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Foreword

Welcome to the Autumn Edition 2012 of *The Asian ESP Journal*!

The authors of the six articles published in this issue come from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan (3 papers), and Thailand. Four articles have students as the informants/participants of the research studies. They, respectively, explore students’ perceptions of tasks in Chinese tertiary level oral English classes (Yang, Y.), citation functions in Humanities and Social Sciences (Yeh, C. C.), genre-based ESP writing instruction (Yang, W. H.), and specialised dental vocabulary strategy training (Loong and Chan).

In addition to student perception of effectiveness and usefulness, Yeh’s study also discusses findings relating to students’ citation knowledge and practice; Yang’s study also investigates students’ attitudes towards genre-based ESP writing instruction; and Loong and Chan’s study also examines improvement in students’ vocabulary test scores. Two articles are concerned with genre analysis: English research article abstracts by Vietnamese agricultural researchers (Zhang, Bui, and Pramoolsook) and a comparison of requesting letters in business communication textbooks and the workplace (Lai and Tseng).

I hope you will enjoy reading the articles and recommend them to your colleagues and students to further disseminate the findings and enhance the impact of the research studies. Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the professional contribution of our Associate Editors and Academic Editors* whose quality review work has made the current issue possible. I also wish to thank our proof readers for their great work!

Chief Editor

*The Asian ESP Journal*

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Genre Analysis of Requesting Letters in Business Communication
Textbooks and the Workplace

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Abstract
Business communication is a purposeful social action; its significant function of disseminating information and making things happen through words in the workplace settings is well-attested. However, there have been relatively few studies investigating the links between written business communication taught in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and that in the workplace settings. The present study is designed to fill this gap, aiming to adopt a qualitative approach to explore how
communicative purposes of one particular genre, requesting letters, are presented in the teaching materials for business writing and in one particular business discourse community. The analysis of written texts of requesting letters and interview data with two senior project managers underlines that clarity is emphasized in both textbooks and the workplace setting. Despite relevant words and structures provided in the textbooks for ESP students, to achieve clarity, intertextuality, and particularly in the ways of negotiation for getting the request done in a concise, assertive, and persuasive (CAP) manner, is considered essentially important. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications are suggested for the course design of English business communication.

Keywords: business communication, requesting letters, genre, intertextuality

1. Introduction
The global dominance of English is well-established in the fields of international business, medical science, law, and other academic disciplines. Hence, there is a demand for ESP training, particularly in the market of Business English courses, which is described as “booming” (St John, 1996, p.3). Business communication has become a purposeful social action; the intertextual nature of commercial correspondence in the workplace settings is well-attested (Bremner, 2008; Bhatia, 2004; Flowerdew & Wan, 2010). As a matter of fact, Business English communication has been a crucial focus in the teaching and learning of ESP, seeking to attain its status in the international society.

Given that studies on English for Business Purposes (EBP) mostly utilized the quantitative approach to collect and analyze the data, and that relatively few studies in the field of business have examined the relationships between business writing taught in the ESP courses and that in the workplace settings (see Section 2 for literature review), the present study is designed to fill this gap. We adopt a qualitative research approach, examining requesting letters by collecting, analyzing, and comparing those letters in business communication course textbooks and those used in one international business firm in Taiwan. Besides, the interview transcripts of two senior project managers are also used to probe deeper into the specific business discourse community. Our intention is to generate new insights into the socio-cultural, multiple-layered view of context to explore the ESP/EBP curriculum. This will in turn contribute to the course design of English business communication, which should take account of
intertextuality, defined as the “explicit and implicit relations that a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary and potential future texts” (Bazerman, 2004, p.86). Issues relevant to intertextuality as well as research on ESP/EBP will be further discussed in the following section (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2).

2. Literature review

2.1 Review of ESP literature

The study of languages for specific purposes has a long history. Teaching and learning English for specific purposes (ESP) has come to dominance in the field of ELT since 1960s. A great deal of ESP literature can be found, mainly relating to the essential and variable features of ESP, history, and overview of ESP curriculum and related syllabus design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991; Richards, 2001; Widodo & Savova, 2010). As Belcher (2008) points out insightfully, the ESP industry continues to flourish, giving much attention about its significance in the contemporary world, particularly its emphasis on constantly changing learning targets, needs, and strategies.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose that a learning-centered approach to needs analysis can help identify learners’ knowledge, language items, skills, and strategies. To achieve a learning-centered approach to ESP course design, they suggest that “we need to take into account not only the requirements of the target situation, but also the needs and constraints of the ESP learning situation, and the general pedagogic approach they determine” (1984, pp.110-111). Briefly, the course design of a learning-centered approach is a dynamic and negotiated process, whereby it has to incorporate opportunities for the learner’s responses with the learning tasks so that the use of classroom tasks can adapt to needs as they develop or change.

Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) characterize ESP as a process of careful research followed by the design of materials and activities for a specific group of adult learners within a specific learning context. They discuss two principal components, needs assessment and discourse analysis, as being integral elements in materials design. Besides, they offer three reasons to explain the international scope of ESP: English for internal communication (e.g. in countries such as India, Nigeria, Singapore, Fuji, and Kenya); the widespread use of scientific and technical English, and English for international communications (e.g., related to business, medicine, and other academic disciplines). In their view, ESP’s development has been dominated by needs
and materials, so ESP requires methods and approaches unlike those found in more general ESL classes. They regret that “few empirical studies have been conducted to test the effectiveness of ESP courses” (p.303). They also see the need for analytical research targeted to the discourse that must be comprehended or produced by a particular discourse community.

2.2 Review of EBP literature: EBP curriculum and instruction, genre, intertextuality

In respect of EBP, traditionally there has been a preoccupation with language proficiency and the types of miscommunication that can occur in interactions between native and non-native speakers of a given language. To a certain extent, analyzing a variety of linguistic features can help students understand a particular linguistic choice, and this may therefore lead to the effectiveness of communication in a business context, rather than simply considering whether it is grammatically correct or incorrect. Example of studies that discuss the contribution of various linguistic features to the effectiveness of communication in different forms of business discourse are work done by Charles (1996), Halmari (1993), and Yamada (1997), for meetings, negotiations, and telephone calls respectively, and by Bhatia (1993), Maier (1992), and Mulholland (1999), for letters of apology, sales letters, and email. All of these studies provide useful ideas for business discourse and language teaching, such as using role-plays or business situations matched to real-life business situations, and training students to become aware of the role of language as a fundamental contributor to organizational communication.,

Yogman and Kaylani (1996) endorse a “task-centered, project and portfolio approach” to teaching Business English with “content-based instruction” at its core (p.312). They suggest small group interactions with a focus on fluency, in which language is a tool rather than a product, and recognize the process of needs analysis as “one of the defining characteristics of ESP and key to planning both ESP curricula and classroom activities” (p.314). With regard to teaching materials, St John (1996, p. 9) discusses four categories of business communication skills: cultural contexts, (English) language in business settings, interpersonal communication skills, and business studies methodology. The first three categories are related to the three main features of the work environment that determine the linguistic skills required, and the last category relates to how business is studied. In her paper, St John (1996) notes that business
executives “do not want to be transported back to a typical classroom” (p.14) and suggests that textbooks are “intended for pre-experience students and not for the executive” (p.13). Accordingly, she considers EBP to be “a materials-led movement rather than a researched movement” (p.15). In her view, intuition and experience are not enough, and therefore research is needed for a fuller understanding.

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) point out that most Business English communications are between non-native speakers using “International English” (p.53). Key issues are discourse communities (including factors that affect business relationships), business genres (e.g. letters, meetings, and negotiations), communicative events (e.g. telephoning, socializing, making presentations, participating in meetings, negotiating, corresponding, and reporting), and functions, grammar, and lexis. Besides, learners’ expectations and strategies as well as cross-cultural issues must be considered. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) place emphasis on the role of needs analysis as being fundamental and consisting of a language audit with two dimensions: the Target Situation Analysis (TSA) and the Present Situation Analysis (PSA). For them, although a professional business background is not required, teachers should be interested in business and knowledgeable about business contexts and people. They should also have “some knowledge of management theories and practice” (p.61), excellent interpersonal and cross-cultural skills, and “first-class training skills” (p.61).

More recently, Zhang (2007) identified that over 80% international business firms use English to communicate in the workplace settings. Business English courses, which include in-service training programs, have therefore become significantly important. In 2001, Hsieh (2001) conducted an experimental research aiming to examine how and what to teach in Business English, focusing on a group of EFL students who majored in the Department of Business Administration at a business school in Taiwan. Hsieh (2001) administered questionnaires with this group of 24 students in respect of their attitudes and perceptions about their learning and the teaching of Business English. Having quantitatively analyzed the data, Hsieh (2001) suggests that both oral and written skills should be emphasized in Business English courses. Hsu (2005), on the other hand, adopted a qualitative approach to examine how the teaching of lexical collocations in a business workshop could enhance Taiwanese EFL learners’ development of English proficiency. The research participants were 9 students who studied in the Department of Banking and Finance.
Hsu (2005) combined interviews with students’ writings, in-class notebooks, and pre- and post-workshop tests. The results reveal the importance of explicit teaching of business lexical collocations.

In 2008, Wang, Hsu, and Liu explored EFL teachers’ and learners’ perceptions of the Business English courses. The researchers conducted interviews with six Business English teachers and administered questionnaires with 49 EFL students who majored in the Department of International Trade. The interview transcripts were qualitatively analyzed while the questionnaires were quantitatively analyzed. The findings reveal that the class size and students’ low level of English proficiency were the major problems for the teachers, and that the lack of ability to write Business English sentences was the major problems for the students. Consequently, Wang and colleagues (2008) suggest that Business English teachers should not only cooperate with business subject teachers and attend teacher training programs, but also carry out needs analysis of students. For them, it is important to provide students practical business training programs for application to the real-life situations in the business world.

Central to the studies on business communication are the theory and application of genre analysis. An important notion in genre analysis is “intertextuality” (Berkenkotter, 2001; Bhatia, 2004). According to Bazerman (2004), intertextuality is the “explicit and implicit relations that a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary, and potential future texts” (p.86). There have been a number of researchers (e.g. Berkenkotter, 2001; Bremner, 2008; Bhatia, 2004; Holmes, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Swales, 2004) who look at ways in which genres operate as interrelated and textually linked components in wider systems of activity. In the context of academic writing, Holmes (2004) argues that intertextuality “once combined with genre analysis, can offer a powerful basis for a coherent methodology that deals with the teaching of EAP reading and writing skills” (p.73). In Hyland’s (2004) view, “teachers can help students to see that their texts do not stand alone but must be understood against a background of other opinions, viewpoints, and experiences on the same theme” (p.81). In the context of workplace writing, Bremner (2008) contends that “a richer discursive environment, and one which would give students the opportunity to make more authentic rhetorical responses to different situations, could be achieved with the provision of more complex sets of intertextually linked texts for them to draw on” (p.307).
Taken together, several researchers (e.g. Belcher, 2008; Douglas, 2000; Robinson, 1991) acknowledge the importance of taking account of the learners’ participation and investment of effort, and thus point out the need of drawing upon the socio-cultural, multiple-layered view of context to explore ESP curriculum. Significant changes in the business context, such as the internationalization of business and the increasing importance of new technology-driven media, have taken place over the past two decades. In this regard, Business English communication has been a crucial focus in the field of ESP. This study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate business communication by exploring how the teaching materials for business writing equip EFL students with knowledge and skills in understanding and performing one particular genre, requesting letters, in one particular business discourse community in Taiwan. Relevant pedagogical implications drawn on the research findings will be of great value use for future ESP/EBP course design, particularly taking into account the multiple-layered view of context and intertextuality in ESP/EBP instruction.

2.3 The theoretical framework of the present study: Generic structure of requesting letters
We follow Swales’ (1990) definition of genre in which members of a specific discourse community share “structure, style, content, and intended audience” (p.58) in order to express their communicative purposes. The analysis of the corpus of requesting letters makes it possible to identify the generic structure of requesting letters shown in Figure 1. The move structure of requesting letters is adapted from the work by Santos (2002).

Moves 1 and 4 provide the channel of the negotiation for the particular request proposed. The negotiation mainly takes place in Moves 2 and 3, as the content of request is provided and negotiated through interactions in these two moves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move 1: Establishing the requesting chain</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Addressing and greeting the addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Explaining the purpose of requesting</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move 2: Providing information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Introducing/providing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Showing opposition (unexpected results)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move 3: Requesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Explaining/clarifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Giving opinion/comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Confirming information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Acknowledging the receipt of a message</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Move 4: Ending politely</th>
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</table>

Move 1 usually appears at the beginning of a requesting letter, aiming at initiating the interaction, from which turns to the stage of negotiation for dealing with the request. The writer usually starts off the interaction with the reader by providing the reference information which links the previous correspondence to the next one. More specifically, this move serves the important rhetorical function of setting the scene of the communicative event, the means, providing information about the interaction of the participants, the purpose of request, and origin and date. In Move 1, the greeting act of addressing the reader is also fulfilled. This move can be divided into two steps: addressing and greeting the addressee, and explaining the purpose of requesting.

Move 2 then suggests the provision of information which may be shared or known as the new idea by both parties of negotiation for the particular request. In the present study, Move 2 can be divided into two main sub-steps: introducing information/providing information and showing opposition (unexpected results). Like Move 2, Move 3 can be divided into several sub-steps: explaining/clarifying, giving opinion/comments, confirming information, and acknowledging the receipt of a message. These sub-steps underline the nature of request, characterized by verbal action for making the request or performing action for confirming the request being processed. Ultimately, Move 4 signals the end of the letter. The writer of a requesting letter signs off by giving the closure of the request and notifying the addressee individual professional data, such as full name, position in the company and other relevant details.

3. Research methods
The data used in this paper consist of 30 requesting letters documented in two business communication course textbooks and used in one international business firm in Taiwan and interview data with two senior project managers working in an international business firm in Taiwan to obtain an in-depth understanding of how requesting letters
are shaped to fulfill the particular communicative purposes in the real workplace.

Parts of our data sources (20 letters out of 30 letters) were collected from the following two business communication course textbooks:


These two books were selected because they were two frequently-used business writing textbooks in educational settings in Taiwan. When analyzing our data, we respectively used “business communication course textbook (A)” and “business communication course textbook (B)” to refer to the first (Zyzo & Heins, 2000) and the second one (Ashley, 2003).

The two senior project managers, Ruth and Steve (pseudonyms) who participated in the present study have been working in this company for more than ten years. The business firm was founded in 1997. It is a Taiwanese manufacturer of mobile phones and personal digital assistant (PDA), focusing on multiple areas of wireless technology. The company has strongly invested in research and development, running a software design office in North America and some European countries.

One of the project managers (Ruth) who participated in this study was taught by one of the researchers in the EMBA course five years ago. Indeed, we have been well aware that the documents used in business firms are essentially deemed confidential, and thus have carefully dealt with the interview data and the business letters produced in the workplace. To deal with ethical issues, the two participants allowed us to use these letters on the condition that we use pseudonymous names for all of the writers and companies shown in the texts. We also checked the interview transcripts that we translated from Chinese to English with the two project managers—whether our translations fitted with the reality of informants’ perspectives.

The analytical approach chosen is that of genre (Swales, 1990; see also Bhatia, 1993, 2004), whereby the interview transcripts are used to probe deeper into the specific business community. Our aim is to explore how the results of the analyses of genre and interview data can provide ESP teachers with Business English communication pedagogy.
The communicative purpose which guides business letters examined in this paper is the motivation of exchanging information or requesting action to ensure the bond between two companies is maintained. Much negotiation is thus involved in the communication for getting the request done. To make such a negotiation possible and the outcome successful, three major elements are often found in the exchange. First, questions resulting from doubt or miscommunication have to be mentioned and answered. Second, services and suggestions have to be provided. Third, arrangements have to be settled so that people involved in the negotiation for dealing with request are satisfied with the agreement.

The key feature of the genre of request, as its name implies, is to make a request for information (e.g. company brochures, product catalogs, the specifications/samples of products, etc.) from a company or a person-in-charge through the business written communication. By following the work of genre within an ESP perspective (Bhatia, 1993; Connor & Mauranen, 1999), which is related to professional and academic communication, we consider genre as constituted in social context. Social context which motivates the language use and communicative purpose justifies the particular genre. Genres are specific text types deployed and (re)produced in shifting power structures to establish relationships with others, convey messages, and get things done. Generic conventions are not fixed, since people can either adhere to or challenge them for particular purposes.

4. Data analysis and discussion

Move 1: Establishing the requesting chain

As the findings of previous investigations (Eggins, 1994; Ghadessy, 1993) suggest, the exchange of business letters of negotiation is characterized by the feature of oral interaction. This dialogue-like feature is noted in the corpus of requesting letters examined in the present study (see Figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract(s) from the requesting letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extract 1: from the business communication course textbook (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Mr. Merton,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were recommended to us by your trade association and I am writing on behalf of our principals in Canada, who are interested in importing chinaware from England.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extract 2: from the business communication course textbook (B)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Sir / Madam
We are a chain of retailers based in Birmingham and are looking for a manufacturer who can supply us with a wide range of sweaters for the men’s leisurewear market. We were impressed by the new designs displayed on your stand at the Hamburg Menswear Exhibition last month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract 3: from the international business firm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hi George (pseudonym)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As you might be aware, my company has requested your company to accelerate the technical approval process for Liberty with targeted TA date as 05/31. I am writing to see if the deadline can be delayed a bit to 06/02.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Examples of Move 1: Establishing the requesting chain

Figure 2 displays the examples of Move 1 in the requesting letters. These requesting letters follow the chain of requesting information, actions or services, as it is implemented in a dialogue. In the requesting letters written in the workplace setting, the language use which realizes the move of establishing the request chain is brief and precise. As one senior manager, Steve, was asked to comment upon the practice of business letter writing, he said the following:

We seek efficiency in communication; thus, the essential element in business communication is clear, concise, and assertive. The business world is competitive and rapidly changing; we have to engage in communication or negotiation straightforwardly, instead of beating around the bush only to bring out the focus at the end.

(Authors’ translation from Chinese)

In addition, when explaining the purpose of negotiation for the particular request, the reference information which links to the previous and next correspondence is stated. It helps the participants in the business communication to keep track of the request chain and reveals that the communicative event shaped through the request chain has a sequence in terms of message exchange

Move 2: Providing information

In Move 2, two important features of language use are found (see the examples in Figure 3).
First, direct discourse is found through relevant language-in-use. Instead of having modified phrases or clauses, the language use is kept concise. This finding conforms with the characteristics of business letter writing, as documented in the relevant literature and mentioned by one project manager, Ruth, in the semi-structured interview. Secondly, the first person pronoun (including I, we) or names of employees are used as the agent of the sentence and you is used to address the audience. The choice of personal pronouns or a person’s name emphasizes the rhetorical function of this move: it is the person rather than the company or department introducing or providing information and dealing with unexpected results. Specifically, it gives the audience the impression that they are engaging in the request with a person rather than an institution. As the two project managers noted, central to the request is the idea of “being friendly and concise” (Steve’s words) and “offering efficient service” (Ruth’s words).

**Move 3: Requesting**

In Move 3, our analysis reveals a number of salient features of language-in-use, which is documented in detail with related examples in Figure 4.
### Extract(s) from requesting letters

#### I. The use of modality markers, usually accompanying with “please”

**Extract 7: from the business communication course textbook (A)**

Could you please send us your latest catalogue and price list, quoting your most competitive prices?

Would you please inform us of the price and payment conditions for the products we ordered as mentioned above?

**Extract 8: from the business communication course textbook (B)**

Could you please increase our order by 1,000 units? We would be grateful. Therefore, please send us the information as requested in a p.m. fax. We would really appreciate your help in supplying us with an additional 1,000 units on this order.

**Extract 9: from the international business firm**

I would appreciate your help in this case. Please let us know your response as soon as possible. If needed, I would like to send Milton (pseudonym) back to HQs and work with the team so that he could advise what other options exist to help de-rising TA.

#### II. The use of adverb “kindly”

**Extract 10: from the business communication course textbook (A)**

Could you please kindly give us more information on our products?

**Extract 11: from the business communication course textbook (B)**

We thus kindly request you strictly follow our instructions for ordering.

#### III. The use of “need”

**Extract 12: from the business communication course textbook (A)**

For the next ordering, I will need a commitment to at least 20,000 texts and I will try to negotiate with American branches to get the best price.

**Extract 13: from the international business firm**

We need urgently our inscription ticket when inviting the chief executive from German headquarters to come to pay us a visit. Please send us the fax a.s.a.p.

To do so, I would need your help in allowing reprioritizing among projects and giving Liberty resources needed to start parallel testing and also the same high priority in coming up fixes if any failure should occur.

#### IV. The use of “if-clause”

**Extract 14: from the business communication course textbook (A)**

If you have any comment on this schedule, please contact us a.s.a.p.

**Extract 15: from the international business firm**

If needed, I would like to send Milton (pseudonym) back to HQs and work
with the team so that he could advise what other options exist to help de-rising TA.
If necessary and probably in a later stage, we will work with you on a system of semi-finished products for testing the quality of final products.

V. The use of “evaluative verbs”

Extract 16: from the business communication course textbook (A)

We regret it is impossible for us to wait as the schedule is quite tight.
We feel awful for the mistakes taken place in the process of transporting the products.

Extract 17: from the business communication course textbook (B)

I hope to have some time to do the final check on the products and relevant services provided to ensure the quality of the products.

Extract 18: from the international business firm

I believe your cooperation with me will generate more financial profits.
We trust you will reply to us within 1-2 days to reduce test time so that the engineering team can turn around a fix without impacting TA or work schedule.

Figure 4 Examples of Move 3: Requesting

First, the actions of requesting can be carried out through interrogatives, imperatives or declaratives. The writers usually use modality markers such as could, would, might to make requests and the expression of would like to indicate the degree of mitigation. Sentences with modality markers are usually phrased with please to strengthen the aspect of politeness, making the atmosphere of “the exchange of request” sound formal, and showing respect to the addressee. In Figure 4, requests made either through imperatives or interrogatives are often accompanied with please. The addressee is addressed in the requesting letter, revealing s/he is the person whom the writer aims at communicating with. The addressee is addressed overtly through interrogatives and covertly through imperatives.

Second, comparing the samples of requesting letters published in the textbook and the corpus of requesting letters in the workplace setting, the pragmatic function of face-saving is more emphasized in the business communication course textbooks, revealed by the use of adverb: kindly. This finding confirms what Charles (1996) argues about how to write well in business letters. However, the request is proposed to be more straightforward in the requesting letter in the workplace setting, linking with the previous correspondence, product(s) or service(s) the addressee claims to be able to offer. More specifically, intertextuality is framed through the interconnection
between the requesting letter and texts related to the particular chain of requesting. In addition, the strength of the request is reinforced through the use of *need*, which demonstrates that the addressee has no choice but to provide what is requested, such as information, favors, or resolutions. The assertive tone and clarity in language use are considered important by the two senior project managers, Steve and Ruth. They commented upon the training they received and provided to the novice employees on business letter writing as follows:

**Steve:** *Being concise and direct is important, as in the business world; no time can be wasted with indirectness but the request should be made clear and in time.*”

**Ruth:** *The expressions of request which intend to present a friendly impression upon the addressee are actually redundant. In order to reach successful business communication or negotiation for getting the request dealt with, I believe, certainty and efficiency are the most significant elements.*

(Authors’ translation from Chinese)

Besides being firm, an *if-clause* is sometimes adopted to suggest a possibility, having an impact upon the addressee, indicating the possibility s/he can decide whether or not to reply to the request, or even to comment upon the request.

**Move 4: Ending**

For the last move, Move 4, relevant research data in our corpus can be noticed in Figure 5.

### Extract(s) from requesting letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract 19: from the business communication course textbook (A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I look forward to your cooperation and welcome any ideas or comments. Many thanks. Linda Lowe Director Sanders &amp; Lowe Ltd. Planter House, Princes Street London EC1 7DQ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Figure 5, it is seen that e-mail, fax number, P.S. line are highlighted in the requesting letters in the workplace setting to capture the addressee's attention. Therefore, if encountering an urgent situation, the addressee will know where to look for further assistance by reading the ending remark, which functions as the last-minute help information.

Overall, the analysis of our corpus of 30 requesting letters in this study reveals that the content and the structure of requesting letters is mainly determined by the communicative purpose of the particular genre: business letters of requesting. Common and dissimilar features between requesting letters published in the business communication course textbooks and used in the international business firm in Taiwan reveal that the constitution of the genre of requesting letters shapes and is shaped by the particular community of practice (see also Wenger, 1998). It is especially evident in the requesting letters in the real business world. The intertextual link is underscored to show the need to build the reciprocal relationship between the writer and the addressee.

Moves 1 and 4 constitute the frame for the social ritual of greeting, displaying
the “given” information or “facts” about the message and participants in the particular exchange of requesting. The sub-step of Move 1, explaining the purpose of requesting, acts as a link between the previous correspondence and the current one, initiating or continuing a chain-like interaction in which each letter is considered a turn, responding to the previous letter or expecting a future reply. Moves 2 and 3, on the other hand, provide “new” information and the “authentic” content for the interaction which motivates the exchange of requesting. These two moves perform the central rhetorical functions of displaying the shared needs or purposes which lead to the communication. The communication is aimed at negotiating for the information of products, companies, or actions for doing favors or offering services. Within the communication, the participants express their ideas, give and evaluate opinions, dynamically negotiate with others, and finally, reach the communicative purpose, that is, the request will be then addressed with satisfactory answers or solutions.

The analysis of the generic structure and the retrospective accounts of two senior project managers reveal that the sequencing of the four move-steps is regular, following the numerical order as shown in Figure 1. Moves 2 and 3 usually come together in the same section of requesting letters, providing information before requesting. This pattern conforms to what people anticipate regarding the conventional social manner of making a request in the target community of practice: talking about something that speakers share knowledge of beforehand prior to introducing something new. The lexical use, particularly the first-person pronoun use (I, we), highlights a more personalized stance that the writer holds, directly addressing the addressee by indicating oneself: “I” or his/her name to emphasize him/her as an individual or the cooperative “we.” Besides, the use of formal expressions such as modality markers, would, could, might; adverbs of entreaty such as kindly and hypothetical expressions enable the writer to create an impression of cordiality and respect. Consequently, it may soften the overt power embedded in the act of requesting; the power exercised in the chain of request is especially obvious due to the differences between the companies in terms of their economical and social status, business interests, as well as market knowledge.

In addition, certain verbs which usually carry the meaning of personal impact or emotional process are used instead to indicate the nature of mental processes, such as believe, feel, trust, regret, and hope. It is noteworthy that the use of these evaluative verbs is more frequent in requesting letters in the business communication course
textbooks. Nevertheless, in requesting letters in the international business firm, shown in Figure 4, only positive evaluative verbs are found to strengthen the assertiveness of the writer through the use of the first-person pronoun (I, we). The writer appears certain, informing the reader of the desire to have the addressee reply to the request with specific and appropriate solutions. Rather than cognitive processes, the social interaction is emphasized more often in requesting letters in the workplace setting, as realized by the linguistic evidence (positive evaluative verbs, direct addressee of the reader as “you”) and supported by the retrospective accounts of two senior project managers as follows:

Ruth: Being concise, assertive, and persuasive is more important than showing respect or sincerity; in the business world, time is money; precious time should be used to get the problem solved, not to make the customer feel comfortable only by being polite.

Steve: Pre-existing templates are often used in my workplace setting. That does not mean I am lazy but the use of templates can ensure productivity. In some cases, discussions with colleagues are found, but in most cases, due to time constraints, letter writing has to be done efficiently by the due date. Rapid reply is expected. All relevant information related to the request and those who will be concerned with the specific request must be included. I always copy my request letter to the particular team members by distributing the follow-up duties to each of them. My experience tells me that it is crucial to always keep monitoring, and checking the follow-up schedule.” (underline: Steve’s emphasis)

(Authors’ translation from Chinese)

Overall, our analysis reveals that in the real business world, negotiating in commercial correspondence should be done in a concise, assertive and persuasive (CAP) manner, and that solving problems should be done in an efficient way. Furthermore, making quick responses to the key, specific points in letters of requesting is considered important in the workplace setting—an international business firm in Taiwan.
5. Concluding remarks

This paper aims to contribute to the research in Business English, particularly the design of business communication courses and materials production (St. John, 1996). The genre-based analysis offers ESP/EBP teachers and researchers insights into the salient features of requesting letters as the particular genre of request, and these insights can be applied and taught to EFL students. However, as genre is socially constructed, its generic conventions are subject to change rather than remain prescriptive templates (e.g. Bhatia, 2004; Swales, 1990). Thus, we integrated genre analysis with interview analysis to take account of shaping of the genre of requesting letters, particularly in one specific community of practice associated with one international business firm in Taiwan. The major finding is that despite relevant words and structures provided in the textbooks for ESP students, in order to achieve clarity, intertextuality, particularly in the ways of negotiation for getting the request done in a concise, assertive, and persuasive (CAP) manner, is considered important.

The emphasis of intertextuality also suggests a genre approach to teaching business writing highlights “pattern seeking” rather than “pattern imposing” (Bhatia, 1993, p.40), for language use and generic structure are dynamic and not fixed. An important pedagogical implication is thus drawn: to ensure successful business communication, teaching contextualized linguistic, social, and cultural differences is significant, particularly how the business communication is operated in the target community of practice. That does not imply that using existing templates to reproduce generic patterns is meaningless. However, it is important that in the design of business communication courses, the implications of genre construction situated in the particular community of practice should be made explicit to EFL students. By so doing, students can be more aware of request shaping and being shaped by genre; in this case, business letters of requesting can be regarded as the genre of request. It is not only the generic moves but also social interactions that underpin these moves determine the success of business communication. Accordingly, it is time for ESP/EBP teachers to direct less attention to static conceptualizations of business communicative competence that lead them into well-structured knowledge representations, but more attention should be given to the teachers’ facilitation, through the use of instructional materials, of students’ development of the communicative flexibility needed to achieve business communication in dynamic, situated social interactions (see Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999; see also Pennell & Miles, 2009).
Given that writing is a social activity, a thick description of written communication in the business field can provide useful evidence for ESP/EBP teachers and researchers. In the present study, genre analysis appears to provide students and teachers with precious data about the rhetorical functions of moves in requesting letters, and to provide what concerns teaching implications of the genre of request.

To conclude, this paper presents only one aspect of the business communication, as it analyzes one specific genre of request: business letters of requesting published in the business communication course textbooks and used in the real workplace, an international business firm in Taiwan. Although the limited data collection might constrain the generalizability of current study, this does not overshadow the importance of the above findings and implications, which can be viewed as the preliminary step for further research on how the genre of request can be taught to equip EFL students with skills and understanding to succeed in business communication. Further investigations can be done to examine more samples of business letters in the real workplace settings and ethnographic details of relevant social actors involved in business communication.

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A Study of Vocabulary Learning Strategies Adopted by Dentistry Students in Hong Kong in Learning Specialized Dental Vocabulary

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Abstract
Since research on the use of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among Hong Kong dentistry students has been scarce, this study attempts to investigate how an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course geared to help learn specialized dental vocabulary has affected their VLS use. Students’ perception of the usefulness of strategy training was also investigated. Data were collected by means of a pre-course and a post-course VLS questionnaire, post-course focus-group interviews,
and students’ pre- and post-course vocabulary test scores. Findings from the questionnaires suggested that the training provided in learning dental vocabulary appeared to have an impact on students’ use of certain VLS and their vocabulary test scores at the end of the course. While most interviewees perceived the training currently provided by the course as useful and effective, they welcomed more strategy training and practice in class. Pedagogical implications derived from the findings are discussed at the end of the paper¹.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary learning strategies, Specialized dental vocabulary, EAP in Dentistry

1. **Introduction**

Vocabulary learning strategies are techniques that learners use to make vocabulary learning more efficient. While individual learners may have different learning strategies and preferences, research on learning strategies in general suggests that (1) it is important to know and use a range of strategies; (2) it is important to choose strategies flexibly and appropriately according to context; and (3) strategies can be taught and learners can benefit from strategy training (Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 2000). Training on vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) is especially valuable to learners due to the large amount of vocabulary and the many aspects of vocabulary knowledge that learners need to deal with. It is generally believed that learners should be trained to use strategies to learn vocabulary autonomously, especially for low-frequency words such as words beyond the 2,000 most frequent English words (Nation, 2001) and that learners should focus more on the kinds of words they will need to learn for their individual purpose after acquiring the first 2,000 words. For university students, this would mean the acquisition of academic words (such as Coxhead’s Academic Word List which contains 570 most frequently used academic words and Nation’s University Word List) as well as specialized words used in their own discipline. This is why there has been growing concern for the learning of specialized vocabulary in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts. However, research into specialized disciplines has just started in the past decade, and research focusing on Asian learners has been scarce. The present study

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aims to investigate (1) the use of VLS by a group of Hong Kong dentistry students in an EAP course before and after VLS training; (2) the effects of VLS training specific for learning specialized dental vocabulary on students’ acquisition of the vocabulary; and (3) students’ perception of the usefulness of the VLS training.

2. Literature review

For a better understanding of the need for the present study, this literature review specifically focuses on two areas: (1) VLS studies on Asian learners and (2) VLS studies in learning specialized vocabulary in health sciences.

One of the most cited VLS taxonomies is the one produced by Schmitt (1997), which is based in part on Oxford’s (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies. His taxonomy consists of 58 VLS classified into two broad categories: discovery strategies (DIS) for finding the meaning of unknown words, and consolidation strategies (CON) for remembering words once their meaning has been discovered. Discovery strategies can further be divided into determination strategies (Det) that involve finding meaning without recourse to others (e.g. analyzing word parts, guessing from context), and social strategies (Soc) that involve consulting or working with others to discover meaning. Consolidation strategies are sub-divided into memory strategies (Mem) (e.g. mnemonics such as creating mental images; word association such as associating the word with its synonyms and antonyms, and grouping words to facilitate memory), cognitive strategies (Cog) (e.g. verbal and written repetition, using word lists and flash cards), social strategies (Soc) (e.g. practicing with other people, interacting with native speakers), and metacognitive strategies (Metacog) that are concerned with the management of learning (e.g. reviewing learnt vocabulary, selecting words for learning).

Research with a special emphasis on the use of VLS among Asian learners has kept increasing in the past two decades (e.g. Fan, 2003; Gu, 2002; Gu, 2003; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Liao, 2006; Schmitt, 1997; Wei, 2007). In Schmitt’s (1997) study of 600 Japanese EFL learners, it was found that the learners preferred using the bilingual dictionary to discover meaning of words, and verbal and written repetition to remember the meanings. The findings also showed that the patterns of strategy use change over time as a learner becomes more proficient in the target language. As the Japanese learners matured, they tended to move away from shallow, mechanical repetition such as word lists and flash cards to higher metacognitive strategies such as
Gu and Johnson’s (1996) study of 850 non-English majors at a university in China reported that a wide variety of vocabulary learning strategies was used by the university learners. Contextual guessing, skilful use of dictionaries, note-taking, paying attention to word formation, contextual encoding, and activation of newly learned words positively correlated with test scores. Later, Gu (2003) carried out a qualitative study using think-aloud protocols and interviews of how two successful Chinese university EFL learners learned vocabulary in an intensive reading task. The results pointed to the importance of metacognitive strategies such as self-initiation and selective attention (selecting words to learn) of the learners, contextual inferencing, and activation of newly learned words.

Wei (2007) investigated Chinese college students’ patterns of VLS use, the relationship between VLS use and gender, field of study, and self-rated language proficiency level. Results indicated that contextualized activation and management strategies were seldom used by self-reported low-proficiency students, and this affected long-term retention and use of vocabulary negatively. Also, English majors reported a significantly higher level of VLS use than non-English majors while non-English majors depended more heavily on mechanical repetition.

In a study of Taiwanese university EFL learners’ use of VLS, Liao (2004) found that metacognitive and social strategies were the two least used strategies and English-major students tended to use VLS more frequently than non-English major students.

Comparatively, there has been little research on VLS among university students in Hong Kong. A large scale self-reported questionnaire survey by Fan (2003) involved more than 1,000 university entrants in seven higher education institutions in Hong Kong. It examined the frequency of VLS use and perceived usefulness of these strategies. Results showed that the learners did not favour association strategies such as imagery or grouping words for learning, and this applied also to the more proficient L2 learners. More proficient students, on the other hand, were found to be using various kinds of VLS more often than those who were less proficient. It was also found that both groups preferred guessing, dictionary use, and analysis strategies to repetition strategies. In fact, one of the least often used strategies was a rather mechanical one which was learning from word lists. These findings seem to contradict the general belief that Asian students liked using more repetition strategies than other kinds of
In the past decade, apart from studying learners’ VLS, researchers also began to look into specialized vocabulary acquisition in academic study contexts. Examples of such studies include Lessard-Clouston’s works on vocabulary learning in Theology (1998, 2006, 2008, 2009), Lam’s work on vocabulary learning in Computer Science (2001), Chujo and Genung’s work on Business English (2004), and Mudraya’s work in Engineering English (2006). One area of specialized vocabulary which has attracted increasing attention is the field of science and medicine as most of the words in the field are made up of Greek and Latin word parts, which could be foreign even to native English speakers. As described by Frenay and Mahoney (1998), the strangeness and complexity of the medical terminology may seem ‘bewildering’ to most students who first encounter it. And this is why many students regard the initial education of health sciences a language course filled with glossaries and definitions. Laufer (1989) suggested that in order to understand a text, 95% of the words must be known. However, having a knowledge of both the General Service List (most common 2,000 word families in English) and the Academic Word List (most common 570 word families in academic texts) can only allow a student to understand approximately 75% of the text with specialized vocabulary (Centre for Biomedical and Health Linguistics, 2009). This suggests that many of the specialized words are not included in the General Service List or Academic Word List and not knowing them would affect comprehension of disciplinary texts.

VLS are thought to be particularly useful for learning specialized vocabulary. Since the size of medical vocabulary is large and expanding (Gylys & Wedding, 1999) and it contains many low frequency words which students rarely encounter outside the disciplinary contexts, equipping students with the appropriate VLS to infer the meaning of such words is particularly important (Nation, 2001). Nation argued that English teachers could “make a useful contribution to helping … learners with technical vocabulary” (p. 203). For example, Chung and Nation (2003) suggested that English teachers should equip students with the VLS which could help, for example, medical students to analyze the Greek and Latin word parts systematically.

Yang (2005) conducted a VLS study among a group of 89 Taiwanese college nursing majors in learning medical vocabulary, using a medical terminology learning strategy questionnaire based on Schmitt’s (1997) VLS taxonomy. It was found that students of high proficiency used memory and cognitive strategies significantly more
often than both their intermediate-level and the low-level counterparts. Low proficiency students were found to be using determination (such as grouping, imagery, and rhyming) and metacognitive strategies (i.e. strategies to control and evaluate one’s learning) significantly less often than the other two groups. However, written repetition and verbal repetition, which are cognitive strategies, were commonly used by both high-level and low-level students, and both groups seldom used social strategies. Yang explained that this may be due to the teacher-centred approach in the classrooms in Taiwan where students had few opportunities to interact with peers and learn co-operatively.

Instead of focusing on a range of VLS, Troutt-Ervin (1990) focused on the effectiveness of a specific strategy, i.e. the Keyword technique in the learning of medical terminology where a target medical word was linked with a sound-alike word (the Keyword) and a visual image was presented to link up the two words. It was found that such a mnemonic strategy was more effective in both initial learning and subsequent retention over traditional methods among a group of medical college students and this was true both in conventional classroom settings and individualized learning situations.

Brahler and Walker’s (2008) study, which also examined the effects of the Keyword technique on the acquisition of scientific vocabulary, found that applying this technique helped the high school students in anatomy and physiology classes to learn the Greek and Latin word parts in scientific and medical terminology. It was also found that the more weird or nonsensical the link and visual image made between the audionym and the keyword, the better the recall and retention over a long period of time. An example is linking the Greek word part ‘gastr-’ with the sound-alike phrase ‘gas truck’, and creating a visual image of a truck carrying a large stomach.

Given the small number of studies of VLS study on the acquisition of specialized vocabulary in the Asian context, the present study aims at investigating students’ VLS use in learning specialized medical/dental vocabulary in an EAP course specifically designed for the first year students in the Faculty of Dentistry in a university in Hong Kong.

The three specific research questions are:

1. What are the most and least used VLS before and after the course?
2. What is the students’ perception of the usefulness of the training in their medical/dental vocabulary acquisition?
3. What are the possible effects of the VLS training as demonstrated in the post-course vocabulary test?

3. Methods

3.1 Participants
All 54 Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) Year One students in the EAP course in academic year 2009-2010 filled in the pre-course and post-course VLS questionnaires and allowed access to their vocabulary test scores, while 10 of them voluntarily participated in the focus-group interviews. Their ages ranged between 17 and 22 with mean age being 19.1 years; 26 of them were male and 28 female. Thirty-nine of them (72.2%) were admitted into the BDS programme with results from the local Hong Kong Advanced Level examination after finishing 7 years at secondary level, while 15 of them (27.8%) were admitted from overseas. This is fairly typical for the BDS programme with a slightly higher than average intake of overseas students in the cohort. A vast majority of the participants, 48 out of 54 (89%) students, indicated that the medium of instruction for their pre-university education was English.

3.2 VLS training and the EAP course
The 12-week EAP course offered to the first-year Dentistry students in their first semester is tailor-made, in consultation with the Dentistry Faculty, to help orient students to achieve success in the BDS programme in which all dentistry-related topics are delivered through the problem-based learning (PBL) approach in small tutorial groups through discussions with the help of a facilitator. This is why there are two foci in the EAP course: (1) Introduction to strategies to study dental/medical terms; and (2) Practice of academic discussion and oral skills. This paper mainly focuses on the first course focus which is the introduction of strategies to study dental/medical terms.

Roughly half of course instruction time is devoted to the discussion and practice of VLS. Instructions related to the learning of the specialized dental terms are graded and delivered in different sessions throughout the EAP course: An overview of word origins and functions of dental/medical-related roots, prefixes and suffixes are introduced at the beginning, followed by a linguistic approach involving combination of word parts and deconstruction of specialized terminology into meaningful parts, and finally the use of different parts of speech of the dental/medical terms in context
at paragraph/text level is discussed. While subject teachers from the Dentistry Faculty usually encourage students to learn the specialized terms from a systems approach (e.g. learning all words related to the respiratory system, then move onto words related digestive system and endocrine system etc), language teachers of the EAP course use the dental/medical terms as examples to draw students’ attention to word origins, word part combinations and terminology deconstruction. For instance, when introducing the word ‘gingivectomy’, the word will first be broken down into meaningful parts: ‘gingiv(a)’ and ‘ectomy’ and then the meaning of ‘gingiv(a)’ which means ‘gum’ and ‘ectomy’ which means ‘the removal of’ will be covered. Where appropriate, other specialized vocabulary with the two word parts would be introduced or reviewed like ‘gingivitis’ (inflammation of the gum), ‘nephrectomy’ (removal of kidney) and ‘gastrectomy’ (removal of stomach). Besides, other vocabulary learning strategies like using word lists (not so much as providing a glossary but demonstrating how words parts are put together; see examples in Table 1), formulating mental images (see examples in Figure 1), connecting related words/word parts (e.g. ‘dextro-’ and ‘levo-’ which mean ‘right’ and ‘left’ respectively), and pronunciation practices are used where appropriate to reinforce students’ understanding of the dental/medical terms in class. In sum, the course aims at helping students develop their ability to read, understand and remember specialized dental/medical terms, appreciate the logical method in analyzing the terms and also pronounce them accurately. While pre-course and post-course vocabulary tests are administered both at the beginning and end of the course to monitor progress among students, mid-term vocabulary review is also included to provide students with practice and reflection opportunities.

Table 1: Wordlist Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roots</th>
<th>gland</th>
<th>Suffixes</th>
<th>-cide</th>
<th>killing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aden(o)</td>
<td>vessel</td>
<td>-gram</td>
<td>a record</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>angi(o)</td>
<td>appendic(o)</td>
<td>-logy</td>
<td>study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arteri(o)</td>
<td>artery</td>
<td>-ule</td>
<td>a small one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Data collection: Instruments, procedures and analysis

The VLS questionnaire was adapted from Schmitt’s (1997) VLS taxonomy. Where appropriate, the VLS were slightly re-worded and accompanied with concrete examples to make it easier for the dentistry student participants to understand (e.g. “analyze affixes and roots” was re-worded to “analyze the word parts that make up the word” e.g. in-digest-ible in the word indigestible). Therefore, the VLS questionnaire (see Appendix 1) contains only 51 VLS, rather than 58 in Schmitt’s. Students were asked to rate their use of VLS on a 5-point Likert scale. The mean for each of the 51 VLS was calculated and ranked. Further, students’ use of each strategy before and after the course was compared and those strategies which recorded statistically significant increase in use after the course were highlighted.

A total of three semi-structured focus-group interviews which aim for a better understanding of students’ perceived usefulness of the training in medical/dental vocabulary acquisition were conducted with 10 voluntary participants at the end of the course. The interviews, each lasted for about 30 minutes, were conducted in English. They were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

As part of the EAP course requirement, all students were required to sit for a pre-course and a post-course vocabulary test with the latter accounting for 20% of the overall course grade. There were five sections in the tests covering different aspects of specialized vocabulary knowledge. While both section 1 and section 5 tested students’ understanding of vocabulary in context, the former adopted a multiple choice format and the latter a fill-in-the-blanks format. Section 2 required students to explain the given medical/dental terms using lay language, and Section 3 asked students to give the medical/dental terms after reading their corresponding lay explanations. Section 4 asked students to match prefixes/roots/suffixes with given meanings. With the consent to access the scores from all participants, students’ pre-course test scores were compared against their post-course test scores. This could help address the possible effects of strategy training throughout the course as demonstrated in the end-of-course
test. Students’ scores before and after the course were compared and calculated for statistical significance.

4. Findings

4.1 Questionnaires

4.1.1 Most frequently and least frequently used VLS before and after the course

Table 2 shows the most frequently used VLS as reported by students in the pre-course and post-course questionnaires respectively. On a 5-point scale, both item 4 (Guess from the textual context) and item 29 (Study the sound of the word), with mean being 4.13, were rated as the most frequently used VLS before the EAP course. Although some strategies remain the top strategies both before and after, some changes in students’ VLS use after the course can still be clearly seen. For example, while item 2 (Analyze the word parts that make up the word) was one of the most frequently used VLS among students before the course (ranked 5th; mean=3.89), it became the most frequently used VLS after the course (ranked 1st; mean=4.28). This was probably the direct impact of English teachers’ use of the linguistic approach and the various class practices in which students were asked to combine word parts and deconstruct terminology throughout the course.
As shown in Table 3, the least frequently used VLS as reported by students before the course were item 8 (Use flashcards to discover meaning), item 47 (Put English labels on physical objects), item 43 (Use flashcards to consolidate meaning), item 32 (Underline the initial letter of the word) and item 22 (Group words using a mind map) respectively. Using flashcards seemed to be rarely adopted by students—both when discovering and consolidating word meaning. When referring to the least frequently used VLS after the course, three of them were the same as those before the course which were items 47, item 32 and item 8. However, all but one of the post-course means were higher than those pre-course means, implying even the use of the least frequently used VLS increased after the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>VLS</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th></th>
<th>After</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 DIS-Det</td>
<td>Guess from the textual context</td>
<td>4.13 (0.85)</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>4.07 (0.77)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 CON-Mem</td>
<td>Study the sound of the word</td>
<td>4.13 (1.05)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>3.91 (1.00)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 CON-Mem</td>
<td>Study the spelling of the word</td>
<td>4.09 (0.92)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 CON-Mem</td>
<td>Connect the word to its synonyms</td>
<td>3.98 (0.92)</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 DIS-Det</td>
<td>Analyze the word parts that make up the word</td>
<td>3.89 (0.98)</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>4.28 (0.81)</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 CON-Mem</td>
<td>Paraphrase the word’s meaning</td>
<td>3.89 (1.06)</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 CON-Cog</td>
<td>Repeat saying the word</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.85 (1.03)</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 DIS-Det</td>
<td>Analyze any available pictures or gestures</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.78 (1.08)</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Least Frequently Used VLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>VLS</th>
<th>Before Mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>Before Rank</th>
<th>After Mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>After Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 DIS-Det</td>
<td>Use flashcards</td>
<td>1.70 (0.88)</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>2.22 (1.14)</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 CON-Cog</td>
<td>Put English labels on physical objects</td>
<td>1.81 (1.10)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>1.80 (1.07)</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 CON-Cog</td>
<td>Use flashcards</td>
<td>1.89 (1.00)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 CON-Mem</td>
<td>Underline the initial letter of the word</td>
<td>1.93 (0.93)</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>2.20 (1.17)</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 CON-Mem</td>
<td>Group words using a mind map</td>
<td>1.93 (0.89)</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 DIS-Soc</td>
<td>Ask the teacher for a sentence including the new word</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.17 (0.88)</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 CON-Cog</td>
<td>Listen to taped word lists</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.19 (0.99)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Significant increase in the use of some VLS after the course

Means of each VLS before and after the EAP course were compared and positive differences were noted in many of them. To ensure that the differences were statistically significant and not random, t-tests were performed in each case. See Table 4 for the list of strategies which differences between the pre-course and post-course use were statistically significant. Many of the VLS, including items 2, 3, 7 and 17, were particularly related to the course approach and class practices (see 3.2 for details). Although mindmapping was not covered in the EAP course, it is understood that since this learning strategy was very useful in the PBL seminars, it was very much emphasized by the Faculty. This could have indirectly promoted the use of item 22 (Group words using a mind map) in vocabulary learning.
Table 4: Strategies with Statistically Significant Increase After the Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>VLS</th>
<th>Pre-course</th>
<th>Post-course</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>DIS-Det Analyze the word parts that make up the word</td>
<td>3.89 0.98</td>
<td>4.28 0.81</td>
<td>+0.39 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>DIS-Det Analyze any available pictures or gestures</td>
<td>3.26 1.01</td>
<td>3.78 1.08</td>
<td>+0.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>DIS-Det Use word lists</td>
<td>2.48 0.93</td>
<td>3.26 1.15</td>
<td>+0.78***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>DIS-Det Use flash cards</td>
<td>1.70 0.88</td>
<td>2.22 1.14</td>
<td>+0.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>CON-Mem Create or use a visual image about the word in my mind</td>
<td>3.24 1.11</td>
<td>3.74 1.18</td>
<td>+0.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>CON-Mem Group words using a mind map</td>
<td>1.93 0.89</td>
<td>2.33 1.06</td>
<td>+0.4**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.05   ***p<0.01

4.2  Focus-group interviews

To investigate students’ perception of the usefulness of the strategy training in their medical/dental vocabulary acquisition in the EAP course, the interviewees were asked to describe their various vocabulary learning experiences, comment on their perception of the VLS training in the EAP course and offer suggestions for future VLS training.

Note that the quotes from interviewees, which are presented in italics, are direct quotes which may contain language mistakes.

4.2.1 Different vocabulary learning experiences

Some interviewees reported that the methods that used to work for them before with the general vocabulary did not work anymore in the university with technical terminology in the Dentistry Faculty. For example, three interviewees stated that while they used to keep a vocabulary notebook in secondary school and thought that was useful, they did not do so any longer. This is probably due to the fact that they thought this strategy more useful for learning general vocabulary and that other VLS such as deconstructing words into word parts are more helpful in learning a large amount of specialized vocabulary such as dental vocabulary within a short time.

On the other hand, most students reported that they had to use specific strategies
in learning the dental vocabulary. Half of the interviewees mentioned the use of the **deconstruction** strategy for dental terms specifically as they could see that the dental words are made up of word parts, and many liked using this approach as they found it very logical.

“*I break the word into parts and try to get the meaning…”* (S 4)

“*… like remember those roots or prefix or suffix… because it’s very logical.*” (S 6)

Half of the interviewees also reported **verbal repetition**, i.e. focusing on the pronunciation of words, was useful in helping them remember the words and their spelling. For example, one of the interviewees, who studied in the arts stream in secondary school in China, explained that she often used the IPA symbols when learning English in China:

“*… because our English books they all have the symbols so I’m quite familiar with [the IPA]... I usually keep pronouncing [the dental words]... Sometimes I will write them for several times also.*” (S 1)

Other interviewees also commented on the importance of **pronunciation** in learning new vocabulary. For example:

“*When I see a new word usually I will try to pronounce it in my mind and this is how I remember it and I think the spelling is already built in ...*” (S 2)

Some interviewees, on the other hand, reported the use of **association** or **elaboration** strategies, which are believed to involve greater depth of processing. Half of them reported that they used pictures or **mental images** (especially of body parts) that they created to remember the dental vocabulary. For example, Student 8 reported using mental images of some actions to help her remember the specialized vocabulary for ‘ankle’:

“*I think of it in the way of actions. Say like a word, you know for ankle, it’s ‘talus’ and I imagine… becoming so tall because of the ankle.*” (See Figure 2)
Student 9 also mentioned the use of some visual images to remember some prefixes:

“Just like the medical term … prefix ‘ab’ and ‘ad’, and the ‘ab’ one is ‘away’ [e.g. abnormal which means away from normal] and ‘ad’ one is ‘toward’ [e.g. adrenal which means towards the kidney]. How do I remember this? I just imagine ‘a’ is a house and then ‘b’ is the person and then …the person facing the other side is ‘away’ and ‘toward’ is [the person] facing the ‘a’. But not all the words can use this method … if I have enough imagination I use this method. But sometimes, the image is weird.” (See Figure 3)

Three interviewees explicitly mentioned the need to use VLS flexibly, depending on the demands in a particular learning context.

“In primary time and secondary time when we encounter new terms, usually I will refer to the passage… to try to guess about the meaning because it is
easier to get the meaning from the passage, entire passage. For right now… we often encounter some dental terms… medical terms… it’s easy… to look for the root of the words. For example, when I see a long term, I can divide into parts and look for the root meaning.” (S 2)

4.2.2 VLS training in EAP course

When asked about the perception of the VLS training in the EAP course, the responses were very positive. Many interviewees mentioned the understanding of word parts, using word lists and understanding different parts of speech particularly useful. For example:

“Actually the use of word parts very useful.” (S 2)

“… like teaching those suffix and prefix. I find it pretty useful when… reading some papers… we can guess the meaning [of the unknown words] even though we didn’t come across the terms before.” (S 6)

“The word lists are useful; you can crack the [approximate] meaning of the words, even though you do not really understanding the [exact meaning] of the whole word.” (S 10)

“I think … the parts of speech of the medical terms because sometimes, for example, a noun and adjective looks [dissimilar]… the same meaning but just different parts of speech.” (S 3)

Although most students very much like the word lists, which illustrate how different word parts are combined, some students, however, pointed out the limitations of only or over-relying on the lists since there are occasions where different word parts may have the same meaning (e.g. both ‘-algia’ and ‘-odynia’ are suffixes meaning pain) but they cannot be freely combined with other word parts (e.g. pain in kidney can only be ‘nephralgia’).

4.2.3 Suggestions for further VLS training

In general, all the interviewees expressed a desire to learn more VLS strategies. Four of them commented that they had received little VLS training before entering the
university and did not know much about VLS. For example:

“[The teacher in the secondary school] only recommended us to write the words repeatedly … he said that he has no method to learn either.” (S 7)

4.3 Pre-course and post-course tests

Overall, students showed gains in test scores in the vocabulary test at the end of the course. They demonstrated better understanding of the meaning of medical/dental prefixes, roots, and suffixes and their abilities in explaining such technical terms using lay language had also improved.

Not only was the overall mean score for the post-course vocabulary test statistically higher than that of the pre-course vocabulary test, the mean scores of each sub-section of the post-course test were also higher than those of the pre-course test statistically. Please refer to Table 5 for details.

Table 5: Pre-course and Post-course vocabulary test scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>Pre-course</th>
<th>Post-course</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Score (Max =50)</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.20 (5.66)</td>
<td>39.43 (6.10)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1 (Max =10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of vocabulary in context</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.73 (1.78)</td>
<td>9.65 (0.63)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: The combining form for hard is _____________.</td>
<td></td>
<td>a. jejunoc</td>
<td>b. caecod</td>
<td>c. scleroc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2 (Max=10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.98 (1.64)</td>
<td>8.37 (1.68)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain specialized vocabulary using lay language</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-course</td>
<td>Post-course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Explain the following term in non-technical language: stomatoglossitis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3 (Max=10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.25 (1.07)</td>
<td>4.51 (2.82)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give specialized vocabulary after reading lay explanation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-course</td>
<td>Post-course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Give the medical/dental terms for the following condition: The surgical procedure of making an artificial opening in the ileum for excretion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4 (Max=15)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.08 (3.22)</td>
<td>14.27 (1.82)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match word parts with meanings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-course</td>
<td>Post-course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: * angi/o</td>
<td></td>
<td>* bile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 5 (Max=5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.18 (1.08)</td>
<td>2.66 (1.49)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of vocabulary in context (Gap-fill)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-course</td>
<td>Post-course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Note any abnormality in _______ [face] contour and shape of the mandible as well as tenderness, swelling, redness, lacerations or _________ [haematomatus].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***  p<0.001
5. Discussion and pedagogic implications

5.1 Value of VLS training in the EAP course

Findings of the present study assert the value of VLS training in the EAP course in helping dentistry students acquire specialized vocabulary for their academic study. Furthermore, significant increase as shown by the post-course questionnaire findings is seen in the use of certain strategies specifically promoted and practiced in the course, e.g. analyzing word parts and using word lists when discovering meaning and creating or using visual image when consolidating meaning of the dental/medical terms (see Table 4). Findings from the focus-group interviews, in Section 4.2.1, also indicate that verbal repetitions with an emphasis on pronunciation are favored by some students. In summary, the above results indicate more frequent use of the strategies covered in the EAP course in specialized vocabulary acquisition at the end of the semester and students’ better understanding of the dental/medical terms as indirectly reflected by their significantly improved scores in the post-course vocabulary test (see Table 5).

Findings of the present study which concern the VLS use in learning specialized dental terms among dentistry students in Hong Kong are different from those as reported in Fan’s (2003) study in which university students across different disciplines were surveyed. While Fan’s study showed that students in her survey did not favor association strategies, such as imagery, and mechanical strategies, such as word lists, these strategies were commonly used as reported by students in the present study. This could also be related to the different target vocabularies in the two studies: general L2 vocabulary in Fan’s study and specialized dental vocabulary in the present study. In line with the findings as mentioned by both Troutt-Ervin (1990) and Brahler and Walker (2008) in their studies on learning medical terms, using visual images seem to be a common and effective approach for students to learn this specialized vocabulary.

Although Fan’s (2003) students did not favour mechanical repletion, Yang’s (2005) study among nursing pre-professionals in Taiwan found that a mechanical strategy, repetition, including both written and verbal repetition, was very commonly used in learning medical terms. In the present study, verbal repetition is also found to be very commonly adopted by Hong Kong dentistry students when consolidating
meaning of specialized dental terms in the present study. The highly verbal nature of the PBL seminars which is the major class delivery mode in the BDS curriculum among first year students could be the reason why the dentistry students like using verbal repetition to help them remember vocabulary.

5.2 Present VLS training

The interview findings of the present study show that students in general appreciate the EAP course which includes VLS training, especially training on strategies related to analyzing word parts and using visual images, in helping them with their academic study in the BDS programme.

While the present course approach is continued, more attention can be given to two specific areas of teaching. First, while analyzing word parts is one of the most common and useful strategies in teaching specialized dental terms, students should be warned about the limitations of such a strategy, e.g. different suffixes can have the same meaning and free combinations may not apply in all cases. This could prevent the confusion as mentioned by the interviewees in Section 4.2.2. Students should also be explicitly told that there are always exceptions to the rules and they should be encouraged to also look for other clues from the context when trying to work out the meaning of an unknown word (Haynes & Baker, 1993; Schmitt, 2000). Second, as mentioned in Section 3.2, visual images are used in the EAP course where appropriate to help students remember meaning of the specialized dental words. Students, as shown by both the post-course questionnaire and interview findings, also found this strategy useful in helping them consolidate their specialized dental word knowledge. Taking advantage of students’ preference here, they could be encouraged to further exploit this strategy by creating more visual images for the newly learnt dental words and sharing their images with others in class. As Troutt-Ervin’s (1990) study suggested, visual images are helpful in both the initial learning and retention of meaning of medical terminology.

5.3 Exposure to more strategies

As expressed by students in the focus-group interviews, they would like to be exposed to more VLS in class. There has been plenty of evidence showing successful learners are usually those who use a wide range of VLS in learning and remembering vocabulary (e.g. Gu & Johnson, 1996; Lawson & Hogben, 1996). Before learners can
use a particular VLS, they should be exposed to and given time to practice using the VLS (Nation, 2001). Therefore, the EAP course teachers are advised to expand the scope of the present VLS training. Given the fact that students in the present study find association strategies useful, they could be introduced to techniques like the mnemonic Keyword method in future. Encouraging students to create weird and illogical links through mental images, which might even be completely meaningless, between the keyword, e.g. something they already know, and the target specialized dental word would help commit the new term to long term memory. As Brahler and Walker (2008) in their study among students in anatomy and physiology classes suggested, the more illogical the links, the better the recall and retention of the target vocabulary.

5.4 Limitations and future research direction

Although the present study has shown that the VLS training tends to have an impact on students’ increased use of certain VLS and their understanding of the specialized dental terms in general, students’ constant exposure to dental vocabulary through the PBL seminars in the Dentistry Faculty and their participation in disciplinary activities throughout the semester may have also provided them with a conducive vocabulary learning environment. In addition, the sample size of the present study which involves only 54 students is too small for any generalization. Further research can be conducted to see if the findings in the present study also apply to similar disciplines like Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy. Research can also be conducted to see if students of different disciplines have different VLS use patterns.

References


A Study of Students’ Perceptions and Attitudes towards Genre-based ESP Writing Instruction

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Abstract

The effectiveness of genre-based approaches (GBAs) to teaching ESP writing has been widely acknowledged in a large number of experimental and theoretical studies; however, any detailed examination of learners’ perceptions of and attitudes towards genre-based learning is still limited. This study investigates twenty-four polytechnic students’ reflections and opinions of an 18-week genre-based ESP writing course in Taiwan, by means of an online questionnaire. The results show that whilst learners generally corroborate the claimed strengths of GBAs, they have divided opinions of its drawbacks. Furthermore, the findings also highlight the importance of providing model exemplars, and analysing a genre from linguistic and contextual perspectives. They also illustrate the fact that GBAs help learners’ confidence in composing text. Nevertheless, their perceptions of any autonomous learning and the different assessments related to the instruction are ambivalent. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are provided at the end of this paper.

Keywords: English for specific purposes (ESP), genre analysis, genre-based
approaches (GBAs), genre-based writing instructions (GBWI), students’ perceptions and attitudes.

1. Introduction

According to the statistics of Language Training and Testing Centre (LTTC, 2011), Taiwanese EFL learners’ writing performance is the poorest of all their language skills and polytechnic university students’ writing ability is ranked lower than traditional university and even high school students. Polytechnic university students coming from vocational high schools usually have lower achievement levels in English than their counterparts and find that English courses in universities do not meet their needs. Consequently, they often feel that their proficiency and ability in English does not match their objectives and goals (Chang, 2007) and they may even give up learning English altogether. In fact, many universities still develop English curricula based on English for general purposes (EGP), with nearly all the courses designed to focus on practising reading and conversation skills (Chern, 2010). In other words, training in writing skills has tended to have been neglected. At the same time these apparently irrelevant types of courses, which are not targeted to learners’ objectives, can be demotivating for learners when it comes to writing.

At present, few Taiwanese universities construct English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in response to learners’ needs in their future workplaces (Chern, 2010). However, it seems that ESP courses may become a trend in polytechnic universities owing to various promotions and incentives from the educational authorities. In fact, genres may well be compatible with meeting the writing needs of different professions, because they are specific, relevant and targeted. They connect language with contexts. In addition, there is some evidence of the effectiveness of genre-based approaches (GBAs) to teaching ESP writing (Lee & Chen, 2009), as well as in other EFL settings. Following the assumption that a genre-based approach could also represent an appropriate direction for teaching ESP writing course in Taiwan, and based on the results of a simple needs analysis, conducted to survey what the learners expected to learn in the course, a genre-based writing instruction (GBWI) was implemented in an ESP course. Subsequently, it was agreed that writing promotional texts in hospitality and tourism industries would be targeted, supportive and relevant to their future needs according to their previous internship experiences. Hence, the course was divided into three phases which included composing hotel, tourist
attraction and holiday brochures, respectively, with the same purposes of informing and promoting. The following is a report of what the learners thought of GBWI, with the aim to shed light on the efficacy of this modality in an Asian EFL setting.

2. **Theoretical background**

2.1 **Genre analysis and genre-based approaches**

Genre analysis belongs to one stream of discourse analysis, which investigates specific uses of language. As Hyland (2004a, p. 95) writes,

> It is driven by a desire to understand the communicative character of discourse by looking at how individuals use language to engage in particular communicative situations.

Consequently, it may be useful to support language education by applying this knowledge. Hyland (2004a, ibid) specifies the purposes of analysing genres as being linked to the following:

- It seeks to identify how texts are structured in terms of move, stage and strategy, and to distinguish the characteristic features in certain texts to realise their communicative purposes;
- Studying genres explores knowledge of the readers, writers, speakers and listeners in one particular community and helps to discover how they relate to users’ communicative purposes;
- It also provides explanations for how and why linguistic choices are made in terms of social, cultural, and psychological context; therefore, it can also support language teaching as one of its pedagogical purposes.

Genre analysis or corpus-based research on teaching English, especially the form-focused approach, has been strongly advocated and conducted in English for academic (e.g. Carstens, 2008; Cheng, 2006; Henry & Roseberry, 2007; Hyland, 2010; Hyon, 2008; Johns, 1995, 1997, 2008; Maingueneau, 2002; Samraj & Monk, 2008; Woodward-Kron, 2005; Wennerstrom, 2003; Wrigglesworth & McKeever, 2010; Zhu, 2005), and non-academic (e.g. occupational) purposes (e.g. Hafner, 2010; Henry &
Roseberry, 1996, 1998; Karlsson, 2009; Matt, 2007; Osman, 2008; Schneider & Andre, 2005; Wennerstrom, 2003). Much of this research verifies the positive effect of GBAs (Lee & Chen, 2009). However, genre analysis in EAP or English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) can be quite broad and as Hyland (2008) and Hyland and Tse (2007) assert; it might be more pedagogically fruitful to focus on specific types of texts in a discipline.

In addition, genre analysis can provide ESP practitioners insights into how a particular language is used by its members in a discourse community. Paltridge (2001, p. 3) argues that,

> making this genre knowledge explicit can provide language teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to communicate successfully in particular discourse communities [and] it can also provide learners with access to socially powerful forms of language.

Thus, ESP curricula are increasingly planned on the basis of generic pedagogy in view of building learners’ generic competence including rhetorical, linguistic and sociocultural awareness of a particular situation.

Nevertheless, genre-based pedagogy has been critiqued as well. The major worry is that it is seen as a recipe that offers teachers and learners a formulaic, mechanical, rigid, conformable, restrictive, and prescriptive how-to-do list rather than encouraging imaginative thinking and creating meanings (e.g. Dixon, 1987; Freedman & Meadway, 1994; Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Raimes, 1991). This may result in learners failing to recognise the variations, choices and constraints of a specific genre. As such teachers should not assume that genre-based instruction is prescriptive and be mindful of claims of the effectiveness of a genre-based framework (Dudley-Evans, 1995; Belcher, 2004). Dudley-Evans (2002) warns teachers not to rely excessively on a set of moves for a given genre because “this approach will not confront many of the day-to-day problems students encounter when writing the actual genres” (p. 235).

### 2.2 The merits and effectiveness of genre-based approaches (GBAs) in teaching writing

According to Hyland (2003), genre-based approaches are a social response to the process approach. He criticises the process approach as isolating writers from the
relevant contexts, requiring writers to ‘discover’ appropriate forms of writing by themselves, which may work for L1 writers but not necessarily for L2 writers. He argues that writing instruction would empower writers to construct texts with social codes, purposes, audience and message and GBWI is able to provide learners with real world writing, which stimulates their interest and enhances their confidence to cope with specific genres (Osman, 2004). Furthermore, it also gives writers access to cultural knowledge and makes them have engagement with sociocultural realities. GBWI also offers student writers explicit and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts (Hyland, 2004a). This also helps students acquire the specialist culture (Bhatia, 1997). Hence, in writing courses both Ur (1996) and Paltridge (2001) advocate a genre-based syllabus, as a mixed syllabus, combining characteristics of different syllabus types altogether in a coherent and principled way, which includes the features of the structural syllabus, functions and notions syllabus and content-based syllabus.

In sum, GBWI is targeted, relevant and supportive for ESP learners. Learners sense that the texts they are exposed to are relevant to their future needs and therefore are supportive to their social participation outside the classroom. Likewise, genre-based instruction or curricula can more centrally involve and prepare individuals for the teaching of writing, as well as providing advice for them on the development of curriculum materials and activities for the writing class (Hyland, 2007, p. 148). It not only helps language teachers to realise “how writing is shaped by individuals making language choices to achieve purposes in social contexts” (ibid, p. 163) but also it helps learners to identify the texts used in particular situations, and consequently to meet their needs in a targeted situation. The following studies provide evidence of the effectiveness of conducting GBAs in teaching writing.

In order to measure the effectiveness of GBAs, many researchers have conducted experiments. One of the first was Henry and Roseberry’s (1998) research at a Brunei university, who found the experimental group with GBAs produced more highly-structured writing in tourism brochures, and similarly Na (2007) discovered that Malaysian business school students in the experimental group actually not only wrote better but also increased the salience of the communicative moves for inclusion in their writing. Later, Zare-ee (2009) added to developing this approach by measuring quantity and quality improvements with clear indices and found that the experimental group showed a significantly higher mean in their writing quality score.
in terms of content, organisation, language use and mechanics, evaluated by the instructors, than the control group did. However, contrary to the above studies that focused on comparing the achievements of two groups, Chiu (2004) adopted a quasi-experimental design to analyse the structure; the transitivity; the mood and modality; the theme and rheme structure and the cohesion system, finding that GBAs was more effective than traditional approaches. Furthermore, the students in the GBAs class participated more actively in class exercises, because they perceived writing as being closely related to their future needs. There were also signs of positive attitudes towards GBAs collected by Emilia (2005) and Krisnachinda (2006). Emilia’s study (2005) reports learners were more aware of the value of class dialogues and more actively participatory in class; later, Cheng (2008), Lin (2008) and Riberio (2011) analysed the results of applying GBAs to Chinese-speaking EFL learners and they have verified that in genre-based EAP courses, in addition to high satisfaction with the courses, learners indeed gained explicit knowledge about the language and genres taught, which they were then able to apply in text content, organisation and language.

While the research cited above is largely experimental with regard to GBAs, some studies have proposed conducting integrated/combined GBAs in writing classrooms, informed by theoretical perspectives. For example, Lin (2006) proposes adopting a Vygotskian approach to GBAs, arguing for paying attention to the roles played by model texts and teachers’ and students’ co-construction of skills and knowledge of context. His report bears out the merits of GBAs and contends that model texts and grammar were important in Japan to increase EFL learners’ confidence and sureness in writing. This is similar to Tang et al. (2009) who claimed that, “Chinese students are always expecting the samples and models for imitation and emulation” (p. 106). Other examples in Korea (Kim & Kim, 2005), China (Gao, 2007; Tang et al, 2009) and Malaysia (Kaur & Chun, 2005) all propose eclectic GBAs: balanced or integrated with other approaches such as cooperative, process or process-genre approaches. These blended proposals aim to minimise the disadvantages of GBAs, and counter the charges that GBAs may overemphasise product and accuracy like product approaches do. Therefore, these authors emphasise the importance of ‘scaffolding’ (Bruner, 1966) language learning, allowing language use as creative self-expression, and providing meaningful responses and diverse types of feedback. Moreover, in his qualitative study, Haq (2006) advocates the adoption of
GBAs to replace the current Indian language syllabus for GBAs, because he posits that GBAs can help adults learners arrange the whole meaning into a full text through explicit instructions. Likewise, Hung (2008) bears out the effectiveness of synthesising product-, process-, and genre-oriented approaches could highlight the significance of writing as a process, leading to a product, and contextualising writing for its intended audience and purpose. In sum, the research studies cited highlight the effectiveness of GBAs and seem to indicate learners’ positive attitudes to GBAs.

2.3 Studying students’ perceptions and attitudes towards approaches to teaching writing
Very few of the studies discussed actually focus on learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards approaches to writing. As Cheng (2006) cautions, many GBAs studies focus on discussing instructional tasks, data reporting, curriculum design and material development, ignoring the importance of more learner-focused research. Most research to date has largely attended to what learners learn instead of how they develop as learners and writers. However, there is much to be gained in researchers observing the full intricacies of learning and exploring learner dynamics in a writing classroom where a genre-based approach is used. Therefore, we argue that this represents a gap in the knowledge which needs to be addressed, since learners are the main stakeholders, participants and recipients of the benefits or shortcomings of teaching approaches. Compared to its counterparts in Asian EFL settings, in Taiwan the adoption of GBAs is still relatively uncommon in polytechnic universities, and any study of its effectiveness is even rare still. Applying GBAs to teaching ESP may be well suitable for occupation-oriented universities. Therefore, the present research aims to investigate whether GBAs are acceptable to learners, by surveying their perceptions and attitudes towards GBAs together with their reflections on learning to write, with the aim of shedding light on future research.

3. Research design
3.1 Setting and participants
Twenty-four senior EFL undergraduates had previously enrolled in an ESP course, ‘Practical Writing for Hospitality and Tourism’ at the National University of Taiwan. The university is a polytechnic university with a profession-oriented syllabus, which is very different from the traditional research-oriented ones. However, the participants
in this present research project were all English majors with experience of learning English for at least ten years or more, and who were training as English professionals to work in the hospitality and tourism (H&T) industries after graduation. Graduation is also contingent upon an internship in the third year within its curriculum. Half of the participants had their placements in the UK while the rest had theirs in Canada, Singapore, Macau and Taiwan.

After carrying out an initial needs analysis in accordance with the university’s overall educational aims, we designed an 18-week genre-based writing course in which the students had to compose three pieces of informative and promotional texts about the hospitality and tourism industries.

### 3.2 The design of the genre-based writing course

The course was divided into three equal cycles with identical procedures. After each cycle, the students had to submit brochure texts on hotels, tourist attractions and holidays respectively, focusing on description and persuasion, and providing information and promoting products, with the layouts arranged like authentic ones.

The implementation of each cycle generally adapted Bhatia’s (1993) suggested framework for conducting a genre analysis. First of all, authentic hotel brochures, previously collected in the UK, were provided for the students to read in class. Then, the students worked together with me to answer a number of questions about the targeted genre in order to identify its particular contextual characteristics. These initial contextual questions were adopted from Paltridge (2001) in respect to: the gist; the purpose; the setting; the tone; the author; the intended audience; the relationship between the author and the audience; the conventions; the assumptions of shared cultural knowledge and the implications of shared understandings of a particular genre. This task helps clarify: the field (what is going on); the mode (roles assigned to language); and the tenor (those who are taking part). These three elements collectively make up contextual analysis (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; So, 2005), and identifying the field, the mode and the tenor offers a clear direction and purpose for writing. Afterwards, the students read the examples again before being helped to identify the obligatory and optional moves/steps (Swales, op. cit.) that a hotel brochure with the purposes of informing and promoting should include.

One week later, the students submitted their first drafts, which were used as the study corpus with the help of Wordsmith (Scott, 2008), as related to the reference
corpus, composed of a collection from the authentic texts. In addition, another authentic keywords list for the hotel brochures was generated using British National Corpus (BNC) as the reference corpus and the authentic texts as the study corpus instead. These latter keywords constitute the precise lexis applied in authentic hotel brochures. In fact, I had collected all the keywords appearing in authentic H&T brochures and compiled them together in a pamphlet for students’ essential reference for their future compositions and revisions. Then, the differences in the lexis, the grammar, and the moves used, between the students’ texts and the examples were explicitly compared, discussed and instructed. During the resulting discussion, not only were the keywords used in the authentic contexts examined, but also students learnt how the hotel industry operates in the UK.

Then, the students revised their first drafts, and re-submitted the following week. The analysis procedure was repeated twice; i.e. each final text had been revised twice before being accepted. The purpose of these activities was to explicitly build genre knowledge about both the language and the context used for this particular genre and to develop learners’ reflections about genre-analysis. The other two cycles followed the same procedures. Regarding the assessment of the students’ work, in addition to the instructor’s formal feedback and scoring, a non-Chinese reader’s judgement on the authenticity of the texts was sought. This latter assessment represents an informal impression and scoring based on the native-like authenticity of how the texts read and their suitability for promotional purposes.

3.3 Instruments for assessment and analysis

In order to assess the students’ writing performance and to study their perceptions of and attitudes towards GBWI, an on-line assessment together with follow-up interviews and an online questionnaire were conducted in the 18\textsuperscript{th} week of the course. Due to space constraints, only the results of the questionnaire are reported and discussed in response to the research questions raised in the present study.

The online questionnaire contains three main parts: consisting of 50 items in total. The first part includes ten 5-point Likert scale questions regarding the students’ opinions of the claimed strengths and weakness of GBWI (drawn from the literature); the second part has 26 questions studying students’ perceptions of the GBWI implemented in class in this research; and the last section contains 14 questions, focusing on exploring students’ attitudes towards the keywords pamphlet, in order to
gauge the usefulness and importance of the specific lexis in a particular genre. The original questionnaire was written in Chinese in order to avoid any misunderstandings, but it was translated into English for discussion purposes in the present study. The two versions of the questionnaire were reviewed by one non-native English-speaking (NNS) colleague to ensure consistency. Additionally, the Chinese questionnaire was piloted by two English graduates to ensure clarity and comprehensibility before being carried out. Office Excel was used to calculate the frequency and percentages.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Student reactions to the claimed strengths and deficits of genre-based approaches

The results of the first part of the questionnaire are displayed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>S. Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Fairly</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>S. Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GBWI is targeted.</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>GBWI is relevant.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>GBWI is supportive.</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>GBWI is formulaic.</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>GBWI is mechanical.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>GBWI is restrictive.</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>20.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>GBWI is rigid.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>20.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>GBWI is prescriptive.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>20.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>GBWI is creative.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>GBWI is communicative.</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally speaking, the results apparently show that most of the students agreed with the alleged strengths of GBAs; however, their opinions of its weaknesses were fairly divided. The average percentage of agreement to items number, 1, 2, 3, 9 and 10 is 84.31 per cent, indicating that the learners have a positive attitude toward GBAs. Following Li and Chen’s (2009) claim that GBAs are effective in teaching EAP and EOP, the respondents’ choices also indicate that GBAs are indeed suitable for ESP courses: in this case due to its close relevance to the genre taught, and therefore increasing learners’ motivation. Relevance and motivation are two important factors
which persuade students to consider their classroom learning as beneficial for future use (Osman, 2004). As such, the participants seem to agree that these GBAs have clear and achievable aims, compared with the other methods used in previous writing for general purposes. Furthermore, the course was tailor-made to meet their future needs in their workplace, leading them to consider the course as relevant to their profession, and in doing so, the instruction supported their learning. Most important of all, nearly 80 per cent of the participants agreed that GBAs can help them engage in particular communicative activities, which is obviously one of the strengths of these approaches (Hyland, 2004a).

With regard to any potential shortcoming of GBAs, the average agreement to items number, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 is only 32.50 per cent, suggesting that only a few respondents perceived these approaches as formulaic, mechanical, restrictive, rigid and prescriptive, as asserted by some critics. On the one hand, the result of item number 9 also indicates a perception of GBWI as other than that of being restrictive; in fact this approach allows students’ choices or creativity whilst writing. However, on the other hand, the average disagreement with the above five items is low (20.83 per cent). Nearly half of them (46.66 per cent) hold a fair or neutral attitude towards these claims. The innate features of genres can probably account for these preferences for example, in order to achieve the specific purposes of communication, certain conventions and rules should be followed, which inevitably results in constraints on writing. Another possible reason is that the participants were not very familiar with the approach, because this was their first time learning how to write with a genre-based approach. They were explicitly instructed to follow the procedures of genre-based writing, but it is likely that they had never consciously considered these questions, making them hesitant to declare their position on this subject. This phenomenon raises another concern about GBAs: whether learners can learn autonomously, or whether they simply rely on the models provided to mimic writing passively. This issue is discussed further in the following section.

4.2 Attitudes towards the genre-based ESP writing course
The investigation in this part focuses specifically on the effectiveness of the GBWI. This section contains 26 items and the results are displayed in Table 2. These 26 items cover nearly all the features of GBWI, ranging from contextual to linguistic levels.
Table 2: Percentages (%) of students’ degree of agreement with statements about their genre-based writing instruction (GBWI) (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>reflections and self discovery</th>
<th>S. Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Fairly</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>S. Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>79.17</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>70.83</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User Satisfaction</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>62.50</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scaffolding Help</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflections and self discovery</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>54.17</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Firstly, GBAs suggest that genre awareness should be built upon explicit instruction or intervention in the classroom, which is largely different from the notions of reflection and self-discovery common to process-based approaches. Therefore, the teacher’s explicit instruction when analysing genres and the dominance of the procedures of the course are both desirable. The respondents’ opinions of items number 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 also suggest that the features of GBWI and the teacher’s explicit instruction made them perceive GBWI as completely different from previous writing instruction. Also, most of them are consciously aware of the characteristics
and procedures of GBWI. This realisation may result in learners perceiving the course as clearly-targeted and sequentially-stepped, which sensitises them to the fact that this learning is supportive, relevant and consequently motivating. Accordingly, nearly 80 percent of them agreed that ultimately they experienced a sense of achievement with their writing, as item number 6 shows.

Secondly, as Paltridge (2001) suggests, initial contextual questions can help build contextual knowledge of genres. Therefore, in each cycle of writing the students had to answer these questions before writing and as a result, over 90 percent of them agreed that this step was beneficial for their subsequent drafting. Strong agreement with item number 12 (91.66 per cent) also reflects this argument. In addition to this contextual analysis, micro-analysis is also necessary in GBWI. This includes analysing language components such as lexis, grammar, and sentences, and analysing content and organisation at the semantic level. Items number 9, 10, 11, 19 and 20 investigate students’ agreement with this. On average, 83.28 per cent of the participants indicated their strong agreement with these activities. For English majors in Taiwan, grammar-based instruction is not unfamiliar to them and the accurate use of grammar is strongly emphasised, which may possibly account for this high percentage. Furthermore, an extremely high percentage of 87.50 in item number 11 together with that of 91.67 per cent in item number 18 clearly convey a hidden message that the students regarded ‘authentic models and lexis used in H&T’ as essential. However, the importance of ‘language authenticity’ has been questioned recently by English as an international lingua franca (ELF) linguists such as Seidlhofer (2004), Jenkins (2007) and Hamied (2011). Nevertheless, the two different notions concerning language authenticity may not necessarily contradict each other. In fact, they even share one similar focus, i.e., language is acceptable as long as the interaction and communication among members of the community runs as well as expected. The domains of a genre are specifically created, shaped and then determined by the people who use it in a particular setting, i.e. community of practitioners (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and consequently the contexts (or norms of English) could be in L1, L2 and EFL settings. However, one difference between them may be that using specific genres puts more emphasis on the rules and conventions employed in communities, especially in writing. The objectives of teaching and learning authentic English in Taiwan could explain participants’ preferences, particularly for English majors and educators. Their attitudes concerning the authentic models are discussed
Thirdly, similar to the results in section 4.1, the respondents seem to indicate that GBWI offers choices rather than constraints. This aspect can be reflected in the results of 70.83 per cent of agreement in item number 14 versus 54.16 per cent in item number 13. Nevertheless, half of the respondents have an ambivalent attitude towards the latter. This tendency is also present in item number 22. Half of the students agreed that they were autonomous learners under GBWI rather than just learning passively, whilst the other half did not. In addition, it is not easy to dispel the idea that these divided responses seemingly indicate that GBAs could indeed be formulaic, restrictive, conformable and mechanic (Dixon, 1987; Freedman & Meadway, 1994; Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Raimes, 1991).

Fourthly, items number 15, 16, 23 and 24 show the results of the assessment of student performance. As published English brochures are also read by non-Chinese readers, such readers’ opinions of the texts are significant. However, only around half of the students i.e. 58.33% perceived these non-Chinese readers’ judgements as reliable. At the same time 70.83 per cent of them believed the instructor’s evaluation to be far more reliable, which was closely related to the fairly high percentage (75.00 per cent) of them agreeing that they were satisfied with their performance. In addition, all of the participants regarded the instructor’s feedback as significantly important. There are various reasons for these particular responses. It could be that the students viewed their writing as ‘assignments’ instead of real brochures. Therefore, they relied more on the teacher’s authority rather than on outsiders’ judgements, although this could be culturally beneficial for Taiwanese EFL learners. Equally, the differences in the assessment criteria between the course teacher and outside readers also affected the students’ attitudes. Judging ‘authenticity’ and ‘promotion’ can be very subjective and subtle, making it difficult to persuade the participants to trust these outsiders’ scores. In contrast, the instructor made judgements based on the lexis, grammar and content, which are all measureable and consequently objective and convincing. These two explanations also reflect the teacher’s dominant and central role, as well as illustrating students’ learning styles in some EFL settings.

Finally, in items number 21 and 7, 83.33 per cent and 70.83 per cent of the participants respectively agreed that both their content and language had increased to some degree. Furthermore, in item number 26, 87.50 per cent of them claimed that they were able to transfer the genre knowledge to the writing of other genres.
Although much research confirms the effectiveness of GBAs as discussed in section 2, there has been limited research to gauge the likelihood of genre transferability. This study, at least, ratifies that the learners believed themselves to be capable of transferring genre knowledge. This is certainly very encouraging for educators and researchers of writing. Due to the positive responses in item numbers 20, 21 and 26, 87.50 per cent of the participants were willing to recommend GBWI in future courses, as shown in item number 25. In sum, the majority of the learners perceived GBWI as beneficial to their writing, despite some divided opinion and criticism of it. The next section of this paper considers participants’ perceptions of the minimal authentic models, i.e. lexis.

4.3 The importance of the lexis used in authentic settings

As discussed in section 3.2, the keyword bank, alphabetically listing all the keywords identified in the authentic texts was used to explain how, why and when the lexis was used in the authentic texts. The students were encouraged to refer to the pamphlet whenever they had difficulties in choosing appropriate words in their own writing. The following table displays the results of the students’ perceptions of this keyword list.

Table 3: Percentage (%) of students’ level of agreement with statements about the H&T keywords list (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Fairly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It provides essential lexis required for H&amp;T brochures.</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>70.83</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is helpful for my future writing.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It increases my content knowledge about H&amp;T.</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It increases my vocabulary bank.</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The lexis collected is sufficient.</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The lexis is similar to what I am using.</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It makes me clearly understand what words are required in H&amp;T.</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>62.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It offers direction for memorizing the lexis.</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. It makes me guess the contexts of using the lexis.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>58.33</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I will use the lexis in my next writing.</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Key words should be listed before the course.</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 The lexis is similar to words in daily use.</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 It is not difficult to remember the lexis.</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 I would recommend others to refer to this list whilst writing H&amp;T brochures.</td>
<td>37.50</td>
<td>41.67</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First of all, the overall average percentage of agreement to the 14 items reaches 77.97%.
per cent, which means that the majority of respondents confirmed the importance and necessity of the keywords pamphlet. For instance, 83.33 per cent of the participants said they would use these words in their future writing of this genre. Indeed, the keywords with GBWI focused not only on linguistic knowledge but also on contextual knowledge, resulting in all of the participants indicating their belief that these words enhanced their content knowledge about H&T. A total of 91.66 per cent of the respondents would also ‘guess’ how and why they were used in the contexts. In other words, the students’ genre awareness was constructed based on both language and context acquisition. The keywords helped them reflect on and monitor their learning, which is apparently similar to the process of self-discovery emphasised by process approaches.

However, the results also show that the participants had divided opinions about applying the words to their English texts. Less than half of them (45.84 per cent) agreed that the keyword bank was sufficient. At the same time half of them said they had difficulties in memorising the words. The reasons for this paradox are still unclear, which suggest a need for deeper investigation in the future. Moreover, only 45.83 per cent of participants indicated that the keywords resembled the lexis they used in their texts and half of them agreed that the keywords were similar to the words used for general purposes. A possible explanation is that this was the students’ first time of composing a particular genre, and consequently the choices and constraints of word usage were challenging for them. Nevertheless, these responses also mirror the fact that some words are used more frequently than others in one genre. It is these keywords that make a genre specific and facilitate the communicative purposes achieved in a particular community. These keywords must be treated carefully by ESP teachers when being taught. Certainly, compared to EGP words, ESP keywords are less frequent in daily usage; therefore, it is understandable why the learners had some difficulties with them. In sum, the keywords can direct students’ learning and make it more targeted and relevant to learners’ needs. Besides that, keywords also help to build genre knowledge in languages and contexts.

4.4 An appropriated alternative to instructing ESP writing
As the results show under the section of ‘User Satisfaction’ in Table 2, the majority of the learners have verified the effectiveness of GBWI and most of them are positive about these approaches. Therefore, this research can reasonably imply that GBAs may
work well to some extent for polytechnic students. Many of these students were poorly served previously, especially as many earlier examinations tended to concentrate only on ‘advanced’ English learners. Although the students in polytechnic institutions are considered to be low achievers in English writing in some research evidence (e.g. LTTC, 2011), we argue that well-planned GBWI can increase students’ motivation to write and gradually improve their writing skills in the long run. This planning requires instructors’ effort: to establish writers’ future needs; to orientate students to GBAs; to design tasks to encourage genre analysis; to provide model exemplars to criticise; to provide linguistic, content and contextual knowledge, and to continuously offer feedback about students’ writing. Furthermore, the success of GBWI also depends on instructors’ tolerance and appreciation of creativity in writers’ texts, rather than emphasising conventions and rules. In sum, genre-based instruction could potentially overcome some of the problems of both product- and process-based approaches and become an alternative for ESP practitioners at polytechnic universities in Asian EFL settings (Hyland, 2003).

4.5 Reliance on model exemplars and job experience

As the data exhibit in Item 18 of Table 2, the learners in this study seem to rely heavily on the model exemplars and authentic lexis provided by the instructor, similar to their counterparts in China (Lin, 2006; Tang, et al., 2009). This tendency may imply that when following the procedures of GBWI, certain steps and provisions are highlighted and valued more than others by learners in certain contexts. The reasons for this may be cultural. For example, learners in a context with high uncertainty avoidance such as in Confucian societies would prefer to maximise certainty by following explicit regulations (Hofstede, 1985). This may imply that language teachers have to be aware of learners’ contextual differences and accommodate their needs when carrying out GBWI, especially in a multicultural classroom. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when offering models, as this might potentially inhibit learner autonomy. For example, less than half of the students in the current study reported that they were autonomous learners in class. In addition, over 80 per cent of the participants confirmed that their previous job experiences helped greatly with their writing. This implies that relevant work experience can be beneficial to build content knowledge of a particular genre, especially in EOP writing. On the one hand, these real-life explorations strengthen the authenticity of students’ texts. On the other hand,
they also ease the language teachers’ dilemma of being unfamiliar with subject content, which is regarded as a major obstacle for EFL teachers when teaching ESP courses (Yang, 2009). Consequently GBWI integrated with real or simulated opportunities of genre application may beneficially enhance the accessibility of texts.

4.6 Gauging learners’ transferability, the learning process and intercultural rhetoric

Although this research study inevitably has its limitations, there is much scope for future investigation. Firstly, the majority of the cited studies above focus on measuring the effectiveness of GBAs or learners’ perceptions of it, but few have researched whether learners can engage in other types of writing tasks with their previously acquired genre knowledge. The issue of gauging genre transferability is still relatively under-investigated by researchers and thus worthy of further research. Secondly, as Cheng (2006) argues, much GBAs research has focused primarily on instrumental tasks and data reporting of pre- and post-tests but has neglected the importance of more learner-centred, context-sensitive, ESP genre-oriented research. Consequently, the recommendation is to shift focus to, “examine how learners, as complex and instantiated agents…will be able better determine its objectives, and clarify its approaches to learning and teaching” (p.86-87). This enquiry requires deeper, more thorough, qualitative and longitudinal investigations. Text-based interviews suggested by Hyland (2004b) represent one choice. He recommends interviewing both writers and readers to confirm how writing strategies and choices are determined and the process of developing writing skills. Finally, as discussed earlier, each cited research study tells a story about a national culture. However, with the prevalence of international or intercultural communication, genres may not be fixed anymore but could become hybrid instead. They can change or a genre could include sub-genres. Texts can be affected by contextual and social factors, into either of which cultural issues can enter (Connor, 2011). Hence, intercultural differences or similarities of genres or GBAs also merit attention from researchers. Like the previously-cited studies (e.g. Lin, 2006; Tang, et al, 2009), model exemplars are relatively important for Chinese and Japanese writers. The issue as to whether this tendency is universal, or only applied to certain cultures is most interesting for further studies.
5. Conclusion

To conclude, this study investigating 24 EFL learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards a genre-based ESP writing course of hospitality and tourism in Taiwan showed a high percentage of agreement with the claimed benefits of GBAs but had divided opinions about its drawback and disadvantages. The majority of them also confirmed that GBAs were effective not only in improving their writing but also in enhancing their content knowledge about H&T. Moreover, they perceived themselves to be able to transfer previous genre knowledge in order to cope with other genres, although this transferability was not explicitly examined in this research. Although most polytechnic university students have much lower performance levels in English writing than their counterparts at other educational institutions in Taiwan (LTTC, 2011), GBAs, rather than the traditional EFL, may be well suitable in these settings, because they not only make the writing courses targeted, relevant and motivating, but also build learners’ linguistic and contextual knowledge of genres, as many studies suggest. Language educators should consider implementing GBWI in their ESP writing courses, especially if they are still searching for a viable alternative or an addition to enhance and maximise the effectiveness of their course instruction and attainment.

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Business Students’ Perceptions of Tasks in Chinese Tertiary Level Oral English Classes

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Biodata

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Abstract

Previous research into task-based approach has been conducted regarding task-familiarity, the operations of tasks, participant characteristics, complexities of tasks (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Brown, 1991), and the influence of these factors on task-completion outcome. However, relatively less is known about students’ reflections after being exposed to task-based activities. The present study investigated business students’ perceptions of tasks in Chinese tertiary level oral English classes. A questionnaire composed of 29 closed-ended items and 4 open-ended items was administered to 59 first-year and second-year university students majoring in various disciplines of business at the end of each semester. Findings suggest that these students generally held positive attitude towards task-based approach, and they also expressed expectations of innovation in the teaching method and material. Pedagogical implications are discussed in terms of how to implement tasks in English teaching in Chinese EFL contexts.

Keywords: task-based approach, business English, students’ perceptions
1. Introduction

Tasks have been the topic for heated discussion over the past few decades for its effectiveness in eliciting authentic language use in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. According to Nunan (2011), tasks can activate learners’ emerging language skills. At the same time, tasks also relate language structures to real-world situations and allow learners to use the language creatively. Researchers have conducted extensive studies on task design and its relationship with task performance (Skehan & Foster, 1997; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005), as well as task difficulty and language assessment (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Luo, 2009; Tavakoli, 2009).

From the pedagogical perspective, a task-based approach has been promoted in language teaching in a variety of ESL and EFL contexts. In China, the Ministry of Education introduced the National English Curriculum Standards (NECS) in which English is stipulated as a compulsory subject from Grade 3 to Grade 12, with an emphasis on a task-based approach to language teaching and learning (Ministry of Education Document, 2001, p.29 cited in Luo, 2009). Although a number of studies on a task-based approach have been conducted at the primary (Liu, 2008) or secondary level (Zhao, 2008), there has been a lack of empirical studies at tertiary level English classes, especially with regard to the application of a task-based approach in these classes.

As argued by Hutchinson and Waters (2002), in order for an ESP course to be effective, learners, as well as instructors, need to develop awareness of the need to learn the content of the course. A truly valid approach to ESP must be based on the understanding of the learning process rather than outlining the skills and language points that learners need to master. As a result, it is of critical importance to understand students’ perceptions of tasks, especially those relating to students’ attitude and opinions about the tasks that they had been exposed to during instruction. The present study explores business students’ perceptions of tasks with an aim to investigate the feasibility of implementing task-based approach in such a context in terms of their content, form and organization.

2. Literature review

2.1 Task-based approach in China
The notion of task in language teaching originated from communicative language teaching. According to Ellis (2003), tasks are “powerful construct for designing courses” (p.240). Generally, tasks can simulate real-world situations; learners can develop their interlanguage through completing meaning-primary tasks; and the learning outcome is assessed by task performance (Skehan, 1998). So far there have been various definitions of tasks and each has its own focus (Candlin, 1987; Willis, 1996; Skehan, 1998). The present study adopted a definition of task by Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 44), i.e., an activity that “involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular situation”, since this definition points out the essential elements in pedagogical tasks and situates tasks in a certain specific language teaching environment.

Although highly acclaimed as a viable approach in language teaching in the content-based, meaning-oriented context (Pica, 2005) and proved to be effective in directing students’ attention to form and meaning at the same time, some scholars questioned the feasibility of this approach in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, especially in the Chinese EFL context. Carless (2007) argued that “there is a need for more critical scrutiny of the suitability of task-based approaches for schooling, particularly in Confucian-heritage culture contexts where task-based teaching may prove to be in conflict with traditional educational norms” (p. 596). He mentioned some of the constraints of a task-based approach such as large class sizes, competitive examination systems and lack of teaching expertise in task-based approach, and an emphasis on direct grammar instruction. With an aim to find out the appropriateness of task-based approach in an Asian EFL context, Carless analyzed the suitability of a task-based approach for Hong Kong secondary schools by using semi-structured interviews with 11 secondary school teachers and 10 teacher educators. The conclusion was that there is a need for “adaptation and a flexible ‘situated version of task-based teaching’” (p.595) and that integrating tasks with the curriculum is necessary.

Despite the concern that tasks should be implemented in accordance with the curriculum, a number of studies that investigated the effect of different task types reported favorable outcome of task-based approach in Chinese foreign language teaching. For example, Chen (2008) investigated the relationship between task types and the allocation of attention in second language learners’ oral output processing. Results showed an overall task type effect on self-repair behavior, with retelling task
prompting the learners to pay more attention to grammatical accuracy and maintaining the same level of language complexity as in the monologue task. Monologue task was found to elicit more grammatical errors than other tasks and dialogue predisposed learners to pay more attention to lexical words. Zhao (2008) investigated the relative efficacy of fluency-focused strategy or the accuracy-based strategy on Chinese high school students’ development of oral English proficiency. Results showed that the accuracy-focused strategy was a better way to improve oral proficiency of Chinese senior high school students.

2.2 Task-based approach in business English teaching and students’ perceptions

A task-based approach has been implemented in ESP courses such as business English; for example, Shu (2008) discussed three merits of implementing a task-based approach to teaching business English: cultivating students’ motivation, understanding business culture, and creating an authentic context. Yuan (2008) explored the theoretical framework of a task-based approach and related it to the pedagogical practice of using a task-based approach in business English. According to Skehan’s (1998) theory of task-based approach, underlying language acquisition is the dual-code mechanism (one lexical and one rule-based), and the development of interlanguage is achieved by the accumulation of lexical items as well as the operationalization of grammatical rules. A task-based approach allows learners to complete meaning-oriented tasks through which language forms, meaning, and function are acquired simultaneously. It was argued that tasks could create authentic context of business communication, encourage cooperative learning, and achieve the balance between input and output, all of which are important factors that enable learners to develop their language and cross-culture communicative skills.

Although researchers (Basturkmen, 2006; Zhang 2008) promote a task-based approach to teaching ESP and argue that tasks “provide a purpose for using language meaningfully and that through struggling to use language to complete the task, the students acquire language” (Basturkmen, 2006, p.24), to my knowledge, empirical research on adopting a task-based approach in business English classes is rather limited. Huh (2006) conducted a study on needs analysis for an ESL business English course, with the purpose of identifying business English target tasks performed by Korean business professionals. 26 tasks were identified including writing a resumé,
writing business e-mails, attending to foreign guests. In addition, results also showed that the majority of Korean business professionals regarded English as a very important element in performing their jobs. Esteban and Canado’s (2004) study on potential drawbacks of case method in business English also shed light on the problems business English teachers need to pay heed to. Findings suggest that advanced preparation by the teacher, suitability of the course syllabus, students’ motivation, authenticity of materials and activities, as well as assessment measures provide key to the success of the case method.

As Chan (2009) argued, previous studies of business English could hardly be applied to language teaching practice and the researcher called for a link between research and pedagogy in business English teaching. One way of strengthening the interface between research and pedagogy is by investigating students’ beliefs of a teaching method, because on the one hand, teachers’ assumptions and intuitions about a certain teaching method may not prove to be effective, and on the other hand, students’ preferences and beliefs may play an important role in influencing teachers’ teaching processes and behaviors (Huang, 2005).

Two recent studies (Xiao, 2005; Rao, 2002) explored teachers’ and students’ views on communicative activities in general. Xiao (2005) reports a study that investigates students’ preferences of communicative classroom activities and non-communicative activities, attitudes towards speaking out in class, and learning target culture. Students showed stronger interest in group work, considered their peers’ news reporting and story-telling more useful than their teachers did. Overall, students showed negative feelings about teacher-dominance in English class and suggested a need for innovation in teaching method and for authentic material for communication-oriented activities in classes.

Rao (2002) used multi-method, qualitative research procedures to study the perceptions of 30 university students on the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their EFL classes. Findings suggest that students favor a combination of communicative and non-communicative activities in their English classrooms.

The limited studies on students’ perceptions of communicative activities offer us some insights into the possibility and potential problems of implementing task-based communicative activities in the Chinese English teaching context, but they did not reveal the specific characteristics of tasks that were favorable to the students in such a
context.

Previous literature on task-based approach suggested that the implementation and effectiveness of task-based activities is determined, to a large extent, by the nature, selection, procedure and organization of the task. Robinson (2011) states that the focus of task-based approach in recent years has been the influence of task characteristics on students’ learning and performance, the forms and complexity of tasks, the sequencing and selection of tasks and its impact on the pedagogical choices. Different types of tasks, such as information-gap, problem-solving, opinion exchange, decision-making, may provide different opportunities for learning (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993). Other characteristics of tasks, such as tasks with convergent/divergent goals may also lead to variation in task performance.

In the same vein, Candlin (1987) pointed out some key features of tasks that teachers need to attend to in order to maximize the effect of task-based instruction, including input, settings, monitoring, and feedback. Grouping arrangements (Brown, 1991) and teacher feedback (Macky & Goo, 2007) have been found to contribute substantially to the effectiveness of task-based instruction.

Theoretical discussion of task-based pedagogy suggests that it is conducive to second language learning. At the same time, a learner-centered approach, which is advocated in ESP course design, also calls for a thorough examination of students’ perceptions of tasks in EFL context, since “learning is totally determined by the learner…Learning is seen as a process in which the learners use what knowledge or skills they have in order to make sense of the flow of new information” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.72). Building on existing literature on TBLT and business English teaching, the present study sets out to investigate how students of business majors perceive communicative task-based activities which have been implemented in their speaking classes.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research questions
Based on the issues reviewed in the previous section, the following research questions are formulated:

1. How do business students perceive task-based activities in general?
2. How do business students perceive the content of task-based activities?
3. Which types of tasks do business students prefer?
4. What are business students’ opinions regarding the group arrangements of task-based activities?

5. What are students’ perceptions of the role of feedback in task-based instruction?

3.2 Participants
The research was conducted in two semesters, one from Sep, 2008 to Jan, 2009, the other from March, 2010 to June, 2010, at University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. The University is a well-known university specializing in business English, international trade, and economics. The students all major in business or economics subjects. The curriculum requires all the students in this university to take 26 credits of English courses. English speaking classes are among the compulsory English courses and are divided into 5 different levels. The students are generally highly motivated to take the English speaking courses.

Three classes of the same oral English course spread over two semesters were included in the research and the researcher was the instructor of the course. A total of 59 students, 20 from Class A, 19 from class B, and 20 from class C participated in the study. From the background information check, participants’ ages in the study ranged from 18-21. They were enrolled in either the first year or second year of university, majoring in various business or economics related disciplines. There were 41 female and 18 male students. Their reported college English entrance exam score was at the high-intermediate to advanced level (100 to 147 out of 150). All participants were able to communicate in English after several years of studying English as a foreign language. They reported an average of 9 years of learning English (ranging from 6 to 14 years).

3.3 English speaking classes
The English class in the present study is one of the essential English classes that business major students need to take in order to obtain their degree. The purpose of the English class is to develop students’ general oral English proficiency and to improve their ability to communicate in English on a variety of topics. Since students are all majoring in business- or economics-related subjects, they regard developing English proficiency, especially communication skills, as a priority in their study.

Considering their proficiency level and their motivation to develop their oral
English proficiency, the instructor used various forms of tailor-made task-based activities with different themes during the course. For example, when teaching the unit about traveling, the teacher prepared an information-exchange task. Two versions of the same map, with different tourist destinations marked with letters, were provided to the students. The students were told to look at their own version of the map and were required to ask each other information and find the location of each tourist destination. Throughout the semester, students performed the tasks individually, in pairs, in groups of four or as a whole class. Teacher-student interaction was also abundant during the semester. Teacher feedback was provided after individual or group activities either on students’ performance, grammatical forms, or the content of the activity. Task content covered diverse topics following the guideline of the textbook, including traveling, technology, animals, fashion and design. During the process of instruction, the instructor did not introduce the concept of tasks, but used various types of tasks, such as information-gap activities, jigsaw, tasks with convergent or divergent goals, and tasks that allowed participants to experience different roles (Skehan, 1998) to develop students’ oral English proficiency.

3.4 Questionnaire design
Since the objective of the oral English class is to develop students’ overall proficiency, and task-based instruction is claimed to assist in students’ development of fluency, complexity, and accuracy in their oral performance (Skehan, 1998), the present study used a post-instruction questionnaires to investigate students’ perceptions of task-based activities in order to better understand students’ needs and the suitability of these activities in the oral English class.

Drawing on the literature of a task-based approach to language teaching as well as the specific situation of the class, the researcher designed a questionnaire composed of 29 closed-ended questions and 4 open-ended questions that inquired about students’ perceptions of task-based activities. The questionnaire was composed of three parts. The first part concerns the biographic information as well as students’ background in learning English.

The second part contains 29 statements about opinions about task-based activities, teacher feedback and the comparison with other commonly used teaching

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2 The Textbook is “A New Coursebook of College Spoken English”.
methods in the speaking classes (such as reciting poems and quotes), each followed by a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The marks were then classified into three categories for the clarity of the data analysis. “Strongly agree” and “agree” were combined into “agree”, and “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were combined into the category of “disagree”, and the middle category is classified as “neutral”. The questions were blended together, but they contained different sub-themes for analysis. The third part of the questionnaire contained 4 open-ended questions related to students’ experience and opinions about task-based activities.

At the end of the semester, a printed version of the questionnaire was administered in class on the final examination day to ensure the highest possible response rate. For the purpose of delivering accurate information and avoiding ambiguity, the questionnaire items were all written in Chinese and the students were allowed to use either English or Chinese to answer the open-ended questions. Students were not required to write their names to ensure anonymity and they were explicitly told that the result of the questionnaire would not affect their final exam score.

The quantitative part of the questionnaire results was analyzed using SPSS 13.0 for measures of frequency as well as mean scores for each item. Open-ended questions were also analyzed to triangulate the result of the quantitative data (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

4. Results

4.1 Questionnaire results (Quantitative)

The first section of the 29 statements included items that examine students’ opinions towards task-based activities in general (See Table 1). Students’ opinions towards task-based activities in general are summarized as follows. Students generally held a positive attitude towards task-based activities. For the first statement “I think it is necessary to perform tasks in oral English classes”, 98% of the respondents chose either “agree” or “strongly agree”, which expressed their favorable attitude towards the tasks that they have been exposed to during the semester. This can also be reflected by classroom observations. During the whole semester, students participated in various task-based activities and they expressed enthusiasm and interest in these activities. For the second statement “I think these tasks can help me improve my oral English proficiency”, 83% of the respondents rated positively. When asked about the
aspects of improvement, 87% of the participants rated positively for fluency, and 59% of the respondents thought tasks could improve their accuracy. 68% of the respondents thought that these tasks would inspire their interest in learning English. 75% of the students rated positively on the statement “I think the form of the tasks is critical” and 95% of the students believed that the content of the tasks is very important. 83% of the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in these activities voluntarily. However, only 40% of the students expressed the idea that they would use English naturally while performing the tasks and would not feel nervous.

Table 1: Students’ perceptions of task-based teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I think it is necessary to perform tasks in the oral English classes.</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I think these tasks can improve my oral English proficiency.</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. These tasks can improve the fluency of my oral English.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. These tasks can improve the accuracy of my oral English.</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. These tasks can improve my interest in learning English.</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The forms of these tasks are important.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The content of these tasks are important.</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. While performing tasks, I will use English naturally without feeling nervous.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I like to participate in these tasks voluntarily.</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four items asked about the grouping arrangements of tasks. 81% of the students responded that they liked group work (four people in one group). 59% of the students rated positively for pair work, 71% of the students rated positively for whole-class activity, and 66% of the students preferred to do individual presentation or answer questions individually.

Table 2: Students’ perceptions of the grouping arrangements of tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. I like to participate in group work (four or more people in one group).</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I like to participate in pair work.</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the role of the interlocutor, the questions were designed to examine students’ view on the interlocutor in assisting the improvement of their oral English proficiency. These questions were designed with reference to the Chinese EFL context, where the class size is generally large and teacher-student interaction is abundant. 88% of the students think that interaction with the teacher in class will help them improve their oral English proficiency and 88% of the students thought that interaction with native speakers would help develop their oral English skills. 84% of the students preferred their teachers to explain the content of the course.

Table 3: Students’ opinions regarding the role of the interlocutor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. I like to listen to the teacher to explain the content of the class.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I like to interact with the teacher in order to improve my oral English.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I like to interact with the native speakers to improve my oral English.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section asked about students’ opinions about the content of the tasks, with an aim to compare task-based instruction with traditional ways of teaching oral English classes. Since teachers often adapted materials into pedagogical tasks to suit the specific needs of their students, the questions were designed according to the most often used material in oral English classes. When asked about whether they liked to recite classic essays, poems and quotes, only 35% of the students expressed favorable attitude. Only 20% expressed positive attitude towards the activities in the textbook. An overwhelming majority of the students (93%) expressed the idea that they liked tasks adapted from English songs, and an even higher percentage (97%) expressed their preference of tasks adapted from excerpts of English movies. 81% of the students rated positively for tasks with videos related to news and updated information. About the difficulty of tasks, 64% of the students showed positive

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3 For example, the teacher may adapt task-based activity based on movie excerpts and songs, with an aim to develop listening and speaking skill or to develop vocabulary or grammar. The questions reflect the common ways teacher develop their syllabus in the oral English class.
attitude towards performing difficult tasks.

Table 4: Students’ perceptions of the content of the tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. I like to recite classic essays, poems, and quotes in oral English classes.</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I like to do tasks adapted from English songs in oral English classes.</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I like to do tasks adapted from English movies in oral English classes.</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I like to do tasks with videos about news and current affairs.</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I like activities in the textbook.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I like tasks that are difficult.</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth section asked about students’ preference for the type of tasks. These questions were designed according to previous literature on task characteristics. Items in this section included various types of tasks, such as picture-description, information exchange activities, activities that require different opinions and so on. 40% of the students think that describing pictures is a good way of practicing oral English. 76% of the students think that information-exchange (information gap) activities are good exercises for practicing oral English. 85% of the students rated positively for activities that require different opinions on the same topic (such as debate).

Table 5: Students’ perceptions of the type of tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. I think describing the content of a picture is a good way to improve my oral English.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I think exchanging information with my partner is a good way to improve my oral English.</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I think exchanging my opinions with my fellow students on a certain topic is a good way to improve my oral English.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The final section asked about students’ attitudes towards teacher feedback in the oral English classes. 96% of the students believed that teachers should give feedback on content of their answers or oral presentations. 87% of the students thought that teachers should give feedback on grammatical errors. Only 46% of the students would like their teachers to give feedback when their classmates are present. Only 7% of the students thought that their mistakes in oral English should not be corrected.

Table 6: Students’ perceptions of teacher feedback during task-based instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26. I do not think that teachers should provide feedback during task completion.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I hope the teacher would provide feedback while my classmates are present.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I hope the teacher would provide feedback on grammatical errors.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I hope the teacher would provide feedback on the content of my presentation or my answers.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Questionnaire results (Qualitative)

The qualitative result corresponds to the quantitative result to a large extent. For example, when asked about the most impressive activity they have performed, many students answered group presentation, debate, and individual presentation. One student commented: “I like debate because everybody is required to express oneself in English in a logical way.”

Another student thought that group work “required team-work, innovation, and public speaking ability, and enhanced our relationship”. Some students mentioned individual presentation because they thought that “individual presentation would allow us to express our opinion about a certain topic in a profound way and exchange information with our classmates”.

Many students showed preference for making powerpoint presentations. They wrote: “Preparing high quality presentation is the best way to improve my oral English skills. I think in the oral English class, it is better to encourage students to make the presentation in a more formal and interesting way.”

When asked about what was the most effective form of activity in improving oral English, the majority of the students wrote “watching English movies”, “listening to English songs”. One student remarked: “Introducing more English movies and
music is an effective way in improving our oral English because students really like it and it is easy to gain more knowledge.”

Other students liked to communicate with their group members, teachers, and native speakers. A student remarked: “I think communication with native speakers is a necessary way to improve my English because in this way, you will not rely on Chinese when you encounter some difficulties in expressing yourself as you always do. You will be more likely to try in English.”

While students general showed more agreement on the first two questions, they expressed quite diverse answers to the third question “Which topics do you like to discuss in class?” Students generally expressed their personal interest and the topics that they think would elicit more discussion, such as love, war, science and technology, music, movies, books, current affairs, sports, art and mythology, fashion, college university life, travelling and so on. Many students expressed their preference for topics that concern their daily life and topics that are updated.

The fourth question asked about students’ opinions about the criteria for high proficiency in oral English. This question was to examine if the students’ expectations and definition of proficiency were in line with the purpose of the oral English course. Students showed unanimous standards in this regard. They mentioned the following items in this respect: good pronunciation and intonation, communicate in a fluent and logical way, authentic expressions, as naturally as mother tongue, large vocabulary, accuracy (or few errors), and meaningful content. Many students commented: “I hope I can express whatever I think in a fluent way”, and “At least what you said should be intelligible and can be understood by your peers and by foreigners.”

5. Discussion
Ellis and Johnson (1994) suggested that at the beginning of a course, it is important to discuss with the learners the course objectives and methods to achieve these goals. In the same vein, exploring the perceptions of learners towards a teaching method to some extent enables teachers to obtain timely information regarding the effectiveness of a certain method, select appropriate material, and design the content of future courses.

In recent years, the use of tasks in a variety of teaching contexts (such as Asia, Europe and North America) has yielded favorable outcomes for second language development. Long and Crookes (1992) summarize the procedure for task-based
syllabus design as a series of steps, of which the central procedure is the analysis of learner needs. In the present study, the quantitative results together with the qualitative analysis revealed that students generally hold a positive attitude towards task-based activities, which was consistent with some of the previous findings related to students’ perceptions of communicative activities (Rao, 2002; Xiao, 2005). Tasks have been claimed to carry out a variety of functions in task-supported language teaching environment, including diagnosing students’ strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of a unit (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 2000), contextualizing interest/activate prior knowledge of theme/topic of a unit of instruction (Nunan, 2004), raising awareness of specific lexico-grammatical features (Lee, 2000), mobilizing and stretching students’ existing knowledge and resources and developing fluency in light of real time processing demands (Johnson, 1996) (cited in Samuda & Bygate, 2010). In the present learning context, students showed great enthusiasm for the exchange of information that tasks brought to class and they became more active in class. Another reason that these activities motivated the students to learn English is because students could associate what they learn with what they are doing in real life, which enabled the students to speak English with real communicative purposes. As reflected in students’ answers to the open-ended questions, students are interested in tasks such as individual presentation because this would “allow us to express our opinion about a certain topic in a profound way and exchange information with our classmates”. They also believe that preparing high quality presentation would allow them to improve their overall oral English skills, which will be required in their future career.

Some students thought that the use of tasks in the oral English classes will help improve their oral English proficiency in general. However, more students thought these tasks improved fluency rather than accuracy. Students’ perceptions of tasks as activities for improving fluency over accuracy may be mediated by the overall objective of the course and their prior learning experience. The students in the present context all experience the form-and-accuracy oriented English teaching environment (Rao, 2002) in their high school and it was the first time for them to be exposed in an entirely oral English environment in this course. According to Lyster & Mori’s (2006) counterbalance hypothesis, language development is triggered by instructional interventions that orient learners to directions opposite to the learning environment that they are accustomed to. In other words, for analytical learners, it is suggested that the pedagogical orientation leaning towards developing fluency and the ability to
express meaning in real time without overemphasizing on the accuracy of grammatical forms (Skehan, 1998).

Learners’ prior experience in the classroom that focuses on grammar and accuracy may have already predisposed them towards accuracy in the tertiary level oral English classes. As a result, in the design of pedagogical tasks, classroom practitioners may consider implementing tasks that encourage meaningful communication among students with an aim to exchange information, opinions, and to achieve a specific goal. However, this does not necessarily mean that tasks do not need to contain target grammatical features. As Carless (2007) pointed out, task-based approaches to English learning can integrate grammar content with meaning-focused language use. Pre-determined language features can be included in the communicative tasks to achieve the balance between fluency and accuracy. Ellis and Johnson (1994) also argued that tasks can be fine-tuned “so that learners know exactly what the setting is, who they are supposed to be, what sort of things they are supposed to communicate, and what is expected of them in performance terms” (p. 39). Teachers could orchestrate tasks while integrating target grammatical features so that learners can either learn to use new grammatical features or to rehearse partially-acquired grammatical features and to proceduralize grammatical knowledge in their oral communication.

Although students expressed strong agreement on the use of tasks and a willingness to participate in the tasks, they also express concerns for using English to communicate fluently in class. Only 40% of the students thought they were confident enough to express themselves in English in class. This indicates that it still takes time to allow students to fully prepare themselves to perform these tasks in a confident manner. Carless (2003) and Li (1998) mentioned that learners’ proficiency level may be a factor that hinders the implementation of the communicative or task-based approach. The result of the present study implicates that teachers need to tailor the tasks to the appropriate level of their students’ proficiency level so that the students may feel comfortable and confident to perform the tasks. Carefully selected language tasks will maximize the effect of the pedagogical intervention.

Results also revealed that students prefer to interact with the native speakers and their teacher in order to improve their oral English proficiency. As Rao (2002) reported, students’ traditional learning styles and habits (such as teacher-centered, book-centered approach) may influence the way they are involved in communicative
Students in the Chinese context still value interaction with their teachers and native speakers because they consider them as authorities or mentors (Hu, 2002). As commented by Xiao (2005), many teachers still “adhere to teacher-centeredness and prioritized the imparting of knowledge to learners” (p. 78), which may in turn have an impact on students’ learning priority and learning styles. Students’ preference for teacher-student interaction is also echoed by the fact that 87% of the students would like their teachers to explain the content of the course, even in the oral English class. As mentioned by Hu (2005), teachers and students in the Chinese context may perceive teaching as “the delivery of knowledge rather than the development of communicative skills” (p.597). In light of this finding, teachers could design some tasks that involve teacher-students interaction, mainly for improving students’ repertoire of language. Teachers could provide valuable feedback during one-on-one interaction with the students which will raise their awareness of certain problematic forms that the whole class may encounter in their oral interaction.

Students generally preferred tasks that require the exchange of information or opinions on certain topics and they consider group work as the most favorable type of grouping arrangement. This is consistent with previous research that examined task type and negotiation of meaning. Researchers synthesized a large number of studies in the area of task type and identified two key features of the task: the interactional activity and the communication goal. This involves a series of features related to tasks type, including whether the participants hold mutual or mutually exclusive information, whether the exchange of information is necessary for task completion, and whether a single outcome is required (Nunan, 2011). Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993) argued that when interactants hold a different proportion of information, and when they need to exchange information to arrive at a convergent goal with only one acceptable outcome, they are likely to generate the most negotiation. It is necessary, therefore, to design tasks that involve more than one participant, with each participant holding different information in order to achieve convergent goals as the measurable outcome. Examples of such activities include jigsaw tasks and information exchange activities.

In terms of the content of the tasks, students showed preference for activities that are of interest such as movies, songs, and news. However, they expressed negative attitude towards reciting poems, classic essays and quotes, and they did not like the tasks in the textbook. This suggests that there is a need for innovation in the
teaching material and teaching method in the university oral English classes. Students seem to be highly enthusiastic about authentic materials, and when teachers design courses, they need to adapt materials into pedagogical tasks which are appropriate to the students’ proficiency level. “The effectiveness of any tool of course relates to its fitness for an intended purpose” (Samuda & Bygate, 2011, p. 220). As argued by Kumaravadivelu (1994, cited in Samuda & Bygate, 2011), the communicative movement has led to the ‘post-method’ phase. In order to meet students’ needs, teachers need to negotiate content, sequence and activity type with learners from a variety of resources. Tasks are seen as pedagogic tools that can be incorporated into the classes depending on the purpose and context rather than pre-packaged materials. In the particular context where the study was conducted, the overall objective of the course is to develop students’ overall oral language communicative competence. In this kind of task-supported teaching context, the development of grammatical accuracy on the one hand, and oral fluency on the other, is the ultimate goal of language teaching; as a result, tasks that involve pre-determined language forms of the target language with carefully designed task cycles (Skehan, 1998) will lead to a more desirable learning outcome.

With regard to teacher feedback, the majority of the students indicated that teachers should correct their mistake, both on the content of their answers or presentations and on the grammatical form and appropriateness of the language. However, they would rather not be corrected in front of their classmates. This finding is consistent with previous studies on patterns of feedback in different contexts, which showed that explicit feedback that overtly indicates the incorrectness of students’ utterance is not often used in communicative classrooms (Lyster & Mori, 2006). Instead, teachers may use indirect feedback techniques, such as recasts or negotiation of form (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) to correct students’ mistakes and at the same time, avoid face-threatening. In fact, feedback is considered an important component in task-based approach because it is likely to impinge on the rule-based system and therefore conducive to the development of a more accurate interlanguage system. In two recent meta-analysis of the effectiveness of oral corrective feedback on second language development (Mackey & Goo, 2007; Lyster & Saito, 2010), researchers concluded that oral corrective feedback had a significant and durable effect on target language development. Therefore, in order for tasks to be effective, either the teacher could provide to the class as a whole to raise learners’ awareness of grammatical
errors, or learners as interlocutors could provide feedback to each other to provide opportunities for modified output (Sato & Lyster, 2007). Furthermore, teachers need to carefully design task cycles to avoid overemphasis on grammar and achieve the balanced goal of language development. As suggested by Carless (2007), feedback and form-focused instruction could be provided at the last stage of the task-cycle to draw learners’ attention to form so as they would not emphasize solely on fluency.

6. Conclusion

Over the past three decades, a task-based approach to language teaching has been studied in Asian EFL contexts. Although controversies remain, we have achieved better understanding of the situations, contextual factors, regional differences, as well as teachers’ views of a task-based approach. The present paper adds to existing literature on a task-based approach by analyzing business students’ perceptions of task-based activities in the tertiary-level oral English classes. Findings reveal that students generally hold a positive attitude towards tasks in their oral English classes. They like tasks that involve more participants exchanging information on convergent goals. In addition, they prefer tasks that are adapted from movies, songs or other authentic materials rather than tasks prescribed in the textbooks, suggesting innovation in teaching method and syllabus design in tertiary level classes in China. The overall conclusion is that there is no monolithic approach that could be implemented in the Chinese EFL context. Teachers and educational practitioners need to analyze students’ needs and the educational goal before they decide which approach to adopt in their teaching. It is also important that teachers design tasks that meet their students’ needs and reflect on their own teaching constantly so that their teaching method is appropriate to their learners and to the society as a whole (Edge, 1996, cited in Rao, 2002). Furthermore, detailed analysis of the classroom context (Xiao, 2005), different task-types (Tavakoli, 2009), students’ performance of the tasks, and the short-term and long-term effect of the tasks on learners’ oral English proficiency (Pica, 2005) will shed light on the issue of task-based teaching in classroom context. Empirical studies in these regards are certainly needed in the Chinese context.

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References


Students’ Citation Knowledge, Learning, and Practices in Humanities and Social Sciences

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Abstract
Recent research has demonstrated that appropriate and strategic use of citation is an essential skill for academic researchers. Learning to use citation has therefore been recognized as an important part of students’ acculturation into their disciplinary discourses. Although research has investigated various aspects of student citation practices, little has been known about how students perceive citation functions, how they learn to cite, and what they know about their own citation practices. To explore students’ citation knowledge and learning, this study recruited five graduate students from four humanities and social sciences departments. It adopted the semi-structured and discourse-based interview methods as the main tools of investigation, which were then triangulated with quantitative text analysis. Results suggested that more advanced graduate students could articulate more rhetorically sophisticated citation functions. Students obtained citation knowledge from sources including advisors, model theses, graduate courses, and their readings, although it appeared that their learning from these sources was largely informal and incidental. Finally, the study found that these students
differed in their levels of citation knowledge, favored reference types, and preferred ways of presenting cited information. These differences may be accounted for by disciplinary cultures, research writing experience, and the written language of the thesis. Implications of the findings for English for academic purposes (EAP) and directions for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** citation, academic writing, graduate student writing, disciplinary differences

1. **Introduction**

Citation, or reference to previous research, is one of the most important linguistic devices that help achieve an author’s communicative purposes. Research on citation in academic writing has gained increasing significance in recent years. Theories of citation have been proposed and debated (Cronin, 1998; Leydesdorff, 1998). These theories can be further discussed in two categories, each representing different perspectives on functions of citation in research writing (Harwood, 2004). In the first category, the normative/reward view, citation is an ethical practice, whose primary purpose is to acknowledge intellectual property rights of researchers who make the discoveries. The second category of theories, the rhetorical/social constructionist view, understands citation as a tool of persuasion to give greater authority to one’s own text (Gilbert, 1977). Swales’ influential CARS (Create a Research Space) model (1990), in particular, illustrates vividly the social constructionist nature of the citing behavior in research writing. That is, citation describes what has been done to pave the way for what has not been done and to create a space for new research. Both theories show that appropriate and strategic use of citation is an essential skill for academic researchers. Learning to use citation has therefore been recognized as an important part of graduate students’ acculturation into their respective discourse communities. Although student citation practices have been addressed in the literature (Pecorari, 2003, 2006; Petrić, 2007; Thompson & Tribble, 2001; Yeh, 2009), little is known regarding students’ citation knowledge and learning. Adopting the semi-structured and discourse-based interview methods as the main tools of investigation, which were then triangulated with quantitative text analysis, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring what graduate students know about citation functions and their own citation practices as well as how they learn to use citation in their disciplines.
1.1 Cross-disciplinary citation practices

It is widely recognized that ways of constructing knowledge vary widely among academic disciplines. Referring to the major distinction between natural sciences (NS) and social sciences and humanities (SS&H), Huang and Chang (2008) point out that the two camps of academic scholarship differ in both subjects and methodologies. In terms of research subjects, NS disciplines investigate natural objects or phenomena while SS&H disciplines study human behaviors. In relation to methodologies, NS disciplines give prominence to “ration and logical reasoning” while SS&H disciplines (and humanities in particular) value “intuition and imagination” (p. 1819). With such fundamental variance, it may not be surprising to find that citation behaviors differ markedly between the two camps of researchers.

Research has shown that NS and SS&H citation practices vary in source types, citation age, citation functions, and linguistic features. Analysis in a review study (Huang & Chang, 2008) concluded that while NS researchers cite predominantly journal articles, the social sciences and humanities literature tends to cite books rather than journal articles. In terms of citation age, NS literature is generally more concerned with the most up-to-date research reports, while SS&H researchers may cite older literature. As regards citation functions, Harwood’s (2009) interview study with 12 computing and sociology researchers found that computer scientists used more signposting citations to direct the reader to further reading, but sociologists employed more critical citations. Furthermore, Hyland’s (1999) study on citation linguistic features found that, compared to the practice in NS literature, citation in SS&H disciplines generally played a more ‘visible’ role in that the latter tended to use more citations. They were also more likely to use integral citations (where the name of the author appears in the sentence), place the author in subject position, and employ direct quotes and discourse reporting verbs.

While the above studies focused on published works, research has also demonstrated the effect of discipline on student citation use. For example, a study of 33 biology undergraduate student papers (Kraus, 2004) reported that more than three-quarters of the citations referred to journal articles. On the other hand, Magrill and St. Clair (1990) found undergraduate students in the humanities cited more books, science students made more reference to journal articles, while students in the social sciences relied equally on books and journal articles. Similarly, a more recent study (Carlson, 2006) found humanities students’ reference to books accounted for 70% of
their total citations, while students enrolled in social sciences cited more journal articles
than their counterparts in the humanities. This brief survey has shown not only
substantial difference between citation use in NS and SS&H fields but also
considerable variance between citation practices in humanities and social sciences
disciplines.

1.2 Student citation practices
Having reviewed literature on cross-disciplinary citation behavior, this section will
focus on student citation practices, with special reference to formal and functional
aspects of citation and the citation composing process.

1.2.1 Formal aspects of citation
Investigations of formal aspects of student citation practices have included syntactic
structures (integral and non-integral), presentation of cited work (direct quotes,
summary, paraphrase, and generalization), and textual appropriation.

Thompson and Tribble’s study (2001) on doctoral theses written in two
departments, Agricultural Botany and Agricultural Economics, examined in detail the
use of integral and non-integral citations, the former referring to instances where the
researcher’s name appears as part of the sentence and the latter consisting of references
in which the researcher’s name appears in parentheses or is represented by a superscript
number. Integral and non-integral citations, Swales (1990) argued, can be used to show
the degree of emphasis placed on a certain reference, with the former giving greater
prominence to the cited author and the latter implying a stronger emphasis on the
reported message. Thompson and Tribble found that while Agricultural Botany theses
had two thirds of their citations in non-integral forms, Agricultural Economics theses
used non-integral structures with only slightly over one-third of their citations (38.1%),
suggesting that disciplinary convention governs writers’ choice about whether integral
or non-integral forms are used.

Yeh’s (2009) corpus study on first-year TESOL graduate students’ citation
behavior showed that Taiwanese students generally used more integral than
non-integral structures. As to presentation of cited work, summary/paraphrase was the
most preferred way of incorporating cited sources. This seemed to concur with
Hyland’s (1999) study results in which researchers across the disciplines were found to
use summary or paraphrase to present the cited information. Nevertheless, Yeh also
noted that students used a much greater number of direct quotes than published writers. In particular, students were found to have a tendency to quote long phrases or sentences. These L2 student writers resorted to long quotes when encountering difficulty in understanding or summarizing the source text and they used long quotes as a survival strategy to resolve the tensions between academic workloads and insufficient linguistic proficiency (Yeh 2009). Closely related to students’ use of long quotes is the concept of textual appropriation, which refers to an act of borrowing from source texts either with or without acknowledging the sources. Shi’s (2010) study asked students to comment on their decisions to use either quotes, paraphrases, or summaries to incorporate cited information. Students reported choosing quoting over paraphrasing when they “did not know how to paraphrase it” or when they could not “think of another way to say it,” suggesting that novice writers’ linguistic resources/proficiency had impact on their citation decisions.

Academic writers’ textual appropriation/borrowing practices were also investigated in Li (2007) and Flowerdew and Li (2007), although in these two studies the practices were labeled as ‘language re-use’. In Li (2007), most of the case study student’s citations were found to involve a certain level of language re-use (i.e., passages were pasted from source materials), but the student justified her textual copying behavior (a practice normally labeled as plagiarism) by noting that she had acknowledged the source. In other words, she seemed to believe that as long as the source was given, she should be free of accusation of plagiarism. Flowerdew and Li (2007) found similar evidence of language reuse in student writing and argued that the practice could be seen as a developmental strategy to learn disciplinary writing.

1.2.2 Functional aspects of citation

Functional aspects of citation refer to a writers’ intention or motivation for citing a particular source. Harwood’s (2009) interview study identified 11 citation functions in researchers’ comments on their own published papers. The most frequently reported functions were signposting, supporting, credit, and engaging (critical dialogue with sources by, for instance, identifying inconsistencies in the source’s position). Yet, these citation functions were not always found in student writing. In fact, Petrić (2007) argued that effective citation use may be quite different in scholarly publication and student writing because scholars and students “write for different audiences, have different writing goals, and use different genres, all of which could affect their citation
use” (p. 239). An obvious example is scholars’ use of citation to build a social network, a function less relevant in student writing due to its very limited circulation. In contrast, knowledge display may be a more significant function in thesis writing because students need to demonstrate a sufficient level of understanding of the field to pass thesis examination. Petrić compared eight high- and eight low-graded masters’ theses to determine what constituted effective citation practices in student writing. Among the nine citation functions identified, attribution was used most frequently by both high- and low-graded theses. This “most common and rhetorically the simplest” (p. 247) citation function was preferred because, Petrić argued, students needed to display their knowledge and showed a familiarity with the literature. Petrić’s study also found more frequent use of evaluation citations (either positive or negative evaluation) and other non-attribution citations in high-graded theses, suggesting that higher grades were awarded to theses that showed analytical ability.

Adopting an interview approach, Shi (2010) asked 16 undergraduates to explain why and how they appropriated source texts with or without citations. To account for students’ citation decisions, she identified 14 reasons in total, classified into three major categories: the first involving the functional or rhetorical role of the borrowed texts, the second concerning students’ interpretations of the source texts, and the third relating to their learning experience. Among the 14 reasons, “support” was the most frequently mentioned reason, indicating that the students understood the importance of using citation to give credit to their own writing. Shi also investigated why students did not cite appropriated texts and found reasons including: a) the source text was interpreted as common knowledge, b) the appropriated text either matched their knowledge accumulated as a result of learning or was not worth citing otherwise they had to cite everything, c) they did not cite a reference cited earlier in the paper to avoid using too many citations, and d) the source text was used to form one’s own point. These findings suggested that students had their own theories of the functions realized by what they chose to cite and reasons for appropriating source texts without citing.

1.2.3 Citation Composing Process
Having examined the formal and functional aspects of citation use in student writing, this review will now turn to students’ citation composing process. Investigating how students integrated information from sources with one’s own knowledge, Flower (1990) identified three typical strategies adopted by students, labeled respectively as “gist and
list,” “TIA” (True, Important, I Agree), and “dialogue.” The first is mainly a text-driven strategy, in which students read through the text “looking for the main points, [find] an idea or term that links them, and [use] that to organize the text” (p. 235). The second strategy is more oriented to students’ existing knowledge or attitudes. Students adopting this strategy select ideas they like, already know about, and have ability to write on. This strategy is therefore characterized as a “one-way communication,” and students adopting it may not be “open to argument or learning” (p. 236). The third strategy, dialogue, illustrates the transition from knowledge telling to knowledge transforming (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987), a problem often encountered by novice writers. Flower further identified in this dialogue strategy four features that “create relations among ideas” (p. 237): comparisons, examples, qualifications, and syntheses. Through these, students learn to examine, question, qualify, and extend knowledge via constant evaluation of others’ claims against their own knowledge. Later studies often found more frequent use of the first two strategies: “gist and list” and “TIA.” For example, the case study student in Chen (2000) was found to use a “gist and list” strategy when writing in English. In Li (2007), a Chinese-speaking doctoral student reported her reading and writing strategies as including reading review articles in prestigious journals to save reading time, listing tentative headings, and copying potentially useful passages from others’ papers to individual sections of her IMRD-structured (Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion) paper. Li characterized this citation composing strategy as schema-based (Bazerman, 1985), but it clearly bears a semblance to Flower’s TIA strategy.

In general, students’ citation learning process has consistently been shown to be difficult, an issue specifically addressed in Dong (1996). In this case study, three dissertation students were reported to learn from their supervisors various aspects of citation use including deleting non-relevant citations, softening tone in negational citations, and adding citations to support argument. But Dong also described the students’ difficulties in using citations: one with selecting relevant citations to contextualize his research, another with supplying any citations in his earlier drafts, and the other with giving due credit for the cited work. It is worth noting that the three students were all conducting doctoral dissertation writing and therefore arguably more sophisticated in their respective disciplinary cultures than students at the master’s level, which is the focus of the current paper; yet, appropriate and effective citation use remained a challenge for them.
As shown in the above review, research has investigated various aspects of student citation practices including functions realized in students’ citations, students’ citation composing strategies, and their preferences for incorporating cited information. As yet, few studies have addressed other important aspects of student citation knowledge and learning, such as how students perceive citation functions in their readings and their own texts, how they learn to cite, and what they know about their own citation practices. Even less is known about the citation learning of humanities and social sciences students, particularly master’s students, who can be described as just embarking on the journey of learning disciplinary writing. The current study therefore seeks to broaden our understanding of students’ citation knowledge and learning by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do humanities and social sciences students perceive the functions of citations in research writing?
2. How do they learn to use citations?
3. What do they know about their own citation practices?
4. What factors contribute to the differences, if any, in their citation practices?

2. Method of study

2.1 Participants

Five professors and their thesis students at a national university in southern Taiwan were invited to participate in the study. Three of the advisor-student pairs came from social sciences disciplines: social welfare, communication, and education, while the other two pairs were recruited from a foreign literature department. Social sciences students in Taiwan typically compose theses in their first language, Chinese, while foreign literature students are required to write in English, as were the cases in this study. There were two reasons for including both students writing in English and those writing in Chinese. First, it reflects the current educational reality in Taiwan: Chinese is the language of thesis in disciplines other than foreign literature departments. Second, in today’s globalizing world, publishing in international journals, where English is often the de facto language, has become increasingly important to one’s academic career. Although social sciences students write theses in Chinese, they may need to present their research findings in English later in their academic career. Understanding their current perceptions of citation use should help develop pedagogy that responds to
their needs.

The students were at various stages of thesis writing (Table 1). Student S1 had just submitted a proposal of approximately 30 pages, while S3 had recently completed her thesis and the oral examination. Still at an early stage of thesis writing, S4 and S5 had received feedback on their draft chapters. S2 completed her thesis in the previous year and was working as a research assistant to her former advisor. She had co-authored two journal papers (both in Chinese) with her advisor, which had been accepted for publication. This diversity in students' thesis writing experience is seen as a positive feature because it provides an opportunity to compare students’ conceptions at different learning stages for a more comprehensive insight into their citation learning and practices.

Table 1: Students’ profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Thesis Writing Stage</th>
<th>Thesis Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Social welfare</td>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Previous year’s graduate</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Recent graduate</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>First draft of one chapter</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>First draft of two chapters</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Data collection and analysis

This study collected data based mainly on a qualitative semi-structured interview method. Interviewing allows researchers to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 1990, p. 196). It is particularly useful when the researcher wishes to learn about “behaviors that took place at some previous point in time” and to understand “how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world” (p. 196). The current study aimed to explore students’ perceptions of citation functions as well as their learning of citation use, and therefore I chose the interview method as the main tool of investigation.

The recruited advisors and students were interviewed individually. Each interview, conducted in the interviewees’ first language (Mandarin Chinese), lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted either at my office or the interviewed professors’ offices. Two sets of interview questions were prepared. Questions presented to the interviewed students concerned background information, such as “How do you perceive yourself as a writer?”; perceptions of citation use in
research writing, such as “What roles does citation play in research writing?”; learning of citation conventions, such as “How did you learn to cite?”; citation practices, such as “How do you usually present the cited work? Quotes, summary, paraphrase or generalization?” (see Appendix). The participating instructors were asked about their views of citation use in academic writing, their perceptions of students’ citation practices, and their role in this aspect of thesis supervision. In addition, the interviews with the students were partly discourse-based (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983), aiming to elicit the writers’ tacit knowledge about the rhetorical context of their own texts. I asked the students to send me their thesis drafts beforehand and to bring to the interviews a reference that they were currently reading. Whenever appropriate, I used these texts as stimulants to refresh their memory of how they cited and perceived citation use in readings. For example, I pointed out particular citations in their texts and asked questions such as “Why did you quote this passage here?” and “Can you show me in your draft an example where you agree with the cited author?” Interview questions based on students’ reference materials included: “Did you notice these two citations when you read this paper?” and “Did you use this reference in your own writing?”

All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcripts were sent back to the interviewees for verification. After transcripts were prepared, I read and reread them in order to find patterns. Themes and keywords were identified, and a table was produced to compare the participants’ views. Example themes and keywords were ‘citation functions,’ ‘learning from advisors,’ ‘reference types,’ ‘translation,’ and ‘secondary citation.’ Due to space limitations, the current paper will focus on student accounts, yet using the instructors’ reports to facilitate interpretation of students’ representation of their citation learning.

Finally, quantitative text analysis was performed to triangulate the interview data. For example, references of different types in student writing were counted to verify students’ verbal reports of their citation preferences.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Student perceptions of citation functions

This section focuses on the citation functions perceived by the student participants. Supporting was the only function nominated by all the participants. Three other functions were also identified in students’ accounts: signposting, comparison, and attribution.
Supporting. The function most frequently mentioned by the participants was supporting, i.e., justifying the topic of research or claims. S1 used citations to “support [her] claims.” Both S2 and S3 emphasized the important role of citing others’ works in creating a research space (Swales, 1990). S5 spoke of justifying the research topic and adding persuasion to her thesis:

You use citations to show that the issue you’re addressing is an academic one. It has a scholarly foundation. Then you use these citations to support, or to reinforce your idea. (S5)

S4 reported using citations not only to support arguments but also to help explain ideas:

When you are still a master’s student, you may have a rough idea, but you can’t explain your idea clearly or forcefully. So you need to cite others so that your reader can understand better. (S4)

This statement appears to reveal a lack of confidence experienced by S4 as a graduate student, who perceived citations not only as a tool to persuade the reader of the soundness of one’s argument but also a crutch to rely on to establish the soundness. This finding mirrors results from Shi’s (2010) study, where three-quarters of the student participants reported that they presented a key point through the voice of a cited author and gained credit by referring to the authority of published writers.

Signposting. Academic writers may use signposting citations for several reasons: to inform less knowledgeable readers, to keep their argument on track, and to save space (Harwood, 2009). In particular, when researchers are strongly aware of their double role as a teacher, they may use citations to inform less knowledgeable readers. Graduate students, in this sense, may not usually intend their citations to serve this function. Among the student interviewees, S5 was the only one that referred to the signposting function of citation. She explained:

[The readers] may have some knowledge of [the novelist], but perhaps they don’t know the relationship between [the novelist] and psychological realism. They may not have read the related books. So, I want to give a summary in my
thesis. Then, if [the readers] want to know more about it, they can go and read the books, or just read my summary.

S5’s statement indicates that she intended her citations to serve the function of informing less knowledgeable readers and directing them to the relevant literature.

Comparison. Referring to the discussion section of a research paper, S2 made a case for the importance of citing others’ works for a comparison with her own research:

The Taiwanese context may be different from the foreign contexts. You will want to establish a link between your work and the research done in the foreign contexts . . . I will characterize it as dialoging with other people’s works. (S2)

Similarly, S3 also referred to the discussion section and pointed to the comparison function indicating similarity or difference between one’s own work and others’ research.

Attribution. While emphasizing the comparison function in the discussion section, S3 described the citations in the methodology chapter of a thesis as insignificant:

[The citations in the methodology chapter] only serve to tell the reader what the concept is about, what qualitative research is, and how to do qualitative research. (S3)

Therefore, S3 appeared to take a more descriptive approach in the methodology chapter and use citations simply to attribute information to the cited sources.

This study has shown that the student participants enumerated a more limited range of citation functions, compared to published scholars in Harwood (2009). The citation functions reported by these students included supporting, signposting, comparison, and attribution, but published scholars can name a wider variety of functions, such as saving space, identifying inconsistencies in the source’s position, and using the source’s methods or ideas as foundations to develop one’s own argument (Harwood, 2009). This disparity may be explained in two ways. First, students are less experienced in research writing and therefore less capable of articulating citation
functions. Secondly, students write for a different audience (Petrić, 2007), so the citation functions instrumental in their thesis writing may be quite different from those in scholarly writing. Another finding from students’ accounts concerned the relationship between students’ research writing experience and their perceived citation functions. The comparison function, arguably the most rhetorically sophisticated among the four functions identified in this study, was reported by only S2 and S3, the most advanced research students in this sample. The other three informants had either just completed one or two chapters (S4, S5) or a research proposal (S1). In other words, having not yet arrived at the discussion part of a thesis, where researchers comment on results by interpreting and comparing results with literature (Yang & Allison, 2003), these novice thesis writers might not have had experience of using comparison citations. It is therefore possible that students with more extensive research writing experience will be able to articulate more citation functions, particularly rhetorically sophisticated ones.

3.2 Students learning citation use

The second issue addressed in this study concerns students learning various aspects of citation use. The interviews revealed that these students obtained their citation knowledge from four major sources: advisors, model theses, readings, and graduate courses.

Learning from advisors. Research has shown that students’ successful thesis writing experience often bears a positive relationship to the amount of academic support that they obtain from their advisors (Belcher, 1994; Dong, 1996, 1998; Krase, 2007). Yet, the results of this study suggested that the students did not always see advisors as an importance source of their citation knowledge. For example, S2 and S3, more experienced than the other three student participants, held almost opposite views regarding the advisor’s role in citation learning: While S2 attributed her citation knowledge to her advisor’s instruction, S3 believed that citation learning was hardly an advisor’s responsibility. To S3, the advisor played the role of guiding only. She believed that as a graduate student, she was responsible for her own citation learning through other means:

[The advisor] wouldn’t teach us how to cite. Besides, I think you should learn
it yourself. You can consult books as well. Anyway, you’ll probably learn how to cite just by reading others’ theses. (S3)

Similarly, S4 and S5 did not place a particular emphasis on the advisor’s role in citation learning, although they each identified various forms of help that they received from their advisors. S4 reported that his advisor would recommend readings, and S5 recalled that she learned how to reference secondary citations from a tutorial focusing on her thesis draft. S5 also noted that she still needed to consult her advisor about certain minor stylistic questions, suggesting that she usually turned to her advisor when encountering problems in documenting sources.

**Learning from model theses.** The graduate students also found it convenient and helpful to use other theses as models for their own writing, even when they were explicitly told by advisors not to consult or to cite other theses. As reported in the previous section, S3 believed that she could learn how to cite “just by reading others’ theses.” S2 also reported that she consulted several theses and tried to “imitate” the writing, including learning about various elements of thesis writing from them, such as how to construct the methodology chapter and what references to cite. In contrast, S4 consulted other theses only for ways of documentation. He noted the particular importance of consulting theses supervised by one’s own advisor because “different professors would not necessarily have the same requirement on [citation] format.”

**Learning from readings.** When asked what they learned about citation from readings, most of the participants referred to the content of citation—the intellectual work signified by a citation plus the corresponding bibliographic entry. In other words, students tended to notice citations for their referential values; for example, they would follow up on certain citations and locate original sources to enlarge their reading repertoire. It should also be pointed out that S4 and S5 noticed in their readings various ways of presenting cited information. For example, S5 observed that while she herself used mostly direct quotes, her readings predominantly employed content notes. S4 noticed how a whole passage was quoted in his readings, although he did not seem to have an awareness of how a summary citation was marked. In other words, it appeared that even when these students noticed markedly different citation patterns in their readings, they, perhaps due to insufficient training or language proficiency, could not
apply them to their own writing. This finding suggested that students may need more explicit instruction to facilitate their reporting of prior works.

**Learning from graduate courses.** Other sources contributing to these students’ citation knowledge included foundation courses and other subject courses at the graduate level. The two literature students, S4 and S5, referred to a foundation course, Research and Writing, to account for their citation knowledge. They noted that this course seemed to focus exclusively on citation mechanics, such as how to use punctuation marks when citing and how to record citations properly in parentheses. Indeed, as the course syllabus indicates, one of the goals of this literature foundation course is for students “to learn to follow the MLA style with proper documentation to write academic papers” (excerpted from the University website). It therefore can be said to be the only source where students may receive systematic instruction on citation use, although from what the students could recall, it is not clear how extensive the citation knowledge was that the course had covered. On the other hand, although the three social sciences students had also taken some foundation courses in their first year, those courses seemed to deal exclusively with various research methods, with little attention paid to academic writing or citation use. Because of this lack of formal teaching, these students turned to other sources. For example, both S1 and S2 reported “discussing with classmates” about the correct citation format.

In addition to formal courses, the students received incidental instruction in citation use when taking courses at either the graduate or undergraduate level. S1, for example, recalled that a professor from her undergraduate years emphasized the importance of acknowledging sources and avoiding plagiarism. S5 reported a professor’s cautions against over-referencing and lengthy direct quotes. On the other hand, S4 recalled that the term papers he wrote for a course did not contain any citations because the professor preferred students not to cite at all rather than to cite improperly.

In summary, this study identified four sources from which students obtained citation knowledge: advisors, model theses, readings, and graduate courses, but learning from these sources was found to be largely informal and incidental. Advisors may not see teaching citation use as their responsibility, although they are in a good position to apprentice students and provide timely feedback on inappropriate citation use (Pecorari, 2006). Graduate courses have their respective subject content to deliver, so students may receive at best incidental instruction on citation use. Foundation
courses may provide a unique chance to help students gain more extensive citation knowledge; yet it seems that only literature programs include academic writing and some basics of citation use in the curriculum. Model theses and readings may thus become important sources of learning various aspects of citation mechanics for students. Nevertheless, it should be noted that student learning about citation from readings may be limited to its more noticeable aspects. That is, students may notice ways of documenting sources and presenting the cited message when authors employ explicit citation markers to acknowledge sources, but the more occluded aspects of citation (Pecorari, 2006), such as the general purpose of citation and the functions of particular citations, may be lost on students. Therefore, to raise student awareness of these subtle areas of citation use, teachers may need to provide more explicit instruction and feedback, one example being parallel presentation of citations and their source texts for comparison (Li, 2007).

3.3 Student citation practices
This study also asked students to report their citation practices in thesis writing. Aspects of citation practices reported in this section include identifying reference types, composing citations, taking positions, and ways of signaling citations, such as surface forms of citations and presentation of the cited information.

Reference types. Among the reference types, journal papers were reported to be the most frequently consulted (albeit not necessarily cited), followed by theses or dissertations (S1, S3, S4, S5), books (S2, S3, S5), and conference papers (S2). In addition, although these students consulted the same types of references, motivation for their selection varied.

The student participants reported consulting and citing journal papers except S5, who noted that she had consulted but not cited any journal papers. It is worth noting, however, that my textual examination found two journal papers in the reference list of her thesis draft. This contradiction between the student’s interview reporting and actual practices may actually represent her mental reality or perception (Silverman, 2001) of a difficulty in finding relevant journal papers to use in writing, a suspicion confirmed by an account of her literature search process. S5 explained that in addition to searching with Google and using online databases, she literally “leafed through journal articles in the library to see if there [was] anything relevant to [her] study,” apparently an
ineffective and labor-intensive search strategy. Except this literature student, all the other participants reported citing journal papers and gave reasons for using this particular reference type. For example, S2 explained that she used more journal papers because she obtained her references mostly from online databases, which by their nature contained more journal papers than references of other types. S4 used more journal papers than books because he found it easier to find journal papers directly related to his research topic, whereas books often proved disappointing:

> When you consult a book . . . you see your keyword in the book title. But more often than not, you find only a small section on [the novelist] and the rest of the book is about other writers. Of course, you will not be able to use the latter part of the book. (S4)

On the other hand, S1’s preference for journal papers was clearly influenced by her professor’s recommendation of journal papers and books over conference papers.

While all the student participants reported consulting theses or dissertations, only three of them (S1, S2, S3) reported actually citing references of this type. As noted earlier, these students were explicitly advised by their professors not to consult or cite other theses, but S1 justified her citing decision:

> The professors advised us against citing theses, but if the findings are rather significant or relevant to my own study, or the concepts advanced in the theses seem important to me, I will cite them.

On the other hand, S4 and S5 seemed to consult theses only for documentation styles and relevant references; they noted that citation of theses was “less convincing or authoritative” (S5).

Three students (S2, S3, S5) reported citing books in their theses. S2 and S3 noted that they cited books to account for the theoretical background underlying their research. S5 explained that she mostly consulted books because, compared with journal articles, books were “easier to locate.” Her reporting was confirmed by my textual examination, which found 15 of the 17 references in her thesis draft were books or book chapters.
**Composing citations.** These students reported employing a number of citation composing strategies, which can be categorized as *text-based insertion* and *schema-based insertion*. Text-based insertion refers to the practice where writers slip in citations after the text proper is nearly completed. When advised to find additional citations to support her arguments, S5 adopted this strategy: producing text first and inserting citations later:

> I think I will write down the argument first. Then I will find more citations. I’ll search for authors who have expressed similar ideas and put them in my text. (S5)

She acknowledged that several citations in her completed chapters were inserted in this way.

In schema-based insertion, schema refers to a reader’s structured background knowledge in understanding a text. The case study doctoral student in Li (2007) adopted a schema-based writing strategy in which she developed headings first and then copied passages from her readings and pasted them under those headings. S3 in the current study reported using a similar strategy when she composed her citations:

> When I wrote the literature review section, I listed the main headings first, and then inserted [citations] under each heading. (S3)

**Taking positions.** Students were also asked whether they took a particular position toward the cited materials. Results indicate that both humanities and social sciences students used citations predominantly to support their arguments and refrained from using critical citations. For example, S1 noted that she would not cite arguments that contradicted hers. Similarly, S5 reported never taking a critical position in her citation use because she did not incorporate citations advancing a different idea from hers:

> Mostly I just introduce the idea, or . . . I elaborate on it, whether I agree or disagree. . . . I rarely disagree though, because I only include citations that I agree with. (S5)

Furthermore, S2 seemed to believe that published works should not be contradicted or
I’ll try to write in a more objective way because I think these articles must be good if they are already published in a journal. (S2)

The stance that S2 took towards published writing would be reminiscent of Chen’s finding (2000), in which the case study Chinese student was reported to regard published papers as an authority, even when she did not agree with the viewpoints expressed in them. This respect for published writing is perhaps related to Confucian discourse, where classical text is valued and studied, but not criticized (Scollon, 1999).

Notwithstanding the cultural interpretation of students’ position-taking, one of the informants, S4, did explicitly speak about taking a critical stance against the cited literature. He reported that besides elaborating on the cited message, he would “raise a different opinion” when controversies arose. However, when asked to give an example of a critical citation, the student admitted that he had yet to include citations of a critical nature in his writing.

Surface forms of citation. This study was also interested in students’ knowledge of the formal aspects of citation, such as use of integral vs. non-integral structures and different ways of presenting cited works. Analysis showed that the students mostly appeared either oblivious of, or neutral about, their use of integral or non-integral citations. For example, while claiming to use more integral forms, S1 noted that she was normally not overtly conscious about the choice between the two forms. Neither S2 nor S3 expressed an explicit preference for integral or non-integral forms. However, S2 noted that she probably used more non-integral citations; she sought to synthesize and refer to multiple works in the form of non-integral citation because her advisor wanted to see more synthesis in her thesis. For S3, however, choosing between integral and non-integral citations seemed to be more a style issue:

It really depends on the text and the context. . . . I would use integral citations at the beginning of a paragraph . . . I just think it would read more smoothly that way.

Thus, it appears that the three social sciences students differed in their opinions
regarding integral/non-integral structures. Similarly, with the two literature students, discipline did not seem to be a factor in the choice. S4 reported using more integral citations, and noted further that he would use the full name at the first mention of an author, as instructed in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Gibaldi, 2009). However, the other literature student, S5, reported more frequent use of non-integral forms because she preferred to blend quotes with her own writing.

**Presentation of cited work.** In presentation of cited work, while the two literature students reported using direct quotes most of the time, the three social sciences students reported either using generalization citations (S3) or presenting the cited work in summary and paraphrase (S1, S2).

S5 noted that she often quoted whole passages because she could not find a better way to reiterate the idea, particularly in the case involving more theoretical discussion:

> Some articles are hard to understand. Those authors use difficult words. We may know every single word in the paper, but still fail to understand the idea. And we’re used to quoting the whole passage because we often don’t know how to phrase it in a better way. Perhaps we just couldn’t grasp the idea. So we quote the whole passage. (S5)

Similarly, S4 reported that he would usually quote the whole passage, except when he was writing footnotes, where summary or paraphrase would be more preferable.

On the other hand, the three social sciences students were more reserved about direct quotes. In fact, they seemed to deliberately refrain from quoting verbatim. Both S1 and S2 explained that they normally presented the cited work in summary or paraphrase because their professors required them to “write in [their] own words.” Therefore, before incorporating a direct quote, S1 would ask herself, “is the whole passage that important [to be quoted verbatim]?” Similarly, S3 reported using few direct quotes in her writing because direct quotation was appropriate only in certain rhetorical contexts:

> In my opinion, you quote the whole passage only when there’s a concern that you may distort the meaning of the cited work, or when it is a very important concept. (S3)
It seems that neither concern surfaced in her thesis writing; accordingly, she did not perceive a need to incorporate verbatim quotes. Furthermore, she believed that when writing a literature review, she was supposed “to read, synthesize, and then own the literature.” She thus concluded that summary was a better strategy to show her ability to synthesize research.

A further reason for S3’s refraining from quoting verbatim concerned the fact that she wrote in Chinese but cited mostly from English language sources. She noted that she would have to translate if she opted to use direct quotes, but translation to her was a task even more demanding than summarizing. S3’s concern about translation of the cited work provides a fine example of the complicated nature of thesis writing involving two languages, as may be experienced by many EFL graduate students in today’s globalizing world, where English increasingly dominates the world of academic research and has become the major language of international publication (Crystal, 2003; Swales, 2004).

Finally, to supplement student accounts, their drafts were examined and citations noted. This analysis revealed that S5 used 10 direct quotes (including two from secondary sources) and one summary citation, while S4 used direct quotes exclusively (N=5). On the other hand, the three social sciences students’ theses included only summary and generalization citations.

3.4 Factors influencing student citation practices

Among the investigated aspects of citation knowledge and practices, no apparent differences were found among the five participants in taking positions, ways of composing citations, and preferences for integral/non-integral citations. However, their citation behavior differed rather markedly in levels of citation knowledge, favored reference types, and preferred ways of presenting cited information. These differences may be accounted for by a number of factors. The first may be disciplinary differences, as borne out by the findings that the two literature students shared a few citation features markedly different from the three social sciences students. These features included; a) quoting profusely from both literary and critical works, b) using few summary citations and no generalization citations, c) relying more on book references than on journal papers, and d) avoiding citing theses. In contrast, the social sciences students; a) used few direct quotes, b) used predominantly summary and generalization
citations, and c) cited abundant empirical studies from either journal papers or master’s/doctoral theses. In terms of the choice between quotes and summary citations, research has shown that direct quotes are widely adopted in humanities, but not in scientific and technical fields (Hyland, 1999; White, 2004). Research writing in humanities made more references to books (Carlson, 2006; Zainab & Goi, 1997), but social sciences literature cited more journal articles (Georgas & Cullars, 2005) or relied equally on books and journal articles (Magrill & St. Clair, 1990). Furthermore, the students’ citing of theses, although a feature largely found in student writing only, also reflects disciplinary difference. In general, social sciences researchers are more likely to refer to empirical studies conducted in research contexts similar to theirs. Hence, graduate students may tend to cite theses to facilitate discussion and comparison of studies conducted in local contexts. On the other hand, less concerned with empirical investigations, literature students tend not to feel obligated to cite less prestigious references such as master’s or doctoral theses.

Another likely factor contributing to students’ different levels of citation knowledge and varying practices is students’ research writing experience. Both having completed theses at the time of investigation, S2 and S3 seemed to be more capable of reporting their citation practices in a confident manner. S2, for example, was able to give her rationale for adopting either integral or non-integral citations. S3 was also eloquent when explaining her criteria for choosing between older and more recent references. In addition, both S2 and S3 had a larger awareness of rhetorically more sophisticated citation functions, such as comparison. On the other hand, S4 and S5, the least experienced of the five informants, occasionally expressed confusion over some rather basic aspects of citation use. For example, S5 was not sure if non-direct-quote citations should be listed in the end-of-text reference list. S4 did not know how to mark a summary citation. These findings therefore suggested a positive relationship between students’ research writing experience and their citation knowledge.

Finally, the language of thesis appeared to contribute to differences in the student informants’ citation practices, particularly in ways of presenting cited information. This language factor can be discussed in two aspects: language proficiency and citing foreign language sources, with the former pertaining to writing and citing in the second language and the latter more relevant to students writing in their first language. On the one hand, when incorporating source texts, L2 students often feel less confident in using their own words due to inadequate language proficiency. They may thus resort to
quoting when they do not know “how to paraphrase it” (Shi, 2010, p. 19). Indeed, although taught in many academic writing courses to help combat plagiarism, paraphrasing still imposes a heavy cognitive load on students and has been found difficult by both native and non-native writers (Yamada, 2003). Studies comparing L1 and L2 writers further found the impact of students’ linguistic proficiency on their paraphrasing practices (Keck, 2006; Shi, 2004). This difficulty in paraphrasing, coupled with the comprehension problems of the sometimes obscure critical texts, may have prompted the literature students, required to compose theses in English as a foreign language, to resort to verbatim quotes. On the other hand, the social sciences students composed theses in their first language—Chinese. Summarizing or paraphrasing may therefore have been easier for them. But in today’s research world, citing English language sources (and often in large quantities) while composing in Chinese is common in many disciplines. Citing foreign language sources requires translation, where the distinction between quoting and paraphrasing may become blurred. To avoid this ambiguity created by the mediation of translation, using summary citations may represent a preferred strategy, as practiced by the three students writing in Chinese.

4. Conclusion
This exploratory study has shown a complex picture of graduate students’ citation learning and practices. The findings suggested that more advanced graduate students could articulate more rhetorically sophisticated citation functions. Compared to published scholars, however, students could identify far fewer citation functions in their own writing. As to their learning, students obtained citation knowledge from advisors, model theses, graduate courses, and their readings. However, it appeared that their learning from these sources was largely informal and incidental. While some of the participants received formal instruction on citation format, others appeared to acquire citation knowledge mainly through informal teacher feedback or peer discussion. On the other hand, students may turn to other theses for citation format and notice in their readings various ways of presenting cited information, but they may not necessarily be able to apply them to their own writing. Finally, the study found that these students differed in their levels of citation knowledge, favored reference types, and preferred ways of presenting cited information. These differences may be accounted for by disciplinary cultures, research writing experience, and the language the thesis was
written in. Overall, these students’ verbal accounts suggest that they had rather limited knowledge of citation functions and received largely informal and incidental instruction on citation use. Furthermore, these students did not seem to have a full awareness of why certain citation patterns are used in general or are preferred in their respective disciplines.

4.1 Implications of the findings
The implications of this study for English for academic purposes (EAP) are significant. First, it is suggested that academic writing teachers should provide more explicit instruction and feedback on students’ citation use. Lessons need to be developed to explain various citation functions to students so that they can exercise a strategic choice when making decisions regarding particular citations. Teachers can also use published writings as examples to sensitize students to how the cited information is presented and how citations are used to show the writer’s position toward the cited material. This teaching approach should be particularly beneficial because after being made aware of the complicated uses of citations, students can likely acquire more citation knowledge through continuous reading throughout the process of their thesis writing.

Second, teachers need to provide exercises on incorporating cited information when teaching or advising L2 students. These exercises should address issues such as how to paraphrase and summarize, choose appropriate reporting verbs, link between the citing and cited texts, and make evaluative commentary on the cited material (Swales & Feak, 2000). On the other hand, graduate students writing in Chinese may need to publish their research results in international journals, where English is often the official language. While these students may have no apparent difficulty incorporating cited information when writing in Chinese, they can in fact fall into the trap of plagiarism due to inadequate training and knowledge in quoting and paraphrasing in English. When counseling such students, EAP teachers need to alert them to the pitfalls of incorporating cited information in English. In addition, exercises on using integral or non-integral citations and adopting appropriate adjectives or adverbs to show one’s position toward the cited material can also be useful to students learning to use citations.

4.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research
Although this study found an apparent relationship between student citation practices
and the various factors discussed here, this relationship cannot be verified due to the small sample size, which in itself is inevitable for an in-depth investigation. Also, the five student participants in this study were an opportunistic sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in that they were accessible and willing to provide writing samples and spend time talking to me about their citation knowledge and learning. It was thus difficult to exercise deliberate selection of participants in terms of language proficiency and research writing experience. Due to this limitation, the results must be interpreted cautiously. Yet despite the limitations, this study has provided some potentially useful information concerning graduate students’ citation learning and behavior and at the same time points out a few directions for future research. Students with varying degrees of research writing experience from the same discipline can be compared for potential quantitative and qualitative differences in citation knowledge. Longitudinal research can be conducted to follow students’ learning throughout their thesis-writing stages. Subsequent thesis drafts together with advisors’ comments can be examined. More discourse-based interviews can also be conducted to substantiate our knowledge of students’ citation learning in the disciplines.

Acknowledgements
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References


Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Appendix: Interview questions for students

Writer’s Profile
1. How do you perceive yourself as a writer?
2. What different genres do you write in the discipline?

Learning Citation
1. What roles does citation play in research writing?
2. How did you learn citation?
3. Did your advisor give you feedback on citation use? Can you recall his/her feedback? Do you need advisor feedback on citation use? If yes, on what aspects of citation use do you need advisor feedback?
4. What did you learn from citations in your readings?
   A. Can you explain why certain sources are cited?
   B. What did you notice about how citations are marked in your readings?

Using Citation
5. What types of references do you cite? Books, book chapters, journal articles, conference papers, theses, or others? Do you have a preference?
6. How do you decide what to cite and what not to cite?
7. When citing people’s ideas, what positions do you usually take toward the cited materials?
8. How do you incorporate a citation into your own work? Do you prefer to use integral or non-integral citations? Why?
9. How do you usually present the cited work? Quotes, summary, paraphrase or generalization? Why?
10. Do you know of secondary citation? What do you think of secondary citation? Do you use secondary citation in your thesis writing?
11. Do you use a different approach when you cite a foreign language source?
12. Have you ever encountered any difficulties in using citation?
Moves and Linguistic Realizations: English Research Article  
Abstracts by Vietnamese Agricultural Researchers

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**Biodata**

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**Abstract**

Writing RA abstracts is a daunting task for novice NNS writers. The purpose of this study was to explore how Vietnamese agricultural researchers write abstracts. A dataset of twenty English RA abstracts by Vietnamese agricultural researchers served as the primary data for the investigation. First, the rhetorical move structure of the abstracts was analyzed with reference to Hyland’s (2000) framework. Second, two aspects of language use were examined: grammatical constructions including voice, tense, and *that*-complement clauses; and interactional metadiscourse including attitudinal stance, hedging, and self-reference. Finally, the typical grammatical errors in the abstracts were identified. The results revealed that the majority of the abstracts
employed the Purpose, Method and Product moves but lacked the Introduction and Conclusion moves, considerably reducing the effectiveness of the abstracts. With regard to linguistic features, the active voice and the passive voice, the present tense and the past tense, and that-complements were generally common, but with varying degrees across the moves. However, interactional metadiscourse was found to be a rarity in the abstracts. In addition, singular and plural forms of nouns, diction, and the use of the comma were found to be problematic. These findings indicate a need for an increased amount of form-based instruction in academic writing courses that is aimed at raising novice writers’ awareness of the generic structure and addressing their linguistic deficiencies related to abstract writing.

**Keywords:** research article abstracts, Vietnamese agricultural researchers, rhetorical moves, linguistic features

1. Introduction

The genre of research articles (RAs), whether published in research journals or in conference proceedings, are still a major means for researchers to communicate their research findings to the relevant discourse community. Virtually all journals and academic conferences require an abstract to be attached to an article to be published. Now that English has become an international language, it is not surprising that most published research articles are written in English. In cases where RAs are published in languages other than English, attaching an English abstract to accompany the RA is a standard practice (Martín, 2002).

The importance of the research article abstract genre lies in the communicative purpose it serves. As most abstracts present in a condensed way the macropropositions of the research article (Salager-Meyer, 1992), the most important purpose it fulfills is to inform the reader about the exact content of the article, thereby indicating whether the study has enough value to merit the reader’s attention (Martín, 2003).

Given the important communicative role the RA abstract plays, ever since Graetz’s (1985) pioneering study of the rhetorical and linguistic features of RA abstracts, there have been numerous investigations into this genre or part-genre as is called by van Bonn and Swales (2007). Most of the research on RA abstracts has been carried out using the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach to genre analysis. The ESP approach was originally developed by Swales (1981, 1990, 2004) with a
focus on academic genres such as RAs and dissertations and grant proposals. Later Bhatia (1993, 2002, 2004) extended its applicability by including professional genres such as job application letters and sales letters. For them and many other ESP practitioners, the ultimate goal of genre analysis is to use their research findings to inform syllabus design and materials development for students of English as a foreign or second language in different disciplines. According to Swales (1990), a genre is a type of communicative event serving a particular communicative purpose shared by a particular discourse community. A genre is a staged event in that members of the same discourse community, when using a particular genre, employ a sequence of distinct moves and component steps to realize its overall communicative purpose. The sequence of moves and steps may vary between different instances of a genre. Moreover, moves and steps may be obligatory or optional, some may be embedded in others, and still some may be recycled. However, an invariant prototypical schematic structure or the overall organizational pattern of the moves and steps can be identified by the discourse community. In correspondence to each of the moves and steps, typical conventionalized ways of expression are used to realize the specific purpose of the move or step. Genre analysis, therefore, entails deriving a generic prototype of the genre under investigation by identifying the moves and steps, either compulsory or optional, in relation to the overall communicative purpose, investigating how these moves and steps are ordered, and identifying the conventionalized ways of expression employed to realize the specific purpose of a move or step. Because of its focus on text segments called moves, the ESP approach to genre analysis is also known as move analysis.

Move analyses of the RA abstract genre have been numerous. This body of work includes Nwogu (1990), Jordan (1991), Bhatia (1993), Dos Santos (1996), Hyland (2000), Lorés (2004), and many others. Perhaps the best-known move-structure deducted is Swales’ (1990) celebrated CARS (Create a Research Space) model, originally intended to describe RA introductions. This model includes three move. Move 1--Establishing a territory, Move 2 -- Establishing a niche, and Move 3 -- Occupying the niche. Each move has a number steps. For example, Move 1 has three steps: Step 1, Claiming centrality followed by two optional steps: Making topic generalizations and Reviewing items of previous research. Bhatia (1993) identified four moves in constructing a typical abstract, namely Introducing purpose, Describing methodology, Summarizing results, and Presenting conclusions. Similarly,
Hyland (2000) compared the move structures of eight disciplines and proposed a model of five rhetorical moves, namely Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product, and Conclusion. Lorés (2004), however, based on Swales’ (1981, 1990) description of the move structure for RAs, concluded that there are three possible rhetorical organizations of RA abstracts. According to her, the majority of RA abstracts take the IMRD (Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion) structure that mirrors the global structure of the RA itself, a significant number of abstracts model on the CARS structure of the Introduction section of the article, and still a small number of RA abstracts combine moves in both the IMRD and CARS models.

Although, irrespective of discipline and language, all RA abstracts belong to the same distinct genre because they share the same well-defined and mutually understood communicative purpose (Bhatia, 1993), the results of interdisciplinary, and cross-linguistic investigations of RA abstracts have revealed considerable differences across disciplines and languages in terms of rhetorical move structure. For example, Melander, Swales, and Fredrickson’s (1997) study of the field of biology indicated that the discipline is largely responsible for the variability in rhetorical and linguistic features of the abstracts. Hyland (2000) identified considerable structural differences across the eight disciplines he investigated. In another study, Martín (2003) found that Spanish abstracts in experimental social sciences conform to the IMRC (Introduction, Method, Results and Conclusion) structure of the article itself, but that the frequencies of occurrence of the Results and the Introduction moves are significantly different.

Meanwhile, studies of linguistic features in RA abstracts have provided much insight into the genre as well. The features that have been investigated can be neatly classified into two broad categories: lexico-grammatical constructions (e.g., voice, verb tense, nominalizations, that-complement clauses, etc.), and interactional metadiscoursive devices (e.g., hedges, attitudinal stance, self-references, and boosters). Graetz (1985) observed that abstracts are characterized by tightly worded sentences that avoid repetition, meaningless expressions, superlatives, adjectives, and so on; and by the predominance of nominalizations and the passive voice. Cooley and Lewkowicz (2003) found that abstracts in the form of a summary of the article tend to use the present tense whereas those that summarize the research typically are more likely to employ the past tense. With regard to metadiscourse, Flowerdew (2001) detected the absence of authorial voice in abstracts written by non-native English
speakers. Gillaerts and van de Velde (2010) exclusively analyzed interactional metadiscoursal features such as hedges, boosters and attitude markers that involve the reader more in the text by commenting on and evaluating the text material. A few studies (e.g., Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2005) indicated that RA abstracts are rather subjective in that the expression of evaluation, stance, and engagement are frequently found. One of the most comprehensive studies of RA abstract linguistic features is Pho’s (2008) study of RA abstracts across applied linguistics and educational technology. In this study, both grammatical features and interactional metadiscourse were investigated, yielding revealing findings about the use of grammatical subjects, verb tense and aspect, voice, modal auxiliaries and semi-modal verbs, epistemic adjectives, adverbs and nouns, reporting verbs, *that*-complement clauses, self-reference words, and stance expressions.

Previous investigations into RA abstracts have undoubtedly enhanced our understanding of the genre. Nevertheless, past research has tended to privilege the writing of native speakers of English. Indeed, very few studies have been conducted to look at the problems that NNS (non-native speaking) writers encounter in writing RR abstracts. RA abstracts written in English by Vietnamese agricultural researchers, in particular, are one of the most under researched varieties. Consequently, we do not have much information on the abstract writing practice of Vietnamese agricultural researchers. One possible reason for this research gap might be the small number of English RAs by Vietnamese agricultural writers that have been published. Currently there are only two English-medium agricultural journals in Vietnam. Even these very journals, which were entirely Vietnamese publications for many years, only started to publish exclusively in English as recently as two years ago. Whatever the reasons, as a primarily agricultural economy, Vietnam attaches great importance to agricultural research and it is the hope of many agricultural researchers to share their research with colleagues outside Vietnam. Therefore, it can be equally important to explore the abstract writing practice of this particular group of NNS agricultural researchers and identify, if any, the areas where they need help most.

Within this context, we carried out a genre study of RA abstracts written in English by Vietnamese agricultural researchers in the hope that our findings may, to a certain extent, inform the teaching of academic writing in Vietnamese institutions of higher learning where scientific researchers are trained. Our data for analysis were 20 English RA abstracts by Vietnamese researchers in the field of agriculture. One aim of
our investigation was to find out to what extent abstracts in the field of agriculture written in English by Vietnamese researchers differ from general international practice. For this purpose, Hyland’s (2000) 5-move model was used as an analytical framework as it could cover all the moves used in the abstracts in the dataset (see in 2.2 for more details). Another aim was to explore how Vietnamese agricultural researchers realize their rhetorical moves linguistically when writing RA abstracts in English. Based on Pho (2008), we investigated a total number of six aspects of language use, namely the grammatical constructions of voice, tense and that-complement clauses, and the interactional metadiscoursal features of hedges, attitudinal stance markers, and self-reference words (see in 2.3 for more details). Moreover, additional effort was made to identify the typical vocabulary and grammatical mistakes the writers tended to make.

2.  Methods

2.1  Data collection

In order to investigate how Vietnamese agricultural researchers write abstracts in English for their research articles, we systematically drew 20 abstracts from Journal of Agriculture and Technology of Hanoi University of Agriculture. Three issues of this journal were sampled: the Special Issue of 2008 and Issues 1 and 2 of 2009.

We decided to use Journal of Agriculture and Technology as the only source for our dataset mainly because, with contributions from all around the country, it is a national journal representing the best research in agriculture in the country. Currently one of the only two English journals in agriculture in Vietnam, this journal used to be published in Vietnamese. Since 2008 it has become an entirely English publication which comes out every three months. The other journal exclusively publishes articles by researchers of Nong Lam University to which it is affiliated and therefore is not representative of the national discourse community of agricultural researchers. The reason why we only drew abstracts from the Special Issue of 2008 and Issues 1 and 2 of 2009 was basically a problem with availability. Nevertheless, we deemed that our dataset of 20 abstracts could, to a fairly large extent, represent the status quo of Vietnamese agricultural researchers’ abstract writing practice.

2.2  Framework for rhetorical structure analysis

2.2.1  Move identification
This study adopted Swales’s (1990, 2004) move-analysis as an analytical framework for the investigation of the overall rhetorical structure of the educational RAs under investigation.

Move identification was based on the content or communicative function of the text segments. Previous studies have used different criteria for move identification. These include the function-based approach (e.g., Kwan, 2006; Pho, 2008), the form-based approach (e.g., Anderson & Maclean, 1997) and a combined approach of function and form (e.g., Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Swales, 1990). While the function-based approach can be criticized for its subjectivity, the form-based approach that draws on linguistic clues is not in line with the concept of move. A rhetorical move, by definition, is a text segment that not only performs a specific communicative function of its own but also contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the genre whereas linguistic features are only secondary to communicative purposes as they serve to realize the communicative purpose of the moves (Swales, 1981). As Partridge (1994) has rightly pointed out, rather than linguistic reasons, it is non-linguistic reasons that give rise to generic staging in texts. The third approach of combining form and form has been criticized for its logical fallacy of circular reasoning (Paltridge, 1994). Therefore, cognitive boundaries in terms of convention, appropriacy, and content were the basis for the identification of structural boundaries rather than linguistic features.

### 2.2.2 Hyland’s (2000) model

Three models are available for analyzing the rhetorical structure or moves of RA abstracts. Bhatia’s (1993) 4-move framework comprises Introducing purpose, Describing methodology, Summarizing results and Presenting conclusions. Hyland’s (2000) model has five moves: Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product and Conclusion. Both Bhatia’s and Hyland’s models describe informative abstracts which present an overview of the whole article and display the organizational IMRD structure of the research article. Swales’ (2004) Create a Research Space (CARS) model consists of three moves: 1) Establishing a territory, 2) Establishing a niche, and 3) Presenting the present work. Each move may consist of several steps. The moves in this model reflect the rhetorical structure of the Introduction section of the article itself. Indicative in nature, abstracts conforming to this model aim to help readers understand the general nature and scope of the research article by indicating the
In order to see which framework could best describe the abstracts written by the Vietnamese agricultural researchers, we carried out a preliminary examination of our dataset. We found that the abstracts were basically informative as the authors seemed to provide an overview of their entire articles. Swales’ (2004) CARS model was found to be the least relevant to the abstracts. Our choice was left between Bhatia’s (1993) and Hyland’s (2000) models, both of which describe informative abstracts. Because a total number of five move types were initially identified which could be categorized as Introduction, Purpose, Method, Product, and Conclusion moves, we eventually decided to base our analysis on Hyland’s (ibid.) model (see Figure 1 below) which could describe all the moves we had found in the abstracts although some of the abstracts did not have all the five moves.

- **Introduction (I):** Establishing context of the paper and motivates the research or Discussion
- **Purpose (P):** Indicates purposes, thesis or hypothesis, outlines the intention behind the paper
- **Method (M):** Provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data, etc
- **Product (Pr):** States main findings or results, the argument, or what was accomplished
- **Conclusion (C):** Interprets or extends results beyond the scope of paper, draw inferences, points to applications or wider implications

Figure 1: Hyland’s (2000) 5-move Framework for Rhetorical Analysis of RA Abstracts

### 2.3 Framework for analysis of linguistic realizations

As to what linguistics features to include in our investigation, we had two primary concerns. First, we wanted to include linguistic features previously recognized as characteristic of abstract writing. In this regard, Pho’s (2008) study we mentioned earlier was very informative. The nine linguistic features he investigated were found to be important for abstract writing as, rather than individually, some of them combine in one way or another to help realize the communicative purposes of the different moves in the abstract. Second, we wanted to investigate features that novice writers
tend to have a problem with. Flowerdew (2001) identified authorial voice as particularly problematic for novice writers. Coincidentally, on Pho’s list were several features that Pho (2010) claims to express authorial voice including self-reference words; stance expressions; and modal auxiliaries and semi-modal verbs. The feature ‘that-complement clause’ is also considered to be capable of expressing stand by Hyland and Tse (2005). Another two features on Pho’s list, namely voice and tense, are also held by many to be important features of abstracts or research articles (e.g., Lorés, 2004; Martínez, 2001; Salager-Meyer, 1992; Swales, 1990). Our second concern was a need to strike a balance between our desire to include a large number of linguistic features and the limits of this rather small-scale study. We decided to base our choice of linguistic features on Pho’s list and chose those linguistic features that manual analysis would allow for. The result was a list of six linguistic features: voice, tense, that-complement, hedges, attitudinal stance markers, and self-reference words.

It should be noted that although the term hedges does not appear on Pho’s list, in his study hedging was actually represented by modal auxiliaries, and epistemic adjectives, adverbs, and nouns.

These six linguistic features can be classified into two categories: grammatical constructions including voice, tense, and that-complements; and interactional metadiscoursive devices including hedges, attitudinal stance markers, and self-reference words. While the rationale for the grammatical grouping was obvious, it was on the basis of Hyland and Tse (2004); and Gillaerts and Van de Velde (2010) that we grouped hedging, attitudinal stance and self-reference under the umbrella term interactional metadiscourse. According to them, interactional metadiscourse involves the reader by means of hedges, attitudinal stance markers, self-reference words, engagement markers and boosters. These devices reflect the author’s perspective towards both propositions in the text and the reader. Based on Hyland and Tse (2004), definitions of the three interactional metadiscoursive devices analyzed in this study are as follows:

Hedges: expressions of tentativeness and possibility by means of such vocabulary items as can, could, might, probably, likely, etc.

Attitudinal stance markers: expressions of the author’s judgments or attitudes towards a proposition or an object

Self-reference words: first-person pronouns (I, we, my, our) and other words referring to the author himself or herself (e.g. the author, the researcher).
2.4 Procedure

We carried out our analysis of both moves and linguistic features manually. So far, there have been a few attempts to analyze the rhetorical structure of RA abstracts using computer software. Such studies include Anthony and Lashkia (2003) which used a computer program named Mover to perform move analysis for the purpose of assisting abstract writing and reading; and Wu, Chang, Liou and Chang (2006) which developed a system for automatically computational analysis of move structures. However, software programs inevitably use linguistic markers to identify moves which run counter to our communicative purpose-based approach to move identification. As for analysis of linguistic features, successful studies using computer software abound, but we opted for the manual method due to the relatively small scope of our dataset.

Objectivity may suffer to a certain degree if rhetorical moves and their linguistic realizations are analyzed manually. We dealt with this problem by obtaining high inter-rater reliability as suggested by Crooks (1986). First, all the stages of analysis were carried out by each of the researchers independently. Then we compared our results and wherever a difference occurred we discussed until we reached an agreement.

Our function-based approach to move identification dictated the order of analysis of rhetorical structure and linguistic features. We first identified the moves and their sequences in each individual abstract and then analyzed the overall linguistic features of each individual move of the abstracts. Frequencies and percentages were then computed of each move and each linguistic feature.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 Move occurrences and sequences

As shown in Table 1, all the five move types in Hyland’s (2000) model occurred across the dataset of 20 abstracts as a whole, indicating the comprehensiveness of the model. However, only 4 abstracts (A8, A13, A17 and A18) employed all the 5 move types described in the model, accounting for only 20% of the entire dataset. Another one A10 (5%) had 4 move types. A majority of 12 abstracts (60%) contained 3 move types. A rare case was A3 which had one single move, Product.
Table 1: Move occurrences and sequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>No. of moves Types contained</th>
<th>Move types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I P M Pr C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A C B D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B D C E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B D C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B D F H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A B C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12 (60%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A B C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A B C D E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A B C D E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A B E C D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A B C D E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of abstracts</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Containing the move types</strong></td>
<td>(45%)</td>
<td>(65%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:** I= Introduction, P=Purpose, M=Method, Pr=Product, C=Conclusion

A1= Abstract 1, A2=Abstract 2, A3=Abstract 3... A20=Abstract 20

Letters in the cells corresponding to the abstracts and moves have two functions. 1) Each letter represents one occurrence of a move in a particular abstract; and 2) The same letter indicates the position of that move in the sequence of all moves present in that abstract. Thus, for example, for A6, the letters A and C under M, B under P, and D under C indicate that Article 6 has 4 moves sequenced Method-Product-Method-Conclusion.

Table 1 also shows an obvious pattern in terms of move type distribution. Despite the incompleteness of most of the abstracts in instances of the number of move types employed, move occurrences tended to concentrate on the three move types of Purpose, Method and Product. The occurrences of the three move types accounted for 65%, 80% and 90% respectively. The other two move types, Introduction and Conclusion, occurred in less than half of the abstracts.

It is possible that the absence of the Introduction and Conclusion moves in the
majority of the abstracts signifies disciplinary variation. Research article abstracts in agricultural science might only have the Purpose, Method and Product moves as obligatory moves. However, without previous research into abstracts of agricultural science RAs to support this reasoning, we are more inclined to consider it a sign of rhetorical knowledge inadequacy on the part of these Vietnamese authors. Although the authors presented the most important information on their investigations in terms of purposes, procedures, and main findings, they failed to situate their research in a particular context and mention the implications of the immediate findings of their investigations. The incomplete picture they painted of their studies and their articles inevitably rendered their abstracts ineffective in realizing their communicative purpose of attracting potential readers. To address this problem, it seems necessary to use a genre-based approach to sensitize NNS would-be agricultural researchers in Vietnam to the overall rhetorical structure of the RA abstract through providing opportunities of experiencing the genre.

In terms of move sequence, most of the moves were found to be in the order described by Hyland’s (2000) model. However, as indicated in Table 1, move recycling was found in a number of abstracts. A6 and A14 recycled either the Method or the Product move once while A11 and A16 repeated both the Method and Product moves. Interestingly, A16 employed the Method and Product moves four times. Moreover, though rare, move reversal was also found. Instead of placing the Method move before the Product move, both A17 and A19 had this move in the final position. An intention to highlight certain content may be an explanation for such move arrangements.

Finally, a few instances of move embedding were found in a number of abstracts (A8, A11, and A16). In the following example, the Purpose move “In order to investigate the underlying causes …the Ca river Basin” was placed within the Method move “remote sensing data was used…”

(A8) In order to investigate the underlying causes of forest cover change over the period 1998-2003 in the two upper-most districts of the Ca river Basin, remote sensing data was used together with the multiple logistic regression technique (Method).

Move embedding in these abstracts helped save much precious space. As Pho (2008) points out, move embedding whereby a move occurs in the form of a phrase or
a word in another move is due to “the compact nature of the abstract” (p.283). Indeed, the word limit of 150 to 200 words commonly specified in most journal submission guidelines demands that writers communicate their intentions in as few words as possible.

In brief, the analysis of the generic structure of the abstracts written in English by Vietnamese agriculturalists revealed that some moves that are described as obligatory in Hyland’s (2000) framework were missing in the majority of the abstracts. The more moves are absent, the less effective an abstract is in achieving its overall communicative purpose. The absence of certain moves indicates Vietnamese agricultural researchers’ lack of knowledge of abstract writing conventions in terms of the prototypical move structure.

3.2 Linguistic features
3.2.1 Grammatical features

Table 2 is a summary of the use of grammatical features in the 20 abstracts. The frequency counts of the features were presented in relation to each move type where they occurred. Since some abstracts did not contain certain moves and moves varied in length considerably, comparing the absolute frequency values of the features across the move types would make no sense. Therefore, the frequency of a particular feature is discussed relative to the total number of abstracts containing that move type as well as against its frequency counts in other moves.

Table 2: Use of grammatical constructions in moves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move types</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Pr</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of abstracts containing the move types</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active voice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive voice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
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</table>

3.2.1.1 Voice (active and passive)
The total number of finite verbs in the 20 abstracts was 138. Table 2 shows that the active voice was used nearly twice as frequently in the abstracts as the passive voice.
The active voice was common in all the five moves of the abstracts. Since, as in the following examples, the majority of the subjects in the sentences of the abstracts were a determiner with a head noun, for example, *this/the study, this/the paper*, it is not surprising that the active voice was decidedly dominant, particularly in the Method and Product moves.

(A9) *The report concludes that, given the scale of the problem, a high level of commitment at all levels of government will be needed to significantly affect the illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam.*

(A15) *The flooding treatment had serious effects on the gas exchange of mungbean and corn, while the damages were lenient in kenaf and napiergrass.*

By contrast, the passive voice tended to concentrate in the Introduction, Method, and Product moves of the texts. As Pho (2010) explains, the preference of the passive voice over the active in the Method and Product moves was due to the authors’ effort to stay as objective as possible. However, as to the reason for the relatively high frequency rate of the occurrences of the passive voice in the Introduction move, we do not yet have a ready answer since our dataset only yielded 9 instances of the Introduction move which is insufficient data on which to base any convincing judgment. Here are two examples of the passive voice used:

(A7) *Landfill gas (LFG), a green, clean, and renewable energy source, can be used for electricity generation or fuel industries.*

(A13) *This study was conducted to examine the growth and photo synthetic characteristics during the vegetative stage* ...
the form of a summary of the article itself rather than a summary of the research. Cooley and Lewkowicz (2003) point out that verb tense use depends on the nature of the abstract: if the abstract is in itself a summary of the article, the present tense is typical; if it is a summary of the research, the past tense is generally used. Indeed, as illustrated in the following examples, the terms this paper and this report occurred frequently in the dataset, indicating most of the abstracts summarized the main content of the articles.

(A1) …this paper aims at providing information on applicators’ knowledge on pesticide risk reduction …

(A9) This report provides data on the logistics, scope and economics of the illegal trade in wildlife in Vietnam.

In addition, the high frequency of the present tense in the Introduction, Purpose and Conclusion moves can also be the result of the frequent references to wider, general knowledge claims and the large amount of explanation and commentary of previous research and the results of the present research.

Whereas the present tense was typical of the Introduction, Purpose and Conclusion moves, the past tense played an equally important role in the Method and Product moves. In fact, the past tense was found in all the 16 abstracts that had the Method move and 14 out of 18 that had the Product move. As is attested by the frequent mentioning of this research, this study and this experiment in the two moves, it was here that the procedures in carrying out the research and the results of the research were presented as relevant to the past. It seems that the authors were trying to sound objective by focusing on the immediate results from their own past research and avoiding making general claims. See these examples:

(A4) CER was positively correlated with the number of roots per plant at [the] recovering stage.

(A5) RAPD analysis combined with the construction of phylogenetic tree revealed the genetic variation and genetic relationship between collected Lilium germplasm.

3.2.1.3 That-complement clauses

Though used in all the five move types in the abstracts, that-complement clauses were
observed to have a much higher frequency of occurrence in the Product move than in any other move. This finding was in keeping with Pho (2010) who claimed that *that*-complements were an important characteristic of the Results (Product) move. The salient use of this structure in the Product move can be explained by the fact that the authors frequently depended on such expressions as *The results revealed that*...and *The analysis showed that*... when reporting their findings. We agree with Pho (ibid.), as illustrated in the following examples, that this structure helps authors project their findings more easily by signaling that the move is now changed to the reporting of the findings in their own studies.

(A7) *The results indicated that the contamination level of water collected in studied slaughterhouses was alarming.*

(A18) *The results show that the methane gas flow at Nam Son landfill can provide considerable energy potential.*

### 3.3 Interactional metadiscourse devices

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<thead>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 summarizes the use of interactional metadiscourse devices employed in the abstracts investigated. A total number of 10 interactional metadiscourse devices were found in the entire dataset of 20 RAs. Given the total number of move occurrences across the abstracts, the overall tendency was for the Vietnamese agricultural writers to use much less interactional metadiscourse than expected. Not a few studies (e.g., Bazerman, 1984; Biber, 2006; Gillaerts & van de Velde, 2010; Hyland, 2005) have indicated that like RAs, RA abstracts are deeply intertwined with subjectivity resultant from the use of hedges, attitudinal stance expressions and self-reference words and other interactional metadiscourse devices. Two factors might account for the scanty use of interactional metadiscourse in the abstracts. One was the influence of the
abstract writing guidelines and manuals that require that the RA abstract should be a fully objective summary of the RA (Gillaerts & van de Velde, 2010). The other possible reason might be the authors’ lack of linguistic resources for the expression of their own opinions and their relationship and interaction with their readers. This may call for focused instruction that is aimed at expanding Vietnamese agricultural researchers’ repertoire of expressions of interactional metadiscourse.

Table 3 also exhibits the mapping of interactional metadiscourse devices onto the different moves of the RAs. The 10 hedges and attitudinal stance markers were concentrated in the Introduction and Conclusion moves with none found in the Product and Discussion moves. This is so probably because the Introduction and the Conclusion of the abstract are often replete with the author’s comments on previous research and on their own research whereas the Method and Product moves traditionally attempt to provide objective descriptions of the method used in the study and its findings leaving little room for argumentation on the part of the author (see Milagros del Saz Rubio, In Press, on RA Instructions).

In addition, in contrast to the 3 hedges and 7 attitudinal stance markers identified, self-reference was found to be completely absent in the entire dataset. This might be ascribed to the authors’ preoccupation with trying to sound as objective as possible by avoiding any reference to himself/herself or his/her own study. Again, the misleading effect of the abstracting guidelines and manuals is evident in the abstracts produced by the Vietnamese agricultural researchers (see Gillaerts & van de Velde, 2010).

3.4 Lexico-grammatical errors

3.4.1 Verb tense

A total of 12 verb tense mistakes were identified in the dataset resulted from inadequate grammatical knowledge. Verb tense errors caused difficulties in move realization. However, given the total number of finite verbs used in the dataset, these agricultural researchers did not seem to have much of a problem with verb tense. An example of this type of errors is

(A20) In this experiment the effect of JA…and attack of caterpillars on the oviposition behavior of the small cabbage white butterflies…on Brussels sprouts plants … is investigated. (Move 2: Purpose) (Correction: was investigated)
3.4.2 Singular and plural forms

Altogether, there were 11 errors. Although the damage they brought to the readability of the abstracts was minimal, they could considerably reduce the effectiveness of the abstracts. This is definitely a sign of the authors’ low English proficiency. Examples are:

(A4) *Four plant* of each *cultivars* was randomly selected for measuring photosynthetic characters viz., photosynthetic rate, stomatal conductance, transpiration rate and specific leaf area… *(Correction: plants)*

(A7) *Lychee* is a high value commodity. *Lychee* is planted in the different provinces in Vietnam … *(Correction: lychees are/the lichee is)*

3.4.3 Word choice

Eleven mistakes detected involved word choice, possibly due to weak grammar, literal translation from Vietnamese or an inadequate vocabulary which is a common problem of inexperienced NNS authors. Some examples of this type of problems are

(A12) *LFG recovery and utilization could contribute remarkable to GHG emission mitigation, toward to sustainability.* *(Correction: remarkably)*

(A7) …*benefits of lychee production …tended to be declined in recent years because of climate, increasing in input prices (fertilizer, chemical, pesticides, etc.) and decreasing in lychee prices…*(Correction: climate changes, increases… and decreases …).*

(A1) *Applicators’ knowledge determines their behaviours in making a decision on selecting and use, treatment of pesticide containers to reduce pesticide risks. *(Correction: users’).*

3.4.4 Articles

A total of 9 article use errors were spotted, but 7 of them occurred in a single abstract (A5). In many cases, articles were missing where necessary. Here is a sentence from A5 that contains 6 such mistakes.

(A5) *The highest polymorphic DNA bands were obtained in group*
containing commercial Oriental Lilies with total 61 bands, following by group of L. longiflorum and their hybrids (33.3%), group of wild species from Japan (8.13%), group of commercial Asiatic Lilies (7.32%) and group of wild species from Vietnam (1.63%).

(Correction: The highest polymorphic DNA bands were obtained from the group of commercial oriental lilies with a total of 61 bands, followed by the group of L. longiflorum and their hybrids (33.3%), the group of wild species from Japan (8.13%), the group of commercial Asiatic lilies (7.32%) and the group of wild species from Vietnam (1.63%).)

In other cases, an article was used where it did not belong, as illustrated by the following example:

(A7) Lychee is planted in the different provinces in Vietnam ...

(Correction: in different provinces)

The small number of article errors is rather surprising, given the enormous difficulty Vietnamese writers encounter in acquiring the English article system. SLA research (e.g., Master, 1987) has demonstrated that the English articles are one of the most difficult areas for L2 learners, especially those whose L1 is without articles. Therefore, while it seems that articles were not a serious problem with these agricultural writers, further research focusing on article use by Vietnamese agricultural researchers is yet to be undertaken to address the discrepancy between this finding and previous research findings.

3.4.5 Prepositions

Only 4 mistakes of this type were identified. Surprisingly, this kind of mistake did not seem to be a serious problem for this group of authors though it is often considered very problematic for NNS writers in general. The identified mistakes seemed to be the result of negative language transfer from Vietnamese into English.

(A17) The results also reflected the level contamination was much higher...(Correction: level of contamination).

(A18) The research found that Gas Engine is more attractive in term of environmental benefit, which can be applied primarily for Nam Son landfill and continue applied for other landfill in Vietnam for the future.

(Correction: in terms of .....to Nam Son landfill and to other landfills in the
3.4.6 Run-on sentences

Of the 7 run-on sentences identified, 2 were due to the use of however. It seems that those Vietnamese authors had inadequate knowledge of the use of the comma as they tried to use a comma to separate the sentences. Here are some examples:

(A4) A correlation between CER and SPAD was observed to be positive at before drought and recovering stages, however it was negative at drought stage. (Correction: stages. However, Or stages; however.)

(A12) Females laid on average 24.5 ± 4.4 eggs, adult longevity was over two months. (Correction: eggs, and adult Or egg. Adult)

To summarize, singular and plural forms of nouns, word choice, and run-on sentences are areas where the Vietnamese agricultural researchers tended to make mistakes while articles, prepositions and verb tense did not seem to be a serious problem. This finding points to the need to give priority to those areas of language use when training researchers in academic writing.

4. Conclusion

This study of 20 RA abstracts in English written by Vietnamese agricultural researchers has revealed some useful information about Vietnamese agricultural researchers’ RA abstract writing practice. Major findings can be thus summarized:

In terms of rhetorical organization, most abstracts in the dataset had the three important moves of Purpose, Method and Product but lacked the Introduction and Conclusion moves as described in Hyland’s (2000) IPMPrc model which is the norm in the international academic community. The typical order of the moves was (Introduction)—Purpose—Method—Product—(Conclusion), as described in Hyland’s (ibid.) model. However, the lack of the Introduction and Conclusion moves in most of the abstracts rendered the abstracts incomplete thus reducing their effectiveness.

With respect to linguistic realizations of the moves, most researchers could appropriately use such prototypical linguistic features as tense, voice, that-complement clauses, etc. to realize the local communicative purposes of moves. In comparison with the use of grammatical constructions, the sparing overall use of interactional metadiscourse in general and self-reference in particular may be
considered an indication of these Vietnamese agricultural researchers’ ignorance of the need to dialogue with their readers, for example, by modifying their claims through commenting on and downplaying and their own research findings. Moreover, the analysis of typical grammatical errors revealed that while articles, prepositions and verb tense did not seem to be a serious problem, singular and plural forms, word choice and the use of the comma were areas these Vietnamese agricultural researchers need assistance.

Despite the small scale of the study, to a certain extent, our findings can be generalized to Vietnamese agricultural researchers, and some implications are obvious from our findings. As structural and linguistic inadequacies may hamper the general readability of an abstract, effort should be made to familiarize would-be researchers with the genre at Vietnamese institutions of higher learning where scientific researchers are trained. For example, a genre-based approach can be used to provide would-be researchers with opportunities to experience the genre of RA abstracts. With raised genre awareness, they can become sensitive to the obligatory moves and can conscientiously model their abstracts on internationally accepted conventions. Meanwhile, an appropriate amount of explicit, form-based instruction may need to be introduced into the classroom with a clear focus on the lexical grammatical aspect of language use.

References


