

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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**A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE
ADMISSIONS ESSAYS IN ENGLISH**

**Field: The English Language
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**M.A. THESIS ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(A Summary)**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 RATIONALE

At its very essence, language can be defined as a tool for the communication. However, there is much more than simple lexical or grammatical meaning encoded in text. People use language to express ideas and achieve goals. Through language, individuals establish and maintain social identity and relationships.

The study of *language in use*, **Discourse analysis**, has become a new area of language investigation since the early decades of the 20th century. Arising out of a variety of disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, discourse analysis has become one of the significant foundations in applied linguistics. Discourse analysis gives us insight into various aspects of language in use: how texts are structured beyond sentence level; how talk follows regular patterns in a wide range of different situations; or how discourse norms and their realization in language differ from culture to culture. At different periods, many works of distinguished scholars such as Halliday and Hasan (1976), Brown and Yule (1983), Widdowson (1984), Cook (1998), etc. have provided a fundamental theory of discourse analysis. In Vietnam, since 1985, when Tran Ngoc Them introduced his pioneering work on discourse, more and more researches have been carried out in this field, namely Diep Quang Ban (1999), Nguyen Hoa (2002), etc.

On the basis of theories and results of previous studies, this thesis is aimed to make small contribution to discourse analysis, one of the most far-reaching areas in linguistics, by researching on

discourse features of **admissions essays** (AdE), also known as **personal statements**, in the light of the theory on genre analysis.

An AdE is an essay written by a prospective student as a part of some college and university admissions processes. The AdE is an effective tool that allows the applicant to distinguish himself from the thousands of other applicants with similar scores and backgrounds because its purpose is to convey a sense of the writer's unique character to the admissions committee and to demonstrate his writing skills as well as his ability to organize thoughts coherently. In other words, the AdE is the best chance to highlight an applicant's accomplishments, experiences, and true potential. Despite the important role the AdE plays in the application processes, little research has been done on discourse features of AdEs and little instruction has been given about it in academic writing courses in Vietnam. This fact creates a need to have research on it. Such a research in the light of discourse analysis, especially genre analysis, may yield important insights to both the theoretical studies in characteristics of this genre and the practical field of teaching and learning English. Those theoretical and practical significances have inspired me to carry out "*A Discourse Analysis of College Admissions Essays in English*".

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 Aims

The study is carried out with the aim to investigate discourse features of college AdEs in English. The findings of the study, then, will be of great help to teachers, learners of English as a foreign language and those who are interested in this genre of essay.

1.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- find out the discourse structure of college AdEs in English;
- provide an in-depth description of English AdEs in terms of lexico-grammatical features; and
- put forward some practical suggestions for teachers and learners of English as well as for those interested in writing AdEs in English.

1.3 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Within the limit of time and knowledge, the study cannot cover all the discourse features of English AdEs; it deals with only two aspects: discourse structure and lexico-grammatical features. Moreover, the data for this study are 40 accepted English AdEs written by English learners which have been written to apply to undergraduate programs in colleges/universities in the USA. The conclusions are therefore by no means representatives of English AdEs in all cases.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the discourse structure of college AdEs in English?
2. What are the lexico-grammatical features of college AdEs in English?
3. What are the implications of the study for teachers and learners of English as well as for those interested in writing AdEs in English?

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite the critical role of the AdEs in the application process, this kind of essay seems not to have received any attention,

let alone guidelines or emphasis, in the courses on writing skills in Vietnam. In the light of the theory on discourse analysis, more typically genre analysis, the study “*A Discourse Analysis of College Admissions Essays in English*” will yield insight into the college AdEs. As a preliminary, this research will focus on aspects such as discourse structure and lexico-grammatical features of AdEs in English. The findings will then be of great significance to the theory on developing the writing skill, especially the English essay-writing skill of the Vietnamese. Moreover, the findings help those who are interested in AdEs be aware of the typical characteristics of this genre.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The research includes five chapters: Chapter 1(Introduction), Chapter 2 (Literature Review and Theoretical Background), Chapter 3 (Methods and Procedures), Chapter 4 (Findings and Discussions) and Chapter 5 (Conclusions and Implications).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 THE REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH

Discourse analysis can be characterized as the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. Many distinguished scholars of different ages such as Harris (1952), Austin (1962), Hymes (1964), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), Halliday and Hasan (1976), Widdowson (1979), Brown and Yule (1983), etc. have made great contributions to the overall picture of discourse analysis. Most of their works equip us with insights to investigate language in use. In Vietnam, linguists have joined in the trend of researching on discourse analysis as well. Tran Ngoc Them is

considered as the first linguist who studies this new field. More and more master theses and doctoral dissertations relating to studying genre types have been carried out such as fairy tales by Tran Thi Ngoc Lien (2003), travel advertisements by Ton Nu My Nhat (2005), political speeches by Ngo Thi Thanh Mai (2007), etc.

As regards genre analysis, research on academic writing has examined a variety of genres such as research article (Swales,1990), sales promotion letters, job applications (Bhatia, 1993), sociology articles (Brett,1994), dissertations (Hyland, 2003), etc. An important genre that has received little attention from researchers, however, is the AdEs. Up to now, only a few scholars have analyzed the genre in terms of its rhetorical qualities and its reception by its intended audiences such as “*Genre Analysis of Personal statements: analysis of Moves in Application Essays to Medical and Dental schools*”, by Ding (2007), “*Self-composed: Rhetoric in Psychology Personal Statements*” by Brown (2004).

Furthermore, as far as the investigation of essays is concerned, a number of writers have discussed some aspects of this issue such as “*Rhetorical Patterns in English and Vietnamese Essays written by Vietnamese Students: a Comparative Study*” by Nguyen Thi Thu Hien (1999), “*An Investigation into the Use of Reference as Cohesive Device in the Writing Tasks by Students of English at Chu Van An High school, Hanoi*” by Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh (2003), or “*A Discourse Analysis of English Essays written by EFL Major Students at Quangnam University*” by Nguyen Thi Trung (2008), etc. In the terms of admissions essay, up to now, there has been only one study of Nguyen Hanh (1999) “*Application Essays written by Vietnamese and American Students: A Constrative Genre Analysis*”. However, in

this study, she collected small numbers of data - 16 essays - which were used to apply to graduate programs.

Therefore, it is necessary to have a further research in terms of discourse features of AdEs in English. Hopefully, this study can bring some contributions to the theory and implications of teaching and learning writing skill, especially writing English essays.

2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

2.2.1.1 Discourse

Widdowson [65] points out,

“Discourse is a use of sentences to perform acts of communication which cohere into larger communicative units, ultimately establishing a rhetorical pattern which characterizes the pieces of language as a whole kind of communication”. [65, p.8]

The borderline between the two terms *discourse* and *text* is very complex. Salkie [48, p. ix] points out that *discourse* and *text* are the same term for a stretch of language possibly longer than a sentence whereas Widdowson [65, p.100] argues, *“Discourse is a communicative process by means of interaction. Its situational outcome is a change in a state of affairs: information is conveyed, intentions made clear, its linguistic product is text”.* Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, in the thesis the two terms are used interchangeably to refer to any stretch of language in use, which is in most cases longer than a single sentence.

Discourse of all kinds has definite structures, and the flexibility of organizations varies from genre to genre. Halliday [26] asserts that discourse structure is *‘a dynamic order determined by the*

semantic unfolding of the discourse'. Hatim and Mason [32, p.173-174] discuss constituents of discourse in terms of *element* and *sequence*. Elements and sequences of discourse with their certain rhetorical functions to the whole purpose of a discourse create a stable discourse organization.

2.2.1.2 Discourse Analysis

Brown and Yule [12] define discourse analysis as follows:

*“In the study of language, some of the most interesting questions arise in connection with the way language is used, rather than what its components are... We were, in effect, asking how it is language-users interpret what other language-users intend to convey. When we carry this investigation further and ask how it is that we, as language users, make sense of what we read in texts, understand what speakers mean, despite what they say, recognize connected as opposed to jumbled or incoherent discourse, and successful take part in that complex activity called conversation, we are undertaking what is known **discourse analysis**”.* [12, p.iii]

2.2.2 Genre Analysis and Approaches to Genre

Genre analysis is an extension of traditional discourse analysis. There are two main approaches to genre - *the Swalesian* and *the Systemic-functional*.

2.2.3 The Systemic-Functional Approach to Language Study

2.2.3.1 Transitivity

The description of the experiential metafunction of language involves one major grammatical system – *Transitivity*. This system is the resource for construing our experience, the flux of ‘goings-on’, as structural configuration and it discriminates six different types of processes as follows: *Material*, *Mental*, *Verbal*, *Behavioural*, *Relational*, and *Existential*. Each process will be discussed briefly in the subsections below.

2.2.3.2 Mood

The system of *Mood* belongs to the *interpersonal* metafunction of the language and is the grammatical source for realizing an interactive move in dialogue. The key to a semantic understanding of dialogue is Halliday’s metaphor of exchange among the interlocutors, which give us the two notions of (i) *the speech roles – giving versus demanding* and (ii) *the nature of the commodity being exchanged – goods and services versus information*.

2.2.3.3 Thematisation

Thematisation is concerned with the organization of information within individual clauses, and through this, with the organization of the larger text, given its purpose and context. The system of Theme is realized through a structure in which the clause falls into two main constituents - *Theme* and *Rheme*. Many linguists share the same view that Theme is “*the initial unit of a clause*” [45, p.410], “*the element which serves as the point of departure of the message*” [27, p.38], “*the first constituent in the clause*” [47, p.222],

or “*the left-most constituent of the sentence*” [12, p.126]. According to Halliday [27], there are two types of Themes - *simple Theme* and *multiple Theme*. A *simple Theme* contains only an experiential element and *multiple Theme* may be a combination at least two among the three kinds of Theme: *Textual Theme* ^ *Interpersonal Theme* ^ *Topical Theme*.

2.2.4 Overview of Admissions Essay

2.2.4.1 Essays

According to modern linguists such as Oshima and Hogue [43, p.76], an essay is defined as ‘*a piece of writing several paragraphs long instead of just one or two paragraphs. It is written about one topic, just as a paragraph is. However, the topic of an essay is too long and too complex to discuss in one paragraph.*’

From the perspective of academic writing, Smalley and Ruetten [52, p.139] claim that the most common format for essays is the five-paragraph essay: one introductory paragraph - the *Introduction*, three development paragraphs - the *Body*, and one concluding paragraph – the *Conclusion*.

2.2.4.2 Admissions Essays as a Genre

Sebranek, Meyer and Kemper [50, p.145] claim that AdEs fall under the rubric of personal writing - the type of writing that has the writer at the center. Moreover, all personal writing shares the distinctive characteristics.

In terms of the structure of AdEs, Starkey [53, p.80] mentions three distinct parts to an AdE: the *Introduction*, the *Body*, and the *Conclusion*.

2.2.5 Summary

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1 METHODS OF THE STUDY

With the aim of achieving the set goal, several methods are simultaneously employed such as descriptive method, the qualitative and quantitative methods, the analytic and synthetic methods.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLES

At the outset, 100 texts which have varied lengths with a minimum of 250 words and which were written to apply to undergraduate programs in colleges/ universities in the United States from 2002 afterwards were collected altogether. The texts were classified into two types: type 1 (of from 250 to 750 words) and type 2 (of more than 750 words). However, not the whole corpus has been closely analysed and described. On the basis of the findings of this first stage of the analysis, 40 texts of type 1 were randomly chosen and closely analysed with reference to the aims of the thesis.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

As mentioned above, subject for this research is AdEs, a large number of which can be found on websites and books. However, this study focuses on samples on some reliable English books. These books are printed by reliable publishers in the United States such as *100 Successful College Application Essays* by Penguin Group Inc, *Accepted! 50 Successful College Admissions Essays* by SupperCollege LLC, *50 Successful Harvard Application Essays* by the Harvard Crimson, *Best college admissions essays* by the Peterson's, *The College Application Essay* by The College board and *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps: Crafting a*

Winning Personal Statement by Crown Publishing Company. The compilers are experienced college advisors, instructors or admissions officers in American colleges/universities.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

On the basis of 40 AdEs collected, we carry out the analysis in terms of their discourse structure and lexico-grammatical features, namely Transitivity, Mood and Thematisation. For the discourse structure, we focus on the principles of organization for an AdE suggested by Starkey [53, p.80] in which the *Introduction*, the *Body* and the *Conclusion* are the main parts. In regard with lexico-grammatical features of AdEs, the study describes the use of Transitivity to explore the experiential meaning, Mood to explore the interpersonal meaning and Thematisation to uncover textual meaning. The results are displayed via tables/graphs in percentage terms. From that the frequency of each category is determined and the results are discussed and evaluated. Finally, the analysis results of AdEs are synthesized and discussed in an attempt to find out salient discourse features of this genre.

3.5 PROCEDURES

Herein after are the steps strictly followed in the research:

- Choosing the topic for our investigation by reviewing previous studies thoroughly.
- Collecting and classifying data: AdEs in English books are collected and classified to put into investigation.
- Analyzing data: AdEs are analyzed in terms of discourse structure and lexico-grammatical features such as Transitivity, Mood and Thematisation.
- Synthesizing, discussing the findings and drawing

conclusions.

- Suggesting some implications for teaching and learning English as well as writing AdEs and giving some suggestions for further research.

3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 DISCOURSE STRUCTURE OF ADES

As presented in the previous chapter, Starkey [53, p.80] suggests a structure of an AdE with three parts, namely the *Introduction*, the *Body*, and the *Conclusion*. Analyzing the 40 essays, we realize that there are two kinds of structure of AdEs as follows:

(1) ***Title - Introduction - Body - Conclusion***

(2) ***Introduction - Body - Conclusion***

Of the two kinds of structure, ***Title - Introduction - Body - Conclusion*** is more popular than the other one with percentages of 82.5% and 17.5% respectively. The result shows that, in addition to the three parts suggested by Starkey [53] most of the AdEs have one more component – the *Title*. That is to say, the *Introduction*, the *Body*, and the *Conclusion* are compulsory; whereas, the *Title* is more or less flexible.

4.1.1 The Title

A title is an introduction to an essay. It is not exactly the thesis statement but has some similarities as the core idea of the essay is depicted here. Thus, it has several important functions: grabbing the reader's attention, introducing the topic of an essay, and conveying the overall spirit of an essay. That is to say, the title of an essay should be unique, informative, compelling and make readers

want to read more. The study “*How to Write the Perfect Essay Title...*” [67] points out that we can classify essay titles into three basic categories: ***Descriptive title, Personal title and Imaginative title.***

As presented in the previous sections, an AdE is an unquestionably important part of the student’s application pack and, indeed, has a substantial influence on an admission officer’s decision to accept or reject an applicant. The college AdEs will give the college admissions committee the chance to get to know more about an applicant. For this reason, the analysis shows that the majority of the *Titles* are *Personal titles* (75.7%), followed by *Descriptive titles* (24.3%) and *Imaginative titles* are not found in collected samples.

4.1.2 The Introduction

Chesla [16, p.93] states that while it can vary slightly from one type of writing assignment to another, an *Introduction* is a critical part of an essay and that with a combination of courtesy and strategy, the *Introduction* “*sells*” the essay to the reader, compelling him or her to read the rest of it.

Basically, as Chesla [16, p.93] claims, the *Introduction* of AdEs includes the following components: ***hook, scene*** and ***thesis statement.***

The *Introductions* in AdEs commonly use the combination of two components: a *hook* - a *thesis statement* or a *scene* - a *thesis statement* with the percentage of 60% - the highest to create the effective *Introductions* to convince the readers to keep reading the essays. The *Introductions* consist of one component, namely a *hook*, a *scene* or a *thesis statement*, are less popular with 40%.

In addition to the “*hook*”, the *Introduction* can set a *scene* to

provide the information the reader will need to understand the story such as: who are the major characters? When and where is it taking place? Is it a story about something that happened to the writer, or is it fiction?

In a classic format of an essay, a clear *thesis statement* is a key component of an effective introduction. However, there is an exception to this rule in the AdEs. According to Chesla [16, p.66], because of the high volume of essays each admissions officer must read, it makes sense to stand out and to keep the admissions officer's attention by being mysterious in the *Introduction*. The writer makes the reader read onto the second paragraph by not revealing the subject until then. Therefore, in the data, we can find out some *Introductions* which do not consist of the *thesis statement*.

What is more, the *thesis statement* of an AdE plays a slightly different role than that of an argument or expository essay. It can begin the events of the story, offer a moral or lesson, or identify a theme that connects the story to a universal experience.

According to Smalley and Ruetten [52, p.142], an *Introduction* normally consists of one paragraph. However, in the samples of AdEs, the two-paragraph *Introductions* are found with a percentage of 10%. It is noticeable that one of the two paragraphs is one-sentence paragraph. Used sparingly, one-sentence paragraphs can be very effective for pointing out critical ideas or keeping the reader mentally focused on the content.

4.1.3 The Body

Whereas the *Introduction* catches the reader's attention, sets the scene and states the thesis, the *Body* serves the role of providing concrete details to convey to others what events, people, or activities have helped to shape the writer's character and goals in life. From the analysis, it is shown that some common contents mentioned in the *Body* are *Description*, *Personal experience*, *Self-identification*, and *Goal*. To describe the structure of the *Body*, we use the following symbols suggested by Eggins [21, p.40]. Basing on these symbols, the *Body* of AdEs can be written out in a linear sequence as in Figure 4.1.

$ \begin{aligned} & (\textit{Description}) \wedge (\textit{Personal experience}) \wedge * \textit{Self-identification} \\ & \wedge (\textit{Goal}) \end{aligned} $

Figure 4.1: Structure of the Body of AdEs

From the Figure 4.1, we can see that of the four stages in AdEs, only *Self-identification* is obligatory whereas the other three are optional. There is, therefore, hardly any essay that covers all the components.

The *Self-identification* is found in all the samples of the corpus (100%). The frequency of two components - *Personal experiences* and *Descriptions* depends on the topics the writer chooses, so they appear with percentages of 76.5% and 32.5% respectively. The least common lies with *Goal* (2.5%).

Undoubtedly, *Personal experiences* and *Descriptions* are effective tools to help the reader form a picture illuminating the writer's personalities. In terms of the *Personal experiences*, the purpose of using this component in an AdE is to share and elaborate

on an appealing experience from the writer's life and the importance of that experience as well as the impact that it has on him/her. The events and experiences are presented in the chronological order so that it is easy for the reader to follow the flow of events associated with the writer's personal experience.

Goal is the element describing the applicant's future intention. In the corpus, we just find only one sample consisting of this element.

4.1.4 The Conclusion

Like the *Introductions*, the *Conclusions* of AdEs serve important functions. They refocus the essay by restating the thesis; they provide a sense of closure; and they arouse readers' emotions. As for the genre of AdEs, Starkey [53, p.41] states, "*when you reach the conclusion, resist the urge to merely summarize the body of your essay and end your essay memorable*". In our corpus, a number of strategies are used for creating a powerful *Conclusion*.

4.2 LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF ADES

4.2.1 Transitivity

An analysis of the data in terms of Transitivity reveals many worth-considered results. Of 40 AdEs, there are totally 2478 clauses - the 2280 ranking clauses, plus 198 embedded clauses. However, there are 7 *Minor* clauses which are ignored in transitivity analysis. Therefore, the number of clauses are discussed in terms of transitivity is 2471. From the analysis, we can see that *Material processes* are dominant in the corpus with a percentage of 48.40%. *Relational processes* rank the second (22.58%) and then is followed by *Mental processes* (19.18%). The *Behaviour processes* account for

less than 6%. Still less frequent are the *Verbal* (4.12%) and *Existential processes* (0.14%).

4.2.1.1 Material Process

In AdEs, the writers have a strong tendency to use *Material processes* as an instrument to present stories about their personal experiences to captivate the readers' interest and to show that he/she is different from everyone else.

4.2.1.2 Relational Process

The clear preponderance of *Relational processes* (22.58%) reflects the main purpose of the AdEs, which is to identify and describe the writer's portrait as well as characters. The AdEs are characterized with two modes of *Relational processes* - attributive relation and identifying relation and they are mainly used in *Self-identification* components of AdEs.

4.2.1.3 Mental Process

The third highest percentage (19.18%) lies with *Mental processes*, with the Sensers being the writers and the Phenomenon projecting the writer's beliefs, opinions, wishes, likes, characteristic choices.

4.2.1.4 Behaviour Process

The *Behaviour processes* account for less than 6% of the whole corpus. Some *Behavioural* verbs used commonly in the data are *listen to, watch, dream, stare, laugh, taste, smile, cry, cough, and sigh*. Like *Mental processes*, *Behaviour processes* are used to describe the characters having a great effect on the writer or to describe personal experiences of the writer.

4.2.1.5 Verbal Process

Verbal processes accounts for 4.12% of the whole corpus. In the data, the *Verbal processes* are mainly used in dialogues, which make the essays more persuasive and interesting. What is more, Butt [15, p.80] states that *Verbal processes* are used to slow the action down while projecting what characters are saying. The element of “*what is said*” may be either directly quoted or indirectly reported.

4.2.1.6 Existential Process

With the percentage of less than 1%, *Existential Processes* are regarded to be the least common type of processes. In AdEs, they are used to introduce the reader to the time, places and things in the story world of the writers.

4.2.1.7 Circumstances

The analysis reveals the frequency of types of circumstances in AdEs. Ranking highest are circumstances of *Location*. They account for more than 40%. It is understandable because they are expected to set scenes in AdEs in time and place to provide the readers with context of the story. The second rank belongs to circumstances of *Manner* which reach 20.55%. This number obviously results from the above high percentage of *Material* and *Relational processes*. With the proportion of 14.68%, circumstances of *Extent* are the third commonly-used type of circumstances. The fourth and fifth ranks are circumstances of *Accompaniment* and *Cause* with the percentages of 6.96% and 6.27% respectively. Similarly, circumstances of *Matter* are of 5.22%, undoubtedly relating to the rare occurrences of *Verbal* clauses. The least common lies with circumstances of *Role* (4.52%).

4.2.2 Mood

In the corpus of 40 AdEs, there are 1254 sentences, which comprise 2478 clauses. Of these, 108 non-finite clauses do not embody a mood choice, 18 non-restrictive relative clauses and 7 *Minor* clauses are ignored. The most common used type of Mood is *Declarative* one, with approximately 96% of the whole corpus. *Interrogative* mood ranks the second (3.02%) and the least common is *Imperative* (1.12%).

4.2.2.1 Declarative

The *Declaratives* are dominant in the corpus because the primary purpose of these essays is to inform or to “*show*” the readers who the writer is and what his/her personality or strength is. Within *Declaratives*, most of them are full. *Elliptical cases* in the corpus are extremely rare, accounting for a very small percentage of less than 0.4%. More often, they are involved with the *Body* and the dialogues in AdEs, supplying information to set the context of the story, as in (4.59a), or responding to the first speaker in the dialogue.

4.2.2.2 Interrogative

The *Interrogative* mood arises far less than the *Declarative* one, with a percentage of 3.02%. *Interrogatives* are involved with the *Introduction* of AdEs, arousing the reader’s attention, making the *Introduction* an invitation to read on.

4.2.2.3 Imperative

Imperatives are extremely rare, accounting for a very small percentage of less than 0.7%. In AdEs, the writer uses *Imperatives* to get things done by himself as well as to interact with the reader as in (4.62). In addition, a full range of *Imperatives* appears in the speech

of characters to attract the reader to the story and to make the story more impressive.

4.2.3 Thematisation

The result reveals the frequency of Theme types used in AdEs. The most popular type of Themes is *Topical* Theme (82.67%). From that total, 75.34 % are *Unmarked Topical* Theme while the remaining are *Marked* Theme (7.34%). The second rank belongs to *Textual* Themes which reach 12 % of the whole corpus. *Interpersonal* Themes are the least popular one with a percentage of 5.33%.

4.2.3.1 Topical Theme

The fact that *Topical* Theme achieves the highest frequency (82.67%) is not a surprising result since the *Topical* Theme is a must in every clause and is the first constituent of a meaningful structure of a clause. It often contains at least one of the elements such as processes, participants, and circumstances. The results of analysis show a total of 82.67% *Topical* Themes. Out of this, 7.34% are *Marked* Themes whereas 75.33 % are *Unmarked* Themes.

- ***Unmarked Themes***

Unmarked Themes account for 75.33 % of the whole corpus. One interesting thing is that the great majority of *Unmarked Themes* in AdEs are the first singular personal pronoun “**I**”, which arises 762 times in the whole data (33.52%).

Marked Themes

Marked Themes account for 7.34% in the whole corpus. In spite of the rare occurrence of *Marked Themes* in AdEs, the types and ways of using *Marked Themes* are varied.

4.2.3.2 *Textual Theme*

It serves as a linking function, which includes any combination of continuative, structural and conjunctive conjunctions. *Textual Themes* occur as high as 12% of the corpus.

4.2.3.3 *Interpersonal Theme*

Interpersonal Theme is still far less frequent in AdEs (4.72%). First of all, in AdEs, *Modal adjuncts as Theme* account for more than 2%.

4.3 SUMMARY

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

Aiming at investigating the discourse features of college AdEs in English, we set up two major goals for the thesis: (1) finding out the discourse structure of college AdEs in English and (2) providing an in-depth description of English AdEs in terms of lexico-grammatical features.

Firstly, the data analysis shows that the majority (82.5%) of AdEs in the corpus has four parts: the *Title*, the *Introduction*, the *Body* and the *Conclusion*. The *Introduction* is the important one because ‘with a combination of courtesy and strategy, the *Introduction* “sells” the essay to the reader, compelling him or her to read the rest of it’ [16, p.93]. To grab the reader’s attention, the writer can use strategies such as a quotation, a question, a surprising statement or fact, or an anecdote to create a hook, a scene or to give thesis statement in the *Introduction*. Moreover, in the *Body* of AdEs, we can find out four components such as *Description*, *Personal experience*, *Self-identification*, and *Goal*, among which only *Self-identification* is obligatory. The detailed information that the *Body*

contains is shown in the following figure:

*(Description) / (Personal experience) ^ * Self-identification*
 ^ *(Goal)*

The *Conclusion* in AdEs refocuses the essay by restating the thesis; they provide a sense of closure; and they arouse readers' emotions. Like the *Introduction*, a number of strategies used for creating a powerful conclusion are *continuing the discussion, making sense of what happened, echoing the introduction to provide balance, bringing the reader to the present day or ending with a quotation*.

Secondly, the analysis yields a picture of lexico-grammatical features in AdEs. The study concentrates on three aspects, including Transitivity, Mood, and Thematisation to explore the experiential meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning respectively of AdEs in English. The findings show that the majority of processes used in AdEs are *Material* and *Relational* (71%) and they reveal *writer-oriented activities* because the texts mainly describe actions or events related to the personal experiences of the writer as well as show the writer's personality. Also, *Declarative* mood is the dominant one, with approximately 96% of the whole corpus, which shows that the AdEs are primarily concerned with giving information to show the admissions committee a sense of the person behind all the grades and test scores. In terms of Thematisation, the majority of Themes in AdEs are *Topical* Themes (82.67%), of which the most frequent *Unmarked Theme* is the first personal pronoun "I" because the writers need to keep their readers well informed about who the writers are. Also, *Marked Themes* account for 7.34% in the whole

corpus, among which is the dominance of circumstances. The main function of these circumstances as Themes is to set the context within the actions happened or described the actions.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, on carrying out this research, I do hope this research can be the map for our journey toward a better understanding the features of the genre AdEs in English in the light of discourse analysis in general and functional grammar in particular. Thompson [60, p.28] claims that one of the areas where functional grammar has had an immensely powerful effect is in the teaching of English as a foreign language. The overall view of language from the functional grammar perspective has fuelled the Communicative language teaching movement - a fashionable trend of teaching language at the moment. Hence, this research is useful for practical use in the classroom. For instance, teachers can explore and trial teaching functional grammar in differences genres to improve student's skills, especially writing. Also, they can explore the use of functional grammar to analyse student's writing and make explicit judgements about their strengths and weakness. Knowledge of grammar from a functional perspective will help second language learners to identify how and what they write/talk about in various contexts.

Practically, the AdE is a critical part of the application. A memorable essay can also make an applicant stand out from a crowd of equally eligible ones. It can easily become the admissions committee's reason for accepting or rejecting the applications. Therefore, this research is an attempt to analyse, pointing out the discourse structure and lexico-grammatical features of AdEs, which

is helpful to not only teachers and learners of English as a foreign language but also those who are interested in writing this genre of essay. I am of the opinion that AdEs should be taught in writing courses at tertiary level and teachers should pay more attention to discourse structure and lexico-grammatical features of AdEs so that learners can have an exact and deep understanding of the way of using words and writing sentences. Similarly, for learners of English as foreign language, they should choose strategies to grab the reader's attention in the *Introduction* and to arouse the reader's emotions in the *Conclusion*. In addition, the way to develop the story in the *Body* needs considering carefully to meet the requirements of individuality and creativity of this genre of essay. It is also advised that learners should avoid making the essays fall into one of three categories: "*being depressing, painting an unflattering picture of the applicant and/or being completely impersonal*" [54, p.34]. What is more, to write an informative and persuasive essay, learners should choose suitable processes, moods and themes which help to show the perfect portraits of the writers.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations in the design of this study due to practical constraints. Because of the difficulty to get access to private documents such as the AdEs, we could only use ones available on English books. Another limitation is the limited size of the corpus.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How thematic progression helps to develop English college admissions essays.
- The semantic and pragmatic features of personal writing essays.