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[literaturalinguistica@ucsh.cl](mailto:literaturalinguistica@ucsh.cl)

Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez

Chile

Díaz Hormazábal, René

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# Argumentative writing strategies and perceptions of writing in academia by EFL college students

René Díaz Hormazábal\*

## Abstract

This article is a product of the Master's thesis in Anglo-Saxon Linguistics by Professor René Díaz Hormazábal that describes, firstly, a historic overview as to the teaching of writing in English as a foreign language. Finally, the author provides the essential component from his theoretical framework concerning the postulates by Toulmin's Argument Model Structure (1958) in text typology.

**Key words:** Toulmin's Model, claim, ground, warrant, backing, qualifier, rebuttal.

## Resumen

El presente trabajo es un producto de la Tesis de grado de Maestría en Lingüística Anglosajona del Profesor René Díaz Hormazábal, y presenta, en primer lugar, una visión histórica en relación con la enseñanza de la escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera. Finalmente, el autor entrega lo fundamental del marco teórico respecto a los postulados del Modelo Argumentativo de Toulmin (1958) en el contexto de la tipología textual.

**Conceptos clave:** Modelo de Toulmin – aserción – evidencia – garantía – respaldo – calificador modal – reserva.

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\* Chileno. Magíster en Lingüística Anglosajona. rdiaz@ucsh.cl

## Introduction

'Either write something worth reading  
or do something worth writing.'  
Benjamin Franklin

This article is intended to present a brief account on the Master's thesis of the author entitled 'Argumentative Writing Strategies and Perceptions of Writing in Academia by EFL College students'. The research study within the thesis project aimed at determining whether the development of argumentative writing by students at college level involved more than the correct use of language rules. The argument structure elements to be produced by the students in their written argumentative essays after instruction were measured by the Toulmin's Model (1958) of argument analysis. The study project also focused on examining students' views of academic writing in university environments, for example, their social motive to write, audience awareness, and sense of belonging to academia.

It was hypothesized that explicit instruction on academic English writing strategies would somehow improve students' writing skills in that they would know how to produce good argumentative essays. Thus, students would be able to generate claims, grounds, and warrants, which are the essential elements of argument structure. The problem dealt with in the research study was within the field of Applied Linguistics, as it attempted to apply some writing theory concerns to the field of teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

Writing has come to be considered as an important part of the English language curriculum in the last few years. However, '...it still remains as one of the least understood, if not misunderstood, subjects in applied linguistics in general' (Silva, T. and K. Matsuda, 2001). Consequently, the research attempted to establish writing as one of the most relevant language skills in university contexts because, on the whole, most students



have to submit research papers, reports, articles, opinions, and even written exams; therefore, training on writing strategies is crucial when it comes to expressing ideas to make the grade at college level.

An instructional study in which students in the experimental group were trained in three essential aspects of argumentation was been dealt with in the research work. Additionally, other components of argument structure were also analyzed, but they were not considered crucial for the study since they were not the major components of argument structure, according to Toulmin (1958).

The study was organized in two parts. Part 1 consisted of a general overview of the problem. It also dealt with the hypotheses inspiring the research, stated both general and specific objectives, comprised the theoretical framework underlying the study and included the methodology applied to accomplish the research. Part 2 examined the results and provides conclusions.

At the end, a glossary of the most frequent terms used in the investigation process and a thorough referential list of the authors, books, dictionaries and web sources consulted were provided along with the appendix sections containing data tables, data collecting instruments and the like utilized in the study.

The contents of the research study are intended to be a referential resource for teachers of English dealing with the teaching of writing. The researcher encourages all those writing instructors to take some time and look this thesis over and benefit from the experience herein.

## 1. The teaching of writing

Raimes, A. (1983) gives us a thorough historical description of writing instruction in her article 'Out of the Woods: Emerging traditions in the Teaching of Writing'. She outlined the following account:

Each approach, at least as it emerges in the literature, has a distinctive focus, highlighting in one case the rhetorical and linguistic form of the text itself; in another, the writer and the cognitive processes used in the act of writing; still in another, the content for writing; and, at last, the demands made by the reader.

Raimes, A. (1983) also stated that the focus on *form* dates back to as early as 1966, the focus on the *writer* in 1976, the focus on *content* in 1986, and, finally, simultaneously with content-based approaches came

another academically-oriented approach, English for Academic Purposes, which focused on the expectations of academic readers; consequently, the focus on the *reader appeared in 1986*.

The act of writing is decidedly a cognitive process, and the steps involved in this cognitive process may be identified when some of the strategies used by the subjects of study in the writing task are revealed.

## 2. Linear stage conception of writing

According to Imtiaz, S. (2003): "...writing remains a complex phenomenon involving the interaction between the reader and the writer". This has been the focus of contrastive rhetoric and cross cultural second language processing. It takes into account what writers bring into the writing situation. The cultural models that writers bring are knowledge of text structures, topics and compositional procedures.

However, university written composition instructors have challenged the linear stage conceptions of writing because the act of composing involves so many processes that its traces are not evident in written products.

## 3. Composition as a cognitive process

Research during 1970s and 1980s focused on the mental states of writers, their problem solving strategies, decisions about audience, language use and composing processes. In first language writing one of the pioneering works was by Emig (1971) entitled '*The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders*', quoted in Danielson, L. (2000), which shifted the emphasis from product to process and used think-aloud protocols of writers as data. Emig (1971) argued that the central concern of writing teachers should be composing processes rather than texts. Emig's research suggested that writing is not linear but recursive, thus shifting focus of writing from product to process, from ends to means.

Emig identified five stages of the composing process as follows:

Prewriting (generation of ideas, mental rehearsal for writing)

Drafting (writing in progress)

Revision (re-see ideas)

Editing / Proofreading (cosmetics/error detection)

Publication (public sharing of product)

Emig noted that writers move back and forth among the first four stages as they recognize a need to rework their written thoughts. This model has been useful in aiding teachers in the instruction of writing and in assisting students in the production of it. Not every piece of writing needs to be taken to the final stage of publication. Teachers might focus on just prewriting or prewriting and a first draft, reserving the other stages for work that will be more formally evaluated. As students gain facility in fitting the stages into their thinking and employing them in their composing processes, they become more skillful in generating meaningful written discourse.

According to Piolat and Pélissier (1998) there are five main types of composing processes: Planning, Translating, Executing, Evaluating and Revising, a description of each process is provided below:

*PLANNING:* This stage is said to occur when the writer generates ideas in order to know what to write. Planning is also referred to when the writer thinks about the best way to organize ideas and this organization is made as a function of the topic and the audience.

*TRANSLATING:* Writing translation of ideas means that ideas are converted into words, into sentences, into paragraphs and text. Mental translation of ideas into a linguistic form means selecting syntactic forms, words, and spelling.

*EXECUTING:* Executing is to write down on the paper the content to which the writer refers. In other words, executing means a concrete transcription of the referred words and sentences that were translated into a linguistic form.

*EVALUATING:* Evaluating means that the writer will judge what he / she thought about and what he / she translated. The writer can ask himself / herself if ideas or projects are satisfying. The writer examines if the written output is appropriate in terms of content, organization, sentences, words, and spelling.

*REVISING:* Revising means transformation for the purpose of correction that follows the detection by the writer of inadequacy in his / her ideas or in his / her writing. Thus the writer will change his ideas or his / her writing in terms of content, organization, sentences, words, and spelling.

The processes just mentioned were included in planning the training

sessions on argumentative writing. Students had to learn about each stage and develop skills in moving through them, thus, they understood the features of each phase in order to gradually improve their production of argumentative texts.

Flower and Hayes (1981) identified composing as a complex problem-solving activity, responding to a rhetorical situation in the form of a text. Their work, largely known as cognitive process model, represented the internal process of the writer's mind and looks at composing as a complex problem-solving activity.

The recursiveness in writing makes writing a process, which is continuously evolving, rejecting ideas, which may not be important, and thereby making it a dynamic practice of composition. Composing involves plans and development, which the writer brings to bear on the writing process.

Imtiaz, S. (2003) concluded that writing was '...a recursive and generative process. This process approach, which appears to be gaining ground, draws on disciplines like cognitive psychology'. Recursiveness in the research should be understood as the writer's possibility to move back and forth during the writing process to generate a piece of writing he/she may feel satisfied with.

The rediscovery of process has become so important that Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigm shift - quoted in Imtiaz, S. (2003) - in the scientific field is regularly invoked for looking into the cognitive processes in writing. One method that has been propounded is the prewriting technique (Spack, 1984), which encourages the student to write some ideas as a sort of outline before the final draft. The same author further states that students should be taught to write down their ideas quickly without being concerned about surface errors and form. In other words, matters of correctness and form need to be left for the revision and editing stage. The paradigm shift, also known as the rediscovery process, marks the change from the product - oriented approach to a process - oriented approach.

## 4. Process writing

Furneaux, C. (1998) explains *process writing* arguing that:

Process writing represents a shift in emphasis in teaching writing from the product of writing activities (the finished text) to ways in which text can be developed: from concern with questions such as 'what have you written?' 'What

grade is it worth?' to 'how will you write it?', 'how can it be improved?'.

Then she adds:

"...this major paradigm shift has entered L2 teaching, under the influence of exponents such as Raimes (1983), Spack (1984) and Zamel (1985), from LI teaching and research in the USA since the 1960s. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) describe a four-stage division in the history of process writing approaches in this context: the expressive stage, the cognitive approach, the social stage, and the discourse community stage."

As to the four-stage division proposed by the authors aforementioned (1996), the following explanations for each of these stages are provided below:

#### 4.1. The expressive stage

The expressive stage focused on the need for the writer to express himself freely in his own 'voice'. Exponents based the approach on insights into good practice; there were no theoretical underpinnings but the results contributed to innovations in teaching writing.

#### The cognitive process model

(Flower and Hayes, 1981)

The *cognitive approach*, considering writing as thinking, became known in the 1970s, especially from the pioneering work of psychologists Flower and Hayes (Figure 1).

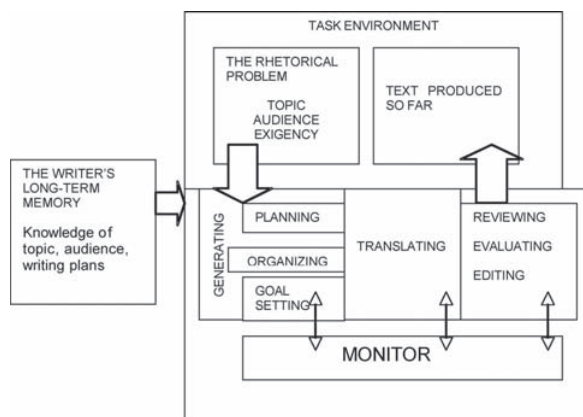


Figure 1. A cognitive process theory of writing (Flower and Hayes, 1981)



Flower and Hayes (1981) are the names most closely associated with cognitive process theory and writing as problem solving. They studied the distinctive features of the composing process in a number of individual writers and consequently developed an elaborate model of that process. The Flower-Hayes model envisioned the entire writing process as driven by goals that writers create and continually modify in response to their evolving process. It located this process within a two-fold context: the specifics of the writing task, and the writer's own store of knowledge as contained in long-term memory.

Flower (1994) then proposed a theory of "negotiated meaning" in which the personal and the contextual elements of the writing process exist in a sort of ongoing tension. According to Flower, this tension was manifest in the "inner voices" that all writers "hear" as they try to understand and balance the demands of socio-cultural expectations, discourse conventions, personal goals, and acquired knowledge. Flower hypothesized that writers respond to and negotiate among the demands of these inner voices by developing a "hidden logic" that operated at a meta-level in order to shape the writer's process.

Their theory of writing suggested that it is a highly complex, goal-directed, recursive activity. It developed over time as writers move from the production of egocentric, writer-based texts (typically, writing everything they know on a topic without thinking of what the reader wants or needs to know) to reader-based texts, which are written with the reader in mind (awareness of the audience).

#### 4.2. Critical views on Flower-Hayes' model

As pioneering as these studies were, the research of cognitive rhetoricians such as Flower and Hayes (1981) was challenged from a number of perspectives:

The Flower-Hayes model (1981) was criticized for being too vague (with no reference to how text was actually produced) or too generalized (the model suggested a uniform process for all writers). Criticism was made of the basic research tool, protocol analysis, on the grounds that thinking aloud while writing interfered with the process. Nonetheless, this model has, on the whole, had enormous influence on subsequent research and writing pedagogy in L1 and L2.

Responding particularly to the studies of Flower and Hayes (1981), Bizzell (1993) stressed that:

What we need to know about writing is how writers operate as part of discourse communities and, furthermore, how the

conventions of these communities exercise a 'generative power' within the writing process.

Every writer has a sense for audience, especially if they belong to a discourse community where there are some defined writing conventions, so the supportive feedback the writer retrieves from his / her reading audience is of major importance as the enhancement in the knowledge of writing originates in a combination of sociolinguistics and cognitive psychology.

Likewise, Bizzell (1993) further criticized the cognitivists' approach in general because it created an artificial separation between the internal problem-solving activities that occurred within a writer's psyche and the context, in an effort to reduce the writing process to a single model.

The cognitivists' failure to account for social and cultural context has been also impugned by David Bartholomae (1985) who faulted the studies of Flower and Hayes because they "located the act of writing solely within the mind of the writer". Bartholomae found the Flower-Hayes problem-solving approach, aimed at transforming the "writer-based" prose of inexperienced writers into "reader-based" prose, to be devoid of concern for the context of "discourse with its projects and agendas that determined what writers could and would do". Bartholomae further suggests that the problem-solving processes envisioned by Flower and Hayes (1981) were inherently limited because they did not allow for the "interpretive strategies" that came into play when expert writers achieved high levels of discipline-specific competence. He contended that "there comes a point... where 'field-specific' or 'domain-specific' schemata... become more important than general problem-solving processes". Berthoff (1984) echoed these concerns about the limitations of the problem-solving model by hypothesizing that the essence of Burke's philosophy of language (1973) demonstrated that:

Thinking which does not include thinking about thinking is merely problem-solving, an activity carried out very well by trout".

According to Sperling, M. (1996), the Flower and Hayes' model for writing was deemed weak on several counts:

Data was gathered in a very narrow context—that is, 'a relatively narrowly defined (though large in number) sample of writers composing under special conditions', the model did not consider the 'generative quality of language', and 'context was not properly considered'".

Later criticism questioned Flower and Hayes' use of "think-aloud protocols" describing their methodology as a "a controversial method even within cognitive psychology because it tended to affect what was being observed," and because "it could lead to 'self-fulfilling' prophecy because its assumption was that the subject's words mirrored her thinking" (Bizzell, 1993).

As mentioned by Furneaux, C. (1998):

...other cognitive models followed, the most significant being Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987). They proposed a developmental view of writing, with two models: less skilled writers operate at the level of '*knowledge telling*' (as in simple narrative), while more skilled writers are involved in '*knowledge transforming*' (as in *expository writing*). *Problems arise in explaining how or when writers move from one stage to the other, or if all do*".

It is easier for less-skilled writers to tell a story rather than using their writing skills to describe the main features of an item as in expository writing, which is a more complex task. The former (knowledge telling) merely requires the knowledge of the event to narrate it, whereas the latter (knowledge transforming) implies that the writer should select the best characteristics of an item in order to present it to the audience, whether it is for selling or for promoting it.

#### 4.3. The social stage

The *social stage* emerged in the 1980s when studies in sociolinguistics, Halliday's functional linguistics and educational ethnography, led to criticism that the above approaches to the writing process omitted the crucial dimension of social context.

At present, educational movements in the USA such as 'Writing across the curriculum' (with writing being taught not only in language classes, but in other subjects as well), and the British primary level National Writing Project have emphasized that writers do not operate as solitary individuals, but as members of a social / cultural group. This course of action influences what and how they write and how their writing is perceived.

Marinkovic, J. and Moran P. (1998), in Chile, proposed an interdisciplinary design called 'Writing across the curriculum' where writing was used as the instrument for reflection and a valuable resource to organize knowledge considering all other areas of the curriculum. In other words, their program aimed at developing writing in conjunction with other disciplines.

The same authors stated that two approaches, cognitive (writing to learn) and rhetoric (writing in disciplines), co-existed in most of the composition programs simultaneously despite the fact that they rested upon different epistemological assumptions. Nonetheless, it has been acknowledged that both of them attempt to accomplish the same goal: students' adjustment to various disciplines of academic discourse by means of the written text.

In the end of their research paper, the authors suggested that the Chilean educational system was not familiar with the concept of writing development proposed, in which, on the one hand, the isolated disciplines scheme would be broken and, on the other, a reflection task was demanded from each of them about their contents and applications in order to achieve a common goal, which also made the project practically unviable.

#### 4.4. The discourse community stage

The *discourse community* stage developed from the above view of writing as a social activity. The notions of audience and genre are fundamental here and attention has focused on tertiary level writing, with its demand that students produce writing acceptable to the academic community. Debate centers on two main areas: defining a discourse community and whether it is necessary, or even desirable, to oblige students to adopt the norms of a different community from their own.

#### 4.5. Stage models of writing

According to Gleason, B. (2001):

Early versions of the writing process introduced a linear stage model, or a straight-ahead view of composing. This later gave way to a recursive theory that sees writing as a two-steps-forward one-step-back process in which writers can "discover" new meanings at any point along the way.

The above remarks on the recursive theory occurred when students stopped their writing and began revising their draft in order to find weaknesses in their texts. Sometimes they could spot mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and the like, so they actually needed that one-step-back action to obtain a better-written product.

A linear stage model of composing: In a 1964 study, D. Gordon Rohman and Albert O. Wlecke presented a stage model of composing comprised of prewriting, writing, rewriting, and editing. Rohman (1965) then published "Prewriting: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process,"

which helped establish a view of prewriting as the most important phase of the composing process. This emphasis on prewriting prevailed in the 1970s but then gave way to increasing interests in teaching revision, in students' focusing on final written products (e.g., in portfolios), and in teachers' assessment of student writing.

Quoted in Danielson, L. (2000), Britton (1975) described three kinds of writing: *transactional*, *expressive* and *poetic*:

Transactional writing is used 'to get things done'. Its purpose is to inform, to advise, to persuade, or to instruct. In short, it is a means to an end. A second category is expressive. This is language 'close to the self', often a kind of 'thinking aloud' on paper. It reflects the writer's immediate thoughts and feelings; it is relaxed and familiar rather than formal; and thus it allows the writer to take risk. We frame the tentative first drafts of new ideas...where in times of crisis... we attempt to work our way towards some kind of a resolution. A third category, the poetic, is language used as an art form, and it exists for its own sake.

All three categories above occurred in the classroom, but not in a balanced proportion, the transactional mode was the primary kind of writing assigned in classrooms and a great deal of it were information-gap activities that required minimal actual composition and low level cognitive processes (e.g., fill-in-the-blank, note taking, short answers).

Figure 2 below shows essential differences between writing in one's own language and in a second language. Scott, V. (1991) stated that when writing in our mother tongue, we go from ideas to words (lexicon), whereas in our foreign language writing process, we go from words (lexicon) to ideas.

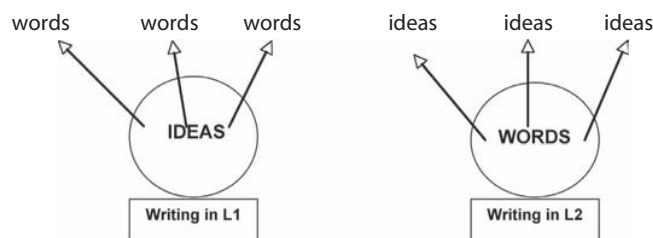


Figure 2. Differences between L1 and L2. Virginia M. Scott (1991). Southern Conference on Language Teaching. Valdosta, GA.

Although the study was backed up by the Toulmin's (1981) framework of argumentative analysis of writing, the developments outlined above

led to enormous changes in the way writing is taught. The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) movement (Horowitz, 1986) criticized the initial ELT cognitive process bandwagon for failing to meet the needs of EAP students. Most experts have now agreed that writing is a socio-cognitive, problem-solving process affected by cultural and rhetorical norms. Thus, writing teachers need to encourage learners to think about and develop their writing process, and to consider their audience and the rhetorical norms of L2 texts.

Even though there is not, as is sometimes thought, one 'process approach', there are many useful process writing techniques which feed from a variety of approaches. White and Arndt's diagram (1991: 4; see figure 3 below) offers teachers a framework that tries to capture the recursive, not linear, nature of writing. Some of the elements in the diagram below about process writing are depicted as follows:

Brainstorming is an activity to generate ideas. It helps writers tap their long-term memory. Focusing (e.g. fast writing) deals with the overall purpose in writing. Structuring is organizing and reorganizing text to present these ideas in an acceptable way. Drafting is the transition from writer-based thought into reader-based text. Reformulation and the use of checklists in guiding feedback develop essential evaluating skills. Re-viewing is the last step in the development of a written text:

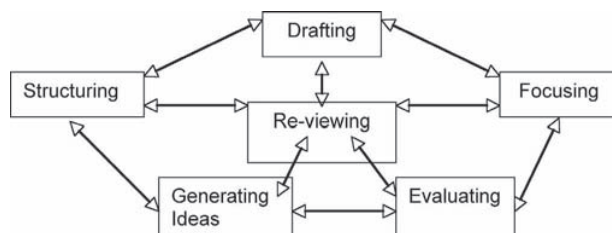


Figure 3. Diagram of process writing (arrows added). White and Arndt's (1991).

The overall aim is to create meaningful, purposeful writing tasks that develop the writer's skills over several drafts. Collaboration between learners and teachers is essential. This interaction results in changes in teacher and learner roles and has implications for teacher and learner training (Leki, 1990).

When presented with written feedback on content, students react in different ways. The students may not read the observations at all, may read them but not understand them, or may understand them but not know how to respond to them. Teacher comments on content are of little use if students do not know what they mean or how to use

them productively to improve their skills as writers. Finally, corrections of grammar mistakes or comments on content tend to be negative and point out problems more than tell students what they are doing correctly. Therefore, as implied above, 'collaboration between learners and teachers is essential' as long as the feedback on content or form given by the teacher is thoroughly understood by the learner.

## 5. Teaching writing in E.S.L. / E.F.L

The central question for language teaching of writing is: how similar is L2 writing to L1 writing? L2 writing research is still in its infancy, but initial findings suggest that while L1 general composing skills - both good and bad - transfer from L1 to L2, 'L2 composing is more constrained, more difficult and less effective' (Silva, 1993). Most L2 writers bring with them knowledge and experience of writing in their L1, and this resource should not be ignored. However, they also bring the limitations of their knowledge of L2 language and rhetorical organization.

According to Imtiaz, S. (2003):

...the process of second language writing cannot be assumed to be identical as that in the first language. Learners may or may not approach a writing task in the same way as they do in their mother tongue.

The upcoming issue is whether there are transferable skills, that is to say, are those skills a student uses well in one language transferable to a second or foreign language?

As to this question, Ross Winterowd, S. (1980) suggests the following: '... almost all of the *transferable* skills must, by and large, be *acquired*. Prewriting, writing, reformulation—these processes are acquired through models; through making attempts at writing; through teacher intervention in the writing process; and through massive, intelligent feedback. The set of skills that can be learned—if they have not been acquired—are those of editing: punctuation, verb agreement, pronoun reference, and so on.

The above suggests that, when learning how to write, there may be two scenarios: one for acquisition (pre-writing, writing, reformulation), and another for learning (punctuation, verb agreement, pronoun reference, among others).

As might be clear by now, writing is a complex skill, and one of the aims

for this study is to see whether it involves much more than the accurate use of sentence construction and a good pool of vocabulary.

There has to be some negotiated meaning between the writer and the reader. Knowledge is best constructed and used through negotiated interaction. If the writer receives comments from the readers, then the writer will develop a better sense of audience, improve confidence, and it will lead the writer to consider alternative writing strategies.

As to research done in EFL writing, it is worth mentioning Nathan B. (1998) who offers an example of how to apply action research to improve EFL/ESL writing instruction. This research was conducted over a 5-year period while the researcher taught 9 semester-long sections of advanced EFL writing to Taiwanese undergraduates. Using Reid's (1987) Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire and the researcher's own open-ended surveys, information was systematically analyzed and gathered about students' learning style preferences. The underlying goal of the study was to understand the relationship between learning styles and EFL/ESL writing, and to subsequently understand the students and better discern what approaches would both accommodate and challenge them. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (1985) with its four Jungian categories of types (extroversion-introversion, sensing-intuition, thinking-feeling, judging-perceiving) was used.

It was found that students were generally hostile to any writing instruction because their primary goal in learning English was to learn to talk to foreigners, not to write to them. Therefore, it was concluded that teachers should first try to explore systematically the learning style preferences of their students before beginning to teach.

All in all, when it comes to interacting in writing with foreigners nowadays, Internet chat-rooms become increasingly important, so formal writing is not essential as long as the message can get through. It is then no surprise that Taiwanese students became hostile at the sound of formal writing instruction.

Another EFL research project, funded by FONDECYT, was proposed by Horsella, M. and Sindermann, G. (1991). This research work aimed at studying argumentation as a type of discourse used in science, and at analyzing it by applying formal and natural models of argumentation. In their literature review, the authors proposed three models to analyze scientific argumentative texts: the formal model, the Toulmin's model and the Perelman's model.



Horsella and Sindermann (1991) described each model in the following schematic form:

$P \rightarrow Q$
$P \quad Q$

Formal model:

Claim
Ground
Warrant
Backing
Rebuttal
Qualifier

Toulmin's model:

Auditorium
Premises
Argumentative Techniques

Perelman's model:

Figure 4. Horsella and Sindermann's description of Argument Models

After the analysis carried out by the researchers with the three models described above, they stated that the scientific reader utilizes discourse elements of the formal and Perelman's type. They added that '...these elements may not be so evident at first glance, but they are present in the complex discourse text type.'

This project was one of the pioneering research studies dealing with the analysis of scientific argumentative discourse dating back to 1991.

Currently, however, there have been more and more ESL / EFL research studies with regards to the analysis of academic writing, such as Marinkovic, J. and Moran P. 1998; Woods, Nancy, 2000; Leki, I., 2003, among others. Each of these research studies presented key issues about ESL / EFL writing as a mode of learning.

From the different text types, descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative, the latter has been the most recurrent type of writing by students when defending an opinion in an academic written assignment. Thus, the present research study deals with the analysis of argumentative essays written by university students. The following pages comprise a definition of argument as well as the most important elements in argument structure that were included in the training sessions for UCSH students.

## 6. Defining argument: purpose, tension and structure

The word argument comes from the Latin 'arguere', meaning 'to make clear'. While there is no infallible formula for winning over every reader in every circumstance, the arguer should learn how and when to use three fundamental argumentative appeals. According to Aristotle (1354), a person who wants to convince another may appeal to that person's reason (*logos*), ethics (*ethos*), or emotion (*pathos*).

If the writer thinks of these three appeals as independent and chooses just one, he / she misses the point. The writer's job is to weave the various appeals into a single convincing argument. As he / she continues to expand and develops his / her ideas, he / she should look for ways of combining the three appeals to create a sound, balanced argument.

### 6.1. Purpose of argument

The goal of argument is, basically, to obtain the reader's consent to your central statement, in spite of active resistance. Pringle and Freedman (1985) define argument as:

...writing organised around a clear thesis...which is substantiated logically and through illustration", a definition which might be applied equally to exposition. Acknowledging more explicitly the essential role of a writer's viewpoint in argument, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982) have labelled this genre of writing the "opinion essay", a position maintained by Crowhurst (1988:03) who defines argument as "that kind of writing which takes a point of view and supports it with either emotional appeals or logical arguments.

Likewise, in order to define argument, and to give an overview of the structure and purpose of argument, Duffin, K. (1998) posits the following:

A clear sense of argument is essential to all forms of academic writing, for writing is thought made visible. Insights and ideas that occur to us when we encounter the raw material of the world must be ordered in some way so others can receive them and respond in turn. This give-and-take is at the heart of the academic enterprise, and makes possible that vast conversation known as civilization. Like all human ventures, the conventions of the academic essay are both logical and playful. They may vary in expression from dis-

cipline to discipline, but any good essay should show us a mind developing a thesis, supporting that thesis with evidence, deftly anticipating objections or counter-arguments, and maintaining the momentum of discovery.

The writer has to adjust to the conventions established by the audience he / she is addressing. There is a problem solving activity in the writer's mind which is reflected in his / her text. As mentioned above, the writer has to anticipate the objections to his / her thesis statement proposing possible views and persuading the reader to believe what he / she has argued about.

It has been rather difficult for the researcher to make the difference between the terms 'persuasion' and 'argument' because in much of the considerable empirical research to date, these two terms are used interchangeably (Connor and Lauer, 1985). To the researcher's relief, however, Kinneavy (1971:21) notes that 'persuasion' is '...that kind of discourse which is primarily focused on the reader and attempts to elicit from him a specific action or emotion or conviction'.

For the purposes of this study, 'persuasion' and 'argument' have been understood as defined by the *Writer's Workshop* from the University of British Columbia, in Canada:

Persuasive writing is writing that sets out to influence or change an audience's thoughts or actions, while an argument is an appeal to a person's sense of reason, emotion and good character.

In van Eemeren, F.H. and Houtlosser, P.'s view (2000):

There is also a rhetorical aspect to argumentative discourse in a more specific or strong sense: people who take part in argumentative discourse try to resolve the difference of opinion in their own favor, and their use of language and other aspects of their behavior are designed to achieve precisely this effect. This does, of course, not mean that the participants are exclusively interested in getting things their way. As a rule, they will at least pretend to be primarily interested in having the difference of opinion resolved. People who engage in argumentative discourse may be considered committed to what they have said or implicated.

If the thesis statement is not successful, they have to maintain the image of people who play by the rules. They should be subtle and persuade

the reader that what they are asserting is true by using very convincing and reliable grounds (supporting details).

If a move is not successful, they cannot escape from their dialectical responsibility by just saying, "I was only being rhetorical". Although they may try as hard as they can to get their point of view accepted, they have to maintain the image of people who play the resolution game by the rules.

Like Kinneavy (1971), others have viewed argument as a subset of persuasion (Connor, 1990). One such view, expressed in Secor (1983:68) specifies the purpose of argument, claiming that "argument is the only means of persuasion which attempts to gain adherence to a position, to convince, not just bring about action". Seen in this light, argument is discourse enacted to produce shifts in beliefs, effected through logical or emotional appeals.

This research study explicitly uses some of the theoretical insights about argument structure by drawing on the Toulmin's (1958) analysis of argument structure for its instructional terminology, evaluating propositions offered by writers as *claims*, the supporting evidence analysed as *grounds*, and the underlying assumptions as *warrants*.

## 6.2. Tension of argument

Argument implies tension but not belligerent fireworks. This tension comes from the fundamental asymmetry between the one who wishes to persuade and those who must be persuaded. The common ground they share is reason. The writer's objective is to make a case so that any reasonable person would be convinced of the sensibleness of his / her thesis statement. The first task, even before starting to write, is gathering and ordering evidence, classifying it by kind and strength. The writer might decide to move from the smallest piece of evidence to the most impressive, or start with the most convincing, and then mention other supporting details afterward; besides, he / she could postpone a surprising piece of evidence until the very end.

In any case, it is important to review evidence that could be used against the main idea and generate responses to anticipated objections. This is the crucial concept of counter-argument. If nothing can be said against an idea, it is perhaps obvious or unintelligent. (And if too much can be said against it, it is time for another thesis statement.) By not indicating an awareness of possible objections, the writer might seem to be hiding something, and his/her argument will be weaker as a consequence. He / she should also become familiar with the various fallacies that can undermine an argument and strive to avoid them.

### 6.3. Structure of argument

The basis of the academic argumentative essay is persuasion, and its structure plays a vital role in this. In order to convince, you must set the stage, provide a context, and decide how to reveal evidence. Of course, if the writer is addressing a group of professionals, some aspects of a shared context can be taken for granted. But clarity is always a good feature. Posing a question that will lead to the claim, or making a thesis statement should describe the goal of the argumentative essay promptly. There is considerable flexibility about when and where this happens, but within the first paragraph, the reader should know where the writer is going, even if some welcome suspense is preserved. In the body of the essay, merely listing evidence without any visible logic of presentation is a common mistake. If the point being made is lost in a confusion of details, the argument weakens.

The most common argumentative structure in English writing style is deductive: starting off with a generalization or claim, and then providing ground or support for it. This pattern can be used to order a paragraph as well as an entire essay. Another possible structure is inductive: facts, instances, observations or supports can be reviewed, and the conclusion to be drawn from them follows. There is no blueprint for a successful essay; the best ones show us a focused mind making sense of some manageable aspect of the world, a mind where insightfulness, reason, and clarity are joined.

The following section describes the Toulmin's Model, which was the core model for the analysis of the argumentative essays produced by the subjects of the present study.

## 7. The Toulmin Model

A widely accepted argument analysis is the Toulmin's Model (1958, 1984, 1979, 2001). It is named after a current Harvard Professor, Stephen Toulmin, who, in his first work on the subject, 'The Uses of Argument' (1958), proposed that every good argument has six components. The first three are essential to all arguments, explicitly, 1) *the claim*, 2) *the ground / support*, and 3) *the warrant*. Furthermore, arguments may also contain one or more of three additional elements: 4) *the backing*, 5) *the rebuttal* and 6) *the qualifier*.

These components of argument structure proposed by Toulmin (1958) are described as follows:

### 7.1. Claims

- The claim is the main point of the argument.
- Plan a claim of your own by asking, "What do I want to prove?" Your response is your claim.
- Synonyms for claim are thesis, proposition, conclusion and main point.
- Like a thesis, the claim can either be explicit or implicit. Whether it is implied or explicitly stated, the claim organizes the entire argument, and everything else in the argument is related to it. The best way to check your claim during revision is by completing this statement: "I have convinced my audience to think that ..."

### 7.2. Grounds/support

- Ground supplies the evidence, opinions, reasoning, examples, and factual information about the claim that make it possible for the reader to accept it.
- Synonyms for ground are support, proof, evidence and reasons.
- To plan ground, ask, "What information do I need to supply to convince my audience of my main point (claim)."
- Common types of ground include:
  1. Facts and statistics.
  2. Opinions (authorities and personal). When using personal opinion, it should be convincing, original, impressive and interesting and backed by factual knowledge, experience, good reasoning and judgment. Rantings, unfounded personal opinions that no one else accepts, or feeble reasons like "because I said so" or "because everyone does it" are not effective ground.
  3. Examples—in the form of anecdotes, scenarios and cases.
- When revising your argument, to help you focus on and recognize the ground, complete this sentence: "I want my audience to believe that ... [the claim] because ... [list the ground]."

### 7.3. Warrants

- Warrants are the assumptions, general principles, the conventions of specific disciplines, widely held values, commonly accepted beliefs,

and appeals to human motives that are an important part of any argument.

- Warrants originate with the arguer, but also exist in the minds of the audience. They can be shared by the arguer and the audience or they can be in conflict.
- Warrants represent the psychology of an argument in that they reveal the unspoken beliefs and values of the author and invite the reader to examine his /her own beliefs and make comparisons.
- Example: I am pro-life. Warrants: Religious: a) abortion is a sin; b) life begins at conception.

#### 7.4. Backings

- Backing is additional evidence provided to support or “back up” a warrant whenever there is a strong possibility that your audience will reject it.
- When reviewing your argument to determine whether backing is needed, identify the warrant and then determine whether or not you accept it. If you do not, try to anticipate additional information that would make it more acceptable.

#### 7.5. Rebuttals

- A rebuttal establishes what is wrong, invalid, or unacceptable about an argument and may also present counterarguments, or new arguments that represent entirely different perspectives or points of view on the issue.
- Plan a rebuttal by asking, “what are the other possible views on this issue?” and “how can I answer them?”
- Phrases that introduce refutation include, “some may disagree,” “others may think,” or “other commonly held opinions are,” followed by the opposing ideas.

#### 7.6. Qualifiers

An argument is not expected to demonstrate certainties. Instead, it usually only establishes probabilities. Therefore, avoid presenting information as absolutes or certainties. Qualify what you say with phrases such as “very likely,” “probably,” “it seems,” and “many.”

(Definitions adapted from Nancy Woods' Perspectives on Argument, 2000).

However, the Toulmin's model has certain limitations. For instance,

'...it is sometimes of restricted use in discussing specialized forms of argument such as those that occur in certain types of disciplinary writing: commercial, legal, and others' (Werry, Chris, 2001).

The Toulmin's model has also been criticized for being too aggressive to the reader and opposed to other models for argument analysis, e.g. the Rogerian Model (1980), named after the psychologist Carl Rogers, which can be simply defined as an argument that sympathizes with the opponent's view. The Toulmin's model, on the contrary, emphasizes that arguers make their claim, support it with evidence and proof, and conclude it with implications or applications without acknowledging the opponent's argument.

Probably, the form of argument analysis depends on the examiner, or it is just a matter of style and adequacy. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, the researcher considers himself to be more familiar with Toulmin's proposal; consequently, he decided to use it in the argumentative essay analysis in the present research work.

The Toulmin's model offers a simple, broad, flexible set of categories, or components, for approaching the study of academic argumentative texts. While the model is simple, each major category can be unpacked and used to discuss arguments in increasing levels of detail.

Conversely, during the last decades, there have appeared other models of analysis, such as the Rogerian Model (1980) and the Swales Model (1990) as tools for analyzing academic arguments, and, probably there will be many others in the years to come. Nevertheless, the main purpose on the part of teachers should be to enhance the improvement of student writing, no matter what model or tool we choose in order to analyze students' academic arguments.

### 7.7. The Genre of academic writing

According to Marius, R. (1991):

A 'genre' is a class of communication that shares modes and purposes. Several genres exist within academe; one of the most important is the research article. Writers try to guess what readers already know and their problems with that



knowledge; readers try to make sense of a writer's position and strive to discern where it leads. Writing and reading, therefore, involve a contract between author and audience that assumes action and reaction.

The above quotation refers to the negotiation in meaning between the reader and the writer. There is an encoding activity carried out by the writer by means of the writing process (action), and there is, in turn, a decoding activity performed by the reader by means of the reading process (reaction).

One common genre of academic writing is the argumentative essay. This type of essay presents a central claim (or claims, depending on length and purpose) and supports the claim(s) using an argument based on evidence and warrants. The goal of the writer is to negotiate with the reader and try to win him over to his claim, and the reader's position is that the writer has to show convincing grounds to be influenced and agree with the writer's proposition.

Academic writing is a type of genre. It is believed to be cognitively complex since the acquisition of academic vocabulary and discourse style is particularly difficult. According to the Cognitive Theory:

Communicating orally or in writing is an active process of skill development and gradual elimination of errors as the learner internalizes the language. Indeed, acquisition is a product of the complex interaction of the linguistic environment and the learner's internal mechanisms. With practice, there is continual restructuring as learners shift these internal representations in order to achieve increasing degrees of mastery in L2. (McLaughlin, 1988).

In academia, students receive all kinds of feedback, from their peers as well as from their teachers. It is very likely that, at first, their feedback may be only the grade accompanied by many corrections in red ink all over their essay. However, over the past few years, student revision and teacher responses have become central at all stages of the writing process: pre-writing, first drafting, revising, final draft writing. Thus, a theoretical argument might suggest that knowledge is best constructed or acquired through negotiations of a discourse community such as the university.

University students must submit a variety of written assignments in the form of:

- Research papers

- Reports
- Essays
- Article reviews
- Dissertations

This list illustrates that the principal medium of communication between that students and the faculty is through academic writing. But are they capable of producing good essays? The question remains unanswered yet.

Research in the area of the genre of academic writing has been focused on strategic writing, which is not only a matter of knowing which strategies to use, but in addition, the writer must know how to apply strategies successfully when writing an essay, a report, or anything of the sort.

The way arguers maneuver strategically to reconcile their rhetorical aims in each of the stages of a critical discussion has always been a fundamental subject of study in the genre of academic writing; for that reason, the research within the thesis project alluded made an attempt to investigate which strategies and how those strategies were applied in writing argumentative essays by students in the English Teacher Training Program at UCSH.

The author encourages all teachers of English once again to read about argument structure since it is vital when they want to express knowledge at college level through articles, reports and research studies.

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