

DEVELOPING ACADEMIC WRITING IN A BUSINESS ORIENTED UNIVERSITY

J.A. Foley

Graduate School of English, Assumption University, Thailand

email: jfoley@au.edu

Abstract: This research investigated the development of language choices in the Academic writing of students at an English medium university in Thailand. The first part involved looking at the writing in the first semester of their English program at the university, representing the level of the students' writing on entry into the university. Seventy two samples of first year students' writing were collected, but only 12 were randomly selected for this study in order to compare their progress over a period of 14 weeks (first semester). The second part of the research looked at the writing of students' journals at the end of their second semester of their first year after the implementation of a writing program based on research originally developed in Australia (Derewianka, 2003). A third part of the research investigated the development of students' writing towards the third year in university with specific reference to their academic writing in the business English program. The focus on Business English was mainly because the university was well known in this field of study. The framework for the analysis of the students' writing was based on a systemic functional approach (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In order to provide insights into the meaning and effectiveness of the text, a discourse grammar needs to be functional and semantic in its orientation. This paper discusses the development of the Nominal Group (NG) in the students' writing in THEME position, as this was felt to be a major issue in the development of academic discourse. However NGs in the RHEME would also be looked, as this was a part of the text structure, where complex nominal groups would be expected as part of the NEW information. The resulting analysis showed that initially the students had a limited knowledge of the different genres and used an equally limited range of lexical and grammatical choices. After the implementation of a new teaching approach in the second semester of the first year, some improvement could be observed. During the third year of the English program, improvement in the writing of genres used in "business" writing, such as Reports, was clearly evident.

Keywords: *Academic Business English, Thailand, lexico-grammatical choices, nominal groups, genres.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menyelidiki perkembangan pilihan bahasa siswa dalam mata kuliah menulis akademik di sebuah universitas berbahasa Inggris di Thailand. Bagian pertama melihat tulisan di semester pertama mahasiswa program bahasa Inggris di universitas tersebut untuk melihat kemampuan menulis mahasiswa saat mereka masuk universitas. Tujuh puluh dua sampel tulisan mahasiswa tingkat pertama dikumpulkan, tapi hanya 12 yang dipilih secara acak untuk kajian ini agar bisa dibandingkan kemajuannya setelah empat belas minggu (satu semester). Bagian kedua penelitian ini melihat jurnal hasil tulisan mahasiswa di akhir semester ke dua tahun pertama mereka, setelah penerapan program menulis menggunakan kerangka teori yang dikembangkan di Australia (Derewianka 2003). Bagian ketiga dari penelitian ini menyelidiki perkembangan tulisan mahasiswa menuju tahun ketiga mereka dengan rujukan khusus terhadap tulisan akademis mereka dalam program bahasa Inggris untuk bisnis. karena universitas tersebut terkenal dalam bidang kajian itu. Landasan teori yang digunakan

untuk menganalisis tulisan mahasiswa ini adalah pendekatan fungsional sistemik (Halliday dan Matthiessen, 2004). Untuk memberikan masukan terhadap makna dan keefektifan teks, tata bahasa wacana harus fungsional dan semantik dalam orientasinya, dimana kategori ketatabahasaannya dijelaskan sebagai perwujudan dari pola-pola semantik. Makalah ini akan membahas perkembangan kelompok nominal (Nominal Group = NG) dalam tulisan siswa pada posisi TEMA, karena hal ini dirasa sebagai masalah besar dalam perkembangan wacana akademis. Akan tetapi, NG dalam Rema juga akan diamati, karena merupakan bagian dari struktur teks, dimana kelompok nominal majemuk diharapkan akan menjadi bagian dari informasi baru. Analisa yang dihasilkan menunjukkan bahwa awalnya mahasiswa memiliki keterbatasan ilmu akan genre yang berbeda-beda dan menggunakan pilihan tata bahasa dan leksikon yang sama terbatasnya. Setelah penerapan pendekatan mengajar yang baru di semester kedua tahun pertama mereka, beberapa perbaikan nampak. Selama tahun ketiga program bahasa Inggris, peningkatan dalam genre tulisan yang digunakan dalam tulisan "bisnis," seperti laporan, nampak jelas.

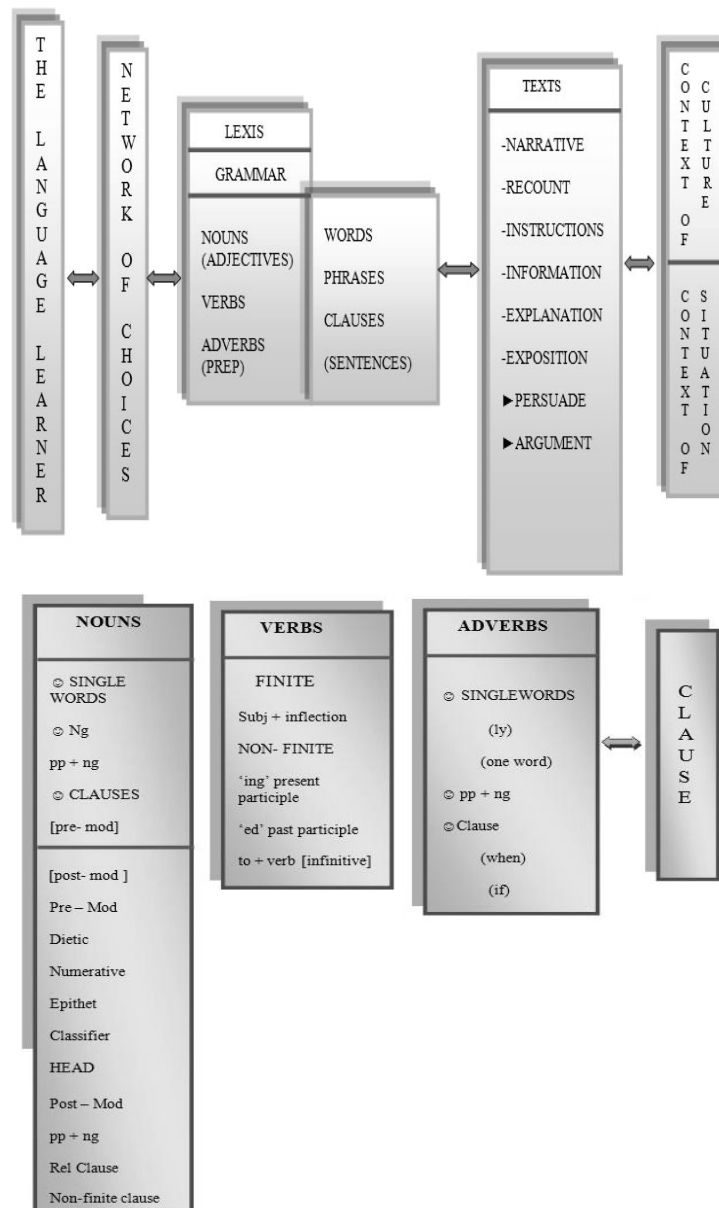
Kata kunci: *Academic Business English*, Thailand, pilihan leksiko-tata bahasa, kelompok nominal, genre.

The paper will discuss the development of the Nominal Group (NG) in the students' writing in THEME/RHEME position as this was felt to be a major issue in the development of the students' writing. The rationale for this research was to see how students were developing their network of choices in their ability to write academic English (in this case "Business English"). In today's complex world, literacy means far more than learning to read and write. Literacy is a form of social action where language and context work together to make meaning. Although much research has focused on the features of early reading and writing in school contexts, less work has been done related to the kinds of tasks that challenge students at tertiary level of education. An individual's growth and development and ability to participate in society require ever-expanding knowledge and control over meaning-making in new contexts and through new linguistic resources. Students need to use language in particular ways in order to be successful in business, the sciences, and several other areas; to develop interpretations, construct arguments and critique theories.

The first part of this research, therefore, involved students' writing in the first semester, on entry to the university. Visual stimuli were used as prompts as according to Gardner (1983) Multiple Intelligence (MI), using pictures involves a wider range of intelligences than simply linguistic. The use of such an approach was based on the belief that the students can use their imagination to express their ideas through their writing. The second part of the research was in the second semester of the first year. This involved modifications to the way in which writing was taught using a "genre" approach to "scaffold" and, thus, helped students improve their writing. A third part looked at the students developing academic writing (in this case, *reports* in the "Business English" program) in the third year.

The form of textual analysis used in the project is based on Systemic-functional grammar (SFG), as it is concerned with the choices writers (the students) are able to make (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). These choices are assumed to be meaningful and related to the writer's purpose which will be influenced by the context and culture (Foley & Thompson, 2002).

Figure 1. A network of ‘choices’ from the perspective of the student (From Foley, 2011)



SFG presents a view of language in terms of both the structure (grammar) and the lexis. The term lexico-grammar is used to underline the fact that these traditionally viewed aspects of language are actually one. Consequently, the clause structure is taken as the basis for analysis and is seen from three points of view, *the ideational, interpersonal and textual* (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The *ideational view* is how the writer represents experience, ideas and ways of seeing the world. In terms of the form, this is

expressed through the clause structure (ng+vg+[adv]), with the adverbial group as optional. The *interpersonal* function concerns how language is used to interact between participants in the exchange of meaning. The finite part of the verb indicates the time frame as seen by the writer. The speech functions and modality indicate the relationship between the participants, while appraisal indicates the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in the text. The *textual* function weaves the ideational and interpersonal meanings

together. Martin (1999) saw this function as the information flow management, involving the organization of the text relevant to the context. The important element to understand the textual meaning in the clause is the **THEME**. The theme serves as the starting point for the message to be conveyed and gives a signal to the reader how to follow the logic of the discourse in the text.

Theme: clause as a message.

The system of **THEME** belongs to the textual metafunction of the language. It is concerned with the organization of information within individual clauses and, through this, with the organization of the larger text.

Every clause is organized as a message related to an unfolding text. The system of **THEME** organizes the clause to show what its local context is in relation to the general context. This local context or point of departure in the clause is called **Theme**. The rest of the message of the clause is what is presented against the background of the local context—it is where the clause moves after the point of departure; this is called **Rheme**. The clause as message is, thus, organized into **Theme + Rheme**. In English and many other languages such as Thai or Mandarin, this organization is signaled positionally that is **Theme** is realized by initial position in the clause and **Rheme** follows. The choice of **Theme** for any individual clause will generally relate to the way information is being developed over the course of the whole text.

For example:

Snakes are reptiles-cold blooded creatures.
They belong to the same group as lizards.
(Foley, 2011)

In terms of the structure of the theme, there are four possible functions: **Topical, Marked Topical, Interpersonal and Textual**. The **Topical** theme normally functions as the subject of the clause

(Eggins, 2004). **Marked Topical Theme** can be circumstantial elements (adverbial group) or participants that are not the subject of the clause. **Marked themes** are often used to signal a new phase in the discourse. The **Textual Theme** relates the clause to its context and can be any combination of conjunctions (*and, because*) and conjunctive adjuncts (*for instance, in addition, likewise*). The logical use of **Textual themes** plays an important role in producing a cohesive text. **Interpersonal themes** are more often related to modal or mood markings. Consequently, these tend to be found more in spoken discourse rather than written, except in direct speech.

The Nominal Group

The **nominal group (NG)** is the grammatical unit which has the most variety at the rank of groups, and this would allow the widest range of meanings to be expressed (Thompson, 1996). In many languages there are three structures pertaining to the **NG**: *Premodifier, Head and Postmodifier* (Wang, 2010).

We can do many things with nouns in English: we can count, specify, describe, classify, and quantify them. These are things you cannot do with other parts of the clause. The ability to construct a complex **NG** is considered an indicator of developing control in a language. Children rarely use complex **NG** in subject position (Foley in Kwan-Terry, 1991). **EFL learners** also tend to employ short **NGs** depending on how much control they have of the target language. The **NG** is constructed differently in some languages, for example, in Thai where there is no premodification as in *nungseu see daang* (book color red) or *sorong see fah sorng peun* (sarongs light blue two), and if a classifier is required it comes after the color.

Students writing academic forms of English need to express what they mean precisely. In the case of nouns, it is very unusual for one noun to express precise

enough meaning on its own. Similarly, many of the things students need to write about are too complicated to be expressed by a single word. It is easier to understand how complex concepts can be expressed if

the student understands how to combine nouns with other words to make precise meaning. Such a combination of the nominal group in English can be summarized as follows:

Single Noun & Noun with Premodifier			
1	Single noun	a Noun/ Pronoun	<i>e.g. you, it, he</i>
2	With Premodifier	D+H	<i>e.g. a gift, my friend</i>
3	With Premodifier	N+H	<i>e.g. some game</i>
4	With Premodifier	E+H	<i>e.g. new e-mail</i>
5	With Premodifier	C+H	<i>e.g. strawberry smoothie</i>
6	With Premodifier	D+N+H	<i>e.g. the first alley</i>
7	With Premodifier	D+E+H	<i>e.g. a big seal</i>
8	With Premodifier	D+C+H	<i>e.g. Clash's music video</i>
9	With Premodifier	N+E+H	<i>e.g. many big leaves</i>
10	With Premodifier	N+C+H	<i>e.g. many water activities</i>
11	With Premodifier	E+C+H	<i>e.g. pink nail polish</i>
12	With Premodifier	D+N+E+H	<i>e.g. these three remote controls</i>
13	With Premodifier	D+N+C+H	<i>e.g. the first pine tree</i>
14	With Premodifier	D+E+C+H	<i>e.g. the big sun glasses</i>
15	With Premodifier	N+E+C+H	<i>e.g. two closed circuit cameras</i>
16	With Premodifier	D+N+E+C+H	<i>e.g. this first little baby boy</i>

Noun with Postmodifier			
17	With Postmodifier	preposition phrase [pp+ng]	<i>e.g. the colour [of the word]</i>
18	With Postmodifier	relative clause	<i>e.g. My friend who stands next Max call me</i>
19	With Postmodifier	reduced relative clause	<i>e.g. You just press the Talk button, located at the middle top</i>

Themes

Genre Theory

The term “genre” is used in this study to refer to the different types of texts that enact various types of social contexts. Since patterns of meaning are relatively

consistent for each genre, we can learn to predict how each situation is likely to unfold. For example, in the first part of this research, the visual stimuli would normally lend themselves to descriptive genres, mainly *recount* and *narrative*.

Proto-typical genres

Main Genre	Main Genre Structure Used in School Settings
Observation/Comment	Orientation (^) Event Description (*) Comment (^)
Recount	Orientation (^) Event (*) Re-orientation (^)
Narrative	Orientation (^) Complication (*) Resolution(*) Coda (^)
Report	General Classification Not necessarily in this order Description --- parts [and their functions] qualities habits/behavior/uses } Not necessarily in this order
Procedure	Goal Steps (*) Diagram (^)
Explanation	General statement Sequenced explanation (*) Final state of being or thing produced
Argument [stating your case]	
Argument [or and against]	Issue Argument (*) ---- for /against Recommendation (^)

(^) optional element, (*) recursive (Foley 2011: 195)

Description

The purpose of the descriptive text is to create an image of a particular person, place or thing in detail. Descriptions can appear in various genres or in mixed genres (Derewianka, 1992). Typically, the generic structure in terms of language features would include:

- Use of specific NG
- A variety of verb processes [relational to provide information; mental to express the writer's view]
- Time frame normal present tense
- Complex NGs to provide information about the subject or situation.

Reports

- The topic of a Report is usually introduced by an opening general statement/general classification, locating what is being talked about.

- The rest of the report will consist of facts about various aspects of the subject.
- These facts are often grouped into topic areas to indicate the particular aspect of the subject being discussed.
Language features would include:
 - Generalised participants: a whole class of things (Child labor in Thailand)
 - Linking verbs [relational processes] (is are, has, etc.).
 - Timeless present tense.
 - NGs for descriptive language that is factual and precise.
 - Likely to contain some technical language.
- The writing is in relatively formal and objective style. The use of first person pronouns and not generally appropriate.

Argument [stating your case]

- The major focus is on an issue and a logical sequence of arguments related to this issue.
- Statement of position
- Justifying the position taken
- Summing up of the position

The typical language features may include:

- Generalised participants, sometimes human but often abstract issues (the internet)
- Possibility of technical terms related to the issue
- A variety of verb process can be used and would include material processes to indicate action; relational processes as linking verbs and mental and verbal processes such as [saying] and [thinking].
- Timeless present when present a position or points in an argument.
- Complex NGs to describe the situation
- Connectives associated with reasoning (therefore, so, because of, the first reason, etc.).

Visuals

In the initial research visuals were used as stimuli in order to engage the students in the writing activities. According to Kress and Leeuwen (2006), the visual mode offers semiotic and cognitive resources which allow the students to create meanings through their own interpretation of what they see. Obviously, the “type” of visual stimuli will affect the genre of writing (White 1978). A single frame is likely to generate a descriptive text, while a sequence of pictures might lend itself to narrative.

Rationale

The main premise upon which this research is based is that students in an EFL/ESL situation need an explicit focus on the form language takes to raise their awareness of how different grammatical choices are functional for achieving particular goals in their writing. Focus on grammar does not

mean learning the “parts of speech” in isolation from the text. A functional grammar perspective highlights the role of grammar and lexis in construing the kinds of meanings that students need to make to be successful in their academic writing tasks (in this case business English) and to be able to participate in the institutions of modern society. The present study tries to answer the following questions: (1) Given the data in this study, have these students on entering an English medium university in Thailand developed nominal groups (NG) in Theme /Rheme position in their writing?, (2) Have the students developed their NG in Theme/Rheme position in their writing at the end of their first year of university, given a more explicit focus in their course work on the different grammatical choices available to them in writing?, and (3) Have the students developed the NG in Theme/Rheme position at the beginning of the third year of their English program with specific reference to the “academic” forms of writing used in Business English?

PART ONE OF THE PROJECT

As previously indicated, this project focused on the students writing on entry into the university and the subsequent development of the nominal group over a period of 14 weeks or one semester. The rationale is that the limited language ability of the students would be manifest in their lack of elaboration or expansion of the head noun and the tendency to use short independent clauses. Visual stimuli were used as prompts to engage the students’ creativity in their writing, and it was hoped that over the period of time of the study the students would improve on their descriptive skills, mainly through using more complex nominal groups.

Different instructors taught each class, but the instructions given to the students were standardized in that the pictures were in black and white and were the basis for a 200-250-word essay. The data were

collected over a fourteen-week period consisting of 76 texts from 12 students. The initial part of this research was undertaken by Minwong (2012). The part of the study to be analyzed here focuses on the development of the nominal group as this is a major problem for Thai students.

The samples that follow show the writing of the same student [G] in the first and fourteenth week. The choices of NGs in THEME position are then compared and commented upon. The NGs in the Rheme are indicated in brackets [].

Figure 1 presents samples of the visual stimuli as used for all students in week one and week fourteen.

Semester One 1 week 1. Student G

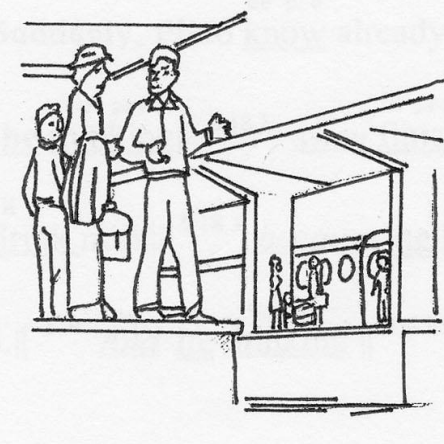
1. In the picture, I see [one mother and one son].
2. **They** love [each other] so much.
3. **They** have [a good relationship].
4. *And* **their family** is [the family that be very happy].
5. *And* in the picture may be in morning,
6. **the boy** will go to school.
7. **They** have [a breakfast].
8. **Breakfast** have [some milk, a cup of coffee, bread and other].
9. **The mother** is pouring [some milk into a glass for her son].
10. *And* **the boy** feels bored
11. *because* **he** must drink [milk] everyday.
12. **He** wants to eat [other breakfast that not be milk and bread].
13. *But* **he** must eat [it]
14. *because* **it** is only [one that easy to eat].
15. *And* **the boy** is waiting to go to school
16. *but* **he** must waits [his father send him to school].
17. *But* **his father** isn't [getting dressed].
18. **He** bored to wait.
19. *Because* **he** want to go to school
20. **He** want to play with his friends.
21. *And* **he** is thinking to play [the games with his friends].

22. *And* **he** is thinking about [his girl friend].
23. **He** is thinking about
24. **What** should he buy [anything that the best gift to his girl friend].
25. *Because* tomorrow is [his girl friend's birthday].
26. *And* **he** is thinking how to surprise to [his girl friend].
27. **He** is having [a poppy love].

Picture 1 (Week One)



Picture 7 (Week Fourteen)



NG

Topical Theme: **bold**

Marked Topical Theme: underlined

Textual Theme: *italics*

Ellipted: ^^

[] NG in object/complement position

Findings

- The majority of the NGs in Topical theme position are pronouns (*I, They, He*) or single nouns (*Breakfast*).
- D+H (*Their family, the boy*) are less frequent
- Marked topical themes are used as pp+ng [adv] (*In the picture*) or single word adverbial (tomorrow).
- In object/complement position H+post-m [relative clause] is used, but often the structure is incorrect: (*that be very happy**, *that not be milk, bread**, *that easy to eat**, *that the best gift to his girl friend**).

N+H+pp+ng

(*some milk into a glass for her son*)

E+H

(*poppy love*)

- The text structure is a description with little structure, very repetitive and limited use of complex nominal groups, showing limited control over the target language at this stage.

Semester One, week 14 Student G

1. **There** are [many people in this picture].
2. **Everyone** looks hurry to go to works.
3. In this picture is in morning.
4. **They** will go to work by BTS.
5. **They** are waiting for BTS.
6. **There** are [two line of BTS].
7. **One of BTS** are going to [final station]
8. *and another BTS* will go back [the first station].
9. **There** is [one of BTS which arrived already].
10. **Two men who were waiting for BTS which not arrived yet.***
11. **A man who is wearing a hat,** [holding bag]*
12. *and* ^^put [his suit on his arm],
13. **he** just lived in Bangkok [2 day ago] for work.
14. **He** is going to work in first day,
15. **he** do not know [the way to go to office which he works].
16. *So he* go to ask another man [for some way that he can go to work by BTS].

17. **Another man** tell him how to go there,
18. *But a man who is wearing a hat* do not understand.
19. *Therefore a man who is not wearing a hat* ask [him] [what office that he work].
20. *When a man* answered,
21. **a man who is not wearing a hat** know
22. *that a man who is talking with him* work in same office.
23. *So he* tell [a man who is wearing hat]
24. *that he* are going to work in same office,
25. **a man who is wearing hat** is very happy
26. *that he* has [new friend in office] already.
27. **A man who is not wearing hat** also ask him about his home.
28. *When a man who is wearing hat* know
29. *That their homes* are nearly.
30. Since that time, they will go to work
31. *and* ^^go back home together
32. *and they* become [close friends].

Findings

- Again, the majority of NGs in Topical theme position are pronouns (*There, They*) or single nouns H or D+H (*another BTS, Another man*) or N+H (*One of BTS*).
- D+H+post-m (relative clause) is used extensively:

A man who is wearing a hat

A man who is not wearing a hat

A man who is talking with him

- N+H + post-m (relative clause + relative clause)

Two men who are waiting for BTS which not arrived yet

- NG are used in complement position N+H +post-m (relative clause)
There is one BTS which arrived already.
- H+post-m (relative clause)
office which he works.

Reduced relative clause (possible because of the punctuation?)

*Holding a bag**

- post modifiers as prepositional phrases

many people in this picture

two line of BTS

*new friend in office**

• Again, the text structure is a description and very repetitive with a limited use of complex nominal groups. The use of the relative clause as embedded post modifier simply increases the repetitive effect. There are more complex clauses with post-modifiers in complement position.

Thematic development

	W1	W14
Topical Theme	24	28
Marked Topical Theme	2	2
Textual Theme	14	14
Ellipted Theme	0	2

Use of NGs in Topical Theme and Complement position

	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
W1	+	+	+				+											+	+	
W14	+	+	+	+	+	+												+	+	+

Discussion

Concerning research question 1, “given the data in this study, have these students entering an English medium university in Thailand developed nominal groups (NG) in Theme/Rheme position in their writing?”, the features that we have been considering are features that were identified through a lexico-grammatical analysis of the text, clause by clause. The significance of such an analysis is to show how the meaning of the text derives from the way the clauses and thematic structures are woven together. As previously indicated, texts in general display their cohesiveness through the Topical and Marked Topical themes at the beginning of the clause. From the visual stimuli the themes would be expected to develop around the interpretation of the images. The evidence from the analysis indicates that the writer’s ability is below the level expected of freshmen year university students.

Both texts from week one and week fourteen are simply “observation,” which is a genre common to young writers in the

very early stages of their writing process. The dominant characteristic in the lexical strings of repetition of the same lexical item in Topical theme position is an indicator of the limited choices available to the student. Even where H+post-m (relative clause) is used, it is both mechanical and repetitive. From the analysis of the text, there seems to be limited improvement in terms of writing over the period of the fourteen weeks. Contextually, the reference to BTS (the over-head train that runs through the center of metropolitan Bangkok) shows some attempt at local color. However, the student in this sample, rarely used Marked Topical themes to vary the writing, and the limited use of the range of NGs is a serious drawback for any form of descriptive writing. From the 76 texts that were analyzed in terms of the nominal group in either Topical or Marked Topical Theme position, they ranged from H, D+H, N+ H, C+H to N+E+H. Where embedded relative clauses were used, the structure was either incorrect or simply a repetition as indicated in the sample: *A man who is wearing a hat; A man who is not wearing a*

hat. However in Week 14, we find some indication of a developing use of N+H+post-m (relative clause + relative clause) and the prepositional phrase as post modifier in complement position. *Two men who are waiting for BTS which not arrived yet. Many people in this picture.*

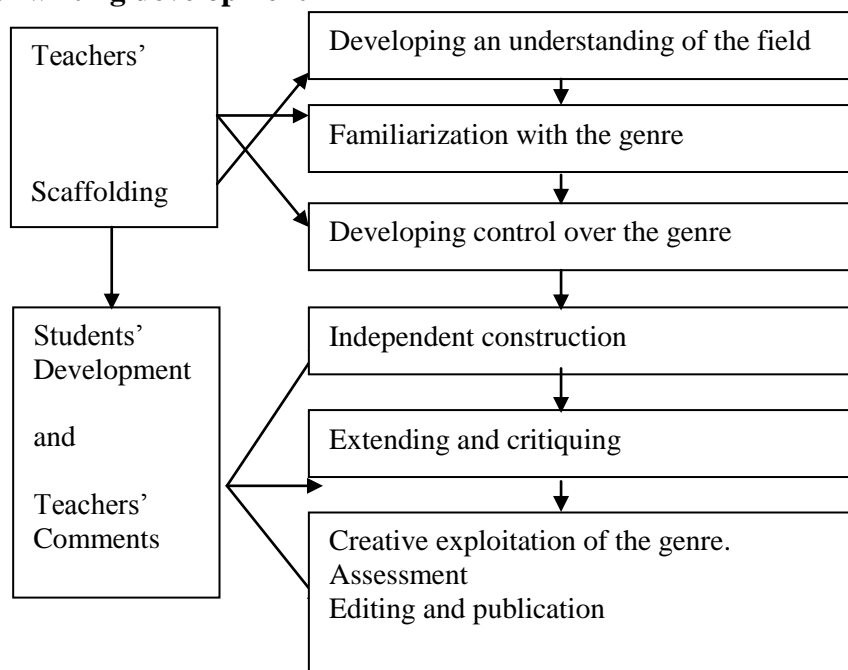
PART TWO OF THE PROJECT

The second stage in the project was to set up procedures to improve the writing of, in particular, the freshmen students. This was undertaken in the second semester of 14 weeks (2011-2012). The rationale for this second stage was that learning a second language means gaining progressive control over the systems of options in the new language and learning which options to select to make meanings in which contexts (Lock, 1996). Beginning learners have very limited options (a few structure some lexical items and some unanalyzed “chunks” of language. More advanced learners will have developed a greater range of options and are able to make delicate distinction of meanings

appropriate for different contexts. The ability to use different text-types or genres is seen as extending the learner’s making-meaning potential.

The genre pedagogy as presented here is based on a Vygotskian (1962) approach to learning. Language is learned through guidance and interaction in the context of shared experience. The teacher inducts learners into the linguistic demands of these genres that are important to participate in academic life and the wider community. Gradually, responsibility is shifted to the learners as they gain control of the genre. However, before developing a genre-based program, the teacher or institution would need to conduct an analysis of the teaching/learning context. At its broadest level, this should take into account the culture, history and tradition of the educational setting as well as the constraints posed by access to materials, English proficiency, learner expectations and assessment requirements.

Phases of writing development



(Zhong, 2012: 52).

• *Developing an understanding of the field*

Locate sample texts in the chosen genre to use for modeling. If the students demonstrate quite different levels of proficiency, it is a good idea to work in groups.

• *Developing the Genre*

Discuss the purposes for which we use this type of text in society (e.g. the purpose of Recount is to tell what happened as in the first pages of a newspaper). It is a good idea to give each group a copy of the model text with its stages clearly marked. Discuss the function of each stage. (For instance, the function of the orientation of a Recount is to let the reader know who was involved, when and where the events took place, and any other information necessary to understand the events which follow.)

• *Developing control over the Genre*

Assessing progress as some students may be keen to try to write an independent text, while others may need more modeling: flexibility is a key factor here. Rather than restricting creativity and copying someone else's work, students need to find out what the valued, accepted and successful norm of a particular kind of writing looks like. In other words, how meaning is constructed and communicated in the particular section of society for which the students are writing. Once they are familiar with the norm, they can start adapting creatively with it to enhance their particular purpose.

• *Teacher-led Construction*

Before the students write independent texts, they should participate in group writing in the chosen genre. The type of writing will depend on the genre we plan to use with the teacher acting as guide, while the students contribute information and ideas.

Student, possibly with the teacher's guidance, chooses a topic already modeled, then the students write their drafts based on the model. Student can consult with the

teacher and peers, receiving comments and suggestions for change to help the text achieve its purpose more effectively. However, at this stage the teacher may find that conferencing about drafts reveals a need for more modeling and joint construction.

• *Student-led Construction*

At this stage, the students independently construct texts of their own similar to the model. It is important that the teacher asks the students to write texts in the same genre and does not require them to write in a different way. While students are working on their texts they could be conferencing with other students or the teacher for guidance on both the content and language to be used in the writing.

• *Assessment*

The primary aim of this procedure is to present clearly the language conventions students need to master in terms of English. In the example presented in this study, the emphasis would be on developing the nominal group in describing. Once the students have absorbed these language features, they can be used as reference points in the formal assessment of the students' writing in English.

• *Extending*

As well as allowing for separate skills development, an extended teaching/learning cycle also allows multiple opportunities to build up the students' knowledge. Editing and publishing the texts are a final step to be kept in a portfolio of the students' work. (adapted from Sharpe and Thompson, 1998: see (Foley 2012).

1. **The number 1 city that I like** is [Hua Hin city]
2. *Because Hua Hin* is [a city in Thailand]
3. *and it* have [the beautiful sea.]
4. **I** really like [the sea and seafood].

5. When I was younge my parent always took me to the Hua Hin
6. *and they* always build [the sand castle] together.
7. **Hua Hin** is [the most famous city in Thailand],
8. *because it* * [very close to the sea and not far from the Bangkok].
9. **Hua Hin** is [the resting place for hard working man and woman as well].
10. *And around the seaside* *have [a horse and banana boat for interest people].
11. **The Hua Hin's sea** is [very clean and safe from jellyfish or fiercely animals].
12. **There** was[the place of the king name is Kai- Kung -won.]
13. **It's** [very beautiful] and [the king] always to relax here.
14. Last mount I have [the plant with my friends]
15. *That we* will go to [Hua Hin city].
16. **I and my friends** went to]Hua Hin by train.]
17. **It's** [very good experience for me]
18. *because since I* was born
19. **I** never went anywhere by train.
20. When we arrived at Hua Hin station we took [tricycle (tuk tuk in Thailand) to the Sofitel Hotel].
21. **This hotel** was [an old Hua Hin station]and we have lunch at the hotel.
22. *Then we* rent a car for travel around Hua Hin city.
23. **The first place that we went to** is]'Khoa-Ta-Keab' mountain].
24. **There** are [a lot of lovely monkey in this place]
25. *and there* is [beautiful temple].
26. *After we* pay respect to [the Buddha][.
27. **We** went to[a view point].
28. **We** can see around [the Hua Hin city]* this here.
29. **It's**[the most highest place in Hua Hin city].
30. *And then we* went to [Ban-sa-bai restaurant for dinner]
31. **We** order [many seafood such as shrimp, crab, fish, etc].

32. **All the seafood in this restaurant** are very fresh and delicious.
33. **I** really love [this restaurant]
34. *because it's* very cheap.
35. *After that we* went to [the hotel] to take a shower and rest.

Findings

Topical Themes

The NGs in Topical Theme position are still dominated by either 1st singular or 1st person plural nouns (*I, We*). The use of 'it' is also quite frequent although it is more of the ambient *it* as in
It's very beautiful
It's very expensive
It's the most highest place

Rather than the non-representational as in the impersonal projection (*it seems that...*) or the anticipatory *it* with relational clauses (*it worries us that...*).

The existential *there* is also used twice. More importantly we have evidence of the use of longer NGs: D+N+H+Relative Clause.

The number 1 city that I like
The first place that we went to
 D+H+pp+ng
All the seafood in the restaurant

Marked Topical Themes

There are four examples of marked topical themes being used:

Adverbial clauses:

When I was younge

When we arrived at Hua Hin station

Prepositional phrase, pp+ng:

Around the sea

Textual themes are used to give indicate the time scale used:

Last mount [month]*

Then

After

And then

After that

Complex clauses are also developing with the more frequent use of: *an* , *because*, *that*.

Also some *complex nominal groups* are beginning to be used in *complement* position:

the most famous city in Thailand
[D+Adv+E+H+pp+ng]
very close to the sea and not far from the Bangkok* [Adv+E+H+pp+ng]

the resting place for hard working man and woman as well [D+C+H+pp+ng]
a horse and banana boat for interest people [D+H D+H+pp+ng]
the place of the king name is Kai- Kung – won [D+H++pp+ng]
an old Hua Hin station [D+E+C+H]
a lot of lovely monkey in this place [N+E+H+pp+ng]
Ban-sa-bai restaurant for dinner [C+H+pp+ng]
Many seafood such as shrimp, crab, fish, etc* [E+H+pp+ng]

Thematic development

Topical Theme	30
Marked Topical Theme	4
Textual Theme	12
Ellipted Theme	0

Use of NGs in Topical Theme and Complement position
Second Semester Week 14.

N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+					+				+	+	

Discussion

In the second research question, “have the students developed their NG in Theme/Rheme position in their writing at the end of their first year of university, given a more explicit focus in their course work on the different grammatical choices available to them in writing?” what we are beginning to see in this Recount is a growing use of complex nominal groups than were found in the first semester of the student’s writing. The more intensive focus on the various phases of writing development outlined previously may have been a possible contributing factor in developing this more mature writing outcome.

The distribution of nominal groups towards the end of the second semester indicates a greater spread in the use of NGs. It is also significant that N1 nominal

groups are no longer dominated by personal pronouns indicating some awareness of the impersonal aspect of report writing.

PART THREE OF THE PROJECT

The next part of the project involved analyzing texts written by students in the first semester of their third year of English. By this time they had had extensive exposure to Report writing. The example that is analyzed here is a report written in the form of a Memo.

Semester 1 [English 3]

Memo report
To; Surayut Juranon, The Prime Minister,
From: Chavapol Sukhadomchote, Deputy of Education Minister
Date : 20 September 2007

Subject: Problems of Thai Scholarship project.

Introduction

1. With regard your request, I have studied [the problem of the One District One Scholarship project],
2. **It** started off in 2004 on a grand scale, launched in the Thaksin era.
3. **The project** has been renamed [the Scholarship for Community Development].
4. **The 921 students** *awarded grants to study overseas.
5. **They** were followed by 914 others in the second year.
6. **But due to problems that arose with the first group overseas, the third group, which is still waiting for government approval**, is only 400 strong.
7. **The Civil Service Commission** made [a long-term plan for officials to assist student in choosing their destinations],
8. **Grade A** can choose any country,
9. **while a smaller list of countries** is available for Grade B students.
10. **Grade C students** are limited to attending local universities.
11. **The finding and analysis in this report** are based on [the observation of Education Affair and interviewed with Punrung Punttuhong, the Civil Service Commission's expert on overseas education and Wijit Sri sarn, Education Minister].

Findings and Analysis

12. **There** are [many causes of problems in Thai scholarship project].
13. **Firstly, the student** had [problem *with their studies],
14. **those who chose to study in English-speaking countries** selected [courses which require a high level of proficiency in English].
15. **Secondly, the students** are required to take [language courses for 1-2 years in their foreign universities],
16. **it** is feared [that they may not be able to finish their bachelor's degree in 4 years].
17. **Thus, they** will come home [empty-handed at the end of a 6-year scholarship].
18. **Most students** had [problems regarding language and educational background].
19. **Although their average grades** had been* between 3.0 and 4.0,
20. **these** were [upcountry students whose academic backgrounds were not as strong as Bangkok students].
21. **This** can make* they faced [the problem of low grade and point averages]
22. **and they** were not fluent enough in the language of the country they had gone to.
23. **As a consequence, of the 921 students in the final group, 93 students** had returned from abroad to enroll in Thai private universities,
24. **three** had resigned from the program,
25. **and one** had killed herself.
26. **In addition, 160 others** are now not sure
27. **they** will be able to complete their courses
28. **and others** will need more time than usual

Recommendations

29. **Education Affairs** should set [a central examination and aptitude test] finally*,
30. **It** allow only *[who pass the examination to use scholarship in *abroad].
31. **Education Affairs** should set [a new revolution educational in the country for measuring]
32. **Education** is equal in the nationwide.
33. **Education Affair** should send [the psychological doctor to check Thai student who got scholarship in every year for checking their stress].

34. **Education Affair** should select [the countries for each student] *The 921 students*
35. *because it* will be equal for* [every student who get Thai scholarship]. D+H [and] H+pp+ng
The findings and analysis in this report
D+E+H+pp+ng
a smaller list of countries
D+E+H
Their average grades
D+C+H
The Civil Service Commission
- Conclusion
36. **I** strongly believe
37. **the implement in recommendation** will make Thailand save more money to pay for [Thai scholarship students]
38. **and the student who get Thai scholarship to study in abroad** will have more proficiencies to make [a contribution to the country's development].
39. *And they* are brilliant students received [education at good universities in abroad].
- It is also worth looking at some samples of the growing use of complex nominal groups in *Complement* position, as clearly the writer is using these very effectively.
- Findings**
- Following the genre of Report writing, what is very noticeable is the reduced number of personal pronouns in Topical theme position. Where *I* is used in the Conclusion, this would be expected in a Report genre, also the use of the impersonal *it*:
- It started off*
It is feared that...
*It allow only**
- However, what is significant is the extensive use of complex nominal groups in Topical Theme position.
- D+H+ relative clause
due to problems that arose with the first group overseas, the third group, which is still waiting for government approval
- the students who get Thai scholarship to study in abroad**
- H+ relative clause
Those who chose to study in English speaking countries
- D+N+H+pp+ng
The 921 students in the final group
*The implement*in recommendation*
D+N+H
- D+E+H+pp+ng
A long-term plan for officials to assist student in choosing their destination
D+H+pp+ng
the observation of Education Affair and interviews with Punrung Puntuhong, the Civil Service Commission's expert on overseas education and Wijit sri sa-arn, Education Minister.
D+H+pp+ng
the problem of the One District One Scholarship project
the problem of low grade and point average
N+H+pp+ng
many causes of problems in Thai scholarship project
D+E+C+H+pp+ng
a new revolution educational in the country for measuring*
H+ Relative Clause
courses which require a high level of proficiency in English
**who pass the examination to use scholarship abroad.*
D+H+Relative Clause
the country they had gone to
N+H+relative clause
every student who get Thai scholarship
C+H+relative clause
upcountry students whose academic backgrounds were not as strong as Bangkok students

D+C+H [and] C+H

a central examination and aptitude test

D+C+H+ Non finite clause

the psychological doctor to check Thai student

a contribution to the country's development

Marked Topical Themes

With regard your request [this is formulaic as an opening]

As a consequence [more marked than simply textual]

Textual themes

Conjunctions: *but, while, thus, although, because, and.* Conjunctives; *firstly, secondly, in addition*

Thematic development

Topical Theme	38
Marked Topical Theme	2
Textual Theme	13
Ellipted Theme	0

Use of NGs in Topical Theme and Complement position

Semester 1 [English 3]

N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1	N1
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+										+	+	+

Discussion

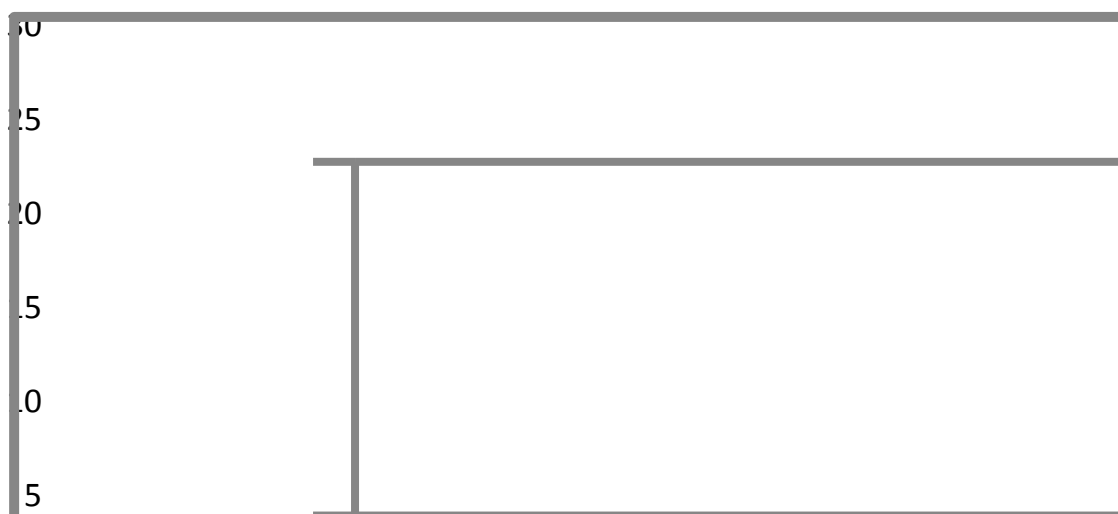
In handling the third research question, “have the students developed the NG in Theme/ Rheme position at the beginning of the third year of their English program with specific reference to the “academic” forms of writing used in Business English?”, at this stage in their writing, these students seem to have acquired control over the more important areas identified in Report

writing. Given the major role that Reports play in these Business students’ academic degrees, the teaching program piloted in this study seems to attain some measure of success. However, it is noticeable the preposition phrase as post-modifier (pp+ng) dominates the use of nominal groups. Further investigation into other genres such as argumentation or persuasion might give a different pattern.

Figure 2: Distribution of NGs



Figure 3: A comparison of the distribution and frequency of NGs from Semester 1 week 1; week 14; Semester 2 and Semester 1 of the third year of study.



This graph gives some indication of the growing use of complex nominal groups in the students' writing as they enter the third year of university. In such a small sample of writing, frequency would not be considered a major factor but rather the distribution of the nominal groups as the type of *genre* would have more impact on frequency as would the actual length of writing. It was also quite noticeable that the more complex nominal groups came in the rheme rather than in topical theme position. However, a much larger sample would have to be taken to draw any conclusions about the success of the genre approach to improve the academic writing of the students.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to see what effect the implementation of a genre-based approach to writing might have on the development of "academic" writing of university undergraduates. The focus was on the nominal group in Topical and Marked Topical themes position. The rationale behind this is that in each text there are different patterns of what comes first in the clause: this is how the genre, the overall social purpose of the writer and the mode, the interaction or planning of the language is constructed. In writing, where

the text is generally planned and edited, and normally, some thought goes into the organizing of the text and making clear its overall direction. Writers, therefore, have to be careful to make the necessary connections in the first part of the clause to summarize and link what follows.

Shifting focus when writing is very important and careful planning may need signposts to indicate what direction the text is taking. When linguists say that something is "unmarked," they mean it is the most common or expected. Conversely, when they say that something is "marked," they mean it is unusual and should be noticed because of the way it stands out; in other words, the text is taking a particular direction. Because choices are meaningful, when we find Marked Themes we look for the purpose behind the writer's patterning; the purpose may be to draw the reader's attention to a particular group or phrase but more often than not it is to build a coherent text that is easy to follow.

A program, such as one based on the theory of 'genre' which scaffolds the students' writing, can be useful, especially in an EFL context, to develop the language resources in different subject areas. Content knowledge and skills cannot be separated from the linguistic means through which that knowledge and skill is

manifest. Approaches to content-based language instruction (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Snow, Met & Genesee, 1989) can be enriched through an understanding that "content," especially at university level. Consequently, as the difficulty of the concepts we want the students to learn increases, the language that construes those concepts also becomes more complex. For example, the movement from the presentation of a new idea in the rheme of one clause to the re-presentation of the same information in the theme of a succeeding sentence is a feature of academic writing that typically involves nominalization. Such forms of nominalization are often a dominant feature of many academic and scientific texts. Consequently, writing programs need to be developed that explicitly teach the strategies that are expected of the students in their writing. Such programs have to develop the linguistic capacities (such as complex nominal groups and nominalization) that display the students' knowledge. If students are unable to draw on the meaning-making resources of academic discourse, then they will be unable to fully demonstrate what they are capable of.

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