Cohesion and Coherence in English Essays Written by Malaysian and Thai Medical Students

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Abstract

This study examined cohesion and coherence in narrative and argumentative English essays written by 14 Malaysian and 14 Thai second year medical students at the National University of Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand, respectively. Examination of the essays written by the two subject groups aimed at answering four research questions. 1.) Which group uses more cohesive devices? 2.) What types of cohesive devices used are most prominent? 3.) What are the similarities or differences of frequencies and types of cohesion and coherence in the essays written by these two groups? 4.) Is there a relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and writing quality? Each student was asked to give his/her demographic information and to write two essays, one narrative and one argumentative. In this qualitative and quantitative mixed type of study, the essays’ quality was holistically rated and the scores were grouped using high-low 27% technique followed by an analysis of the cohesive devices used in each essay.

The series of T-tests performed on the cohesion analysis showed both similarities and differences. Regarding the similarities, a case in point is that both the Malaysian and Thai writers used more syntactic ties (reference & conjunction) than semantic ties (reiteration & collocation). However, the Malaysian writers used more reiteration, than the Thai writers. Nevertheless, the Thai writers used more references in their argumentative essays than the Malaysian writers. There were no differences in the number of cohesive devices used between the high and low-rated essays written by these two groups of writers.

It is suggested that ESL/EFL teachers, Thai teachers in particular, should teach coherence to students via ideas and organizational emphasis, train students’ minds and thought processes with reasonable argumentation through frequent writing practices.

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Introduction

In Thai colleges and universities, students are required to write different genres including summaries, term papers, research abstracts and proposals. In particular, medical students need to use English in almost all of their courses. Therefore, they need to be equipped with this demanding academic talent. In fact, Thai students have problems of connectedness in their writing as evidence in Khongput’s study (2005).

Although several studies which analyze ESL learners’ writing in terms of cohesion and coherence have been carried out (Johnson, 1992 and Palmer, 1999), there is no evidence that any researchers have conducted a study on cohesion and coherence of current medical Thai ESL students’ writings which otherwise, this study can help.

Also, researchers have widely acknowledged that students’ instructional backgrounds or prior experiences, their linguistic knowledge and the writing strategies they use play very important roles in L2 writing (Thongrin, 2002). Therefore, the researcher is interested in investigating cohesion and coherence of Thai students’ writing with another Asian country (Malaysian), to discern similarities and differences in these two groups of writers. By doing this, it allows this study to promote education of the people in these 2 countries as it is one of the requirements of bilateral cooperation between the Thailand-Malaysian Association and the Malaysian-Thailand Association in 1998 (National News Bureau).

Also, the previous studies confirmed that cohesion and coherence varied across topics (Indrasuta, 1988). So, this study selected two different modes of writing as the research instrument, namely: narrative and argumentative. The narrative mode was selected because this genre contains a story line or plot which is most frequently used in real life and it is achieved in the writing with the use of cohesive devices (Hew, 1994). Also, this type of writing is considered easy for students to write when compared to other types of writings as it is reflections of the past events or an exploration of the author’s values in a story form (Henley, 1988). On the other hand, the argumentative mode was chosen because it is considered the most difficult writing which requires all the expository skills the students have learned. Fahnestock and Secor (1983) believed that writing argument prepares students for the kinds of writing tasks demanded in college courses and careers. Therefore, choosing these two genre of writings would be appropriate mixture to elicit cohesion and coherence in data produced by the subjects in this study.
To this end, thus, this study aimed specifically to examine cohesion and coherence in compositions written by Thai medical learners of different cultural and educational backgrounds and by Malaysian medical learners who had other different linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. Therefore, the following four research questions were set forth in this study:

1) Between Malaysian and Thai learners, which group uses more cohesive devices in their essays?

2) What types of cohesive devices are most prominent in essays written by Malaysian and Thai students?

3) What are the similarities or differences of frequencies and types of cohesion and coherence in essays written by these two groups of writers?

4) Is there a relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and textual coherence in essays written by Malaysian and Thai students?

Based on the research questions above, it was hypothesized that:

1) Malaysian learners use cohesive devices as frequent as Thai learners.

2) Syntactic ties, particularly the use of reference, is the most prominent in essays written by Malaysian and Thai students.

3) Malaysian and Thai learners share a similarity in the use of syntactic ties which is above the use of semantic ties.

4) There is no relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and textual coherence in essays written by these two groups of writers.

**Prior Research on Cohesion and Coherence**

The relationship between coherence and cohesion in a text has proven an essential element for quality English writing and the writing process of non-native speakers of English. Empirical studies on this relationship indicate some relationships between writing quality which depends on overall coherence in content, organization and the quantity of cohesive devices used (Fitzgerald and Spiegel, 1986; Neuner, 1987; and Johnson, 1992).

Fitzgerald and Spiegel (1986) examined the relationship between cohesion and coherence in the 27 third grade and 22 sixth grade students’ writing and investigated the degree to which this relationship would vary with quality of writing and grade level. Each child wrote two essays: one on
each two days (i.e., four days for 2 essays) whereby the brief story stems were given. Thirty minutes were allotted for planning and writing, and three students couldn’t finish when time has run out but were allowed to finish on another day. Fitzgerald and Spiegel used Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) system for scoring cohesion. The result showed that there was some evidence of a significant relationship between cohesion and coherence in children’s writing. This relationship varied according to text content but didn’t vary according to grade level.

Next, Neuner (1987) studied cohesive ties and chains in 20 good and 20 poor essays written by 40 college freshmen which were rated by a panel of 12 professors using a four point holistic scoring scale. The essays were randomly chosen from a collection of over 600 papers written at summer orientation session required of all new full-time students at a private college in New York. No education or background data were collected for the participants. The researcher found that none among the different types of cohesive ties were used more frequently by the good writers than poor writers.

Later, Johnson (1992) carried out a study to investigate 3 types of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesion categories (reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion) in good and weak essays written in Malay and in English by native speakers of both languages and in ESL by Malaysian writers. The essays were written under pressure in a specified time length and evaluated holistically as ‘good’ or ‘weak’ by the three groups of teachers. In other words, essays written in Malay were evaluated by the Malay teachers, in English by American teachers, and in ESL by other groups of American teachers. The result showed that good essays written in Malay had more semantic ties through reiteration of words than in weak essays. In contrast, good essays in English had more syntactic ties (conjunction and reference). However, the general findings suggested that the good essays are not more cohesive than the weak ones.

Coherence

It is essential that ESL/EFL teachers have a clear understanding of the concept of coherence. This is because coherence is a component of the writing skill which proves a crucial part of and a virtual guarantee of writing quality. According to Lee (2002), coherence is defined as the relationships of various ideas in a text that are linked together to create a meaningful discourse. Lee identifies five features of a coherent text as follows:
1. The text has a macrostructure that provides a sense appropriate to its communicative purposes and functions. The macrostructure is an outline of the main categories or functions of the text, e.g. when the writer’s purpose is to tell a story, it is common to arrange the events in a chronological order.

2. The text has an information structure that guides the reader in understanding how information is organized and how the topic of the text is developed. This involves the giving of old information before new information.

3. The text shows connectivity of the underlying content evidenced by relations between propositions. A text is coherent if the propositions it contains are justified or exemplified with detail.

4. The text has cohesive devices to establish a relationship between sentences and paragraphs. This feature is associated with the surface structure of coherence which links sentences and points being made.

5. The text contains appropriate metadiscourse features. Metadiscourse markers in texts help readers organize, interpret and evaluate information. Some examples of these markers are sequencers (first, second, finally), and certainty markers (certainly, no doubt), etc.

Cohesion: Syntactic Ties & Semantic Ties

Cohesion is how words and expressions are connected using cohesive devices which can be categorized into five groups: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976). These cohesive devices ‘tie’ sentences together in order to create a meaningful text.

In this study, the researcher examined the syntactic ties of reference and conjunction and the semantic ties of lexical cohesion in particular, reiteration and collocation in the narrative and argumentative essays of the Malaysian and Thai medical student subject groups.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), reference is a device which allows the reader or hearer to trace participants, entities, events, etc. in a text. For example, ‘Ms. Prissana has resigned. She announced her decision this morning.’ The pronoun ‘she’ in this example points to Ms. Prissana within the textual world itself. Conjunction, on the other hand, involves the use of formal markers to combine clauses, sentences and paragraphs such as the use of ‘and’, ‘however’, ‘but’, etc. Lexical
cohesion involves either the reiteration, repetition of an item, or the use of a synonym, near synonym, or superordinate term. Lexical cohesion could also be used in reference to lexical collocation. Collocation involves the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur, for instance, *climb / ascend; order / obey; laugh / joke; garden / dig;* and *beach / waves / sand / swim / lifeguard.*

**Data Collection and Findings**

The four research questions mentioned earlier were answered through the investigation of the participants’ demographic information and a writing test which included 2 essay questions, namely narrative and argumentative essays.

The subjects involved in this study were 14 Malaysians and 14 Thai second year medical students from the National University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand respectively.

**Participants’ Demographic Information**

The demographic survey indicated the following aspects of information. Both population groups had a greater number of female respondents (Malaysian: 10 females and 4 males; Thai: 13 females and 1 male). The Malaysians speak Malay, Chinese, English, Tamil and other as their first languages, while the Thai sample group were 100% Thai native speakers. The Malaysian group studied English for 1.1 years more than the Thai group (14.4 years Malaysian and 13.3 years Thai). The Malaysian group began studying English from an earlier age (5.7 years) than the Thai sample group (7.4 years).

In terms of attitudes towards writing in English, the Malaysian sample group had positive (8) and neutral (6) feelings, while the Thai had positive (1), negative (1) and neutral (5) feelings.

With regards to perception of difficulty in writing in English, the Malaysian sample group reported it as: easy (4), moderate (1), and difficult (9), while the Thai sample group reported it as: easy (3) difficult (10), and most difficult (1).

Regarding ESL/EFL and a cultural context, it is well-known that Malaysia offers greater exposure to English language and multilingual experiences than Thai culture (L. Naomi, personal communication, April 6, 2006). This could affect the writing proficiency of both populations.
**Coherence Analysis of Essays**

The (56) essays, 14 narrative and 14 argumentative essays written by the Malaysian respondents and 14 narrative and 14 argumentative essays written by the Thai respondents were evaluated holistically from 1 – 6 in terms of overall quality by the researcher (a Thai national, college English teacher), and an American Ph.D. native speaker (who is teaching English at the college level in Thailand). Bailey’s (1988) six holistic scale which is called Test of Written English Scoring Guide (see Appendix B) was used to examine the organization of content. The guide clarifies essays of different scales as the followings: 6 = clearly demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have some occasional errors; 5 = is generally well organized but have fewer details than does a 6 essay; 4 = demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels; 3 = demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both; 2 = suggests incompetence in writing; and 1 = demonstrates incompetence in writing. The inter-rater reliability, agreement between the raters, was high; the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of narrative composition scoring was 0.97 and that of argumentative scoring was 0.95, using SPSS 11.5 for Windows.

The English compositions written by the Malaysians revealed a minimum score of level 3 for narrative and level 2 for argumentative, while the compositions of the Thais revealed a minimum score of level 2 for narrative compositions and level 0 for argumentative essays. The maximum scores for Malaysians reached level 6 and level 5 for argumentative essays as did the Thais; however, the percentage of Malaysians scoring level 5 or 6 were higher.

In order to investigate whether or not the quality of writing related to the number of cohesive devices used in the writing of these two participation groups, the scores were then ranked from highest to lowest. Then, the top 27% of the narrative and argumentative and the bottom 27% of the narrative and argumentative from the ranking were taken out. These top 27% were designated high scorers and the bottom the low scorers.

**Cohesion Analysis of Essays**

This study examined the frequency of use of syntactic and semantic ties in the Malaysian and Thai narrative essays and argumentative essays. This covered the examination of three types of reference (personal, demonstrative & comparative), eight types of conjunction (causative,
comparative, contrastive, objective, effect, additive, exemplified and temporal), and two types of lexical cohesion (reiteration and collocation).

The cohesive ties were first identified as referential, conjunctive or lexical, followed by a counting for each category. A series of statistical analyses (frequencies, mean, standard deviation of cohesion and T-test comparing the frequency of cohesive ties used in the narrative and argumentative essays) were employed in this study.

Comparative data were analyzed for the Malaysian and Thai narrative essays, and then for the Malaysian and Thai argumentative essays as follows in Tables 1 & 2. The narrative essays showed a similar use of cohesive ties by the Malaysians and the Thais except in the category of reiteration in which the Malaysian narratives (6.60) contained nearly double the frequency of the Thai (3.87). This comparison is shown in Table 1.

The argumentative essays revealed a slightly similar pattern as the narrative as seen in Table 2. Again the category of reiteration in the Malaysian essays (8.13) outpaced the Thais (3.20). And, interestingly the Thais employed a significant number of references (32.87) in their argumentative essays in comparison to the Malaysians (25.87).
Table 1
Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties Across Narrative Essays Written by Malaysian and Thai Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesive Devices</th>
<th>Malay N=14</th>
<th>Thai N=14</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>50.07</td>
<td>17.70</td>
<td>38.73</td>
<td>14.15</td>
<td>1.94</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.063</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>18.80</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>.40</td>
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<td>.692</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reiteration</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.08</td>
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<td>25.94</td>
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<td>.047*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collocation</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.20</td>
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<td>.240</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average ties per essay</td>
<td>80.07</td>
<td>24.18</td>
<td>65.79</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>1.69</td>
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</table>

*P< 0.05 calculated from the total number of cohesive ties in each essay, which were then summed and averaged across all essays in each group.

Table 2
Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties Across Argumentative Essays Written by Malaysian and Thai Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesive Devices</th>
<th>Malay N=14</th>
<th>Thai N=14</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>25.87</td>
<td>11.04</td>
<td>32.87</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>2.035</td>
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<td>.053*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>14.06</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>-1.674</td>
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<td>.105</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reiteration</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>-2.302</td>
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<td>.030*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collocation</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.108</td>
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<td>.915</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average ties per essay</td>
<td>63.25</td>
<td>18.93</td>
<td>57.71</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td>.884</td>
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<td>.385</td>
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</table>

*P< 0.05 calculated from the total number of cohesive ties in each essay, which were then summed and averaged across all essays in each group.

The series of T-tests performed on the cohesion analysis showed both similarities and differences. Regarding the similarities, a case in point is that both the Malaysian and Thai writers...
used more syntactic ties (reference and conjunction) than semantic ties (reiteration and collocation). However, the Malaysian writers used more reiteration than the Thai writers. Nevertheless, the Thai writers used more references in their argumentative essays than the Malaysian writers. There were no differences in the number of cohesive devices used between the high and low-rated essays written by these two groups of writers.

**Discussion and Implications**

The Malaysian and Thai groups shared similarities in the use of four categories of cohesive ties: high use of references, medium use of conjunctions and low use of reiterations and collocations. This similar patterns in the use of cohesive devices in English Essays written by the Malaysian and the Thai respondents are consistent with the Indrasuta’s (1988) study who found that when American and Thai students wrote essays in English, they used reference the most, following by conjunction, reiteration and collocation, respectively. The similarities in the use of cohesive devices in both cases might be because the native speakers of the two language groups (Malay & Thai) share some patterns of use of devices for unifying their texts cohesively. The results of this study also suggested that both Malaysian and Thai respondents used more cohesive devices in the narrative mode than in the argumentative one. Moreover, the use of references and conjunctions in their narratives and arguments were above the use of reiterations and collocations. It is reasonable to say that it was the nature of the narrative conventions which require the writers to use sufficient cohesive elements in order to make the text (plot/story) coherent or incomprehensible text otherwise (Nicholas and Nicholl, 2000).

With regards to the differences, the Malaysian use of reiteration through repetition of the same word and the use of synonyms was significantly higher than the Thai’s in both narrative and argumentative essays. Therefore, it is worth saying that the only characteristic which can differentiate the essays written by the Malaysians and the Thais was the use of reiteration. One possible explanation would be that the Thai students did not realize the importance of reiteration that it connects parts of their writing. This might due to the fact that they were not properly taught in their early education. Last, the Malaysians differed from the Thais in their use of references. This is true when we take a closer look in the Thai use of references which was much higher than the number of references used in the Malaysian argumentative essays. This finding was consistent with the study investigated by Indrasuta (1988) who found that Thai students used “I” as a reference at a
high frequency and with a minimal use of lexical ties in their narrative writing. This was because Thai students used their personal experiences to support their arguments as seen in the following example, when one of the Thai students wrote: “Most of foods from restaurant are bizarred. I can select different kind of foods everyday. Having food prepared at home is make me tired and bored. Cooking make my kitchen dirty.” (Sample 8)

The findings on the lack of distinction in the use of cohesive devices between the good and poor essays seem to support the theoretical distinction between cohesion and coherence in written discourse as characterized by Lautamatti (1990) and Yule (1996). According to Lautamatti, the lack of difference in terms of cohesive devices used in narrative and argumentative essays rated as high and low written by the Malaysians suggests that it is the coherence patterns or textual organization of the essays that characterize quality. The findings on the lack of cohesion difference between the high and the low rated narrative and argumentative essays written by the Malaysian and the Thai also seem to support the theory of Hyme’s communicative competence (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 1997). Hyme viewed language in a broader sense, as a social whole, and introduced the concept of communicative competence. According to Hyme, there are four strategies in order to make successful communication, namely, grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Therefore, the situation in the present study where the low rated essays used cohesive devices at almost the same rate as in high rated essays but failed to achieve text coherence seems to imply that students may have linguistic competence but lack right performance or communicative competence as described earlier.

Regarding pedagogical implications, teachers of ESL and EFL may hereby know that in this study, students made use of syntactic ties more frequently than semantic ties. Thus, we may enhance our students understanding of semantic ties through vocabulary building, teaching word relations, teaching reiteration and the use of synonyms to connect sentences. Also, teachers may help their students to improve their writing by asking students to rate the coherence of texts as part of English lessons (Palmer, 1999).

Lee (2002) recommended four steps when teaching students coherence in writing classes. First, teachers should introduce and discuss the topic of coherence. Second, the students are led to read a text, discuss and determine if it is coherent. Third, the teachers offer students the 6 criteria for coherence (1. purpose, audience and context of situation; 2. overall structure of texts; 3. information distribution and topical development; 4. propositional development; 5. text cohesion; and
6. metadiscourse). Fourth, the learners’ awareness of coherence is raised via mini-text analyses in which the teacher serves as a facilitator. Fifth, students are requested to write independently.

As for this study, it is revealed that the medical students found it easier to write narrative essays than argumentative essays. Thus, teachers may help their students to develop their critical thinking skills and reasonable argumentation.

Considering cross-cultural aspects, this research indicates a significant cross-cultural difference in rhetorical forms as evidenced in Kaplan’s analysis (as cited in Takala, Purves and Buckmaster, 1982) stating that “each language and each culture has a paragraph order unique to itself, and part of the learning of a particular language is the mastering of its logical system.” The internal logic and organization of texts of English and Malay are more similar than the internal logic and organization of texts of English and Thai. The rhetorical patterns of a language are determined by the culture and are an expression of the collective consciousness of the culture. And, an examination of the contrastive rhetoric showed cultural memes such as the positive collectivism of Malaysian culture and thus a clear and structured support of organizing texts (paragraphs, sentences and punctuation) when writing; and the loosely structured relationships in Thai culture and therefore the ego-affirming use of self-referentials and the loosely structured paragraphs, sentences and punctuation (L. Naomi, personal communication, April 6, 2006). So, when teaching writing in English, teachers should keep in mind the writing conventions of students from different cultures. Thus, appropriate remedies to the students’ writing should be done accordingly.
References


Appendix A: Research Instrument

The purpose of this instrument is to study the students’ compositions in English. The result is expected to provide some insights on how to improve the teaching of writing skills in the future.

Time: 1 hour

There are three sections of this instrument. Please answer all of them.

Section 1: Background Information

1. Gender: _______ male _______ female

2. First language:
   ______ Thai ______ Malay ______ Chinese ______ Hindi

3. Years of studying English: ______ years

4. Age when you first began to study English: ______ years

5. Do you enjoy writing in English?
   ______ Yes ______ No ______ Neutral

6. Do you consider writing in English to be:
   ______ easy
   ______ difficult
   ______ most difficult
   ______ (other. Please explain.)

7. When you write in English, what do you consider as the most important factor? Please rate from 1 to 3, (most important = 1, least important = 3).
Section 2: Narrative Essay-Writing

**Instructions:** Please write a narrative essay (length, approximately 250 words) on the following topic.

‘My First Year as a Medical Student’

Section 3: Argumentative Essay Writing

**Instructions:** Please write an argumentative essay (length, approximately 250 words) on the following topic. You may write in support of or in opposition to the topic.

In modern daily life, purchasing food from fast food chains is more convenient than having food prepared at home.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix B: Test of Written English Scoring Guide (Bailey, 1998)

6. *Clearly demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors.* A paper in this category:

- is well organized and well developed
- effectively addresses the writing task
- uses appropriate details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas
- shows unity, coherence and progression
- displays consistent facility in the use of language
- demonstrates a syntactic variety and appropriate word choice
5. Demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors. A paper in this category:

- is generally well organized and well developed, though it may have fewer details than does a 6 paper
- may address some parts of the tasks more effectively than others
- show unity, coherence, and progression
- demonstrates some syntactic variety and range of vocabulary
- displays facility in language, though it may have more errors than does a 6 paper

4. Demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels. A paper in this category:

- is adequately organized
- addresses the writing topic adequately but may slight parts of the task
- uses some details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas
- demonstrates adequate but undistinguished or inconsistent facility with syntax and usage
- may contain some serious errors that occasionally obscure meaning

3. Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:

- inadequate organization or development
- failure to support or illustrate generalizations with appropriate or sufficient detail
- an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage
- a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms
2. *Suggests incompetence in writing*

A paper in this category is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:

- failure to organize or develop
- little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics
- serious and frequent errors in usage or sentence structure
- serious problems with focus

1. *Demonstrates incompetence in writing*

A paper in this category will contain serious and persistent writing errors, may be illogical or incoherent, or may reveal the writer’s inability to comprehend the question. A paper that is seriously underdeveloped also falls into this category.