

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the researcher will first encapsulate previous researches on the coherence in teaching English writing. Then, the related literature on the subject of translation and writing will be introduced. Finally, the author will proceed to discuss the studies on coherence and writing, especially on students' problem in this aspect.

2.1 Coherence in Teaching Writing

The trend of teaching English writing has been changing from a form-dominated approach to a process-oriented one in the past (Raimes, 1993). The former features the grammatical and structural correctness in final written product, while the latter features the process of planning, rehearsing, writing content, revising and feedback. In 1960s, grammatical accuracy was so dominant that the wholeness or the readability of the writing was overlooked in writing classroom (Widdowson, 1978; Zamel, 1982). The emphasis was put on sentence drills, including fill-ins, substitution, transformation, and completion (O'Hare, 1973; Pack & Henrichsen, 1980). In 1970s, the process-oriented approach was then administered in the writing classroom (Emig, 1971; Zamel, 1976). The instruction was characterized by the use of journals (Peyton, 1990; Spack & Sadow, 1983), invention strategies (Spack, 1984), peer collaboration (Bruffee, 1984; Long & Porter, 1985), revision (Hall, 1990), and the

emphasis on content rather than form (Raimes, 1983; Zamel, 1976, 1982, 1983). Ideas, revisions and feedback in writing process received more attention than grammar aspects and sentence patterns. This trend shift in teaching writing was supported by Cumming (1989), Friedlander (1990), Hall (1990), Jones (1982, 1985), Jones and Tetroe (1987), Krapels (1990), and Raimes (1985, 1987).

Currently, process-oriented approach is still adopted in Taiwan in the teaching of English writing (Hsu, 1996). Students follow the five steps: prewriting, organizing, writing, evaluating, and revising (Hsu, 1996). Basing on the theory of this approach, teachers have guided students to write topic sentences or outlines and then develop them into paragraphs. However, students are found be weak in structuring and organizing compositions although the content has been highlighted in process-oriented approach. Accordingly, their writings are incomprehensible for readers because coherence is absent in their texts. The lack of coherence in writing originates from the unawareness of the difference between Chinese and English thinking patterns (Kaplan, 1966). The insufficiency of process-oriented approach has emerged.

2.2 Translation and Writing

Chinese learners are found to have actually done a direct literal translation from Chinese to English while writing English compositions, which results in the lack of coherence and unity (Feng, 1995; Lay, 1983). The incoherence in English paragraphs comes from the deeply rooted influence of Chinese culture and Chinese thinking patterns in learners' mind. Feng (1995) found that most Chinese students first

composed their ideas in Chinese and then translated them into English, and “students’ English was not good enough for them to express freely their ideas; therefore, when they wrote, Chinese came out more spontaneously” (p. 298). They intuitively write down what's in their mind without managing to arrange their ideas systematically (Uzawa, 1994). As a result, L2 writers are found to lack the knowledge of conventions of L2 written products and the practice in generating ideas and organizing them in L2 (Raimes, 1987). Their first language interference brings about their writing deficiencies (Banathy, 1996; Jakobovits, 1970; Lado, 1975; Politzer, 1968).

Furthermore, while doing the writing, L2 learners are usually found to use L1 or translation to compensate for their deficiency in vocabulary use (Cumming, 1989; Uzawa & Cumming, 1989). This is because learners’ vocabulary competence level of Chinese language is superior to that of English. The additional burden from the force of using a language beyond learners’ competence level is then alleviated by the translation (Chang & Kao, 1995).

However, L2 learners’ native language has a great influence on their L2 writing both positively and negatively (Deng, 1992). Some researchers have compared L2 learners’ L1 and L2 composing processes (Cumming, 1989; Raimes, 1987; Sommers, 1980; Zamel, 1983) and found frequent parallels between L1 and L2 writing processes. For instance, Jones and Tetroe (1987) found “strong, direct data for the transfer of first language skill to second language” (p. 39) in their five Venezuelan students' writing. Concerning Chinese students’ English writing, some investigations have shown writers' inclination to translate main points into English to have a stronger connection with various ideas in their essays (Lay, 1982, 1983). Mohan and Lo (1985)

also claimed that L2 writers' organization ability in native language could enhance their L2 writing ability. As Spack (1984) mentioned, with the support of translation, learners tend to link words and sentences more meaningfully in writing. Meanwhile, Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) observed that students produce better L2 compositions via translation from L1 than by writing in L2 directly. This phenomenon reveals that L2 writers' semantic knowledge of L1 enhances their ability to generate a more clear and concise discourse in the second language (Hall, 1990). As Cumming (1989) commented, students' first language facilitated their L2 writing. In her study, she referred that students' L1 is shown to be "an important resource in their continual processes of decision making while writing" (p. 128). They benefit rather than suffer from the transformation of L1 discourse structure.

Still, students' L2 writing processes have scarcely been analyzed in comparison with their translation processes (Uzawa, 1996); empirical data on translation in the framing of L2 language learning are not enough. Lado (1988) stated that "various uses of translation in English as a second language are justified or even desirable . . . Without understanding there can be little learning and less assimilation. Furthermore, it is sometimes desirable to ask the learners to translate something in order to show how differently it is expressed in the two languages and to focus on what must be learned" (p. 223). Moreover, Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) referred that low-level writers are found to benefit from the process of translation much more than high-level ones in content, organization and style. This indicates that translation exercise can particularly help beginners construct a more comprehensive passage because they can depend on their L1 assets to ensure their writing quality.

According to what is mentioned above, through the practice of translation, students are able to recognize the global errors in their compositions and perceive the different developments and distinct thinking patterns between two languages. The practice can be used to present L2 “not as the acquisition of new knowledge and experience, but as an extension or alternative realization of what the learner already knows” (Widdowson, 1979, p. 111). Learners are asked to pay attention to grammar, syntax, register, and so on, and they would compose some lines that they do not use in their speaking (Uzama, 1994). As Tudor (1987) stated, learners are aware of the inter-lingual communication problems via translation in that it is a prominently communicative activity. It functions as a communicative process of conveying messages across linguistic and cultural barrier (Tudor, 1984). It also serves to sharpen students’ perception about the two languages and improve their communicative appropriateness in L2 (Titford, 1983). Since unskilled learners encounter more communicative problems in writing than skilled learners (Raimes, 1985), the effect would be especially apparent in unskilled ones' compositions.

However, although positive effects of translation practice have been claimed in previous studies, the transfer of the concept of English writing via Chinese-English translation is not ensured because Chinese and English feature very different rhetorical patterns. In other words, it is still unknown whether Chinese-English translation will help learner sharpen their perceptions of English language, achieve their communicative purposes, or promote their coherent writing as a whole.

2.3 Coherence problems

Pedagogical concerns on the development of coherence in students' writing constitute a wide-ranging area of discussion and inquiry, across both first-language and second-language contexts (e.g., Abraham, 1995; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Clanchy & Ballard, 1991; Connor, 1990; Connor & Farmer, 1990; Connor & Johns, 1990; Flower et al., 1990; Freeman, Pringle, & Yalden, 1983; Hamp-Lyon, 1991; Kroll, 1990; Lautamatti, 1990; Leki, 1991; Olson, Torrance, & Hildyard, 1985; Raimes, 1991; Robinson, 1988; Silva, 1993; Swales & Feak, 1994;). To achieve coherence in writing, writers have to neatly organize their conceptual relations underlying the surface text. As Carrell (1982) stated, even though cohesion helps construct the surface structure of a text, the presence of cohesive items does not contribute to the holistic expression of a language. It is the writer's perception of composing the underlying semantic meaning that makes a text coherent and show the stretch of a language (Baker, 1992).

However, learners are found to remain on the same level and make no significant progress in writing for they mostly keep an eye on sentence level correctness, and fail to write a coherent composition to portray their ideas. Perl's (1980) study indicated that learners' main problem is that they focus their concerns on correctness and form and thus fail to go beyond the surface in the composing process. The accuracy of sentence rather than the organization of discourse gains abundant attention from them (Mohan & Lo, 1985). Unskilled learners are particularly found to be more concerned with lexicon and sentence level problems (Sommers, 1980). Furthermore, Johns (1984) mentioned that in many countries, including his own, the sentence was regarded as the principal unit for language: the concept had strongly affected English language

learning; Chinese L2 learners and teachers did not realize the gap between a sentence and the whole text, failing to utilize some features to provide links between sentences and achieve coherence in a text. According to his study, even experienced Chinese teachers did not do well in composing text beyond sentence level. As Allison, Varghese, and Mei (1999) noted, coherence problem in students' writing has much to do with their failing to express their ideas while they are developing their paragraphs. Even in the beginning step of developing the second sentence of a paragraph, they fail to make good use of the second sentence to provide supportive information about the paragraph (Reid, 1996). At this point, Zamel (1982) purported that "writing is a process through which meaning is created . . . Methods that emphasize form and correctness ignore how ideas get explored through writing and fail to teach students that writing is essentially a process of discovery"(p.195). All the previously mentioned problems come from students' insufficient knowledge of English discourse and ignorance of coherence. Therefore, teachers have to help change students' nonlinear way of L2 writing (Emig, 1971) so that they can move a step further in writing.

To promote students' writing, it is necessary to instruct them about the features of text structure. Still, the features, such as cohesive devices, are particularly difficult for learners to comprehend (Arapoff, 1968; Carrell, 1982; Connor, 1984). This has something to do with the characteristic of Chinese language. It is suggested that Chinese is more paratactic than English, and consequently makes less use of connectors (Cheng, 1985; Wang & Wang, 1982). In test of written English, Reid (1992) found that Arab, Chinese, and Spanish learners considered that among

propositions, coordinate conjunctions, subordinate conjunctions, and pronouns, the last item is the only category of lexical repetition. Besides, Jacob (1982) reported that second language writers, even high proficiency L2 ones, tend to employ a style by which they maintain internal structure through repetition of key ideas but lose coherence by getting off the point. This is because repetition is frequently applied as a safe device to keep on the right track while L2 writers are organizing their main ideas and supporting statement. The need to investigate whether writers have problems using cohesive markers and lexical repetition in particular to achieve coherence is claimed (Hoey, 1991). Teachers have to perceive obstacles in students' writing and examine the intangible process, not to evaluate the tangible product (Hairston, 1982). In other words, the training of coherence in paragraphs should be done in the teaching of writing.

As far as lexical cohesion is concerned, this device predominates native-speaker discourse (Witt & Faigley, 1984), while this type of cohesion is not so common in Chinese students' writing (Connor, 1984). Teaching vocabulary and phrases separately without transmitting the items into a whole semantically correspondent text in ESL classroom results in the inadequacy of lexical cohesion; such a kind of global type error (see Burt & Kiparsky, 1974) is more difficult to distinguish and to illustrate than local ones (Johns, 1984). When writers inadequately reveal the bridge of the ideas across sentence boundaries, they leave large gaps in logic in the text (Robinson, 1984). As the case stands, they can mostly realize the importance of organization and logical development; however, they just fail to do them (Zamel, 1984). Even though the importance of coherence in writing is highlighted, an often cited problem in students'

writing is a lack of the trait (Holloway, 1981; NAEP, 1977; Shaughnessy, 1977). More specific sequential exercise is needed to help students develop the ability of coherent writing.

Moreover, high-rated ESL writers are found to have better management of cohesive ties than low-rated ones. High-rated writers, as indicated in Witte and Faigley's (1981) study, use dense and explicit cohesive ties, like conjunctive elements, to express linear meanings in the discourse and establish strong bonds between sentences. High frequency of lexical cohesion marks good writers in their expanding and connecting ideas into paragraphs and developing semantically smooth content (Witte & Faigley, 1984). Coherent writing is then more likely to be achieved.

Unskilled ESL writers, however, do not develop lexical, reference, and conjunction devices naturally or precisely in their writing; the communicative purposes of the discourse and the interactive relationships of sentences are unable to encourage the holistic development and comprehension of the discourse. They fail to elaborate concepts through the cohesive devices successfully. Even when examining errors and syntactic features, they tend to ignore the beyond sentence level boundaries. The semantic relation of the elements, which allows sequences of sentences to be understood in a text, is broken (Holliday & Hasan, 1976). Also, in comparison with native speakers, Connor (1984) claimed, ESL learners are not good at using the various lexical cohesive devices. As for further function of coherence, he pronounced that "ESL learners' writing lacked: (1) adequate justification for claim statements, and (2) sufficient linking of concluding statements to preceding subtopics of the problem" (p. 302). Even if it is the rating among native speakers' writing performance,

high-rated writers exhibit more frequent use of lexical collocations than low-rated ones (Witte & Faigley, 1981), who are just like unskilled ESL learners in writing technique.

However, if cohesive ties are applied unwisely in writing, the ties can turn out to be a severe hindrance to the understanding of the text. As Lay (1975) referred, the unclear reference of pronoun was one of the most common errors in Chinese students' writing in coherence. Also in Johns' (1984) study, he showed that cohesive error of reference items was common in Chinese students' writing, personal pronouns in particular causing ambiguous identifications through the paragraph. The ambiguous employment of pronouns or words in sentences, such as *it*, *this*, *that*, and *others*, has hindered the understanding of the text. The lack of specific reference arising from the different Chinese and English language systems causes a lot of trouble identifying the display of meaning. Accordingly, coherence in paragraphs is absent. Johns (1984) also demonstrated that Chinese students overused English cohesive conjuncts, especially additives, e.g., *and*, *or*, *in addition*, and the reoccurring error type of the adversative conjunct was frequent throughout their writing. For native speakers, however, only when a connection or an emphasis is explicitly needed will they employ the overt transition (Singh, 1977). The overuse of conjuncts results from the overt teaching of the device; the error type of the adversative conjuncts comes from the misunderstanding in meaning (Johns, 1984). Since conjuncts are the main signals for changes in discourse, processing difficulties are particularly obvious when this type of device is misused (Hoey, 1979). Readers are confused by the misleading conjoining signals when they try to follow writers' thoughts.

Still, writing quality depends much on coherence level than on cohesion developments. Cohesion in writing underpins the semantic combining between elements in a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976); coherence enables a text to be accepted in a real-world setting and reveals the underlying semantic relations, including the writer's purpose and the reader's knowledge and anticipations (Witte & Faigley, 1984). Coherence beyond sentences allows a text to be appreciated in real settings while cohesion may achieve a small amount of coherence only. That's why frequent use of cohesive items in students' writing does not necessarily help the rising in their writing quality. The coherence problem in student writing requires attention to help students move forward in writing. In fact, teachers in writing class may have stopped conducting further before getting into the level of coherence, partly because ESL materials related to the organization of writing above paragraph level is not enough (Carpenter & Hunter, 1982). Even if it is an advanced ESL writing class, students' awareness of the process of achieving coherence is mostly not observed. That explains why creating a smooth, coherent overall composition has been proved to be a high technique for advanced students to master (Carpenter & Hunter, 1982).

It seems that few studies have discussed how to help learners acquire coherence in English writing, even though L2 writing difficulties in coherence have extensively been claimed. Although transformation of L1 into L2 has been found to help generate a more comprehensible L2 writing, there is little information available on how translation would promote learners' coherent writing. It is hoped that the findings of this present study would suggest a effective way for ESL teachers to help students acquire coherent writing.

2.4 Research Hypotheses

This study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Chinese-English paragraph translation practice in participants' acquiring the coherence expertise. Since there is no previous study testing the effectiveness of Chinese-English translation in this aspect, four null hypotheses are addressed as follows and these hypotheses are tested in this present study.

1. Participants would not perform better in coherent writing in post-test than in pre-test compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.
2. Participants would not better apply cohesive devices in compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.
3. Participants would not perform a better job in revising incoherent parts of compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.
4. Participants would not better apply cohesive devices to promote writing coherence while revising their compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.