



A Systemic-Functional Analysis of English Language Learners' Writing

Uma Análise Sistêmico-Funcional de Redações de Aprendizes da Língua Inglesa

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a systemic-functional linguistic analysis of two writing samples of the University of California Analytical Writing Placement (AWP) Examination written by English language learners (ELLs). The analysis shows the linguistic features utilized in the two writing samples, one that received a passing score and one that received a failing score. The article describes some of the grammatical resources which are functional for expository writing, which are divided under three main categories: textual, interpersonal, and ideational resources. Following this brief description is the analysis of both essays in terms of these resources.. The configuration of grammatical features used in the essays make up the detached style of essay 1 and the more personal style of essay 2. These grammatical features include the textual resources of thematic choices and development, clause-combining strategies (connectors), and lexical cohesion; interpersonal resources of interpersonal metaphors of modality; and ideational resources of nominalization and abstractions as ideational metaphors. . Implications for educational practice and recommendations for educators based on the analysis are provided.

Key-words: *systemic-functional linguistic analysis; English language learners; expository writing.*

RESUMO

Este trabalho apresenta uma análise sistêmico-funcional de duas redações originadas do Exame de Redação Analítica da Universidade da Califórnia, escritas por aprendizes da língua inglesa. A análise mostra as escolhas linguísticas utilizadas nessas duas redações, uma que recebeu uma nota alta e uma que recebeu uma nota baixa no exame. O artigo descreve algumas das escolhas gramaticais que são funcionais para a redação expositiva, divididas em três categorias principais: escolhas textuais, interpessoais e ideacionais. Depois dessa breve descrição é apresentada a análise das duas redações em termos desses recursos. O artigo mostra as diferenças entre as redações em termos das escolhas linguísticas usadas pelos dois autores. Algumas conclusões para a prática educacional e recomendações para educadores baseados na análise serão incluídas.

Palavras-chave: *linguística sistêmico-funcional; aprendizes de língua inglesa; redações expositivas.*

Language develops through social experience. Students need experience with the kinds of writing tasks and genres that will be required of them so that they can develop an advanced level of literacy necessary in school contexts. This is especially important for students who speak a language other than English at home in the context of the United States. These students must become proficient in English to be competitive with their English-speaking peers for access to higher education (Rumberger 2000). Yet English language learners (ELLs) entering higher education need to develop academic language - the language used in learning academic content in school contexts which usually includes aspects of language associated with academic achievement and literacy skills as well as lexicon specific to schooling contexts (Schleppegrell 2001; 2004). The use of academic language is important for ELLs to fulfill the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement. One way to fulfill this requirement is by passing the Analytical Writing Placement (AWP) examination, formerly known as Subject A exam.

This article presents a systemic-functional linguistic analysis of two AWP examination samples written by ELLs. The analysis shows the linguistic features utilized in the two writing samples, one that received a passing score and one that received a failing score. Such

analysis can show the differences between the essays in terms of the linguistic resources used by the writers. This article demonstrates the importance of giving language the “visible status it deserves, so that it becomes, quite properly, an object of overt study in the classroom” (Christie 1989: 198).

Many ELLs use linguistic features that cannot be corrected by changing a verb form or adding an article. It is very problematic to just tell students that some features are not appropriate for academic writing. Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) offers tools for conducting text analysis that can inform the work of educators, especially those responsible for teaching ELLs. This linguistic theory offers ways to focus on lexico-grammatical features and their realization of particular social contexts. Language is the primary resource to achieve educational goals. An understanding of how language is used in texts is important for educators.

English Language Learners

Many ELLs are enrolled in California schools. In the 2008-2009 academic year, English language learners corresponded to 25% of the total student population, or 1.5 million (California Department of Education 2010). Many students who enter institutions of higher education in California have developed English through exposure and have already developed their everyday language for communicative purposes but are still in the process of developing academic language.

Many U.S. resident students have come to the United States because their parents were escaping from political changes (Reid 1998). Often these children came to the U.S. by themselves to live with relatives or even strangers. Most learn English by ear, i.e. “through oral trial and error” (Reid 1998: 4). Although they may not be fully literate in their home language, they usually possess good oral skills. They may have limited understanding of English structures as well as limited literacy skills and reading experience.

Another term used for U.S. educated ELLs is Generation 1.5 students (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal 1999; Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau 2009) because their experiences and educational needs fall between

those of first generation adult immigrants and the US-born second generation children of immigrants (Roberge 2002). ELLs face many challenges when learning English. Such challenges, however, have not been the focus of many research studies. Because of their great exposure to oral language, their writing usually reveals many conversational features. Some of the linguistic differences these students bring to the classroom pose a unique set of challenges to writing teachers. Students need a high level of literacy skills in order to meet the language demands of university-level work, as shown in this article, and teachers may be unprepared to deal with such linguistic diversity of students.

The challenges of academic English can be shown by analyzing the percentage of students who met the University of California Entry Level Writing Requirement (University of California 2010). In 2008, from the 17,112 candidates who took the AWP exam, 9,032 (or 52.8%) passed and 8,080 (or 47.2%) failed (University of California 2010). All students are required to satisfy this requirement before they are juniors, either by passing the AWP exam, achieving a satisfactory score in other exams or completing an acceptable English composition college course with a grade C or better.

The AWP Exam: An Expository Genre

The AWP exam is a 2-hour one-time assessment exam. Students read a prose passage of about 700 to 1,000 words that usually presents a point of view with which they can disagree, i.e., an arguable issue, and then they write an essay responding to a prompt based on the content of the passage. The exam is scored holistically but does take into consideration grammatical accuracy and lexical choices. In an academic context where ELLs are expected to show their writing competence, grammatical and lexical choices play a crucial role in determining students' placement in college composition classes.

The AWP exam calls for an expository genre. Expository essays put forth a judgment that is socially significant and provide reasons to support this judgment (Martin 1989). Martin refers to the judgment as *thesis* and to the reasons supporting it as *arguments*. Usually each argument for the thesis forms a paragraph and arguments and thesis

may be summed up in a conclusion, a final paragraph (Martin 1989: 14). Exposition requires reasoning, interpretation, and explanations, so it is important to know how English expresses reasoning by analyzing the grammatical resources that have to be used to write effective expository essays. The purpose of an analytical expository essay is to “persuade **that** the thesis is well formulated” (Martin 1989: 17). The common way to organize exposition is to “tell people what you’re going to say, say it, and then tell them what you’ve said” (Martin 1996: 87).

Study Focus and Overview of Essays

This study will analyze two ELLs’ texts, one that received a maximum holistic score and one that received a failing holistic score, published online as a sample examination (University of California 2010). This study shows the different linguistic resources utilized by each writer that helped them to succeed or fail in the writing task. It also compares the two essays in terms of these resources. By looking at a successful essay and a failing essay, we can see the expectations for this specific type of analytical expository essay. The research questions addressed are:

- What textual resources are students using in these two texts? How do they differ?
- What do these textual resources show about these texts and these students?
- How do these writers use interpersonal metaphors of modality in their writing?
- How do these writers use nominalization and abstractions in their writing?

The two essays selected are examples of essays from the Universitywide Subject A Examination of 1987 (University of California 2010). Each essay is accompanied by the score it received and a commentary on the reasons why each got a specific score. Students were presented with a section from *Mirror for Man* by

Clyde Kluckhohn. The writing assignment asked students to explain Kluckhohn's views about differences and similarities among world's peoples and the influence of culture and biology and to respond to such views.

By using the writer's own experience with Vietnamese and American cultures, the first essay describes the ways that both cultures are different. The writer starts out by acknowledging the similarity of both countries but goes on to discuss the differences in terms of education. He moves on to talk about differences in terms of dress styles and marriage. Each topic is considered and developed in a different paragraph, showing a clear organizational structure. This essay was considered strong because of its development of ideas and clear understanding of the reading passage, shown through the comparison technique utilized by the writer. According to the commentary this essay received, this writer possesses a sophisticated control of writing. Even though there were some language features showing ELL usage, they did not interfere with the writer's exposition.

The second essay shows the writer's understanding of the passage, but the writer organizes it differently compared to the previous essay. The writer starts out by discussing the main idea of the reading passage, moves on to agree with Kluckhohn's idea on culture, supporting his position by discussing how people model themselves on other people's behavior. The writer then gives a concrete example of differences in education and parental attitudes by focusing on the United States and Hong Kong. The commentary this essay received shows that this writer's language is in need of further instruction in English for non-native speakers.

The writer of essay 1 was considered by Subject A graders to have a "sophisticated control of written English" while the writer of essay 2 "needs to develop more consistent control of written English" (University of California 2010). The analysis will show specifically what discursive features help construe the sophistication of Essay 1 and contrast those with the less sophisticated style of essay 2. The following is a discussion of the major aspects from the analysis of the two essays.

Analysis of Language Resources in AWP Essays

Language Metafunctions: Three Types of Meanings

Halliday (1994) describes three types of meanings, or language metafunctions: *textual meanings*, *ideational meanings*, and *interpersonal meanings*. These meanings correspond to the register variables *mode*, *field*, and *tenor*, and lie behind the various functional approaches to language (Eggins 1994; Halliday & Hasan 1989). These three kinds of meaning - *textual* (clause as a message), *ideational* (clause as a representation), and *interpersonal* (clause as an exchange) - are integrated in the structure of a clause; the structure as a whole construes, or realizes, the meaning. *Textual meanings* organize “the language into coherent and meaningful spoken and written texts” (Droga & Humphrey 2002: 11). Textual meanings correspond to the register variable *mode*. The parts of the grammar realizing textual meanings are *thematic structures* and *nominalizations*. Another important part of the textual metafunction is cohesion analysis. Cohesion analysis refers to the analysis of cohesive ties, i.e. pairs of cohesively related items, within a text. A tie includes the cohesive element and what presupposes it (Halliday & Hasan 1976). *Ideational meanings* express what is going on and participants and circumstances surrounding events (Droga & Humphrey 2002). Ideational meanings correspond to the register variable *field*. The part of the grammar that realizes ideational meanings is the *transitivity system* (participants, processes, and circumstances). *Interpersonal meanings* express ways of instituting relationships with others. Interpersonal meanings correspond to the register variable *tenor*. The parts of the grammar that realize interpersonal meanings are the *mood structures*, *modality*, and *appraisal system*. Mood alternatives in English are declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Modality facilitates the representation of probability, necessity, usuality, inclination, and certainty.

Textual Resources

Thematic Choices and Development

Thematic choices are a textual resource for realizing the expository essay. *Theme* refers to “the point of departure of the message”

(Halliday 1994: 37), the first grammatical element in the clause. The remainder of the message is the *Rheme*. A clause consists of a Theme + Rheme structure. *Given information* often serves as the *Theme* of the message and the remainder of the clause, the *Rheme*, often presents *new information*. The beginning of the English clause is fundamental because it shows the writer's point of departure for the clause and relates it to the rest of the text (Halliday 1994). A progression of Themes from one clause in a paragraph to the next clause in the following paragraph is anticipated (Schleppegrell 2000).

Thematic development focuses on the use of topical and textual Themes. A topical Theme is where the experiential meaning of a clause is found. It is realized through premodification and postmodification of a noun group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase. A textual Theme connects clauses, being responsible for the cohesive ties of a text. Textual Themes are realized through conjunctions or conjunctive adjuncts, functioning as structural elements. In SFL, there are contrasting views on issues concerning Theme recognition (Hasan & Fries 1995).

Typically when the Theme of a clause is one structural element, it is usually represented by one unit: one nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase (Halliday 1994). When the Theme consists of two or more groups, it would still be a single structural element. In English declarative sentences, the Theme typically coincides with the mood function of Subject of the sentence, which is referred to as *Unmarked Theme*. The Subject is the typical thematic choice "unless there is a good reason for choosing something else" (Halliday 1994: 43). This article uses Martin & Rose's (2003) definition of Theme as "everything up to and including the participant that functions as the Subject of the clause" (Halliday 1994: 177).

Analysis of Thematic Choices and Development

Table 1 shows the Unmarked Themes that appear unaccompanied by Marked Themes from both essays. As previously mentioned, to say that an Unmarked Theme is used means that it also has the mood function of Subject.

Table 1 – Unmarked Themes in Essays 1 and 2

Essay 1 Unmarked Themes	Essay 2 Unmarked Themes
It	Kluckhohn
One	these questions
Both	they
It	he
Children	he
The Americans	Kluckhohn
One	I
One	people
They	the way people feel
Such indiscreet action	they
The Vietnamese people	they
The women	they
The Vietnamese people	they
They	I
The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles, and marriage	the school systems
Their different behaviors	I
They	I
A Vietnamese person	Chinese parents
He	They
	People
	Their attitudes toward things

The Unmarked theme selections of each writer help us see the main differences between these two essays. It is clear from this table the use of nouns and nominal groups in essay 1 (*children; such indiscreet action; the Vietnamese people; the women; their different behaviors; the differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles, and marriage; a Vietnamese person*) versus the use of mostly pronouns in essay 2 (*he, they, I*). The writer of essay 1 also uses pronouns, but the strategy he uses is first introducing the main group he will be focusing on in a specific paragraph; then, he uses pronouns to refer back to that group. For instance, in paragraph 2, the group “*the Vietnamese*” is introduced in the Rheme position of a clause and then referred back in Theme position as “*they*.” The writer of essay 2 also introduces a group “*people*” in paragraph 2 and refers back to them by using the pronoun “*they*” four times after the group

was first introduced which makes the text repetitive. This writer also uses the pronoun “I” in Theme position four times, which makes the text more personal, whereas the writer of essay 1 uses groups as the main Themes throughout his essay. It is in Theme selection that we notice many differences between the more successful and the less successful writer.

The thematic choices of Essay 1 show the writer as more distanced and more impersonal. The generalized personal pronoun “one” is used effectively in Theme position by the writer to show impersonality. Other thematic choices such as “Vietnam,” “Children,” “the Vietnamese people,” “the women,” also show impersonality and objectivity. This writer is making generalizations about groups and using lexical items that refer to them as the point of departure for his comments. This author also uses “differences” in thematic position, the focus of his essay. In general, through his thematic choices, including choices of topical Themes, the writer sounds more detached from his essay.

Table 2 shows the Themes in the introduction of Essay 1. The thematic choices of Essay 1 show a wide range of options used by the writer. For example, the writer uses generalized personal pronouns (clause d) and noun phrases in Theme position. He also uses conjunctive adjuncts (clause c) that help him to indicate different relationships between clause-complexes, that is, they serve a textual function by linking with other preceding portions of the text. Table 2 shows examples of some thematic choices.

Table 2 – Thematic Choices and Development - Essay 1, 1st paragraph

THEME	RHEME
a. In a world where everyone has experienced “the same poignant life experiences, such as birth, helplessness, illness, old age, and death,”	it is incredible to think of the number of ways that peoples can go through these events in life.
b. It is most common	that their attitudes and responses are influenced by their environment and society.
c. As Clyde Kluckhohn had explained in “Mirror for Man”,	the best explanation for any human action is the “concept of culture.”
d. One	cannot clearly define ... of culture.
e. By comparing Vietnam and the United States, two very contrasting nations,	one can see ... in shaping people’s lives.

While essay 1 shows a wide range of thematic choices, essay 2 reveals a limited variety. The author uses mostly pronouns (clauses b', d', f') and short noun phrases (clause c') as Themes. Theme selection shows that the author has mostly chosen Unmarked Themes. Table 3 shows examples of some thematic choices.

Table 3 – Thematic Choices and Development - Essay 2, 1st Paragraph

THEME	RHEME
a'. Kluckhohn	explained ... different lifestyle.
b'. At first, he	brought up ... certain things.
c'. These questions	were served ... to the examples.
d'. They	also served as attraction ... another culture.
e'. Then he	went on ... in his examples.
f'. He	compared an American woman ... or tuna fish to that of a rattlesnake.
g'. Kluckhohn	has a strong ... human's culture.

In terms of thematic development, the writer of essay 1 uses many textual Themes to show causal relationships (e.g. “as a result” and “therefore,”), adversative relations (e.g. “yet” and “however”) and summative relations (“as can be seen”). These resources help the writer to control the flow of information and to organize the information by showing relationships between the various clauses. For instance, in the following section of the essay, part of the 2nd paragraph, the writer is describing the differences of education between Vietnam and the United States:

Children are encouraged to do math mentally rather than depend on calculators. *As a result*, the Vietnamese people do not consider it a sacrifice that they should lead a hard life. *Also*, their education emphasizes morality rather than independent thinking. *Therefore*, most Vietnamese children would never think of leaving their families before marriage, unlike the Americans, who would leave for college right after high school or move out of their parents' house to live with friends.

As a result, a connector indicating a causal relationship, links this clause to “It stresses hard work rather than the use of machines.” The continuative *also* in Theme position helps the writer to add more information to the previous clauses. The Theme selection of the

connector *therefore* realizes a causal relationship and helps the writer to organize his text by making a cohesive tie to the previous clause. These connectors when used in Theme position function as cohesive devices that link what will follow to what was already stated (Halliday & Hasan 1976).

Essay 2, on the other hand, makes use of many personal pronouns in thematic position. This writer does not use generalized Themes to show his assertions. The main Theme is “they”, repeated many times as the Theme in several clauses. This writer also uses the pronoun “I” when he refers to himself as an example and when he uses mental processes to make a statement. This is more subjective, making the writer more involved in the essay. Most of this writer’s Themes are unmarked and pronominal.

The thematic development of essay 2 is different from essay 1. The author shows adversative relations by utilizing the conjunction “but” three times and causal relationship is shown through the use of “therefore” in one clause. Both the pronominal choices and the use of the conjunction “but” by the less successful writer are typical of spoken discourse. Building on this analysis of Theme, the next section shows how clause-combining strategies and the use of connectors help the writers accomplish different effects.

Clause-combining Strategies

Clause-combining strategies are another textual resource for realizing the expository essay. Use of conjunctions is one clause-combining strategy. Second language writers often use conjunctions to combine clauses that are more appropriate for speaking than for academic writing, including the use of *because* clauses in expository essays (Schleppegrell 2000).

There are two main ways of combining clauses in English: parataxis and hypotaxis. Hypotaxis is “the relation between a dependent element and its dominant” and parataxis is “the relation between two like elements of equal status, one initiating and the other continuing” (Halliday 1994: 218). This dimension of relationship between clauses is referred to as the type of *inter-dependency*. A second dimension, *the*

logico-semantic relation, can be divided mainly into *expansion* and *projection* (Halliday 1994). Within expansion, there are three options for a secondary clause to expand a primary clause: by elaborating, extending or enhancing it. Elaboration occurs when a clause restates another in some way, specify, comment or exemplify it. Extension occurs when a clause adds some new aspect, gives an exception or presents an alternative. Enhancement appears when a clause qualifies another by using circumstances of time, place, cause or condition (Halliday 1994: 220). Within projection, two options are available, locution and idea. Locution is a “construction of wording” and idea is a “construction of meaning” (Halliday 1994: 220).

Conjunctions are usually seen as cohesive devices, i.e., they tie the different parts of the essay together. Students can recognize the possible ways to link and develop ideas using clause complex structures (Er 1993: 70). Conjunction in SFL refers to “the semantic connection between clauses” (Er 1993: 69). There are different ways one can utilize the resource of conjunction in writing.

Analysis of Clause-combining Strategies

The analysis of clause-combining strategies of the two texts shows some distinct features. Essay 1 makes use of more paratactic enhancement and embedding, especially in its introduction, in a way to condense more information. Essay 2 uses more hypotactic enhancement and elaboration, which shows how the two essays utilize different resources of grammar to realize their meanings. Table 4 shows some clause-combining strategies used in both essays.

Essay 1 uses clause-combining strategies to condense information in the nominal groups. Take clause b as an example: “One cannot clearly define this idea, but through the comparison of two different groups of people hopefully one can better understand the meaning of culture.” In the primary clause, the writer uses the abstract nominal group “this idea” then with the connector *but* links this clause with the second clause where the nominalizations “the comparison of two different groups of people” and “the meaning of culture” condense a lot of information. By choosing the paratactic enhancement strategy,

the writer was able to say more in just a few lines. In each clause of his introduction, the writer is using a connector within the clauses, such as in a and b.

Table 4 – Clause-combining Strategies in the 1st paragraph (Introduction)- Essays 1 and 2

Essay 1	
Clause Complex	Clause Type
a. As Clyde Kluckhohn had explained in “Mirror for Man”, the best explanation for any human action is the “concept of culture.”	Hypotactic enhancement, primary clause Connector “as” – comparison (similarity)
b. One cannot clearly define this idea, but through the comparison of two different groups of people hopefully one can better understand the meaning of culture.	Primary clause, paratactic enhancement (causal-conditional clause - concession ^ consequence) Connector “but” – concessive
Essay 2	
Clause Complex	Clause Type
a’. Kluckhohn explained the differences and similarities among the world’s peoples by taking different life examples of different cultured people and compared them to another person who was raised up in a different lifestyle.	Primary clause with paratactic projection and embedding Connector “and” - addition
b’. At first, he brought up several questions, asking why certain people do or don’t do certain things.	Primary clause with hypotactic enhancement (non-finite clause)
c’. These questions were served as guides, which led on to the examples.	Primary clause with hypotactic elaboration
d’. They also served as attraction to the readers who are curious about different people from another culture.	Primary clause with embedding
e’. People reacts to things differently because they were raised up in different environments with different cultures.	Primary clause with hypotactic enhancement (causal-conditional clause - cause: reason) Connector “because” - cause

Another example of the effective use of clause-combining strategies and connectors is the 2nd paragraph, which I have divided by sentences:

1. In terms of education, the similarities between the two countries are few.

2. Both aim at improving their people's lives, and yet the method in which this is achieved differs greatly.
3. Vietnam, a small country with a large population, has to make do with the lack of technology.
4. It stresses hard work rather than the use of machines.
5. Children are encouraged to do math mentally rather than depend on calculators.
6. As a result, the Vietnamese people do not consider it a sacrifice that they should lead a hard life.
7. Also, their education emphasizes morality rather than independent thinking.
8. Therefore, most Vietnamese children would never think of leaving their families before marriage, unlike the Americans, who would leave for college right after high school or move out of their parents' house to live with friends.

The writer initiates this 2nd paragraph by introducing the focus of the paragraph, “education,” in sentence 1. The primary clause in sentence 2 specifies the “similarities” mentioned in sentence 1 while the second clause, added to the clause 1 by paratactic enhancement, is contrasting the “method” with the “aim”. Sentences 3, 4, and 5, which are all primary clauses explain the “method”. The connector *as a result* links sentence 6 to a stretch of discourse, i.e. to the sentences 3, 4, and 5, serving as a causal connector and a cohesive device. The continuative *also*, whose function is addition, adds to the idea expressed in sentence 6. The connector *therefore* also serves as a causal connector and a cohesive device. These explicit causal connections help this writer to express his reasoning, especially important for the expository essay. Other ways of expressing causality are used in this essay, discussed later.

Essay 2 uses more hypotactic enhancement and elaboration. The connector *because* is utilized many times in essay 2 to show causality. Sentences (a) through (e) are examples of *because* clauses utilized by the author of Essay 2 to link clauses. This is a sequence of sentences presented in the second paragraph:

- (a) People reacts to things differently because they were raised up in different environments with different cultures.
- (b) They feel different emotions because they have felt this emotional happiness or sadness before.
- (c) They think what is right and what is wrong because they have learned from past experiences.
- (d) They react to different things because they experienced things that please them and the things that displease them.
- (e) They behave in certain ways because they want to design their way of living into what they have admired from other people's lives.

Most of these sentences have the same structure (primary clause with hypotactic enhancement with a causal-conditional clause indicating reason), which shows the writer's difficulty in using varied sentence structures and nominalizations, unlike the writer of essay 1 who uses cohesive causal connectors and other causal expressions. These differences help make the two essays very distinct in terms of clause-combining strategies and connector use.

Lexical Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976) specify five types of cohesive ties: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical. Lexical cohesion refers to the continuity established in a text by the choice of lexical items (Halliday 1994) and involves relations between these items. Lexical cohesion occurs through "the selection of items that are related in some way to those that have gone before" (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 570). The primary types of lexical relations are *repetition*, *synonymy*, *hyponymy*, and *meronymy*. *Repetition* of the same lexical item is the most common type of lexical cohesion and refers to the choice of a word that is associated with a previous one or the use of keywords in a longer text. It is important to mention that it is not necessary for a lexical item to be in the same morphological form to be accepted as repeated. Words such as *important* and *importance* are considered the same item, even though they have different morphological forms. *Synonymy* occurs when a lexical item is synonymous with a preceding one. *Hyponymy* is the type of lexical relation in which "the first lexical item represents a class of thing and

the second either (i) a superclass or a subclass or (ii) another class at the same level of classification” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 574). *Meronymy* refers to the lexical relation in which the relationship between two terms is one of ‘part-whole’ or ‘whole-part’. The general sense of hyponymy is ‘be a kind of’ while meronymy is ‘be a part of’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). The analysis of lexical relations will show the lexical choices students are making in their texts.

Analysis of Lexical Cohesion

Both writers used lexical cohesion strategies in their essays. However, the writer of essay 1 utilized a different approach to repetition when compared to the writer of essay 2. Essay 1 repeated some of the same lexical item, but using different morphological forms. For example, the idea of “comparing” is realized in items like “comparing” and “comparison; the idea of “different” is realized in forms like “differs”, and “different”. Table 5 contain several cases of repetition, the main resource for lexical cohesion.

Table 5 – Repetition in 1st and 3rd paragraphs of Essay 1

1st paragraph	
<i>Lexical item and paragraph placement</i>	<i>Repeated lexical item and paragraph placement</i>
...explanation for any human action is the “concept of culture .” (3 rd sentence)	understand the meaning of culture (4 th sentence)
...explanation for any human action is the “ concept of culture .” (3 rd sentence)	one can see the force behind the concept of culture in shaping people’s lives. (5 th sentence)
... but through the comparison of two different groups of people hopefully one can better understand the meaning of culture. (4 th sentence)	By comparing Vietnam and the United States, two very contrasting nations (5 th sentence)
3rd paragraph	
of different education methods (last sentence of 2 nd paragraph)	people to be different in their dress styles. (1 st sentence of 3 rd paragraph)
One has to dress properly (4 th sentence)	Americans have to dress so well to go to sleep (5 th sentence)
Their two ways of thinking differ as a result of different education methods. (last sentence of 2 nd paragraph)	The way that the Vietnamese and American people dress is very much determined by their ways of thinking . (last sentence of 3 rd paragraph)

Table 6 – Repetition in 4th paragraph of Essay 1

4th paragraph	
<i>Lexical item and paragraph placement</i>	<i>Repeated lexical item and paragraph placement</i>
One can also see how culture causes people to be different in their dress styles (<i>1st sentence of 3rd paragraph</i>)	A very important factor which is influenced by culture is marriage (<i>first sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)
A very important factor which is influenced by culture is marriage (<i>1st sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)	play an important role in their children's marriage . (<i>4th sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)
The Vietnamese people place an emphasis on parents' approval (<i>4th sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)	and therefore the parents play an important role in their children's marriage (<i>4th sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)
Sometimes they go through this process without consulting their parents (<i>8th sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)	Very often, they would go to places like Reno to marry quickly and have no second thoughts about what their parents (<i>9th sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)
Their two ways of thinking differ as a result of different education methods. (<i>last sentence of 2nd paragraph</i>)	Again, the differences are results of different ways of thinking . (<i>last sentence of 4th paragraph</i>)

What is most striking about this analysis is the writer's use of lexical cohesion as an organizational and structural resource. For instance, the lexical items "different" (or its variation as a verb "differ" or a noun "differences") and "result" (or the plural form "results") are used in paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5 (shown in Tables 5, 6, and 7) consistently. The use of such words is not surprising because the essay is about differences between two countries, Vietnam and the United States and about the causes of such differences.

In terms of lexical cohesion, the most interesting paragraph in this essay is the last (Table 7). In the first sentence of each paragraph, the writer introduces the topic of the paragraph, which is then repeated in the first paragraph of the conclusion. The other lexical items repeated throughout the essay are again used in the first sentence of the conclusion, "differences" and "results": *The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles, and marriage are results of the way they were raised.*

Table 7 – Repetition in 5th paragraph (Conclusion) of Essay 1

5th paragraph (Conclusion)	
<i>Lexical item and paragraph placement</i>	<i>Repeated lexical item and paragraph placement</i>
Again, the differences are results of different ways of thinking. <i>(last sentence of 4th paragraph)</i>	The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles, and marriage are results of the way they were raised. <i>(1st sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>
By comparing Vietnam and the United States , two very contrasting nations <i>(last sentence of 1st paragraph)</i>	The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles, and marriage are results of the way they were raised. <i>(1st sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>
In terms of education , the similarities between the two countries are few. <i>(1st sentence of 2nd paragraph)</i>	The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education , dress styles, and marriage are results of the way they were raised. <i>(1st sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>
One can also see how culture causes people to be different in their dress styles . <i>(1st sentence of 3rd paragraph)</i>	The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles , and marriage are results of the way they were raised. <i>(1st sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>
A very important factor which is influenced by culture is marriage . <i>(1st sentence of 4th paragraph)</i>	The differences between Vietnam and the United States in such areas as education, dress styles, and marriage are results of the way they were raised. <i>(1st sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>
Their different behaviors can be traced back as early as their first education <i>(3rd sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>	They are all born being the same, but because they are taught different sets of rules, their attitudes and responses to things in life are different . <i>(4th sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i> A Vietnamese person would not be so unless he behaves in certain ways. <i>(5th sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>
He can become as American <i>(last sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>	as an American by birth as long as he is educated like an American . <i>(last sentence of 5th paragraph: conclusion)</i>

In addition, this writer uses the resource of *synonymy*, *hyponymy* (specific-general), and *meronymy* (part-whole). These resources refer to the choice of words that are associated with previous words in a text.

Table 8 contains examples of these language choices. The first column identifies the type of lexical cohesion, either synonymy, hyponymy, or meronymy. The second column specifies the lexical item(s) the first time they appear in the text. The third column shows the lexical items that are associated with the items shown in the second column.

The following examples of identity *these events*, *this idea*, *such indiscreet action*, *this process* are clear examples of synonymy. The reference devices “these,” “this,” and “such” help us see the relationship of identity; these reference markers refer back to several clauses or specific lexical items introduced in previous sentences. The lexical item *to sleep* is an example of a synonym in a narrower sense, where the items

Table 8 – Synonymy: Identity (of reference), Hyponymy (specific-general), and Meronymy (part-whole) in Essay 1

Synonymy: Identity (of reference)	Lexical Item	Synonymous lexical item (identity – of reference)
	... “the same poignant life experiences, such as birth, helplessness, illness, old age, and death, ”	these events
	the best explanation for any human action is the “ concept of culture ”	This idea
	By comparing Vietnam and the United States , two very contrasting nations	In terms of education, the similarities between the two countries are few
	Their two ways of thinking differ as a result of different education methods.	<i>(These lexical items refer to the whole paragraph, which is describing these two ways of thinking.)</i>
	pyjamas is worn at night and to bed only	have to dress so well to go to sleep
	some Americans go to the opposite extreme and not wear anything at all.	Such indiscreet action
	They meet someone they like, fall in love, and get married	Sometimes they go through this process
Hyponymy (specific-general)	Lexical item	Cases of hyponymy (specific-general)
	two very contrasting nations	By comparing Vietnam and the United States ,
	it is acceptable to wear clothes	similar to pyjamas out in the street
Meronymy (part-whole)	Lexical item	Cases of meronymy (part-whole)
	By comparing Vietnam and the United States, two very contrasting nations	the comparison of two different groups of people hopefully one can better understand the meaning of culture.
	with the lack of technology	use of machines

are related in some way (Halliday 1994). Two examples of hyponymy (specific-general) are used where the writer introduces the specific terms then refers to them by using a more general term (as is the case of *Vietnam and the United States* and *nation*). Meronymy occurs when the relationship between two terms is one of part-whole, such as in *groups of people* and *nations*; *groups of people* would be part of *nations*.

Table 9 – Forms of Lexical Cohesion - Essay 2

Repetition	Lexical item and paragraph placement	Repeated lexical item and paragraph placement
	Kluckhohn explained the differences and similarities among the world's peoples (1 st sentence of 1 st paragraph)	Kluckhohn has a strong point in viewing human's culture (1 st sentence of 2 nd paragraph)
	Kluckhohn explained the differences and similarities among the world's peoples by (1 st sentence of 1 st paragraph)	taking different life examples of different cultured people and compared them (1 st sentence of 1 st paragraph)
	he brought up several questions	These questions were served as guides,
	They also served as attraction to the readers who are curious about different people from another culture . (4 th sentence of 1 st paragraph)	Then he went on to compare people from different cultures in his examples. (5 th sentence of 1 st paragraph)
	These questions were served as guides, which led on to the examples . (3 rd sentence of 1 st paragraph)	Then he went on to compare people from different cultures in his examples . (5 th sentence of 1 st paragraph)
	Over in Hong Kong, students go to school for seven hours and then they would go home (2 nd sentence of 3 rd paragraph)	But yet, the students would accept the homeworks assignments (4 th sentence of 3 rd paragraph)
	spend another seven or eight hours on homeworks . (2 nd sentence of 3 rd paragraph)	The school systems really forces you to study and do your homework to stay up with the rest of the class. (3 rd sentence of 3 rd paragraph) But yet, the students would accept the homeworks assignments without complaining because they are use to doing so much homeworks and taking the pressure (4 th sentence of 3 rd paragraph) But as for the United States, if the teacher would give a little more homework or even a quiz, the students would complain so much that you wouldn't believe. (5 th sentence of 3 rd paragraph)
Synonymy	Hyponymy (specific-general)	
	They feel different emotions because	they have felt this emotional happiness or sadness before.

Essay 2 also utilizes repetition as a lexical cohesion resource but in a different way compared to essay 1. In terms of lexical cohesion strategies, the writer of essay 1 utilized repetition of the same lexical items, but using different morphological forms. The following table, Table 9, shows the lexical cohesion relations used by the writer of essay 2.

The writer of essay 2 repeats the same lexical item more often, which makes the essay repetitive. Essay 1 makes greater use of lexical relations than Essay 2. Thus, we can see the different resources used by these two writers. Even though the type of cohesion relation was the same, repetition, the use of different morphological forms referring to the same idea in essay 1 helped the writer to realize a more effective essay. We can see the repetition of the same lexical item *questions*, *people*, *culture*, *examples*, and *homework*. Another important cohesion relation is hyponymy, used between the lexical items *emotions* and *emotional happiness or sadness*.

As can be seen, the writers of these two essays have used the textual resources of thematic choices, clause-combining strategies and lexical cohesion differently. The writer of Essay 1 talked about groups instead of individuals, found mainly in Theme position. Such thematic choices enabled him to construct a text that is more objective. In addition, the choices of textual Themes contributed to a successful text organization.

Ideational Resources

Ideational Metaphor: Nominalization and Abstractions

Ideational metaphor refers to the “transference of meaning from one kind of element to another kind” (Martin & Rose 2003: 104). According to Halliday (1994), speakers of a language recognize “typical ways of saying things” as well as other possibilities which can be used by a speaker or writer. Typical patterns of wording is what Halliday calls congruent. The most common change in meaning is from processes (verbs) where people and concrete things are included to relations between abstract things. In other words, other elements in the grammar

are presented as entities,. This change enables expansion of meaning so that more information can be added, such as numbers, descriptions, and classifications (Martin & Rose 2003). Nominalizations are the most common form of ideational metaphor. Abstract concepts are another kind of ideational metaphor. Some examples are words such as *inflation*, *metafunction*, *gene*, *offense*, *applications*, *violation*, *issue*, *question*, *letter*, *class*, *part*, *kind*, *manner* (from Martin & Rose 2003).

Analysis of Ideational Resources: Nominalization and Abstractions as Ideational Metaphor

Nominalizations and abstract concepts are the main ideational resources utilized by the more successful writer. Some nominalizations were also used by the less successful writer. Taking the following clause from essay 1 as an example: “One cannot clearly define this idea, but through the comparison of two different groups of people hopefully one can better understand the meaning of culture.” The noun “idea” is an abstract term. The use of the nominalization *comparison* allows for the expansion of the nominalization with a prepositional phrase added to it, “of two different groups of people”. The writer is able then to add more information to the nominalization and use a complex nominal group “the comparison of two different groups of people”. Actually, when considering the preposition “through” and the nominal group “the comparison of two different groups of people” we find another kind of ideational metaphor that indicates means. Another nominalization, “meaning,” is used and is expanded by “of culture”, added as more information about what *meaning* the author is referring to. A more congruent way of saying this would be in other words, “one can better understand what culture means by comparing two groups of people.”

In “similarities between the two countries,” “similarities” is a nominalized term from the adjective “similar”. Here we also see the nominalization being expanded by a prepositional phrase, “between the two countries.” Other examples of nominalizations being modified by prepositional phrases are “lack of technology” and “the use of machines.” Another example of abstractions is in the complex nominal group “the force behind the concept of culture in shaping people’s lives.” Here “force” is an abstraction that is also being expanded

with a prepositional phrase adding information to it, “behind the concept of culture in shaping people’s lives,” where “concept” is also an abstraction. The abstractions “method” and “sacrifice” are also expanded. Both abstractions are followed by embedded clauses that add information to them: “the method in which this is achieved” and “a sacrifice that they should lead a hard life.”

The last examples of ideational metaphors occur in the following sentences:

Their two ways of thinking differ as a result of different educational methods.

Again, the differences are results of different ways of thinking.

In both cases, the nominalizations “a result of” and “results of” are being expanded by other nominal groups, “different educational methods” and “different ways of thinking.” These nominalizations are metaphorical ways of showing a causal relationship.

Three examples of the use of nominalizations were found in essay 2 in the following sentences:

1. They also served as attraction to the readers who are curious about different people from another culture.
2. I agree with his definition of culture –
3. Raising up in different culture is going to effect the developments of people’s behaviors, feelings, personalities, and thinkings.

In these sentences, “attraction,” “definition,” and “developments” are nominalized terms. “Attraction” is an example of an infelicitous use, but the other two cases of nominalizations seem appropriate. This writer seems to be starting to develop more academic ways of representations.

In short, these two essays have utilized ideational resources in different ways. Several cases of nominalization and abstraction were found in essay 1 while two cases of nominalization were present in essay 2. The next section focuses on the area of interpersonal meanings.

Interpersonal Resources

Interpersonal Metaphors of Modality

As previously mentioned, interpersonal meanings express the ways of instituting relationships with others. An area of the grammar that realizes interpersonal meaning is modality. Modality refers to a speaker or writer's judgment of probabilities or obligations entailed in what they are stating (Halliday 1994). Writers have many ways in the grammar to express their opinions. In general, metaphor happens when a lexical item (or items) that usually means something turns out meaning something different. For instance, interpersonal metaphors of the expression "I believe" might be "it is obvious that...", "it stands to reason that...", "the conclusion can be hardly avoided that..." among others (Halliday 1994: 355). According to Halliday, modality corresponds to the speaker's perspective. He explains,

Speakers being what we are, however, we like to give prominence to our point of view; and the most effective way of doing that is to dress it up as if it was this that constituted the assertion ('explicit' I think...) – with the further possibility of making it appear as if it was not our point of view at all ('explicit objective' it's likely that...) (Halliday 1994: 362)

By utilizing explicit objective metaphorical expressions, speakers use the grammar to mask their opinions. In the analysis we will see examples of both a more explicit subjective representation, such as "I believe," and of explicit objective expressions, such as "it is common..."

Analysis of Interpersonal Resources: Expressing Judgment and Modality

The interpersonal resources utilized in Essay 1 are expressions of judgment by the writer. The construction "it is + adjective expressing judgment", as in "it is incredible," "it is acceptable," "it is incomprehensible," is used in this essay to make judgments, which helps the writer to present his viewpoint more objectively. An explicit

objective construction of likelihood, “it is most common” indicates an impersonal judgment. The use of these expressions also helps the writer to detach himself from these judgments. For instance, he is talking about “acceptability,” incomprehensibility” and not about what he thinks or believes or they (Vietnamese or Americans) think or believe. These are known as interpersonal metaphors in Halliday’s framework. The focus changes from the person giving the opinion or judgment, for instance in an “I think” kind of clause where the identity of the person is certain.

Other resources also help this writer construct impersonality, such as the use of the generalized personal pronoun “one” with the modal “can,” such as in “One *cannot* clearly define...,” “One *can* better understand...,” and “One *can* see...” The use of the phrase “one can” with a mental process shows a more impersonal style versus the more personal use of “I believe” or “I know”. The other uses of this modal are common ways of showing ability (see attachment 6).

The writer of essay 2 uses mental processes as an explicit subjective way of showing probability in the following sentences:

- *I would imagine* the average time that an American student would spend to do their homework is maybe three hours per day.
- *I think that* this also has a lot to do with the parents of the students

In the following sentence, the use of the pronoun “you” shows the more personal character the writer is applying in his essay, referring to the reader as *you*, commonly seen in ELL’ essays, along with expressions such as *yes, no*, and exclamations and questions directly intended for the reader: “But as for the United States, if the teacher *would* give a little more homework or even a quiz, the students *would* complain so much that **you** *wouldn’t* believe.” The use of an introductory phrase calling attention to the Theme of the sentence is another characteristic found in this essay, as in the following clause: “Naturally, **the students** when **they** grow up would be more inward and coping the behavior of their parents.” Through the thematic choice “naturally” this writer is making a judgment and trying to be more objective. This choice seems to be

an attempt towards a more academic way of expressing judgment. The interpersonal resources utilized in these two essays differ in the ways that judgment is expressed. While essay 1 uses resources that create impersonality, essay 2 uses mental processes and pronouns referring to the reader, setting up a more subjective and involved style.

Grammatical Resources Functional for Expository Writing

The focus of the analysis is some grammatical resources that are functional for the expository essay (see Table 10).

Table 10 – Functional features for expository writing

1. Textual Resources	Thematic choices and development Clause-combining strategies (connectors) Lexical cohesion
2. Interpersonal resources	Interpersonal metaphors of modality
3. Ideational resources	Nominalization and abstractions as ideational metaphors

Implications for Educational Practice

The close examination of these essays illustrates how English language learners' skills can be assessed on a number of dimensions. The analysis illustrated the language choices that construed the sophistication of essay 1 and the less sophisticated style of essay 2. Different discursive features interact with one another to make up the products which were in this case used as an evaluation measure of students' preparedness for college English courses. The configuration of grammatical features, including textual resources and interpersonal and ideational metaphors, make up the detached style of essay 1 and the more personal style of essay 2. It is clear that the style of essay 1 was more highly valued in the academic context for which it was written.

The analysis shows how the less successful writer is using different resources from the more successful writer. Effective teaching starts at what students already know but should move beyond what they can

do to ways that are valued in academic environments. For instance, by looking at Theme selection, a teacher can help students move beyond pronominal choices and achieve a more impersonal style by utilizing expressions such as “*one*” or “*it is* + adjective expressing judgment.”

Text analysis techniques offer many advantages for teaching. They help us reach an understanding of language variation within different situations and how variation may occur in predictable ways. An analysis of more and less successful examples of a genre could illuminate the planning of language programs. Such analysis can be used to diagnose areas needing attention in students’ writing, which can then be used to make more informed planning decisions and pedagogical applications. Students can then develop their linguistic repertoires for expressing textual, ideational, and interpersonal meanings and organizing and structuring texts.

SFL is an approach that can assist applied linguists in addressing the issues described. Many researchers have shown how SFL can inform language teaching (e.g. de Oliveira 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Fang & Schleppegrell 2008; Montemayor-Borsinger 2009). By applying an SFL approach, we can better understand how grammatical and lexical choices provide the means for students to express their intended meanings. Analysis of texts using the SFL framework can reveal what is effective for a particular purpose within a specific context of situation. The linguistic features of texts are particularly important for students who are getting ready to go to college.

If ELLs are expected to complete English entrance exam requirements which require a high level of English proficiency and accuracy, then high school ESL instructors must consider this when planning to focus on grammar in their classes. According to Harklau, Losey & Siegal (1999: 8), “the issue of how nonnative language features are to be interpreted is crucial because such features frequently form the basis for placement in and exit from mandatory writing coursework.” Expository essays very often become evaluation measures, but expectations for this genre are often not explicitly described in linguistic terms. In addition, approaches to teaching grammar are more likely to emphasize language structures rather than language as a resource for making meanings.

Experience with writing texts in different genres is critical for students. Many educational traditions, following an overemphasis on students' expression of their ideas, assume that knowledge of writing will automatically be developed without explicit attention to linguistic resources. SFL makes explicit the interrelationships between clause-level grammar, text structure, and social situations. An SFL approach can add to current practices in composition studies.

Recebido em setembro de 2010

Aprovado em agosto de 2014

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