

Grammatical Metaphor in English Writing for College Students

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Abstract. English writing is a rather difficult skill to acquire. The paper makes an attempt to solve this problem from the perspective of Halliday's grammatical metaphor. By using the ideational grammatical metaphor, interpersonal grammatical metaphor, and nominalization under the theory, the teaching experiment was designed in the paper. Also the author applied a variety of flexible teaching methods into the teaching experiment, aiming at finding out approaches to help students to acquire better College English writing skills. The main jobs in the study were the classroom teaching, the teaching materials accumulating, the questionnaires, the pretest and post-test, etc. After the research, both the interest and confidence of the experimental group were greatly strengthened. And the scores of the pretest and post-test said: prior the experiment, the average and the standard deviation of experimental group and the controlled one were almost equal. But after it, a big gap appeared: the former advanced from 6.50 to 7.70 (the full score, 15); the latter, from 6.56 to 6.88. It is clear that, through this teaching research, a dared design and operation for a reform in College English writing under Halliday's grammatical metaphor is feasible and effective. And a combination of grammatical metaphor and normal teaching of College English writing shows exploring and promoting significance, and it is worth advocating.

Keywords: Grammatical metaphor theory; Nominalization; College English writing

1. Introduction

At present particularly given the importance of English as an international language, an increasing number of people need to learn writing in English for occupational or academic purposes. Teachers have devoted considerable effort to the teaching of writing. It cannot be denied that a lot of work had been done to develop students' writing ability. Teachers have used every means tried different ways to improve the students' writing skills. Various approaches been used in the EFL writing classroom for years, especially the product approach, the process approach and the genre approach. So far there has not been a certain approach proved to be effective and most influential in the teaching of EFL writing, which calls for further efforts to explore and discover new and influential approaches for our teaching.

Referring to the traditional theory of metaphor, Halliday has been revised and improved his Functional Grammar constantly, and puts forward the concept of grammatical metaphor in the "An Introduction to Functional Grammar", a book of 1985 and 1994, and he thinks the metaphor is also a transference, which uses a kind of grammar means to replace another, but expresses the same grammatical meaning. Grammatical metaphor has its unique performance characteristics as a kind of grammar phenomenon. The congruence and metaphor are two means to express the meaning, both of which have difference in the event of the order, frequency, and cognitive habit. Grammatical metaphor again involves a type of metaphorical movement: from a process as clause (the default encoding of a process) to a process as noun phrase. Grammatical metaphor is thus based on the variation between something common, standard, default(i.e. a process realized as a clause)and something which is extended from that(i.e. a process realized by some other form, e.g. a noun phrase), and in this sense grammatical metaphor is similar to the traditional type of metaphor looked at above.

This paper explores the application of Grammatical Metaphor (GM) theory to the EFL writing in China. It intends to construe the expressive effects of GM which will serve as guidance on students' practice of writing. And more approaches will be found out to help students to acquire better writing skills with the aid of Grammatical Metaphor theory.

Grammatical metaphor in writing from non-English major college students is illustrated and the objectives of the study have been conveyed as well. It spotlights the common problems in English writing committed by non-English major college students, analyzing some possible reasons of common mistakes and recommending various approaches and teaching methodologies in order to improve the non-English major college students' English writing level.

2. Research Methods

The skill of writing is of vital importance as speaking, listening, and reading. It is an individual cognitive problem-solving skill, which is complex and recursive. So writing is by no means simple and easy. Instead, it is a very complex intellectual and emotional process. It is challenging for both native and non-native speakers and is generally regarded as the most irksome and problematic activity in learning and teaching of English in China.

How to improve writing instruction and help students to acquire better skills in writing practice? Scholars both from abroad and in China have done a lot of researches since 1980. Many papers were published to introduce new theories and approaches for the teaching of writing. People's focuses vary, ranging from the product of writing to the process of writing. Teachers also resort to linguistic theories for instructions in their teaching practice of writing.

GM theory was foremost presented by Halliday. According to him, "the only examples of discourse without metaphor that we normally meet with are in young children's speech, and in traditional children's rhymes and songs that seem to survive for that very reason: that they lack grammatical metaphors." (2000:342). For young children at the age of two, the so-called language, with a higher-order semiotic system replaced their protolanguage since there is grammar in it. And as they move into secondary school, they pass through the move from the grammar of written language to that of the technological language, which is systematic application of grammatical metaphor. In this process, children learned to reconstruct experience in an increasingly theoretical mold. Metaphorical language makes their language more "written". When we move from common sense knowledge into literate and then into technical knowledge, the semantic density of the text has to increase. English being a foreign language to Chinese students thus are unable to develop natural stages to grasp it systematically from listening to speaking and then onto writing and reading. They lack the chance to "reconstruct" the experience in a natural way as the native speakers do. That may partly explain the reason why it is hard for students to learn to write in a theoretical and technological mold.

3. Application of GM to CETW

The paper is to illustrate how GM could be applied to college English teaching in writing (CETW) to direct teachers to play a more positive role while applying GM to their English writing classes, meanwhile to encourage teachers of college English to explore more scientific teaching methods which will be beneficial to their teaching procedures.

3.1 The Experimental Instruments

The subjects are 160 second-year non-English majors. The students come from four natural classes, two of which were planned as the experimental group of 80 students; the other two, as the controlled one of 80. All the students of the experimental class are taking GM as the main teaching method; the other class, as the controlled group, is under the traditional teacher-oriented environment.

Such instruments as test, surveys, class observations, interviews and SPSS are used for the objective of making the comparison between the learners' attitudes and enthusiasm, academic achievements in CC and ones in EC.

The writing part of the first mid-term examination as the pretest, It was a general inference of student's previous English level and a standard for their future progress. Therefore, the result of

the post-test could show whether or not the experimental class did better than the controlled class. The post-test (the writing part of the final examination of the second term) was given at the end of the second term to the students both in the experimental class and the controlled one.

In order to clarify the effectiveness of some of the GM strategies applied to CEWT, the author designed two questionnaires according to GM theories and English teaching procedures.

Questionnaire1 (designed according to Prof. Liu Runqing's viewpoint and Prof. Pei Dina's questionnaire) was addressed to the students both in the experimental class and in the controlled one before GM was conducted at the very beginning of that term. Questionnaire 2 was delivered only to the experimental class after CL has been carried out at the end of the term to test the changes of students' writing study after they accepted GM.

The interviews consist of two parts. The first part was conducted for the experimental class to get more knowledge about students' attitudes toward English writing study, their difficulties in English writing study and their advice for the application of GM to CEWT; the second part was also finished by having talks with colleagues of English from Foreign Language Department.

3.2 Classroom observation

Observations on students' behaviors can also provide us evidence for the research. The author made regular records in both the experimental class and the controlled one. They were carried out without the knowing of the students, so the author can get students' natural performances, which could reflect students' real activities in the classroom. The records can be used to show the amount of time dominated by the teacher's lecture, and the amount of time occupied by the students' activities.

3.3 Teaching strategies

When teaching is geared towards the difference of text types instead of being presented as general principles, students can get specific help of how nominalization and coherence vary with different genres. During the experiment, the expository essays of writing are mostly focused on because exposition is the most frequently used form by scientists, professionals or students and most of the essays we have read in the textbooks are of the expository type.

A five-stage instruction is adopted in the present study to help students realize how the elements of coherence work in different types of texts thus in order to improve their writing. Learning from student feedback and analysis of their writing, the instruction has uplifted their awareness of the role of nominalization and coherence in writing, which given them new strategies when doing their writing.

3.4 Data collection and analysis procedures

This experiment is composed of three stages: a pre-experimental stage, an experimental stage and a post-experimental stage. Reliability and validity are counted for the instrument as a whole. After the collection of the data, then SPSS is made use of to decode the data and statistical analysis. Finally, the data are analyzed and organized as the answers to the research questions that have been presented in the previous section.

The duration of this experiment was one semester. During the period, the teacher employed the five-stage instruction to give explicit explanation of grammatical metaphor from the discourse level to the experimental group. In the whole semester, students wrote five compositions at the interval of about two weeks. They had to write all the compositions by themselves without referring to any books, using Internet or resorting to other sources except dictionaries.

3.5 Result and analysis

The number of valid compositions of each group and each time varies according to the number of students present in the class. The first and the last essay of students were evaluated with a holistic goal according to these raters' opinion. The distribution of high-and low-rated essays of both the experimental group and the control group is shown in the table.

(1) Distribution of high-and low-rated essays

Table 1. Distribution of high-and low-rated essays of the first and the last essays

	EG I [n=40]	EG II[n=38]	CG I [n=40]	CG II [n=41]
High	10	17	11	12
Medium	20	13	22	21
Low	10	8	7	8

EG: Experimental Group; CG: Control Group;

I: The First Essay during the Experiment; II: The Last Essay during the Experiment

From this table we can see that the last writing of experimental group is much better than the first essay. There is no distinctive improvement shown in the control group. High-rated essays reveal a large number of lexical collocations, conjunctive and reference ties. High-rated essays display a higher number of using logical connectors. Maximally coherent texts include a great number of Initial Sentence Elements. Low-rated essays exhibit frequency of changing topic. High-rated essays contain clearly identifiable “strands of proper grammatical metaphors”.

(2) Comparison of high-level writing samples of Essay Two and Essay Four of Experimental Group and Control Group Respectively

To what degree did students with different proficiency level in the experimental group make improvement and which group of students made the greatest improvement?

For this purpose 3 high-proficiency-level students' essays and 3 low-proficiency-level students' essays are picked out for comparison. The initial and the revised drafts of the second and the fourth essays of each student were analyzed in the way suggested above. High-and low-rated essays were analyzed to evaluate the frequency of each variable. The scores for the two groups were compared using the t-test, and results are shown in Table 2 and 3:

Table 2. Comparison of High-level Writing Samples of Essay Two and Essay Four of Experimental Group and Control Group Respectively

		t-value	df	Sig.[2-tailed]
	Std. deviation			
COHESIVE-COHE2	1.528	-7.56	2	.529
CONNECTOR-CON2	1.000	.000	2	1.000
ISE-ISE2	.577	-4.000	2	.057
TOPICS-TOPICS 2	.577	-7.000	2	.020
LOCAL-LOCAL2	2.000	-.866	2	.050.
GLOBAL-GLOBAL2	.577	-1.000	2	.045

Table 3. Comparison of Low-level Writing Samples of Essay Two and Essay Four of Experimental Group and Control Group Respectively

		t-value	df	Sig.[2-tailed]	
	Std. deviation				
Pair 1	COHESIVE-COHE2	1.528	.378	2	.742
Pair 2	CONNECTOR-CON2	1.155	1.000	2	.423
Pair 3	ISE-ISE2	.577	-2.000	2	.184
Pair 4	TOPICS-TOPICS 2	1.000	-3.464	2	.074
Pair 5	LOCAL-LOCAL2	.577	2.000	2	.184.
Pair 6	GLOBAL-GLOBAL2	1.732	1.000	2	.423

From the analysis of the data of Table 2 and Table 3 and the data of the frequency of each variable of the two groups, it is clear that high-rated texts differ from low-rated texts by establishing a clear global level strand of nominalization and coherence, and as predicted, low-rated texts are characterized by a higher converting of new topics.

It's an effective way for teachers to identify and analyze students' writing problems of grammatical metaphor so that students might have a clear picture in what aspect they can make progress. In a cohesive paragraph, each sentence associates clearly with the topic sentence and to the sentences on either side of it. Cohesive devices such as transition words or reference words make clear to the reader both where the paragraph is going and how each sentence relates to the others.

A cohesive and formal paragraph also highlights the ties between old information and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments clear to the reader. To think of moving from old information to new is like tying or gluing the sentences together.

4. Conclusions

Grammatical metaphor and the introduction of it into foreign language teaching is correspondent to human's cognitive law and is helpful to exert students' activeness in learning a foreign language; to teach a foreign language must teach its grammatical metaphors. Teaching grammatical metaphor explicitly, esp., nominalization and thematic progression, helps students organize their writings and make their writings formal and coherent, thus improving their writing skills.

The GM helps us enhance active learning and create a harmonious atmosphere in which students no longer feel boring and sleepy. Gradually they realize the writing learning process is interesting in some degree. Each student receives attention or praise from the teacher and other group members as well which comfort them and encourage them to do better than before. The experimental class behaves more actively in English writing class on the whole.

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