

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of four sections: (1) the major findings and discussion; (2) the pedagogical implications; (3) the limitations for this present study; (4) suggestions for further studies.

5.1 Findings and Discussion

The present study aims to explore the effectiveness of Chinese-English paragraph translation in coherent writing. The results will serve to test the four hypotheses of this study.

5.1.1 Coherence in Post-test

As shown in Table 4.2, the progress is significant ($t = -8.418, p < .01$) in coherence learning in post-test compositions. The results reject the first research hypothesis: participants would not perform better in coherent writing in post-test than in pre-test compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.

This finding is consistent with Titford's (1983) statement that translation exercises can sharpen learners' perceptions about their native and second languages and thus advance their communicative appropriateness in L2. The translation practice functions as a communicative process of conveying messages across linguistic barrier

(Tudor, 1984). Through the sequential exercises, learners know when and how to express their ideas and thus develop the ability of coherent writing (Zamel, 1984). Furthermore, with the reference to the word bank in each exercise, they could be more likely to focus their attention beyond lexical or sentence level. It would be more possible for them to smoothly link the sentences, and regard each exercise as a whole paragraph. That is, they would be more capable of using the cohesive devices and arranging the lexical elements appropriately in English writing and then generating a coherent paragraph in post-test. Therefore, the finding in this study lends support to the assumption that the Chinese-English translation exercises help promote participants' coherent writing expertise.

5.1.2 Cohesive Devices in Post-test

As shown in Table 4.5, participants use an average of 25.2 cohesive devices in the post-test while they apply 19.2 ones in the pre-test. In comparison, the participants use a larger number of cohesive devices in post-test than in pre-test as a whole. Although frequent use of cohesive devices does not necessarily contribute to coherent writing (Farghal, 1992), the overall performance in the post-test suggests that the increased employment of cohesive devices actually enhances writing quality rather than hinders the writing coherence. The finding rejects the second research hypothesis: participants would not better apply cohesive devices in compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.

Table 4.5 shows that, on average, 1.3 (3.8-2.5) more reference items are applied in each post-test composition than in pre-test one. Although Lay (1975) and John

(1984) claimed that the improper or ambiguous use of reference items was common in Chinese students' writing, which contributes to incoherence in expressing their ideas, the increased number of reference items in post-test does not cause incoherence in writing discourse. In fact, participants could skillfully use reference ties to promote coherence rather than randomly apply the devices and cripple readability.

Meanwhile, although Singh (1977) stated that only when a connection is clearly needed will native speakers employ conjunctions, Hoey (1979) stated that misused conjunctions result in great processing difficulties because of conjunctions being the main signals for changes in discourse, and John (1984) advocated that Chinese students tend to overuse conjunctions in writing, the progress in coherence learning in post-test implies that the increased mean ($3.6 - 2.2 = 1.4$) of conjunctions does not lead to incoherence. Students actually learn to better apply the devices to achieve coherent writing.

Also, according to Table 4.6, each post-test composition contains an average of 17.7 lexical cohesive ties while each pre-test composition includes 14.4 ones. This implies that after doing the Chinese-English paragraph translation practice, participants could compose a composition with more lexical cohesion in writing. The finding is consistent with Witte and Faigley's (1984) claim that good writers are also characterized by using high frequency of lexical cohesion to expand and connect ideas to compose semantically fluent writing.

As for lexical collocation, the increased use of this device shown in Table 4.6 is in line with Witte and Faigley's (1981) statement that high-rated writers are inclined to manifest a more frequent use of lexical collocation than low-rated ones. Although

some compositions ranking "fair to poor" level may contain even more collocations than higher-level compositions, collocations in low-rated compositions are not tactfully used to achieve coherent writing.

As mentioned in this section, participants are proved to apply cohesive devices more tactfully to promote writing coherence after doing the Chinese-English translation practice. They seem to acquire the cohesive device strategy in the process of doing the language translation practice. The correction done in the classroom actually enhances their learning. It ensures their acquiring of proper use of the cohesive devices designed in the ten translation exercises. It is likely that they develop better domination over cohesive items in writing. Abundant connecting words are used to join related ideas; smooth transitions and contrasting are made in compositions; holistic smooth flow of the text is receiving concern. This explains why the increased use of cohesive devices does not cause negative effect to their writing, but promote writing coherence. It seems that most of the unskilled learners have acquired the strategy as a basis for achieving coherent writing.

5.1.3 Coherence in Pre-test Revision

As shown in Table 4.8, the progress in coherence learning in pre-test revision compositions is significant ($t = -7.365, p < .01$). The results reject the third research hypothesis: participants would not perform a better job in revising incoherent parts of compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.

The finding corresponds to Titford's (1983) claim that through the translation exercise, students can have better perceptions about their native and second languages,

and they can better express their communicative meaning in L2. After perceiving the different expressive features of the two languages through the translation practice (Lado, 1988), learners can detect their incoherent parts of compositions to exclude global errors and promote readability. Their coherent writing expertise is thus promoted.

One reason could be that through the sequential translation exercises, participants seem to be more capable of having a clear picture of coherent writing. Since the exercises are exclusively devised to help participants acquire coherence, and the content and difficulty level are designed based on the textbook in use, they could possibly absorb English coherence feature in the exercise and acquire the fluent flow of the translated English texture. They may unconsciously perceive the smooth transition or contrast in the paragraph. Therefore, their perceptions about English language are sharpened and communicative function in writing is promoted. That is why they perform a good job in revising incoherent parts of pre-test compositions.

5.1.4 Cohesive Devices in Pre-test Revision

According to Table 4.11, participants use an average of 3.7 (22.9-19.2) more cohesive devices in pre-test revision than in pre-test compositions. Although frequent use of cohesive devices does not necessarily guarantee coherent writing (Farghal, 1992), the overall progress in coherence in pre-test revision suggests that the increased application of cohesive devices does promote writing coherence.

Participants learn to revise the improperly used cohesive items or add new ones to achieve coherence in compositions. The results reject the fourth research hypothesis:

participants would not better apply cohesive devices to promote writing coherence while revising their compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice.

As Lay (1975) and John (1984) claimed that Chinese students tend to use reference items improperly and cause ambiguity in their communicative meaning. And Table 4.11 shows that the means of reference in pre-test and pre-test revision compositions are close, being 2.5 and 2.8 respectively. This implies that participants could use reference more tactfully after doing the translation practice. Even though the means of reference device are close, pre-test revision compositions prove better in coherence than pre-test compositions.

Although Hoey (1979) claimed that misused conjunctions result in great processing difficulties for readers, the increased use ($3.8-2.2=1.6$) of conjunctions does not lower readability because conjunctions are properly used. This suggests that after doing the Chinese-English translation practice, participants can better apply conjunctions to revise their compositions instead of abusing or misusing the device.

Moreover, participants' increased application ($16.2-14.4=1.8$) of lexical cohesion devices in pre-test revision confirms Witt and Faigley's (1984) statement that high-rated writers are characterized by high frequency of lexical cohesion while composing. The progress in coherence indicates that participants become a higher-rated writer in pre-test revision as a whole. They learn to better apply lexical cohesion devices to revising their compositions and promoting coherence.

As mentioned above, participants do better apply cohesive devices to promote writing coherence while revising their compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice. That is, they do acquire appropriate use of the cohesive devices

through the sequential exercises. Since the length of each exercise is not too long and the difficulty level does not go beyond participants' competency, they would automatically pay more attention to coherence aspect while doing the translation; they would not easily be distracted to lexical or grammar aspect. The cohesive devices designed in the exercises would be more likely for them to acquire. Consequently, they would be able to detect their incoherent parts and remove or add cohesive devices to achieve coherence. That is to say, they could better apply the devices to enhancing writing coherence while revising their pre-test writing.

To sum up, after doing the Chinese-English translation practice, participants perform better in coherent writing in post-test than in pre-test compositions. They also revise incoherent parts of compositions in pre-test revision to promote coherence. Their progress in coherent writing is significant. Although frequent use of cohesive items does not necessarily contribute to coherence in writing, and their overuse may even cause failure to fluently transmit meanings (Farghal, 1992), the significant progress in coherence in post-test and pre-test revision compositions suggests that the increased employment of cohesive devices do not result in incoherence. Participants can better apply cohesive devices to promote coherence in writing; they could be better aware of incoherent parts and know how to revise them.

Cohesive devices are by no means the only way to achieve coherence. As Witte and Faigley (1981) claimed, the writer's communicative purpose, the encoding medium, and the receiver's decoding and background knowledge all need further concern in the written discourse; cohesive devices alone are not complete in evaluating writing coherence. However, for unskilled learners in vocational senior

high school, acquiring cohesive devices through Chinese-English translation practice might serve as an easy access to coherent writing.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

This study indicates that EFL learners are able to write a more coherent English composition after acquiring the learning strategies of the cohesive devices through Chinese-English translation practice. Based on the findings of this present study, pedagogical implications are offered for teaching English writing in ESL classrooms.

To begin with, before teenage students become molded in their writing habit, the competency of organizing a coherent writing discourse had better be cultivated as early as possible. The concept of composing a paragraph beyond the sentence level needs emphasis in the writing classroom as well as other features of a good writing. Only by perceiving the significance of coherence in discourse can ESL learners write a meaningful and readable paragraph in writing class.

Second, cohesive devices can function as a basic reference to achieving coherence for unskilled learners, especially junior or senior high EFL learners. Although the employment of cohesive device is not a decisive contribution to a coherent writing, for most unskilled ESL learners, the application of the devices at the current stage could rather effectively promote their coherence in writing. Therefore, writing teachers should introduce the functions of cohesive ties so that students would be aware of the techniques in reading materials and then apply them in writing. Meanwhile, teachers should always check students' coherence competency instead of accentuating sentence level only.

Finally, the researcher suggests teachers design Chinese-English translation exercise in accordance with students' language level, and in the meantime the five categories of cohesive devices are included in translation training sessions. The training in writing class would help students possess a better understanding of cohesive devices and then produce a preferable coherent writing. While doing the exercise, students would exercise their language knowledge to compose the whole paragraph. In the process of correcting errors in their assignments, their improperness in applying words or conjunctions, or stammered flow of expressing the ideas will be clarified as well. Accordingly, coherent writing will be more tangible in uplifting their language proficiency.

5.3 Problems and Limitations

The present study is conducted to measure the effects of Chinese-English translation practice on students' coherence in writing. Three major problems and limitations are listed as follows. First, the corpus is confined to Applied English Section students' writings in Hsin-Chu Commercial Vocational Senior High School and the subjects are quite small. A larger corpus involved would help achieve a higher generalizability of future studies.

Second, the two targeted topics of this study, *English and I* and *Internet and I*, are both expository text type. Whether the same effect could be expected in other text types is still uncertain. Consequently, more text types of topics to be applied in future studies would be more capable of helping students acquire better perceptions about coherence.

The last limitation lies in the reliability of the rating scale on coherence. As referred in 3.3.2.1, an English composition rating scale focusing on coherence is needed. Yet, a reliable and justified scheme is still wanted (Cameron et al., 1995; Moe, 1979). The scoring system adapted from *ESL Composition Profile* (Jacob et al., cited in Hadley, 1993, p. 346) may not lead to wholly objective evaluation of students' writing coherence even if the scoring reliability has been confirmed in this study.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

The present study aims to explore the effects of Chinese-English translation practice on students' coherence in writing. The results have proved a positive effect on students' performance in coherent writing. However, further researches are needed to broadly pinpoint the effects of Chinese-English translation practice.

First, the present study chooses only Applied English Section students in vocational senior high school as the subjects. However, adult learners or students from different schools may achieve different results. It is hoped that future researches will further verify the effects of the translation practice by expanding the diverse groups of subjects, such as junior high schools students, non-vocational senior high schools, or adult learners.

Second, in addition to expository writing, the researcher suggests that various text types be investigated in further researches. Different text types may result in the variance in the effects of implementing Chinese-English paragraph translation practice. Perceiving the variance in different text types, teachers would be able to better manipulate divergent reading materials to convey the functions of cohesive

devices.

Then, an investigation into the coherent writing for different-level unskilled learners is encouraged in further studies. The results may provide writing teachers with more effective ways of designing Chinese-English translation practice for different-level learners.

Finally, in this study, the five cohesion devices are employed in the translation practice to help students acquire the coherence writing expertise. Still, a more efficient way of teaching coherence in writing class is also expected so that unskilled learners can have a more concrete way to achieve their competency in coherent writing.