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EFFECTS OF THE TWO TYPES OF PREWRITING CONTENT GENERATION ACTIVITY ON VOICE IN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXTS

Abstract

A lack of individualized voice in writing performance of non-native writers is one common concern of the second language (L2) writing classroom pedagogy, especially in Asian cultures like Vietnam. In learning to write in English, Vietnamese students might face the clashes of the communication conventions of their mother tongue (L1), Vietnamese, and of L2 English that might affect their writing voice. Situated in a Vietnamese context, the two different types of prewriting content generation activity, Group discussion and Free writing, were stimulated in a four-week experiment with two switching panels to examine the causal connection between the prewriting activities and the voice construction of novice Vietnamese students in writing argumentatively in English. Group discussion might enhance the self-confidence about content, however, results in a less personal voice in argumentative texts. Free writing is assumed to enhance the individualized voice, however might affect the self-confidence about content. Participants were 66 EFL adult Vietnamese learners at intermediate level in English proficiency. Analyses of the first voice dimension, *personal voice*, of the argumentative texts students wrote indicated a significantly lower level of personally-authored voice as a result of Group discussion, compared to free-writing. Mixed results were found with the second voice dimension, *indirectness*, in students' texts.

Keywords: voice; group discussion; free-writing; argumentative writing; second-language writing

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing and the creation of an author's identity received concerns of researchers in the field of academic writing (Hatch, Hill, & Hayes, 1993; Hyland, 2010; Ivancic, 1998). The lack of *individualized voice*, a feature embedded in the native L1 individualism culture, is assumed in L2 writers from so-called interdependent cultures, like Vietnam, where collective values take precedence over individualism (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003, p. 246). From a sociocultural perspective, the lack could be traced back to the established norms embedded in the two different L1 and L2 cultures (Atkinson, 1997; Fox, 1994; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hinkel, 1999; Li, 1996; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996a, 1996b; Wu & Rubin, 2001). In this introduction, we will examine the social norms expected of the Vietnamese students in their mother-tongue communication to provide a justification for an intervention in writing voice of Vietnamese EFL students. The second part reviews the recent studies investigating the voice in writing. The last part will be the assumptions of effects of the two experimental conditions, free writing and group discussion, on voice.

1.1 L1 Vietnamese social norms and L2 English writing expectations

“When I look at a new topic, I do not have any idea to write [about] the topic and consequently my text is a boring and not persuasive text.” (Linh, participant numbered 28 wrote of her problems in L2 writing in the first meeting of the study)

Student Linh, a Vietnamese EFL writer student, shared her problems when facing the writing task “writing for or against a crime punishment”, a task which is extracted from her Anglophone EFL writing text book. It is not that she does not know something about the topic, but she has not learned or experienced that what she thinks individually is worth putting into a text. Why is that? We try to locate three major cultural clashes of L1 Vietnamese writing and L2 Anglophone writing that might account for the lack of individualized voice in second language writing, specifically in the tasks that require an author’s own stance: 1) L1-L2 differences in requirement of academic writing, 2) role of self-identity, and 3) notion of voice.

L1-L2 differences. L1-L2 differences in what academic writing requires are reflected in genres and conventions. First, academic writing in mother tongue of Vietnamese EFL writer students is not a subject per se; writing is about literary fiction instead. Linguistic features of mother tongue writing and discourse essays in simple forms, like narrative letters, are taught in lower education (primary, lower-secondary level). In upper-secondary level, academic writing is writing about aspects of literary stories such as writing about the character(s)⁹ or discussing the thematic issues of a story. How to write those literature-related academic essays, yet, is not taught in schools (Phan, 2011). Second, writing in Vietnamese lessons is a means for Vietnamese students to show, and for teachers to examine, to what extent the students have internalized the transmittable traditions and values of their culture in a literary work and rearticulate them in a traditional writing form (see further discussions of Phan (2011) on Vietnamese writing). On the contrary, L2 academic writing places emphasis on writer’s uniqueness, such as the writing task for student Linh above requiring the writer’s own stance and supportive arguments. In conclusion, the argumentative writing genre and the writing conventions expected of that genre, which is closely related to L1 Anglophone cultures or settings, are far from the Vietnamese students’ experience in their mother language writing.

Role of self-identity. In Asian communication settings an individual must be connected, related, and adjusted to other people of the community (Kim et al., 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Communicators must adapt to who their addressee is (with respect to age, sex, relative social position of and relationship to the address-

⁹ For example, the two writing tasks are elicited from the Vietnamese National Exam of Secondary Education Graduation in June-2011: Task 1: Analysing character Trang in the short story *Vo Nhat [The Gathered Wife]* of writer Kim Lan, the extract of the story located in the 12th Grade Advanced Literature, Book Part II, Vietnam Education Publishing House-2008; Task 2: Analysing the character Fishing Village Woman in the literary work *Chiec Thuyen Ngoai Xa [The Far Boat]* of writer Nguyen Minh Chau, the extract in the 12th Grade Advanced Literature, Book Part II, Vietnam Education Publishing House-2009.

ee). As an example from Vietnam, the self-adjustment in communication is reflected clearly with the constraint of choosing an appropriate form of self-reference in more than 11 first-person singular subject pronouns in Vietnamese communication, compared to the only one *ö* equivalent in English. In communication between students and teachers, for instance, Vietnamese students use the first-person singular pronoun *ö* (first-person singular pronoun used in the case a speaker addresses themselves as in a lower position than their interlocutor $\text{\textcircled{r}}$); the students will never use the first-person singular pronoun *ö* (pronoun equal to *ö* in English).

The notion of voice. In Vietnam, voice in communication is expected to be a voice of *ö* instead of a voice of an individual. Communicators, in general, follow the values that are highly respected in the group and fear being ostracized personally (see more analysis of collectivism-culture communication behaviour in Adler, 1997; Bosley, 1993; Kim et al., 1996; Meyer, 2003). It does not mean that communicators in collectivist-cultural setting do not have their own voice and their own judgment, but that these are related and closely attached to what their group emphasizes. This notion of voice can be observed in a descriptive study of L1 Vietnamese in L2 English writing of Phan (2001, 2011). L1 Vietnamese writers were characterized with *indirect, writing from a distance towards a topic, an intention of being less straightforward and more sophisticated*, whereas Anglophone emphasized *being clear in statement, theme-driven reasoning and a strong sense of self-author* (Phan, 2011, p. 30-31).

To conclude, the above differences might account for the problems that the Vietnamese learners face in finding their own voice in performing an L2 writing task, especially the tasks that require a writer $\text{\textcircled{r}}$ self-authority towards a controversial issue. This challenges EFL-teachers in Vietnamese universities to finding the practical support for L2 student writers.

1.2 Research on voice in writing

In L2 writing research, the connection between writing and identity has been a subject of academic interest for some time (Hyland, 2010; Ivanc, 1998). There is some agreement that identity is created from the texts writers engage in and the linguistic choices they make (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Hyland, 2010). Writing researchers have attempted to formulate specific concepts of voice and identity in writing. These conceptions range from *ö* Voice as an attribute that captures the sound of the individual on the page $\text{\textcircled{r}}$ (Elbow, 1981, p. 287) to a more sociocultural definition of Matsuda (2001) *ö* Voice is the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available, yet ever-changing repertoires $\text{\textcircled{r}}$ (p. 40). Correspondingly, L2 writing research on voice has been designed to address the question of how voice is revealed in writing. Hyland (2011) examined how scholars carved a sense of their self in the disciplined discourse of academic homepages. Hyland (2010) compared the frequency of language features representing the voice of the two leading researchers in applied lin-

guistics, Cameron and Swales, to trace back to their identity construction. Ivanic (1998) and Ivanic and Camps (2001) reported how voice of an author, e.g., self-confidence, certainty or depersonalization, was revealed through analyzing the lexis, generic reference, evaluative lexis, and syntax of students' texts. Tardy and Matsuda (2009) reported the clues, e.g., *breadth or depth of knowledge (or lack thereof), choice of topic, the author's representation of the field, description of the research setting*, that journal reviewers in a blind review process used in guessing who the author of an academic paper is (e.g., guessing the level of the author's experience in the field, author's language background or author's nationality). Other researchers compared how L1 and L2 writers were different in the usage of rhetorical and linguistic features such as first person singular, transitivity, lexical choice, or deductive versus inductive organization (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Hinkel, 1999, 2002; Hyland, 2001, 2002b; Tang & John, 1999; Wu & Rubin, 2001). Although the studies reveal what voice is and how voice could be found in texts, it is still unclear how authentic classroom supports may stimulate the voice expression of second language novice writers in a learning context where they are mostly assumed to possess a different perspective on voice in their L1 native writing.

1.3 Classroom activities and effects on voice

From research literature, two prewriting activities that might generate content and consequently enhance the quality of argumentation are free writing and group discussion. *Free writing* was reviewed as an effective tool for generating contents which were sometimes even new to writers. So, in other words, free writing might help to form new knowledge (see the discussion of Elbow, 1973, on free writing and idea generation and Hillocks, 1986, on effects of free writing on text quality). *Group discussion* and its positive effects on idea generation was discussed in many empirical studies: effects of text-centered discussion on higher-order thinking and critical literacy (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006), of classroom discussion on development of subject knowledge and understanding (Corden, 2001; Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007; Weber, Maher, Powell, & Lee, 2008), and of discussion and arousing multiple viewpoints about complex issues and problems (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999).

In a Vietnamese context, the two activities might not only affect the number and quality of ideas, but also the stance of an author towards his readers/addressees. As connected to the introduction above, de-emphasis of personal ideas and stance and respect of group values is the conventional behaviour in Vietnamese communication. We assume while free writing might facilitate writers to seek their own voice (Elbow, 1973), group discussion might soften writers' personal voice in addressing an issue at stake.

We formulated the following research question:

“What are the effects of the two prewriting content generation activities, free-writing versus group discussion, on voice in Vietnamese EFL texts?”

Two hypotheses were constructed:

H1. Free writing results in a more personal voice in argumentative texts, compared to group discussion. However, in free-writing condition, arguments are generated by students individually, without being shared in a peer group; this might affect the author-content relation in students' texts. Therefore, the second hypothesis is

H2. Free writing results in a more indirectness in argumentative texts, compared to group discussion.

Both personal voice and indirectness in voice will be described in the method section.

2. METHOD

A pre-test post-test reversed-treatment control group design with switching replications (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002, p. 137) was implemented to examine the effects of content generation activities on voice in argumentative writing (see Table 1). The design allowed us to examine the effect of the two opposing conditions twice, at T2 and at T3, after the two groups swapped conditions.

Table 1. Experimental design

Group	Pre-test T1	Intervention 1	Post-test 1 T2	Intervention 2	Post-test 2 T3
GF (n = 33)	O ₁₋₂₋₃	Group discussion	O ₄	Free writing	O ₅
FG (n = 33)	O ₁₋₂₋₃	Free writing	O ₄	Group discussion	O ₅

Note. GF = Group-discussion group in T2 and then Free-writing group in T3; FG = Free-writing group in T2 and then Group-discussion group in T3; O = measurements_(1 to 5)

2.1 Course specifications

The study was carried out in four weeks (three meetings of 2.30 hrs/meeting for each group per week) in Tra Vinh University, Mekong, Vietnam. The teacher informed the students of the experiment's purpose and that the data from the course will be used for research and treated confidentially. She explained that all students would have exactly the same learning activities and writing assignments, however, in a different sequence. The students were asked to participate fully in all sessions of the course. They received credits and grades for completing the course, a compulsory part of their Bachelor's degree. Instead of a no-exposure/untreated control group in which the effect of intervention found in the experimental group is simply attributed to the lack of treatment operation in the control group, we implemented two treatments, in which all students participated in, but in a different sequence. Time, the level of input materials and types of activities for each parallel operation in the sequence of the two treatments were the same.

The first treatment was individual free writing; the second was group discussion. In this experiment, to reduce the problem of resistance to challenging each other's ideas in working in group of Vietnamese students (see the discussion of Meyer, 2003, on Asian learners and problems in group work), in group-discussion condition students were not required to place much emphasis on judging or challenging their group members' ideas, but on sharing individual ideas, knowledge and/or insights towards a controversial topic instead. In Table 2, the sequence of all learning activities is presented for both conditions. After both groups swapped conditions, the same program was implemented (panel 2).

Table 2. Six stages of the experimental course in two conditions
(differences are written in italics)

Group discussion	Free writing
1. Topic involvement (10 minutes)	
Looking at some pictures of the issue at stake	
<i>Jotting down the immediate thinking</i>	<i>Free writing</i>
2. Exploring pros & cons (20 minutes)	
<i>Sharing each member's own viewpoint and pro and/or contra of the issue in group</i>	<i>Forming a stance and figuring the rebuttals: examining pro and contra statements/arguments about the issue provided by the teacher, identifying the level of agreement to the statements and stating reasons</i>
3. Elaborating the topic (30 minutes)	
Reading documents (students read and select information from provided sources)	
4. Sample analysis (20 minutes)	
Reading and analyzing the context of writing, point of view of the writer, built-in audience, component and purpose of each component and what-could-be-improved of a sample text	
5. Writing preparation (20 minutes)	
Planning individually the organization and content frame of the essay on the issue at stake with a text-element schema provided by teacher (a 5-element schema with 5 blank spaces for one introduction, two arguments, one counterargument and one conclusion); students are free in adding more elements in the basic schema.	
6. Writing (60 minutes)	
Writing a full argumentative text on the issue at stake in 60 minutes, at the expected length of 250 words.	

Students in group discussion treatment were invited to look at two prompt pictures of their topic and note their immediate thinking (Stage 1. Topic involvement). Then they formed smaller groups of four members: each person shared his viewpoint and pros and/or cons of the issue in their group and noted the sharing on one large A3 paper (Stage 2. Exploring pros and cons). In the free-writing treatment, students were invited to be involved in an argumentative topic with looking at the two pic-

tures of their topic, and do the free writing on the topic through keeping on writing freely until time was up. After stage 2, both treatments were the same.

2.2 Participants

Participants were 66 students of EFL intermediate level and of two age groups (19-21 and 22-27) in a university in Vietnam. They were all from Mekong Delta Vietnam, sharing similar social, cultural, demographical and economic context. The proportion of girls (69%) is common for language classes in Vietnam. Of the participants, 14% were from ethnic minority group, Khmer, and they were equally represented in both intervention groups and both age groups. The younger age group included academic students who were full-time students of the undergraduate training program of the university; the older group included post-academic students who had previously finished a part of the university undergraduate training program and at the time of the experiment came back to the university, as part-time students in the evenings, to complete the undergraduate program. From the two age groups students were randomly assigned to Group GF (14 academic students and 19 post-academic students) and Group FG (13 academic students and 20 post-academic students). Although there might be a difference in life experience, working experience, and problem solving ability between the younger students and the older students, both groups were ranked by the university as at intermediate level in EFL competence. Both groups were taught by the same teacher.

2.3 Data collection

Data consisted of the final texts collected. As shown in Table 1, data was gathered at three moments: just before the start of the course (pre-test scores were based on three essays on three argumentative topics per student, see Table 3), just after the experimental round 1 (panel 1; post-test 1) and after the experimental round 2, when both groups had swapped, at the end of the course (panel 2; post-test 2).

There were six students absent at the pre-test and one student absent at the first post-test. In total, 192 texts during the pre-test, 65 texts during the first post-test and 66 during the second post-test were collected. All handwritten texts were typed to reduce the effect of handwriting quality on raters' assessment.

Table 3. Allocation of topic

Group	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
1 (n = 33)	Topic A, B, C	Topic D	Topic E
2 (n = 33)		Topic E	Topic D

To create a replication as exactly as possible, two argumentative topics were assigned randomly to post-test 1 and post-test 2 (see Table 3). The two topics which were considered as similar in the level of controversy included Animal Testing (topic D) and Capital Punishment (topic E).

2.4 Measures

Voice quality in the study was measured with two dimensions of voice. The first one was Personal voice, indicated by the two linguistic features: *Intensifier* (for example, *very, really, absolutely, terribly, always*) with its function of strengthening authors' claims (Crystal & David, 1980; Hyland 2010), and *First-person singular pronouns* (for example, *I, me, mine, my, myself*) which represented the confidence of writers to speak personally and authoritatively (Hyland, 2001, 2010). The second dimension of voice was Indirectness, indicated by the two linguistic features: *Hedges* (for example, *may, might, almost, to some extent*) functioning to soften writers' arguments, lessen their commitment to the certainty of the referential information they present in their writings (Hyland 2010; Lakoff, 1972), *Passive voice* functioning to save writers from mentioning agent(s) of an action in a statement (Dewart, 1979). The last grammatical indicator, *Passive voice*, might be assumed to characterize an indirectness of writers' accountability for the actions suggested in their statements. Passive usage is also a way of hedging (Hyland, 1998). However, because this linguistic feature was highly distinctive for concealing authorship, it was measured separately from other hedges.

These four indicators were judged by the two raters with Master's degree in language and education on the basis of 30 randomly sampled texts. Each rater judged each occurrence of the four linguistic indicators in each text. The inter-rater reliability in terms of Pearson's correlation was satisfactory (see Table 4). The other 293 texts were scored by one of the two raters. To correct for text length, the total number of each of the four indicators occurring in each text was divided by the total number of words of that text and multiplied by 100.

Table 4. Reliability of the four voice indicators ($n = 30$).
Correlations (r) between scores of the two raters

Indicator	r
Intensifiers	.91
First-person singular pronouns	.98
Hedges	.97
Passive voice	.96

Factor analyses, principal components analysis with varimax rotation, were used to extract the two voice dimensions underlying these four indicators. The factor analy-

sis resulted in two factors that explained 57% of the variance in the scores of post-test 1 and 67% of the variance in post-test 2. In Table 5, we presented the factor loadings.

Table 5. Results of the factor analyses

Voice indicator	Post-test 1		Post-test 2	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Intensifiers	.682	-.014	.787	.152
First-person singular pronouns	.663	-.026	.822	.008
Hedges	.440	.659	.239	.762
Passive voice	-.311	.794	-.055	.850

The first factor was interpreted as the extent to which students explicitly expressed their *personal voice*, the second as the extent to which students expressed their *indirectness* in their writing. Personal voice in post-test 1 ranged from -1.81 to 2.31, and in post-test 2 from -1.48 to 5.16. Indirectness in post-test 1 ranged from -1.43 to 2.94 and in post-test 2 from -1.18 to 3.61. Both factors had a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

2.5 Analyses

To observe an effect of the two experimental conditions in panel 1 and 2 separately, we applied univariate covariance analyses with condition as independent factor, the pre-test scores as a covariate, and the two voice dimensions, personal voice and indirectness, as dependent variables in time 2 (T2) and time 3 (T3), respectively. The pre-test scores included the four indicators of voice.

3. RESULTS

The results are presented in Table 6. We found an effect of condition on *personal voice* in both panels. In panel 1, students in the Free-writing condition generally showed higher scores on personal voice than students in the Group-discussion condition, controlled for the pre-test scores ($F(1,64) = 4.42, p = .04, \eta^2 = .07$). In panel 2, this effect was replicated ($F(1, 64) = 12.73, p = .001, \eta^2 = .18$).

For indirectness, we found an effect of condition in panel 2 with students in the Free writing generally showing more indirectness than students in the Group-discussion condition, controlled for the pre-test scores on voice ($F(1, 64) = 5.82, p = .019, \eta^2 = .09$). No significant effect of condition was found in panel 1 ($F(1, 64) = .03, p = .867$).

Table 6. Results for personal voice and indirectness with means and (standard deviations)

Variable	Group	Pre-test	Post-test 1	Post-test 2
Personal voice	GF	-.09 (1.08)	-.26 (1.02)	.32 (1.15)
	FG	.09 (.91)	.27 (.91)	-.32 (.70)
Indirectness	GF	.13 (.97)	-.01 (1.25)	.30 (1.17)
	FG	-.13 (1.02)	.01 (.67)	-.30 (.68)

Note. GF = Group-discussion group and then Free-writing group; FG = Free-writing group and then Group-discussion group

To illustrate the differences found in personal and indirect voice of students in the two treatment groups and how students changed their voice in the two different treatments, four examples were taken from the introduction part of four argumentative essays of the two students, Thien and Vi (see Table 7).

Table 7: Examples of students' writing (Introduction 1 was written in Group-discussion condition; Introduction 2 was written in Free-writing condition)

Student Thien

Introduction 1 (Group discussion): The effectiveness of animal experiments and the ethical questions raised when using animal ó the closest living relatives of human for experiments are coming to the heated controversy in many countries in the world. There are facts one cannot deny is that animal testings have been vital in finding cures for human diseases.

Introduction 2 (Free writing): The law of death penalty was set for years and its effects remain obviously in every citizen's awareness. Time went by, but whenever we talk about death penalty, people think it's an issue of globally controversial [controversial]. In my very personal idea, I absolutely think that is a law of God and should be applied for all people whoever they are and wherever they live. This essay will let you know why death penalty should be accepted despite there are lots of ideas criticize [criticize] the law of death penalty.

Student Vi

Introduction 1 (Group discussion): It's time for us to change our mind on testing animals. It shouldn't continue anymore. There are some (its) advantages but the advantages are less than disadvantages of testing animals. So the human being must consider very carefully about the problem and choose the best for us. I mean that we must end animal testing.

Introduction 2 (Free writing): The Vietnamese has a very good saying "Do what, get what" [You will reap what you will sow]. I completely agree with the saying so I am satisfied with a death penalty for the murders. If you make people pain and suffer, you must be the same as them. It's fair. Moreover, death penalty is safe for good citizens and prevents social evils.

Introduction 1 of both students was written in Group-discussion condition and introduction 2 of both students was written in individually Free-writing condition. The

four linguistic indicators judged by raters were underlined. With all the four introductions, readers might recognize the writers' stance without much effort. However, the intensity of personal voice the students expressed was rather different. A lower level of personal voice in Group-discussion condition (introduction 1) of both students and a higher level of personal voice was found in Free-writing condition (introduction 2) of both students. Indirect voice was also expressed more in Free-writing condition of one of the two students. The examples are the original texts students wrote in the introduction of their full argumentative text in the classroom, without the teacher's revisions, and without consulting a dictionary or grammar book while writing.

Although *Student Thien* in *introduction 1* seemed not to disagree with animal testing when he ended his introduction with the statement "There are facts one cannot deny is that animal testings have been vital in finding cures for human diseases", his stance towards the issue was not expressed in a strong and definite way. In the whole paragraph, there are not many indicators of personal voice found. Readers also recognized an effort to include a counterargument "animal () the closest living relatives of human" in his short text. In general, although it is not very difficult to recognize his stance, his personal voice towards the issue is not revealed explicitly in the text. Differently, in *introduction 2*, more indicators of personal voice towards the issue were found in his text. Thien stated emphatically his personal viewpoint "In my very personal ideas, I absolutely think ()". Passive voice, found in his conclusion that *the penalty should be applied and accepted*, helped to avoid a directedness or a confirmed certainty, and therefore involved readers in his argument.

Student Vi in both *introduction 1* and *2* expressed her stance very clearly. Differently from student Thien's texts in which a clear discrepancy of personal voice in introduction 1 and 2 were noticed, in Vi's a strong personal voice was found in both introductions. In introduction 1, Vi mentioned the issue she concerned directly and definitely "I mean that we must end animal testing". However, in introduction 2, she stated even with more personal liability for her statement "I completely agree with () so I am satisfied with ()". Raters also noticed a lower level of personal voice indicators found in her introduction 1.

4. DISCUSSION

The effect of the two different types of content generation activity on *personal voice* was confirmed in both panels. In both panels, students who worked in individual free-writing condition showed a higher level of personal voice expression in their argumentative texts than students who discussed an argumentative topic in a small group before writing on that topic. The related indicators of this voice including intensifiers (e.g., *extremely, absolutely, terribly*) and first-person singular pronouns (*I, me, myself, mine*) were found significantly more often in writings of students in individual free-writing condition than in those of students in group discussion.

The effect of free writing and group discussion on level of *indirectness* was observed in panel 2 but not in panel 1. The related indicators of *indirectness* including passive voice and hedges (*may, seems, almost, to some extent*) were found more often in argumentative texts of students in free-writing condition than in those of students who wrote after group discussion. In other words, free writing was found affecting positively the level of indirectness in writing argumentatively of EFL writer students in the second panel.

We may conclude that some voice indicators seem to be more attached to the type or form of content generation activity in EFL writing classroom. With the results found of personal voice that changed in an exact treatment replication we might assume that *personal voice* (first-person singular pronouns and intensifiers) appears to be more sensitive, in comparison to *indirect voice* indicators (hedges and passive voice), to what type of content generation activity stimulated in class. In other words, for novice EFL writer students when there is a change in type, individual or group working, of content generation activity, we might expect to see clearly a change in the students' personal voice. From this finding we might infer that personal voice seems to be one of the clear indicators of EFL writing voice expression (see the discussion of Hyland, 2010, on the necessity of empirical studies on recognizing linguistic features related to L2 writers' constructing voice).

4.1 Limitations

Please note that random topic allocation was nested in condition to raise the level of replication. That is to say, we found an effect of content generation activity in two panels within one and the same topic on personal voice. For this design we opted to replicate the findings as fair as possible: both Free-writing conditions (in panels 1 and 2) were measured with the same writing task and same writing topic (topic E), and, similarly, both Group-discussion conditions (in panels 1 and 2) were measured with the same writing task and same writing topic (topic D). This choice for replication is at the cost of generalization. Although assignment of topics to condition was done randomly, we could not exclude that part of the experimental effect was due to topic. Further study must confirm the generalizability of the findings in our study. One counter finding that topic effect did not occur might be that global scores of the final text's quality were not different for both topics in post-test 1 and post-test 2 of Group GF and FG (respectively $t(32) = .60, p = .553$; $t(31) = .15, p = .882$). Global quality of each text was judged by three different raters using the quality scale for argumentative texts of Hamp-Lyons (1991). We used the mean score per text as the score for text quality while the inter-rater reliability between the three raters per text was high ($r = .80$).

Another limitation to mention is the choice of indicators of voice in the study. Voice was measured from a micro-linguistic perspective with four linguistic indicators. This might be not 'global' enough to show the picture of voice in argumentative writing. For example, we indicated 'indirectness' quality of voice with two indicators 'passive voice' and 'hedges'; however, other indicators like 'to be' and evaluative language (e.g., adjective) might also be good indicators signaling authors'

assertiveness and directness in proposing arguments (see the discussion of Hyland, 2010, on function of *õto beõ* and evaluative language as authorial positioning assertiveness, p. 169). Nevertheless, the way we measured voice in the current study clearly formed the two dimensions that showed to be sensitive to our treatments.

4.2 Conclusion

We could now conclude that writing classroom activities do affect voice expression of writers, at least at this level of students (EFL novice writers), for this argumentative writing genre and in this cultural learning context.

First, individual free writing, in comparison with group discussion, was found to result in a higher level of personal voice expressed in a written text. In other words, an EFL classroom condition that encourages students to brainstorm personally a controversial topic before writing on that topic will increase the presence of writers as personal authors in their writings; and the other way around, the level of authorial presence in text will be reduced if the students share their different viewpoints around the topic in groups. This result might be interesting in the Vietnamese/Asian context because, as analyzed in the introduction, in social communication the communicators in the context are expected to respect a group voice and deemphasize a personal voice. In this L2 writing experiment, we also see a direction of low personal voice of EFL students in effect of discussion in groups: a transition of mother-tongue cultural values in performing an L2 writing task.

Second, individual free writing was found resulting in a higher level of indirectness, compared to group discussion, in one of the two experimental panels. We propose from this result that individual working might affect writers in stating their arguments in texts with more indirectness. We might assume that individual free writing is different from normal practice in L1 Vietnamese writing; therefore it might result in less self-confidence about the writing content. On the contrary, a classroom condition where sharing individual ideas, knowledge and/or insights towards a controversial topic is encouraged, students will be more certain towards an issue, therefore be more direct in proposing their arguments. However, we need to check the stability of this finding with further experiments because the effect of group discussion on *indirectness* was not replicated. Although the result needs to be confirmed through further research, it may be interesting if we relate the finding of group discussion on reducing indirectness voice of students to what cross-cultural studies revealed of communication characteristics of Asian students: Asian students are reported to feel confident, certain in what is valued, suggested by group, rather than what is individually valued and originated (see discussions on Asian learners and group work in Carson & Nelson, 1994; Meyer, 2003). We see that students brought into L2 text performance their L1 communication practice when L2 classroom was activated by group activity.