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# **Teaching Textual Features of Academic Writing to Chinese Learners of English**

by

**Zhouhui Yan**

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## **1. Introduction**

### ***1.1 Introduction to EAP, ESP and EGP***

Recent decades have witnessed a rapid development of international communication and cooperation in academic fields, in which the international language English has played a crucial role. English for Academic Purposes refers to “language research and instruction that focuses on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts” (Hyland & Lyons, 2002, p. 2). According to Hyland & Lyons English for Academic Purposes grounds instruction “in an understanding of the cognitive, social and linguistic demands of specific academic disciplines. This takes practitioners beyond preparing learners for study in English to developing new kinds of literacy: equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts” (p. 2). EAP instruction aims at training students to use appropriate English language and study skills in a specific discipline or a particular communicative context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19).

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English language training can be divided into English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and EAP is a branch of ESP. English for General Purposes refers to teaching or learning English language as a discipline. It refers to teaching the basic knowledge of English that learners need to know to deal with everyday situations in an English setting, for example, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc (Mohammad, 2008). EGP can be understood in “contexts such as the school where needs cannot readily be specified. It is more usefully considered as providing a broad foundation rather than a detailed and selective specification of goals like ESP” (Mohammad, 2008, p. 3).

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), on the other hand, means that the learners have specific intentions of learning English, such as for occupational purpose or for academic purpose. It aims to satisfy learners’ specific needs through tailored instruction. ESP is “designed to meet specified needs of learner, related in content (i.e. themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities, centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse and semantics, in contrast with general English” (Stevens, 1988, p. 9). EGP courses aim to enhance students’ general language level to have a more accurate reception and production of English in dealing with everyday situations.

The learners of EGP and ESP can also be different. ESP learners are usually adult learners who have already mastered some basic knowledge of

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English language, and have specific intentions of learning English (Mohammad, 2008). EGP learners, on the other hand, can be both children and adults, who are simply interested in learning English (Mohammad, 2008).

### ***1.2 The Necessity of Offering EAP Instruction in Mainland China***

Currently, in mainland Chinese colleges EGP is in the dominating position while EAP is still new and gains much less attention than EGP (Liu, 2011). In mainland China the majority of universities provide ‘College English’ courses, which emphasize grammar learning and mainly aim at preparing students for passing the national language exams, College English Test (CET) 4 and 6 (Zhang & Luo, 2004).

Many studies have revealed the problems of over-emphasizing EGP training while overlooked EAP instructions. Cai & Liao (2010) analyzed the practice of EGP courses in Chinese college English teaching, concluding that EGP courses cannot satisfy the diverse learning needs and interests of college students. Because of the over emphasis on passing CET 4/6, the instruction of academic English is overlooked and very few colleges in mainland China have English language centers to offer specific linguistic consultancy for EFL students (Cai, 2013). It is often reported that Chinese students are able to achieve high scores on grammar-based tests but find it difficult to write acceptable English compositions (Cai, 2013). Chinese college students’ academic writing proficiency is far from satisfactory as a result of “large class size, disjunction between classroom instruction and the CET test and students’

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test-driven learning styles” (You, 2004, p. 25). Due to the lack of EAP training, Chinese college students found it very challenging to write a literature review, experiment reports and academic essays in English. (Cai, 2012, Deng & Liu, 2013)

Moreover, there are also some needs analyses showing that EGP training cannot satisfy college students’ diverse needs. What they really need is EAP training. Cai (2013) did a small-scale need analysis on 50 graduate students majored in English, who just enrolled in a new EAP program in a Chinese university. The survey results indicate that 70% of the students have never taken academic writing courses before entering this program. What’s more, among the 12 students who had taken academic writing courses before, 8 of them found the courses “just so-so,” 1 said “not satisfied at all,” while 4 were “generally satisfied” (focus-group comment), because the academic writing skills students found difficult are those less frequently taught (p. 11). After the survey a focus group interview was conducted to gain in-depth information, which may not be shown in the survey. The interview results suggest that students need a new course which provides them with generic features for writing the sections in a research paper and, “more importantly, the linguistic resources needed for writing academic papers appropriately” (p. 5).

Evans & Green (2007) did a need-analysis survey to revisit the question proposed by Hyland (1997): is EAP necessary in the Hong Kong higher education context? A total of 5000 Cantonese-speaking undergraduates from

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all 26 departments at Hong Kong's largest English-medium university participated in this questionnaire survey. In terms of the number of participants this survey is one of the largest-scale surveys in the field of EAP research. The data were collected from interviews with students and surveys of department program leaders. The results showed that a significant percentage of the students have difficulties when using English as a medium to study other subjects. It is indicated that the participants' problems centre on academic writing and academic speaking.

Cai Jigang from Fudan University is a representative figure of the study of college English teaching in China, who has researched in that study area for more than 20 years. Cai (2012) did a questionnaire research and some interviews about the need analysis of EAP courses on college students from four Chinese universities in Shanghai city. The survey content are mainly about whether students urgently need academic English instruction, what are the major problems they encounter when they use English as medium in their academic study, and how much do they know about academic English. He received 927 questionnaires in total and had interviews with some of the students. The results indicate that 78.2% of the students surveyed think EAP instruction is necessary and helpful for their academic development. During the interview students from Fudan University said that they are required to take at least one selected course that are taught in English, but without EAP training they find it very difficult to follow the professor's lecture in English. In terms

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of the problems that students have in using English to do academic study, the results showed that the major three problems they have are group discussion (28%), academic writing (23%), and English note-taking (20%).

All the three need-analysis results indicate that English for Academic Purposes instruction is urgently needed by Chinese college students. Among the EAP language skills, academic writing is an very important one to be acquired. Academic writing is considered as the most important language skill in college because students' grades are to a great degree determined by their performance in written assignments, tests and examinations (Leki & Carson, 1994; Zhu, 2004).

Moreover, there are also some pioneers of EAP in some foreign countries and in Taiwan area, which set good examples of introducing EAP instruction into colleges. They also suggest that offering EAP instruction is an overwhelming trend in colleges. The reform of college English teaching in mainland China and in Taiwan started almost at the same time at the end of the last century, and both of them set a goal of improving students' international competitiveness (Cai, 2010). Nevertheless, Taiwan have introduced a new approach since the beginning of the reform--EAP teaching while the colleges in mainland China still keep the traditional EGP training and test-oriented teaching approaches (Cai, 2010, p. 26). For example, the Chenggong University in Taiwan set up an ESP teaching center and opened a series of ESP courses, which include English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses and



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English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) courses. They offered EAP courses as required courses for second-year students while selective courses for third-year and fourth-year students (Cai, 2010). Although EAP is not popular in mainland China, there are still few forerunners that open EAP courses for non-English-major students. They are Tsinghua University, Tongji University, and University of Nottingham Ningbo China, and most universities in Hong Kong area (Zhang Weimin, Zhang Wenxia, & Liu, 2011)

Some universities in other countries also set good examples of opening EAP courses. Many colleges in South Korea has already canceled EGP courses in college English teaching and replace them with EAP courses and EOP courses (Teng, 2013). Japan also introduced EAP into its college English teaching and begin to implement the document “Strategies of Training Japanese People with Practical English” in 2003 (Teng, 2013). In Europe, EAP courses is already prevailed in the UK, Germany and French colleges and most of them gains great popularity among students (Liu& Fan, 2011).

To sum up, the test-oriented English teaching in mainland China and the EGP training cannot satisfy Chinese EFL students’ diverse needs. The need-analysis results also indicate that Chinese college students need academic writing instruction to improve their academic writing proficiency and also facilitate their study in other subjects with the medium of English. The success of pioneers of EAP in other countries and areas also proved the necessity and benefits of EAP instruction for college students.

### ***1.3 Research Purposes***

Many researches have been conducted to examine the characteristics of Chinese EFL students' academic writing in order to find out the existed problems of their academic writing. However, few of them offered solutions or teaching methods to deal with these problems. This paper aims to summarize the features that have been studied in previous researches and also suggest a method for EFL teachers to teach these features to students with explicit instruction.

### ***1.4 Research Questions***

1. What are the features of Chinese EFL students' academic English writing? What problems did prior studies find?

2. How can teachers plan and deliver explicit instruction about these features to Chinese EFL students thus to improve their academic writing proficiency?

## 2. Literature Review

Previous researchers have conducted many studies on the characters of Chinese EFL students' academic writing that are regarded as unconventional and in need of remediation. Some articles I reviewed use the term "feature" some use "trait" to refer to these aspects of writing that require remediation. According to Oxford Advanced Learners' English-Chinese Dictionary (2009), the word "feature" means something important or typical of a thing, while "trait" means a particular quality in one's personality, so I choose "feature" to refer to something important or typical of English academic writing.

In this paper I reviewed a total of 10 features that had been examined. They are rhetorical/ text organization, placement of thesis statement, expression of personal voice, use of support/citation and quotation, reservation, hesitation, background information, rational appeals, affective appeals, and conclusion. Actually I reviewed more features than 10, but some of the literature examined on the features of Chinese middle school students or elementary school students' English writing. In this paper I only want to discuss the features of adult or youth Chinese EFL students' academic writing, so I only choose studies that examined college students or high school students. Among the 10 traits I reviewed, I found some that are especially necessary to be taught to Chinese EFL students but the others are more difficult to offer

justification for teaching them. The justification of my selection will be given later. In the following part I'd like to review the literature from topic to topic and assess their importance in a later section before describing potential teaching approaches. Studies that examine on same feature(s) are grouped into one topic.

### ***2.1 Rhetorical/Text Organization***

Rhetoric and text organization are fundamental terms for describing academic compositions. Rhetoric is considered as a mode of thinking (Kaplan, 1966), namely, a thought pattern. Kaplan (1966) argued that rhetoric is not universal but vary from culture to culture. It is invisible and exists in one's brain. On the other hand, text organization is visible and refers to the specific way that a writer organizes his/her writing. A writer's thought pattern influences his/her text organization while a writer's text organization reflect his/her thought pattern (Xu, 2012)..

Since there is a clear contrast in studies that examined rhetorical/text organization, I'd like to divide them into studies that support cultural pattern in rhetorical/text organization and studies that dispute cultural pattern in rhetorical/text organization.

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### **2.1.1 studies that support cultural pattern in rhetorical/text organization**

As mentioned before, Kaplan (1966) believes that a certain rhetoric is evolved from a certain culture. The English language and its related thought patterns have evolved out of the Anglo-European cultural pattern. Foreign student's English writing is out of focus "because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader" (p. 4.) Kaplan stated that the thought patterns of native English speakers can be considered as "a sequence that is dominantly linear in its development" (p. 4). To English speakers, a direct paragraph organization "usually begins with a topic statement, and then, by a series of subdivisions of that topic statement, each supported by example and illustrations, proceeds to develop that central idea and relate that idea to all the other ideas in the whole essay, and to employ that idea in its proper relationship with the other ideas, to prove something, or perhaps to argue something" (p. 5).

On the other hand, stated by Kaplan, some Oriental writing appears to be indirect to native English speakers. In this kind of writing, the paragraph organization turns around in a circle way. The circles "turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly" (p. 10). This kind of organization is indirect to English speakers. To illustrate the indirection of Oriental writing, Kaplan gave an example written as a class exercise by a native Korean student:

### Definition of college education

College is an institution of an higher learning that gives degrees. All of us needed culture and education in life, if no education to us, we should to go living hell. One of the greatest causes that while other animals have remained as they first man along has made such rapid progress is has learned about civilization. The improvement of the highest civilization is in order to education up-to-date. So college education is very important thing which we don't need mention about it (p. 10).

This Korean student did not define college education directly. Instead, he/she first talked about what is college, then talked about the importance of education, then talked about that civilization is the reason of human's progress, then talked about the importance of college education. All the things he/she talked about are related subjects to college education but they are not directly answering the definition of college education. This way of writing is considered as a circle way of writing as it go around the topic but never directly touches the central point. This way of writing is what Kaplan defined as indirection.

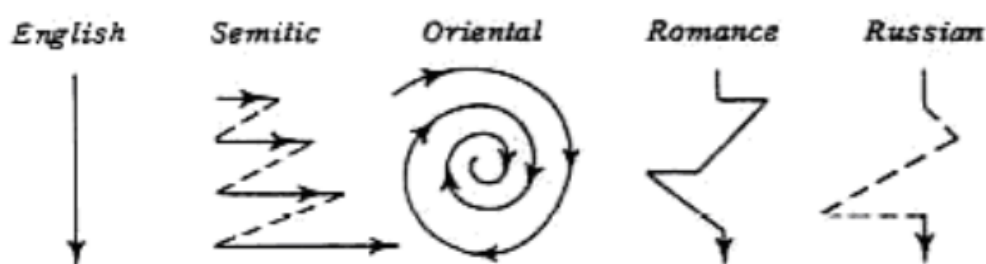


Figure 1. Diagram of cross-cultural differences in paragraph organization from Kaplan (1966, p. 11)

Matalene (1985) supported Kaplan's opinion. The textual feature she discussed in her paper is also rhetorical organization. She wanted to identify and suggest some differences between Chinese and Western rhetoric from the point-of-view of an American writing teacher in China. According to Matalene rhetoric is about relationships and different cultures define and value different relationships. Matalene wrote that she did not understand those different rhetoric and cultural patterns until she experienced them during her semester at Shanxi University in Taiyuan city. She taught composition to fifty senior English majors in that university for a semester. Based on her teaching experiences there, she claimed that when Chinese writers support their thesis, they always assert its truth again and again instead of providing specific examples or evidences for the thesis. They develop paragraphs of other seemingly relative topics around the central topic but never directly deal with the central topic. According to Matalene (1985), this way of writing is indirect in comparison to western rhetoric.

It should be noticed that the Chinese students' writing described by Matalene (1985) resonates with the circle way of writing described by Kaplan (1966). Both Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985) believed that rhetoric varies across culture and both of them state that a direct writing in western culture

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emphasizes on the internal coherence of the writing while indirect writing lack internal coherence.

Cai (1993) also reported similar findings with Kaplan. He did a review of the history of Chinese literature and analyzed centuries-old essays to illustrate the source of Chinese writing conventions. Cai referred to Marilyn Cooper that "language and texts are not simply the means by which individuals discover and communicate information, but are essentially social activities, dependent on social structures and processes not only in their interpretive but also in their constructive phases"(p. 3). He also referred to Karen LeFever's claim that the idea of writing takes place in a social context. He further claimed that the different rhetorical conventions that EFL students incorporate into their writing are situated in the deeper social, political, ideological beliefs that are gained from their native cultures. Cai referred to Fagan and Cheong (1987)'s study and pointed out that the four-part model of *qi-cheng-jun-he* is still influencing Chinese students' writing. *Qi* prepares the reader for the topic, *cheng* introduces and develops the topic, *jun* turns to a seemingly unrelated subject, and *he* concludes the whole essay.

I think *qi-cheng-jun-he* is a very typical example of the circle writing described by Kaplan (1966). It should be noticed that *qi* and *cheng* have very similar role, namely, introducing the topic. In a four-part model, if two parts are spent on introducing the topic, there must be a late thesis statement, but the direct writing described by Kaplan (1966) usually begins with a general



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statement. In addition, the *jun* part is very similar with the circle way of writing described by Kaplan (1966), as it requires writers to turn to an unrelated subject instead of directly discussing the topic. Altogether Kaplan (1966), Matalene (1985) and Cai (1993) describe Chinese students' writing as indirect because they do not have internal coherence that is consistent with western ways of expression in their writings.

### **2.1.2 studies that dispute cultural pattern in rhetorical/ text organization**

Mohan and Lo (1985) dispute Kaplan's argument of the indirectness in Chinese students' compositions. They surveyed teachers of native Chinese-speaking EFL students in both Hong Kong and in British Columbia, they argued that nowadays both classical and modern Chinese writing taught at schools favor a direct rather than an indirect expressive mode. The survey results showed that the text organization of Chinese writing does not differ significantly from that of English and the writing instruction students received in classes influences their text organization.

Yang and Cahill (2008) also examined on the text organization of Chinese college students' writing, but they did not discuss rhetoric directly. The purpose of their study was to find out to what degree Chinese college students' text organization differs from that of American students. In total they examined 200 expository essays, 50 written by American university students, 50 by Chinese university students, 50 by first-year Chinese EFL students

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(beginning EFL writers) and 50 by third-year Chinese EFL students (advanced EFL writers). What is different with Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985) is that in this study, the researchers only view the placement of what they call a “thesis statement” as the indicator of the degree of directness. The “thesis statement” in this research is defined as the statement that summarizes the writer’s viewpoint on the impact of individualism on society. Yang and Cahill believed that the earlier the statement appears, the more direct the text or paragraph is considered to be.

In a later section I will examine the notion of a “thesis statement” in more details. For the purpose of describing the different perspectives on directness I will use the term “opinion statement” rather than “thesis statement” as it was the expression of an opinion that was used as the criteria for identifying the statement in their research.

Yang and Cahill (2008)’s results showed that both American students and Chinese students prefer placing the statement in the top 1/3 of the text, so the researchers judged Chinese college students’ writing as direct. This research also indicated that advanced EFL writers demonstrate more direct composition than beginning level EFL writers, because they had more than one year of English-writing training. Yang and Cahill showed that Chinese students generally prefer direct text organization.

The research by Yang and Cahill is different from Kaplan (1966)’s finding and Matalene (1985)’s finding. However, this difference is possibly

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because of their different descriptions of direction and indirection. I will compare the different descriptions of direction and indirection later.

Chien (2011) did a study to compare the text organization of compositions written by Taiwanese senior high school students in their Chinese and English classes. The purposes of his study are: 1) to explore the types of discourse organization students employ in their Chinese and English writing; 2) whether students choose same or different organization pattern in Chinese and English writing, and 3) what factor(s) motivate(s) students to choose direct or indirect organization, namely, to examine the influence of teacher's instruction on students' text organization. Data were collected through the analysis of 432 writing samples taken from students' Chinese and English class and the interview with their teachers about their instruction in writing classes. Chien also interviewed 20 students to further probe their choices in adopting direct or indirect organization. Same with Yang and Cahill (2008), Chien also considered the location of opinion statement the most important feature for distinguishing direct and indirect text organization. He defined the student's explicit statement in agreement or disagreement with the writing topic as the 'thesis statement'. The results showed that among the 432 writing samples collected most students adopted the direct text organization, particularly for the students who wrote in English; that is, they put the opinion statement at the beginning rather than in the middle or final position of the essay. Specifically, 72% of the students (156/216) adopted the direct approach in both their

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Chinese and English academic writing. The results indicate that there is no fixed cultural patterns in the text organization for Taiwanese high school students. What's more, the interview with teachers and students showed that the main reason of this finding lies in teachers' instruction and emphasis on placing opinion statement early. This study's finding echoes with that of Yang & Cahill (2008), which is possibly due to their same descriptions of direction and indirection.

### **2.1.3 summary of different perspectives on direction/ indirection**

To sum up, there is a clear contrast in the literature regarding the characterization of Chinese EFL writing as direct or indirect. Some educators believe that there are cultural patterns in rhetorical/text organization in academic writing (Kaplan, 1966; Matalene, 1985; Cai, 1993), while others believe that there are no fixed cultural patterns in rhetorical/text organization (Mohan & Lo, 1985; Yang & Cahill, 2008; Chien, 2011).

In my opinion, the major reason for this contrast is that they have different descriptions of direction and indirection. Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985) both described direction as internal coherence. To be specific, both of them believe that a direct organization should begin with a statement or a central idea and then all the following text has an explicit relation to the central idea through illustration and explanation. On the other hand, according to Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985), in an indirect organization, the writer seems to skip from one topic to another without explicit connection leaving the

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native speaker of English with the impression of seemingly unrelated topics to a central organizing idea. This kind of organization is described as turnings around in a circular way and is characterized as indirect by Kaplan and Matalene.

Cai (1993) did not describe direction and indirection specifically, but the four-part-mode *qi-cheng-jun-he*, which he pointed out as the reason of the indirection, especially the third part *jun* which he describes as turning to a seemingly unrelated subject. This turn of writing is very similar with the indirection described by Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985). Because of the similar description of direction and indirection, Kaplan (1966), Matalene (1985) and Cai (1993) have same finding that Chinese EFL students' writing is marked by indirection.

On the other hand, Yang & Cahill (2008) and Chien (2011) adopt a different approach to defining direction and indirection through the placement of an opinion statement. That is to say, the earlier the opinion statement appears, the more direct the text organization is considered to be. Since Yang & Cahill (2008) and Chien (2011) consider only the placement of opinion statement as an important indicator of the degree of directness, they did not examine whether the following texts including illustrations and explanations are explicitly related to the opinion statement. It is possible that Chinese students just put the opinion statement early but after that they proceed to write in a circular way. Therefore, Yang & Cahill (2008) and Chien (2011)'s results

only shows the structural feature of the location of an ‘opinion statement’, but it does not offer any insight into whether they have internal coherence in their whole writing.

## ***2.2 Characters of Thesis Statements***

### **2.2.1 studies that examine on the placement of thesis statement**

Yang and Cahill’s (2008) research was based on a standard writing task given to both Chinese and American university students. They were assigned to the same prompt that:

"What kind of impact do you think individualism has on society? Is it positive or negative? Why?" (p. 116).

Their research focused on identifying the placement of a thesis statement that they specifically defined as the statement that summarizes the writer’s viewpoint on the impact of individualism on society. For example: I believe that individualism has positive impact on society.

The researchers determined that if the opinion statement appears in the first one-third of a text, it is considered to be at the beginning; if it is in the second one-third, it is regarded as being in the middle; and if it appears in the final one-third, it is considered to be at the end of a text. If there is not an explicit statement summarizing the writer's stance in a text, the opinion statement is considered as being implied. The results showed that placing the

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opinion statement in the beginning 1/3 is the method most frequently adopted by both the Chinese students and the American students.

Chien (2011) examined on the placement of “thesis statement” of Taiwanese senior high school students’ writings in both their Chinese and English classes. The Chinese writing prompt is:

“Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? High schools should allow students to study the courses that students want to study. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer” (p. 422).

The English writing prompt is:

“Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is better for children to grow up in the countryside than in a big city. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer” (p. 422).

He defined the student’s explicit statement in agreement or disagreement with the writing topic as the “thesis statement”. For example, I agree with the above statement that it is better for children to grow up in the countryside than in a big city.

The location of the thesis statement was one of the following: Initial (explicitly enunciated in the introduction), Middle (in the development), Final (in the conclusion), or Vague (not explicitly enunciated). The results showed that among the 432 writing samples collected most students put the thesis statement at the beginning rather than in the middle or final position of the

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essay, particularly for the students who wrote in English. Chien (2011)'s result support Yang and Cahill (2008)'s findings.

Zheng (2013) examined Chinese EFL learners', Korean EFL learners' and native English writers' placement of "thesis statement" in their English argumentative writing. The writing prompt was a topic from TOEFL test:

"Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Always telling the truth is the most important consideration in any relationship?'" (p. 68).

In this study "thesis statement" is defined as a single sentence which presents the writer's opinion, which is actually an opinion statement as well. For example: I agree with the statement that always telling the truth is the most important consideration in any relationship. Zheng decided that the location of the opinion statement is in one of the following parts: beginning, middle and end, however, he did not describe how to define the three parts. The results showed that out of the whole 168 essays written by EFL writers, only 5 of them fail to offer a clear opinion statement. Most of the three groups of students locate their opinion statement in the beginning paragraph of the essay, which is similar with Yang & Cahill (2008) and Chien (2011).

Liu and Furneaux (2014) examined the presence or absence and placement of "thesis statement" in texts written by three groups of university students. They are 31 British university native English-speaking undergraduates who were specializing in English language and literature, politics, history or Law, 18 Chinese university Chinese-speaking



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undergraduates majoring in Chinese language and literature, economics or journalism and 32 Chinese university third-year English-majors. Three groups of students wrote an argumentative essay in response to the same topic on the role of the internet and online information. What is worth mentioning here is that the researchers choose to examine opinion statement is because they view the location of what they call “thesis statement” as the indicator of direction and indirection, which is same with the description proposed by Yang & Cahill and Chien (2011). The writing prompt is as follows:

“Some people say that the Internet provides people with a lot of information and much convenience. Others think access to so much information creates problems and brings potential troubles. What is your opinion? You are given 40 minutes to write a 250/500 word argumentative essay with specific reasons and examples to support your opinion” (p. 95).

In this study, the “thesis statement” is defined as the statement of the writer’s viewpoint on the role of Internet and online information, which is again an opinion statement. For example: I believe that Internet and online information play a positive and helpful role in our lives.

This study adopted Tirkkonen-Condit and Lieflander-Koistinen’s (1989) trichotomy approach which takes the sentence as the unit of measurement. The position of a thesis statement/ topic sentence is regarded as:

- “1. in initial position if in the first third of the whole text/paragraph;
2. in the middle if in the second third; and

3. in final position if in the last third” (p. 80).

Surprisingly, the results indicate that most Chinese students have the opinion statement in the top 1/3 of their English and Chinese writing, but most native English students put their opinion statement in the middle 1/3 or even final 1/3. Furthermore, these Chinese EFL students’ responses in the writing experience questionnaire showed that their writing teachers had emphasized the importance of having initial and explicit thesis statements, which indicate the potential influence of writing instruction upon students’ knowledge of writing strategies and practices.

### **2.2.2 the definition of thesis statement**

As we can see from the four mentioned definitions of “thesis statement”, Yang & Cahill (2008), Zheng (2013) and Liu & Furneaux (2014) are actually use a less definite definition: a statement of the writer’s opinion. I choose to call it “opinion statement” instead of “thesis statement” because a “thesis statement” in real sense is more complicated than just a statement of the writer’s opinion. According to Sunderman English 1A, thesis statement refers to the sentence that asserts the main point, controls and structures the whole essay. That is to say, a thesis statement not only calims the writer’s main point but also signals how the writer is going to develop the main points. A good thesis statement should have many qualities such as debatable, narrow, explicit, and predicting the main points of the text (Purdue OWL). The simple definitions of thesis statement in Yang & Cahill (2008), Chien (2011), Zheng

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(2013) and Liu & Furneaux (2014) indicated that the teachers and students may overlook the complex characters of a thesis statement.

### **2.2.3 different prompts and genres require different thesis statements**

Also it should be noticed in the four researches that the definition of “thesis statement” varies across different writing prompts, which may indicate that the writing prompts are asking for different genres of response. For example in Zheng’s (2013) research and Liu & Furneaux’s (2014) research the writing prompts ask students to write an argumentative essay, so this kind of prompt requires the thesis statement to be an argument. On the other hand, the prompts in Yang & Cahill’s (2008) research and Chien’s (2011) research did not specify the genre of the writing task, so the students’ thesis statement can be either an argument or not. In addition, in both Zheng’s research and Liu & Furneaux’s research the participants put their opinion statement very early in their argumentative essays, this may indicate that a certain genre has its unique requirement about the location of thesis statement.

### **2.2.4 a character of a thesis statement—explicit or not**

Yang & Cahill (2008) mentioned in their research that if there is not an explicit statement summarizing the writer's stance in a text, the thesis statement is considered as being implied. Chien (2011) mentioned that the thesis statement will be considered as vague if it is not explicitly enunciated. Zheng (2013) mentioned in the study results that only five students failed to offer a

clear thesis statement. It should be noticed that all these three researches mentioned the explicitness of a thesis statement, although they did not mention how to decide whether a thesis statement is explicit or not. This finding indicates that explicitness is a character of thesis statement. Later I will talk about the characters of thesis statement in the teaching implication part.

### **2.2.5 contrast of the results**

The results of Yang & Cahill (2008) and Zheng (2013) indicate that both Chinese students and the American students put thesis statement very early. On the contrary, Liu & Furneaux (2014)'s results indicate that Chinese students tended to put their thesis statement in the top 1/3 of the text, while native English writers typically put their thesis statement later in the middle 1/3 or even the final 1/3 part of the text. Liu & Furneaux (2014)'s result is very shocking as it is the only study that indicates that native English writers do not have early thesis statement. Although it is the only one, it is also the most recent one, so the results deserve great attention. Since the results indicate that early thesis statement may not be a feature of English academic writing, it may also indicate that for native English writers, a direct organization not necessarily means early thesis statement, namely, Yang & Cahill (2008) and Chien (2011)'s description of direction and indirection is not reasonable.

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### **2.2.6 the reason of Chinese students' top 1/3 location of thesis statement**

It should be noticed all of Yang & Cahill (2008), Chien (2011), Zheng (2013) and Liu & Furneaux (2014) found that Chinese students have very early thesis statement in their writing. The reason of these similar results could lay in teachers' writing instructions and the training students received (Yang & Cahill, 2008; Chien, 2011; Liu & Furneau, 2014). Yang and Cahill (2008)'s study showed that advanced EFL writers' writing has earlier thesis statement than beginning level EFL writers, because they had received more than one year of English-writing training. Chien (2011)'s interview results showed that the major motivating factor of students' choice of early thesis statement is teacher's instruction. Liu & Furneaux (2014) claimed that the results of Chinese EFL students' responses in the writing experience questionnaire showed that their writing teachers had emphasized the importance of putting thesis statements in top 1/3 of their text.

From these studies we can know that Chinese EFL teachers views early thesis statement as an essential feature of English academic writing and incorporate it into their instructions, which influences students' writing. However, since Liu & Furneaux (2014) showed that native writers tend to not put thesis statement in the top 1/3, Chinese teachers may be over-emphasizing on the top 1/3 location of thesis statement. They may have paid too much

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attention on the location of thesis statement, while neglected the importance of the rest part of the text.

### ***2.3 Use of Support / Citation and Quotation***

I reviewed these two features because thesis statement in an argument essay makes a basic claim and then this claim is supported by evidence and explanation. The use of citation is the most essential form of evidence for argumentative writing, and the referred form of evidence is citation. In addition, the use of support also has close relationship with the directness of the text, which we can see from the following literature.

Matalene (1985) identified a problem in using citation as support in EFL writing. She claimed that in terms of using support Western teachers encouraged students to be original, to use new language and to avoid cliché, while Chinese students are encouraged to include a large number of *cheng yu*, proverbs, maxims, and pieces of folklore as elements of good style when they write essays. Matalene claimed that as a result of this influence from their native culture, Chinese students' use of support to any common topic is likely to be collective and standardized. She gave an example that her students' first writings on the topic of learning English almost all contained the same support: they wanted, according to the Chinese Communist Party line, "to learn English as a tool, to adopt the advanced technology, to support the Four Modernization, to make a contribution to the Motherland" (p. 802), but such support is not the type of formal citation that is expected in western style arguments.

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In terms of citation and quotation, Matalene (1985) claimed that western writers want credit for their own ideas, for their own unique inventions. However, “for the Chinese writer who has memorized and mastered a large amount of set phrases, conventional forms, and accepted messages, invention not surprisingly means imitation” (p. 803). Matalene also provided an example of Chinese student’s extraordinary fondness for citing and quoting from classical literature.

Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher, maintains that whatever your calling, "The first thing to do is to give everything a true and proper name." Now, we have got a name, "tractors," it is true, a "A motor vehicle that pulls farm machinery," according to my Longman's dictionary. We should do now is to give every tractor a chance to live up to its expectations. I am nothing of a philosopher, but I have a dream that every one of us is aware of this simple, pragmatical idea: Call a spade a spade. Use a tractor as it should be used. (p. 804)

This paragraph illustrates how Chinese students cite from classical Chinese literature and historical figure’s lines.

Cai (1993) also discussed the use of support, citation and quotation in Chinese students’ writing. He referred to Fagan & Cheong (1987) who claimed that when a native speaker of English use support to back up his/her thesis, he/she will not always rely on using “sentimental expressions, exaggerations, and reference to the past”, but an English paragraph by Chinese EFL students

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is often marked by “poetry, flowery, and florid styles, exaggerations, and use of quotations and reference to the past” (p. 25).

According to Cai (1993), in Chinese writing citing and quoting from the past is not only regarded "the height of culture" and "the mark of good breeding" (Tsao, 1990, p. 109), but also considered as “willingness to respect authorities and to accept traditional values, social norms, and group ideologies, and as a politeness strategy” (p. 12). Cai (1993)’s discussion supports Matalene (1985)’s findings.

Zhang (2011) examined the use of support, citation and quotation in Chinese and English argumentative writing, aiming to investigate the influence of Chinese collective culture and English individualistic culture on their writing. The first finding is that when Chinese students use support, they cite examples extensively and directly with less effort to elaborate on them. On the contrary, English students use fewer examples as support but explain and elaborate on them in details. The second finding is that English students use fewer direct quotes than Chinese students. The third finding is that when English students cite from other sources, they give credits to the authors, which Zhang believed is a cultural practice based on individualism. By contrast, Chinese writers use other people’s words or lines directly without mentioning the original authors, because they view knowledge as a common heritage and according to Zhang this is a cultural practice based on the collectivism culture



in China. The use of unattributed paraphrase of the work of others has been identified as the basis for much confusion over plagiarism in EFL writing.

A point should be noticed here is that Zhang (2011) had a new finding besides the shared findings with Matalene (1985) and Cai (1993). That is Chinese students use more examples as support without explaining them in details, while English students use fewer examples but elaborate on them in details. This finding reminds me the text organization mentioned before. The direct text organization described by Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985) mentioned that after the thesis statement, there should be some reasoning paragraphs to support the thesis. In the supporting paragraphs, each paragraph should have a central idea and then followed by explanations and illustrations to back up that central idea. However, according to Zhang (2011)'s finding, students failed to illustrate and explain their supports in details, which violates the direct text organization described by Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985).

#### ***2.4 Expression of Personal Voice***

The expression of personal voice is related with not only the character of thesis statements but also the directness of the text, and this relationship will be indicated in the following literature.

Besides discussing rhetorical/text pattern, Cai (1993) also examined on the expression of personal voice. He did a review of the history of Chinese literature and analyzed centuries-old essays to illustrate the source of Chinese writing conventions. After the review Cai concluded that Chinese students

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always avoid to speak their personal opinion and feelings in their writing. He referred to an old Chinese saying that, *For the sake of safety, do not speak about policies when you are not in the position to make them* to discuss the importance of not offending the higher officers and the societal rule in Chinese writing. Cai (1993) also mentioned that Chinese students are encouraged to put “we” above “I”, namely, put the society above individuals. Cai (1993) quoted a paragraph from Yuan Yen’s “On Learning”.

Basically no difference exists between a sage's mind and the minds of all others. The difference lies in the fact that while an ordinary person places the individual "I" above the collective "we," thus confusing the important with the comparatively insignificant and, furthermore, blocking the communication between the individual “I” and the collective "we," a sage does exactly the opposite (p. 325).

Cai (1993) found that the Chinese literature he reviewed revealed that:

Individuals are responsible for maintaining social harmony. However, individual obligation to social harmony and group values do not recognize the importance of individuality. Rather, individuality is suppressed due to the hierarchical nature of Chinese society. Only some key individuals, such as emperors and ministers, are in the position of speaking and making social policies. Self-expression of others is believed to cause conflict, dissension, or even catastrophe,

which may eventually be harmful to both the speaking individuals and social harmony (p. 6).

According to Cai (1993) Chinese students are not encouraged to express their opinions. Everything people speak and write should contribute to the stability and harmony of the society. Cai (1993) revealed the deep ideological reason of students' avoidance of expressing personal opinions, but the limitation is that he just reviewed Chinese literature but did not examine on real samples written by Chinese students.

Zhang (2011), a more recent study, examined on the presentation of personal voice in Chinese and English argumentative writing in real writing samples, aiming to investigate the influence of Chinese collective culture and English individualistic culture on their writing. The Chinese sample essays in this study were collected from the National College Entrance Exam in 2006, while the English sample essays were collected from SAT tests. These samples were analyzed through contrastive textual analysis. The analysis of first person pronoun use reveals that Chinese writers use far more first person plurals (we) than English writers, especially in the concluding paragraph. Zhang argued that Chinese writers frequently use first person plurals "we", but English writers use first person single form "I" to put forward their arguments. According to Zhang, this difference in the presentation of personal voice may stem from the underlying ideologies of the two cultures. Chinese ideology attach great importance on collective goals and the maintenance of harmony, "which has

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been regarded as the ultimate goal of people's communication and social interaction" (p. 78).

The results of these two researches are similar but also different. Cai (1993) found that Chinese students are not encouraged or even discouraged from expressing their personal opinions in their writing, while Zhang (2011) found that Chinese students can present personal opinions in their writing, but the way in which they express opinions is different from American writers. Chinese students use "we" to express opinions while American writers use "I". Zhang (2011) is more recent than Cai (1993) and the difference of their results may indicate that Chinese students are making progresses in expressing their personal opinions, but they still need to change their way of expressing opinions. It also should be noticed that the way Chinese students express opinions resonate with the paragraph Cai (1993) quoted from Yuan Yen's "On Learning". This may indicate that the reason that Chinese students use more "we" than "I" is possibly because some classic Chinese literature encouraged them to do so.

A point worth mentioning here is that both Cai (1993) and Zhang (2011) examined the presentation of voice, the use of support, citation and quotation and they believed that these three features of Chinese students' writing are all due to the deeper sociological and ideological reasons. I think this overlap indicates a mutual cause-effect relationship among these three features. Since the students are not encouraged to express their own opinions, they have no

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choices but to cite from other people's opinions. Vice versa, since they are encouraged to cite and quote from the past and great figures, they don't have chances to express their personal opinions.

Another thing should be noticed here is that in the previous section about thesis statement most researches have similar definitions on thesis statement: a statement that clearly summarizes the author's opinion (Yang & Cahill, 2008; Chien, 2011; Liu & Furneaux, 2014). Therefore, expression of personal voice is related with the character of thesis statements, which demands writer to express a clear personal opinion. In addition, Cai (1993) and Zhang (2011) mentioned that use "I" is more direct than using "we", so the expression is also related with the directness of the text.

### ***2.5 Background Information, Reservation, Hesitation, Rational Appeals VS Affective Appeals, Conclusion.***

These five features are grouped into one topic because in Zheng (2013)'s study these features are considered as key components of the text organization of argumentative essays. If text organization is a big feature of academic writing, then in Zheng (2013)'s study, these five features are viewed as five sub-features that compose the whole text organization. Zheng (2013) employs Kamimura and Oi (1996)'s classification of the organizational patterns of argumentative essay. They are Thesis Statement (TS), Background Information (BI), Reservation (R), Hesitation (H), Rational Appeals (RA) VS Affective Appeals (AA) and Conclusion (C). In this study background information refers

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to the introductory comments concerning the topic, without any clear opinion of writers. Reservation refers to the sentences in which the writer recognizes the given topic is a controversial issue and shows his understanding to the counter opinion to his. According to Zheng, reservation indicates whether the writer prefer a linear or circular way of thinking. Zheng believed that usually the more reservation, the more circular the writer's thinking method is. Hesitation refers to that whether writer need time to decide which side to support. Rational appeals means the logical reasoning the writer uses to persuade the readers. Affective appeals are these specific examples that the writer uses to support his or her opinions. Conclusion is the summary of the writer's opinion.

Here it should be noticed that Rational appeals and Affective appeals actually relate back to the notion of types of evidence. In this case the preferred western evidence (Rationale appeals) is citation, while the preferred Chinese classical evidence is appeals to tradition, namely, Affective appeals to authority figures.

From background information frequency, the researcher saw whether the writer likes direct way or indirect way to state his/her opinion. Zheng believed that if the background information is depicted a lot, it may indicate that the writer likes indirect way to express him or herself. The results of the proportion of background showed that Chinese EFL learners have a larger proportion of background information, which indicate that they might be more indirect when

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stating their opinions. Both Chinese and Korean EFL learners use a large number of rational and affective appeals to support their statement, indicating that these EFL learners know how to make their essays more convincing through using both logical argument and specific examples. Hesitation exists in none of these essays, which showed that all these writers have clear opinions toward the essay prompt. The proportion of reservation in EFL writers' writing is about 30%, which means some essays still use circular ways to express opinions instead of single linear ways. Another difference of the structure patterns between Chinese EFL writers' writing and the English native speakers' writing is that Chinese writers have longer background information, which means less directness according to Zheng (2013)'s criteria of directness.

It should be noticed that besides the two descriptions of direction and indirection mentioned before, Zheng (2013) provided another different description of direction and indirection, which connects the proportion of background information to the directness of the text. However, if we look closely we can find that Zheng (2013)'s description of direction and indirection is very similar with the description proposed by Yang & Cahill (2008) and Chien (2011), because in Zheng's study background information is defined as the introductory comments before the clear opinion of writers. That is to say, the background information refers to the part before the thesis statement, so Zheng (2013) is also connecting the location of thesis statement with the directness of the text organization. Another important finding worth

mentioning is that the proportion of reservation in EFL writers' writing indicates some essays still use circular ways to express opinions instead of single linear ways, and the circle way is what Kaplan and Matalene described as indirection.

By now it is easy to notice that many features are connected together, and almost all the features are related to the directness of rhetorical/text organization. For example, placement of thesis statement and background information are viewed as indicators of the directness of text organization; the use of support is related to the internal coherence of a text; expression of personal voice is related with use of support and the character of thesis statement; reservation is related to the internal coherence, etc. Therefore, I'd like to rank rhetorical/text organization as the most important feature of academic writing. It can be viewed as a parent feature while the other features are considered as the sub-features of this parent feature. In order to have a direct text/organization with consistent internal coherence, the writer must pay attention to all the sub-features.

In summary, all the above studies have examined a total of 10 features of Chinese EFL student's English academic writing. These 10 features are not equal as rhetorical/text organization has 7 references, placement of thesis statement has 4 references, use of support has 3 references, citation and quotation has 3 references, presentation of personal voice have 2 references, and the other features only have 1 reference. Among the 10 features I will



choose 4 features to teach: rhetorical/text organization, use of support, citation and quotation, and presentation of personal voice. The justification of my selection will be given in the following part.

### **3. Pedagogical Practice**

In the Introduction of this Project I described the goal of EAP to be: “EAP instruction aims at training students to use appropriate English language and study skills in a specific discipline or a particular communicative context” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19), and also the need for EAP instruction that is focused on the specific needs of academic writing. Through the review of literature it has been shown that there are a few persistent and problematic features that particularly need to be addressed when teaching writing in an EAP context.

In this section I will offer some suggestions for writing teachers about how to approach the 4 major writing features that have been identified in the literature as especially problematic for EFL students writing in a an academic context.

The selected problematic features are: rhetorical/text organization, the character of thesis statement, the use of support/citation and quotation and the expression of personal voice. In this section I will outline some specific teaching suggestions to address each of these four problematic features. The justification of my selection will be given in this section as well.

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### ***3.1 Rhetorical/Text Organization***

#### **3.1.1 justification of my selection**

The first feature to focus on for teaching is rhetorical/text organization and I have two reasons for my selection. First, it should be noticed that there are much more researches identifying on rhetorical/text organization as a problematic feature than any other feature. Since among the above literature most studies examined text organization, we can infer that many researchers believe that organization plays a more important role in writing a successful academic paper than other features do. Second, because of the two different descriptions of direction and indirection, even though some studies showed that Chinese students are able to put thesis statement initially (Yang & Cahill, 2008; Chien, 2011; Zheng, 2013; Liu & Furneaux, 2014), there are other aspects of writing, such as students write in a circle way even after the thesis statement is placed early in the text. Moreover, Zheng (2013) showed that there was reservation, namely, the circle way of writing, in Chinese students' compositions. Therefore, I will not teach the placement of thesis statement but I will teach students how to organize their text with internal coherence, namely, the direction described by Kaplan (1966) and Matalene (1985).

#### **3.1.2 teaching suggestions**

As shown in the literature review section, the directness of rhetorical/text organization is a major problematic feature for Chinese EFL students, and the

major reason is that Chinese EFL students' writing lacks internal coherence. In order to help Chinese students create coherence in their writing, I'd like to offer the following teaching suggestions to writing teachers.

First, the teacher can set the class objectives as: after this class students are expected to understand the meaning and importance of internal coherence in text organization; after this class, students will be able to identify coherence and non-coherence of a text and master cohesive devices like topical subjects, repetition and conjunction. Following instruction related to these aspects of coherence, students are expected to be able to revise their own writings and fix problems of coherence.

At the beginning of the class the teacher should teach students the basic definition of coherence, such as: coherence refers to the connection and organization of ideas in a text to create unity. Then the teacher can ask students to think that what factors can make a text coherent based on the meaning taught before. There are several devices can help create coherence in a text, such as properly using conjunctions, repetition of key words, consistent topical subjects, adopting organizational templates, etc. The students may have difficulties in answering this question, then the teacher can use some samples texts to guide students to the answers. For example, the teacher can give a sample text that lacks coherence and another text that create coherence by adding conjunctions to illustrate the function of conjunctions.

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Swales & Feak (2004) offered the following examples of using conjunctions to establish a clear connection of ideas.

A. Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. Lasers play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery. Most of the eye tissue is transparent. The frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue. The beam “cuts” inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue—even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are effective in treating some causes of blindness. Other treatments are not. The interaction between laser light and eye tissue is not fully understood” (p. 26).

B. Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, they play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the eye tissue is transparent. Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue, so that the beam “cuts” inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue—even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are also more effective than other methods in treating some causes of

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blindness. However, the interaction between laser light and eye tissue is not fully understood (p. 26).

Text B is a revised version of Text A. The teacher can ask students to underline conjunctions in the revised text and read the sentence before and after each conjunction. Then ask them to decide on the relation between the two sentences. The teacher can ask students to discuss in groups and choose one text that they think is more coherent and give reasons. I assume that most students will choose Text B, and then the teacher can ask them to think about the effects of these added conjunctions and get the conclusion that using proper conjunctions can add coherence to a text.

In order to provide students with a tool to identify coherence and non-coherence, the teacher can consider adopting the concepts and tools of Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) as a way to identify and interpret instances of coherence and non-coherence. TSA is an analysis tool of coherence “derived by examining the internal topical structure of each paragraph as reflected by the repetition of key words and phrases” (Simpson, 2000, p. 293). It is conducted by identifying sentence elements, especially the topical subject of each sentence, to see relationships in the development of the thematic structure of the paragraph. In addition, it also plots the repetition of key words and phrases to see whether the writer is focusing on one central idea. Schneider & Connor (1990) examined the applicability of TSA in text analysis of coherence

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and concluded that “TSA offers a productive approach to text analysis in composition research” (p. 423).

Now let’s look at a sample text and use TSA to analyze its coherence:

#### Definition of college education

College is an institution of an higher learning that gives degrees. All of us needed culture and education in life, if no education to us, we should to go living hell. One of the greatest causes that while other animals have remained as they first man along has made such rapid progress is has learned about civilization. The improvement of the highest civilization is in order to education up-to-date. So college education is very important thing which we don't need mention about it (Kaplan, 1966, p. 10).

According to (Lautamatti, 1987), a topical subject in a sentence is like a psychological subject but not necessarily the grammatical subject. In this sample, the topical subject of each sentence is “college”, “culture and education”, “cause of progress”, “civilization” and “college education”. We can see that all these topical subjects are different with each other and only the topic subject in the last sentence addresses the central topic of this paragraph. What’s more, since the topic asks to define college education, the key word in this paragraph should be college education. However, there is only one sentence mentioned college education but no other repetition of this key word.

The teacher can ask students to underline the topical subjects of each sentence and then draw students' attention to the problematic sentences and ask them to think of the relation between them and the given topic. Teacher can also ask students to calculate the repetition of the key word "college education" and lead students to get the conclusion that this text is marked by incoherence. I suggest writing teachers to teach students TSA not only because it is good at identifying coherence and non-coherence, but also because it teaches students some cohesive devices, such as topical subjects, key words, repetitions, etc. Then students can use this analysis tool to analyze their own writings and fix the problems of coherence in their writing.

After teaching TSA, as suggested by Dominic Cole in his IELTS Blog, the teacher can design a follow-up chain writing activity to further strengthen students' awareness of using repetition of key words to creating coherence. That is one student writes the first sentence, and then passes it to the next student who writes the next sentence etc. The rule of this activity is that each sentence must begin with a reference to something from the previous sentence, namely, repetition from the previous sentence.

Besides TSA, I also want to suggest writing teachers to adopt the CARS (create a research space), a template to identify the organizational features of an introduction for an academic paper, proposed by Swales & Feak (2004), as an analysis tool of coherence. According to Swales & Feak, the introduction



section of research papers typically follows the pattern in the following table, and the pattern in the table is called CARS model (p. 244).

Table 1 Moves in Research Paper Introductions

Move 1	<p>Establishing a research territory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By showing that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way (optional)</li> <li>b. By introducing and reviewing items of previous research in the area (obligatory)</li> </ul>
Move 2	<p>Establishing a niche<sup>①</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By indicating a gap in the previous research, or by extending previous knowledge in some way (obligatory)</li> </ul>
Move 3	<p>Occupying the niche</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By outlining purposes or stating the nature of the present research (obligatory)</li> <li>b. By listing research questions or hypotheses (PISF<sup>②</sup>)</li> <li>c. By announcing principle findings (PISF)</li> <li>d. By stating the value of the present research (PISF)</li> <li>e. By indicating the structure of the research paper (PISF)</li> </ul>

①In ecology, a niche is a particular microenvironment where a particular organism can thrive. In our case, a niche is a context where a particular piece of research makes particularly good sense.

②PISF = probable in some fields, but rare in others

This template is helpful to teach students write a coherent introduction as each move in this table reference to the previous move. The teacher can first introduce this template to students and then give students a sample text to ask them to analyze it. For example, the following paragraph from a humanities research paper is offered by Swales & Feak (2004) to illustrate CARS model.

#### Thomas Eakins and the ‘Marsh’ Pictures

①Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) is now recognized as one of the greatest American painters, alongside Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper and Jackson Pollock. ②Over the last thirty years, there have been many studies of his life and work, and in 2002 there was a major exhibition devoted entirely to his art in his home city of Philadelphia. ③His best-known pictures include a number of rowing and sailing scenes, several domestic interiors, the two large canvasses showing the surgeons Gross and Agnew at work in the operating theater, and a long series of portraits, including several of his wife, Susan McDowell. ④The non-portraits are distinguished by compositional brilliance and attention to detail, while the portraits-most of which come from his later period—are thought to

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show deep insight into character or “psychological realism”. ⑤In many ways, Eakins was a modern late nineteenth century figure since he was interested in science, in anatomy and in the fast-growing “manly sports” of rowing and boxing. ⑥In his best work, he painted what he knew and whom he knew, rather than being an artist-outsider to the scene in front of him. ⑦Among Eakin’s pictures, there is a small series of scenes painted between 1873 and 1876 showing hunters preparing to shoot at the secretive marsh birds in the coastal marshes near Philadelphia. ⑧Apart from a chapter in Foster (1997), this series has been little discussed by critics or art historians. ⑨For example, these perhaps because there overall smallness (physically, socially and psychologically) did not fit well with her books’ title, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life*. ⑩These pictures are usually thought to have come about simply because Thomas Eakins used to accompany his father on these hunting/shooting trips to the marshes. (11)However, in this paper I will argue that Eakins focused his attention on these featureless landscape for a much more complex set of motives. (12)These included his wish to get inside the marsh landscape, to stress the hand-eye coordination between the shooter and ‘the pusher,’ and to capture the moment of concentration before any action takes place (p. 244-245).

The teacher can first ask students to divide the text into the three moves in Table 1. After analyzing the teacher can lead students to get the conclusion that sentence 1-6 can be viewed Move 1 as they establish the research territory as the pictures of Thomas Eakins; sentence 7-10 can be considered as Move 2 as they establish a niche: a small series of scenes painted between 1873 and 1876 showing hunters preparing to shoot at the secretive marsh birds in the coastal marshes near Philadelphia; sentence 11-12 can be judged as Move 3 as they occupy the niche and state the author's argument. The teacher can guide students to think about the links between these moves, thus making the coherence in this model clear to them.

Fourth, according to Bamford & Day (2004), reading extensively has helpful influence on all language skills, particularly on writing. The teacher should encourage or even press students to read more academic English in the form of academic papers or even domain-specific magazines, for example, *Scientific American*, *New Scientist*, *Psychology Today*, in order to deepen students understanding of coherence and directness (Jones, 2007). The teacher can also organize a seminar to ask students share their reading experiences and what they learn about coherence from the articles they have read.

Fifth, at the end of the class the teacher should emphasize again the importance of coherence in English academic writing and list the elements of coherence that have been discussed on the board as a quick reminder of what has been said. These elements include: proper use of conjunctions, consistent

topical subjects, repetition of key words, recognizable organization templates such as CARS. The teacher can conclude the class with teaching students a major principle: all the things they talk about in a text should connect with the central topic and all the supports they use in a text should directly contribute to the thesis statement. Students should always bear this principle in mind and never talk about seemingly unrelated topics in their writing. At last the teacher can assign a home work to ask students to review a piece of their previous writing and see how coherent it is, and then write another revised version to show their understanding of coherence.

### ***3.2 Characters of Thesis Statement***

#### **3.2.1 Justification of my selection**

As shown in the literature review section, previous researches indicated both the placement of thesis statement and the character of thesis statement. In this section I will not give suggestions about teaching the placement of thesis statement, but I'd like to offer some suggestions about how to teach students to write a "good" thesis statement.

I did not select the placement of thesis statements in this section for two reasons. First, as mentioned before, recent studies have proved that Chinese students put thesis statements very early (Yang & Cahill, 2008; Chien, 2011; Zheng, 2013; Liu & Furneaux, 2014). Second, Liu & Furneaux (2014)'s results indicate that Chinese students tended to put their thesis statements in the top

1/3 of the whole text in their English and Chinese writing, while native English writers typically put their thesis statements later in the middle 1/3 or even the final 1/3 part of the text. Even though among all the literature above Liu & Furneaux (2014) is the only study that showed native writer place thesis statements later than Chinese writers do, it is also the most recent one, so it still indicates that nowadays initial thesis statements may not be a shared feature of English academic writing any more.

I choose to discuss the teaching of characters of thesis statements for three reasons. First, as shown in the literature review, the simple definitions of thesis statement in Yang & Cahill (2008), Chien (2011), Zheng (2013) and Liu & Furneaux (2014) indicated that the teachers just regard a thesis statement as a simple opinion statement but overlook the complex characters of a thesis statement. Second, the definition of “thesis statement” varies across different writing prompts, which may indicate that the writing prompts are asking for different genres of response. This may indicate that a certain genre has its unique requirement about the location and the character of thesis statement. Therefore, the teachers should teach different genres’ different requirements of thesis statement to students. Third, all of Yang & Cahill (2008), Chien (2011), Zheng (2013) mentioned the explicitness of a thesis statement, although they did not mention how to decide whether a thesis statement is explicit or not. This finding indicates that explicitness is an important character of thesis statement and should be taught to students.

### **3.2.2 teaching suggestions**

First, the class objectives of teaching characters of thesis statement can be set as: after this class students are expected to master the basic characters of thesis statements and are able to write a thesis statement with these characters; after this class students should acquire different genres' requirements of the thesis statements and can write different thesis statements in response to different prompts and genres.

At the beginning of the class the teacher should explicitly explain the basic characters of thesis statements. A thesis statement refers to the sentence that asserts the main point, controls and structures the whole essay. According to Purdue Online Writing Lab, a good thesis statement should be debatable, narrow, and explicit.

As mentioned in the literature review section, some researchers simply define a thesis statement as an opinion statement. Actually a thesis statement should not only be an opinion statement but also be an opinion that is debatable and arguable. The teacher should teach students the difference between a debatable thesis statement and a statement of fact. If students just write a thesis statement that tells a fact, such as smoking is harmful to human's body, the essay will be very dull because this is a fact that the general public already knows and there is no reason to discuss about it. In order to make their writing attractive and engaging, students must develop thesis statements that are debatable.

The teacher can give students examples of a non-debatable thesis statement and then another debatable thesis statement, for example:

A non-debatable thesis statement: “Pollution is bad for environment” (Purdue OWL)

A debatable thesis statement: “America’s anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars” (Purdue OWL).

The teacher can ask students that if they are reading an essay with the first example sentence as the thesis statement, do they have interest to go on reading it? I assume most students will answer no. Then the teacher can ask them why and lead them to the answer that because it is an already existed fact which is non-debatable. Then the teacher can guide students to think about some contrary opinions of the second example, for example, America’s anti-pollution efforts can focus on other areas, such as ocean pollution, so this is a debatable thesis statement.

In terms of the second character—narrow, the teacher should explain to students that if a thesis statement is too broad then it is very difficult to support it. A narrow thesis statement means the thesis statement just talks about one central topic and only covers that the writer will discuss in the paper. Usually the narrower the thesis statement is, the more effective the argument will be (OWL-thesis statement). The teacher can give student an example of a broad thesis statement and then ask them to narrow this thesis statement. For example, Purdue OWL offers an example of a broad thesis statement: Drug use



is detrimental to society. When guiding students to narrow this thesis statement, the teacher can lead them to first make the subject “drug” more specific, such as “illegal drug”. Then the teacher can lead students to add a brief explanation or a reason to this statement, such as “Illegal drug use is detrimental to society because it encourage gang violance” (OWL-thesis statement).

As shown in the literature review, explicitness is an important character of thesis statements. The teacher should first explain to students that in traditional Chinese culture students are discouraged to directly express their opinions but English academic writing emphasizes on direction so the thesis statement of academic writing must be a direct and clear opinion without any hesitation or reservation. In writing a thesis statement the author should take a clear position instead of swinging between two opinions. Students should not use words like “maybe”, “perhaps”, “possibly” in their thesis statements. The teacher can give students an explicit example of thesis statement and another vague example of thesis statement to show the difference. For example:

A vague thesis statement: Internet has some positive effects on young people’s lives but sometimes it maybe also have some negative effects.

An explicit thesis statement: Internet has more negative effects on young people’s lives than positive effects.

The teacher can ask students in which sentence can they see the author’s position more clearly. I assume that most students will choose the second one.

Then the teacher can teach them not to write a thesis statement like the first example which swings between two opinions. Instead, the writer must tick on only one opinion and clearly take his/her position.

Third, as shown in the literature, different writing prompts are asking different genres of response and different genres require different kinds of thesis statement. The teacher should firstly introduce some different genres of academic writing to students, for instance, argumentative essay, expository essay, descriptive essay and narrative essay. Purdue Online Writing Lab offered definitions of these four genres of essays. Argument type text is one of the most important and most frequently assigned writing assignments for college students (Hale *et al*, 1996; Irvin, 2010). Argumentative essay is a genre that requires the writer to investigate a debatable topic, take a position on the topic and collect and select evidences to support his/her position. Expository essay is a genre that requires the writer to investigate an idea, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument concerning that idea in a clear and concise manner. The descriptive essay is a genre that requires the writer to describe somebody or something, such as an object, a person, a place, an experience, an emotion, a situation, etc. The goal of writing a descriptive essay is to make the readers have a lasting and vivid impression on the thing that the writer described. The narrative essay is a genre of essay that requires the writer to tell something in a moving way. Usually there are two kinds of narrative essays. The first kind of narrative essay is to write a story.

After introducing these four genres of essays, the teacher can give students four typical examples of thesis statements of these four genres and ask students to find the differences among these examples:

Thesis statement of an argumentative essay: Academic writing instruction is necessary to be offered in Chinese colleges.

Thesis statement of an expository essay: What some people refer to as global warming is actually nothing more than normal, long-term cycles of climate change.

Descriptive essays: no required thesis statement. A beginning sentence can be: In this essay I will describe what is global warming.

Thesis statement of a narrative essay: wales & Feak's book *Academic writing for graduate students: essential tasks and skills* is helpful to teach academic writing to both native and non-native college students.

The teacher can ask students to compare these four examples and then conclude that an argumentative essay demands a clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay and is well supported with strong evidences in the following paragraphs; an expository essay also needs a clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that locates in the first paragraph of the essay (Purdue OWL). On the other hand, a descriptive essay just requires the writer to describe something vivid but does not have requirements about thesis statement (Purdue OWL). Similarly, a narrative essay just requires the writer have a clear purpose of writing but not necessarily

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have requirements. If the narrative essay is a book review then the writer should write from a learner point of view and have a statement to express the author's opinion on this book, just as the sample sentence did. (Purdue OWL).

At last, the teacher can offer students a check list of the characters of good thesis statements and ask students to write thesis statements according to the points in the list. I suggest teachers to consider adopting Sunderman English 1A website's check list of writing thesis statement:

- Does my thesis sentence attempt to answer (or at least explore) a challenging intellectual question?
- Does the thesis statement address the topic given to you? Will it allow you to fully explore and discuss all aspects of the essay prompt?
- Is the point I'm making one that would generate discussion, or is it one that would leave people asking, "So what?"
- Is my thesis too narrow? Is it a "dead-end" statement?
- Is my thesis too vague? Too general? Too broad? Should I focus on some more specific aspect of my topic?
- Does my thesis indicate a direction and structure for my paper?
- Is the language in my thesis vivid and clear? Is it formulaic, or is it engaging and interesting?

### ***3.3 Use of Support/ Citation and Quotation***

#### ***3.3.1 justification of my selection***

The second features I select are the use of support and citation and quotation. As mentioned before, these two features are closely related with

each other, so I will teach them together. The results of the literature review indicated three problems Chinese students face about these two features. First, Chinese students' use of support is largely based on their recited lines and memories, instead of offering objective and authentic evidences such as data, figures and tables, which are believed to be more convincing in academic writing (Matalene, 1985; Cai, 1993; Zhang, 2011). Second, when Chinese students use other people's lines as support they just directly copy them without giving credits to the original author and this behavior is viewed as plagiarism in academic writing (Zhang, 2011). Third, Chinese students use more examples than native writers but not explain the examples in details, while native writers use fewer examples but elaborate on them in details (Zhang, 2011). These findings are not disputed by other studies, so probably Chinese students still have problems with it. What's more, English academic writing emphasizes on evidence, often in tables, graph, and images (Thonney, 2011). This indicates that students should use objective, authentic, and convincing evidences instead of using the supports based on their memories. In Osmond (2013)'s list of feature he mentioned referencing correctly, which again emphasizes the importance of citing and quoting in a correct way. Furthermore, the use of support connects with the internal coherence of text organization and citation and quotation relates with expression of personal voice. Due to these above reasons I'd like to offer suggestions to writing

teachers about how to teach students the use of support and citation and quotation.

### **3.3.2 teaching suggestions**

First, the class objectives can be set as: after this class students are expected to be able to use objective and authentic evidences as support instead of just using proverbs, maxims, or pieces of folklore that they recited; after this class students are also expected to be able to cite and quote correctly in either MLA or APA style; after this class students are expected to be able to elaborate on supporting examples and maintain an internal coherence within the supporting paragraphs.

Second, at the beginning of the class, the teacher can explicitly teach students that an important convention of English academic writing is that the use of support must be objective, authentic, and convincing. The teacher can give students two sample texts with one text full of affective appeals and lines from authority figures while the other text supported by objective evidences, for example.

Text 1: "Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher, maintains that whatever your calling, "The first thing to do is to give everything a true and proper name." Now, we have got a name, "tractors," it is true, a "A motor vehicle that pulls farm machinery," according to my Longman's dictionary. We should do now is to give every tractor a chance to live up to its expectations. I am nothing of a philosopher,

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but I have a dream that every one of us is aware of this simple, pragmatical idea: Call a spade a spade. Use a tractor as it should be used. I am not an economic policy maker, but I have a dream of tractors singing in the fields and trucks roaring effortlessly on roads. I am not an agricultural technical program planner, but I have a dream of seeing farmers studying science and technology and working comfortably with machinery.” (Matalene, 1985, p. 804).

Text 2: “Hybrid cars are an effective strategy to fight pollution. Driving a private car is a typical citizen’s most are polluting activity. Because cars are the largest source of private, as opposed to industry produced, air pollution switching to hybrid cars should have an impact on fighting pollution. Each vehicle produced is going to stay on the road for roughly 12 to 15 years. Cars generally have a long lifespan, meaning that a decision to switch to a hybrid car will make a long-term impact on pollution levels. Hybrid cars combine a gasoline engine with a battery-powered electric motor. This combination of technologies means that less pollution is produced, According to ineedtoknow. og “the hybrid engine of the Prius, made by Toyota, produces 90 percent fewer harmful emissions than a comparable gasoline engine” (OWL-Organizing your argument).

The teacher can ask students to find the differences between the use of support in these two paragraphs and ask them to judge which one is more

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convincing to them. The teacher can hint students that the supports in the first text are personal and subjective while the supports in the second text are data and evidences. I assume that under the teacher's guidance the students will judge the second one more convincing. Then the teacher should encourage students to use data, evidence, sources and other rational appeals as supports in their writings.

Third, after raising students' awareness of using convincing supports, the teacher should teach students that when they cite from other sources as supports they must give credits to the original author(s). The teacher can firstly introduce the notion of plagiarism in western colleges in order to improve students' awareness of the importance of referencing correctly and the danger of directly copying from other sources without giving any credit. When teaching students how to cite and quote, I suggest writing teachers to adopt some templates. Since the rules of citation and quotation are unfamiliar to Chinese students, imitating templates is a good method because templates provide many concrete examples and easily unpack the complicated maneuvers that students need to take time to figure out (Matsuda, 2003; Graff, G., & Birkenstein, C., 2010). For example, Graff & Birkenstein (2010)'s book *"They Say I Say" The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* offered some templates of introducing and explaining quotations (p. 46-47):

#### Templates for Introducing Quotations

X states, " \_\_\_\_\_."



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As the prominent philosopher X puts it, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

According to X, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

X himself writes, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

In her books,, X maintains that “\_\_\_\_\_.”

Writing in the journal *Commentary*, X complains that “\_\_\_\_\_.”

In X’s view, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

X agrees when she writes, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

X disagrees when he writes, “\_\_\_\_\_.”

X complicates matters further when she writes, “\_\_\_\_\_” (p. 46).

#### Templates for Explaining Quotations

Basically, X is warning that\_\_\_\_\_ .

In other words, X believes\_\_\_\_\_ .

In making this comment, X urges us to\_\_\_\_\_ .

X is corroborating the age-old adage that\_\_\_\_\_ .

X’s point is that\_\_\_\_\_ .

The essence of X’s argument is that\_\_\_\_\_ (p. 47) .

After introducing these templates the teacher should teach students two formal reference styles: MLA and APA. The teacher should first tell students that MLA and APA are two styles of referencing sources that have strict formats about citing and quoting from journals, books, online sources, etc. After a brief introduction I suggest teacher to refer to *Purdue OWL: MLA Formatting and Style Guide* and *Purdue OWL: APA Formatting and Style*

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*Guide*. The teacher can print the PDF version of MLA and APA guide in this website and distribute the printed materials to students in class. In these materials from Purdue OWL there are many written examples so students can imitate them. The teacher can give students 15 minutes to read the materials and choose one style that they prefer to use. Then the teacher can give students some reference sources and ask students to rewrite them in either MLA or APA style, for example, rewriting the following source in APA format:

Author: Tim Ashwell

Article name: Pattern of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method?

Journal: *Journal of second language writing*, 9(3). Page 227-257.

Publish year: 2000

The correct APA format of this reference is:

Ashwell, T. (2000). Pattern of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9(3), 227-257.

After several times of practice, students are supposed to get familiar of one of the referencing format. Then the teacher should summarize the main points of this class and emphasize again on the importance of use convincing supports and referencing correctly. The teacher should also ask students to

revise their previous writings in order to practice their understanding of the content taught in this class.

### ***3.4 Expression of Personal Voice***

#### **3.4.1 justification for my selection**

The third feature I choose to teach is the expression of personal voice. The first reason is that both Cai (1993) and Zhang (2011) find that Chinese students avoid expressing their opinions. If they must, they choose to use “we” instead of “I” to give opinion. On the other hand, native English-speaking writers choose to use “I” to express their opinions in a straightforward way. The second reason is that as mentioned before, the expression of personal voice is closely connected with the use of support, with citation and quotation, and also related to the directness of text and whether the author has a clear thesis statement.

#### **3.4.2 teaching suggestions**

First, the class objectives can be set as: after this class students will understand the importance of directly express their personal opinions; after this class students are expected to be able to directly express opinions through using first person single forms “I”, “my”, “myself”, etc.

Second, at the beginning of the class the teacher can introduce this topic by asking students to write a short paragraph to express their opinion on a topic, for example Internet’s impacts on people’s lives. And then the teacher

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can read students' writings to see whether students use "we" when the writer actually means "I". If they do, then the teacher can ask students why they express their opinion in this way. Some students may answer that because they are trained to write in this way when they write Chinese essays. Then the teacher should come to the point of this class and explicitly tell students that this way of expressing opinion is not approved in Western academic writing.

The teacher should explain to students the deeper cultural and sociological reasons of the choice of "I" or "we" in expressing opinions and the teacher can refer to Cai (1993) and Zhang (2011) when explaining the cultural and sociological reasons. The teacher can also offer students some templates and ask them to imitate these templates in their writings:

From my point of view \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to suggest that \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, \_\_\_\_\_

As far as I'm concerned, \_\_\_\_\_

I believe that \_\_\_\_\_

I agree with XXX that \_\_\_\_\_.

Last but not least, due to the historical and cultural reasons, some students may be shy or not confident to speak out their personal feelings, then the teacher should encourage students to be confident and praise those students who are brave to express their personal opinions.

### ***3.5 Background Information, Reservation, Hesitation, Rational Appeals, Affective Appeals, Conclusion.***

As mentioned before, the features examined in Zheng (2013)'s study are actually the components of a text organization of an argument essay. The proportion of background information actually means the location of thesis statement. Reservation tells whether the writer is writing in a circle way. Hesitation connects whether the writer has a clear thesis statement. Rational appeals and affective appeals can be considered as two sorts of supports. Conclusion is also a part in the text organization and no problem was found about Chinese students' conclusion. Since all these above features are already covered in the previous teaching plans, I will not teach them respectively.

## 4. Conclusion

With the advancement of globalization, recent decades have seen a rapid development of international communication and cooperation in academic fields. English, as a *lingua franca*, is the most widely used language in the world and has played a vital role in international academic communication. An accurate reception and production of academic English becomes an essential tool for success in the academic arena. In the literature review it was shown that Chinese college students urgently need EAP instruction especially writing instruction. Academic writing as an important component of EAP requires EFL teachers and students' great attention. Academic writing has its own features and conventions. Due to the great differences between Chinese culture and English culture, Chinese students may not be familiar with the features and conventions of English academic writing, therefore I reviewed researches to see what problems do Chinese students have with the features of academic writing.

Through reviewing the researches that examined the features of Chinese EFL students' academic writing, I found that there are four main problematic features: rhetorical/text organization, characters of thesis statement, use of support/citation and quotation and the expression of personal voice. The major issue among these features is that Chinese EFL students' writings lack

directness, namely, internal coherence of the text organization. It is surprising to find that actually all these features are related together and rhetorical/text organization is in a leading position as all the rest features contributes to its internal coherence. This finding indicates that writing teachers should pay more attention to teach students create internal coherence when they organize their writing, and in order to achieve this goal they also must pay attention to all the sub-features that connects with coherence.

I suggest writing teachers to explicitly teach each of these four features. Teachers should guide students to be aware of the importance of these features and realize the differences between their writing and native writers' writing. Teachers should have clear class objectives before teaching and plan several class activities to help students understand these features and how to incorporate them into their writings.

Since formal academic writing instruction is still a new thing in China, there is a long way to go both for students and also for teachers. Writing teachers themselves should first strengthen their awareness of those problematic features and try to help students to leap the cultural gap between traditional Chinese writing and English academic writing. Also I hope that there will be more researches conducted to examine the academic writing in Chinese EFL classroom so as to shed light on future academic writing instruction. I believe that with the combined efforts of researchers, teachers and students, the problematic features can be taught explicitly and Chinese EFL

college students will make great progress in improving their academic writing proficiency.



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