

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this study, we have attempted to investigate the EFL stories of college English majors on the discourse level from a functional perspective. Instead of giving a “mysteriously authoritative number” (Marsh, 1992, p. 56) that represents the performance of the students, a thorough observation on the structural patterns presented in the collected data has been made in order to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the participants’ story-writing performance. In this chapter, **5.1** gives a summary of the major findings in accordance with the four research questions proposed in Chapter One. In **5.2**, pedagogical implications are provided. In **5.3**, the limitations of the present study are presented. Suggestions for further studies are offered in **5.4**.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The major findings are summarized in the following:

First, different narrative structures are observed in the collected data. The

structural patterns are classified into five major categories by the completeness of an episode, including (1) Description, (2) Abbreviated Story, (3) Complete Story, (4) Lengthened Story, and (5) Complex Story. The structural uses not only reflect the learners' writing styles but also reveal their concepts about story structure.

Second, all of the students are able to accomplish the part of exposition in a story.

This is likely due to their previous experience in practicing expository writing.

Besides, various writing skills are presented in the compositions. For example, some of the students understand how to create the sense of inevitability in the story; others know how to adequately use the formal devices to achieve certain effects; still others are able to grab the readers' attention by weaving the conflicts into the story from the very beginning. On the other hand, the weaknesses of these learners include (1) lacking a crisis in a story; (2) falling short of some essential components; (3) adding too many unnecessary details; and (4) obscuring the theme.

Third, generalized from the analysis and discussion shown in Chapter Four, the major writing difficulties these students may have experienced are summarized below:

(1) Lack of knowledge of the typical story structure: The learners do not understand the typical structural of English stories as signified in our study, or they do not understand that the typical structure is required in this writing situation. e.g. Story 1

on page 32.

- (2) Paucity of content to draw upon: The learners are not able to think of “good” ideas for the plots of a story in the given time. e.g. Story 2 on page 35.
- (3) Unfamiliarity with the conventional formal devices: The learners are not familiar with the formal devices used to realize certain parts of the story. e.g. Story 1 on page 32.
- (4) Lack of appropriate editing: The learners forget to read their texts twice before handing them in. Or, they are not capable of revising their compositions appropriately on their own. e.g. Story 5 on page 43.
- (5) Inclusion of too many dimensions: They include too many aspects in a short story, making the theme obscured. e.g. Story 7 on page 48.

Fourth, cultural influence is observed in the collected data. For example, two-thirds of the compositions end with a moral. Besides, students tend to detail the mental states of the story characters, presenting secondary characters, as well as illustrating of the relationship among story characters. Moreover, more descriptions than actions are included in the compositions. These writing preferences coincide with other Asian cultural groups in many ways. Therefore, the findings of this study may also serve as evidence for the high similarity existed among Asian cultures.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The major problems the subjects of this study may have experienced are generalized, including (1) Lack of knowledge of the typical story structure; (2) Paucity of content to draw upon; (3) Unfamiliarity with the conventional formal devices; (4) Lack of appropriate editing; and (5) Inclusion of too many dimensions. For the teachers who are interested in improving the story writing skills of advanced EFL learners in Taiwan, the problems generalized above may need to be taken into consideration. What follow are pedagogical suggestions.

First, students need to be made aware of the genre structure they are assigned to write (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Gray, 1990; Martin, 1989). Not only the present study but also other previous studies (Bearse, 1992; Vardell & Burris, 1986) have shown that students can not always apply their general knowledge about English stories to their own compositions although they could detect some common elements and structures of the English stories (Cheng, 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to inform the students of the conventional story structure or typical story components before assigning the writing task. Direct and explicit instruction in story structure or story components has proved to be effective in enhancing the organization in learners' writing (Cheng, 2002; Fitzgerald & Teasley, 1986; Taylor, 2000). Moreover, when assigning a story-writing task as the one in our present study, it would be beneficial

for the students to learn to distinguish a recount from a narrative story.

Second, for the students who can not think of “good” ideas for the plots of a story, the teacher could encourage them to develop upon the detailed information of the story characters (e.g. what they fear, what they hope for, what they are interested in, etc.) to generate the main conflict of the story (Klingensmith, 2003). Besides, guiding the learners to adapt or transform the existing well-known folktales is also proved useful in sharpening students’ story-writing skills (Bush, McCall & Thompson, 1992; Cheng, 2002; Pullum, 1998; Sipe, 1993). As reported by Cheng (2002), the subjects of her study (25 first-grade junior high school students in Taiwan) have successfully transformed the folktales with creativity after the teaching project.

Also, Rogers (1992), a professional writer and teacher of creative writing, proposed that modeling the techniques a writer uses can effectively enhance the learners’ writing. She noted that by identifying the basic plots occurring in literary works and asking the students to do likewise help them “remove that dreadful pressure to be original” (p. 113). Besides, with a given plot, the students can concentrate more on their line-by-line writing. Moreover, in the process of examining those well-known literary works and realizing the techniques the skilled writers use, the students may gain some insight into literary criticism, which is an important subject for most college English majors. In addition, they could discover by themselves that “there is

more than one way to tell the story” (p. 114).

Third, for the learners who are unfamiliar with the surface structure conventions, the teacher can help them by noting these formal devices while reading. As Tickoo (2001) pointed out, the teacher can present model texts to illustrate the absence or presence of the conventional devices, get the learners to investigate text samples for the conventions, and ask them to make the necessary adjustments. “Such active engagement... will guarantee greater success than the passive modes” of traditional grammar instruction or “models approach” (Tickoo, 2001, p. 34). Moreover, it is noted by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) that the “instruction should induce a simplified version of the complex strategies needed by students and then that these strategies may be gradually appropriated by students” (p.245).

Fourth, the teacher should inform the students of the importance of editing and diminish their fear for revising. As Murphy (2003) pointed out, “the idea of change is often terrifying” to the students, but “failure is essential to effective writing” (p. 461). Also, it is necessary to remind the learners that editing is not all about fixing the mistakes in grammar and spelling, but also checking the story for its style and organization. However, ESL or EFL learners are unable to rely on intuitions to edit their stories “the way L1 writers can by re-reading texts to see if they ‘sound’ right” (Silva, 1992, cited from Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Therefore, the teacher could

incorporate cooperative learning activities into the writing course, offering the students clear guidelines for revising (or having them discuss the guidelines by themselves), and ask the students to do peer correction in order to improve their drafts.

5.2 Limitations of the Present Study

This study has taken a step in investigating the story-writing performance of college English majors in Taiwan. However, there are still four limitations to be improved.

First, availability of pictures may influence the content of the compositions. As depicted earlier in **3.3**, the writing task of this study is concerned with three pictures collected from the Internet by the students. As a result, what the students found may provide them inspiration for writing or, oppositely, confine the content of their stories to the available pictures.

Second, only one type of story is investigated in this study. However, the performance of students may vary with different story types. For example, one student may perform better in creating a fairy tale than a mystery. Therefore, to get a full picture of the story-writing performance of the learners, it is necessary to involve more types of stories in the study.

Third, the small size sample may diminish the explanatory power of this study.

The twenty stories, although representative of the performance of the twenty subjects in our study, are insufficient to demonstrate the performance of all the college English majors in Taiwan. Therefore, if possible, we suggest more subjects to be included to find out more about the story-writing performance of college English majors in Taiwan.

Finally, although we have made every categorization based on the definitions, the decisions may sometimes still seem to be arbitrary or subjective. This is also an inevitable problem for all other studies of this nature. Therefore, to achieve a more persuasive and objective result, it is suggested to include more experienced analysts in the study. Moreover, information about the reliability of the analysts should be provided.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Few studies have been conducted toward the writing performance of higher level EFL learners in Taiwan. To get a clear picture of the holistic writing ability of higher level learners, further research can be done on examining their performance in other genres such as expository or argumentative writing based on the notional structural patterns or formal linguistic devices.

Besides, the present study has generalized the strengths and weaknesses of some higher level EFL learners in Taiwan and has provided certain pedagogical implications. Further studies can be done on exploring practical and useful ways to enhance the learners' story-writing ability.

In addition, it is claimed by some researchers that "L2 writers' performance does not always reflect language proficiency; L2 students often reveal more sophisticated composing abilities which have previously been developed in the L1" (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p.240). Further research can be done on probing the interrelationship between the learners' L1 and L2 writings, and the correlation between the learners' overall L2 proficiency and their L2 performance.