

THESIS

ENGLISH INFORMATION PACKAGING CONSTRUCTIONS IN VIETNAMESE
STUDENTS' ESSAYS

Submitted by

Nhat Nguyen

Department of English

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Gerald Delahunty

Anthony Becker
Maite Correa

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ABSTRACT

ENGLISH INFORMATION PACKAGING CONSTRUCTIONS IN VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' ESSAYS

Mastering English information packaging constructions is essential for Vietnamese students in language departments in universities and colleges in Hanoi. Previous research on English grammatical constructions has focused on the analysis of the structure at word and sentence level. The present study aims to investigate the way Vietnamese students use English information packaging constructions (subject-dependent Inversions, clefts, passives, existentials, and extrapositions) in their essays. The study is intended to examine the structures the students used and the syntactic and pragmatic errors they made. The following research questions were addressed: “How do Vietnamese students use the five English information constructions which were taught in grammar lessons in their essays?” “What are the common syntactic and pragmatic errors they made while using these constructions?” Fifty first year students of Hanoi University participated in this investigation. A writing test served as the principal tool to collect data. The results show that the students used passive, cleft, existential, and extraposition structures, but they did not use the subject-dependent inversion construction in their writing. The results also show that the students made a small number of syntactic errors; however, they made a wide range of pragmatic errors, probably on account of rather limited instruction on how to use these English structures pragmatically. These findings suggest that to help Vietnamese students use English grammatical constructions accurately and appropriately in various contexts, the inclusion of pragmatic features into the teaching and learning of English grammar is essential.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction of information packaging	1
Statement of the problem	4
Goals of the study.....	5
Research aims and questions.....	6
Structure of the study	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Syntactic features	8
Subject-dependent inversion.....	8
Clefts.....	10
Passives.....	12
General description of the passive.	12
Passive types.	13
Existential <i>there</i> constructions.....	15
Extrapositions.	17
Discourse functions and information status	18
Subject-dependent inversion.....	19
Clefts.....	21
Passives	23

Existential <i>there</i> constructions.....	25
Extrapositions.	27
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	29
Research methods.....	29
Sampling.....	29
Corpus	30
Procedures	32
Data analysis	32
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	34
Syntactic properties	35
Clefts.....	35
Types of clefts found in the students' writing.	35
Types of highlighted elements found in <i>it</i> -clefts.	36
Types of highlighted elements in <i>wh</i> -clefts and reversed <i>wh</i> -clefts.	37
Passives.....	39
Existential <i>there</i> constructions.....	41
Extrapositions.	43
Discussion.....	44
Common Errors and Discussion.....	46
Common syntactic errors.....	46
Clefts.....	46
Passives.....	47
Existential <i>there</i> constructions.....	48

Pragmatic use in particular contexts.....	49
Clefts.....	49
Passives.....	50
Existential <i>there</i> constructions.....	53
Extrapositions.	55
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	56
Pedagogical implications.....	56
Implications for future research	57
Conclusions	58
Limitations of the study.....	59
Significance of the study.	60
REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX A: Essay Topic	66
APPENDIX B: Cleft Construction Database.....	67
APPENDIX C: Passive Construction Database.....	72
APPENDIX D: Existential <i>There</i> Construction Database	79
APPENDIX E: Extrapositive Construction Database.....	82

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to information packaging constructions

In natural languages, grammars offer speakers or writers a wide range of formal options to express the same basic information content (Gundel, 2012, p. 585). Consider, for example, the different constructions in Table 1.1 in conveying the content: a person named Smith won an election. Given this content, *it* in example i refers to *that election* and *he* in example j refers to *Smith*.

Table 1.1

10 information constructions conveying one content (Gundel, 2012, p. 585)

a. Smith won that election.	f. It was Smith who won the election.
b. The election, Smith won.	g. What Smith won was the election.
c. There was an election that Smith won.	h. (As for) that election, Smith won it.
d. This election was won by Smith.	i. Smith won it.
e. Smith won an election.	j. He won the election.

The term *information structure* is used to refer to the kinds of distinctions illustrated in Table 1.1. According to Gundel (2012), the use of various ways of expressing the same information may help the addressee in processing the information in a given context. Information packaging constructions have, therefore, received due attention among researchers, such as Chafe (1976); Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, Svartvik, & Crystal (1985); Lambrecht (1994); Engdahl & Vallduvi (1996); Biber et al. (1999); Huddleston & Pullum (2002); Erteschik-Shir (2007).

The term *information packaging* or *information structure* is introduced in Chafe (1976). By the term *packaging*, Chafe (1976) implied that by choosing one structure rather than another

to package information, a speaker accommodates his or her speech to various states of the addressee's mind. *Information packaging* is also defined by Engdahl & Vallduvi (1996) as to:

indicate how linguistically conveyed information fits into the hearer's information state at the time of utterance. When communicating a proposition, a speaker may realize it by means of different sentential structures according to his/her beliefs about the hearer's knowledge and attentional state with respect to that proposition. (p. 2)

In the spoken form, *information packaging* also refers to different meanings of stressed elements in various positions in sentential utterances (Engdahl & Vallduvi, 1996, p. 3), as in (1a) and (1b).

(1) a. He hates CHOCOLATE.

b. He HATES chocolate.

According to Engdahl & Vallduvi, (1a) and (1b) are equivalent in their truth conditions; in other words, these two sentences are identical to each other in what is conveyed: some male does not like chocolate. However, there is a difference between the two sentences in how they present the content: *CHOCOLATE* is stressed in the first sentence, and *HATES* is stressed in the second one; that is, the two sentences differ from each other in the way their content is packaged.

In the written form, *information packaging* refers to non-canonical structures which are different from their own basic or canonical counterparts not in "truth conditions", but "in the way the content is presented" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1365). Some typical examples for canonical and noncanonical versions are illustrated in Huddleston & Pullum (2002).

Table 1.2

Sample canonical and non-canonical sentences (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1365)

Canonical version	Non-canonical version
a ₁ . Kim wrote the letter.	b ₁ . The letter was written by Kim
a ₂ . Two doctors were on the plane.	b ₂ . There were two doctors on the plane.
a ₃ . We rejected six of the applications.	b ₃ . Six of the applications were rejected.

As claimed by Huddleston & Pullum (2002), there is no difference in truth conditions between each pair in Table 1.2, a₁- b₁, a₂- b₂, a₃- b₃. Nevertheless, it can be clearly seen from the syntax of such examples that there is a variety of ways to express the same idea, with numerous versions in which the content is organized in different ways.

Syntactically, according to Huddleston & Pullum (2002), there are eight main English information packaging constructions: complement preposing, postposing, subject-dependent inversion, existential and presentational clauses, extraposition, dislocation, clefts, and passive voice. These constructions are exemplified in Huddleston & Pullum (2002) in Table 1.3, with the basic or canonical version on the left-hand column and the non-canonical version in the right-hand column. The underlining helps distinguish the two versions in syntax.

Table 1.3

Sample sentences for 8 information constructions (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1365)

Information construction	Canonical version	Non-canonical version
Complement preposing	She accepted <u>this one</u> .	<u>This one</u> she accepted.
Postposing	I made <u>all the changes you wanted</u> without delay.	I made without delay <u>all the changes you wanted</u> .
Inversion	<u>Two nurses</u> were <u>on board</u> .	<u>On board</u> were <u>two nurses</u> .
Existential	<u>A frog</u> is in the pool.	<u>There is a frog</u> in the pool.
Left dislocation	<u>That money I gave her</u> must have disappeared.	<u>That money I gave her</u> , <u>it</u> must have disappeared.
Right dislocation	<u>The people from next door</u> are still here.	<u>They're</u> still here, <u>the people from next door</u> .
Cleft	<u>You</u> broke it.	<u>It was you who</u> broke it.
Passive	<u>Kim</u> took <u>the car</u> .	<u>The car was taken by Kim</u> .
Extraposition	<u>That he's guilty</u> is clear.	<u>It is clear that he's guilty</u> .

Statement of the problem

There have been a number of studies examining the way ESL learners use English grammar features and common errors they make while using such grammar structures in second language acquisition: passive voice (Khalil, 1993); verb forms (Bui, 2002); morpho-syntax (Tang, 2007); prepositions (Chodorow et al., 2007); tense and aspect (Dao, 2008); article, prepositions, and collocation (Leacock et al., 2010); modal verbs (Minh, 2010); verb tense, prepositions, subject-verb agreement (Taghavi, 2012), discourse markers (Daif-Allah & Albeshar, 2013). These analyses, however, focus only on the syntactic form at the word and sentence level, and so just help the learners with the syntax but not with the appropriate use of English grammar structures in context. It is important to conduct studies which provide an investigation on how learners of English use English grammar constructions both syntactically and pragmatically.

Students in the Foundation Studies Department of Hanoi University follow the language curriculum approved by the University, and need to pass a final grammar test. However, there is a fact that the Grammar Translation teaching approach is commonly applied in Vietnam. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), this teaching approach focuses on the form rather than the use of the target language (p. 3). The students, as a result, generally seem not to know when it is appropriate to use English structures in context. Furthermore, English instructors do not have enough time to acquire further knowledge relating to these grammar features on account of their busy teaching schedules in and outside the University. In lessons, they just focus on the limited amount of information provided in the grammar textbook *Advanced Grammar in Use* (Hewings, 1999). Therefore, EFL grammar and writing instructors in Hanoi will highly appreciate a document which helps provide a comprehensive understanding of the English

information packaging constructions which are taught in the program, including subject-dependent inversion, cleft, passive, existential *there*, and extrapositive constructions.

It is required for the students in Hanoi University to master English information packaging constructions in order to appropriately use them in context in their writing. Nonetheless, the instruction time at school for each kind of English information packaging constructions is limited to a 90 minute lesson for each one. In addition, the textbook is almost the only source of learning and teaching material. This probably accounts for the fact that the students do not have an adequate knowledge of the syntax and pragmatics of each structure, and have difficulty in appropriately using the constructions in their writing. Having a supplementary document about English information packaging structures would be of great help for students.

In the academic writing section at Hanoi University, the students are encouraged to apply what they learn in other components (vocabulary, grammar) in their essays. But, how effectively the students use these structures in their writing has not been investigated or researched so far. The present study focuses on the investigation of five information packaging constructions, including subject-dependent inversion, passive, cleft, existential, and extrapositive constructions, syntactically and pragmatically in the written form, not in the spoken form, since these English information packaging constructions are mostly practiced with exercises in the written form in the grammar lessons.

Goals of the study

The goal of the present study is to analyze the types of information packaging constructions used in essays written by advanced students in the Foundation Studies Department at Hanoi University. It also presents an investigation of the common syntactic and pragmatic errors made by the students to see how appropriately they use these constructions in their

writing. The study intends to (1) provide the students in Hanoi University and the other five universities and colleges with supplemental information on the topics that are taught in grammar lessons, (2) help the students be more successful in using these information packaging constructions, and thus writing more cohesive essays, (3) help EFL teachers in the six universities and colleges better understand the problems facing their students when using English information packaging constructions in writing essays, and (4) help EFL teachers adapt the teaching of not only such grammar topics but also other ones in grammar and writing lessons, accordingly: teaching grammar features with the emphasis on form, function, and meaning; creating more exercises on error analysis; and focused practicing the use of grammar points in context.

Research aims and questions

The purpose of the present study is to gain a better understanding of how Vietnamese students used English information packaging constructions (subject-dependent inversion, clefts, passives, existential *there* constructions, and extrapositives), which common grammatical errors the students made while using such structures, and how appropriately these constructions were used in the students' writing. The following research questions will be examined in this study:

1. How do the Vietnamese students use the five English information constructions which were taught in grammar lessons in their essays?
2. What are the common syntactic and pragmatic errors made by Vietnamese learners while using these constructions?

Structure of the study

This study consists of four main chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction of English information packaging structures. Chapter 2 is the Literature Review in which the present state

of knowledge regarding the topic and the existing studies on issues in the topic are discussed. Specifically, syntactic and pragmatic features of the information packaging structures that are taught in the university grammar lessons are explicitly presented: subject-dependent inversion, cleft, passive, existential *there*, and extrapositive constructions.

In Chapter 3, I present the study's methodology, participants, research instrument, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

In Chapter 4, I analyze how Vietnamese learners of English use the five English information packaging constructions in their essays or compositions syntactically and pragmatically. In addition, I analyze common syntactic and pragmatic errors made by the students.

In Chapter 5, I offer pedagogic suggestions for EFL teachers and students in the use of these English information packaging constructions and suggest implications for further research. I also offer conclusions and a discussion of the limitations and the significance of the present study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter consists of two sections. In the first section, I present the syntactic features of the five constructions which are covered in grammar lessons in Hanoi University, and thus are the focus of the thesis. They are the subject-dependent inversion, cleft, passive, existential *there*, and extrapositive constructions. In the second section, I offer an analysis of the discourse functions and information status of the structures. The notions *new/old information* and *discourse or hearer familiarity* are invoked to account for the use of such constructions in a particular context.

Syntactic features

Subject-dependent inversion. Syntactically, subject-dependent inversion is a construction in which the subject NP is put in the final position of the sentence, while other dependents of the verb occur in front position of the clause (Birner, 1994; DeCarrico, 2000; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The illustrated structures are placed in italics in (1).

- (1) a. Expressions like 'geezer,' 'codger,' 'fuddy-duddy,' 'old goat' obviously disparage the old person. *Not so obvious are the euphemisms 'umpteens years young' and 'Golden Ager'.* (Chicago Tribune, 3/15/90, sec. 1, p. 25, as cited in Birner, 1994, p. 234)
- b. *In a land far away, lived a handsome prince.* (DeCarrico, 2000, p. 192)
- c. On Saturday they received an astonishing fourteen credit offers in the mail. *Three days later came another eight offers.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1385)
- d. *Her face was stony and even stonier was the tone of her voice.* (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1381)

In (1a), (1b), and (1c), the subject NPs, *the euphemisms 'umpteens years young' and 'Golden Ager', a handsome prince, another eight offers*, and *the tone of her voice* are moved to the right of the main verbs, *are, lived, came*, and *was*. And the post-verbal constituents, *not so obvious, in a land far away, three days later*, and *even stonier* are put in clause-initial position.

Quirk et al. (1985) discuss two conditions that allow subject-verb inversion. The first condition is with “certain verbs of stance” (p. 1381), such as *stand, lie, be*, etc., as in (2a, 2b, 2c). The second condition is when the verbs are “very general verbs of motion” (p. 1381), such as *live, run, roll*, etc., as in (2d, 2e, 2f).

(2) a. There at the submit stood the castle in all its medieval splendor. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1381)

b. In a distant grave lies his beloved body. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1380)

c. On the counter are loaves-whole wheat, cinnamon raisin, oatmeal, rye, soy sunflower, corn meal. (Terkel 1974, as cited in Birner & Mahootian, 1996)

d. In one of the villages of Kerman lived a shapherd. (Ebrahimi, 1973, as cited in Birner & Mahootian, 1996)

e. Away ran the terrified boy. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1380)

f. Slowly out of its hangar rolled the gigantic aircraft. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1380)

Chen (2003) claimed that a negative verb prevents inversion, as in (3a) and (3b). Quirk et al. (1985, p. 1381) claimed that inversion don't occur with personal pronouns when the pronoun is alone and functions as subject, as in (3c).

(3) a. *On my left did not sit Tom Lopez. (Chen, 2003, p. 120)

b. *From below, from Mrs. Abney's domain, did not come any sound. (Chen, 2003, p. 121)

- c. * Here is he. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1381)

Chen (2003) claimed that a transitive verb is allowed in the inversion structure if it meets the following requirements: It is in its participial form which then needs to occur “in the leftmost position” (p. 135) in the sentence, as in (4a) and (4b); it is in the “progressive aspect of various kinds” (p. 136), as in (4c); and it is in the passive voice with different tenses, as in (4d). Chen (2003) also indicated two possibilities in which a transitive verb is not allowed in an inversion structure: The transitive verb is in its non-participial form, as in (4e); the transitive verb is in the present perfect tense or past perfect tense, as in (4f) and (4g).

- (4) a. Enclosed in this packet is a copy of the letter I sent you last time. (Chen, 2003, p. 134)
- b. Shooting the ball at the free-throw line is Rick Fox. (Chen, 2003, p. 134)
- c. Pushing Davis through the revolving door is/will be/has been Lopez. (Chen, 2003, p. 136)
- d. Pushed through the revolving door by Lopez is/was/had been/has been/will be Davis. (Chen, 2003, p. 137)
- e. * Through the revolving door pushed Tom Lopez Mary Davis. (Chen, 2003, p. 134)
- f. * Through the revolving door had pushed Tom Lopez Mary Davis. * Pushed Davis through the revolving door had Lopez. (Chen, 2003, p. 134)
- g. * Through the revolving door has pushed Tom Lopez Mary Davis. * Pushed Davis through the revolving door has Lopez. (Chen, 2003, p. 134)

Clefts. There are three kinds of clefts: *it*-clefts, *wh*-clefts, and reversed *wh*-clefts.

Syntactically, the *it*-cleft structure consists of four main constituents: *it*, copula, cleft constituent or focused element, and the “clause” of the cleft structure. For example, in (5), *it* is

the subject, *is* is the copula, *the President* is the cleft constituent or focused element, and *that appoints the Cabinet* is the “clause”:

(5) It is the President that appoints the Cabinet. (Delahunty, 1984, p. 63)

Delahunty (1984) claims that noun phrases (NPs) (6), prepositional phrases (PPs) (7), particle phrases (8), quantifier phrases (QPs) (9), and adjective phrases (APs) (10) can be cleft.

(6) It was Alex Greene who directed “The Miscreant”. (Delahunty, 1984, p. 74)

(7) It was to the President that we addressed protested letters. (Delahunty, personal communication, 2013)

(8) It wasn’t on that he pulled his boots, it was off. (Delahunty, 1984, p. 76)

(9) It was not only too little that they received, but it was also too late. (Delahunty, 1984, p. 79)

(10) It was green that he painted his boat. (Delahunty, 1984, p. 77)

Wh-clefts are composed of a relative clause introduced by *what* serving as the subject (Collins, 1991, p. 26), as in (11a) and (11b).

(11) a. What the car needs is a new battery. (Collins, 1991, p. 32)

b. What he bought was a small red convertible. (Cowan, 2008, p. 524)

According to Collins (1991), the *wh*-cleft allows only three phrase types as its highlighted element: NP (12a), finite clause (12b: a content clause), and non-finite clause (12c: an infinitive clause serving as a complement of *do*).

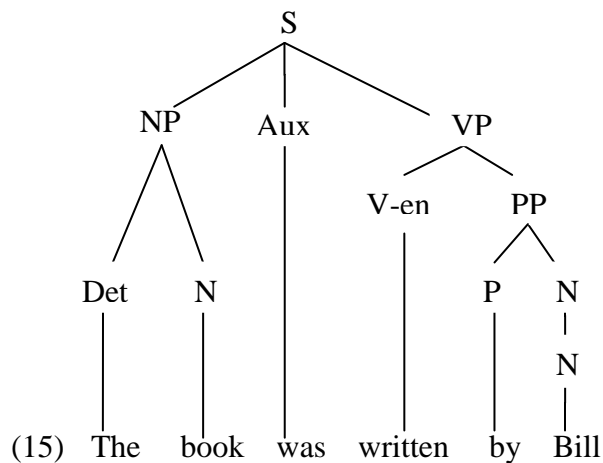
(12) a. Unfortunately, modern research tends to discredit the legend, claiming that what really happened was a visit from a labour agent who attracted many local young men away to Bohemia, with the promise of good wages. (Collins, 1991, p. 57)

sentence. The main verb was changed into its past participle, *stolen*, and past tense of the auxiliary *be* was inserted before the main verb.

Passive types. Passive sentences may be “long” or “short”. Long passives include a *by*-phrase (Biber et al, 1999, p. 935). The following is the representative formula of long passives:

NP + be + V-en + *by*-phrase

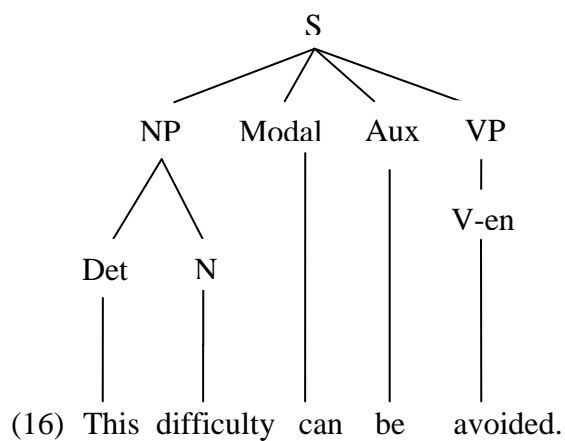
This structure is illustrated in (15):



(Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 296)

Short passives do not include a *by*-phrase: NP + be + V-en

This form is illustrated in (16):



(Quirk et al., 1985, p. 167)

Be-passives contain *be* + past participle (*be* + V-en), as exemplified in (17).

(17) Our house was bought by a realtor. (Azevedo, 1980, p. 86)

be + V-en

A bare passive, the most reduced form of the passive (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), is a construction headed by a V-en form. Its typical structure is V-en (+ *by* phrase). Bare passives come in two forms. The first form can appear with a *by*-phrase but without a subject or an auxiliary verb, as in (18a). The second form, it can occur without a subject, auxiliary verb, and *by*-phrase, as in (18b).

(18) a. The guy mauled by our neighbor's dog is in intensive care. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1430)

b. The major weather factors involved are apparently temperature and precipitation.
(Biber et. al., 1999, p. 936)

Biber et al. (1999) claim that short passives “are more common than long passives and is widely used in academic writing” (p. 477) for various reasons: the active subject is unknown (19a) or redundant (19b) from the context and the mention of the first person is often avoided.

(19) a. The prime minister has often been criticized recently. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 165)

b. Jack fought Michael last night, and Jack was beaten. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 165)

Cowan (2008) provides other reasons for the omission of the *by*-phrase in a passive sentence. The first reason is that the speaker or writer does not want to show the agent. In (20a), the writer does not include the *by*-phrase in order to “avoid assigning blame” (p. 395). The second reason is that the speaker or writer wants to report the action rather than the agent, as in (20b).

(20) a. Rather than dwelling unnecessarily on the causes of this fiasco, let's just say that mistakes were made. (Cowan, 2008, p. 395)

b. The subjects were each given a pencil and a sheet of paper. (Cowan, 2008, p. 398)

Existential *there* constructions. Syntactically, existential *there* constructions contain the dummy *there* in subject position (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) and *be* as the verb. Within this construction, “the verb agrees with the NP that follows it in surface structure” (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 295). This structure is exemplified in (21a), (21b), and (21c).

(21) a. There is a unicorn in the garden. (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 295)

b. There are unicorns in the garden. (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 295)

c. *There is unicorns in the garden. (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 295)

Dummy *there* is analyzed by Huddleston & Pullum (2002) as a pronoun, not as locative *there* which refers to a specific location. *There* “functions as a grammatical subject rather than as an adverbial” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1405; Biber et al., 1999, p. 944). This is exemplified in (22). Also, this construction “simply postulates the existence of some entity or entities” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1406), as illustrated in (23).

(22) There_{pro} is nothing there_{loc}. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1391)

(23) There was a moment's silence. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1406)

There also occurs as “the raised subject or object of a catenative verb”, such as *seem*, *go*, or *start*. This is exemplified in (24):

(24) a. There seems to have been a mistake. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1392)

b. We hadn't expected there to be over a hundred people at the meeting.

(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1392)

In (24a), *there* is the raised subject of the catenative verb *seem*. In (24b), *there* is the raised object of the catenative verb *expect*.

The displaced subject, according to Huddleston & Pullum (2002), is “an internal complement of the verb that is not syntactically a subject but corresponds semantically to the subject” of the simple counterpart sentence (p. 1391).

(25) a. Several windows were open. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1391)

b. There were several windows open. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1391)

Several windows functions as the subject in (25a); whereas in (25b), this NP functions as a displaced subject. Dummy *there* functions as the subject in the second sentence.

There are two kinds of existential structures: bare existential and extended existential. The bare existential is a construction that contains *there*, the verb *be*, and the displaced subject, alone or accompanied by adjuncts, as illustrated in (26a) and (26b). The extended existential is a construction which contains *there*, the verb *be*, the displaced subject, and an extension, as exemplified in (27a) and (27b).

(26) a. There are good teachers and bad teachers. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1393)

b. There is no milk (again). (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1393)

(27) a. There were two sirens blaring. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1393)

b. There's Sue to consider. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1393)

There are five types of extended existential constructions, including locative and temporal extensions (28.a and 28.b), predicative extensions (29), infinitival extensions (30), participial extensions (31a and 31b), and relative clause extensions (32), underlined in the examples.

(28) a. There is a friend of yours at the door. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1394)

- b. There is one concert on Sunday. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1394)
- (29) There were two delegates absent. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1394)
- (30) There are still a few replies to come. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1394)
- (31) a. There were [specimens measuring over twelve inches in length]. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1394)
- b. There were [some letters written by her grandmother] in the safe. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1394)
- (32) There was [one man] that kept interrupting. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1396)

Extrapositions. Syntactically, extraposition is the construction in which the subject position is filled with a dummy pronoun *it*, a predicate, and a subordinate clause which is related to the subject (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1403; Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1391). The extrapositive construction helps to put relatively a heavy constituent at the end of the clause. The following is the formula for this construction:

it + predicate + subordinate clause

- (33) *It is amazing* that the real problems surrounding NATO's planned bombing raid on Serbia were never addressed during the marathon peace talks now underway in France. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1404)
- (34) *It is unclear* why she told him (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1403)
- (35) *It makes her happy* to see others enjoying themselves. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1392)

Examples (33) and (34) show extraposition in which the relatively heavy extraposed subject *that the real problems surrounding NATO's planned bombing raid on Serbia were never addressed during the marathon peace talks now underway in France* is re-located to the end of the sentence and the normal subject position is filled with the empty pronoun *it*. In (34), the

extraposed constituent is a noun phrase. In (35), the extraposed constituent is an infinitival clause.

Besides the basic form, there are three other cases of extraposition: extraposition of gerund-participial subjects (36a), extraposition of NP (36b), and extraposition of non-subjects).

(36) a. *It would be no use complaining.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1407)

b. *It impressed me the way she disarmed him.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1407)

c. *I find *it* quite incredible that he got away with it for so long.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1407)

Discourse functions and information status

Regarding the use of focused information packaging constructions in discourse, Birner & Ward (2003) say that “the felicity of one structure may require that a certain constituent represent discourse-old information, while the felicity of another construction may require only that a certain constituent represent less familiar information within the discourse than does another constituent” (p. 121). Therefore, the notions *new/old information* or *given/new information*, and *discourse and hearer familiarity* are invoked to account for the felicitous use of the discussed constructions in particular contexts.

The concepts *consciousness* and *shared knowledge* have been used to define *new/given information*. Chafe (1976, p. 30) and Prince (1978, p. 888) define *given information* in terms of consciousness. According to them, *given information* is the knowledge that “the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of utterance”, and *new information* is “what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee’s consciousness by what he says”. Clark & Haviland (1977, as cited in Collins, 1991) defined *given/new information* on the

basis of shared knowledge. Specifically, *given information* is what the speaker “believes the listeners already knows and accepts as true”, while *new information* is what the speaker “believes the listener does not yet know” (p. 92).

The notion of *discourse and hearer familiarity* is defined and distinguished by Birner & Ward (2003). According to these two researchers, *discourse-old information* is “that which has been evoked in the prior discourse” while *hearer-old information* is “that which the speaker believes to be present within the hearer’s knowledge store” (p. 121). *Discourse-new information*, as defined by Birner and Ward (2003), is what denotes an entity that has not been evoked in the prior discourse. In Birner & Ward’s (1998; 2003) definition, *hearer-new information* is information that the speaker believes is not already familiar to the addressee.

Subject-dependent inversion. In terms of discourse function, as demonstrated by Cowan (2008), subject-dependent inversion is used for several purposes: to avoid long and complex subject NPs which, if occurring in normal position at the beginning of the sentence, usually create a discontinuity with the previous sentence, as in (37a); to emphasize a point related to the previous discourse, as in (37b); to introduce a new topic or “shift the topic at the start of a paragraph” (p. 538), as in (37c).

- (37) a. Investigators were at the scene of the crash by ten o’clock. *Dead were the pilot, Ralph Halsott, 29, Kankakee, Ill.; and two passengers, Susan Galston, 43, Milwaukee, Wis.; and William Johnson, 52, Chicago, Ill.* (Cowan, 2008, p. 535)
- b. Report shows that many passengers sustain trauma to the body and broken limbs in this type of roll-over accident. *Far more serious* are the severe head injuries that cause bruising of the brain. (Cowan, 2008, p. 536)

c. *Complicating the White House calculus is soaring hostility on Capitol Hill, which some officials call “off the charts”*. Congress has largely deferred to the president’s foreign policy priorities, but China is one area where legislators are demanding a change of course, particularly on trade. (Cowan, 2008, p. 536)

In (37a), the inversion helps the writer to create a connection to the preceding sentence and move the heavy information, a long subject NP, to the end of the sentence. In (37b), the inversion helps to put emphasis on the importance of the new information, *the severe head injuries that cause bruising of the brain*, which occurs after the expression *far more serious*. In (37c), using the inversion, according to Cowan’s (2008) analysis, the writer “shifts the topic from the problem the White House is having exerting pressure on China to alter its economic policies to a related problem - the growing hostility in Congress, which is making it difficult for the president to gain support for his policy” (p. 536).

In terms of information status, Penhallurick (1984, as cited in Birner & Ward, 1993) argues that the postposed phrase in an inversion represents the information which is new to the discourse (p. 29). Huddleston & Pullum (2002) agree, stating that for the felicity of the inversion, the preposed phrase must not represent information that is less familiar in the discourse than that represented by the postposed NP (p. 1386). Huddleston & Pullum (2002) add one more condition for an inversion with verbs other than *be* to be felicitous: the verb other than *be* must represent discourse-old information (p. 1386), as in (38c). So, when the information status of the preposed and postposed constituents is reversed, infelicity results, as in (38d) with the preposed phrase conveying new information and the postposed phrase presenting old information. Let us consider, for example, the following inversions.

- (38) a. We have complimentary soft drinks, coffee, Sanka, tea, and milk. *Also complimentary is red and white wine.* We have cocktails available for \$2.00.
(Flight attendant on Midway Airlines, as cited in Birner & Ward, 2003, p. 129)
- b. They have a great big tank in the kitchen, *and in the tank are sitting a whole bunch of pots.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1386)
- c. He opened the door and took a folded canvas bucket from behind the seat. *Coiled on the floor lay a fifty-foot length of braided nylon climbing rope.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1389)
- d. They have a whole punch of pots in the kitchen, *^{*}and in a great big tank are sitting all of the pots.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1386)

In (38a), the preposed AP *also complimentary* represents information previously evoked in the discourse, while the postposed *red and white wine* is new to the discourse, and thus the sentence is felicitous. In (38b), the preposed element *in the tank* is old to the discourse while the postposed constituent *a whole bunch of pots* is new to the discourse; (38a) and (38b) are therefore felicitous. In (38c), the verb *lay* does not convey new information. *Lay* is evoked from the preposed phrase *coiled on the floor*, because “an object is coiled on the floor is known to be lying there” (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1389). In (38d), however, the preposed element *in a great big tank* is new to the discourse while the postposed constituent *all of the pots* is old to the discourse, so the sentence is unacceptable or infelicitous.

Clefts. One of the discourse functions of clefts is to express a contrast (Prince, 1978; Declerck, 1988; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), as in (39a). Two discourse functions of clefts suggested by Declerck (1988) are “emphasis” and “implicature of exhaustiveness” (p. 227). The use of *it*-clefts expresses an emphasis, as in (39b). The “implicature of exhaustiveness” helps the

hearer or reader specify the variable in the sentence correctly through “the inherent in the use of a specificational sentence (p. 227), as in (39c). Consider, for example, the two following sentences:

(39) a. Sue is planning to buy a Camry, but it’s a Lexus that I want. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1426)

b. I’ve been bit once already by a German shepherd. It was really scary. *It was an outside meter the woman had.* I read the gas meter and was walking back out ... (Prince, 1978, p. 894)

c. It was John and Bill who ran away.

Example (39a) shows the contrast between *a Lexus* and *a Camry*. In (39b), the speaker/writer puts emphasis on *an outside meter*, and thus “stressing a relevant point in the situation described: if the meter had been inside, the owner of the dog would have been aware of his visit and would have kept the dog from biting him” (Declerck, 1988, p. 227). In (39c), from the use of the *it*-cleft, the reader can infer that only (the exhaustiveness implicature) two people, John and Bill, ran away.

As demonstrated by Huddleston & Pullum (2002), in terms of information status, *it*-clefts belong to two types depending on the information which is represented by *that*-clause: whether it is discourse-old or discourse-new (p. 1424). In the first type, the information which is represented by *that*-clause is discourse-old, and the foregrounded element tends to convey old information, as in (40). In the second type, the information represented by *that*-clause is discourse-new, and the foregrounded element or highlighted element conveying old information “may be an adjunct (41) or a complement (42)” (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1424).

(40) A: Did you turn the air-conditioning off?

B: No, it was Kim. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1424)

(41) It was fifty years ago that the first real computer was built in Philadelphia.

(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1424)

(42) The Indians were helpful in many ways. *It was they who taught the settlers how to plant and harvest crops successfully in the New World.* (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1424)

In (40), the *that*-clause represents old information which has been evoked in the prior sentence: “someone turned the air-conditioning off” (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1424). In (41) and (42), the information represented by *that*-clause, *that the first real computer was built in Philadelphia* and *who taught the settlers how to plant and harvest crops successfully in the New World* are new to the discourse. The highlighted element conveying old information, *fifty years ago*, is an adjunct in (41) and a complement or a subject, *they*, in (42).

According to Huddleston & Pullum (2002), a *wh*-cleft is felicitous when the *wh*-clause represents information which is old to the addressee. Consider the following example.

(43) a. A: You said you’d be home early.

B: No, *what I said was that I’d come home as soon as I could.*

In (43), the information expressed in *what I said* is discourse-old, having been evoked in A’s *You said you’d be home early*. The information in the focus *that I’d come home as soon as I could* is discourse-new.

Passives. The choice for using the passive or active is discussed in Smalley, Ruetten & Kozyrev (2001) that ‘Most writing involves the use of the active voice . . . Sometimes, however, when the doer of the action is unknown, or perhaps the doer of the action is unimportant, the passive voice is appropriate’ (p. 372).

Biber et al. (1999) provide two reasons for using a short passive instead of a long one. The first reason is the tendency to generalize in academic discourse, i.e. by not specifying who carries out an action. The verb in short passives therefore usually conveys new information. The second reason is when the agents are specific but their identity is either not at issue or it does not need to be stated, as exemplified in (44).

(44) Jobless Frank Mason **was cleared** last night of attempting to kill a man in a street.

Mason, of Bramston View, Witham, **was acquitted** of attempting to murder 27-year-old Adrian Hawes, but the jury failed to reach a verdict on alternative charges of wounding with intent and causing actual bodily harm. The charges arose from an accident in Cypress Road, Witham, on February 19 last year when three men got out of a car and set about Mr Hawes. He **was punched**, and **kicked** to the ground and **stabbed** three times in the back. (NEWS, cited in Biber et al., 1999, p. 939)

Biber et al. (1999) explained that in the cases of *was cleared* and *was acquitted*, “the agent follows from shared cultural frameworks of knowledge to do with law courts and hospitals” (p. 939). With *was punched/kicked/stabbed*, the agent is suppressed since its identity is inferable from the prior discourse.

It has been argued in Chafe (1970) and Chafe (1976) that the notion of given/new information helps to explain the use of the English passive. Chafe (1970) indicates that the patient of the passive conveys old information, whereas the agent conveys new information. So, in the sentence *The Christmas present was given to David by Micheal*, *the Christmas present* conveys old information while *Micheal* is new information, according to Chafe’s (1970) analysis. In Birner’s (1996, as cited in Birner & Ward, 2003) explanation, in the passive structure, “the syntactic subject must not represent newer information within the discourse than

does the NP in the *by*-phrase” (p. 130). If the information status of the relevant NPs is reversed, this results in infelicity. Let us consider the two following examples:

- (45) a. The mayor’s present term of office expires Jan. 1. *He will be succeeded by Ivan Allen Jr.* (Birner & Ward, 2003, p. 131)
- b. Ivan Allen Jr. will take the office Jan. 1. **The mayor will be succeeded by him.*
(Birner & Ward, 2003, p. 131)

In (45a), the subject, *he*, represents discourse-old information, whereas the *by*-phrase NP, *Ivan Allen Jr.*, represents discourse-new information, and thus the sentence is felicitous. But, the subject, *the mayor*, in (45b) conveys discourse-new information while the *by*-phrase NP, *him*, conveys discourse-old information, and so the sentence is unacceptable.

Existential *there* constructions. In an existential *there* structure, the “displaced subject” is discourse-new, i.e. the information has not been evoked in the prior discourse. (Prince, 1992; Delahunty & Garvey, 1994; Birner & Ward, 1998; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

- (46) What can happen is a hang-up such as Rocky Smith ran into, as the independent hauler was traversing Chicago with a load of machinery that just had to get to a factory by morning. “*There was this truck in front of me carrying giant steel coils, and potholes all over the place,*” he remembers. (Birner & Ward, 2003, p. 127)

In (46), the truck mentioned in the displaced subject is introduced to the reader for the first time and so is new to the addressee. The existential sentence is therefore felicitous.

Birner & Ward (1998, 2003) provide some examples when an existential is infelicitous. In the first example, the displaced subject is both hearer-old and discourse-old (47a); in the second example, the displaced subject is discourse-new but hearer-old (47b).

- (47) a. A: Hey, have you heard from Jim Alterman lately? I haven’t seen him for years.

B: Yes, actually. **There was on the panel your good friend Jim Alterman.*

b. I have some news you're going to find very interesting. **There was on the panel your good friend Jim Alterman.*

In (47a), the displaced subject is not only discourse-old, but also hearer-old. Similarly, in (47b), the displaced subject is new to the discourse, but presumably familiar to the hearer. These two sentences are therefore infelicitous.

Huddleston & Pullum (2002) also discussed the felicitous use of the existential and non-existential structures. When the indefinite NP denotes a physical entity, both non-existential (48a) and existential (48b) are felicitous. However, only the existential structure is felicitous when the indefinite NP “denotes an abstract entity” (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1397), as in (48d). Therefore, (48a), (48b), and (48d) are felicitous, and (48c) is infelicitous, according to Huddleston & Pullum (2002).

- (48) a. A furniture van was in the drive. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1397)
b. There was a furniture van in the drive. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1397)
c. *Sincerity was in her voice. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1397)
d. There was sincerity in her voice. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1397)

In term of quantification, *most*, *all*, *each*, and *every* are used only in the non-existential structures, while other quantifiers, such as *some*, *many*, *one*, *a* are felicitous in both existential and non-existential constructions (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), as in (49).

- (49) a. There are some/many/*most/*all small firms experiencing difficulties.
(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1401)
b. There was a/one/*each/*every student from my class at the party. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1401)

- c. Some/many/most/all small firms are experiencing difficulties. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1401)
- d. A/one/each/every student from my class was at the party. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1401)

Extrapositions. The information in the subject of a non-extraposed sentence conveys old information, whereas the information in the subject of an extraposed content clause may be either given with respect to the discourse, or it may be discourse-new (Prince, 1981; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Consider, for example, the sentences in (50):

- (50) a. A: Jeffrey didn't turn in his term paper until a week after the deadline.
 B: *That he did it at all* is a miracle (non-extraposed structure).
 B: It's a miracle *that he did it at all* (extraposed structure).
- b. **That the real problems surrounding NATO's planned bombing raid on Serbia were never addressed during the marathon peace talks now underway in France* is amazing (non-extraposed structure).
- c. It is amazing *that the real problems surrounding NATO's planned bombing raid on Serbia were never addressed during the marathon peace talks now underway in France* (extraposed structure).

In (50a), both B versions (extraposed and non-extraposed) are felicitous, since the content clause, *that he did it at all*, conveys old information (Jeffrey's completing his term paper is evoked in the preceding context). In (50b) and (50c), taken from the beginning of an article, only the extraposed version is acceptable because the content clause, *that the real problems surrounding NATO's planned bombing raid on Serbia were never addressed during the marathon peace talks now underway in France*, is discourse-new.

In summary, the syntactic and pragmatic properties of the five information packaging constructions presented in this chapter are the foundation for the analysis and explanation of how Vietnamese students use these structures in their academic writing. The following chapter offers the methodology applied for the data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research methods

Several research methods are used in the present study. Quantitative methods are useful in investigating the distribution of the five information packaging constructions in the students' writing. Qualitative methods are appropriate for examining common errors and how the students use the five constructions in different contexts in their writing. So, I used both.

Cross-sectional design is chosen as the primary framework of the present study. This is a method which is “probably the most frequently used in linguistic research” (Rasinger, 2008, p. 36). According to Rasinger (2008), compared to other quantitative research methodologies (longitudinal, experimental, and quasi-experimental), cross-sectional design helps to describe the current status of a particular linguistic feature with a number of people and a large amount of data which are collected simultaneously at “a particular moment in time” (p. 36). This method helps answer the research questions in “greater details and accuracy” (p. 36). With a sample of 50 first-year students and data (essays) collected via a writing test, the present study aims to investigate the current use of English information packaging constructions among Vietnamese students in their writing.

Sampling

The target population is first-year learners of English at the Foundation Studies Department in Hanoi University and in English Departments in some other universities and colleges in Hanoi. In these programs, students are required to complete a one-year intensive English program during their first academic year before entering their major departments. That is, they have to participate in three semesters of Basic English Language (BEL), English for

Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). There are the same components in each semester: academic reading, academic writing, listening, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary. In ESP, the students are taught about English information packaging constructions and how to use them in speaking and writing, a topic that the grammar textbooks in the BEL and EAP courses do not include.

The participants of the present study are a sample of 50 Vietnamese advanced students of English coming from three classes in D group (the students who have been studying English since secondary school) at the Foundation Studies Department in Hanoi University. These advanced classes have two 90 minute grammar sessions and three 90 minute academic writing sessions per week. One grammar instructor and one writing instructor are in charge of each class.

It was assumed that the participants would have a great deal of knowledge of English grammar and writing, since they had been studying English as a foreign language since secondary school.

Corpus

In order to investigate the way Vietnamese students use the five information packaging constructions in their writing, I conducted a corpus-based study. The corpus for this study consists of 50 essays written by first-year students at the Foundation Studies Department in Hanoi University, Vietnam. This corpus provides a wide range of texts from which I could get the five investigated constructions and the contexts in which these structures occur.

A 40 minute written essay is one of the school tasks students are required to complete in the writing course during the semester, so this time allotment is set for the writing test. The controlled writing prompt provided below was administered by the three participating instructors:

*In 40 minutes, write an essay about the following topic: **The most Memorable Moment in Your Life**. The essay should have at least 250 words.*

The researcher did not include evaluating requirements relating to grammar, lexicon, or accuracy in the prompt because these criteria are usually used in assessing students' writing essays during the academic year. Specifically, when evaluating the essays, writing teachers mainly focus on the four assessment categories: task achievement, lexical choice, coherence and cohesion, and grammatical range and accuracy; in which, the last two criteria are considered to be more important. In terms of task achievement and lexical choice, evaluators want to know how well students develop the topic with main and supported ideas and how well they choose words for specific topics. To assess how logically students organize the ideas and how appropriately they use cohesive devices to combine and connect sentences, examiners look at the coherence and cohesion in the writing. For the last criterion, grammatical range and accuracy, teachers evaluate how accurately and appropriately they use grammar features, a wide range of sentence structures, and punctuation that they have learnt in grammar lessons. Moreover, students had several opportunities of discussing their friends' writing essays based on these criteria, so they were familiar with these criteria and usually pay due attention to such important elements when writing essays. Indeed, being aware of specific required assessment criteria as well as in-class practice on evaluating essays in writing lessons, students are expected to show their ability in developing topics, controlling grammatical accuracy, coherence and cohesion in writing essays, such as the one for this study. Because of these assumptions, the researcher felt justified in using the students' essays as appropriate data for her research questions.

Procedures

Written permission was sought from the Dean of the Department of the participating instructors before the test was administered to the students. Three teachers set up a time and place that is usually used as a final test location for the participants: 9 o'clock in the morning, two classes with 15 students in each, one class with 20 students, and one teacher as test administrator for each class. The essays were collected, scanned, and mailed back to the researcher.

Data analysis

I carefully located 88 English information packaging constructions in the 50 essays and put them under five categories based on Huddleston & Pullum (2002): subject-dependent inversion, cleft, passive, existential, and extrapositive constructions. After that, my advisor and I discussed each sentence to make sure that they were all accurately categorized according to syntactic characteristics of each construction discussed in the *Cambridge grammar of the English language*. After all 88 examples were finalized; I counted the number of occurrences of each construction and each subtype of the construction to see how students use the five English information packaging constructions.

To investigate common syntactic and pragmatic errors the students made in their essays, I looked back at the text where each construction was located and collected the text that preceded and followed it. I then analyzed each occurrence of the construction in relation to its context for insight into how the students use these constructions in particular contexts. My advisor closely assisted me during the analysis process, providing valuable comments and suggestions. Also, I myself was always objective in analyzing the data by accurately locating the structures and quoting the text. Doing that, I could have the most accurate results to help not only me but also

my colleagues better understand how our students use these information packaging constructions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing the students' fifty essays, I found a wide range of cleft, passive, existential, and *it* extraposition constructions. However, I found no subject-dependent inversion constructions. The number of structures found is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Information packaging constructions found in the students' essays.

Non-canonical constructions		No. of structures found
1.	Subject-dependent inversion	0
2.	Clefts	26
3.	Passive	40
4.	Existential <i>there</i>	16
5.	Extraposition	6

The two sections of this chapter focus on the interpretation of the constructions found: clefts, passives, existentials, and extrapositives. In the first section, I present and discuss the findings relating to syntactic features of the constructions. In the second section, I analyze and discuss a number of common syntactic and pragmatic errors the students made using these constructions in their writing.

Syntactic properties

Clefts. In this part, I first analyze the kinds of clefts found in the students' writing. Then, I offer an investigation of different types of highlighted elements found in *it*-clefts, *wh*-clefts and reversed *wh*-clefts.

Types of clefts found in the students' writing. Twenty-six cleft sentences were found in the students' writing, representing the three different types of English clefts discussed in the literature: *it*-clefts, *wh*-clefts, and reversed *wh*-clefts.

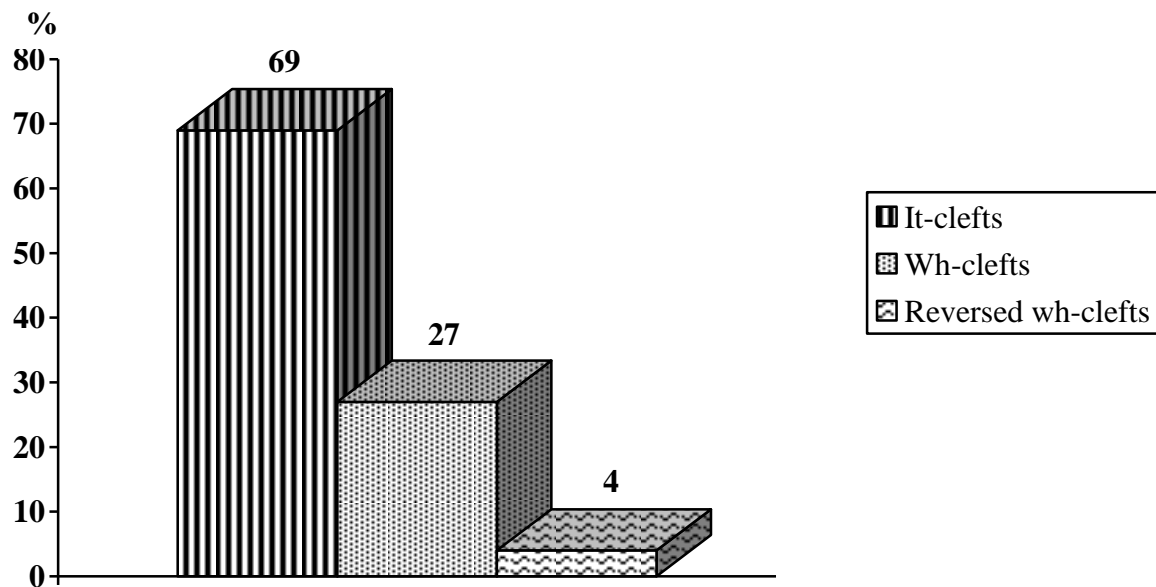


Figure 4.1: Types of clefts (n = 26)

Figure 4.1 shows that *it*-clefts account for 69% of the total, *wh*-clefts for 27%, and reversed *wh*-clefts for 4%, as illustrated in (1), (2), and (3), respectively.

- (1) I never forget the year the Japanese people lived in disaster. *It was in 2011 that the earthquake and tsunami happened in Japan.* Citizens in the whole world turned to this country to help, to share so that the people could overcome physical and mental difficulty. (Essay 37)

(2) She was an active, petite, and lovely girl and had a very good singing voice. *But what I liked most was that she was very active.* (Essay 2)

(3) But in that year, during a festival in my high school English, I was impressed by very talented people. *In particular, a little girl is what most impressed me.* She was an active, petite, and lovely girl and had a very good singing voice. (Essay 2)

Types of highlighted elements found in *it*-clefts. There were eighteen *it*-cleft sentences in the students' writing. The chart below shows the three types of highlighted elements in the *it*-cleft sentences used by the students: NPs, PPs, and APs.

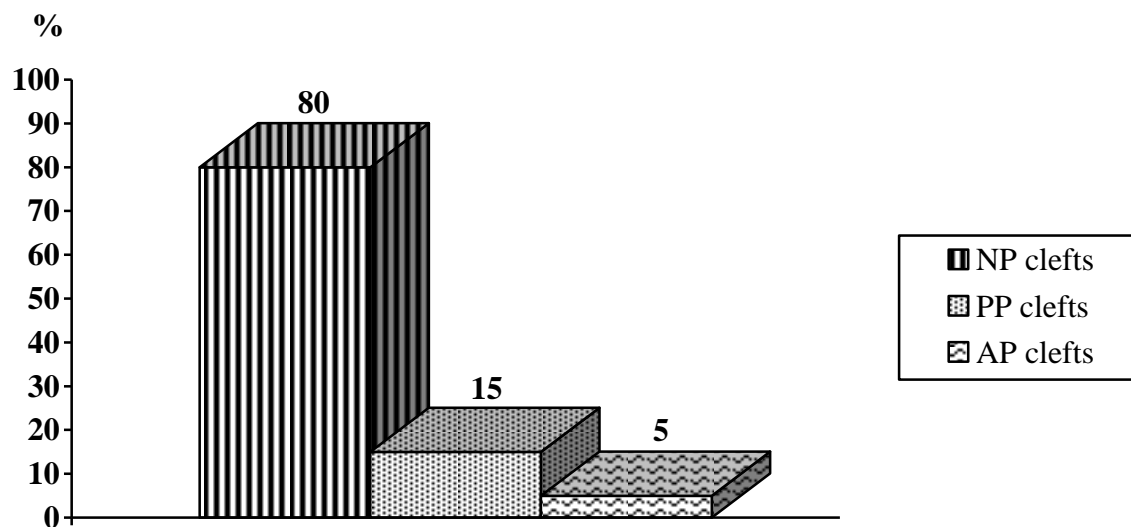


Figure 4.2: Types of *it*-clefts (n = 18)

As shown in Figure 4.2, the most common type of highlighted element in *it*-clefts is noun phrases (NPs), as illustrated in (4), (5), and (6) (accounting for 80% of the cases in found constructions). The second most commonly occurring highlighted element, representing 15%, is prepositional phrases (PPs), as in (7). The last highlighted element which occur the least with only 5% of the total, or one sentence, is adjective phrases (APs), as in (8).

- (4) A great number of people were there to see the competition. At first, I got behind the other three athletes, and I was so stressed. *But it was the audience who encouraged me to keep moving forward.* (Essay 9)
- (5) I just could not keep myself controlled and also my tears couldn't be held. So did my parents. I could feel how proud of me they felt. *Therefore, it is belief that will lead you to dream.* (Essay 32)
- (6) But then, with the encouragement from everyone, especially a close friend of mine, I decided to try to make my dream come true. She said: "I think you will pass it" and I felt very confident. *It is her that helped me have the strength to overcome this trial.* (Essay 39)
- (7) I never forget the year the Japanese people lived in disaster. *It was in 2011 that the earthquake and tsunami happened in Japan.* (Essay 37)
- (8) I also found it important that everything depended on me and I had to make everything become true. This success became a motivation for me to do another thing in future. *It was happy that I feel since then.* (Essay 23)

Types of highlighted elements in *wh*-clefts and reversed *wh*-clefts. Out of twenty-six cleft sentences found in the students' essays, there are seven *wh*-cleft sentences and one reversed *wh*-cleft. In the case of the *wh*-clefts, three syntactic classes appear in the focus position: declarative content clauses, non-finite clauses, and NPs. These classes are represented in *wh*-clefts. There is only NP occurring in the reversed *wh*-cleft construction, as in (12). These types are shown in Figure 4.3.

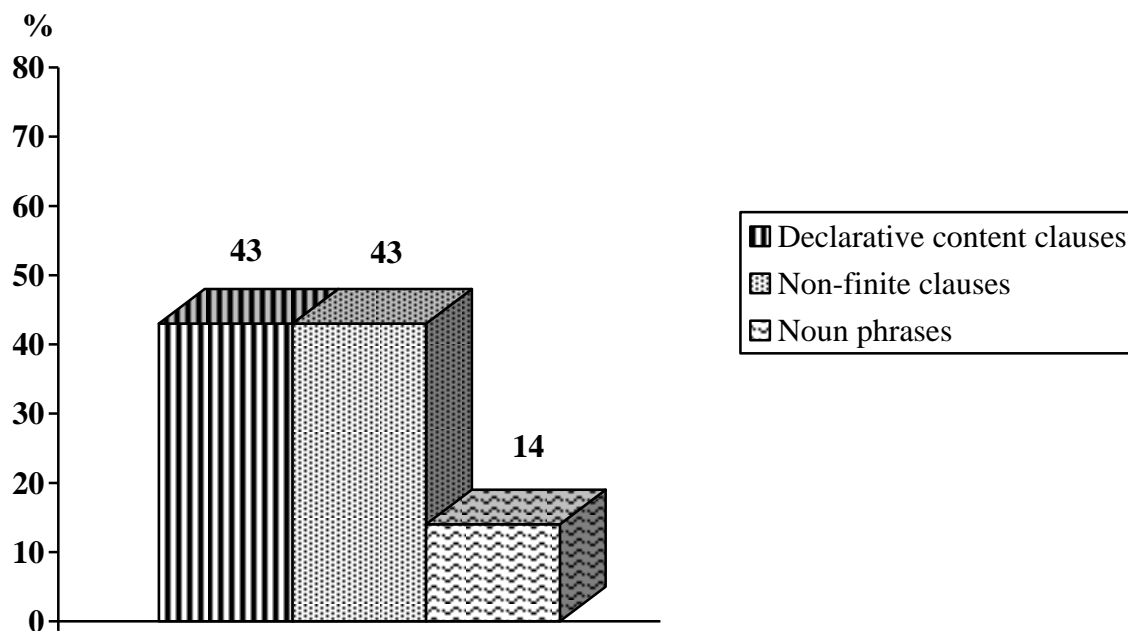


Figure 4.3: Types of highlighted elements found in *wh*-clefts (n = 7)

Figure 4.3 indicates that out of seven (100%) *wh*-cleft structures, the most commonly appearing highlighted elements, representing 43% each of the total, are declarative content clauses and non-finite clauses (infinitive clauses serving as complements to *do*), as in (9) and (10), respectively. NPs account 14% of the total instances, as in (11).

(9) But in that year, during a festival in my high school English, I was impressed by very talented people. In particular, a little girl is what most impressed me. She was an active, petite, and lovely girl and had a very good singing voice. *But what I liked most was that she was very active.* (Essay 2)

(10) I went climbing with the group of my friends on very cold days in February. *What we had to do was to prepare a lot from physical to spirit conditions,* because we hoped that we could climb to the peak safe and sound. (Essay 14)

(11) If there had been no words from my friend, I will never realize that if you want something enough, a vague dream can still come true. *What I have in mind are the feelings and thoughts of that day*. (Essay 1)

(12) But in that year, during a festival in my high school English, I was impressed by very talented people. *In particular, a little girl is what most impressed me*. She was an active, petite, and lovely girl and had a very good singing voice. (Essay 2)

Passives. This part examines the types of passives used by the students.

The data shows that twenty-seven out of fifty students used forty passive structures in the writing, and the forty passive sentences found are divided into two main types: *be*-passives and bare passives. The percentages of occurrence are shown in Figure 4.4.

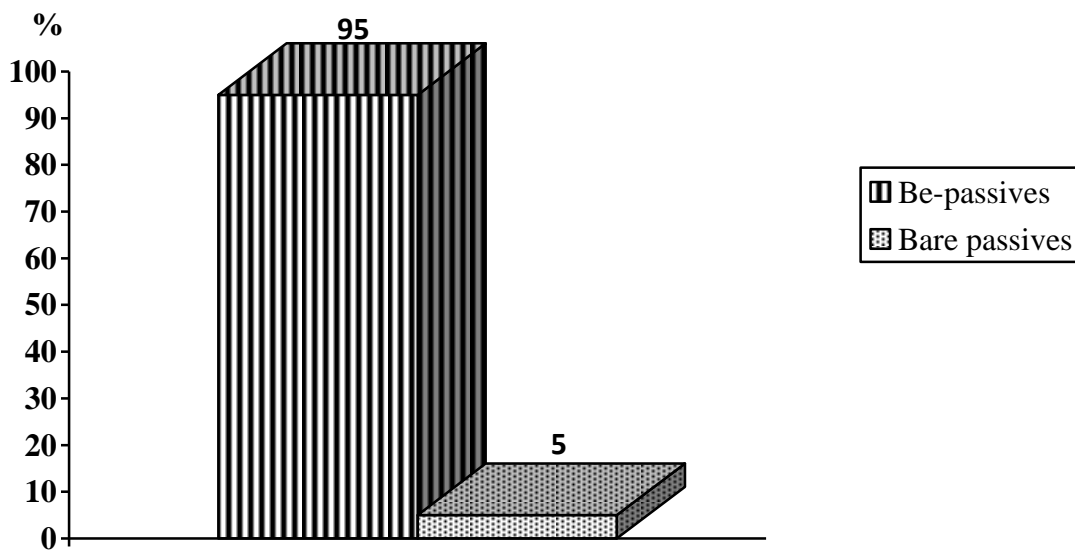


Figure 4.4: Types of passives (n = 40)

As shown in Figure 4.4, the most commonly occurring type of passive structure, accounting for 95 percent, in the students' writing, is the *be*-passive, as illustrated in (13). In contrast, only 5 percent are bare passives, as in (14).

(13) I remembered the prize I won was in Literature. *The competition was held between a lot of schools of Hanoi city.* Many intelligent participants competed with each other to take the 1st position, which enable them to take part in the National Competition. (Essay 27)

(14) Until now, there have been many times of achieving something successfully in my life. *However, in my mind, the most memorable and successful moment was when I held the position of organizing board's chief of a big event called "Spring Sensation Night" two years ago.* (Essay 11)

The forty passive sentences found in the students' writing are also divided into long and short passives. The data in Figure 4.5 reveals that 90% of the instances are short passives, which do not include a *by*-phrase (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), as illustrated in (15). Whereas, the proportion of long passive constructions found is 10% of the total, as exemplified in (16).

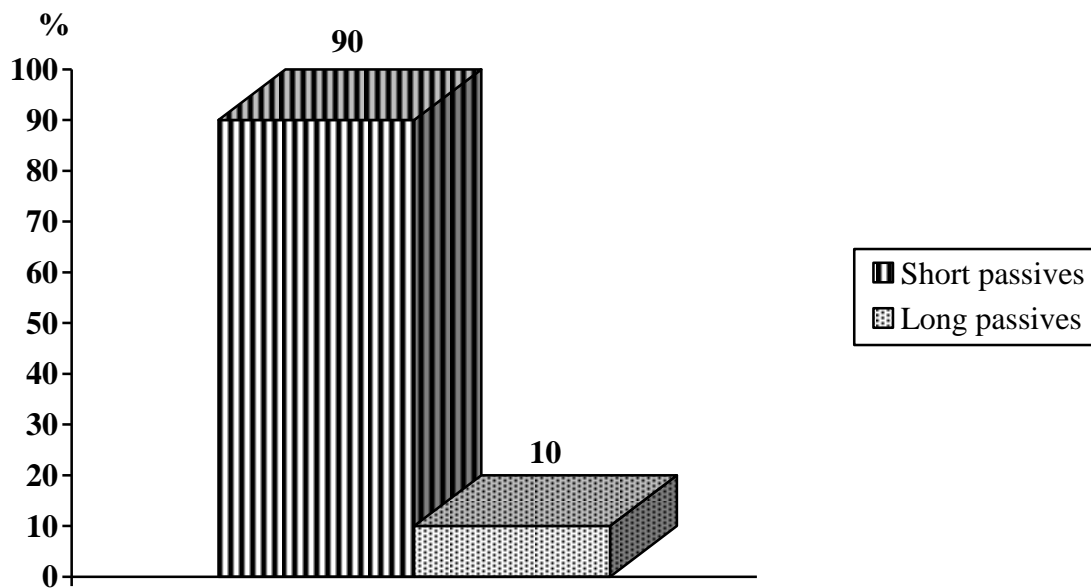


Figure 4.5: Long and short passives found in the students' essays (n = 40)

(15) I was really nervous and hopeful on the day I handed in my application to get the scholarship. The time of waiting was extremely long to me. *One rainy day, I got a phone call from the Taiwan Embassy informing that my application had been accepted and I could start prepare for going abroad.* (Essay 32)

(16) When I was 15, I entered into the high school that was far for from my home. So I chose to live in dormitory. I found it really difficult and uncomfortable that I have to share the room with seven students from different departments. *I used to be taken care of by my parents* and then I have to do everything by myself. (Essay 20)

Existential *there* constructions. Ten of the fifty students used existential *there* structures in their writing, one of these was a bare existential (the construction which contains *there*, the verb *be*, and a displaced subject) and fifteen were extended existentials (the construction that contains dummy *there*, the verb *be*, the displaced subject, and an extension) of different types. The proportions of occurrence are shown in Figure 4.6.

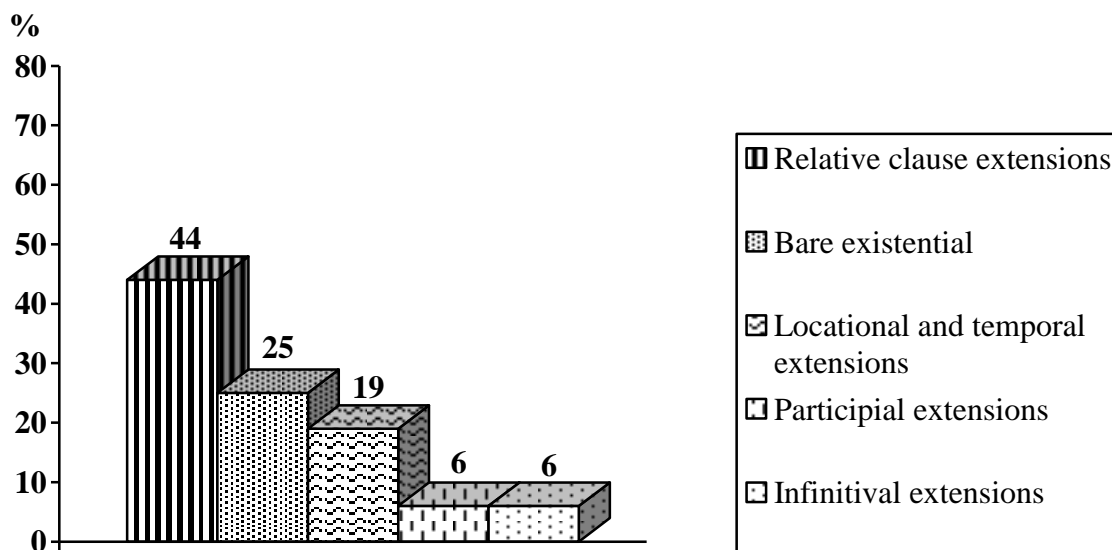


Figure 4.6: Types of existential clauses (n = 16)

It can be seen from Figure 4.6 that the most commonly occurring extension, representing 44 percent, is the relative clause extension, as illustrated in (17), followed by the participial extensions, as exemplified in (18), with 25 percent. Locational and temporal extensions account for 19 percent of the total, as exemplified in (19). The least common kinds of existentials are bare existential and existentials with infinitival extensions, at 6 percent each, as shown in (20) and (21), respectively.

- (17) In my life, *there are many moments which make me happy and satisfied about myself*, such as receiving the third prize in English contest, working as a volunteer in Sapa to help poor people. However, the most successful moments is the time when I have attended Hanoi University. (Essay 29)
- (18) I was responsible for signing contracts or finding sponsors. My contribution was proved at the party. *There were so many students registering to attend the event*: students from four departments of the university, volunteer students in GREEN club, and students from graduate school. (Essay 11).
- (19) And surprisingly, I finally was selected. Although I was not going through the later rounds, this is still a huge success for me. *If there had been no words from my friends*, I will never realize that if you want something enough, a vague dream can still come true. (Essay 1).
- (20) People have experienced many significant moments in their lives. *There are happy moments, sad moments and also successful moments*. Personally, the most successful moment in my life is when I passed the entrance exam to Hanoi University. (Essay 22)

(21) Thanks to my teachers, my friends and also the expectation of my mother, I tried to continue and went to the competition with the confidence and bravery. I wrote everything I knew about the topic, checked carefully and handled the paper. At the time I came out of the room, I really thought that I had tried my best and *there was nothing to regret*. (Essay 27)

Extrapositions. Four of the fifty students used six extraposition structures of two different types: extraposition of infinitive clauses and extraposition of non-subjects. The proportions of occurrence are shown in Figure 4.7.

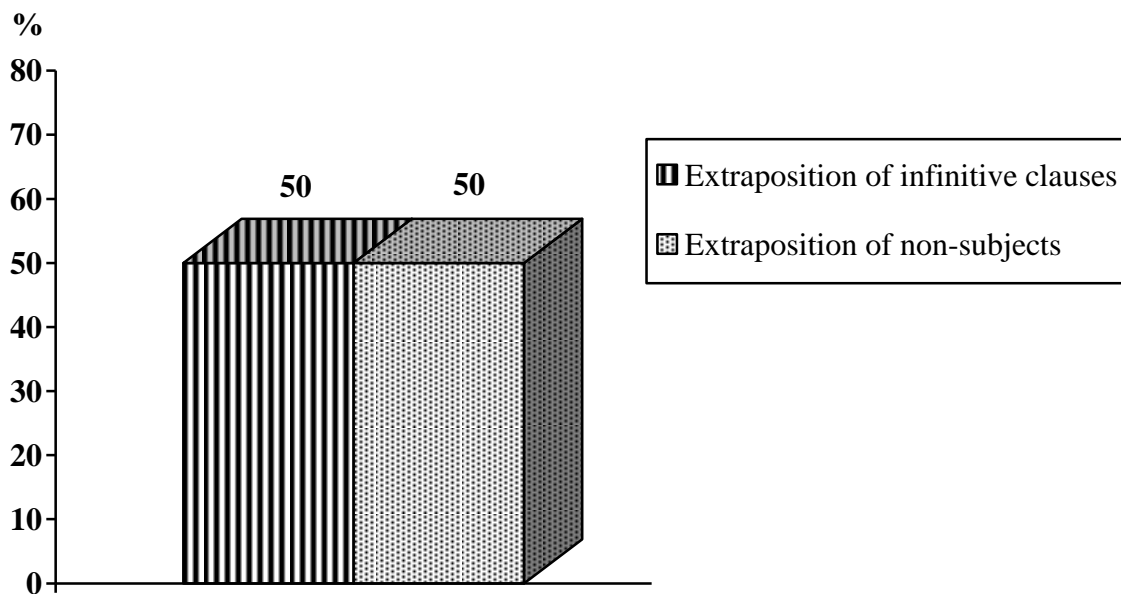


Figure 4.7: Types of extrapositive constructions (n = 6)

Figure 4.7 shows that these two types (extraposition of infinitive clauses and extraposition of non-subjects) share the same proportion of occurrence, 50 percent each, and are illustrated in (22) and (23), respectively.

(22) I tried to study especially in English and my teacher chose me to take part in the Olympic examination between high schools. *It was hard to deny teacher's decision*

so I took part in it and won silver medal. I couldn't believe that I could do well.

(Essay 23)

- (23) When I was 15, I entered into the high school that was far from my house. So, I chose to live in dormitory. *I found it really difficult and uncomfortable that I have to share the room with seven students from different departments.* (Essay 20).

Discussion. The analysis of the five information packaging constructions in terms of syntactic form helps to answer the first research question about how the students used subject-dependent inversion, clefts, passives, existentials, and extrapositives in their writing. No subject-dependent inversion was found in the students' writing, though this feature is taught in two units (119 and 120) in the textbook (Hewings, 1999). Passive and cleft constructions were the most common in the students' writing (sixty-six structures as shown in Table 4.1). Existential *there* and extrapositive structures are also found in the students' writing, though the number is limited (twenty-two structures as shown in Table 4.1).

Biber et al. (1999) claimed that short passives are far more common than long passives and is widely used in academic writing. This is also true in the Vietnamese students' essays when almost all the passive constructions found in the students' writing (90%) are short passives. A majority of the students use the *be*-passive structure; however, there was only one student using a bare passive though this structure was taught in both grammar and writing lessons.

In the case of *it*-clefts, there are a number of phrase types mentioned by Delahunty (1984) that can function as the cleft constituent in *it*-clefts, including noun phrases, prepositional phrases, particle phrases, quantifier phrases, and adjective phrases. The only types found in the students' writing were noun phrases, prepositional phrases, and adjective phrases. It is understandable that students use noun phrases and prepositional phrases, since they were familiar

with these two classes. Interestingly, however, one student used an adjective phrase though this was not taught or mentioned in the grammar textbook.

Regarding *wh*-clefts and reversed *wh*-clefts, the students know all three classes mentioned by Collins (1991) and in the grammar textbook that can function as the highlighted element in *wh*-clefts (noun phrases, content clauses, and infinitive clauses serving as a complement to *do*). They also learn that the NP phrase is the only one that can be reversed. The students, therefore, use these structures accurately in terms of syntactic form.

All the types of existential *there* discussed in Huddleston & Pullum (2002) were found in the students' writing: bare existentials, infinitival extensions, relative clause extensions, locational and temporal extensions, and participial extensions. Surprisingly, the students used relative clause extensions accurately though they were not taught about relative clause extensions in the one cleft unit. The possible reason for this is that the students learned about relative clauses (four units), and so they extended this to clefts.

Finally, the two kinds of extraposition constructions discussed in Huddleston & Pullum (2002) and in Hewings (1999) were found in the students' writing: extrapositions of infinitive clauses and extrapositions of non-subjects. Although there are two units on this construction in the curriculum, compared to only one unit on clefts, the number of extraposition used by the students are rather limited, only six sentences. Perhaps, this is due to the difference in the position of heavy information in the structure between two languages: English and Vietnamese. There is a tendency to put heavy information at the end of the sentence in English, whereas it is at the beginning of the sentence in Vietnamese. The students may find it quite unfamiliar or difficult to use such construction.

Common Errors and Discussion

Common syntactic errors. From the data collected, I found no syntactic errors with extrapositive constructions. However, I found some grammatical and stylistic problems in the students' writing in their cleft, passive, and existential constructions.

Clefts. One minor problem in using cleft structures by Vietnamese students relates to writing style. Hewings (1999) indicates that in order to focus particular attention on certain information in a sentence, a *what*-clause followed by *be* is sometimes used. However, with other *wh*-clauses which appear at the beginning of the sentence, such as *how*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *who*, a noun having a meaning related to the *wh*-word followed by a *that*-clause or *wh*-clause is to be preferred (p. 196). For instance, *reason* is used instead of *why*, or *place* is used rather than *where*. Based on this principle, the following sentence should be revised.

(24) *Why I overweight was that my parents let me eat a great deal of sweet and fat-containing food such as butter, cheese, candy, and fast food.* (Essay 40)

(25) *Why we could do it successfully was that the driving force for other people is always greater than the motivation for ourselves.* (Essay 37)

In these sentences, the student used *wh*-clauses, *Why I overweight* (the correct clause should be: *why I was overweight*, since *overweight* is an adjective) and *Why we could do it successfully*, at the beginning of the two sentences, and both *wh*-clauses are followed by *that*-clauses. According to Hewings (1999), the noun phrase, *the reason*, has a meaning similar to the *wh*-word, *why*, and should be used in addition. And more appropriate sentences would be:

(26) *The reason why I was overweight was that my parents let me eat a great deal of sweet and fat-containing food such as butter, cheese, candy, and fast food.*

(27) *The reason why we could do it successfully was that the driving force for other people is always greater than the motivation for ourselves.* (Essay 37)

Passives. Two kinds of grammatical problems are found among the 40 instances, including using the wrong form of the past participle and subject-verb agreement. For the first error, *choosen*, *droven*, and *improve* are used, as in (28a, 29a, 30a) instead of *chosen*, *driven*, and *improved*, as in (28b, 29b, 30b).

(28) a. **Original:** *I was choosen for this competition because at the young age, my friends did not have a chance to get access to computer.* (Essay 5)

b. **Revised:** *I was chosen for this competition because at the young age, my friends did not have a chance to get access to computer.* (Essay 5)

(29) a. **Original:** *When I heard the news from the school, I was droven crazy by the success.* (Essay 9)

b. **Revised:** *When I heard the news from the school, I was driven crazy by the success.* (Essay 9)

(30) a. **Original:** *However, with my mother's help, my sewing skill was improve significantly.* (Essay 10)

b. **Revised:** *However, with my mother's help, my sewing skill was improved significantly.* (Essay 10)

For the second error, the subject pronoun *I* - the first person - requires the verb *have* (31b), not *has* as in the incorrect sentence (31a).

(31) a. **Original:** *In my own entire life, I has been brought up in my parents' warm arms.*
(Essay 48)

b. **Revised:** *In my own entire life, I have been brought up in my parents' warm arms.* (Essay 48)

The students made these errors maybe because there is a difference in using the verb tenses in Vietnamese and English. English uses verb inflections (e.g. *-ed*, *-ing*) to indicate tense and aspect, whereas, in Vietnamese, three words *đã*, *đang*, *sẽ* are used to indicate past, present, and future, respectively. Tang (2006) claimed that “Vietnamese speakers may use the present tense verb to indicate tenses of past or future” (p. 22).

In Vietnamese, in order to create a passive sentence from an active one, one just adds *bị* or *được* before the main verb. The main verb does not change form. The students, therefore, in many cases are not aware of the importance of learning by heart the past participle form of English irregular verbs. It is also not easy for them to remember the past participle form of the large number of English irregular verbs. Another reason may be that the students do not carefully recheck the past participle verb used in the passive sentence after finishing their writing. The possible reason for the second error, subject-verb agreement, is that there is no subject-verb agreement in number (singular or plural) or person in Vietnamese; whereas, English requires the use of the plural marker *-s* or *-es* (Erickson, 2001, as cited in Tang, 2006) to indicate number. Specifically, Tang (2006) indicates that the verb in Vietnamese sentences “does not indicate number” (p. 18).

Existential there constructions. The most frequent syntactic error found in the students' writing is the lack of quantifier-noun agreement. This is likely due to the effect of the first language, which only requires the addition of numerals (*một*, *hai*, *ba*) and quantifiers (*nhiều*, *rất nhiều*, *các*) before the noun without adding a plural inflection to the noun (Tang, 2006, p. 16).

The students, as a result, usually add quantifiers before nouns and forget to add the final {-s} to make the noun agree in number with the quantifier.

(32) a. **Original:** *There are many unforgettable moment in one person's life since he was born: growing up, going to school, graduating, marriage, going to work, being older and passing away. (Essay 27)*

b. **Revised:** *There are many unforgettable moments in one person's life since he was born: growing up, going to school, graduating, marriage, going to work, being older and passing away. (Essay 27)*

It can be concluded that the students did make some errors while using English passive, cleft, and existential constructions in their writing, but the errors are not serious; they are unlikely to affect the interpretation of the sentences. Furthermore, no syntactic errors related to the use of the extraposition construction were found. This analysis helps to answer the second research question about the common errors made by the students in their writing: all the mentioned mistakes can be avoided if the students become more careful in learning the form of these grammatical structures at school as well as while applying them in writing essays.

Pragmatic use in particular contexts. In this part, I will consider pragmatic errors made by the students in their essays.

Clefts. *It*-clefts belong to two types depending on whether the information which is “represented by the presupposition” is discourse-old or discourse-new (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1424). Seven sentences which belong to the first type (the information represented by the presupposition or *that*-clause and the foregrounded element or highlighted element is old) are used accurately by the students. However, I found two infelicitous sentences which fall into the

second type (the information represented by the presupposition or *that*-clause is discourse-new, and the foregrounded element or highlighted element conveying old information), as in (33).

- (33) Indeed, to high school students, getting an offer from a university can be considered the most important thing. *It is parents, friends, teachers, relatives who put so much expectation to them that they have to pass the university entrance exam.* (Essay 24)

In (33), the presupposition represents information (someone put expectation to them) that has not been evoked in the preceding discourse. However, the highlighted element, *parents, friends, teachers, relatives*, does not convey old information. The sentence, therefore, is infelicitous.

Regarding *wh*-clefts, as claimed by Huddleston & Pullum (2002), a *wh*-cleft construction is felicitous when the *wh*-clause conveys old information which has been evoked in the preceding discourse. Of the six *wh*-clefts collected, I found one infelicitous *wh*-cleft (34).

- (34) I went climbing with the group of my friends on very cold days in February. *What we had to do was to prepare a lot from physical to spirit conditions* because we hoped that we could climb to the peak safe and sound. We decided to walk to school every day to become stronger in health, and bought warm clothes. We read a lot to get information about the place we would go to. We felt really excited. (Essay 14)

In (34), the *wh*-clause represents information (“we had to do X”) that has not been evoked in the prior discourse; that is, it conveys discourse-new information. This results in the infelicity of this sentence.

Passives. Chafe (1970) claims that the subject of the passive conveys old information, whereas the object of *by* conveys new information. Birner (1996, as cited in Birner & Ward,

2003) emphasizes that if the information status of the relevant NPs is reversed, that is, if the subject conveys new information and the object of *by* conveys old information, or both the subject and object of *by* convey old information, a passive construction will be infelicitous.

Out of three long passives, there is one infelicitous sentence in which both the subject and object of *by* represent old information, as in (35)

(35) For all 18 years of my life, my dream is always becoming a fashion designer.

However, my parents hardly accept to let me pursue that career. My parents work in the business sector, so they want me to continue their job. *I am forced to study business by them, but I still continue to draw.* (Essay 3)

In this example, both the subject *I* and the object of *by*, *them*, which refers to *my parents* have been indicated in the prior discourse. That is, both convey discourse-old information. This makes the sentence infelicitous in this context. The use of the active sentence, therefore, makes the text more effective and cohesive, and thus enhancing the communicative effect, as in (36).

(36) For all 18 years of my life, my dream is always becoming a fashion designer.

However, my parents hardly accept to let me pursue that career. My parents work in the business sector, so they want me to continue their job. *They forced me to study business, but I still continue to draw...*

I found five infelicitous sentences out of 37 short passives. In these five sentences, the subject conveys new information instead of old information, as in (37, 38).

(37) I also had to find person to organize the party. Everything nearly went fluently. *My friends and other staff were assigned tasks suitably.* Although there were a few things happening unfortunately, I still kept calm and guided my staff to solve those problems. (Essay 11).

(38) As for my friends, the vast majority of them were excited because they were starting a new life with many strange things. But I was really afraid and worried *because my school was located too far from my house*. This meant that I had to live independently and alone in a strange place at the age of 15. (Essay 48)

In (37, 38), the subjects of the passives, *my friends and other staff* and *my school* represent discourse-new information, i.e. they haven't been mentioned or referred to in the preceding discourse. These sentences are thus infelicitous. The sentences might be revised as in (39, 40)

(39) I also had to find person to organize the party. Everything nearly went fluently. *I assigned tasks to my friends and other staff suitably*. Although there were a few things happening unfortunately, I still kept calm and guided my staff to solve those problems. (Essay 11)

(40) As for my friends, the vast majority of them were excited because they were starting a new life with many strange things. But I was really afraid and worried *because I studied in a school which was located too far from my house*. This meant that I had to live independently and alone in a strange place at the age of 15. (Essay 48)

I found a wide range of passive constructions (40), and there are several possible reasons for that. The first reason is likely due to the effect of the teaching and learning approach, which focuses mainly on the syntactic form. Another may be because of the students' assumption that the passive and the active are simply two patterns expressing the same meaning, and thus they can use both patterns freely without considering pragmatic rules. The last possible reason is the

belief among a number of ESL/EFL teachers and students that using the more complex passive structures means having higher proficiency in English.

Existential there constructions. Out of sixteen existential *there* sentences found in the students' essays, six sentences were used to begin the essay, and the other ten sentences appear in different contexts within the essays. The data shows that the students accurately used this construction as the opening sentence of their writing. These six sentences are all felicitous, according to Prince (1992); Delahunty & Garvey (1994); Huddleston & Pullum (2002), since the displaced subject of each sentence conveys entities which are discourse-new and addressee-new (the information is unfamiliar with the reader), as in (41, 42, 43, and 44).

(41) Until now, *there has been one moment that I cannot forget*. It was when I held a position of organizing board's chief of a big event called "Spring Sensation Night" two years ago. (Essay 11)

(42) *There is one successful moment I remember most*: I've been elected to be on an English competition exam. This meant a lot to me as I could finally have a chance to show my skills and knowledge. (Essay 26)

(43) In my life, *there are many moments which make me happy and satisfied about myself*, such as receiving the third prize in English contest, working as a volunteer in Sapa to help poor people. However, the most successful moments is the time when I have attended Hanoi University. (Essay 29)

(44) Everything comes easy to me and goes away fast, but *there is one thing that I can't forget*. It was the time when I passed the university entrance exam, the most successful moment in my life. (Essay 33)

In (41), (42), (43), and (44), the displaced subjects, *one moment that I cannot forget*, *one successful moment I remember most*, and *many moments which make me happy and satisfied about myself*, and *one thing I can't forget* represent new information, being introduced to the addressee for the first time. The new information is expanded upon in the same sentence, as in (42, 43), or in the following sentence in the discourse, as in (41, 44).

In contrast, a number of sentences (45, 46, and 47) used elsewhere in the text were found infelicitous.

(45) My family and my friends encouraged me and told me to try my best. I felt very confident and tried my best in the competition, because *there were so many motivating words from other people around me*. And surprisingly, I was finally successful. (Essay 1).

(46) Up to now, my life is full of successes. *There are several successes that left me with so much memory*. Among them, the most successful moment was when I broke the record of swimming 3000m. (Essay 34)

(47) We all felt so happy when we could do such a good thing for people. It is indeed a moment of meaningful success in my life. I realize that collective power is really enormous. When *there is the strength of numerous people*, everything would be easier to implement. (Essay 37)

In (45, 46, and 47), the displaced subjects, *so many motivating words from other people around me*, *happy moments*, *several successes that left me with so much memory*, *the strength of numerous people* represent discourse-old information - the information can be inferable from the preceding discourse.

One student used a non-existential construction with an indefinite NP denoting an abstract entity (49).

(48) I also had to find person to organize a party. Everything nearly went fluently. My friends were assigned tasks suitably. Although *a huge anxiety was in my mind during the event*, I still kept calm and guided my friends to solve those problems.
(Essay 11).

According to Huddleston & Pullum (2002), this sentence is infelicitous or unacceptable. They claim that only the existential structure is felicitous when the indefinite NP “denotes an abstract entity” (p. 1397). Therefore, this sentence is felicitous when it is revised as an existential, as in (50).

(49) I also had to find person to organize a party. Everything nearly went fluently. My friends were assigned tasks suitably. *Although there was a huge anxiety in my mind during the event*, I still kept calm and guided my friends to solve those problems.
(Essay 11).

Extrapositions. The data shows that the students used extraposed structures appropriately in their writing; however, the number of students using the structure is very limited (four students). The possible reason is that while learning this structure, the students might not have opportunities to practice the structure and therefore forget it afterwards. The four students who used the extrapositives may be at higher level of proficiency in grammar than the others.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The four previous chapters have presented the background to the study, a literature review, data collection methods, data analysis and major findings. This chapter includes these sections: (1) implications for instructional practice, (2) implications for future research, and (3) conclusions about the limitations and significances of the study.

Pedagogical implications

The findings of this study suggest that the way the students use these information packaging constructions could be affected by the structural syllabus which according to Long (1991, as cited in Hinkel & Fotos, 2002) “does not produce communicative competence”. In-class practice is limited to some typical exercises with isolated sentences which “provide the learners with formal and declarative mastery but not opportunities to explore grammar constructions in context” (Nunan, 1998, p. 102), such as translating sentences, filling in blanks with proper words, and correcting errors. The findings of this study suggest that it could be better to teach syntactic forms and pragmatic principles in grammar instruction. That is, students should be provided with information on the syntactic forms as well as appropriate uses of these forms and opportunities to use them in “meaningful communicative context” (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Chang, 2011) so that they could understand the relationship between form, meaning, and use (Nunan, 1998, p. 102).

As claimed in Nunan (1998), grammar structures are taught “out of context” in grammar textbooks (p. 102). It is so recommended from the findings of this study that each grammar feature is taught through authentic discourse and text analysis (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002, p. 8) to develop the students’ competence in written communication. Students are assumed to have a

basic knowledge of syntactic forms of each construction, grammar lessons that include authentic examples of each construction in context should help students better understand the use of the construction.

Another recommendation is that the notions of discourse-old, discourse-new, given information, new information should be taught with explicit instances to increase students' awareness of when, where, and how each construction is used in discourse. Finally, it should be helpful to work with the students on correcting grammar errors in their text and to provide feedback. The suggestion on grammar error correction is consistent with what indicated in Krashen (1984) and Zamel (1985) when these two researchers advocate the grammar error treatment (Hylan & Hylan, 2006, p. 81). In terms of giving feedback, indirect feedback (the errors, as indicated in Hylan & Hylan (2006), are underlined, circled, coded, or marked and the teachers leave the students opportunities to correct errors) should be provided, since the students are all at advanced level. The indirect feedback, according to Hylan & Hylan (2006), forces students to engage in "guided learning and problem solving" (Lalande, 1982, as cited in Hylan & Hylan, 2006, p. 83). Last but not least, the students should realize that a comprehensive understanding of English information packaging constructions is not something that can be accomplished in a 90-minute lesson twice per week. They should learn how to use these structures by practicing them repeatedly, over long periods of time, and with lots of different texts.

Implications for future research

The reported findings suggest the following directions for future research:

1. More studies are needed to investigate how Vietnamese students use English information packaging constructions using a variety of data collection instruments in

- order to obtain more convincing results, such as interviewing teachers about how they teach each construction and how they provide feedback in grammar lessons, observing how students practice these structures in grammar and academic writing lessons, designing a survey questionnaire, or comparing and analyzing essays students complete in placement tests with essays they produce in final tests of the semester.
2. Further research is essential to compare the use of English information packaging constructions by Vietnamese students in their essays to the use of these constructions in essays written by native-English students. This would provide Vietnamese students with valuable information about how differently native-English students and Vietnamese students use these structures in particular contexts.
 3. Another area that should be explored more is the effects of traditional grammar teaching focusing on the syntactic form at word and sentence level only.
 4. Research on grammar textbooks is necessary to determine whether EFL students in Vietnam would benefit from an up-to-date grammar textbook that incorporates a communicative teaching approach. For example, are there advantages to a grammar textbook which focuses on form, function, and meaning? Is there a grammar textbook that would be the most effective for the Vietnamese students in Hanoi University and in the other five Hanoi universities and colleges?

Conclusions

In spite of some inevitable shortcomings, I believe that this research work is a positive contribution to me in teaching English grammar and writing at Hanoi University and to EFL teachers in the other five universities and colleges in Hanoi.

Starting from the need and the requirement in reality to find ways to best teach five English information packaging constructions (subject-dependent inversion, clefts, passives, existentials, and extrapositives), the researcher decided to conduct research on these constructions with Vietnamese students in Hanoi University, Vietnam. In the introduction, it was argued that this research on English information packaging constructions was intended to find out what kinds of structures were commonly used by advanced students in Hanoi University in their writing. I also wished to discover the common syntactic and pragmatic errors. The results of the study suggest that grammar teaching, especially for adult students in EFL settings, would benefit from the inclusion of pragmatics.

To sum up, the study has been successful. It helped me to tentatively answer the research questions. The findings of the study are not only of help for the writer's teaching but also, hopefully, for other teachers in the Foundation Studies Department in Hanoi University and the English departments in the other five universities and colleges in Hanoi.

Limitations of the study. Due to limited time, the study is subject to some limitations. The fundamental limitation is the ultimate impossibility of controlling all the relevant variables. Firstly, the collection of the data at one point in time may not accurately measure the students' use of English information packaging constructions in writing.

The second limitation is using just one set of data, written essays, which may not effectively identify how frequently students use these constructions correctly and appropriately. The results of the study might have been more convincing if more instruments of data collection had been used, such as interviewing teachers and students or doing a survey with a questionnaire designed to collect more information from students and teachers about how teachers teach each construction or how students practice these constructions in grammar and writing lessons.

The third limitation is that the researcher performed the experiment with a rather small number of students (50). The findings of the study would be more generalizable and more reliable if the experiment was conducted with a larger number of students (a well-designed sample of all the students under the same curriculum from six universities and colleges in Hanoi).

Finally, the results of the data analysis may not be reliable, since the researcher is the only person who analyzed the data.

Significance of the study. The findings of the present study are a contribution to the developing body of research investigating linguistic features of Vietnamese English learners. In addition to this, it provides a reference document for Vietnamese students and instructors in six universities and colleges. For the instructors, the findings should help inform them about how their students use information packaging structures. As a result, they can adapt teaching materials more comprehensively for future lessons on these linguistic features. For the students, the findings can provide information regarding the uses of five English information packaging constructions and common syntactic and pragmatic errors in using such structures. As a result, the students may write more coherent essays.

In summary, if more time had been available, the study might have been more comprehensive and of course the shortcomings might have been minimized. In conclusion, the researcher suggests that only by careful investigation into EFL grammar use in all the language skills by the students, can we come to the understanding necessary to help our students improve their grammar comprehension syntactically and pragmatically.

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APPENDIX A: Essay Topic

In 40 minutes, write an essay about the following topic: *The most memorable moment in your life*. The essay should have at least 250 words.

APPENDIX B: Cleft Construction Database

- (1). Athur Rubinstein (1886-1982) has a very famous quotation: “of course there is no formula for success except perhaps an unconditional acceptance of life and what it brings”. I agree with that idea. I am afraid of failure and more specifically I am afraid of people thinking that I am not good enough to win. *It was the first year in college that this story happened.* On television, a contest was going to be held to search for young talents in various fields. There were a large number of young people registering to attend. I wondered very much whether I should participate or not. (Essay 1)
- (2). Many young people coming to the contest. It is the fairness of the contest that I loved. We all had the same opportunity to compete with each other. (Essay 1)
- (3). If there had been no words from my friend, I will never realize that if you want something enough, a vague dream can still come true. What I have in mind are the feelings and thoughts of that day. (Essay 1)
- (4). But in that year, during a festival in my high school English, I was impressed by very talented people. In particular, a little girl is what most impressed me. She was an active, petite, and lovely girl and had a very good singing voice. (Essay 2)
- (5). But in that year, during a festival in my high school English, I was impressed by very talented people. In particular, a little girl is what most impressed me. She was an active, petite, and lovely girl and had a very good singing voice. But what I liked most was that she was very active. (Essay 2)
- (6). After a long period of training and preparing both physical and spirit conditions, at least the competition took place on a sunny day of August. A great number of people were there to

- see the competition. At first, I got behind the other three athletes, and I was so stressed. But it was the audience who encouraged me to keep moving forward. (Essay 9)
- (7). I went climbing with the group of my friends on very cold days in February. What we had to do was to prepare a lot from physical to spirit conditions because we hoped that we could climb to the peak safe and sound. We decided to walk to school every day to become stronger in health, and bought warm clothes. We read a lot to get information about the place we would go to. We felt really excited. (Essay 14)
- (8). A lot of friends of mine were here, so I thought it must not have been too hard. However, because of the severe weather, the climbing became a disaster to me. The higher we got, the colder it was. To continue to reach at that place was really the hardest thing I had ever done in my life up to then. It was me who insisted on coming back. I was too tired and cold while my feet also made me feel too weary. (Essay 14)
- (9). Personally, the most successful moment in my life is when I passed the entrance exam to Hanoi University... I always remember this successful moment to encourage me in study and also other things. I want to have other successful moments and be “on top of the world”. *It is the passing of the entrance exam that motivated me to be successful in studying and doing other things.* (Essay 22)
- (10). I also found it important that everything depended on me and I had to make everything become true. This success became a motivation for me to do another thing in future. *It was happy that I feel since then.* (Essay 23)
- (11). Life is full of ups and downs. *Throughout nearly 20 years of living, it was when I passed the University entrance exam and got an offer to Hanoi University that was my most memorable success.* (Essay 24)

- (12). Indeed, to high school students, getting an offer from a university can be considered the most important thing. *It is parents, friends, teachers, relatives who put so much expectation to them that they have to pass the university entrance exam.* (Essay 24)
- (13). It is the school where outstanding teachers gather. They are specialized in particular subjects and have excellent educational skills. Moreover, I could enjoy a motivating studying environment in that school, and try to study harder. *It was the competition to get the top 10 students that encouraged me to try harder and harder.* A serious learning attitude of my friends also helped me build my own one. (Essay 25)
- (14). Secondly, it must be a huge mistake if I do not mention the people who help me overcome my weakness in studying, and show me the way to get good grades. *It was my literature teacher who guided to how to get higher point in examinations.* (Essay 25)
- (15). I took a deep breath, asked for a cup of hot ginger tea and continued to do what I was doing. I finished the test excellently and won the second prize and I felt very confident. *For me, it is the success in the test that helps me become more confident then.* (Essay 26)
- (16). I had very good scores at university, but experiences were what I lacked and I needed to fulfill that. So then, I started to find the club that suited me the most. *Because what I wanted to acquire was experience, I tried to find the place where I could learn new things.* I was really nervous and hopeful on the day I handed in my application to get the scholarship. The time of waiting was extremely long to me. (Essay 32)
- (17). I believed that my application would be promising because I had tried my best before. One rainy day, I got a phone call from the Taiwan Embassy informing that my application had been accepted and I could start prepare for going abroad. I just could not keep myself

controlled. So did my parents. I could feel how proud of me they felt. *Therefore, it is belief that will lead you to dream.* (Essay 32)

(18). Since I was a young little girl. I was very fond of swimming. *It was my father who dared me to swim as much as possible.* On the day my father went away, he did not forget to dare me to break the record of 3000m swimming. I promised him to do it. (Essay 34)

(19). I never forget the year the Japanese people lived in disaster. *It was in 2011 that the earthquake and tsunami happened in Japan.* Citizens in the whole world turned to this country to help, to share so that the people could overcome physical and mental difficulty. (Essay 37)

(20). Seeing pictures of mothers losing their children, the family separate or ruined cities, my friends and I did not stop crying. We felt pity for them immensely. Finally, we decided to do something for them. We went to different places to get donation, and invited as more donors as possible. *We believed that it is the masses that can bring a larger share than mall individuals.* (Essay 37)

(21). But in the end we also had some interest which was 3.200.000 VND. *Why we could do it successfully was that the driving force for other people is always greater than the motivation for ourselves.* (Essay 37)

(22). But then, with the encouragement from everyone, especially a close friend of mine, I decided to try to make my dream come true. She said: “I think you will pass it” and I felt very confident. *It is her that helped me have the strength to overcome this trial.* Finally, I succeeded. (Essay 39)

- (23). For me, the most successful thing I have done is that I managed to win over myself in my weight losing campaign in the past. *It was ten years ago that I weighed about 70kg while my height was only 160cm.* (Essay 40)
- (24). For me, the most successful thing I have done is that I managed to win over myself in my weight losing campaign. It was ten years ago that weighed about 70kg while my height was only 160cm. *Why I overweight was that my parents let me eat a great deal of sweet and fat-containing food such as butter, cheese, candy, and fast food.* (Essay 40)
- (25). I could not follow the diet for several days and after that, I was not able to resist my strong appetite. I wanted to give up. Some people in my family asked me to continue. *It was my sister who encouraged me by giving me information about the outcomes of obesity.* (Essay 40)
- (26). I guess the experience I mentioned above is definitely my major success in life since it brings me joy, happiness, make me become a well-being and useful person for our society. *Particularly, what I have participated in so far are the blood donation event, selling paintings which were drawn by Ba Dinh's district orphans and children with disability.* (Essay 49)

APPENDIX C: Passive Construction Database

1. It was the first year in college which this story happened. *On television, a contest was going to be held to search for young talents in various fields.* There are a large number of young people registering to attend. (Essay 1)
2. I wondered very much whether I should participate or not. When a friend in the class knew this, he seemed so despised me, and said that I could never do. ... *And surprisingly, I finally was selected.* Although I was not going through the later rounds, this was still a huge success for me. (Essay 1)
3. She was an active, petite, and lovely girl, and had a very good singing voice. But what I like most was that she was very active... She had just responded and seemed very fond of her. *I was wondering why I was just mixed in the dark, almost did not know people there.* I felt so lost. (Essay 2)
4. For all 18 years of my life, my dream is always becoming a fashion designer. However, my parents hardly accept to let me pursue that career. My parents work in the business sector, so they want me to continue their job. *I am forced to study business by them, but I still continue to draw...* (Essay 3).
5. For me, this precious moment belongs to the 3rd prize I got in Computer Skill competition when I was at grade 6. *I was choosen for this competition because at the young age, my friends did not have a chance to get access to computer.*(Essay 5)
6. The moment I felt most successful was when I performed on stage and people cheered and screamed. To me, it was a successful performance even though it had many flaws because it

was the first time I ever stood in front of hundreds of people to sing. *Although I've rehearsed a lot before but mistakes could not be avoided.* (Essay 7)

7. My family and I were so worried, and I did not want to stay home for a year. *When I heard the news from the school, I was droven crazy by the success.* I finally passed the university entrance exam. (Essay 9)

8. Everyone has a memorable moment in their lives and I am not exception. *The time when I was given the second prize of tailoring contest in my city became the most successful moment of mine.* (Essay 10)

9. Before taking part in this competition, I learned all the theories of sewing and practicing making some clothes with my mother. Actually at this time, I found difficulty to remember all the way to cut the material and tailor the garment carefully. *However, with my mother's help, my sewing skill was improve significantly.* (Essay 10)

10. I got second place in this contest. I thought it was the most blissful time of my life. *I was gotten award from my principal and in front of my whole friends.* I felt very proud because I could show my skill and ability to others. (Essay 10)

11. Until now, there have been many times of achieving something successfully in my life. *However, in my mind, the most memorable and successful moment was when I held the position of organizing board's chief of a big event called "Spring Sensation Night" two years ago.* (Essay 11)

12. I was responsible for signing contracts or finding sponsors. *My contribution was proved at the party.* (Essay 11)

13. I also had to find person to organize a party. Everything nearly went fluently. *My friends were assigned tasks suitably.* Although a huge anxiety was in my mind during the event, I still kept calm and guided my friends to solve those problems. (Essay 11).
14. *In conclusion, holding the event successfully was the most excellent moment in my life because my ability was partly proved.* I felt very proud and happy in spite of many difficulties. I believe I can do better things in the future with the beginning like that. (Essay 11)
15. One of the most favorite sayings which I choose as my motto of life is that “life without dreams like body without soul”. *This is totally true because I think when a dream is achieved; people will feel many fireworks around them.* (Essay 12)
16. *All in all, after that thrilling moment, I have learnt that nothing could be achieved without patience and determination.* (Essay 15)
17. In conclusion, passing the entrance exam is the most wonderful and successful moment in my life. It gave me a sequence of mixed emotions and they really striked me hard. *It would be no surprise for me if that moment was kept in my heart for the rest of my life.* (Essay 16)
18. When I was 15, I entered into the high school that was far for from my home. So I chose to live in dormitory. I found it really difficult and uncomfortable that I have to share the room with seven students from different departments. *I used to be taken care of by my parents and then I have to do everything by myself.* (Essay 20)
19. When I was at 12 grade, I suffered from a quite serious accidents. As a result, I had to be absent from class for nearly 2 months. *Consequently, when returning to school, I was left far behind my friends.* Keeping up with the curriculum was not an easy job so my family was afraid that I would fail or do not have a good result. (Essay 21)

20. However, with my effort and support from friends and family, I got a high score in the exam and passed to Hanoi University. *More surprisingly, I also was given a scholarship for the good grade, which made both myself and my family astonishing.* This result made me extremely happy and proud. (Essay 21).
21. This result made me extremely happy and proud. *In the end, I had been repaid the effort that I put in studying nights and days and the care and love from my entire family as well.* After that experience, I found out that it was nothing I could not do if I tried my best. (Essay 21)
22. On the last days of July, I got a mail from the University. So excited, I carefully opened the envelop and read it word by word. *“We are so great to congratulate that you have passed the university entrance exam and are offered a place in the university”.* (Essay 24)
23. *There is one successful moment I remember most: I’ve been elected to be on a English competition exam.* This meant a lot to me as I could finally have a chance to show my skills and knowledge. (Essay 26)
24. I remembered the prize I won was in Literature. *The competition was held between a lot of schools of Hanoi city.* Many intelligent participants competed with each other to take the 1st position, which enable them to take part in the National Competition. (Essay 27)
25. Thank to Blood Club, I help many people with their main activities is to propagate everyone to give their blood to help patients in Blood hospital. *Witnessing each patient who is helped, I felt that I am helpful.* (Essay 29)
26. *I felt so sad that I used to be called a geek when at high school.* My family was very poor and my parents couldn’t afford my abroad study. With that dream, I tried my best to study harder than my friends. Hence, my most significant achievement was my getting scholarship from the Taiwan Government. (Essay 32)

27. I was really nervous and hopeful on the day I handed in my application to get the scholarship. The time of waiting was extremely long to me. *One rainy day, I got a phone call from the Taiwan Embassy informing that my application had been accepted and I could start prepare for going abroad.* (Essay 32)
28. As we grow up, we have different perspectives on life corresponding with each stage of life and they impress us many kinds of feelings which we used to call them memories. *When we are children, we are brought up in love and care.* (Essay 35)
29. I was embarrassed to see any friends and relatives. The door of future seemed to have closed in the presence of me. I could see the despair written on my parents' faces. *And nothing would be changed without my mother's words.* She encouraged me to get a second best choice. (Essay 36)
30. Correspondently, I could temporarily weep the sadness away and focus on find a university that offered second chance for failing students. *Success and luck came to me then I was accepted to the one I chose.* (Essay 36)
31. *I remembered when mid-autumn festival came and children in my neighborhood wanted a party but nothing was prepared.* Therefore, the children felt very disappointed. (Essay 43)
32. Finally, we had a very interesting party. *During the party, I was chosen to be MC.* When I saw smiles on children faces, I was so happy. (Essay 43)
33. There were three subjects I had to test in my university entrance exam. And I knew that I had not done well the Maths, which made me feel worried. As I estimated that I would get 28 points compared to the standard point last year of 26. But the mark format changed and the standard one as well. However, I still hoped. *The worry increased when I was informed my*

marks. It was disappointing that I just got 7.5 points for English subject and 6.5 for Maths.

(Essay 44)

34. I helped her to do Math and English, checked her literature writing skill. *Sometime, I felt tired but when I thought of studying with her at university, I was motivated to help her more.*

(Essay 46)

35. Due to my parents, I was optimistic and found another chance for myself. I applied for Accounting major instead of Finance and Banking firstly. *My letter was accepted.* I was very happy. (Essay 47)

36. *In my own entire life, I has been brought up in my parents' warm arms.* Their love, their hearts warmth have been my incentives to encourage me to overcome obstacles in my life.

(Essay 48)

37. As for my friends, the vast majority of them were excited because they were starting a new life with many strange things. *But I was really afraid and worried because my school was located too far from my house.* This meant that I had to live independently and alone in a strange place at the age of 15. (Essay 48)

38. *Well I suppose the most successful moment in my life has to be the time that I first joined a volunteering club which was just open three months ago.* (Essay 49)

39. The outcomes was remarkable, the profits that we generated from a very small budget was in excess of 10 million VND. *This large amount of money was soon transferred to the Children Central Hospital as soon as we arrived the hospital.* (Essay 49)

40. No one even believed that I could do that, even my teacher. But with my own efforts, I could. I went over my lessons during the summer and when I sat for the exam, I did well. *I*

was extremely thrilled at the moment I saw my marks. I did not believe in my eyes. I got

30.5/40. (Essay 50)

APPENDIX D: Existential *There* Construction Database

1. My family and my friends encouraged me and told me to try my best. *I felt very confident and tried my best in the competition, because there were so many motivating words from other people around me.* And surprisingly, I was finally selected. Although I was not going through the later rounds, that was still a huge success for me. (Essay 1)
2. *Until now, there has been one moment that I cannot forget.* It was when I held a position of organizing board's chief of a big event called "Spring Sensation Night" two years ago. (Essay 11)
3. I was responsible for signing contracts or finding sponsors. My contribution was proved at the party. *There were so many students registering to attend the event: students from four departments of the university, volunteer students in GREEN club, and students from graduate school. I also had to find person to organize a party.* Everything nearly went fluently. My friends were assigned tasks suitably. (Essay 11).
4. People have experienced many significant moments in their lives. *There are happy moments, sad moments and also successful moments.* Personally, the most successful moment in my life is when I passed the entrance exam to Hanoi University. (Essay 22)
5. For every Vietnamese student, university is the highest and biggest goal. So, when I passed the exam I considered it to be the first successful thing that I achieved. *At that time, there were many feelings happening inside me.* Moreover, I was not the only one who was happy, my family and my relatives were even more excited and happier. (Essay 22)

6. *In each person's life, there are many milestones that can change his whole future. They are marriage, having a happy family, getting a good job, etc.. To me, it was when I managed to pass the entrance exam to my province's high school for specialized students. (Essay 25)*
7. *There is one successful moment I remember most: I've been elected to be on an English competition exam. This meant a lot to me as I could finally have a chance to show my skills and knowledge. (Essay 26)*
8. *There are many unforgettable moment in one person's life since he was born: growing up, going to school, graduating, marriage, going to work, being older and passing away. For me, the most successful moment was when I won the 3rd prize in a competition last year at high school. (Essay 27)*
9. *Many intelligent participants competed with each other to take the 1st position, which enable them to take part in the National Competition. That is the reason why I considered the competition as one important goal at that time. I knew that there are more students dreaming about the first prize. (Essay 27)*
10. *Thanks to my teachers, my friends and also the expectation of my mother, I tried to continue and went to the competition with the confidence and bravery. I wrote everything I knew about the topic, checked carefully and handled the paper. At the time I came out of the room, I really thought that I had tried my best and there was nothing to regret. (Essay 27)*
11. *In my life, there are many moments which make me happy and satisfied about myself, such as receiving the third prize in English contest, working as a volunteer in Sapa to help poor people. However, the most successful moment is the time when I have attended a Bood club in the University. (Essay 29)*

12. *Everything comes easy to me and goes away fast, but there is one thing that I can't forget.* It was the time when I passed the university entrance exam, the most successful moment in my life. (Essay 33)
13. Up to now, my life is full of successes. *There are several successes that left me with so much memory.* Among them, the most successful moment was when I broke the record of swimming 3000m. (Essay 34)
14. So we sold T-shirts to raise money. We had to design and had them printed in a small processing plant. *During the time of production and selling, there were many difficulties that occurred as the delivery of clothing, the payment for garment factory, hat sale.* But in the end we also had some interest which was 3.200.000 VND. (Essay 37)
15. We all felt so happy when we could do such a good thing for people. It is indeed a moment of meaningful success in my life. I realize that collective power is really enormous. *When there is the strength of numerous people, everything would be easier to implement.* (Essay 37)
16. I went over my lessons during the summer and when I sat for the exam, I did well. I was extremely thrilled at the moment I saw my marks. I did not believe in my eyes. I got 30.5/40. *There were so many feelings appearing in my head at that time.* I went home right away to tell other people in my family. (Essay 50)

APPENDIX E: Extrapositive Construction Database

1. To be honest, it takes me a long time to find out the most successful moment in my life. For me, success is when you fail and then you gain the experience and stand up. *It is a long process to become success.* (Essay 20)
2. In the school. I didn't know anyone, all of my friends studied at Bim Son high school, so I had to make new friends and try to study better because my friends laughed at me when I failed in the examination. I tried to study especially in English and my teacher chose me to take part in the Olympic examination between high schools. *It was hard to deny teacher's decision so I took part in it and won silver medal.* I couldn't believe that I could do well. (Essay 23)
3. *I also found that it is important to depend on me and I have to make everything become true.* (Essay 23).
4. Since I was a young little girl. I was very fond of swimming. It was my father who dared me to swim as much as possible. On the day my father went away, he did not forget to dare me to break the record of 3000m swimming. I promised him to do it. Day by day, *I swim the most I could, but it was really hard to meet the point of 3000m.* (Essay 34)
5. When I was 15, I entered into the high school that was far from my house. So, I chose to live in dormitory. *I found it really difficult and uncomfortable that I have to share the room with seven students from different departments.* (Essay 20).
6. After that my best friend gave me an advice-a really precious advice. *She said "It is not important that where do you go, but how do you learn".* Her advice made me feel more confident and I decided to get the second choice. (Essay 33)