

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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NGUYỄN THỊ LỆ HẰNG

**NEGATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSFER
AT DISCOURSE LEVEL: A STUDY OF COHERENCE
IN ESSAYS WRITTEN BY THE THIRD - YEAR
ENGLISH MAJORS AT QUANG BINH UNIVERSITY**

Field : English Linguistics

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**M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(A SUMMARY)**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Situation

Writing is an important productive skill in language learning. It can objectively reflect students' competence of thinking, organizing and expressing. In English teaching, writing is considered as a difficult knot for both teachers and students. Actually, it is undeniable that English-major students often make a lot of errors in writing, the higher level of proficiency they are required, the more errors they make. That is, at sentence level, their difficulties are only problems related to grammatical structures and vocabulary; or at paragraph level the problems encountered often relate to ideas arrangement so as to support the topic sentence. At essay level, however, the problems are more complicated since they have to deal with another important feature of academic writing - discourse organization. A survey of English majors' writing shows that most of English majors lose unity and coherence in their writing as their academic writing practice is oriented more towards accuracy at sentence level than towards the development of appropriate discourse organization. Thus, a discourse analysis of coherence in essay writing can be useful to teachers and students in overcoming problem stated.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

A number of English majors in Vietnam in general and at Quangbinh University in particular, at present, cannot write native-like essays even if they have acquired a large number of vocabulary, studied a lot about English grammar and essay format. Because of the strong interference of their mother tongue, students think and write in a Vietnamese way. This phenomenon is mainly caused by

the negative transfer of the mother tongue in English learning. In the traditional teaching of college English writing, teachers usually focus on grammar and vocabulary rather than teaching English as a whole. This results in a problem that students can be completely correct as sentence level, however, when asked to build paragraphs or essays, they are not well-done since a good English essay does not only depend on correct grammatical structures but it is the combination of grammar and other factors such as unity, cohesion and coherence.

If in sentence writing, grammar and vocabulary are the most noticeable problem, a lack of clear thesis statement, inadequate supports or evidences to support and control the thesis statement, a lack of unity in essay ideas and organization, a lack of coherence among essay components and so on are major problems confronted in essay writing. Because of this reason, I decided to conduct the research entitled *“Negative Language Transfer at Discourse Level: A Study of Coherence in essays written by the third-year English majors at Quang Binh University”* with the aim at responding to the urgent need for writing quality improvement.

1.3. Justification of the Study

Together with sentence and paragraph, essay writing is an essential sub-skill that English major students are supported to develop since this is a way to raise their thinking, reasoning and expressing their opinions. Essay writing is, moreover, seen as the highest writing level that English major students are required to master because its importance to our daily life is undeniable.

The teaching and learning of writing skill at Quangbinh University, in reality, has achieved, to some extent, great deal of success. However, it also needed to be improved. This study,

therefore, hopes to make a small contribution to the teaching and learning English writing skill, especially how to help students write coherent essays so as to create a good foundation for higher levels of writing.

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study is restricted to investigate negative language transfer at discourse level, that is, errors appeared when transferring from L1 to L2 in discourse on the basis of students' written products, particularly focusing on the coherence of current English major students' essays to clarify how student apply coherence in making essays logical and understandable to the readers.

1.5. Aims and Objectives

1.5.1. Aims

This study aims at exploring the use of coherence, an aspect of discourse in English essays written by English majors at Quang Binh University so as to respond to the urgent need for writing quality improvement.

1.5.2. Objectives

- Investigate students' perceptions of coherence in essays and the ways they employ coherence in their essays.
- Identify factors that affect coherence in students' essays in English.
- Identify likely problems related to coherence faced by students in the process of essay writing.
- Suggest some implications for teaching and learning essay writing related to coherence.

1.6. Research questions

1. What are students' perceptions of coherence in essays?

2. How do they employ coherence in their essays?
3. What factors that affect coherence of essays are transferred into students' essays in English?

1.7. Organization of the study

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

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Overview

2.2. Previous Studies

Up to now there have been a lot of books in which language transfer, is mentioned by well-known scholars such as Corder (1974), Odlin (1989). The matter of discourse and discourse analysis are also investigated by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Brown and Yule (1983), Cook (1989), Bloor (1990), Mc Carthy (1991), David Nunan (1993), and Widdowson (1994), etc.

In Vietnam, there are also a lot of linguists having great contribution to the study of discourse analysis such as Do Huu Chau (2001) Nguyen Thien Giap (2003), Tran Ngoc Them (1999), Diep Quang Ban (1998)...

Together with these theoretical studies relating to discourse and discourse analysis, some practical ones on this topic have been conducted so far, such as the doctoral dissertation “Phương tiện liên kết phát ngôn - Đối chiếu ngữ liệu Anh - Việt” by Phan Van Hoa (1998) and the master thesis “An Analysis of Coherence and

Cohesion and Contrastive Analysis of Lexical Cohesive Devices in English and Vietnamese” by Phuong To Tam (2003).

Although several studies which analyze cohesion and coherence have been carried out, there is no evidence that any researchers have conducted a study relating to coherence in essay writings made by English major students of a Vietnamese University as this study aims to explore. Therefore, in this dissertation, the matter of coherence in essay writing is taken into consideration with the aim at helping English majors create their own writing products coherently; as a result, improve their academic essay writing

2.2. Theoretical background

2.3.1. Language Transfer

2.3.1.1. Concepts of Language Transfer

Until now, a lot of different concepts about language transfer has been set, such as Corder (1974), Odlin (1989).

According to Odlin (1989), “Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that have been previously and perhaps imperfectly acquired”.

2.3.1.2 Kinds of Language Transfer

(i) *Positive Transfer*: refers to the transfer occurring when both the native language and the target language have the same form. (Odlin, 1989)

(ii) *Negative transfer*: Negative transfer is the use of a negative language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language. (Odlin, 1989)

2.3.2. Errors

2.3.2.1. Definitions of Error and Error Analysis

According to Crystal (1992):

Error is a term used in psycholinguistics referring to mistakes in spontaneous speaking or writing attributable to a malfunctioning of the neuromuscular commands from the brain. It is thus distinct from the traditional notion of error, which was based on the language user's ability to conform a set of real or imagined standards of expression.

Whereas, for the error analysis, he defines as follows:

In language teaching and learning, error analysis is technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the mistakes made by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics. (p.135)

2.3.2.2. Errors in Writing

Chambers' (1989) experience in teaching writing to university students shows that incoherence is a recurring problem in the students' writing and can be a major obstacle to their success in writing classes. Unfortunately, unlike grammatical errors which can be easily corrected, errors in coherence are often more difficult to handle as they involve a chunk of units, such as a series of sentences or paragraphs. Because of the difficulties in correcting errors, students sometimes do not get sufficient insights into their errors, and teachers find it impractical to correct the whole erroneous section.

2.3.3. Discourse and text

2.3.2.1. Discourse

a. Definition of Discourse

Brown and Yule (1983) and Cook (1989) say that discourse is language in use. Widdowson (1994) considers discourse as “a

communicative process. Nunan (1993) considers discourse as “a stretch of language consisting of several sentences which are perceived as being related in some way. And the sentences are related not only in terms of the ideas they share but also in terms of the jobs they perform within the discourse, that is, in terms of their functions.”

b. Features of Discourse

* Every discourse has a specific target.

* Every discourse must be completed both in form and in content.

* Every discourse has its unity.

* Language use can be categorized according to register, level of formality, attitudes of the other participants or to the communication, relationship between the participants and the situational context.

2.3.3.2. Text

i. Definitions of text

According to Lindeberg (1985), text is considered as a layer of words that can be divided into subparagraphs. Halliday (1973) sees text as a language unit in use. Fergenson (1989) defines text as a written notice which is complete in content and structure, and the writer has a certain attitude to that notice. Later, Brown and Yule (1996) considers text as a “verbal record of communicative act”. More recently, McCarthy (1991) focuses learners’ attention on whole, rather than part of text from as early as possible in their language development. And Nunan (1993) viewed text as a “written record of a communicative event which conveys a complete

message”. In Vietnam, Tran Ngoc Them (1999) states that in general, text is a system in which sentences are constituents.

ii. Features of text

* Text has the fundamental factor because every text expresses speakers’ or writers’ intention.

* Every text must possess the content factor.

* Every text must have the cohesive and coherent factor.

* Every text must be quantitative.

* Every text must be in boundary.

2.3.4. Essays

2.3.5. Coherence

2.3.5.1. Concepts of Coherence

In language teaching, coherence is a component of the writing skill which plays a crucial part in writing quality. Hatch (1992) said, “Without coherence, a text is not properly a text”. Although coherence has been accorded the increasing interest by the teachers and researchers around the world such as Van Dijk (1997), Enkvist (1990), Witt and Faigley (1981), it is still an illusive concept. Therefore, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the concept of coherence.

According to Palmer (1999), coherence refers to the rhetorical devices, the ways of writing and speaking that bring about order and unity and emphasis”.

According to John (1986) coherence can be generally viewed in two aspects: text-based coherence and reader-based coherence.

The notion of coherence in discourse is so important that if any two utterances or sentences are produced in a sequence, a semantic relation or logical connection between them will be

assumed. A coherent text, therefore, is one where interpreter can readily reconstruct the speaker's plan with reasonable certainty, by inferring the relations among the sentences and their individual relations to the various sub-goals in the inferred plan for the entire to be understood at hand.

2.3.5.2. Ways to achieve coherence

To achieve coherence, Oshima and Hogue (2006) suggest four basic ways as follows:

- i, Repetition of Key Nouns*
- ii, Consistent Pronouns*
- iii, Transition Signals*
- iiii, Logical Order*

2.3.6. Cooperative Principle

According to Grice (1975), the Cooperative Principle "*Make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.*"

Getting more specific, Grice proposes four maxims as follows:

- * The Maxim of Quantity
- * The Maxim of Quality
- * The Maxim of Relation
- * The Maxim of Manner

2.3.7. Adapting Grice's Maxims in the Teaching of Writing

Although writing differs from speaking in channel, and grammatical and discoursal features, the Cooperative Principle is not suspended when communicating in writing. If these maxims are

flouted, violated or ignored, it is possible for the readers to derive quite different meanings from what the writers intended to express.

2.3.8. Chapter summary

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURE

3.1. Research Design

The thesis design is based on the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

3.2. Research Methods

In a study, it is possible to use multiple methods so as to obtain data from different sources simultaneously. Therefore, in order to reach the goal of the thesis, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is used to carry out our thesis. Besides, in order to get the exact instances of appropriate and inappropriate instances of using techniques to achieve coherence in essay writing, statistics and descriptive method was also used.

3.3. Description of the Samples

To conduct this study, 100 third-year English major students studying at Quang Binh University were chosen randomly to fulfill the activities set by the researcher, that is completing the questionnaires and 10 others participating in the interview.

3.4. Instrumentation

The instrument for the study were 40 essays written by English majors during the course. In addition, questionnaires and interviews were used as instruments for this study.

3.5. Data Collection

Data were collected from students' written products. About 40 essays collected from 40 students in class were initially analyzed.

The questionnaires with the total of 14 closed and open-ended questions written in English with careful and clear instructions as well as guidance to make sure that the respondents could easily understand and give appropriate answers to the questions were carefully prepared and delivered to 100 third year English majors randomly because the total students of this course is 126. They, then, were collected one day later; therefore, students had enough time to think of the questions carefully before giving their answers.

For coherence analysis of essays, 40 essays written by English majors at Quang Binh University were holistically and analytically evaluated. The holistic form of evaluation is based on the researcher's general evaluation of the students' writing while the analytical form of evaluation is grounded on a set of criteria, that is Grice's (1975) maxims of relation, quantity, and manner as a quantifiable, objective measure of text coherence.

3.7. Reliability and Validity

With an attempt to carry out the study as reliable and valid as possible, a great effort has been made.

Thanks to a little experience in teaching writing for the English major students at Quang Binh University as well as the friendly relationship between the teacher and the students, the researcher was delighted that the interviews and questionnaires be successful as they were expected. With the careful explanation of the researcher and the free discussion of the respondents, the research was more accurate, reliable and objective.

3.8. Chapter summary

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents the findings of this research. Hence, the results of questionnaires and interview, as well as the students' written products are used firstly to investigate the perception of English-major students at Quangbinh University towards coherence in essay writing. Following this part is the investigation of how students employed coherence in essay. Some of the major factors that affect coherence of English essay written by English major students are the third part to be mentioned. Together with the analysis based on the real data collected, brief discussion on the results in the light of the literature review will be presented with the aim at making the analysis clearer and more comprehensible.

4.2. Students' perception towards coherence in essay writing

In terms of coherence, a majority of the students think that it is very important in essay writing. The result is illustrated through two different sources of data, the major source is from the questionnaires and the additional one comes from the interview. Figure 4.1 which shows students' perception of coherence in essay writing indicates that most of English majors at Quang Binh University are aware of the importance of coherence in essay writing. This is proved by the selection of 93 out of 100 questionnaire-given respondents, occupying 93%. This high percentage indicated that coherence in essay writing is very important and can not be ignored in the process of teaching and learning writing skill.

Despite the fact that coherence is an indispensable element to make an essay a good piece of writing, only a small number of the

respondents (as shown in Figure 4.2), 8 out of 100 questionnaire-given ones (8.0%) affirmed that they always paid their attention to coherence when they write an essay. Additionally, 19% of the respondents said that they often thought about this discursal element. Nearly a half of the respondents (48.2%) admitted that they sometimes took their concern to coherence, meanwhile 15% and 11% of the respondents appealed that they rarely and never kept an eye on coherence when they wrote an essay respectively.

In order to achieve coherence, every text or discourse should be clear, unified and well-informed. Similarly, in essay writing, coherence is seen as one of the prime conditions or characteristics that make sentences and paragraphs connected, relevant and logical. It, then, can not be denied that coherence plays an important role in writing. In the reality, a text without any cohesive signals can be coherent, on the contrary, there may be another with full of cohesive devices, yet incoherent. Since, together with the contents, coherence can be regarded as the heart of the text.

In terms of students' prior criteria in essay writing, the result collected shows the variety in their priority of the factors. (*See Table 4.1*)

The combination of statistics in column of rate 1 and rate 2 showed that content was the most important criterion that made the essays acceptable and comprehensible to the readers with the choice of 68 questionnaire-given respondents. Ranking the second was the organization of the essays, occupying 48 of the total 100 respondents. Among six criteria given, grammatical structures and coherence ranked the third place with the total of 42 respondents. The fourth criterion of importance was word choice by the selection

of 21 out of 100 students. The least important criterion, according to the students, was cohesion with only 10 out of 100 participants.

From the interview, it seems to the researcher that students did not come up with so many obstacles in using cohesive devices, however, when asked about the cohesive devices they frequently used in essay writing, the participants' answers revealed that their knowledge of cohesive devices just confined to a limited range of words or phrases such as *and*, *but*, *however*, *first*, *second*, *firstly*, *finally*, *in conclusion*, *in summary*, *etc...*

According to Enkvist (1990), the majority of English majors feel that the only tool they can use in writing English essays is grammar and this causes them to have difficulty in making their writing coherent. From this situation, it is important that the students be taught alternative strategies to improve coherence in their writing. Focusing on coherence can shift students' attention from sentence-level grammar to discourse features such as textual structuring and unity, which are crucial to creating meaning in texts, indeed, helping students improve the coherence of their writing is a significant aspect of L2 writing instruction.

When asked why coherence is an important factor in essay writing, most of the respondents had more than one choices of answer, even some of them chose four of five out of six items given, which makes the rate exceed 100%.

As can be seen in the Figure 4.3, 58 out of 100 respondents showed their awareness of the importance of this "rhetorical device" (Palmer, 1999) by giving their own ideas that coherence helps the essays make sense to every reader, 48 and 43 respondents, shared their opinions that coherence helps connect ideas in an essay and

makes the ideas relevant to the thesis statement respectively. In addition to the explanation to the importance of coherence above, 32 turns of the respondents said that if they followed the ways to achieve coherence, the ideas in their essays would be presented in a logical order. Since coherence refers mainly to the ways of combining or joining ideas to make a piece of writing clear, logical and smooth rather than the rules of using grammatical structures vocabulary, it seemed to the researcher that the English major students at Quang Binh University could distinguish these two separated categories. It was illustrated by the choice of only 7 out of 100 respondents to the third item given, that is, coherence helps show the correctness of word choice and grammatical structures. No questionnaire-given respondents gave their own other opinions about this question, however, 1 out of 10 interviewed informants shared his own idea besides what the researcher listed above. He said, “together with all the explanation given, coherence can also help ideas in an essay follow in a clear sequence”, and added that “sentences can be conjoined in some way, but if they are not followed in a clear sequence, the essay might not be coherent as it is expected”.

4.3. Students’ ways to employ coherence in essay writing

It can be seen from the Figure 4.4 that more than two thirds of the respondents (77%) reported that always or often made errors regarding coherence in essay writing. Nearly 15% of them confessed that they sometimes made this type of errors, 7% of the total respondents said that they rarely got obstacles in coherence when writing an essay, and only 1 questionnaire-given respondent answered that he/she never made any errors on coherent issue.

Learning to write is an indispensable part of language learning and can reinforce language learning. Without learning to do so, we cannot have affective acquisition of a language. With awareness of this necessity, writing is receiving more and more attention in English teaching. However, when asked about the difficulties commonly faced in the process of writing essays, the respondents' responses varied. (*See Table 4.2*)

Among the six different difficulties given in the questionnaire, most of the respondents did not hesitate to choose more than one for their responses. Lacking of vocabulary and structures, and the insufficiency of the ideas closely relating to the given topic are the two most common difficulties faced by the English majors. That was illustrated by the confession of the total 70 and 58 questionnaire-given respondents respectively. Ranking the third and the fourth positions are the two items relating to coherence, i.e. lacking transition signals for connecting ideas and failing to arrange ideas in English logically. This was shown by the choice of 38 respondents for the third and 33 others for the fourth. Difficulties rising in writing thesis statements ranks the fifth, and the last problems is the insufficient time.

The result collected from the interview, once again, reaffirmed the variety of the difficulties met with by the English majors at Quang Binh University. When asked "What are the difficulties you often encounter in the process of writing an essay?", all 10 of the interviewees, by one way or another, revealed that 5 out of 6 difficulties given were the common ones they often encountered, except for the last item, the time.

Students' ways to achieve coherence in essay writing is one of the most important issues that the researcher would like to make clear in this chapter since finding the suitable ways to make the essays coherent is considered as a difficult strategy for most of the English majors at Quang Binh University at the moment. (*See Table 4.3*)

i. Proper order

As shown in Table 4.3, 91% of the questionnaire-given respondents chose proper as a common way to achieve coherence in essay writing. Additionally, all 10 interviewed students shared their opinions that proper order is one of the most common ways to make the essay coherent. When the ideas are well-organized, unity and coherence in an essay will certainly be easy to achieve. Depending on different types of essay, different types of order are applied so that the supporting paragraphs are arranged in proper way, such as chronological order, spatial order and progressive.

ii. Transition words/phrases

Among the 5 different ways suggested, transition words and phrases seemed to be paid most concerns by the respondents, even the interviewed ones. According to Johns (1990), transition signals are words or phrases that act like "bridge" between parts of the writing. They link sentences and paragraphs together as smoothly as they can so that there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas.

Since achieving coherence through transitional words and phrases such as *in addition, however, moreover, although, and first/ second/ third...* seem to be easy to construct and link sentences as well as paragraphs, students tend to take advantage of using this device as a way to make their essay coherent.

In short, using transitional words and phrases is one of the most common ways to link parts of a whole to make a complete piece of writing, i.e. an essay.

iii. Repetition of key terms

Together with proper order and transition words/phrases, repetition of key terms is one of the most common ways to achieve coherence in essay writing. And it is commonly used by English majors. This is because repeating words is of importance to the sense of each paragraph's message and the whole essay's as well.

Repetition, as mentioned, is an effective technique to create a logical, clear and coherent discourse/text. The repetition of key terms in essays helps the readers; firstly, know the topic that the writer is mentioning. Furthermore, it helps them see the main ideas and find out important connections to use. This technique also plays a part in focusing the readers' attention on the important ideas from the beginning till the end of the essays. (*See Table 4.4*)

iv. Consistent Use of Pronouns

Another way to gain coherence in writing is to keep verb tenses and pronoun number consistent within each paragraphs and the whole essay as well.

It is obvious that using pronouns as a means to gain coherence is a quite natural and effective way to connect ideas and in fact was widely used by English majors. However, when the use of personal or possessive pronouns are not clear, it might result in the possibility of misunderstanding by the readers. (*See Table 4.5*)

v. Using parallel structures

Relatively speaking, parallelism is seen as pairs of sentences or utterances which have identical or very similar structures. In other

words, parallelism in writing refers to the repetition of the structural elements in order to create a balance in the writing.

In comparison with the four ways above, gaining coherence in essay writing through parallel structures seemed less common to students, only 31 turns among the total 100 of the questionnaire-given respondents shared their opinions that they often used parallel structures as a means to achieve coherence in the process of writing an essay. (*See Table 4.6*)

4.4. Some common factors affecting coherence of students' essays in English

4.4.1. The students' ways of writing an essay in English

The essays written by the English majors at Quang Binh University, generally speaking, were well-organized with the fulfillment of requirement about content, grammatical structures, word choices, proper arrangement of ideas and some of the rhetoric techniques such as cohesion, coherence and unity. However, a rather large number of the essays collected were incoherent due to some obstacles arisen in the process of writing such as the way of writing an essay in the combination of Vietnamese and English style instead of English style alone. (*See Table 4.7*)

As the result shows, the number of students who use the combination of English and Vietnamese ways and completely in Vietnamese way to write an essay in English occupied 84% of the total 100 questionnaire-given respondents. This high percentage can be understandable and explainable because the respondents are all Vietnamese; they, therefore, did not hesitate to apply their mother tongue's way of idea expression to fill in the gap of their foreign

language competences. Only 16 out of 100 respondents affirmed that they always wrote essays completely in English ways.

4.4.2. Ideas and Proper Organization of Ideas in Students' essays

Ideas in an essay are like the skeletons in the human's body. Whether the essay which is considered well-done or not depends on the network of ideas and the logical arrangement of ideas so as to make each of the supporting idea in every paragraph closely connect and smoothly flow. The organization of ideas is, therefore, indispensable in achieving unity and coherence which are the two important elements of a good writing as can be seen in the Table 4.8.

It can be seen from the result in the Table 4.8 that among the different aspects that need to be taken into consideration when transferring ideas in writing an essay, the content was taken much concerning with the choice of 52 out of 100 respondents, and it was also the most difficult aspect that caused students a lot of obstacles to create a good essay with the choice of total 24 students. In contrast, ideas and the logical organization of ideas was the small matter in the students' process of writing, which was illustrated by the choice of only 14% of the respondents, and it did not cause many difficulties to students in the process of transferring ideas from their native language to English in a particular skill, i.e. essay writing.

As stated in the chapter 2, writing is different from speaking in channel, grammatical and discoursal features, however, the Cooperative Principle with three out of four maxims set by Grice can also be adapted to this skill. According to White (2001), these maxims can be flouted, violated or ignored not only by the skilled writers but the less skilled writers as well. Regarding the adaptation of the maxim of relation, quantity and manner in essay writing, the

written products collected from the English majors at Quang Binh University generally showed that the students violated these maxims quite often. (*See Table 4.9*)

By using descriptive statistics method as chosen in chapter 3, the sentences violating Grice's maxim from students' essays were picked out with the aim at evaluating the matter of coherence in the process of essay writing.

It can be seen from the Table 4.9, the maxim of quantity, which reflects the informative aspect of the text was the most problematic in the students' essay, occupying 55.4%. This indicates that the students failed to supply sufficient information about the assigned topic, as the meaning of this maxim "make your contribution as informative as it is required for the purposes of the discourse" (Clyne, 1996).

4.5. Chapter summary

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

Data generated from the questionnaires and interview show that among the four basic skills in English, writing was regarded as the difficult one to most of English majors. In the process of essay writing, they face a lot of difficulties, not only in finding ideas logically but also using cohesive devices to make their written product coherent.

The finding obtained from student's written products reveal that although students liked to use transitional words/phrase in connecting ideas in each paragraph and the whole essays, their use of

these linking words was sometimes not appropriate, i.e. misuse or overuse.

The results gained from the findings also revealed that students tended to use both English and Vietnamese ways of expressing ideas in their essays since most of them were the mother tongue-oriented. Because of this habit, students writing were not English native-like in the aspect of discourse level. That made their essay illogical, incoherent and even created a mismatch between the writer and the reader.

From the analysis of coherence in essays written by English majors at Quang Binh university, the brief evaluation of coherence on their essay was pointed out on the basic of three maxims set by Grice (1975). Among which the maxim of quantity was the most problematic, followed by the maxims of manner and maxim of relation. The findings indicate that students often lacked or had a little sufficient information about the topic given, sometimes the information provided was irrelevant and redundant. Consequently, the ideas presented did not fully develop the thesis statement or the topic sentences of every single paragraph.

Another problem encountered by students in the process of writing an essay is that they did not go straight to the point on conveying the thought or expressing their ideas.

In short, a number of findings of negative transfer at discourse level in terms of coherence in essay writing have been revealed. They, to some extent, help us have a deeper understanding of student's essay writing ability, their perception on coherence in essay writing, the ways they did to achieve coherence as well as some common factors affecting coherence on their essay in English.

5.2. Implications

- *For English majors:*

Students should have a deep theoretical insight in a good piece of writing in which coherence should be ranged great emphasis.

Students should be put in the English learning environment where they have a habit of thinking and writing everything, even a simple sentence, in English.

Students should build the habit of reading books, magazines and newspapers frequently in order to accumulate knowledge for the subject of writing and other as well.

- *For the Teachers of English:*

The teacher should take the responsibility in understanding how the students express their ideas, their thoughts or their viewpoints in the combination of their native language and English to understand more about their writing style, from which to eliminate the abuse of adapting Vietnamese way in writing an essay in English.

The teachers should carry out variety of realistic discourse level so that the students can realize the importance of coherence and build a habit of considering coherence as a matter to be taken notice of whenever they write a paragraph or an essay.

5.3. Limitations

For the outward reasons, due to limitation of scope and time, this study is partly restricted. This thesis concentrates only on analyzing students' perceptions toward coherence in essay writing, ways to achieve coherence in essay writing and common factors affecting coherence in English essay, without aiming at analyzing errors relating to coherence, comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences in way to achieve coherence in essay writing between English and Vietnamese as well.

For the inward reasons, due to the limited knowledge of the researcher, this work can not avoid certain restrictions, consequently, inevitable shortcomings and mistakes. Furthermore, the lack of personal experience and language competence are also the reasons for shortcomings.

5.4. Suggestions for Further Research

1. More study on coherence in paragraph/essay writing using topic-comment structures
2. Improving coherence in paragraph/essay writing among the Vietnamese learners of English
3. Negative discourse transfer of the first language in Vietnamese college students' English writing
4. An investigation in errors in the essay writing of Vietnamese language learners of English