity of giving formal instruction in some specific meta-linguistic aspects. All of them believed that the approach was feasible and relevant in the Vietnamese university and were willing to adopt our approach in the future. Based on some negative reactions and comments from both the learners and the colleagues, I have made some necessary adjustments to aspects of the lessons in particular and the method in general that proved to be ineffective, uninteresting, or too much difficult for the learners.

Analyses of the current chapter and the last chapter were used as implications for my discussions in the next chapter in which I discussed the feasibility of my teaching method in wider applications in the field of second language teaching.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter, in the light of the findings and discussions in previous chapters, I come to conclusions about the whole study concerning the following major issues: whether and how much the study answers my research questions, the application of my teaching approach in wider teaching contexts, and the limitations of the study.

The research questions, as stated in chapter 4, are as follows:

1. What problems and difficulties (if any) do L2 learners encounter in their reading and writing in English as the result of their lack of a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure?

2. Which among these problems arises because of the interference of their mother tongue information structure features and their L1 reading and writing strategies?

3. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their problems?

4. Can a cognitive meta-linguistic approach help the learners overcome their reading and writing problems and develop their reading comprehension and written communicative ability by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure?

5. Are there any differences between student groups of different English proficiency in terms of their skill development?

6. Is the approach relevant and feasible in the Vietnamese university system?

With respect to the feasibility and relevance of implementing my teaching method in wider teaching contexts, my conclusion has been made concerning whether and how the teaching method and its elements would be accepted and implemented in the Vietnamese university system in particular and in second language teaching institutions in general. Conclusions about the limitations of the study mention groups of L2 learners to whom the approach might not be applicable, and the subjectivity in the interpretation of some qualitative data obtained in the study.

7.2. Summary of the study

In the realization that L2 learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure might play a role in the development of their reading and writing skills in particular and their communicative language ability in general, I carried out the current study in which the learners were given explicit instruction enhancing their understanding of English information structure as an initial step into overcoming their reading and writing problems and developing their reading and writing skills. In the literature review, I investigated aspects of English information structure considered necessary for the enhancement of L2 learners' discourse knowledge. Learners are expected to manipulate this knowledge for their communicative ability development. This meta-knowledge includes sentential and discourse levels feature of English information structure. At sentential level, the knowledge encompasses the order in which information is distributed in the sentence, the given/new status of information exchanged, the contextual constraints on the given/new status, and the syntactical devices used to indicate the given/new status. At discourse level, the knowledge includes the rhetorical structures and features of academic texts approached from genre perspective, the pragmatic awareness of audience in academic writing, and aspects of the clause relational approach to text analysis such as clause relations and textual patterns. Also in the literature review, I discussed the major differences between English and Vietnamese information structure. Knowledge of the differences was expected to help my learners overcome problems assumed to derive from their L1 reading or writing strategies. This discussion was used for pedagogical purposes rather than as a research approach. At the same time I discussed the role of teaching information structure knowledge to L2 learners in developing their communicative language ability. Included in this discussion was the role of genre knowledge in academic writing. The model of communicative language ability adopted in the study is Bachman's (1990) in which knowledge of information structure is viewed as one component. In my assumption, enhancing this knowledge could develop L2 learners' communicative ability by applying a teaching method which focuses on providing the learners this knowledge. My teaching method, which is cognitive meta-linguistic in approach, was executed over a period of two months and a half in which the learners in the study were given essential aspects of meta-knowledge of English information structure and instruction of how to manipulate this knowledge in developing their skills. In this period, data necessary for my research were collected to help me find out answers to my research questions involving my learners' problems in reading and writing in aspects related to their meta-knowledge of

information structure and whether my teaching method helped them overcome the problems and develop their skills.

7.3. Major findings of the study

7.3.1. L2 learners' problems in reading and writing

The discussions in this section are concerned about my answers to the first three research questions involving L2 learners' reading and writing problems in relation to their meta-knowledge of English information structure.

The data analyses in chapter 5 show that the learners in the study did encounter the following six reading problems:

1. Failing to recognize main ideas of reading passages

2. Having inappropriate reading patterns

3. Failing to recognize semantic relations between a sentence or a paragraph and the whole text

4. Overlooking cohesive devices

5. Having difficulty in recognizing meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions

6. Not setting goals for reading:

In writing, the data analyses in chapter 5 show that the learners in the study encountered the following problems:

1. Lack of coherence in introducing and developing ideas

2. Lack of planning for essay writing

3. Paying too much attention to local constructions and forgetting the global aspects of the text such as its communicative purpose or its social functions

The first problem, lack coherence in introducing and developing ideas, are shown in the following features:

- Unclearly stating or omitting topic sentences and/or thesis statements

- Indirectness in introducing the main topic

- Diverting from the main idea

- Inappropriate distribution of given and new information

- Not contextualizing information presented

- Concluding without explicitly answering previously raised questions in the introductory paragraph

- Inadequate use of transitional signals

The percentages of learners who encountered the problems varied and changed over time. On the whole, there was the decrease in the percentages towards the end of the post-teaching phase.

I assume that the problems are related to the following three causes: learners' lack of a clear meta-knowledge of English information structure, the interference of L1 information structure features, or the transfer from L1 strategies. Of course, it is undeniable that the learners' difficulty with English reading and writing may also be grounded very simply in their low level of general English proficiency. For example, they may simply not know enough vocabulary to apply effectively reading strategies, and they may not know enough sentence grammar, to be able to think strategically about composition at text level. However, because the learners' level of proficiency was intermediate, and their grammatical competence was considered as satisfactory based on the assessment test done prior to my teaching, I would not think that their general English was a major cause to the reading and writing problems investigated.

I could not find strong evidence for the interference of the learners' L1 information structure features in any of the reading problems. Furthermore, there was not strong evidence to claim that the reading problems were transferred from learners' L1 strategies. Data from the pre-teaching phase interviews showed only one student (2%) reported using inappropriate reading pattern and overlooking cohesive devices, and none of them reported not setting goals for reading in L1. However, there was some relationship between the following three reading problems and learners' lack of meta-knowledge of English information structure: failing to recognize main ideas of reading passages, failing to recognize semantic relations between a sentence or a paragraph and the whole text, and having difficulty in recognizing meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions. The claim was based on the percentage of learners who gained knowledge of English information structure and solved their problems in the while or post-teaching phase.

Most writing problems were related to one or more of the three causes mentioned. For example, their tendency towards concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question was due to both their not fully realizing this requirement in English academic writing and their tendency in their L1 writing. The following writing problems showed obvious evidence of L1 strategy transfer: unclearly stating thesis statements and topic sentences, indirectness in introducing the main topic, diverting from the main idea, distributing information inappropriately, not contextualizing information presented, and concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question. All the above writing features can be seen as related to the learners' L1 indirectness feature, which is related to their reader-responsible tendency. 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. However, there was not enough evidence of their L1 topic-prominent feature in their writing. Only 8% (4/48) of the students used the topic-prominent feature in their writing and this only happened in the while- and post-teaching phase. This came as a surprise to my study because in my experience, many L2 learners tend to make English sentences bearing topic-prominent feature in their speaking. However, as the study showed, this tendency was not prominent in their writing.

The data in chapter 5 show that in general, there were no big differences between the two groups in their encountering the problems investigated. The differences in the percentages of learners having problems in the two groups varied according to each specific problem. In some cases, more Group 1 students experienced problems than students in Group 2, particularly in some writing features such as being indirect in introducing the topic or not stating the thesis clearly. In my own explanations, these tendencies could be due to the fact that learners of higher level of proficiency would tend to be more confident of their writing and be more tempted to show their idiosyncrasies. As a consequence, their writing would tend to bear some features considered to be inappropriate in academic writing seen from information structure perspective. However, in general, no generalized conclusions could be made about the correspondence between learners' levels of proficiency and their encountering the problems.

7.3.2. The impact of the cognitive meta-linguistic teaching method on the learners' skill development

In this section I conclude about the answers to the last three research questions concerning the following three issues: the impact of my teaching approach on the learners' reading and writing skill development, the differences between the two groups of learners in their skill development after the teaching phase, and the relevance and feasibility of the approach in the Vietnamese university system.

The impact of the approach on the learners' skill development

Data analyses in chapters 5 and 6 show that there is interrelationship between my teaching approach and the learners' reading and writing skill development. My conclusion is based on the high percentage of learners who managed to perform more than 50% of the tasks in the meta-linguistic test and the higher percentages of them getting higher scores or having better strategies in the while or post-teaching phase tests and tasks. The development on the whole was proportional with time. The only exception was with their tendency towards not diverting from the main topic in writing in which the percentage in the while teaching phase was much higher than that in the post-teaching phase. However, this post-teaching phase percentage was higher than that in the pre-teaching phase.

In reading, on the whole, problems related to the learners' strategies (e.g. their tendency towards setting goal for the reading or their reading patterns) were better solved than those related to their meta-knowledge (e.g. their recognizing the semantic relations between sentences/paragraphs and the whole text). 60% (29/48) of the learners reported in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire that they did not frequently (never, rarely, or sometimes) exercise the setting goal strategy whereas the percentage in the second while teaching phase task was 100%. Nearly one-third of the learners (29% to 31%) still had difficulty in recognizing the semantic relations between a sentence or a paragraph and the whole text in the second while teaching phase task.

In writing among the problems related to learners' L1 strategies, not reinstating the thesis statement in the conclusion was the problem most solved with only 13% of the learners showing evidence in the post-teaching phase test. Other writing problems saw remarkably low percentages of learners encountering the problems in the post-teaching phase included their tendency towards clearly stating thesis or topic sentence, and making outlines for essay writing (19%). Problems with high percentages of the students (38% to 42%) who could not

overcome them in the while and post-teaching phase included their tendency towards being indirectness, inadequate using of transitional signals, and distributing information inappropriately.

Group differences

There were differences in the percentages of learners who showed skill development between the two groups; however, no general statement could be made about the correspondence between the learners' level of proficiency and their skill development. The increase in the percentages of learners making improvement in their skills varies according to each reading or writing feature. In general more Group 1 students showed development in performing tasks relating to their meta-knowledge of information structure (realizing the focal meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions, recognizing semantic relations between sentences/paragraphs and the whole text). One exception was found with their getting main ideas of reading passage in the post-teaching phase when a little bit more students in Group 2 managed to perform the task (88%, 23/26 students) whereas the percentage in Group 1 was 77% (17/22 students). On the whole, Group 1 learners had higher mean scores both in the pre-teaching and post-teaching phase reading tests. However, the increase in the mean score is higher among Group 2 learners, 3.5 as against 2.3 among Group 1 learners. On the other hand, more students in Group 1 still encountered the problems relating to their L1 strategies in the post-teaching phase (with the only exception of the topic delaying practice in which the percentage of Group 2 learners was higher in the post-teaching phase). In general, Group 2 learners had higher mean scores in both the pre- and post-teaching phase writing tests. Group 1 learners' essays show better mastery of grammatical knowledge, however, in terms of writing features related to information structure such as clearly stating thesis statements and topic sentences and not diverting from the main ideas, Group 2 learners show better strategies. The increase in the mean score of Group 2 learners (1.8) is also slightly higher than that of Group 1 learners (1.5). I tentatively feel that learners of higher level of proficiency tend to show their idiosyncrasies in writing and not conform to the conventions of academic writing in terms of information structure. Data from my diaries show that the higher increase among Group 2 learners in reading and writing scores might be due to the fact that Group 2 learners were more motivated and willing to change. This might suggest that learners' motivation plays an important role in action research.

The relevance of the approach in the Vietnamese university system

Based on the review of the current teaching and learning situation in many universities in Vietnam, the learners' skill development including their overcoming the reading and writing problems after the execution of the teaching method, their reactions to each lesson and to the skill developing suggestions, and my colleagues' opinion, I conclude that my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing is relevant and feasible in the Vietnamese university system.

In the post-teaching phase questionnaire, all of the colleagues asked said that they were dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the teaching methods currently applied in their institutions in bringing about their learners' communicative language ability. One of the reasons given was that their learners were not given meta-knowledge necessary to support their skill development. A reading and writing skill-developing session largely involved the teacher asking learners to do their tasks without cognitive meta-linguistic eliciting questions to guide them through the tasks. Therefore, all of them reported that they were looking forward to a teaching method that might enhance the situation. In response to my teaching approach in general, they all agreed on the feasibility and relevance of my teaching method in the Vietnamese university system with respect to the amount of meta-linguistic instruction input, the balance between the meta-linguistic and skill-developing phase, and the necessity of giving formal instruction in some specific meta-linguistic aspects.

Many of the learners showed development in their reading and writing throughout the teaching phase and in the post-teaching phase and this suggests a correspondence between their being equipped with the meta-knowledge of information structure and the development of their reading skill.

My learners' reactions to the teaching method in general and to each lesson in particular were very positive and encouraging. The reactions showed that most of the learners were enthusiastic about receiving the meta-knowledge and incorporating it into their skill developing activities. Aspects of each lesson which the learners did not show positive reactions to (e.g., of CD and TCA) have been adjusted for future execution of the method.

7.4. Suggestions for future executions

The following suggestions for the future execution of my approach are made based on the following three sources of data: the percentages of learners who still encountered reading and

writing problems in the while or post-teaching phase, learners' reactions to the lessons, and my colleagues' opinions in the questionnaire.

That a percentage of learners who still encountered the problems in the while teaching phase tasks or in the post-teaching phase tests suggested that more activities should be designed in my future lesson plans to help more of them overcome the problems. In reading, there are two problems requiring more teachers' formal instruction: recognizing semantic relations between sentences/paragraphs and the whole text and realizing focal meanings in such non-canonical constructions as inversion and there-sentences. This can be done in the sequence of meta-linguistic explanations followed by meta-linguistic exercises and then reading tasks. In terms of the first problem, the meta-linguistic aspects which can support this skill, in our view, may include semantic implications of cohesive devices, clause relations and clause relation signals, and textual organization (coherence and cohesion). With respect to the second problem, more explanations should be given to the pragmatic reasons underlying inversion and there-sentences. In writing, problems requiring more classroom instruction include the learners' tendency to being indirect, using transitional signals inadequately, and distributing information inappropriately. My suggestion for the first two problems is that teachers should frequently remind learners of the required directness and using transitional signals adequately in L2 academic writing. As concerns learners' ability in distributing information appropriately, teachers should give more instruction enhancing learners' knowledge of such information structure aspects as the given-new distribution in sentences of different constructions.

Learners and colleagues' reactions to and opinions on the lessons suggest the following adjustments to my method. The two meta-linguistic lessons on Topic-Comment Articulation (TCA) and Communicative Dynamism (CD) should be more simplified on the one hand, and require more teachers' explanations on the other. The lesson on the differences between topic-prominent and subject prominent languages can be excluded. Concerning one of my colleagues' opinion on the load of meta-linguistic input in the sample lesson plan, I would not think that it would be a good idea to break the meta-language section into smaller parts. My purpose in providing learners with meta-knowledge of all the five common textual patterns in one lesson is to equip them with a general view of all the patterns at one time so that they can manipulate the knowledge in dealing with reading passages of different patterns. Disintegrating the introduction may lead to learners' not having a panoramic view of the knowledge without mentioning it is unrealistic in terms of the time constraints on our

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syllabus. As concern the lesson on non-canonical constructions, to reduce the load of the meta-linguistic content, and at the same time to guarantee the panoramic view of the knowledge on the part of the learners, I suggest that the lesson should be administered in two sessions. In the first session, all the constructions are introduced with preliminary and simple explanations to give learners an overview of the constructions. In the second session, more detailed explanations are given to help learners go deeper into the finer points of the constructions in terms of the pragmatic reasons underlying each construction in distributing the given and the new information.

The following suggestions offered by my colleagues should be taken into consideration. First, there should be more fun in the meta-linguistic phase introduction and discussion. In my teaching experience, L2 learners would work more effectively with meta-language if they enjoy the task. Organizing games or group competitions to encourage learners when they are attempting to explore the knowledge can be one suggestion. Second, learners should be arranged in different groups in different activities for better motivation. However, this is a vexed issue and requires teachers' sensitivity and intuition to handle with each specific group of learners. Some students would find it boring to be in the same group all the time. Others would be reluctant to be with classmates they are not quite familiar with.

7.5. Application of the study

The teaching approach can be applied in many kinds of English language teaching institutions in Vietnam and in some other Asian countries like Thailand, China, Japan, and Korea. Our hope in the application of the approach in other Asian countries is grounded on the similarities in L2 learners of the region in encountering their reading and writing problems, for example in their tendency towards indirectness in writing as mentioned in Hinds (1987). Within the context of English language teaching institutions in Vietnam, it is hoped that the method can be applied where obtaining an IELTS or TOEFL certificate is in high demand or where English is a compulsory learning unit. English language centers where a high number of learners are attending to improve their skills to get the certificate or to prepare for their abroad studies is huge in number in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and in many other big cities in Vietnam. Besides, in all Vietnamese university institutions, general English, ESP, EAP, or EOP is required as a compulsory unit and as an important tool for their future career development. The level of communicative language ability of students in this

situation is quite similar to that of the students in my study, that is not reaching a satisfactory level. The approach, however, is not relevant to colleges and universities where English is taught as a major subject, for example in teachers' training colleges or institutes of international diplomatic relations. Language communicative ability of the students of these institutions is generally very good.

In my plan for the execution of the teaching method, I will first apply the method as a model within several schools in my university (School of Information Technology, School of Business Management, School of Economics, School of Laws, and School of Humanities and Social Sciences). The method is then hoped to deploy in many English centers in Hanoi and HCM cities where many learners are desperately trying to pass IELTS and TOEFL examinations as a requirement to get their abroad education.

7.6. Limitations of the study

There are limitations to the study and to the application of my teaching approach. As the study aims first at bringing about changes in the teaching and learning situation in my institution and the targeted learners of the study are ESP students who have studied English for at least seven years, its potential application in wider teaching scenarios can be limited in some of the following aspects depending on the targeted learners' ethnic background, their level of English proficiency, and the nature of their English study. The approach is best applicable to L2 learners whose level of proficiency is intermediate or above and who are in the second year of their university level onwards. This is because learners of lower levels may find my meta-linguistic lessons difficult and beyond their comprehensibility. On the other hand, the method is not relevant to students whose major subject study is English because their language communicative ability is generally very good. Moreover, the method may not be applied to non-Asian students of English who do not share the same problems with the students in my study. These problems might be typical only of students who speak languages rather similar to the Vietnamese language in such aspects as indirectness in writing. In other words, whereas my method can be applied to students of many Asian ethnic backgrounds like Thai, Japanese, or Chinese, it does not seem so applicable to students of other languages like Spanish or French.

Subjectivity in my interpretation of some qualitative data obtained from the diaries is another limitation of my studies. These data include my learners and colleagues' responses to the

open-ended questions in the questionnaires and their responses in the interviews, my scoring of the learners' writing, and my reflective accounts of the learners' reactions and attitudes to my teaching method documented in my diaries. However, in full awareness of this, I have taken several measures such as prolonged engagement and triangulation to reduce the subjectivity and increase the credibility of this kind of data.

7.7. Final remarks

The studies have answered my research questions to a large extent. As far as the first three questions are concerned, the learners in the study did encounter the reading and writing problems investigated. Not having a clear and systematic meta-knowledge of English information structure led to more problems in their writing than in their reading. I could not see any relation between their reading problems and their mother tongue information structure features or L1 reading strategies. There was not strong evidence for the transfer of topic-prominent feature of the learners' L1 language into their L2 writing. Moreover, motivation and willingness to change might play an important part in the learners' skill development based on the fact that Group 2 learners, who were considered to have lower level of proficiency prior to my teaching, had a higher increase in their mean scores in the post-teaching phase reading and writing tests.

After receiving my meta-linguistic lessons, the percentages of learners with problems decreased and the learners showed development in their skills, notably in their getting main ideas of reading passages and in their reinstating thesis statements in conclusion paragraphs. My conclusion was that a cognitive meta-linguistic approach can develop L2 learners' reading and writing skills by first enhancing their meta-knowledge of English information structure.

I am quite confident about the feasibility of carrying out the teaching method across many institutions in the Vietnamese university system as well as in many English language centres in Vietnam and in some other Asian countries. My confidence is grounded on the following reasons. First, it is the current level of communicative language ability among L2 learners of these institutions and centres where a lot of teachers and learners are not satisfied with the learners' communicative ability and are looking forwards to change in teaching methods. At the same time, there is for the time being a high demand among learners who would like to improve their skills to pass IELTS or TOEFL examinations to seek further education abroad.

However, there are limitations to the application of the study. This is because the targeted learners of the study are ESP, EAP, or EOP students whose levels of proficiency is intermediate or above.

In terms of the role of theory in the research, theory has guided my process of inquiry in such a way that gathering the data helped clarify some aspects of the theories that played important roles in my research, viz. the theory of language transfer and comparative rhetoric, the role of cognitivism in language learning and teaching, and how CLT actually works in a specific constitutionized setting with all its requirements for a CLT class.

Appendix A: Questionnaires

A1: Learners' pre-teaching phase questionnaire

Please give your answers in the space provided. For some questions, indicate your answers by either ticking or circling the most appropriate option. You will be given specific instructions on how to show your answers in several cases.

Questions 1 to 4 involve your identification and academic background.

1. Name: …………………………………………………………………………………

2. Group: …………………………………………………………………………………

3. How long have you been studying English? …………………………………………..

4. What is your short-term goal of studying English?

    a. To pass IELTS/TOEFL or other tests of the kind to get a place in an overseas university

    b. To read technical books

    c. To attend international conferences in Information Technology

    d. Others. Please briefly state the goal in the space provided:

    …………………………………………………………………………………………
    …………………………………………………………………………………………
    …………………………………………………………………………………………

Questions 5 to 9 involve your meta-knowledge of English information structure. Please answer the questions to the best of your knowledge and belief.

5. What are the theme and the rheme in the following sentence?

President Clinton appeared at the podium accompanied by three senators and the vice president.

Theme: ………………………………………………………………………………….

Rheme:…………………………………………………………………………………..

Briefly explain your choices in a few words:

………

……

6. What information is new and what is given (old) in the following sentence? Suppose that this given and new status is not affected by its context (the sentences appearing before and after the sentence).

Suddenly there ran out of the woods the man we had seen at the picnic.

New information:………………………………………………………………………………………..

Old information:…………………………………………………………………………………………

Briefly explain your choices in a few words:

……

………..

7. How well do you understand the following terms, which are all related to the information structure of a sentence or a text: information focus, cleft structure, textual patterns, problem-solution pattern? Please indicate your answers in the boxes provided just below:

a. Quite well. I know what they mean and often use this knowledge in my writing and reading.

b. I know their Vietnamese equivalents but I do not really understand what they mean.

c. I have never come across the terms.

Information focus		Cleft structure	
Textual patterns		Problem-solution patterns	

8. If your answer is "a" to the above question, give a brief explanation of the terms

Information focus:……………………………………………………………………………

Cleft structure:………………………………………………………………………………

Textual patterns:……………………………………………………………………………

Problem-solution pattern:…………………………………………………………

9. Are the following sentences grammatically correct? Please indicate your choice by ticking in the appropriate boxes provided below.

	Yes	No
a. A bran muffin I can give you.		
b. Not far from Avenue de Villiers there lived a foreign doctor		
c. There was behind him the vice president.		
d. There remains a political vacuum in the high-tech workshops of Tarrant County.		
e. Also complimentary is red and white wine.		
f. However, it is in the realm of high technology that computer disciplines have really begun to make themselves felt.		
g. What seem to me objectionable about these phrases is not that they are in some sense "wrong".		
h. Gallstones, you have them out and they are out.		
i. The landlady, she went up and he laid her out.		
j. She's a smart cookie, that Diana.		

Questions 10 to 16 involve your writing strategies in the English language. Please indicate your tendency by either ticking or circling the most appropriate option.

10. How often do you delay the introductory sentence further in the introductory paragraph?

    a. Always   b. Usually   c. Sometimes

    d. Rarely   e. Never

11. How often do you produce the topic sentence of a paragraph?

    a. Always   b. Usually   c. Sometimes

    d. Rarely   e. Never

12. How often do you produce the thesis statement of the essay?

    a. Always   b. Usually   c. Sometimes

d. Rarely e. Never

13. In writing up the conclusion, how often do you reinstate the question raised in the introductory paragraph?

 a. Always b. Usually   c. Sometimes

 d. Rarely e. Never

14. How often do you make an outline or a plan for your essay?

 a. Always b. Usually   c. Sometimes

 d. Rarely e. Never

15. Do you think that it is the reader who is responsible for understanding the text you have written?

 a. Yes

 b. No

16. In the process of writing, how often do you follow the communicative purpose and social function of the essay?

 a. Always b. Usually   c. Sometimes

 d. Rarely e. Never

Questions 17 to 22 involve your reading strategies in the English language. Please indicate your tendency by either ticking or circling the most appropriate option.

17. How often do you set up a goal for your reading?

 a. Always b. Usually   c. Sometimes

 d. Rarely e. Never

18. Do you look for the cohesive devices in a reading text?

 a. Yes

 b. No

19. Do you anticipate the pattern of a reading text?

 a. Yes

 b. No

20. Which of the following best describes the pattern of your reading strategy?

   a. Reading the text through from beginning to end first, looking for specific information

   b. Looking for the topic, and following its logic development

21. Do you distinguish between factual information and personal belief in a reading text?

   a. Yes

   b. No

22. Do you try to interpret the information in a reading text in your own way?

   a. Yes

   b. No

23. Which teaching/studying mode do you like? Please indicate your preference by ticking in the boxes provided. You can choose more than one option

a. Pair-work		d. Whole class	
b. Group-work		e. Discussion	
c. Language laboratory		f. Power point presentation	

A2: Learners' post-teaching phase questionnaire

Please give your answers in the space provided. You will be given specific instructions on how to show your answers in several cases.

Questions 1 to 2 involve your identification.

1. Name:………………………………………………………………………………

2. Group:………………………………………………………………………………

Question 3 involves your writing strategies in the English language after receiving formal instruction in enhancing your knowledge of English information structure and your writing skill. Following are some statements about L2 learners' writing strategies. For each statement, please indicate which of the situations below best describes your strategies <u>now</u> by ticking either "A", "B", "C" or "D" in the boxes provided.

A. I do not realize the negative side of the strategy and do not wish to give it up.

B. I have come to realize that it is not a good strategy, but I cannot get out of it.

C. I have got out of the practice partially.

D. I have got out of the practice completely.

	A	B	C	D
1. L2 writers do less planning and reviewing, at the global and local levels.				
2. L2 writers do less goal setting, global and local.				
3. L2 writers pay more attention to local mistakes and tend to forget the global aspects of the text such as its communicative purpose or its social functions.				
4. L2 writers are "reader-responsible", being inclined to leave the responsibility to understand what they want to say to the readers.				
5. L2 writers let their thoughts and language go free and fall outside the requirements of the target community.				
6. L2 writers just copy the language and modes of thought of the target community and lose their own idiosyncrasies.				

	Yes	No		
7. L2 writers often find themselves muddled with making contradictions, deviations, and redundancies and not having the expected topic sentences and thesis statements.				
8. L2 writers tend to be indirect in stating the purpose of the writing piece.				
9. L2 writers are inclined to arrive at the conclusion without explicitly answering the question raised in the introduction.				
10. L2 writers do not utilize enough necessary transitional signals.				

Question 4 involves L2 writers' writing characteristics. Please indicate if the following statements are applicable to you <u>now</u> by ticking either "Yes" or "No" in the boxes provided.

	Yes	No
1. Organizing generated material in the L2 is more difficult.		
2. Transcribing in the L2 is more laborious, less fluent, and less productive.		
3. L2 writers do not have enough vocabulary or structure to express their ideas.		
4. L2 writers show less confidence and freedom of thoughts and styles.		
5. L2 writers' written products often show a lack of coherence and instances of unsuitable focuses.		
6. Pauses are more frequent, longer, and consume more writing time.		
7. L2 writers tend to assume that they are not obliged to make explicit the topic sentences, which in their intentions are implied in the paragraphs, that their arguments are embedded in their "beat- about- the- bush" examples.		

Question 5 involves your reading strategies in the English language after receiving formal instruction in enhancing your knowledge of English information structure and your reading skill. Following are some statements about L2 learners' reading strategies. For each statement, please indicate which of the situations below best describes your practices <u>now</u> by ticking either "A", "B", "C" or "D" in the boxes provided.

A. I do not realize the negative side of the strategy and do not wish to give it up.

B. I have come to realize that it is not a good strategy, but I cannot get out of it.

C. I have got out of the practice partially.

D. I have got out of the practice completely.

	A	B	C	D
1. Getting down to reading a text without anticipating the pattern of the text				
2. Setting no goal before reading				
3. Overlooking cohesive devices				
4. Reading from beginning to end without first skimming or scanning the text to get its main topic				
5. Not stopping when necessary to look forwards or backwards in the text (e.g. when getting lost in the reading)				
6. Not attempting to spot the focus of information				
7. Not making a clear distinction between theme and rheme; given and new information				
8. Not asking themselves why the information is presented the way it appears in the text (e.g. not questioning the usage of a passive sentence)				
9. Not using their grammatical knowledge to decipher information				
10. Not relating a text to its context				

Question 6 involves your evaluation of some suggestions for L2 learners' writing skill development. Please indicate your tendency as to whether you will adopt them or not by ticking either "Yes" or "No" in the space provided.

	Yes	No
1. Student writers must make their topics, their arguments, their organization and transitions clear to the reader.		
2. Writers should pre-reveal the pattern (form) and the content within the first paragraphs of the text.		
3. Writers should provide generalizations at appropriate points in the discourse, and maintain and develop topics in a manner accessible to the reader.		
4. Writers should organize the text in a manner familiar to the reader, use		

	Yes	No
appropriate cohesion, and present information directly and explicitly.		
5. Truth and reality projected by the writer should seek optimal agreement from the reader.		
6. Student writers are required to get involved in planning extensively, which includes defining the rhetorical problem, placing it in a larger context, making it operational, exploring its parts, generating alternative solutions, arriving at a well-supported conclusion.		
7. Multiple drafts are encouraged, each subsequent draft being cleaner than the previously done.		
8. L2 writers should get involved in extensive revising which includes adding, deleting, modifying, rearranging ideas.		
9. L2 writers should write economically, clearly and emphatically.		
10. L2 writers should diversify their essays' grammatical structure by utilizing as many sentence patterns and non-canonical constructions as possible.		
11. Theme/rheme; old and new information should be distributed relevantly.		
12. Information should be contextualized.		

Question 7 involves your evaluation of some suggestions for L2 learners' reading skill development. Please indicate your tendency as to whether you will adopt them or not by ticking either "Yes" or "No" in the space provided.

	Yes	No
1. Set up a goal for their reading.		
2. Anticipate the pattern of a reading text.		
3. Look for cohesive devices, and identify the following signals: co-ordination, subordination, semantic relationship and discourse patterning.		
4. Recognize typical patterns of textual organization.		
5. Look for the topic and follow its logic development.		
6. Distinguish between factual information and personal belief.		
7. Interpret selective information in their own way.		
8. Ask themselves comprehension questions to help figure out the text		

frame of the text or part of the text.		
9. Find out how texts/topics/themes are opened, developed and closed. Recognize the relation between topics/themes in a text or paragraph.		
10. Familiarize unfamiliar structured discourse.		
11. Identify the theme/rheme structure and given/new status of information of a sentence.		

A3: Colleagues' post-teaching phase questionnaire

Please give your answers in the space provided. You will be given specific instructions on how to show your answers in several cases.

Question 1: Which school/institute are you working at?

………………………………………………………………………………….…………

Question 2: How long have been teaching English?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

For questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 12, please circle your choices and briefly explain your responses in the space provided.

Question 3: Are you satisfied with the current teaching method applied in your institution in terms of its effectiveness in bringing about learners' communicative language ability?

1. Yes, because:

……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

2. No, because:

……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

Question 4: Based on your teaching experience, do you think that your students are satisfied with the classroom reading and writing activities applied in the current teaching method?

1. Yes, because:

……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

2. No, because:

……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

For questions 5 to 14, please consult the attached description of my teaching approach, the meta-linguistic lessons, students' activity handouts (for lesson 2, unit2), and the sample lesson plan.

Question 5: Do you think that the time allocation for the meta-linguistic phase and skill-developing phase in the sample lesson plan is relevant?

1. Yes, because:

……
……
……

2. No, because:

……
……
……

Question 6: Do you think that the amount of meta-linguistic instruction input in the sample lesson plan is relevant?

1. Yes, because:

……
……
……

2. No, because:

……
……
……

For questions 7 and 9, please circle your choices. There is no restriction on the number of choices.

Question 7: Which among the following meta-linguistic aspects do you think is necessary for L2 learners?

1. Communicative Dynamism (CD)

2. Theme/rheme distinction

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3. Clause relation cohesive devices

4. Textual organization (cohesion and coherence)

5. Topic-prominent and subject-prominent languages distinction

6. Comparison of L1 and L2 learners' writing strategies

7. L2 learners' problems in reading and writing

8. Skill developing suggestions

9. Others, please specify:

……………………………………………………………..…..……………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………

Question 8: Please specify any meta-linguistic aspects you think are NOT necessary for L2 learners' reading and writing skill development?

……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………

Question 9: The meta-knowledge of which English non-canonical constructions below do you think is necessary for L2 learners?

1. Fronting

2. Left-dislocation

3. Inversion

4. Passivization

5. Cleft structure (it- and wh-cleft)

6. There-sentences (existential and presentational)

7. Right-dislocation

Question 10: How would you rate the overall feasibility of our cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing skills in the Vietnamese university system?

    1. Extremely feasible   2. Very feasible   3. Feasible

    4. Not very feasible   5. Infeasible   6.Extremely infeasible

Question 11: How would you rate the overall relevance of my cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching L2 learners reading and writing skills in the Vietnamese university system?

    1. Extremely relevant   2. Very relevant   3. Relevant

    4. Not very relevant   5. Irrelevant   6. Extremely irrelevant

Question 12: Do you think that in order to apply the method, teachers need to be equipped with this meta-knowledge?

    1. Yes, because:

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

    2. No, because:

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Question 13: How likely is it that you will apply our method in your future teaching?

    1. Extremely likely   2. Very likely   3. Likely

    4. Not very likely   5. Unlikely   6. Extremely unlikely

Question 14: Please give any other comments concerning the meta-linguistic lessons, the skill-developing activities in the handouts, and the sample lesson plan:

………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix B: Interviews (pre-teaching phase)

B1: Sample pre-designed interview sheet

Informant: sohongu (pseudonym)

Group: CA1

Time: 12:10 p.m. March 7th, 2008

Venue: Room 103, School of Information Technology campus

Aims:

1. To guarantee the validity and reliability of the data gathered in the previously done questionnaire, which include:

- Informant's motivations, and academic background (questions 3 and 4)
- Informant's meta-knowledge of English information structure (question 5 to 9)
- Informant's meta-cognitive strategies in writing (questions 10 to 16) and reading (questions 17 to 22)
- Informant's preferred modes of learning (question 23)

Pre-designed interview questions: (based on questionnaire responses)

Question 3: time of studying English: 9 years

- How many years at primary/ secondary/ high school, and university?
- Which period of English studies is most efficient in terms of what you have gained?
- How many years of studying General English and how many years of studying ESP?
- Which kind of English do you prefer to study? GE or ESP? Why?

Question 4: Informant's motivation: b (to read technical books)

- Could you briefly state any other goals of your studying English apart from the one you have stated in the questionnaire?

Question 5 to 9: Informant's meta-knowledge of English information structure

- Why did you leave question 5 unanswered? (Q. 5)
- How could you distinguish between the given and the new information of the sentence? (Q. 6)
- What is the Vietnamese equivalent of the term 'information focus'? (Q. 7)

-   Why do you think that the sentence 'A bran muffin I can give you' is not grammatically correct? (Q. 9)

Question 10 to 16: Informant's writing strategies in the English language

-   When do you delay the introductory sentence further in the introductory paragraph? (Q. 10)
-   Do you think that the delay of the introductory sentence affects the reader's understanding of your writing?
-   Do you think that a native speaker will do the same with the introductory sentence?
-   When did you first have the practice of producing thesis statement and topic sentence? (Secondary school? / University?) (Qs. 11 and 12)
-   Did you have the strategy from your own experience or did your English teacher advise you to?
-   Do you have the practice when you write an essay in Vietnamese?
-   When do you reinstate the thesis in the conclusion? (Q. 13)
-   When do you make outlines for your essays? (Q. 14)
-   Why do you think that it is the reader who is responsible for understanding the text you have written? (Q. 15)

-   When do you follow the communicative purpose and social function of an essay? (Q. 16)

Question 17-22: Informant's reading strategies in the English language

-   Why do you always set up a goal for your reading? (Q. 17)
-   Why don't you look for cohesive devices in a reading text? (Q. 18)
-   Why do you anticipate the pattern of a reading text? (Q. 19)
-   Why do you look for the topic of a reading passage first? (Q. 20)
-   Do you ever read from beginning to end? (Q. 20)
-   How do you read a Vietnamese reading passage? (Q. 20)
-   Why don't you distinguish between factual information and personal belief? Do you think that the distinction between them is important to your reading/your understanding of the text? (Q. 21)
-   Why don't you try to interpret the information in a reading text in your own way? (Q. 22)

Question 23: Informant's preferred teaching/studying modes

- Why do you prefer group-work?

B2: Sample interview transcription

Transcription conventions

Spelling: British English spelling is used.

Punctuation: Capital letters are used for new utterances, pronoun 'I' and proper names. Interrupted or unfinished utterances begin a new line with no capital letters. Full stops are used for end of utterances. Apostrophes are used for abbreviations e.g. don't, haven't. Commas are used to separate phrases and clauses as assumed by the transcriber.

(?)	=	inaudible
(xxx)	=	uncertain that word is correctly transcribed
(.)	=	brief pause
(…)	=	longer pause
{ }	=	longer timed pause
[ ]	=	overlapping or interrupted speech
(V)	=	Speaker speaking in Vietnamese
( )	=	Transcriber's explanations

I think the object must be here = underlined information to be the focus of analysis

Participants: T = interviewer and S = informant (Sohongu) (pseudonym)

Interview 1: 14301 WS 20001.WMA (from minutes 6:34 to 27:30)

(For questions 5 to 20 in the pre-teaching phase questionnaire)

Line	Speaker	Words
1	T	And for questions from 5 to 9, I would like to ask about your knowledge
2		of English information structure. I know that this one is a new issue for
3		you. I will give you some explanations about these terms later. (V: bởi vì
4		em không trả lời câu hỏi này: Because you did not give the answers).
5		But it seems that you don't know anything about theme and rheme.
6	S	Yes (the student meant 'no')
7	T	That's fine. But you you have some idea about what is old information
8		what is new information in the sentence. For example, in your opinion,
9		the new one is the man ran out of the woods, and the old information is
10		we had seen him at the picnic. Er, this is partially true. In fact, the old
11		information is er the man we had seen at the picnic, is the old, and the
12		new information is the fact that he had ran out of the woods. So this one
13		is the new information. The man we had seen is the old information.
14		(…). And it seems that you know information focus in Vietnamese.
15	S	Yes.

16	T	But you do not understand what it means. For all the other terms like
17		textual patterns, cleft structure, or problem-solution patterns, you have
18		no ideas about. (…). Why do you think that this sentence is not
19		grammatically correct? (.) So in order to make this sentence
20		grammatically correct what would you say?
21	S	I think it's er (.) not correct (?){}. I think the object must be here.
22	T	You think so? But in fact, this sentence is quite correct. We will study
23		about this structure later. This sentence is correct.
24	S	(?){}
25	T	Now questions from number 10 to number 16 involve your writing
26		habits in the English language. And in question number 10 you said that
27		sometimes you delay the introductory sentence further in the
28		introductory paragraph and sometimes you don't. But do you know the
29		meaning of the word delay?
30	S	Trì hoãn (V) (meaning delay in English)
31	T	That's right. Most Asian students, not only Vietnamese students, but you
32		know, Thai students, Chinese students do the same. They tend to delay
33		the introductory sentence further in the introductory paragraph. Can you
34		tell me when you delay the introductory sentence and when you do not
35		delay the introductory sentence in the introductory paragraph?
36	S	I delay the introductory sentence in the introductory paragraph when
37		when (xxx of course) I want I want to (..) uh I want I want to describe
38		the things in the paragraph in (…) in the first sentence and and and I I
39		(xxx wrote) the introductory sentence last (?) the end of the paragraph.
40		But I do not delay the introductory sentence when I want to go go the
41		direct way (?) in the introductory paragraph.
42	T	For question number 11 you say that you always produce the topic
43		sentence of a paragraph. Can you tell me why? That's a very good habit.
44		Can you tell me why?
45	S	The topic sentence is important in paragraph. And and in first year I
46		have learn the way to write paragraph and your teacher (?) the paragraph
47		and you have to write the topic sentence.
48	T	It means that you began writing the topic sentence of the paragraph
49		when you went to university and you did not do that at high school. [I
50		suppose so.
51	S	Yes.]
52	T	For question number 12, you said you usually produce the thesis
53		statement of the essay, not always.
54	S	Yes.
55	T	Er can you tell me why why you do not always produce the thesis
56		statement of the essay. Can you tell me when you do not produce the
57		thesis statement of the essay?
58	S	Because I have learn way to way to produce the essay er not long
59		enough and sometimes I forget thesis statement.
60	T	So when the essay is not a very long essay, you tend to forget to the
61		thesis statement (interviewer misinterpreting informant's idea)
62	S	Yes.
63	T	So if the essay is a long essay, you do produce the thesis statement
64		(interviewer misinterpreting informant's idea).
65	S	Yes. (…)

66	T	And for question number 13 you say when writing up the conclusion
67		sometimes you reinstate the question raised in the introductory
68		paragraph and sometimes you don't. OK, so can you tell me when you
69		produce when you reinstate the problem you raise in the introductory
70		paragraph and when you do not do so.
71	S	Uh I restate uh the (.) question in the introductory paragraph when <u>when</u>
72		<u>essay 's long</u> and I want to I want to I want to <u>mind the reader about the</u>
73		<u>topic I write</u>. But now when sometimes sometimes uh in fact I usually
74		(xxx do not) reinstate the question in the introductory paragraph because
75		I want to <u>expand the topic the other way</u> and and uh I <u>want the reader to</u>
76		<u>think think about think about think about uh about think about uh (.) the</u>
77		<u>conclusion.</u>
78	T	In a different way. For question number 14 you say sometimes you make
79		an outline for the essay and sometimes you don't.
80	S	Yes.
81	T	Can you tell me when you make an outline and when you do not make
82		an outline?
83	S	Actually I <u>I don't have to write an essay long enough to make the outline</u>
84		I just write short about 200 and 300 words so I don't make an outline
85		plan for my essay.
86	T	<u>So you mean if it's a long essay you do make an outline.</u>
87	S	<u>Yes</u>
88	T	Uh and you think that it is the reader who is responsible for
89		understanding the text you have written so the writer isn't responsible
90		for making the text understood to the reader. Tell me why, why it is not
91		the writer who is responsible for making the text well understood but it
92		must be the reader.
93	S	Because <u>my writing skill is not good enough</u> and so <u>I will work harder</u>
94		<u>and and (xxx be) responsible responsible the writer</u> but now <u>I (?) the</u>
95		<u>reader who will (?) my study could understand my essay.</u>
96	T	And for question number 16 you say that sometimes you follow the
97		communicative purpose and the social function of the essay sometimes
98		you do not. Can you tell me when you follow the communicative
99		purpose and the social function of the essay and when you do not do so?
100	S	<u>In fact I quite don't understand (xxx the question).</u>
101	T	The communicative purpose of the essay is what you want the reader to
102		do after you have written the essay for example, to warn to warn about
103		the pollution in Hanoi, to advertise something, to advise somebody to do
104		something, to introduce something (V: đây là chức năng giao tiếp của
105		bài luận, để cảnh báo, để quảng cáo, để giới thiệu, và chức năng xã hội
106		của bài luân, ví dụ chức năng giáo dục: this is the communicative
107		function of the essay, to warn, to advertise, to introduce, and the social
108		function of the essay is for example its educational function).
109		<u>Sometimes.</u>
110	S	But you do not understand the question. (…) Questions from 17 to 22
111	T	are about your reading habits. For question number 17 you say you
112		always set up a goal for your reading and it's a very good habit. Can you
113		tell me why?
114	S	<u>Yes I always set up goal for my reading because I read what I like and (.)</u>
115		<u>so I have set up a goal for my reading to (.) comprehend comprehend the</u>

116		the text or essay or paragraph easy (…)
117	T	And for question number 18 you say you do not look for the cohesive
118		devices in a reading text, but by the way <u>do you know anything about</u>
119		<u>cohesive devices?</u>
120	S	<u>I 've no idea.</u>
121	T	In fact they are words or phrases that combine clauses or sentences
122		together like however, moreover, furthermore. So so now you think you
123		look for or you do not look for them when you are reading a text?
124	S	<u>I do not look for them.</u>
125	T	Can you tell me why?
125	S	<u>When I reading I reading the main idea and I just browse browse the text</u>
127		<u>and I look for the main content of the text.</u>
128	T	It means that you think cohesive devices are not important in helping
129		you to understand the text.
130	S	(.) <u>No, it's I think it's (? important).</u>
131	T	<u>So you think that the devices are important but you do not look for them.</u>
132		<u>Is it because it is your habit in the mother tongue?</u> (..) but, <u>has your</u>
133		<u>English teacher ever taught you about the cohesive devices?</u>
134	S	<u>Yes.</u>
135	T	For question number 19 you say you anticipate the pattern of a reading
136		text. Can you tell me why, what for? You know anticipate? To predict or
137		to guess in advance (V: đoán trước mẫu thức của một bài đọc: predict
138		the pattern of a reading text). For example in the reading comprehension
139		you have some patterns like problem-solution-evaluation, general-
140		specific, or condition-consequence. So you do or you do not anticipate
141		the pattern of a reading text?
142	S	<u>Yes I anticipate the pattern of a reading text.</u> <u>I first I (xxx take) of the</u>
143		<u>type text and I (?) the pattern of a reading text to comprehend the text</u>
144		<u>more easy.</u>
145	T	<u>Have you ever heard of the textual pattern of a text like this before?</u>
146	S	<u>No.</u>
147	T	So this is your reading habit in general. You look for the topic first and
148		then you follow the logical development of the topic. And can you tell
149		me why? Do you ever do this way or you always take this way?
150	S	I take this way <u>when I read quite a long text.</u>
151	T	The second one or the first one?
152	S	The first one.
153	T	The first one. <u>When it's a long text</u>
154	S	<u>Yes. (? And) A story</u>
155	T	<u>A story and a long text.</u> And when you follow the second way?
156	S	<u>When I read newspaper or short story.</u>

B3: Sample interview summary

Learners' meta-knowledge of English information structure (Questions 5 to 9)

- In general, the learner did not have a clear knowledge of EIS.
- He knew nothing about theme and rheme and some information structure-related terms like textual patterns, cleft structure, or problem-solution patterns. However, he could to some extent distinguish the old and new information and he knew the term information focus in Vietnamese though not quite clearly understanding its meaning. He could not judge the grammaticality of some non-canonical sentences (lines 1-22).

Learner's writing strategies

- The learner delayed the introduction when he wanted to say something else (lines 33-38).
- He always wrote topic sentences because he thought they were important and he got instructed about the strategy from his university English teacher (lines 41-46).
- He did not always produce thesis statement because he did not practice writing essays long enough to have the strategy (lines 52-59).
- He reinstated the thesis when the essay was long and when he wanted to remind the reader of the main topic. He did not use the strategy when he wanted the reader himself to think about the conclusion (lines 64-69).
- He made outlines for long essays only (lines 74-77).
- He thought the reader was responsible for understanding his essay because his writing skill was not good enough. (He did not really understand the question) (lines 82-84).
- He sometimes followed the communicative purpose and social function of the essay (he did not really understand the question in the first place) (lines 89 and 96).

Learner's reading strategy

- He always set up goals for his reading because he read what he liked and to understand texts easily.
- He did not look for cohesive devices while reading because he would just look for the content of the text although he knew from his teacher' instruction that cohesive devices were important.
- He anticipated the pattern of a reading text to understand the text better (this sounds contradictory to his claim that he had no meta-knowledge of textual patterns).

Appendix C: Tests

C1: Pre-teaching phase reading test

Time allotted: 40 minutes

Please read the attached passage entitled "Becoming Certified" and answer the following questions

A. *Multiple choice questions*

Answer the following questions by circling the best option

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

    A. How to become a certified support engineer

    B. How to become a Microsoft Certified Professional

    C. How to prepare for Microsoft Certified Professional exams

    D. How to update your qualifications

2. What is the pattern of the whole passage?

    A. Problem-Solution-Evaluation

    B. Denial-Reason-Correction

    C. General-Specific

    D. Condition-Consequence

B. *Short answer questions*

Briefly answer the following questions in the space provided

1. What problem a support engineer might encounter in his/her job?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. What solution he/she might take to solve the problem?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

3. What result he/she might get if he/she takes the solution?

……

……

4. Which qualification would you need to have if you wanted to do each of the following?

   a. Be an operating system expert

……

   b. Troubleshoot systems

……

   c. Teach computing

……

   d. Design business solutions

……

D. True-false answers

Decide whether the following statements are true or false according to what is stated or implied in the text. Indicate your choice by ticking in the appropriate boxes provided.

		True	False
1.	Microsoft offers a large range of certification program to study		
2.	You must get an advanced certificate before you can call yourself a Microsoft Certified Professional		
3.	All Microsoft training courses involve a period of full-time study		
4.	You can decide on the suitability of a course by its title		
5.	Gaining a certificate is likely to make you more attractive to other employers.		
6.	Training yourself to be a certified support engineer is part of the Microsoft Certified Professional training program		

D. Matching Information Questions

Say which of the items in the list a-e matches the items in the following list 1-5. Indicate your answer in the space provided.

1. Not being able to upgrade your certification
2. Requirements for attendants and content
3. Practicing and experience
4. Upgrading your qualification
5. Speed

   a. might be affected by your level of experience
   b. you might stand the chance of losing it
   c. can give you advice about the suitability and effectiveness of the course
   d. Might increase your chance of getting a certification
   e. means your are more attractive to other employers

1.   2.   3.   4.   5.

E. Cloze Test

Fill in each blank with only one most suitable word. Write your answers in the space provided

Holding one of the Microsoft Certified … (1) … can help you step out of your …(2)… boring job in the field of   …(3)… support by making yourself more attractive to potential ….(4)….. In order to take the most …(5)… course for your needs, you should ask yourself several substantial …(6)… concerning the content of the ….(7)…., the pre-requisites for attendants, your present …(8)…, and so on. The next step is to be …(9)…for the exams organized by …(10)…. To do well in the exams, your ….(11)…. is extremely important, so taking some ….(12)…. exams is a praiseworthy idea. However, bear in mind that you need to ….(13)…. your certification if you do not want to see …(14)… falling behind and no longer head-hunted by employers.

1.   2.   3.   4.   5.   6.

7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12.

13. 14.

C2: Post-teaching phase reading test

Time allotted: 40 minutes

Please read the attached passage entitled "Futures" and answer the following questions.

A. *Multiple choice questions*

Answer the following questions by circling the best option

1. What is the discourse pattern of the whole passage?

      A. Problem-Solution

      B. Hypothetical-Real

      C. General-Particular

      D. Claim-Counter claim

2. What is the main idea of the passage?

      A. The electronic revolution in the 21st century

      B. British Telecom (BT)'s innovations in the 20th century

      C. Professor Cochrane's vision of the future of Information Technology (IT)

      D. Some innovations in the field of IT and electronics now and in the future

B. *Short answer questions*

Briefly answer the following questions in the space provided

1. Of what is Professor Cochrane completely convinced?

………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. What is stored in the professor's signet ring?

………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………

3. What is the BT lab developing with artificial intelligent?

………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………

4. What does the professor see as the negative side of the electronic revolution?

....

....

5. What was the result of combining the Internet with TV?

....

....

C. True-false answers

Decide whether the following statements are true or false according to what is stated or implied in the text. Indicate your choice by ticking in the appropriate boxes provided.

		True	False
1.	BT has a lot of new ideas that will astound people.		
2.	Jewellery that can store large amounts of data has started to replace credit cards.		
3.	BT's smart phone can only translate English into one other language at a time.		
4.	Intelligent agents can help users deal with an overload of information.		
5.	Watching TV will be a more active pastime in the future.		
6.	The professor thinks that humanity will be destroyed by very powerful computers in the future.		

D. Matching Information Questions

Say which of the items in the list a-e matches the items in the following list 1-5. Indicate your answer in the space provided

> a. Smart phone
>
> b. Intelligent agent
>
> c. Rocket science

d. Artificial intelligence

e. Real-time

1. Very advanced study

2. A telephone that can translate English into various languages in real-time

3. A computer program that watches, learns and communicates with the user

4. Computer programs that perform tasks that can normally only be done using human intelligence

5. Instantly

1	2	3	4	5

E. Cloze Test

Fill in each blank of the following passage with only one most suitable word. Write your answers in the space provided.

Professor Cochrane is completely ...(1)... that human beings can create revolutions and ...(2)...in almost every aspect of their lives, ...(3)...in the field of electronics and Information Technology. ...(4)..., British Telecom (BT)'s products have proved the ground of his...(5).... A signet ring with a built-in ...(6)... to store data, and artificial ...(7)... are some of the most remarkable examples. All these innovations ... (8)... some people fear that human beings will be ...(9)... by a very powerful computer in the future. However, this fear is discarded by the professor as far-fetched since human beings are ...(10)....

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
6.	7.	8.	9.	10.

C3: Pre-teaching phase writing test

Time allotted: 40 minutes

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

You have been asked to write about the following topic:

> *Some people say that computers have made life easier and more convenient. Other people say that computers have made life more complex and stressful. What is your opinion? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.*

You should write at least 250 words.

………
………
………
………
………

C4: Post-teaching phase writing test

Time allotted: 40 minutes

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

You have been asked to write about the following topic:

> *What changes in the field of electronics and information technology do you think the 21st century will bring to our life? Use examples and details in your answer.*

You should write at least 250 words.

………
………
………
………
………
………

C5: Post-teaching phase meta-linguistic test

Time allotted: 50 minutes

1. Identify the clause type of each of the following sentences. Give your answers in the boxes provided.

	Clause type
1. Every increase in knowledge augments our capacity for evil.	
2. He was really a lawyer.	
3. The police laid the bodies by the side of the road.	
4. His annoyance did not last.	
5. I can't keep my hands warm.	
6. Will you keep me a seat?	
7. I have always lived in this country.	

2. Identify the non-canonical construction of each of the following sentences, saying which information is new in each sentence. Give your answers in the boxes provided.

	Construction	New information
1. His face I'm not fond of.		
2. It must have been his brother that you saw.		
3. So absurd was his manner that everyone stared at him.		
4. What I like about Joan is her sense of humor.		
5. Your method is similar to mine.		
6. All these problems were finally solved.		
7. There, at the summit, stood the castle in its medieval splendor.		

3. Rephrase each of the sentences below, using accepted patterns of subject-verb inversion. Identify the theme/rheme in each of the original and rephrased sentences.

1. We only then realized how much he had suffered.

Theme:

....……

Rheme:

....……

Rephrased sentence:………………………………………………………………..

Theme:

....……

Rheme:

....……

His Majesty the Emperor is now mounting the steps.

Theme:

....……

Rheme:

....……

Rephrased sentence:………………………………………………………………..

Theme:

....……

Rheme:

....……

4. From each of the sentences below form cleft sentences that will focus, in turn, on the different elements given in brackets.

1. Captain Mackay reported this incident to Admiral Gage (S, Od).

S as focus:

....………

Od as focus:

………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. The book took a long time to write because it raised so many difficult questions (A).

A as focus:

....……

5. What is the discourse pattern of the following passage? Identify the discourse elements and discourse relations in each passage.

Most deodorants are effective. The trouble is they don't stay effective long enough. As the day wears on, they wear off. So No. 7 has made a new extra-strength anti-perspirant that lasts longer. It helps keep you dry and fresh as a daisy and you don't have to worry about it wearing off too quickly. It doesn't. No.7's new extra-strength anti-perspirant really works. From first to last.

Discourse pattern:

………………………………………………………………………………………………

Discourse elements:

………………………………………………………………………………………………

Discourse relations:

....……………………

....

6. Combine the following pairs of sentences as to make one sentence. Say what local semantic relationships are held between them.

1a. He's a crook.

1b. I trust him.

Combined sentence:…………………………………………………………………………

Local semantic relationship:…………………………………………………………………

2a. He missed the bus.

2b. He arrived late for work.

Combined sentence:…………………………………………………………………………

Local semantic relationship:………………………………………………………………….

7. What cohesive devices are used in the following paragraph? Support your answers with evidence taken from the passage

Most students start each term with an award cheque. But by the time accommodation and food are paid for, books are bought, trips taken home and a bit of social life lived, it usually looks pretty emaciated.

Cohesive device:

....………………

Evidence:

....………

Cohesive device:

....………………

Evidence:

....………

Appendix D: Syllabus

Unit 1: Sentential level issues of English information structure

Lesson 1: The given/new status of the information exchanged

Part 1: Introduction of information structure

Reading passage: Operating system (Unit 1, students' book)

Task 1: Setting goal for reading (1)

Task 2: Reading pattern (1)

Part 2: The given/new status distinction and the contextual constraints on the given/new status

Reading passage: Programming (Unit 2, student' book)

Task 1: Getting main idea (1)

Task 2: Getting specific information (1)

Writing: Awareness in information distribution with respect to contextualization of presented information

Lesson 2: The sentential ordering the information distributed

This lesson falls into 2 parts.

Part 1: Information distributing principle and tendency

Reading passage: Programming languages (Unit 3, students' book)

Task 1: Getting main idea through scanning (1)

Task 2: Recognizing the semantic implication of cohesive devices (1)

Writing: Awareness in information distributing principles in writing

Part 2: Canonical constructions (7 major clause types) and non-canonical constructions

Reading passage: How is a database different from a spreadsheet? (Unit 4, student' book)

Task 1: Recognizing the semantic relations between a paragraph and the whole text (1)

Writing: Diversifying sentence structure

Unit 2: Discourse-level issues of information structure

Lesson 1: Clause relations and types of clause relations

Reading passage: Graphic design and desktop publishing (Unit 5, student' book)

Task 1: Recognizing the semantic relations between a sentence and the whole text (1)

Task 2: Recognizing the meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions (1)

Writing: Awareness in clause relation types and cohesive devcies in writing

Lesson 2: Textual patterns

Reading passage: Presentation program (Unit 6, student' book)

Task 1: Getting main idea through scanning (2)

Writing: manipulate knowledge of textual pattern in making essay outline

Unit 3: A comparison of English and Vietnamese information structure

Lesson 1: Topic-prominent and subject-prominent language

Reading passage: Multimedia (Unit 7, student' book)

Task 1: Recognizing the meanings imbedded in non-canonical constructions (2)

Task 2: Setting goal for reading (2)

Writing: Awareness in avoiding topic-prominent feautre in writing

Lesson 2: Directness and indirectness

Reading passage: Network topology (Unit 8, student' book)

Task 1: Recognizing the semantic implication of cohesive devices (2)

Task 2: Recognizing the semantic relations between a sentence and the whole text (2)

Writing: Awareness in directness in writing style

Unit 4: Incorporating meta-knowledge of English information structure into reading and writing strategies

Lesson 1: L2 learners' problems in reading and writing

Reading passage: Computer networks (Unit 9, student' book)

Task 1: Recognizing the semantic relations between a paragraph and the whole text (2)

Task 2: Reading patterns (2)

Lesson 2: Suggestions for L2 learners' development of reading and writing skills

Reading passage: Jobs in computing (Unit 10, student' book)

Task 1: Getting main idea (2)

Task 2: Getting specific information (2)

Writing: Incorporating aspects of information structure meta-knowledge into writing strategies

Appendix E: Reading and writing task worksheets and post-task retrospective answer-sheets

E1: Unit 1, lesson 1, part 1

Reading worksheet

Read the following text

Operating system

An operating system controls every aspect of your computer; it's the program that starts your computer during boot up and closes it during shut down. It accepts and interprets your application instructions, allocates the necessary resources, hardware and/or memory, which are needed to carry out those instructions; and ensures that all the resources cooperate to achieve their common goal. It accepts input from all devices including the mouse, keyboard etc. and deals with them accordingly. The tasks of operating system generally fall into six categories, processor management, memory management, storage management, device management, application interface and user interface. Your computer has many resources such as a processor, memory, disk space, a mouse and many others. While many applications may be running at the same time, your operating system manages these resources and ensures that each application gets the resources it needs.

While there are many different types of operating systems, there are generally four types which are categorized based on the types of computers they control, including Real-Time Operating System, Single-User, Single Task Operating System, Single-User, Multi-Tasking Operating System and Multi-User Operating System.

Real-Time Operating System: is used to control machinery, scientific instruments and industrial systems. In an RTOS, there is generally very little user interface and no end-user utilities. This system relies on precise timing and delivers results or actions based on time. In the case of complex machinery, it may also ensure that moving parts move in sync with each other. When timing is an important factor, an RTOS is the way to go!

Single-User, Single Task Operating System: This system is designed so that one user can accomplish one task at a time. It is not capable of multi-tasking. For example, you would not be able to download software while typing a presentation in Word. A good example of a modern SU-ST operating system is a Palm OS.

Single-User, Multi-Tasking Operating System: This type of operating system, which is popular and more commonly found on today's PCs and laptops, allows a single user to perform many tasks at once. A user can have several programs running at the same time. On this system, it is possible for a user to download software while typing a document in Word. Microsoft Windows is a good example of a common and popular SU-MT operating system used today.

Multi-User Operating System: A multi-user operating system allows many users to use the computer's resources simultaneously. The computers resources are shared in an MU OS. It balances the use of these resources among the different users and makes sure allocated resources do not interfere with each other. UNIX and mainframe operating systems are a few examples of multi-user operating systems.

(Adapted from: domanski.cs.csi.cuny.edu)

Task 1: Answer the following questions:

1. What is an operating system?

2. What are today common operating systems?

Task 2: Base on the information in the text, provide questions for the answers given:

1…………………………………………………………………………………………
   - Controls every aspect of your computer.
2…………………………………………………………………………………………
   - Six.
3…………………………………………………………………………………………
   - When timing is an important factor.
4...………………………………………………………………………………………
   - SU-ST O/S does one task at a time while SU-MT O/S performs many tasks at once.
5…………………………………………………………………………………………
   - SU-MT O/S is designed for one user while MT O/S allows many users to use the computer's resources simultaneously.

Post-task answer-sheet

1. Did you set up a goal for your reading the passage?

a. Yes

b. No

2. Which of the following two reading patterns did you follow in your reading?

a. Read the text through from beginning to end first skipping over unfamiliar vocabulary, then look for specific information

b. Scan the text, look for the topic, and follow its logic development

3. Which among the following statements best describes the reading strategy you used in the reading?

    a. You tried to use scanning first to get the main idea and believed that you managed to understand the main idea in that way

    b. You tried to use scanning first but you could not get the main idea and went back to the beginning of the text and did the reading line by line.

E2: Unit 1, lesson 1, part 2

Reading worksheet

Task 1: Below are the five main steps in programming. Match each step with its correct explanatory paragraph.

1. Clarify Programming Needs

2. Design the Program

3. Code the Program

4. Test the Program

5. Document and Maintain

Programming

3

After the program has been designed it must be coded or written. Using the pseudocode and logic requirements from step two, an appropriate programming language must be selected. As stated in the introduction, coding languages differ in specifications and usability. Once the appropriate code language has been chosen, it is imperative that the programmers follow the syntax rules with as little deviation as possible.

5

Documentation should be ongoing from the very beginning because it is needed for those involved with program now and future. Upon completion, User Documentation for commercial use, Operator Documentation for people who run computer systems and Programmer Documentation for programmers charged with maintaining the program are all issued.

1

Knowing the objective is the first consideration. Is it a payroll or editing program? Knowing who the end user will be is also important. Determining the inputs and outputs is next. How will the program operate and what data is needed to make it happen. After this has been decided, feasibility is the next consideration. How many programmers will it take, is the project within budget, does the project have a realistic outline. Finally, if the project is a go, then one must take measures to ensure the project is properly documented and analyzed.

2

Programs use algorithms which are like equations that tell the computer what task to perform. The aim of the programmers is to create algorithms that are clear and simple. Algorithms are expressed first in logical hierarchical form known as modularization. Using modules or (a complete thought), the programmers create a logical thought process for the computer to follow. After that, the program is broken down in greater detail using pseudocode. Pseudocode uses terms like if, else, and, then to relate the programs rules to the computer.

4

Testing the program comes in two phases, alpha and beta. Alpha testing is the process of reading through the program in search of errors in logic. The second step is to run a diagnostic program to search for syntax or input errors. Beta testing involves using the program in the real world to see if it contains any bugs or other deficiencies.

(Adapted from http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Computer_Revolution)

Task 2: *Read the passage again and decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F)*

1. Finance is not a consideration in clarifying programming needs.	
2. The first step in clarifying programming needs is to decide what the program is used for.	
3. Pseudo-code is used to design details.	
4. The job of preparing support documents should be done from the first stage of programming.	

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	5. User Documentation is used after other documents.	

Task 3: Read the following statements and decide which steps (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) the actions belong to.

1	Select the appropriate high-level programming language.	
2	Document the analysis.	
3	Run a diagnostic program to search for syntax or input errors.	
4	Follow the syntax carefully.	
5	Determine the desired outputs.	
6	Write user documentation.	
7	Determine program logic through top down approach and modularization, using hierarchy chart.	
8	Double-check feasibility of implementing the program.	

Task 4: Look back at the text and find words which mean

1. Purpose (Para. 1)
2. Possibility (Para 1)
3. Actions (Para 2)
4. Separated into parts (Para 2)
5. Essential (Para 3)
6. Steps (Para 4)
7. Imperfection (Para 4)

E3: Unit 1, lesson 2, part 1

Reading task work-sheet 1

Task: Scan the text and arrange the following from lower level to higher level

Machine languages, High-level languages, Assembly languages, 4GL, Hardware

What is Programming Language?

1   A programming language is the vocabulary and set of grammatical rules for instructing a computer to perform specific tasks. The term *programming language* usually refers to high-level languages, such as BASIC, C, C++, COBOL, FORTRAN, Ada, and Pascal. Each language has a unique set of keywords (words that it understands) and a special syntax for organizing

5   program instructions.

Lying between machine languages and high-level languages are languages called assembly languages. Assembly languages are similar to machine languages, but they are much easier to program in because they allow a programmer to substitute names for numbers. Machine languages consist of
10   numbers only.

Lying above high-level languages are languages called *fourth-generation languages* (usually abbreviated *4GL*). 4GLs are far removed from machine languages and represent the class of computer languages closest to human languages.
15

Regardless of what language you use, you eventually need to convert your program into machine language so that the computer can understand it. There are two ways to do this: compile the program or interpret the program.

20   The question of which language is best is one that consumes a lot of time and energy among computer professionals. Every language has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, FORTRAN is a particularly good language for processing numerical data, but it does not lend itself very well to organizing large programs. Pascal is very good for writing well-structured and readable programs, but it is not as flexible as the C programming language. C++ embodies powerful object-oriented features, but it is complex and difficult to learn.

The choice of which language to use depends on the type of computer the program is to run on, what sort of program it is, and the expertise of the programmer.

(Adapted from JCU material)

Post-task answer-sheet

Did you consult the cohesive devices while performing the reading task?

a. Yes
b. No

Reading task work-sheet 2

Task: Use the line references given, look back at the text and find the reference for the following words in bold and italics.

1. words that *it* understands (line 4)

2. but *they* are easier to program in (line 8)

3. the computer can understand *it* (line 16)

4. one *that* consumes a lot of time (line 18)

5. but *it* does not lend itself very well (line 20)

6. but *it* is not as flexible as the C programming language (line 22)

7. but it is complex and difficult to learn (line 23)

Post-task answer-sheets

Which among the following best describes your reading process in reading task 1?

1. You scanned the text and you managed to perform the task.

2. You tried scanning the text but you could not perform the task and started reading the text line by line from beginning to end and you managed to perform the task.

3. You tried scanning the text but you could not perform the task and started reading the text line by line from beginning to end but you still could not perform the task.

E4: Unit 1, lesson 2, part 2

Reading task worksheet

The reading passage below mentions five different points between a database and a spreadsheet. Choose the most suitable heading for each numbered paragraph. There are three extra headings.

a. Performance and Capacity	e. Data Entry
b. Data Integrity and Validity	f. Programming
c. Limiting Data View	g. Multiuse
d. Data Redundancy	h. Security

How is a database different from a spreadsheet?

It is very likely that you have already used spreadsheet applications like KSpread, OpenOffice.org Calc or Microsoft Excel. If so, you will probably wonder: since both spreadsheets and databases have tables, why should I use the latter? While comparing spreadsheets and databases you may encounter numerous issues, some of which are introduced below.

(1) A careless spreadsheet user can enter the same data in different ways (i.e Adam and ADAM). Thus, you will not get a full result when you search on a spreadsheet.

Using a database, you can solve this by using the condition required field.

(2) A spreadsheet displays all rows and columns of the table which is bothersome in case of very large data sheets. To limit the data view, database applications offer queries, forms and reports. It is possible if you share only a query and not the whole table.

(3) Spreadsheets containing large data sets may take ages to open. A spreadsheet loads lots of data to the computer's memory while opening. Most of them are probably useless/ unnecessary for you at the moment. Databases, unlike spreadsheets, load data from computer storage only when needed.

(4) A classical way of sharing data saved in a spreadsheet with other person is to send a file as a whole or providing a spreadsheet file in a computer network. This way of work is ineffective for larger groups of users. In a database, on the other hand, locking at a particular table row's level is possible, which enables easy sharing of table data.

(5) If you provide a spreadsheet file in a computer network, whoever is able to copy the file can try to break the password. Databases do not need to be available in a single file. You access them using a computer network by providing a user name and a password. If any data is not available to you, it will not be even sent to your computer, so there is no possibility of making a copy of the data in such easy way as in case of spreadsheet files.

Generally, you should consider using a database if your data collection expands every week. Also, it is advisable in case you create reports and statements for which the table view of a spreadsheet is not suitable. Especially, database is much more effective for you in protecting and sharing information.

Adapted from: http://docs.kde.org/

E5: Unit 2, lesson 1

Reading task work-sheet

Task 1: These sentences have been taken from the reading passage. Choose the most suitable one for each blank.

a.   Computer graphic design enabled designers to instantly see the effects of layout or typography changes without using any ink in the process.

b.   In contrast, desktop publishing is a mechanical process.

c.   The designs are applied to static media as well as electronic media, not always in the completed form.

d.   The elements (including shape, form, texture, line, value, and color) compose the basic vocabulary of visual design.

e.   Graphic designers use desktop publishing software and techniques to create the print materials they envision.

Graphic design and desktop publishing

A. Graphic design is a form of communication using text and/or images to present information. The art of graphic design embraces a range of mental skills and crafts including typography, image development and page layout.

B. Graphic design is applied in communication design and fine art. Like many forms of communication, graphic design often refers to both the process (designing) by which the communication is created, and the products (designs) such as creative solutions, imagery and multimedia compositions. (1) .In commercial art, client edits, technical preparation and mass production are usually required, but usually not considered to be within the scope of graphic design.

C. Common graphic design software applications include Adobe InDesign, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, QuarkXPress, Macromedia Dreamweaver, Macromedia Fireworks and Macromedia Flash.

D. Design elements are the basic tools in every design discipline. (2). Design principles, such as balance, rhythm, emphasis, and unity, constitute the broader structural aspects of the composition.

E. In the mid 1980s, the arrival of desktop publishing and the introduction of software applications such as Adobe Illustrator and Aldus Pagemaker introduced a generation of designers to computer image manipulation and 3D image creation that had previously been unachievable. (3).

F. Graphic design and desktop publishing share so many similarities that people often use the terms interchangeably. In fact, graphic design jobs involve the creative process of coming up with the concepts and ideas and arrangements for visually communicating a specific message. (4). During this process, the designer and the non-designer use to turn their ideas for newsletters, brochures, ads, posters, greeting cards, and other projects into digital files for desktop or commercial printing. While desktop publishing does require a certain amount of creativity, it is more production-oriented than design-oriented.

G. (5). The computer and desktop publishing software also aids in the creative process by allowing the designer to easily try out various page layouts, fonts, colours, and other elements.

Adapted from http://desktoppub.about.com/

Task 2: The following sentences are taken from several passages in your student's book and further reading book. What is the focus of information in each of the following sentences?

1. Lying between machine languages and high-level languages are languages called assembly languages.

2. For instance, a patient with chronic headaches had not been treated successfully by several doctors.

3. There's a term for this model of software development; it's called Open Source (see www.opensource.org/ for more information).

4. There are several techniques for achieving this, the most obvious being for the processor to write directly to both the cache and main memory at the same time.

5. But it is the more dramatic innovations such as speech recognition that are poised to shake up interface design.

6. What is more likely is being able to change the color of the car each day, or to use slowly changing patterns.

E6: Unit 2, lesson 2

Reading task

Reading task 1: Scan the text and answer the following question:

Which is NOT the main function of a presentation program?

          1. A text editor

          2. A graphic manipulating method

          3. A spreadsheet creator

          4. A slide-show system

Presentation programs

[1] A presentation program is a computer software package used to display information, normally in the form of a slide show. It typically includes three major functions: an editor that allows text to be inserted and formatted, a method for inserting and manipulating graphic images and a slide-show system to display the content.

[2] There are many different types of presentations including professional (work-related), education, worship and for general communication. Presentation programs can either supplement or replace the use of older visual aid technology, such as

Pamphlets, handouts, chalk boards, flip charts, posters, slides and overhead transparencies. Text, graphics, movies, and other objects are positioned on individual pages or "slides" or "foils". The "slide" analogy is a reference to the slide projector, a device which has become somewhat obsolete due to the use of presentation software. Slides can be printed, or (more usually) displayed on screen and navigated through at the command of the presenter. Transitions between slides can be animated in a variety of ways, as can the emergence of elements on a slide itself.

[3] The most commonly known presentation program is Microsoft PowerPoint, although there are alternatives such as OpenOffice.org Impress and Apple's Keynote.

[4] Many presentation programs come with pre-designed images (clip art) and/or have the ability to import graphic images. Custom graphics can also be created in other programs such as Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator and then imported.

[5] Similar to programming extensions for an operating system or web browser, "add ons" or plug-ins for presentation programs can be used to enhance their capabilities. For example, it would be useful to export a PowerPoint presentation as a Flash animation or PDF document. This would make delivery through removable media or sharing over the Internet easier. Since PDF files are designed to be shared regardless of platform and most web browsers already have the plug-in to view Flash files, these formats would allow presentations to be more widely accessible.

[6] Certain presentation programs also offer an interactive integrated hardware element designed to engage an audience (e.g. audience response systems) or facilitate presentations across different geographical locations (e.g. web conferencing). Other integrated hardware devices ease the job of a live presenter such as laser pointers and interactive whiteboards.

(Adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org)

Post-task answer-sheets

Which among the following best describes your reading process in reading task 1?

1. You scanned the text and you managed to perform the task.

2. You tried scanning the text but you could not perform the task and started reading the text line by line from beginning to end and you managed to perform the task.

3. You tried scanning the text but you could not perform the task and started reading the text line by line from beginning to end but you still could not perform the task.

E7: Unit 3, lesson 1

Reading task worksheet

Read the following passage

Multimedia

[1] Sine 1965, multimedia has become a generic term for "multimedia computing" or "interactive multimedia". The computer and its software are used to control and navigate through the communications medium, not only one at the time, but several simultaneously which simulates the real-world and presents unique and innovative opportunities to captivate human senses. Computer systems are most developed in using vision and hearing to interface between the digital and analogue worlds, e.g. still and moving images, text and graphics use the visual senses, audio uses hearing. Generally, "Multimedia" is defined as visual, audio and textual information which can be presented separately or simultaneously to convey and present information interactively to users. Multimedia is now possible because it is technically easy to digitise the analogue forms of these common media and handle them by computers which are easily available and which are small enough to be used on the desktop.

[2] By definition, modern multimedia has typically meant one of the following: **(i)** Text and sound; **(ii)** Text, sound, and still or animated graphic images; **(iii)** Text, sound, and video images; **(iv)** Video and sound; **(v)** Multiple display areas, images, or presentations presented concurrently; and **(vi)** In live situations, the use of a speaker or actors together with sound, images, and motion video.

[3] Multimedia may be broadly divided into linear and non-linear categories. Linear active content progresses without any navigation control for the viewer such as a cinema presentation. Non-linear content offers user interactivity to control progress as used with a computer game or used in self-paced computer based training. Non-linear content is also known as hypermedia content.

[4] Multimedia can arguably be distinguished from traditional motion pictures or movies both by the scale of the production (multimedia is usually smaller and less expensive) and by the possibility of audience interactivity or involvement (in which case, it is usually called interactive multimedia). Interactive elements can include: voice command, mouse manipulation, text entry, touch screen, video capture of the user, or live participation (in live presentations).

[5] Multimedia tends to imply sophistication (and relatively more expense) in both production and presentation than the simplicity of text-and-images. Multimedia presentations are possible in many contexts, including the Web, CD-ROMs, and live theatre. A rule-of-thumb (for the minimum development cost of a packaged multimedia production with video for commercial presentation, as at trade shows) is: $1,000 a minute of presentation time. Since any Web site can be viewed as a multimedia presentation, however, any tool that helps develop a site in multimedia form can be classed as multimedia software and the cost can be less than for standard video productions.

Task 1: Base on the text, provide questions for the following answers.

1.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

       - To interface between the digital and analogue worlds

2.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

       - Separately and simultaneously

3.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

       - Linear and non-linear

4.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

       - By the scale of the production and the possibility of audience interactivity or involvement

5.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

       - $1,000 a minute of presentation time.

Task 2: The following sentences are taken from several passages in your student's book and further reading book. What is the focus of information in each of the following sentences?

1. Between the applications software and the hardware is a software interface-an operating system.
2. In commercial art, client edits, technical preparation and mass production are usually required, but usually not considered to be within the scope of graphic design.
3. Then there is the problem of interference, if a neighbor is using the same channel, and security.
4. There is a noticeable positive feedback loop in technology development, with each generation of improved computers giving us more assistance in the design and development of the next.
5. What I like about it is my books are available all over the world.

6. But usually it's the retailers, not the buyers, who get done by people using fake or stolen cards.

Post-task answer-sheet

Did you set up a goal for your reading the passage in task 1?

  b. Yes

  c. No

E8: Unit 3: lesson 2

Reading task worksheet 1

*Task: **Choose the best position A, B, C, or D to indicate where the following sentences can be added to paragraph 1, 2, and 3.***

1. When you are connecting computers in networks using networking devices, a variety of topologies can be used.
2. One advantage of a star network is it is easy to be expandable.
3. Also, the number of nodes supported by the bus can affect network performance.

Network topologies

[1] (A). A network is basically all of the components (hardware and software) involved in connecting computers over small and large distances. **(B)**. Topology refers to the shape of a network, or the network's layout. **(C)**. How different nodes in a network are connected to each other and how they communicate are determined by the network's topology. **(D)**.

[2] Star networks are one of the most common computer network topologies. **(A)**. A star network stretches out in different directions from a central location which is occupied by physical equipment known as a hub. **(B)**. The hub itself can participate actively in the network by boosting signals as they pass through, or it can be a passive wiring panel that simply relays transmissions through the network. **(C)**. In addition, because the cabling in a star network extends from hub to nodes, problems are easier to isolate, and a break in the cable brings down only the node directly affected by that cable. **(D)**. However, if the network depends on a single hub, a breakdown in that hub does, of course, affect the entire network.

[3] A bus network is a network architecture in which a set of clients are connected via a shared communications line, called a bus or the backbone. **(A)**. Each message is broadcast, along with the recipient's unique network address, to the entire community, but only the node to which the message is sent can actually intercept and read it.

Transmissions are limited to one computer at a time, so at any given time, one computer is master of the network and any other one wanting to transmit must wait until the line is free. **(B)**. Bus networks are easy to implement and require less cabling than other topologies. However, a break in the backbone means a breakdown in the entire network. **(C)**. Too many nodes would slow the network, because the nodes must wait for longer periods before being able to transmit over an open line. **(D)**.

[4] A ring network is a topology of computer networks where each node is connected to two other nodes, so as to create a ring. To avoid conflict, ring networks typically rely on a well-known method of transmission called token passing, which resembles a relay in that the computers pass a token, a small collection of bits, around the ring. When a node has some information to transmit, it waits until it receives the token. It then modifies the token, say, "stamping" it to inform the other nodes that the token is in use, and then passes the token and its message along to the next node in line. When the token (and message) arrive at the recipient, that node acknowledges receipt of the message and creates a new, available-for-use token, which it then sends on its merry way around the ring.

[5] In a mesh network, every node has a connection to every other node in the network. This network is fault tolerant, i.e. it allows communication to continue in the event of a break in any connection. However, disadvantages are quite many as such a network is expensive to set up and difficult to manage or troubleshoot.

(Adapted from http://microsoft.com/technet and http://webopedia.com)

Post-task answer-sheet

Did you consult the cohesive devices while performing the reading task?

    c. Yes

    d. No

Reading task worksheet 2

Task: *Find references for the bold words from the text*

1. **which** is occupied by physical equipment (Para. 1)
2. in **which** a set of clients are connected (Para. 3)
3. only the node to **which** the message is sent (Para. 3)
4. can actually intercept and read **it.** (Para. 3)
5. and any other **one** wanting to transmit. (Para. 3)
6. **where** each node is connected (Para. 4)
7. **which** resembles a relay in that the computers pass (Para. 4)
8. "stamping" **it** to inform (Para. 4)
9. the token and **its** message along (Para. 4)

10. **which** it then sends (Para. 4)

E9: Unit 4, lesson 1

Reading task worksheet

Task 1: Choose the most suitable heading for each paragraph from the list below. There are two extra headings.

A. Internet understanding
B. What networks are and their uses
C. The differences between the Internet and the World Wide Web
D. Different Networks
E. Basic information of the World Wide Web
F. LANs and WANs

Computer networks

| 1 | B |

Computer networks consists of computers linked by communication lines and software protocols, enabling users to share expensive devices, such as printers, as well as data. They are also being used for ever increasingly diverse tasks such as carrying email, or chat sessions, and file transfer, supporting e-commerce, e-learning, and providing access to public databases.

| 2 | F |

Networks come in many types but the most common are LANs and WANs. The former is a computer network that spans a relatively small geographical area such as a single building or group of buildings. However, one LAN can be connected to other ones over any distance via telephone lines and radio waves. A system of LANs connected in this way is called a wide-area network (WAN). The largest WAN in existence is the Internet.

| 3 | A |

Contrary to some common usage, the Internet and the World Wide Web are not synonymous or the same. The *Internet* is a massive network of networks linked by copper wires, fiber-optic cables, wireless connections, etc., or a network infrastructure. It connects millions of microcomputers together globally, forming a network in which any computer can communicate with any other computers as long as they are both connected to the Internet. Information that travels over the Internet does so via packet switching and a variety of languages known as protocols.

| 4 | E |

The *World Wide Web*, or simply *Web*, is a way of accessing information over the medium of the Internet. It is an information-sharing model that is built on top of the Internet. The Web uses the HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) protocol, only one of the languages spoken over the Internet, to transmit data. Web services, which use HTTP to allow applications to communicate in order to exchange business logic, use the Web to share information. The Web also utilizes browsers, such as Internet Explorer or Netscape, to access Web documents called Web pages that are linked to each other via hyperlinks. Web documents also include graphics, sounds, text and video. The Web is just one of the ways that information can be disseminated over the Internet. The Internet, not the Web, is also used for e-mail, which relies on SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol), Usenet news groups, instant messaging and FTP (File Transfer Protocol). So the Web is just a segment of the Internet, albeit a large segment, but the two terms are not synonymous and should not be confused.

(Adapted from www.wlaf.lib.in.us/Internetwhat)

Post-task answer-sheet

1. Please could you tell us which of the following two reading patterns did you follow in your reading?

> a. Read the text through from beginning to end first skipping over unfamiliar vocabulary, then look for specific information

> b. Scan the text, look for the topic, and follow its logic development

2. Which among the following statements best describes the reading strategy you used in the reading?

> a. You tried to use scanning first to get the main idea and believed that you managed to understand the main idea in that way

> b. You tried to use scanning first but you could not get the main idea and went back to the beginning of the text and did the reading line by line.

E10: Unit 4, lesson 2

Post-writing task answer-sheet

Did you pay attention to the global aspects of the essay such as its communicative purpose and social functions while writing the essay?

a. Yes

b. No

Appendix F: Summary of Field Trip Diaries: Monday February 25th to Friday May 2nd 2008

Week 1: Monday February 25th to Friday February 29th

- Contacted Head of the Faculty of ESP, Head of the IT teaching group, and the two colleagues who were in charge of the two learner groups

- Arranged the schedule and timetable

- Got information about the two groups

The Head of the Faculty of ESP, the Head of the IT teaching group, and the two colleagues were willing to help me carry out the project. The Head of IT teaching group informed that the students would have their mid-term exam in four skills by the end of March. The two colleagues said that learners of both groups were eager to take part in the project. Learners of Group 2 (considered to be of lower level of proficiency), in their opinion, were more enthusiastic in class. They were more actively engaged in classroom activities. Students of the other group were better in their general English but were rather reluctant to take part in class activities.

Week 2: Monday March 3rd to Saturday March 8th

Monday 3rd March: First meeting with group 1 learners

Tuesday 4th March: First meeting with group 2 learners

Wednesday 5th to Saturday 8th: Interviews

Introducing the project

Prior to the session, the students had been informed of my teaching them for a period of 2 months. Many students seemed excited when I told them that the aim of the project was to develop their reading and writing skills. Most students were eager to take part in the project. Some asked me about the term information structure and I gave them a short description of the term and what it involved. However, it seemed that the term was still vague to them.

Having the informed consent signed

Three students were worried that their participation in the project might affect their time dedicated to their major studies. I told them that their participation as clearly stated in the

informed consent was absolutely voluntary but suggested that attending the lessons might be beneficial for their skill development. One of them did not sign the form. However, this student still attended all the lessons.

Carrying out the pre-teaching phase questionnaire

Most students left the sections involving their meta-knowledge of information structure unanswered. They seemed quite interested in the two sections involving their reading and writing strategies.

Administering the pre-teaching phase reading and writing tests

Before running the tests, I informed the students that the test results would not be taken into their end-of-term overall marks and that my aim was to find out their current reading and writing ability. However, all of them were serious in taking the tests.

The interviews

8 sessions of interviews were administered in an informal atmosphere. Learners of Group 1 in general were better at expressing their ideas in English. Most of them could justify their responses to the questions involving their reading and writing strategies. More learners of Group 2 showed that they were not quite sure of their responses in the questionnaire. I felt that some of them had selected options in the questionnaire that they thought might please us, particularly with questions involving their reading and writing strategies. Some learners of both groups seemed annoyed when I code-switched into Vietnamese.

Week 3: Monday 10th (Group 1) and Tuesday 11th (Group 2): Unit 1, lesson 1, part 1: Introduction of English information structure

In this part of the lesson, learners were introduced to the term of information structure, what the term involves, and how meta-knowledge of information structure might help them develop their reading and writing skills, and communicative language ability. To my satisfaction, learners of both groups were very eager to explore the term. In general, more learners of the second group showed difficulty in understanding the term and required more explanations from the teacher. Some weaker students in the first group had the same struggle with understanding the term. After being given explanations, they seemed to understand the term better and showed more interest in the term by asking us questions about information distribution and the shared knowledge between writers and readers. Some of them found the

idea of how to distribute information relevantly and resorting to the shared knowledge between the readers and the writers very interesting because as they admitted, when engaged in a piece of writing, they did not often think about the readers and what the potential readers might know or not know about the topic they were delivering. Some reported that they had started thinking about changing their strategies of writing by paying more attention to how the information should be best distributed and by filtering the information they were going to present so that they could make themselves better understood by the readers. In general, learners associated the definition more with their writing than with their reading.

V, the student who got 7.5 in IELTS, seemed very competent in explaining the term on his own. He did show his first understanding of information structure by saying what was old and what was new information in the definition. In the discussion, he sounded very clear when explaining the term to other students in the group.

Wednesday 12ᵗʰ (Group 1) and Thursday 13ᵗʰ (Group 2): Unit 1, lesson1, part 2: The given/new status distinction and the contextual constraints on the given/new status

In this part of the lesson, learners were introduced to the concepts of given and new status of information in the sentence and related issues such as the relativity of the status. The concepts of theme/rheme and the distinction between theme/rheme and givenness/newness were then presented to help learners understand more about the distribution of the new and the given in a specific contextualised sentence in relation to the theme/rheme framework. Learners were also supposed to realize the importance of context in assigning the given/new status of information. Related issues such as shared knowledge between interlocutors, prior discourse, and cataphoric links were also explored to help learners understand more about the dependency of the given/new status of information in a sentence on the context in which it occurs.

The learners seemed having no difficulty understanding the terms given and new information. I could feel their enthusiasm while discussing the terms in groups. However, many of them (even the more competent including the student who got 7.5 in IELTS) seemed to struggle with the terms theme and rheme and the difference between given/new and theme/rheme distinction. Some of them said: 'It's difficult', 'I still don't understand'. I still realized obvious looks of grimace on many faces even when we were explaining the terms in Vietnamese.

Week 4: Monday 17th (Group 1) and Tuesday 18th (Group 2): Unit 1, lesson 2, part 1: Information distributing principle and tendency

In this part of the lesson, learners were introduced to the principles and tendencies of distributing information in the sentence: the principle of end-weight and end-focus, communicative dynamism, and non-canonical constructions. In general, it seemed that they understood more about the principle of end –weight and the introduction of non-canonical constructions. Some of them said they did not quite understand the CD rank.

Wednesday 19th (Group 1) and Thursday 20th (Group 2): Unit 1, lesson 2, part 2: Canonical constructions (7 major clause types) and non-canonical constructions

In this part of the lesson, learners had the opportunity to explore the canonical constructions (the 7 major clause types) as well as the con-canonical constructions in English. Due to its massive content load, the students were strongly encouraged to take time exploring each construction in pairs or groups.

In terms of canonical constructions, many of them said that some patterns were new to them, like SVC, and that they found it difficult to distinguish between C (complement) and O (object). Some of the weaker students were still confused of this difference after the explanations were given. All of the students of both groups were eager to do the two exercises aimed at helping them to be able to recognize the clause patterns. Some of them still could not distinguish between SVO and SVC in the meta-linguistic exercises. With respect to non-canonical constructions, most of them found it quite interesting when for the first time they got to know the pragmatic reasons for using a specific construction like fronting, passivization, cleft structure, inversion, existential there- and presentational there-sentences in terms of the given-new constraints of information. Many learners found the fronting very interesting to know because it is very much like the topic-prominent feature of the Vietnamese language. However, some learners found that such non-canonical constructions as left-dislocation and right-dislocation quite new to them and they seemed not very interested in them because they had never used the constructions before and said that they would not think they would use them in their writing. Some learners complained that the lesson was overwhelming and that they had to struggle in order to understand the explanations of the given-new distribution.

In the writing section, learners were asked to write an essay with emphatic requirement on its diversification in terms of clause patterns used. Some learners were very good at using one or

more of the constructions and could justify the reasons for their usage. Some tended to abuse some constructions like fronting when they could not explain the reason for their usage saying that they used the construction just because they thought it would help to diversify the style of their essays. Some learners asked whether they could do the writing at home. However, we strongly recommended them to perform the task in class.

In the reading section, the students were very keen on a task in which they were expected to recognize as many as possible the clause patterns and non-canonical constructions in a reading passage. Most of them were very pleased when they got the chance to analyze the given/new distribution in those sentences and seemed very happy when they found out and could explain the reasons why the writers used such constructions.

Week 5: Monday 24th (Group 1) and Tuesday 25th (Group 2): Unit 2, lesson 1: Clause relations and types of clause relations

Learners were expected to grasp the concept of clause relations and types of clause relations to assist them in approaching their reading and writing from a global view of text. Their role of interpreting the relation of clauses in comprehending and constructing text at discourse level was emphasized.

This was one of the most successful lessons when all of the learners showed obvious eagerness in exploring the terms, especially cohesive devices. Many seemed happy when they understood more about the cohesive devices which they thought would help them to a great extent in their reading and writing. Some learners said that they found the section about clause relations useful and applicable to their skill development. The students of the second group seemed more interested in the lesson than those of the first group, particularly some of the better students who said they had got to know some of the semantic implications of the cohesive devices. Their eagerness went on with the exercises when they arduously discussed the cohesive devises used in the given paragraphs.

In the reading activity, the students were asked to perform a reading task in which they were expected to manipulate their meta-knowledge of clause relations to find out the semantic relations existing in the reading passage and how this finding or understanding might help them with the reading comprehension. Most learners enjoyed this part of the lesson and were deeply engaged in the activities. In the writing task, priority was given to learners' usage of clause relation signals in their writing. Most learners enjoyed this part of the lesson and were deeply engaged in the activities.

Wednesday 26th (Group 1) and Thursday 27th (Group 2): Unit 2, lesson 2: Textual patterns

In general I believe that this was one of the most successful lessons of my teaching. The lesson involved many activities learners might be engaged in using knowledge of textual patterns in reading and writing skill development. Most learners were very pleased when they could understand what textual patterns were and how they could help them understand the text better. In the follow-up tasks in which they were asked to find out the textual patterns of some given passages, the students in both groups showed clear enthusiasm in solving the problems together and the discussion went on in a very cooperative manner. Some learners were really pleased when recognizing the patterns of some passages and said that this recognition really helped them understand the passages better.

In the skill-developing phase, learners were asked to do one reading and one writing task in which their focused job was to recognize the textual pattern of the text and see if this could help them understand the text more easily. In the writing task, they were require to make it clear their textual pattern of the essay by thinking of the topic and deciding on the most appropriate pattern for the essay. Most of the learners were extremely happy with the tasks and said that they were eager to use the knowledge gained in the meta-linguistic phase into these activities. All of them showed real enthusiasm while trying to find out the patterns of the given passages and most of them succeeded in doing so and were very pleased when they knew that their answers were right.

Week 6: Monday 31st March (Group 1) and Tuesday 1st April (Group 2): Revision for mid-term progress tests (administered by the Faculty of ESP)

Wednesday 2nd (Group 1) and Thursday 3rd (Group 2): Mid-term progress tests (administered by the Faculty of ESP)

Week 7: Monday 7th (Group 1) and Tuesday 8th (group 2): Unit 3, lesson 1: Topic-prominent and subject-prominent language

In this lesson, learners' awareness was drawn towards the fact that Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language whereas English is a subject prominent language. My aim in giving learners this lesson was to raise their awareness of avoiding creating infelicitous topic-prominent sentences in writing, a tendency that I assumed to be phenomenal among Vietnamese learners of English as the result of the transfer of their L1 topic-prominent feature into their L2 writing.

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Learners found it interesting when they got to know this difference in information structure between the two languages. Most learners agreed on their indirectness in stating the thesis or topic or supporting the main idea. As far as the topic-prominent features, most of them said that they would tend to topicalize in their speaking not in their writing.

Wednesday 9th (Group 1) and Thursday 10th (Group 2): Unit 3, lesson 2: Directness in English and indirectness in Vietnamese writing style

In the lesson, learners had a chance to argue my statement in the meta-linguistic phase about the directness in English writing style and the indirectness in L2 writing style. Learners found it interesting when they got to know this difference in information structure between the two languages. Most learners agreed on their indirectness in stating the thesis or topic or supporting the main idea.

In the writing activity, learners were asked to do a writing task in which they were warned not to 'beat about the bush' the topic, the thesis and the development of the essay. Most of the students showed obvious attempt in not "beating about the bush" especially in the introductory paragraph. Some students took it too far and went so directly into the thesis statement.

Week 8: Monday 14th (Group 1) and Tuesday 15th and (Group 2): Unit 4, lesson 1: L2 learners' problems in reading and writing

In this lesson, learners had a chance to discuss the problems related to their meta-knowledge of English information structure they might encounter in reading and writing. Most learners showed agreement with our statements of the differences in L1 and L2 learners' reading and writing strategies and admitted that they found themselves using the strategies ascribed to L2 writers or readers. Some of them said they would try to get rid of the negative practices though knowing that it might take some time before they could.

Wednesday 16th (Group 1) and Thursday 17th (Group 2): Unit 4, lesson 2: Suggestions for L2 learners' development of reading and writing skills

Learners were given suggestions for the development of their reading and writing skills. The lesson went on in a very cooperative atmosphere. The students were asked to work in pairs or groups of three and go through discussing all the suggestions for the development of their reading and writing skills. Most of the students got really involved in the discussions in which they were expected to reveal their attitudes as whether or not they thought the suggestions relevant to their needs and strategies and above all whether or not the suggestions

would help them in their skill development. Many of the learners said they found the suggestions useful and beneficial to their reading and writing. Some seemed not so enthusiastic with one or two of the suggestions which they thought hard to follow and irrelevant to L2 learners like them. In summary, most of the suggestions were highly appreciated by the learners who said would adopt them in their reading and writing activities. Among the most obviously adopted suggestion was the textual pattern anticipating in the reading and the introduction reinstating in the writing.

Week 9: Monday 21st (Group 1); Tuesday 22nd (Group 2): Revision

This was an opportunity for the learners to revise what they had studied. Many of them put up questions to clarify some aspects of the meta-linguistic lessons.

Wednesday 23rd (Group 1) and Thursday 25th (group 2): Post-teaching phase questionnaire

Learners answered in the questionnaire seriously.

Week 10: Monday 28th (Group 1) and Tuesday 29th (Group 2): Post-teaching phase test (reading, writing, and meta-linguistic)

Learners did the test very seriously. They had been informed that the tests would be taken into their end-of term overall marks.

Appendix G: Informed Consent

University of Southampton

School of Humanities⎪Modern Languages

Informed Consent

Consent form to participate in the project "**Strategies to Enhance the Understanding of English Information Structure among Vietnamese Learners of English**"

I, the participant, agree to take part in the project stated above, conducted by Tuan Anh Huynh, the researcher, doctoral student of Modern Languages, School of Humanities, University of Southampton, the UK.

I have been informed of and therefore have fully understood the following terms and conditions concerning my participation, my rights and the concessions made between me and the researcher:

1. My participation is devoted on absolutely voluntary basis and I, therefore, have the right to withdraw from the project anytime if I wish to and for whatever reason.

2. My participation will involve doing two reading tests, two writing tests, four immediate recalls, two interviews, and two questionnaires. The time and venues for the events are as negotiated with the researcher.

3. I agree for the immediate recalls and the interviews to be audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed. I also give the researcher permission to use my opinion and all the other information as appearing in the recorded data as well as the information in the questionnaire, the results of the reading and writing tests, *but only and exclusively for research purposes*.

4. The researcher guarantees, thereby taking responsible for, the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected from me. A pseudonym will be used for my nomination and authentic names of key places such as my educational institution will be omitted. However, some elements of my identity such as my academic

background, which are relevant to the aforementioned study, are permitted to appear as they are in the data.

5. I have the right to ask for a copy of the transcription of any immediate recalls or interviews if I consider it necessary.

6. I am not going to receive any monetary reward for my participation in the project.

7. I have the right to make a formal complaint if I realize that the study has been conducted in violation of the ethical principles described in the information sheet the researcher has provided me with and all the terms, conditions and commitment having been made in this consent form.

Participant's name:………………………………………………………………………………

(signature)……………………….…. (date)…………………………………………………………

University of Southampton

School of Humanities│Modern Languages

Tuan Anh Huynh, PG student

Email: ath@soton.ac.uk

The participant in the project '**A cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching English information structure for the development of communicative language ability among learners of English as a second language'**

March 3rd, 2008

Dear participant,

I am currently carrying out empirical research into the effectiveness of a cognitive meta-linguistic approach to teaching English information structure for the development of communicative language ability among learners of English as a second language as realized in the two skills of reading and writing. For this purpose, I would like you to read through the attached informed consent and show your agreement to taking part in the project by kindly signing the consent form.

For further information about the project or any other enquiries, please contact:

Researcher: Tuan Anh Huynh

Email: ath@soton.ac.uk

Mobile: 0084-(0)976245424/0044-(0)7737737092

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Appendix H: Teaching materials

H1: Pedagogic treatment of English information structure (Meta-linguistic lessons)

Unit 1: Sentential level issues of English information structure

Lesson 1: The given/new status of the information exchanged

Part 1: Introduction of information structure
Definition of information structure

Language users engaged in an act of communication in particular or in the whole process of discourse in general in order to express or negotiate their ideas and beliefs have to make myriads of decisions in terms of both intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic constraints if they wish to assure the success of the communication. Among the many decisions that language users have to make and which may determine their effectiveness as discourse participants is how they distribute information in a message. Information distribution, together with information exchange and processing, is known as information structure. The term can be briefly described as follows:

> Information structure 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, 1998; Richards et al., 1992; and Quirk et al., 1985)

Fundamental issues of English information structure

The definition above reveals the following four fundamental issues in the field of information structure:

The order in which information is distributed in the sentence

Pragmatically, how information is distributed is important in that it may affect the newsworthiness status of the information, directing the hearer/reader to the highpoint of the message. On the whole, information distribution in English is constrained by three principles and tendencies: the principle of end-weight and end-focus, communicative dynamism and non-canonical constructions.

Principle of end-weight and end-focus

The principle of end-weight and end-focus generally stipulates that clausal or sentential units bearing the most important information should be postponed towards the end of the clause or sentence for communication to be achieved effectively (Quirk, et al., 1985), for example, in the sentence, 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian' (McCarthy, 1991: 51), 'the Guardian' is intended by the speaker to be the most important information for the listener.

Communicative dynamism (CD)

In Richards (1992), and Quirk, et al. (1985), Communicative Dynamism (CD) is the semantic contribution of each major element in a sentence and rated with respect to the dynamic role it plays in communication. Normally, speakers/writers process the information in a message so as to achieve a linear presentation from low to high information value, which is related to the principle of end-focus. This value is contextually dependent and highlighted by some phonological devices such as stress and intonation in spoken discourse and by word order in written discourse. In a declarative clause, a syntactic unit bearing new information (normally final-positioned in the clause) has the most communicative dynamism. In the example 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian', 'sometimes' is lowest, and 'the Guardian' is highest in information value as intended by the speaker's linear presentation.

Non-canonical constructions

Parallel to these two principles and tendencies are some constructions such as fronting or right-dislocation in which some items of information are dislocated from their normal position towards either the initial or final position of the sentence to perform a certain pragmatic function like linking with previous discourse or compensating for unclear information, as illustrated in the following two examples:

> *The cheese* they sold mainly to the miners (Brown, 1983:322).

In the above example, 'the cheese', which normally occupies post-verbal position, is pushed to the sentential initial position to provide a link with previous discourse, the construction thus being termed 'fronting'.

> She reads the Guardian, Joyce (McCarthy, 1991: 52).

In this sentence, 'Joyce' is pushed towards the end of the sentence after being substituted by the pronominal subject 'she'. 'Joyce' is said to be right dislocated, and the construction is termed 'right-dislocation'. The function of 'Joyce' in this position is to compensate for the

pronominal subject which the speaker, in his or her afterthought, believes to be unclear to the listener.

Non-canonical constructions are highly contextually dependent.

The given/new status distinction and the contextual constraints on the given/new status

Givenness-newness distinction

According to Kuno (1978: 282-283), 'an element in a sentence represents old, predictable information if it is recoverable from the preceding context; if it is not recoverable, it represents new, unpredictable information.' In the example 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian', 'Joyce' is given information, whereas 'the Guardian' is new (as assumed by the speaker.)

Given-new and theme-rheme

Speakers tend to start a conversation with something new in their mind (potentially becoming the rheme) which they wish to communicate and they use the theme as the 'point of departure' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:64). In the example 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian', 'Joyce' is the theme, and part or the whole of the rest of the sentence is the rheme (depending on the context, e.g., whether and how much the listener has got to know the other information). It is the speaker who assigns the theme/rheme distinction, and the listener who sees which information is given, and which is new, i.e., Theme and rheme are speaker-oriented whereas given and new are listener-oriented.

Syntactical devices as information status indicators

In English, devices utilized to encode information and indicate its saliency status can be phonological or syntactical or a mixture of both. Relevant phonological units are stress placement and intonation, which are used to imply that information is new or given by giving some contrast with one word being stressed and not the other (Richards et al., 1992). Syntactical devices include canonical and non-canonical constructions (Quirk et al., 1985; Ward and Birner, 2001).

Contextual constraints on given-new status

Whether an item should be treated as given or new is constrained by the context in which it occurs. Prior discourse and cataphoric links are strong clues for status and they are especially important when the borderline of the given-new status is blurred. Furthermore, much of this

distinction depends on the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. Haviland and Clark (1974) propose that when speaker and listener expectations match with respect to the identification of given and new information, communication occurs most expeditiously. In order for this to occur, interlocutors are supposed to make an implicit agreement in which the speakers are committed to refer to information they believe the listeners can uniquely identify from their background knowledge as given information and to refer to information they believe to be true but new to the listeners as new information.

The role of meta-knowledge of information structure in developing L2 learners' reading and writing skills, and communicative language ability

Having this knowledge, L2 learners might realize the reasons underlying the information distribution in academic texts, which helps them have a better understanding of the texts. The knowledge is also hoped to raise their awareness of the responsibility to construct information in a way most reader-friendly.

Part 2: The given/new status distinction and the contextual constraints on the given/new status

Givenness-newness distinction

The distinction between givenness and newness with regard to the status of information depends on either its recoverability or predictability or both. According to Kuno (1978: 282-283), 'an element in a sentence represents old, predictable information if it is recoverable from the preceding context; if it is not recoverable, it represents new, unpredictable information.' Prince (1981: 226) claimed if 'the speaker assumes that the hearer can predict or could have predicted that a particular linguistic item will or would occur in a particular position within a sentence', the item might have givenness status. In the pragmatic and syntactic interface, the given/new status is seen as simultaneously affected by two parameters: the order of distribution, as earlier discussed and the knowledge shared between discourse participants, which Paprotté & Sinha (1987) calls discourse knowledge. Information, which may be new to a particular hearer, can be quite old to others. This status therefore is highly contextualized, dynamic, and flexible.

Given-new and theme-rheme

Theme and rheme are speaker-oriented whereas given and new are listener-oriented. 'The Theme is what I, the speaker, choose to take as my point of departure. The Given is what you, the listener, already know about or have accessible to you' (Halliday and Matthiessen,

2004:93). The distinction can be explained in the following examples: (Halliday, 1967: 200; and Halliday and Matthiessen 2004:94)

John [saw the play yesterday].

Supposing the above utterance is a direct response to a previous question in the discourse, say 'Who saw the play yesterday?' in that case, 'John' bears the new information though being the theme.

I haven't seen you for ages.

If used as a counter-attack against some prior complaint made by another interlocutor of one's absence, 'I haven't seen' may be treated as new which includes the thematic grammatical subject 'I'.

Contextual constraints on given-new status

It is almost impossible to define the given-new status of an information item when it is isolated from its context. Whether an item should be treated as given or new is constrained by the context in which it occurs. Prior discourse and cataphoric links are strong clues for status and they are especially important when the borderline of the given-new status is blurred. Furthermore much of this distinction depends on the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. Haviland and Clark (1974), while investigating syntactic devices used in English for explicitly marking information types, propose that when speaker and listener expectations match with respect to the identification of given and new information, communication occurs most expeditiously. In order for this to occur, interlocutors are supposed to make an implicit agreement in which the speakers are committed to refer to information they believe the listeners can uniquely identify from their background knowledge as given information and to refer to information they believe to be true but new to the listeners as new information. Clark & Clark (1977) called this the given-new contract. Renkema (1993) emphasizes the crucial importance of accuracy of assumptions and judgments made by the writer about the extent of the reader's previous knowledge of the subject matter on maintaining the given-new contract. In particular, she warns that inaccurate judgments may result in a violation of the contract and subsequently, a breakdown in communication between writer and reader.

Lesson 2: The order in which information is distributed in the sentence

Part 1: Information distributing principles and tendencies

On the whole, information distribution in English is constrained by three principles and tendencies: the principle of end-weight and end-focus, communicative dynamism and non-canonical constructions.

Principle of end-weight and end-focus

The principle of end-weight and end-focus generally stipulates that clausal or sentential units bearing the most important information should be postponed towards the end of the clause or sentence for communication to be achieved effectively (Quirk et al., 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In other words, more important information-bearing syntactic phrases are disfavored in subject position in canonical constructions (Ward and Birner, 2001; Erteschik-Shir, 2007; Bloor and Bloor, 1995; Van Valin and Lapolla, 1997). From the given/new distribution perspective, this is the tendency in which the given is placed before the new. For example,

Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian (McCarthy, 1991: 51).

In the example, the speaker pushes 'the Guardian' towards the end of the utterance to highlight its newsworthy status. Other information is implicitly treated as either given due to having been previously introduced into the discourse (Joyce, the topic of reading) or as unimportant (sometimes). If the speaker wanted to highlight the frequency, she or he could have said: 'The Guardian, Joyce reads it sometimes.' In this case, 'the Guardian' and other information are treated as having been brought into the discourse.

The tendency is considered to be unmarked as opposed to the marked or non-canonical constructions (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Quirk et al, 1985; Bloor and Bloor, 1995).

Communicative dynamism (CD)

Information status tends not to be static but dynamic. Different parts of an utterance or different elements in a sentence might vary in their communicative value and the variation is really dynamic in real-time communication. This dynamism is called Communicative Dynamism (CD), a term originally created by the Prague School Linguists. In Firbas (1974), Werth (1984), Quirk et al, 1985, Bloor and Bloor (1995), Crystal (1997), CD is defined as the actual and contextual semantic contribution of each major element in a sentence and rated with respect to the dynamic role it plays in communication. The contribution of the elements to the CD is ranked on a scale which can range from very low, through medium, to very high. Normally, information exchangers process the information in a message so as to achieve a linear presentation from low to high information value, which is somehow related to the

principle of end-focus (Quirk et al, 1985). In the example 'Sometimes, Joyce reads the Guardian', the adverb of frequency is lowest in information status rank. The subject and the verb are medium on the scale. The object is intended to have the highest information value. This value is contextually dependent and highlighted by some phonological devices such as stress and intonation in spoken discourse and by word order in written discourse. Bloor and Bloor (1995) pointed out that in an unmarked declarative clause, a syntactic unit bearing new information (normally final-positioned in the clause) has the most communicative dynamism.

Non-canonical constructions

Parallel to the principle and tendency above are some constructions in which the sentence does not begin with a grammatical subject. In fronting, for example, an item of information is pushed towards the initial position of the sentence to link the topic of the sentence with previous discourse, e.g.:

> *The cheese* they sold mainly to the miners. (Brown, 1983:322)

In the above example, 'the cheese', which normally occupies post-verbal position, is pushed to the sentential initial position to provide a link with previous discourse, the construction thus being termed 'fronting'.

Non-canonical constructions are marked and highly contextually dependent.

Part 2: Canonical and non-canonical constructions

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), functionally, there are three different kinds of subject in a sentence: grammatical, psychological, and logical. When a sentence is viewed as consisting of a subject and a predicate, grammatical subject is part of the sentence followed by the predicate. The relationship between the subject and the predicate is purely grammatical. Psychological subject is what the speaker has in his mind to start with when producing a sentence. Logical subject means the doer of the action.

The three kinds of subjects are exemplified as in the following sentence:

this teapot	my aunt	was given by	the Duke
psychological subject	grammatical subject		logical subject

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:56)

Canonical constructions in English are those beginning with a grammatical subject. Otherwise, they are non-canonical.

Canonical constructions

Canonical constructions in English are those beginning with a grammatical subject.

The 7 canonical clause patterns are introduced in Quirk et al. (1985: 721) as follows:

Pattern	Examples
1. SV	The sun is shining.
2. SVC	Your dinner seems ready.
3. SVO	That lecture bored me.
4. SVA	My office is in the next building.
5. SVOO	I must send my parents an anniversary card.
6. SVOC	Most students have found her reasonably helpful.
7. SVOA	You can put the dish on the table.

Non-canonical constructions of English

Non-canonical constructions in English are those which do not begin with a grammatical subject.

Fronting (Pre-posing)

Fronting is the pushing into typically but not always initial position an item which normally occupies another position in the sentence. Often it is the context that urges the speaker to resort to fronting, which may be either to provide direct linkage with what has been preceded or to initially introduce what the context most requires. The fronted parts may be direct object, prepositional complement, subject complement, object complement, predication adjunct and predication, e.g.: (the italicized are fronted elements)

Od: *The cheese* they sold mainly to the miners. (Brown, 1983:322)

Cprep: *Others* I have only that nodding acquaintance with and some are total strangers. (Birner and Ward, 1998: 4)

Cs: *Rare* indeed is the individual who does not belong to one of these groups. (Sinclair, 1990: 429)

Co: … and *traitor* we shall call him. (Quirk et al, 1985: 1378)

Left-dislocation (LD)

Superficially, left-dislocation is rather similar to fronting in that an item is pre-posed, i.e. moved leftwards in the construction, e.g.:

> *The cheese they made there*, they sold most of *it* to the miners. (Brown, 1983:321)

The canonically constructed sentence would have been:

> They sold most of the cheese they made there to the miners.

The two constructions differ in the following aspects.

Structurally, while in pre-posing the canonical position of the item is left unoccupied, in left-dislocation a resumptive co-referential pronoun appears in the marked constituent's canonical position. In the above example, co-referential with the sentence-initial item *the cheese they made there* is the direct object pronoun *it*. In terms of function, left-dislocation is also distinct from pre-posing in that whereas in pre-posing, the pre-posed constituent consistently represents information standing in a contextual relationship with information either discourse-old or evoked or inferable based on prior discourse. However, left-dislocated item introduces discourse-new (or maybe hearer-new) information. In the above example, 'the cheese they made there' has never before appeared in the discourse.

Argument reversal

Argument is a structural-functional term used to indicate a phrase (mainly but not exclusively nominal) required by a verb as it complementation (Ward and Birner, 2001). As the term argument reversal itself reveals, this process involves the reversal in order of the arguments. The reversal is to perform a focusing or discourse linking function. In the reversing process, one clause element is pushed to the sentential initial position resulting in another element normally occupying that position is pushed towards the sentential final position. Argument reversal exists in two constructions: inversion and by-phrase passives, both subject to the same discourse constraint in that they both place relatively familiar information before unfamiliar information while performing a linking function. That is, the pre-verbal constituent conveys information interlocked in a linking relationship with a previously evoked or inferable item in the discourse. The two constructions with examples are presented below.

Inversion

Inversing process involves the logical subject appearing after the main verb, while other elements, canonically appearing after the main verb occupying preverbal position. Birner (1994) while examining 1778 naturally occurring inversions found out that in 78% of the tokens, the pre-posed constituent represented discourse-old information while the post-posed

constituent represented discourse-new information. He also argued that felicitous inversion in English depends on the 'discourse-familiar' status of the information represented by the pre-posed and post-posed constituents, e.g.:

We have complimentary soft drinks, coffee, Sanka, tea, and milk. *Also complimentary is red and white wine*. We have cocktails available for $2.00. (Ward and Birner, 2001:129)

In the italicized part of the example, the discourse-old item 'complementary' is pre-posed to provide linkage with the previously mentioned 'complementary'.

Passivization

English *by*-phrase passives are sub-categorized with inversion as argument reversal because both constructions involve the reversing of the canonical order of the two arguments. *By*-phrase passives are so purposely termed to indicate passives with a *by*-phrase containing the logical subject not omitted from the sentence, e.g.:

The device was tested by the manufacturers. (Quirk et al, 1985: 1389)

In this example, 'the device' is pre-posed for linking purpose, 'the manufactures', according to Quirk et al. (1985) is the focus.

The discourse constraint for *by*-phrase passives, according to Ward and Birner (2001), is that for the sake of felicity, the syntactic subject must represent relatively familiar information leaving relatively unfamiliar information to be presented by the noun-phrase in the *by*-phrase, e.g.:

The Mayor's present term of office expires Jan.1. *He will be succeeded by Ivan Allen Jr.*

In the italicized part of the example, 'he' ('the Mayor' in the previous sentence) is discourse-familiar and 'Ivan Allen Jr.' is discourse-new, and the sentence is felicitous.

If the information status of the relevant NPs is reversed, such *by*-phrases will be seen as infelicitous, e.g.:

Ivan Allen Jr. will take office Jan.1. # *The mayor will be succeeded by him*.

The italicized sentence is taken as infelicitous because 'the mayor' is discourse-new, whereas, 'him' is discourse-old. The given-new status of the sentence initial noun phrase and the by-phrase is not always clear because it is governed at the same time by both the syntactic

determiner of the noun phrase (the articles) and the context. Consider the following example as analyzed in Renkema (1993:149):

A passer-by was hit by the falling debris.

The articles suggest that 'passer-by' is new and 'falling debris' is given. If so, an active sentence would sound more felicitous by linking the given with prior discourse.

In case of agents or patients realized by proper nouns, the given/new status goes through a different distinction. Consider the following example:

Peterson would have been approved of by Tatum. (Werth, 1984: 12)

In this case, for felicity's sake, 'Peterson' is pre-posed, however; both noun phrases must be discourse-old and hearer-old.

Graver (1971) gave the following pragmatic reasons for using the passives:

- To avoid weak impersonal subject
- To maintain the same subject in the discourse
- To disclaim responsibility or to evade personal involvement
- To promote the predicates
- To focus object of interest

Cleft structure

Cleft structure (Quirk et al., 1985), or focus construction (Brown, 1983), is a construction aimed at giving an item more prominence by cleaving the sentence into two parts. The outcome of this process is a cleft sentence, which is the general term for both 'it-cleft' and 'wh-cleft' (or 'pseudo-cleft'), e.g.:

It-cleft: It was *the rain* that destroyed the crops. (Widdowson, 1978:35)

Wh-cleft: What I need is a good holiday. (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:75)

A loaf of bread is what we chiefly need. (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004:70)

What happened to the crops was that they were destroyed by the rain. (Widdowson (1978:38)

Cleft structure can be said to have two simultaneous functions: focusing and contrasting, the contrasting is to rectify interlocutors' wrong assumptions or propositions about an item previously brought into the discourse. For example:

I've always had morning stiffness, I accept that's part of my life. By the time I've had my pills for two hours in the morning, the stiffness eases and I'd sooner have a bit of stiffness than I'd have the pain. *It's the pain I can't cope with* (Carter and McCarthy, 2006:785).

The cleft structure in the example was used to set focus on 'the pain'.

And, say the authors, it was Mary Magdalen, not Mary the Mother of Jesus, who has been the real, if secret, object of Mariolatry cults down the ages (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:96).

In this example, the cleft structure was used to contrast 'Mary Magdalen' with 'Mary the Mother of Jesus'.

The difference between the two is in their structural features. While the focused item is always in the first part of the sentence after 'it + to be' in 'it-cleft', in the pseudo-cleft, it can be in either sentence initial or final position. For this reason, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:70) call the pseudo-cleft construction a 'thematic equative' because in this construction, there is the equated proportion of the two parts of information in the sentence: the Theme and the Rheme. (Other constructions, e.g. fronting are non-equative, in which elements rather than the subject can be the theme).

Cleft structure (it-cleft and wh-cleft) differs itself from other non-canonicals as follows:

Whereas cleft structure functions as a means of focusing, the others (fronting, e.g. with the exception of existential there-sentences) functions as a means of topicalizing (Erteschik-Shir, 2007). In terms of the given/new distribution, while most the other constructions (fronting, e.g.) set their items a very clear status, it is not so fixed with cleft structure when viewed in the whole discourse, though it is always explicitly clear within the sentence.

Post-posing

As opposed to pre-posing, post-posing is an information movement tendency in which an item is dislocated from its canonical position towards the typically (but not exclusively) final position in the sentence, either emptying its canonical position or allowing it to be occupied by 'there', termed 'expletive' in Birner and Ward (1996). In terms of given-new contrast, post-posing distinguishes itself from pre-posing in that while pre-posing requires the marked constituent to represent discourse-old information; post-posing requires the marked element to represent new information. There are two post-posing constructions frequently used with

the logical subject post-posed, leaving the expletive *there* in the canonical subject position, traditionally known as existential *there* and presentational-*there* sentences.

Existential there-sentences

The post verbal noun phrase (PVNP) of existential *there*-sentences must represent information that the speaker believes to be unfamiliar to the hearer, otherwise, i.e. if the PVNP represents information hearer-old or both hearer-old and discourse-old, the post-posing construction would be unacceptable or infelicitous, e.g.:

c. I have some news you're going to find very interesting. # *There was on the panel your good friend Jim Alterman*. (Cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:127)

d. President Clinton appeared at the podium accompanied by three senators and the vice president. # *There was behind him the vice president*. (Cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:127)

The PVNP in (a) represents hearer-old information and that in (b) both hearer-old and discourse-old, thus disallowed because of their infelicity.

Presentational there-sentences

One feature that makes presentational *there*-sentences differentiated from existential *there*-sentences is that their PVNPs are discourse-sensitive, more specifically, the referent of the PVNPs can be both hearer-new and discourse-new or it can be hearer-old but discourse-new, e.g.:

c. And so as voters tomorrow begin the process of replacing Mr. Wright, forced from the speaker's chair and the House by charges of ethical violations, *there remains a political vacuum in the stockyards, barrios, high-tech workshops and defense plants of Tarrant County*. (AP Newswire 1989), (cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:128)

d. *Suddenly there ran out of the woods the man we had seen at the picnic*. ex.12), cited in Ward and Birner, 2001:128)

In (a) the referent is new to the readership and simultaneously to the discourse, while in (b) it is hearer-old, yet discourse-new.

While sharing the same feature of requiring the information represented by the post-verbal noun phrase (PVNP) to be discourse-new, there are two major differences between existential *there*-sentences and presentational *there*-sentences. The first involves the main verb used in

each type of sentence. While in existential *there*-sentences, the main verb is *be*, verbs other than *be* function as the main verb in presentational *there*-sentences. The second difference lies in the nature of the unfamiliarity of the PVNP in each construction as to whether the information must be (or believed to be) new to the hearer or new to the discourse.

Right-dislocation (RD)

Structurally, both right-dislocation and post-posing involve the non-canonical placement of a complement of the verb in post verbal position. The difference lies in the given-new status of the information expressed by those non-canonically positioned elements. In right-dislocation, the right-dislocated constituent represents information that has been either explicitly or implicitly evoked in the prior discourse, e.g.:

> *It* bothered her for weeks, *John' smile.* (Brown, 1983:322)

In this example, 'John's smile' has been previously mentioned in the discourse, right-dislocated in sentential final position.

Unit 2: Discourse-level issues of information structure

Lesson 1: Clause relations and types of clause relations

Clause relation

> A clause relation is the cognitive process whereby the reader interprets the meaning of a clause, sentence, or groups of sentences in the context of one or more preceding clauses, sentences, or groups of sentences in the same text (Winter, 1977).

Clause relation cohesive devices

In Winter (1994), the relations between one clause with other clauses in its sentence and adjoining sentences can be signaled by cohesive devices such as conjunctions, repetition structure (systematic repetition), and the replacement of the clause within the repetition structure. Conjunctions which include coordinators (and/or/but) and subordinator (because/although, etc.) can create surface links between clauses. There are also lexical items acting as cohesive devices, e.g. 'the reason is…' might be used instead of the subordinator 'because'. Repetition structure may be words, phrases, or structures being repeated in adjoining clauses. The term 'repetition structure' encompasses ellipsis, and substitution. The following examples illustrate repetition and replacement in clause relations.

    a. 'What we have still not forgiven him for', she says, is that he [Mozart] *reasoned.*' 'Miss Brophy, whose spiritual home is the eighteen century enlightenment, also *reasons*.

b. The symbols *seem easy to the point of glibness*. *So does* the scepticism that repeatedly informed them.

In the above examples, the italicized parts of the examples show repetition structure, and the remainders of the clauses are viewed as replacement change. In each example, the predications of the clauses are repeated, thus termed clause constants. In example a, the lexical item 'reason' is repeated. In example b, the repetition structure is realized by the substitution inversion structure 'so does'. The replacement takes place in the subjects bringing about change in the semantics of the clauses.

Basic clause relations types

Textual segments

Textual segments in McCarthy (1991) are units of written discourse which could be related to one another by cognitive relations. These segments might vary in their structural length, i.e. they could be phrases, clauses, sentences, groups of sentences or a whole paragraph. The cognitive relations can be matching or logical sequence (Winter, 1994).

The matching relation

Clauses in which attributes, people, actions, events, things, etc are compared or contrasted with one another concerning their similarities or differences can be said to hold the matching relation. The relation might be comparison, alternative, general-particular (preview-detail), similarity, exemplification, exception, apposition, contrast, or contradiction (denial and correction). In the following example, we can se a matching contrast between the two clauses as realized by the repetition structure 'do' repeating the old information 'wants to conquer the world'. 'Some American' is viewed as the replacement bearing the new information:

No Russian wants to conquer the world. Some Americans do, on the best crusading ground.

The logical sequence relation

The logical sequence relation is held among clauses in which there exists a temporal, spatial, causal or deductive sequence among them. The relations can be actual or potential. Logical sequence relation and the matching relation differ from each other in that while the former involves putting propositions in some order of priority in time, space or logic, the latter does not. Following are types of the logical relation: phenomenon-reason, phenomenon-example, cause-consequence, condition-consequence, instrument-achievement, means-purpose,

premise-deduction, preview-detail, and temporal sequence. In the following example, there is the instrument-achievement relation between the clauses as revealed by the conjunction 'thereby':

> Once on this page I announced 'I am no warped spinster waving the feminist flag', and thereby gravely offended some spinster readers.

Multiple clause relations

Multiple clause relations can be found where both logical sequence and matching relations are present in the clauses. In the following example, we can see the contradiction matching relation (denial and correction) as well as the logical sequence relation of condition-consequence as revealed by the correlative subordinators 'if'… 'then', and the repetition structure 'must be', which partially substitutes 'were not to blame'. The replacement 'the Americans' is the new information:

> If the Russians were not to blame, then the Americans must be.

Matching and logical sequence relations can embrace the local semantic relations forming a web of complex relationship throughout the whole text. And again, to some extent, it is the reader who interprets the relations; therefore the degree of clarification of the relationship might vary from reader to reader.

Cohesion, coherence and text organization

Hoey (1991:3) defined cohesion as 'the way certain words or grammatical features of a sentence can connect that sentence to its predecessors (and successors) in a text'. Richards et al (2002:85) viewed coherence as 'the way a text makes sense to the readers through the organization of its contents, and the relevance and clarity of its concepts and ideas'. Hoey assumed that while cohesion is a property of the text, laying objective outside the reader's judgment, coherence is, on the other hand, reader-dependent. What is common between clause relation and coherence is the interpretive role of the reader. Both coherence and clause relation to some extent exist as how the reader interprets them. Therefore these two discourse phenomena can be said to be both objective and subjective, i.e. they exist as their own right and as how the reader sees them. Winter (1977) and Hoey (1983) both claimed that the sequencing of textual segments and how the relations between them are signaled are the two most important factors in textual coherence.

Clause relations and their signals as important factors in textual coherence

The sequencing and matching of textual segments and how the relations between them are signaled are considered important factors in textual coherence. In other words, a text is seen as coherent if there are evident signals showing that textual segments are matched or sequenced. The presence of cohesive devices can bring about the surface cohesion of the segments. However, how much coherent the whole text is depends on the reader who has to interpret for himself the semantic links between textual segments. That is to say there is an interaction between the cohesion and coherence of a text.

Lesson 2: Textual patterns

Basic textual patterns

When functional textual segments combine, they form the logical structure of the whole text called textual patterns (McCarthy, 1991). They are common macro-structure organizational patterns of text recurring in different texts. Some patterns are more popular, more typical, and more frequently occurring than others. A given text may contain more than one of the common patterns, either following one another or embedded in one another, e.g., the problem-solution pattern can be embedded in a hypothetical-real pattern.

Textual patterns and cognitive relations are not two separate concepts. They overlap each other and are intertwined with each other. Some of the terms used to refer to clause relations might be justifiably used to indicate a textual pattern. There may be more than one relation within one pattern, and there may be more than one pattern in a text. For example, the counterclaim (the real element in the pattern hypothetical-real) may consist of a preview and some details. The details may encompass a situation, a problem, a response, and an evaluation.

Following are the 5 most popular textual patterns as presented in Hoey (2001):

Problem-solution (situation-evaluation)

The expanded version of the pattern might include the following elements: situation-problem-responses (possible solutions)-evaluation of responses (positive or negative). In this pattern, the key element is a positive evaluation of at least one of the possible solutions offered. A text with no positive solution offered leaves the reader with a feeling of unease. The pattern can be complicated in several ways, e.g. when the evaluation of the solution is negative, which is itself a problem, there is an alternative suggested solution followed by evaluation.

Hypothetical-real (Claim-counterclaim/response)

The pattern consists of two elements: the hypothetical, which reports what has been said or written, and the real, which states the writer's affirmation or denial of the hypothetical. The hypothetical reports somebody else's statement; the truth-value of it is unknown or controversial. The real states whether the hypothetical is true or not true. Unlike the problem-solution pattern in which the problem can be implicit, in hypothetical-real pattern, the hypothesis must be explicitly signaled as hypothetical.

General-particular

In this pattern, a generalization is followed by specific statements. The patterns can be in the form of a generalization followed by examples or a preview followed by details. In the particular element (examples or details), there can be imbedded matching relation, i.e. the examples or details may contain two clauses or more holding a matching relation. Definition is one of the most typical examples of the detail in the preview-detail relation. There can be at least three types of detail: composition, structure, and function depending on whether the detail is to give detail about the composition, structure or function of something mentioned in the preview.

Question-answer

The pattern is similar to the problem-solution. The difference is that there is an explicitly posed question followed by a satisfactory answer. The main elements are question, answer and positive/negative evaluation. The evaluation is obligatory when the answer is ascribed to someone rather than the author. When the answer is made by the author, the evaluation can be optional. Question-answer differs from the other patterns in that there is no intermediate stage between question and answer and there is no logical sequence relationship between question and answer.

Goal-achievement

This pattern is similar to the problem-solution in almost every respect. Mapped onto the problem-solution pattern, the goal in the pattern is like the problem, and the achievement the solution. The major difference is that the goal element in the pattern is defined as 'an intended change in situation', i.e. instead of suggesting a possible solution to the problem, in this pattern, the writer tend to make it explicit that something must be done for the goal to be achieved. The expanded version of the pattern is: situation-goal-method of achievement-

evaluation/result. As it may happen in other patterns, we can see another pattern, e.g. problem-solution imbedded in this pattern.

Unit 3: A comparison of English and Vietnamese information structure

Lesson 1: Topic-prominent and subject-prominent languages

The distinction between subject-prominent language and topic-prominent language is as follows:

> In subject-prominent (Sp) languages, the structure of sentences favors a description in which the grammatical relation subject-predicate plays a major role; in topic-prominent (Tp) languages, the basic structure of sentences favors a description in which the grammatical relation topic-comment plays a major role.

(Li and Thompson, 1976: 459)

In this distinction, English is widely acknowledged as a subject-prominent language, whereas that Vietnamese is a topic-prominent language is still under debate. This is because of the fact that Vietnamese sentences bear both topic-comment type and subject-predicate type. In principal, the topic-comment structure is used when the topic has been evoked (or is thought to have been evoked by the speaker) in prior discourse. Sentences with the grammatical subject coming first, i.e. the non-topicalized versions, are utilized when, for example, it is the speaker who initiates the topic. Traditionally, Vietnamese was acknowledged as a subject-predicate type. However, recently, Vietnamese has been typologically described as a topic-prominent language by such authors as Thompson (1987), Duffield (2007), Hao (1991), Giap (2000), Con (2008) and others. 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-comment type and only 30% of them are of Subject-predicate type. The percentage of topic-comment type sentences in Vietnamese is even higher in Con (2008), fluctuating between 75% and 86%.

Topic-prominent feature of the Vietnamese language can be transferred into L2 learners' reading and writing in the English language. In reading, for example, as the majority of Vietnamese sentences begin with a topic followed by a comment, they might get into difficulty in realizing the main idea in an English sentences typically beginning with a

grammatical subject. In writing, some Vietnamese learners of English might produce topic-comment sentences in English which might sound clumsy and not very comprehensible to some native readers such as 'Not only robots, we can find the application of automated technology in some other devices such as rockets or airplane without pilots'.

Lesson 2: Directness in English and indirectness in Vietnamese writing style

Researchers in the field of contrastive rhetoric, for example, Connor (1996), Kaplan (1966, 1987), Hinds (1990), and Clyne (1994) have claimed that writers of some Asian languages like Japanese, Chinese, and Thai tend to be more indirect in their writing style than Anglo-American writers. 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, 1996:15). Indirectness in the writing style of English learners of these language is shown across their whole essay including introducing and developing the main topic, and in the conclusion. Hinds (1990:98), mentioned the 'delayed introduction of purpose' in their introduction paragraph. Clyne (1994: 171) remarked: 'Whereas the English essays end with an identifiable concluding section encompassing a restatement and predictions of future implications, the majority of the Thai essays that actually have conclusions merely restate'. On the contrary, according to Kaplan, essays in an Anglo-American style English are written with 'the straight line of development thought' (cited in Connor, 1996:15). In other words, English writers typically show their tendency to directness in expressing ideas. Being direct in English is also revealed in the fact that English writers normally support their ideas with factual figures. Connor (1996:167) said that English writers 'move from generalizations to specific examples and expect explicit links between main topics and subtopics'. Leki (1991, 1992) pointed out that, facts, statistics, and illustration in arguments are what normally expected by English speaking readers. Kaplan (1987:10) claimed that in English directness and specificity are 'highly valued'.

The difference might be due to the fact that Asian writers are not so writer-responsible as native English writers. In English the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the speaker/writer, while in other languages, such as Japanese, the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the listener (Hinds, 1987).

Many Vietnamese learners of English fall into the tendency of being indirect in their writing in the English language. Directness in Vietnamese L2 learners' writing is revealed in such practices as not stating or unclearly stating thesis statement and topic sentence, being indirect

in introducing the topic, diverting from the main idea, inadequately using transitional signals, and concluding without explicitly answering the previously raised question. This does not necessarily suggest that Vietnamese writers are never direct in their writing. In Vietnamese speaking and writing, both indirectness and directness are acceptable depending on the context and closely related to what is referred to as politeness in communicative strategies. This is, of course, also true in many languages including English. However, English writers are clearer about the responsibility to be direct when necessary. Clyne (1994) mentioned an article by Cam (1991:43) claiming that Vietnamese people tend to 'rao truoc, don sau' ('beat about the bush') for politeness' sake, i.e. for example, when the speaker finds it difficult to say something directly as he reckons it might be offensive to the listener. In the Vietnamese language sometimes people do not mean what they say to guarantee the following: politeness, humbleness, modesty, tolerance, courtesy, and sympathy, which are all part of standardized Vietnamese communicative strategies (Giap, 2000). This might be true for any specific language and culture, however; the extent of the strategy might differ from culture to culture, and language to language. Although in general, Vietnamese students of English are introduced to some popular text patterns, such as 'situation + problem + solution + evaluation', and some of them have attempted to adopt the overall structure, there is a great amount of indirectness or divergence in each of the component of the structure especially in the introduction of the problem. And they do not use them consistently. This is partly because Vietnamese learners of English tend to reveal their creativity and idiosyncrasies thus often diverge from the norm.

Differences among languages are only relative and it is a matter of fact that there are occasions when English people are more indirect than Vietnamese people or Asian people in general. In terms of what is considered as good for the written text' cohesion and coherence, both languages set up the same set of rules. The differences therefore lie in the strategies of writers in the two languages which are sometimes referred to as the oriental and occidental ways of developing the topic. This is of course cultural and neither should be considered as better than the other. However, when L2 language learners learn to write in English it is advisable for them to adopt the native speaker's way of thinking and developing ideas. Elaboration is required in both languages; however, constrained by their own traditional perspective, Vietnamese learner-writer tends to divert from the main topic in the process of elaboration whereas an experienced native writer usually or always tries to get to the point even when elaborating.

Vietnamese learners' free style of writing result in many inappropriate theme/rheme distributions in which we can easily find a break in the linkage between the themes, something that an experienced native writers rarely violates. This inconsistency in observing the given/new distribution also falls within the reader-responsible view of many writers of languages other than English. It is this view that results in many of them neglecting the constraints on given/new distribution and causes native readers of English much trouble in understanding the more important points of their writing.

Unit 4: Incorporating meta-knowledge of English information structure into L2 reading and writing strategies

Lesson 1: L2 learners' problems in reading and writing

The following writing and reading problems L2 learners would tend to encounter are either mentioned in Silva (1993) and Canagarajah (2002) or are based on our teaching experience.

Writing problems

- L2 writers do less planning, at both global and local levels.
- L2 writers do less global and local goal setting, and have more difficulty achieving these goals.
- L2 writers pay more attention to local mistakes and tend to forget global aspects of a text such as its communicative purpose or its social functions.
- L2 writers tend to leave the responsibility to understand what they want to say to the reader, while English is a writer-responsible language.
- L2 writers do not often produce expected topic sentences and thesis statements.
- L2 learners tend to assume that they are not obliged to make explicit the topic sentences, which in their intentions are implied in the paragraphs, that their arguments are embedded in their 'beat- about- the- bush' examples.
- They adopt a different logic of development.
- They are indirect in stating the purpose of the writing piece.
- They tend to conclude the writing without explicitly answering the question raised in the introduction.
- They do not use enough necessary transitional signals.
- Their writing lacks coherence.

Reading problems

- Setting no goal before reading

- Not anticipating textual patterns

- Overlooking the significance of cohesive devices

- Difficulty in recognizing the main topic

- Losing track of the main idea

- Difficulty in recognizing the focus of information in non-canonical constructions

Lesson 2: Suggestions for L2 learners' development of reading and writing skills

Reading suggestions
- Set up a goal for their reading.

- Anticipate the textual pattern of a reading text.

- Look for cohesive devices, and identify the following signals: co-ordination, subordination, semantic relationship and discourse patterning.

- Recognize typical patterns of textual organization.

- Look for the topic and follow its logic development.

- Distinguish between factual information and personal belief.

- Interpret selective information in their own way.

- Ask themselves comprehension questions to help figure out the frame of the text or part of the text.

- Find out how texts/topics/themes are opened, developed and closed. Recognize the relation between topics/themes in a text or paragraph.

- Familiarize unfamiliar structured discourse.

- Identify the theme/rheme structure and given/new status of information of a sentence.

Writing suggestions
- Student writers must make their topics, their arguments, their organization and transitions clear to the reader.

- Writers should pre-reveal the pattern (form) and the content within the first paragraphs of the text.

- Writers should provide generalizations at appropriate points in the discourse, and maintain and develop topics in a manner accessible to the reader.

- Writers should organize the text in a manner familiar to the reader, use appropriate cohesion, and present information directly and explicitly.

- Truth and reality projected by the writer should seek optimal agreement from the reader.

- Student writers are required to get involved in planning extensively, which includes defining the rhetorical problem, placing it in a larger context, making it operational, exploring its parts, generating alternative solutions, arriving at a well-supported conclusion.

- Multiple drafts are encouraged, each subsequent draft being cleaner than the previously done.

- L2 writers should get involved in extensive revising which includes adding, deleting, modifying, rearranging ideas.

- L2 writers should write economically, clearly and emphatically.

- L2 writers should diversify their essays' grammatical structure by utilizing as many sentence patterns and non-canonical constructions as possible.

- Theme/rheme; old and new information should be distributed relevantly.

- Information presented should be contextualized.

H2: Examples of textual patterns

Problem-solution pattern

One of the irritations for joggers is having to stop every five or ten minutes to retire their shoe laces. A new device- the Lacelock- puts an end to those involuntary pauses. The laces are threaded through the ends of a simple plastic barrel. This is pushed down on the tongue of the shoe and locked into place. The tie is then completed and the shoes will stay done up, throughout a bout of running, cycling or squash playing (cited in McCarthy and Carter, 1994: 55).

Hypothetical-real pattern

Every other critic has said that *On Food and Cooking* is brilliant, a revelation, and a unique combination of scientific insight and literacy which sweeps aside all myth and jargon as none have done before. McGee's book is indeed well written, is full of good things and is good to have on the shelves as a continuing source of reference and quotes. But it also has its fair share of mistakes, omissions and misalignments of emphasis (cited in McCarthy and Carter, 1994: 57).

General-particular pattern

A poem differs from most prose in several ways. For one, both writer and reader tend to regard it differently. The poet's attitudes is as if, sticking his neck out, he were to say: I offer this piece of writing to be read not as prose but as a poem- that is more perceptively, thoughtfully and considerately, with more attention to sounds and connotations. This is great deal to expect, but in return the reader has a right to his own expectations. He approaches the poem in the anticipation of out-of-the-ordinary knowledge and pleasure (cited in McCarthy and Carter, 1994: 57).

Question-answer pattern

What, then, is the advantage which we may hope to derive from a study of the political writers of the past? A view prevalent in earlier ages would have provided a simple answer to this question. A view of politics, it would have been said, is the handbook of an art, the art of governing. Just as a man of superior knowledge or kill in the art of carpentry my compile a work in which his knowledge is made valuable to those who aspire to be good carpenters, so

man of superior wisdom in the art of politics may set down his knowledge in a book for the instruction of those whose business it is to found, govern, preserve states. If this is what political is there is no difficulty in determining what advantage may be expected from the study of grate political works. They will be consulted by those who have to govern states (cited in Hoey, 2001: 171).

Goal-achievement

Read the world's 100 Best Classics…in les than 2 hours. Like most of us, you've always wanted to read the world's greatest classics of literature. But because you have so much on, you haven't been able to find the time. And right now, you cannot see when you will have time. Now you can catch on the world's greatest books-in just 60 seconds per book, thanks to a new guide called the 100 Best Classics at a Glance (cited in Hoey, 2001: 149).

H3: Less frequently used patterns (Hoey, 2001; McCarthy, 1991)

Opportunity-taking pattern (Hoey, 2001)

The opportunity-taking pattern often begins with an implicit offer followed by the taking of that opportunity by a participant, or how the opportunity may be taken. The offer may take the form of a question or a set of questions. Following is an example of the pattern:

> Turner's Venice
>
> A unique opportunity to obtain four limited lithographs from the artist's final your of Venice.
>
> A special offer to collectors
>
> Reply now and you will receive a free colour brochure giving you a fascinating insight to Turner's Venice. The publishers will immediately reserve a complete set of pictures for you.

Desire arousal-fulfillment pattern (Hoey, 2001)

The pattern often begins with a positive evaluation (whereas in problem-solution pattern, the evaluation tends to be negative). This positive evaluation is then followed by a desire to fulfill the evaluation in a particular way. The pattern is exemplified in the following text:

> Lexmark printers
>
> So good, you'll want to stay together forever. It's definitely a love thing. 'Nice curves,' said the *Business Week* and promptly gave the Lexmark Color Jet-printer 2030 a Gold Medal in its prestigious Annual design Awards…PC Pro awarded it six out of six for value for money. Try any printer in the Lexmark inkjet range yourself and you'll soon appreciate the features that inspire such adoration.

Gap in Knowledge-filling pattern (Hoey, 2001)

The pattern often begins with a situation in which there is a gap of knowledge, followed by what a participant does to fill the gap and the result. The pattern is illustrated in the following example:

In a study by Weir (1988), college and university subject teachers indicated that clarity of expression was (not surprisingly) an essential feature of academic writing…A number of researchers have suggested that although academics may recognize such features of good writing and demand it from their students, they do not necessarily praise it in their colleagues…The ELT profession endeavours, theoretically, to offer examples of good practice and clarity in writing. Are ELT professionals, however, impressed by impenetrable prose from their colleagues, even if they criticize it when it is produced by their students? … It is recognized that the scale of this survey is limited. However, it does indicate that ELT professionals are impressed by less impenetrable prose. They may expect clarity form their students, but may be less concerned about what is produced by colleagues.

Narrative pattern (McCarthy, 1991)

McCarthy (1991) summarized Labov (1972)'s descriptions of a narrative as follows. A narrative often contains the following five elements: abstract (short statements of the topic of the narrative), orientation (time, place, and characters), complicating event (main events taking place), resolution (how the events are resolved), and coda (a bridge between the narrative world and the moment of narrating). Not every narrative contains all the five elements. However, orientation, complicating event, and resolution must be included to make a narrative. Elements of other patterns like situation and evaluation are often embedded in the elements of a narrative. Following is an example of a narrative:

> The parents of a seven-year-old Australian boy woke to find a giant python crushing and trying to swallow him. The incident occurred in Cairns, Queensland and the boy's mother, Mrs Kathy Dryden said: 'It was like a horror movie. It was hot night and Bartholomew was lying under a mosquito net. He suddenly started screaming. 'We rushed to the bedroom to find a huge snake trying to strangle him. It was coiled around his arms and neck and was going down his body'. Mrs Dryden and her husband, Peter, tried to stab the creature with knives but the python bit the boy several times before escaping.

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Appendix I: Sample Lesson Plans and Student's Handouts

I1: Sample Lesson Plan for unit 2, lesson 2

Unit 2: Discourse-level issues of English information structure

Lesson 2: Textual Patterns

- **Level:** Intermediate (second-year ESP students in their second term)
- **Time allowance:** 180 minutes
- **Class size:** 26 students
- **Objectives:**
  - ➢ Equipping learners with meta-knowledge of textual patterns. The knowledge is intended to support their reading and writing strategies.
  - ➢ Language skills to be developed: reading and writing

    By the end of the lesson, students should be better at:
    - ✓ Recognizing textual patterns in academic texts as a way to understand the texts better
    - ✓ Producing cohesive and coherent essays with clear appropriate textual patterns

Procedure

1. The Knowledge-oriented (meta-linguistic) phase (90')

1.1. Introduction (5')

Remind learners of the term 'textual segments' and 'cognitive relations' explored in the previous lesson. Introduce the link between the terms and the concept of textual patterns.

1.2. Meta-knowledge of textual patterns exploration (85')

Task 1 (25')

Step 1 (10')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three to answer the questions in task 1.	Walk around to explain and sort out any questions that might arise (in terminology, e.g.). Encourage learners to contemplate how the knowledge of textual patterns might be incorporated into their reading and writing.

Step 2 (15')

Students' activities (anticipated)	Teacher's activities
Ask the teacher questions to clarify any vague ideas concerning the term 'textual patterns'.	Explain and clarify the term 'textual patterns' to the whole class. Make sure learners can identify the discourse elements in each pattern and can see the reasons why each pattern is so distinctively termed.

Task 2 (20')

Step 1 (10')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three to find out the textual pattern of each of the three given passages.	Walk around and help with the problem-solving task. Discuss the answers with students. (Do not give students the answers at this point).

Step 2 (10')

Students' activities (anticipated)	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with or unsure of the answers.	Whole class explanations of the answers

Task 3 (20')

Step 1 (10')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three and answer the questions about the discourse elements of the text.	Walk around and help with the problem-solving task. Discuss the answers with students. (Do not give students the answers at this point). Encourage students to consult the section discussing Problem-solution pattern if necessary.

Step 2 (10')

Students' activities (anticipated)	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with the answers or still vague about the explanations	Whole class explanations of the answers

Task 4 (20')

Step 1 (10')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three and solve the problem given.	Walk around and help with the problem-solving task. Discuss the answers with students. (Do not give students the answers at this point). Students might need to consult the section discussing Claim-counter claim pattern. Give students the text, the text frame, and a blank frame, that is a copy of the text frame without any entries (labels and line numbers). Ask students to make brief notes in the blank frame that will answers questions such as 'what is the basis for the claim in sentences 1-3?', or 'what claim is made in sentences 4-6?'

Step 2 (10')

Students' activities (anticipated)	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with the answers	Whole class explanations of the answers

2. The Skill-oriented phase (90')

2.1. Task 1: Reading comprehension (45')

Activity 1 (15')

Step 1 (10')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Read the passage about 'Presentation Program' in their students' book. Discuss	Walk around and help with learners' discussions. Discuss the answers with

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
and answer the questions given.	students. (Do not give students the answers at this point). Remind learners of the meta-knowledge previously introduced (cognitive relations, cohesive devices, etc.) if necessary. Encourage learners' creativity for question 12.

Step 2 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with the answers.	Whole class explanations of the answers

Activity 2 (10')

Step 1 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three and answer the questions.	Walk around and help with the discussions. Discuss the answers with students. (Do not give students the answers at this point). Allow learners to recollect the terms 'textual patterns' and 'discourse elements' if necessary.

Step 2 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with the answers.	Whole class explanations of the answers

Activity 3 (10')

Step 1 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three and answer the questions.	Walk around and help with the discussions. Discuss the answers with students. (Do not give students the answers at this point). Allow learners to recollect the terms

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
	'textual patterns' and 'discourse elements' if necessary.

Step 2 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with the answers.	Whole class explanations of the answers

Activity 4 (10')

Step 1 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work in pairs or groups of three to perform the task and answer the final question.	Walk around and help with the discussions. Discuss the answers with students. (Do not give students the answers at this point). Allow learners to recollect the terms 'textual patterns' and 'discourse elements' if necessary.

Step 2 (5')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Ask questions if not agreeing with the answers.	Whole class explanations of the answers

2.2. Task 2: Writing argumentative essay (45')

Step 1: Introduction (3')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Read the task topic and task requirements.	Introduce the task, emphasizing learners' manipulating the knowledge they have had about textual patterns in their essay writing.

Step 2: Outline making (10')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities

Work individually or in pairs to make the global and local outlines, focusing on the textual pattern of the essay (suggested to be hypothetical-real).	Walk around to help with the outline making, giving suggestions about possible textual patterns.

Step 3: Writing process (25')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Work individually or in pairs. Write the essay based on the outlines and the pattern favored.	Walk around to help sort out with learners' developing the main idea, adhering to the pattern, using cohesive devices and revising textual coherence. Use think-aloud protocols to know what is going on in learners' mind to help them with difficulties they might encounter in the process of writing.

Step 4: Feedback (5')

Students' activities (anticipated)	Teacher's activities
Ask questions about the usefulness of having the textual pattern when making the outlines. Argue about the textual pattern suggested.	Give general feedback on students' outlines and the writing, focusing on how framing textual patterns might help the writing process.

Step 5: Home assignment (2')

Students' activities	Teacher's activities
Rewrite the essay at home. Pay attention to the logic development of the essay based on the textual pattern agreed on.	Remind learners of the strategy of framing textual patterns before constructing an academic essay.

I2: Sample student's handouts for unit 2, lesson 2

Unit 2: Discourse-level issues of English information structure

Lesson 2: Textual patterns

Meta-linguistic phase

Task 1

Work in pairs or groups of three and read the introduction of textual patterns below. Discuss and answer the following questions:

1. Which textual pattern is most familiar to you?
2. What are the discourse elements in each pattern?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the patterns?
4. How might knowledge of textual patterns enhance your reading and writing strategies?

Basic textual patterns

When functional textual segments combine, they form the logical structure of the whole text called textual patterns. They are common macro-structure organizational patterns of text recurring in different texts. Some patterns are more popular, more typical, and more frequently occurring than others. A given text may contain more than one of the common patterns, either following one another or embedded in one another, e.g., the problem-solution pattern can be embedded in a hypothetical-real pattern.

Textual patterns and cognitive relations are not two separate concepts. They overlap each other and are intertwined with each other. Some of the terms used to refer to clause relations might be justifiably used to indicate a textual pattern. There may be more than one relation within one pattern, and there may be more than one pattern in a text. For example, the counterclaim (the real element in the pattern hypothetical-real) may consist of a preview and some details. The details may encompass a situation, a problem, a response, and an evaluation.

Following are the 5 most popular textual patterns:

Problem-solution (situation-evaluation)

The expanded version of the pattern might include the following elements: situation-problem-responses (possible solutions)-evaluation of responses (positive or negative). In this pattern, the key element is a positive evaluation of at least one of the possible solutions offered. A text with no positive solution offered leaves the reader with a feeling of unease. The pattern can be complicated in several ways, e.g. when the evaluation of the solution is negative, which is itself a problem, there is an alternative suggested solution followed by evaluation.

Hypothetical-real (Claim-counterclaim/response)

The pattern consists of two elements: the hypothetical, which reports what has been said or written, and the real, which states the writer's affirmation or denial of the hypothetical. The hypothetical reports somebody else's statement; the truth-value of it is unknown or controversial. The real states whether the hypothetical is true or not true. Unlike the problem-solution pattern in which the problem can be implicit, in hypothetical-real pattern, the hypothesis must be explicitly signaled as hypothetical.

General-particular

In this pattern, a generalization is followed by specific statements. The patterns can be in the form of a generalization followed by examples or a preview followed by details. In the particular element (examples or details), there can be embedded matching relation, i.e. the examples or details may contain two clauses or more holding a matching relation. Definition is one of the most typical examples of the detail in the preview-detail relation. There can be at least three types of detail: composition, structure, and function depending on whether the detail is to give detail about the composition, structure or function of something mentioned in the preview.

Question-answer

The pattern is similar to the problem-solution. The difference is that there is an explicitly posed question followed by a satisfactory answer. The main elements are question, answer and positive/negative evaluation. The evaluation is obligatory when the answer is ascribed to someone rather than the author. When the answer is made by the author, the evaluation can be optional. Question-answer differs from the other patterns in that there is no intermediate stage between question and answer and there is no logical sequence relationship between question and answer.

Goal-achievement

This pattern is similar to the problem-solution in almost every respect. Mapped onto the problem-solution pattern, the goal in the pattern is like the problem, and the achievement the solution. The major difference is that the goal element in the pattern is defined as 'an intended change in situation', i.e. instead of suggesting a possible solution to the problem, in this pattern, the writer tend to make it explicit that something must be done for the goal to be achieved. The expanded version of the pattern is: situation-goal-method of achievement-evaluation/result. As it may happen in other patterns, we can see another pattern, e.g. problem-solution imbedded in this pattern.

Task 2

Work in pairs and find out the textual pattern of each of the following passages:

Passage 1

Rare and unusual aspects of Hertfordshire's history are the subject of a book to be released at Christmas. *Hertfordshire Yesterdays* (Kylin Press, £7.50) is the work of Frank Ballin and Malcolm Tomkins. Among the tales retold are the landing of Vincenzo Lunardi, the first man to fly a balloon in England; the lighting of beacons with the news of the Armada; the building of Digswell Viaduct; and the happenings along the "Highwayman's highway".

Passage 2

Every other critic has said that *On Food and Cooking* is brilliant, a revelation, and a unique combination of scientific insight and literacy which sweeps aside all myth and jargon as none have done before. McGee's book is indeed well written, is full of good things and is good to have on the shelves as a continuing source of reference and quotes. But it also has its fair share of mistakes, omissions and misalignments of emphasis.

Passage 3

Pauling and Corey have proposed a model for the structure of D.N.A. Their model consists of three intertwined chains, with the phosphates near the fibre axis and the bases on the outside. The problem is that their model fails to identify the forces which could hold the structure together. We have attempted to solve this problem by proposing a radically different structure which has two helical chains each coiled around the same axis and in which the two chains are held together by the purine and pyramidine bases. Our model has two advantages. It accounts for the structural cohesion and it suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material.

Task 3

Work in pairs or groups of three and read the text below. The text can be ascribed to have the pattern Problem-Solution. Try to answer the following questions about the text:

1. What is the situation?
2. What is the problem?
3. What is the suggested solution?
4. What is the evaluation of the suggested solution?
5. What is the new situation?

High Technology U.K. Company

Having developed an extremely accurate three-dimensional copying system, wishes to expand and seeks capital in return for equity. An excellent opportunity for investment in rapidly expanding industrial market. Franchises of non-technical part of the system will be offered in future. Preferential consideration will be given to holders of equity, with opportunity to convert equity to franchise capital. High earnings potential.

Task 4

Work in pairs and solve the following problem:

Below is a passage, the pattern of which can be ascribed as Claim-Counter claim. Find the numbered sentences in the passage that best fit in the blanks of the following diagram:

Basis for claim
(....)

Claim
(...)

Counter claim
(...)

Basis for counter claim 1		Basis for counter claim 2	
(...)		(...)	
Preview	Detail	Preview	Detail

(...)	(...)	(...)	(...)

Situation (...)
Response (...)
Problem (...)
Evaluation (...)

(1) "In only six days I lost four inches off my waist and seven pounds of weight."

(2) "In only five weeks I added two inches to my bust line."

(3) "Two full inches in the first three days!"

(4) These are the kinds of testimonials used in magazines, newspaper, radio, and television ads, promising new shapes, new looks, and new happiness to those who buy the preparation, the devices, or the prescribed program of actions. (5) The promoters of such products claim they can develop the bust, shape the legs, wipe pout double chins, build muscles, eradicate wrinkles, or in some other way enhance beauty or desirability.

(6) Often such devices or treatments are nothing more than money making schemes for their promoters. (7) The results they produce are questionable, and some are hazardous to health.

(8) To understand how these products can be legally promoted to the public, it is necessary to understand something of the laws covering their regulation. (9) If the product is a drug, FDA (Food and Drug Administration) can require proof under the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic (FD&C) Act that it is safe and effective before it is put on the market. (10) But if the product is a device, FDA has no authority to require pre-marketing proof of safety or effectiveness. (11) If a product already on the market is a hazard to health, FDA can request the manufacturer or distributor to remove it from the market voluntarily, or the Agency can resort to legal actions, including seizure of the product. (12) In such cases FDA must prove that the device is adulterated or misbranded if the directions for use on the label are inadequate, or if the product is dangerous to health when used in the dosage or manner or with the frequency or duration prescribed, recommended, or suggested in the labeling.

(13) Obviously, most of the devices on the market have never been the subject of courtroom proceedings, and new devices appear on the scene continually. (14) Before

buying, it is up to the consumer to judge the safety or effectiveness of such items. (15) It may be useful to consumers to know about some of the cases in which FDA has taken legal action.

(16) One notable case a few years ago involved an electrical device called the Relaxacisor, which had been sold for reducing the waistline. (17) The Relaxacizor produced electrical shocks to the body through contact pads. (18) FDA brought suit against the distribution in 1970 to halt the sale of the device on the ground that (18a) it was dangerous to health and life.

(19) During the five-month trial, about 40 witnesses testified that they had suffered varying degrees of injury while using the machine, and U.S. District Court Judge William P. Gray issued a permanent injunction prohibiting the sale of the device to the general public. (20) It is to be hoped that all owners of Relaxacizor have destroyed the device so there is no longer a possibility of harm to a user who might not be aware of the danger.

Skill developing phase

Task 1: Reading comprehension

Read the passage entitled: 'Presentation Program' in your student's book (p.33).

Activity 1

Scan the text and answer the following question:

> 1. What is the pattern of the whole text?

> 2. What are the discourse elements?

> 3. Which is NOT the main function of a presentation program?

> A. A text editor
> B. A graphic manipulating method
> C. A spreadsheet creator
> D. A slide-show system

Activity 2

Work in pairs or groups and answer the following questions:

1. What is the topic of the text?
2. Is this topic introduced in the first sentence of the introductory paragraph?
3. Which words/phrases in the sentence do you think are most important in helping you to grasp the main idea of the passage?

4. How are the 2 sentences in the introductory paragraph related? Which cohesive device is used to show this relationship?

5. What are the functions of a presentation program? Which words or phrases are central in expressing these functions?

6. In your anticipation, will these functioned be analyzed later in the text? Why/why not?

7. Can the 2 sentences in the paragraph be combined to form 1 single sentence? If so, in what way? Is this combination felicitous? Why?

Activity 3

Read the second paragraph and answer the following questions

1. What is the main topic of the second paragraph?

2. Is it only stated in the first sentence of the paragraph?

3. What is the relationship between the sentences in the paragraph?

4. What cohesive devices are used to show this relationship?

5. What is the relationship between the 1st and the 2nd paragraph? Can the two paragraphs be combined as to form one single paragraph? If so, what changes need to be made?

Activity 4

Ask yourselves the same questions while trying to comprehend the other paragraphs.

Did the recognition of the pattern help you better understand the text?

Task 2: Writing

Write an essay of about 250 words about the following topic. Try to make your essay as cohesive and coherent as possible. Look back at the list of cohesive devices introduced in lesson 1, unit 2 if you think that this might help. You can work in pairs if you consider it beneficial.

> Some people think that governments should spend as much money as possible on developing or buying computer technology. Other people disagree and think that this money should be spent on more basic needs. Which one of these opinions do you agree with? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.

Activity 1

Making essay outline

Work in pairs through the whole process.

Global outline

Discuss to agree on the most suitable pattern for the essay. When agreement has been reached, specify the discourse elements to be included in the pattern selected.

Local outline

For each paragraph (which can be an element of the whole pattern), think about a topic sentence. How can this topic developed? Use your knowledge of basic clause relation types (matching or logical sequence) to support your thinking.

Activity 2

You can work in pairs or individually.

Write the essay using the global and local outlines.

Answer the following questions:

1. Are there any changes which need to be made to the outlines?

2. Do you think the outlines help your actual writing?

Homework

Assignment 1

1. Find out the discourse pattern of each passage

2. Identify the discourse elements and discourse relations in each passage

Passage 1

We are all becoming more and more affected by computers. Yet, in spite of this, the general level of understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of computes among manufacturing managers is dangerously low.

In order to improve the situation, the Manufacturing Management Activity Group has organized a two day seminar on "Computers and Manufacturing Management". This seminar will be held at the Birmingham Metropole Hotel from 21-22 March.

The seminar has been specially designed for managers who are concerned with manufacturing processes and so all of the discussions will be relevant to their needs.

Passage 2

The Education Secretary has refused help to local authorities facing an education spending crisis over the Youth Training Scheme. He said they must get by until next year's rate support grant negotiations for 1984/1985.

A delegation from Devon County Council, which has been left with a heavy deficit because the Manpower Services Commission is not taking up all the YTS places it asked for, was told by Sir Keith Joseph on Tuesday that some other authorities seemed to be in a similar plight, but that thee could be no question of relaxing the overspending penalty rules for anyone this year.

Devon will now have to decide whether it will accept the deficit, which means pushing its spending further into the penalty zone, or make cuts in YTS provision which will force it to turn away some of the trainees whom the MSC is still willing to provide.

Meanwhile, cash economies are being undertaken at Exeter College to stave off a threat of immediate staff redundancies. The college has been told that it must eliminate a current overspending of £110,000 a year, as distinct from the £135,000 loss which the council recognizes is attributable to the YTS.

Passage 3

Most deodorants are effective. The trouble is they don't stay effective long enough. As the day wears on, they wear off. So No. 7 has made a new extra-strength anti-perspirant that lasts longer. It helps keep you dry and fresh as a daisy and you don't have to worry about it wearing off too quickly. It doesn't. No.7's new extra-strength anti-perspirant really works. From first to last.

Passage 4

Only a handful of satellite orbits are known to be changing. Such changes are usually subtle and can be detected only by long-term observations. One exception is the orbit of Neptune's large moon Triton, which is shrinking quite rapidly. That is because it circles Neptune in the direction opposite to the planet's revolution, generating strong gravitational friction.

(*New scientist*, 23 January 1986:33, cited in McCarthy, 1991)

Passage 5

Wind power. Wave power. Solar power. Tidal power.

Whilst their use will increase they are unlikely to be able to provide large amounts of economic electricity. Generally, the cost of harnessing their power is huge. However, there is a more practical, reliable, and economical way of ensuring electricity for the future. And that is through nuclear energy.

It's not a new idea of course. We've been using nuclear electricity for the last 30 years. In fact, it now accounts for around 20% of Britain's electricity production. And it's one of the cheapest and safest ways to produce electricity we know for future. What's more, world supplies of uranium are estimated to last for hundreds of years, which will give us more than enough time to develop alternatives if we need to.

So, while some people might not care about their children's future. We do.

(Advertisement for British Nuclear Forum from *The Guardian*, 7 October 1988:17, cited in McCarthy, 1991)

Assignment 2:

Write an essay of about 250 words about the following topic. You should make an outline for the essay. Decide on a suitable pattern for the essay. You can work in pairs if you consider it beneficial.

> Many students choose to attend schools or universities outside their home countries.
> Why do some students study abroad? Use specific reasons and examples to explain
> your answers. Try to diversify the structures of the sentences in your essay by using
> as many canonical and non-canonical constructions you have studied as possible.

I3: Sample handouts of meta-linguistic exercises

Unit 1, lesson 2, part 2: English canonical and non-canonical constructions

Exercises 1 and 2 were used after the meta-linguistic phase. Exercises 3, 4, and 5 were assigned as homework.

Exercise 1: Identify the clause type of each of the following sentences:

1. George's father greeted the headmaster warmly.

2. The headmaster put George into the second class.

3. That made Stanley very angry.

4. His annoyance did not last.

5. He was really a lawyer.

6. He proved himself a great soldier.

7. The manager is not in.

8. May I offer you a cup of coffee?

9. He threw himself from his horse.

10. I remember the reasonableness of my father's argument.

Exercise 2: Identify the non-canonical construction of each of the following sentences, saying which information is new in each sentence.

1. Joe his name is.

2. Here comes the bus.

3. Relaxation you call it.

4. In went the sun and came down the rain.

5. It was in September that I first noticed it.

6. Far be it from me to condemn him.

7. Under no circumstances must the switch be left on.

8. His face I'm not fond of.

9. Hardy had I left before the quarrelling started.

10. His character I despise.

Exercise 3: Rearrange each of the sentences below, using accepted patterns of subject-verb inversion. Identify the theme/rheme in each of the original and rephrased sentences.

1. The rain fell down.

2. The prices went up and up.

3. He was so anxious to turn over a new leaf that he actually changed his name.

4. He would not give up writing his satires under any circumstances.

5. His determination to tell the truth about his experiences was just as firm.

6. It has never been more difficult for a writer to make his name.

7. A tall, gaunt figure stood at the far end of the room staring at us.

8. We only then realized how much he had suffered.

Exercise 4: From each of the sentences below form cleft sentences that will focus, in turn, on the different elements given in brackets:

1. Sartoris first saw an enormous serpent approaching (S, Od).

2. Captain Mackay reported this incident to Admiral Gage (S, Od, Cprep).

3. He sent Admiral Gage a report of this incident (Oi).

4. The book took a long time to write because it raised so many difficult questions (A).

5. The most striking feature of malaria in Tropical Africa is its high endemicity with hardly any seasonal change.

Exercise 5: Rephrase these sentences so as to begin each with existential/presentational *there*, **explaining the difference in the given/new status of the information in each sentence.**

1. A small, grey monkey was wearing my best silk tie.

2. Monkeys were under the table, swinging on the light-fittings, everywhere.

3. A boy named George Sampeter sat in the same class as me.

4. Several trains were coming into the station at the same time.

5. Beneath our house was an old cellar with a thick flint wall.

Appendix J: Examples of learners' writing features

Thesis statement

Clear thesis statement

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. (NTT, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing test)

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

Direct thesis statement

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. (TVC, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Indirect thesis statement

<u>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.</u> 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). (LDH, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Topic sentence

Clear topic sentence

Firstly, with the applications of computers, we can work and relax easily. Secondly, using computers makes our life more convenient. (NTA, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Unclear topic sentence

In my opinion, computers have made life easier and more convenient. I don't think that computers have made life more complex and stressful. <u>With a computer, we can play games or listen to music to relax after a stressful working day. We can see computers everywhere for examples universities, supermarkets, companies, and stations because they are very useful.</u> (The student did not clearly signal where each topic began). (LVD, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Direct topic sentence

Firstly, with the applications of computers, we can work and relax easily. Secondly, using computers makes our life more convenient. (NTA, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Indirect topic sentence

<u>Computer can process a large number of calculating even complex calculating and so on</u>. People use it to manage their exchange economy, their important data, or use it for entertainment. We can listen to music, watch films, or to do everything. (The intended topic sentence is the opinion that computers have made life more convenient.) (HC, Group 2, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Supporting sentences

Supporting sentences diverting from the main topic

The quality of human life is higher and higher. It requires improvements in all fields in life. In fact, there are many changes in the field of electronics that 21st century will bring to our life. People will not use wire to broadcast electrical signals. The wireless technology has been widened. The speed of machine will not be a problem in the future. The trend of machine is to save electricity and money for people. (The main topic is changes in the field of electronics and information technology in the 21st century) (NTH, Group 2, post-teaching phase writing test)

Supporting sentences not diverting from the main topic

In the office, we use computers to… In schools, teachers can… In factories, auto-machines can… In our home…In traffic… (NTA, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Given/new information distribution

Information appropriately distributed

In addition, high technology is developing fast. It brings to our life things that we can never dream of. (NTS, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Information inappropriately distributed

Firstly, with the applications of computers, we can work and relax easily. In schools, teachers can… In our home, computers help us… (There was breakage in topic continuity, from 'computer' to 'we'). (NTA, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Contextualization

New information contextualized before being introduced into the discourse

The last century has seen the dramatic development of the Internet. It has fundamentally changed the way people receive and create information. What is coming up next will be even more appealing to you. With the advancement of communication speed and accuracy through satellite and optic-fibre transmission, the flow of information on the global scale will be greatly increased. (NHV, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing test)

New information not being contextualized before being introduced into the discourse

Firstly, computers help people to store human and nature data which are bigger and bigger with time. Computers sort and separate them by special algorithm to make the easiest and fastest way to access them. (The audience might need to be given some explanations of 'special algorithm'). (NTK, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Conclusion

Thesis statement reinstated

In summary, computers have become a vital role in our life. With computers, our life becomes less complex and stressful. We will always feel comfortable and happy. (NTA, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Thesis statement not reinstated

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These are the basic features of computers. Computers are not only a machine but also like a friend who help you manage your schedule. With the developing of technology, computers are smarter and smarter. And they bring many utilities to people's life. (The question raised in the introduction is whether computers have made life easier and more convenient or they have made life more complex and stressful). (NTK, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Transitional signals

Adequate use of transitional signals

Firstly, the advancement of nano-techology will surprise us about the small size of electronic devices…

Secondly, with artificial intelligence, we can produce smart phones that can translate English into German, Japanese, and Vietnamese…

Finally, I think that a smart chip will appear to help us follow our health… (PTVA, Group 2, post-teaching phase writing test)

Inadequate use of transitional signals

So I strongly believe that computers have made our life a lot easier and more convenient no matter whether the field is communication as working or entertainment. There has been a blooming era of communication since the birth of computer and the Internet. My friend's parents can talk with him, who is in the USA, by using an instant messaging software such as Yahoo! Messenger. (There was no signal between the first sentence, which is in the introduction paragraph, and the second sentence, which is intended to be the topic sentence of the second paragraph.) (LDH, Group 1, pre-teaching phase writing test)

Topic-prominent features

1. First of all, <u>computer technology our country is not ready for.</u> (…) <u>Money the thing it needs we don't have, while low-quality workers the thing it hates we have many</u>. (LDH, Group 1, while-teaching phase writing task)

2. Some of them we can name: artificial intelligence, virtual reality and always-on connections. (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. (HTN, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing test)

Non-canonical constructions used

1. I agree with the opinion that governments should spend as much money as possible on developing or buying computer technology. <u>Very important computer technology is</u>. (NVM, group 1, while-teaching phase writing task)

2. Today<u>, it's computer technology that is driving the economy of many countries such as India or China</u>. As our country has bad infrastructure to develop industry, the government has decided to develop computer technology, which demands not much in infrastructure. However, spending as much money as possible on developing computer technology is not a good policy. There are more important basic needs where we should invest money in.

   First of all, <u>computer technology our country is not ready for. So much money is needed to develop a healthy computer technology</u>. Although computer technology does not have high requirements for massive infrastructure, it demands the high quality one. <u>So weak is the national network backbone that sometimes it's ridicule. So low is the quality of human resources that only our sourcing we could do and do it decently. Not until the education system makes a big reform will our country be able to go further in this field of high-tech.</u> More importantly, investing in this industry is risky for poor countries. <u>Money the thing it needs we don't have, while low-quality workers the thing it hates we have many</u>. (…)

   Not until the basic requirements are satisfied could we go further. (LDH, group 1, while-teaching phase writing task)

3. Unstoppable is the progress of those intelligent machines, and naturally the technology is expected to bring us many more benefits in the 21st century. Some of them we can name: artificial intelligence, virtual reality and always-on connections. (LDH, Group 1, post-teaching phase writing test)

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