

Original Paper

The Effectiveness of Using a Deductive-Cum-Process Writing Process Approach to Teach Tone Formality

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the usefulness of a deductive-cum-process writing approach to raise native Cantonese-speaking ESL students' awareness of the inappropriate use of informal language in academic writing. Achieving tone formality by incorporating appropriate syntactic and semantic elements poses great difficulties to freshmen at the City University of Hong Kong. Furthermore, the effectiveness of using a deductive approach to teach word usage has been inconclusive despite numerous studies on this issue (e.g., Alzubi, 2015; Tammenga-Helmantel, 2014; Vogel et al., 2011). In the current study, seven types of informal language expressions and corresponding formal alternatives were first taught, followed by peer review and individual teacher-student consultations to reinforce the teaching.

The experimental group consisted of 19 students taking an academic writing course in the summer semester 2017-2018. The end-of-course writing examination showed that the experimental group used significantly fewer informal expressions than did the control group in three measures—the total number of informal expressions and two component measures ($p \leq 0.05$). Questionnaire findings confirmed the usefulness of the current teaching approach, as perceived by the majority of the participants. Qualitative analysis revealed several types of informal expressions that were most difficult for the participants to identify and to make correction.

Keywords

tone formality, informal expressions, formal expressions, academic writing

1. Introduction

Achieving tone formality by incorporating appropriate syntactic and semantic elements constitutes a new challenge to university students in Hong Kong because the teaching of formal usage of words has

not been included in the syllabus of the subject “English Language” of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education. It is not unusual to find a large number of informal vocabulary and grammatical structures in the argumentative essays written by Year 1 students at the City University of Hong Kong before and even after the teaching of tone formality in academic writing lessons. As such, pedagogical research into the teaching of formal and informal words would benefit teaching practitioners as well as learners who learn English as a second language. The teaching of tone formality, similar to the teaching of other grammatical structures, involves deductive or/and inductive approaches. A deductive approach is characterized by the sequence of presenting general rules first, followed by illustrating the rules with examples and ended with the provision of practice; an inductive approach, on the other hand, is characterized by the provision of examples first, followed by practice and ended with the provision of general rules (Alzubi, 2015; Glaser, 2013). Alzubi (2015) succinctly pointed out several features of the two approaches. A deductive approach is a) rule-driven—that is, rules are taught directly and examples are provided afterwards; b) top-down, and c) teacher-front transmission style. An inductive approach is a) rule-discovery; b) examples are provided first, and rules will be induced by students; c) bottom-up; and d) student-centred (p. 188).

A deductive approach was found to be preferred by the majority of students in some research studies (e.g., Jean & Simard, 2013; Rahmatian & Zarekar, 2016; Vogel et al., 2011); similarly, a deductive approach was found to be preferred by teachers (e.g., Thornberry, 1999; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016). On the other hand, the students in Mohamed’s (2004) study and in Valijärvi and Tarsoly’s (2015) study indicated that both approaches had advantages and disadvantages. Overall, the effectiveness of using a deductive approach to teach word usage is not conclusive (Alzubi, 2015; Tammenga-Helmantel, 2014; Vogel et al., 2011). To add to the body of literature, this study aims to investigate the usefulness of a deductive approach supported by a process-writing approach to raise ESL students’ awareness of the inappropriate use of informal language in academic writing. To be specific, this study is intended to investigate whether the number of informal expressions appearing in the problem-solution essays written by the experimental group will be significantly lower than that appearing in the essays written by the control group. It is hoped that the research findings will shed light on the pedagogical implications of the deductive-cum-process writing approach used in this present study.

The present study intends to address the following research questions:

- 1) Will the deductive-cum-process writing approach used in this present study help the participants who speak Cantonese as their first language learn tone formality more effectively than the inductive approach used for the control group?
- 2) What are the participants’ views on the form of input enhancement used in class?
- 3) What are the participants’ views on the effectiveness of the coding system used in this present study as the coding system as an error-correction tool?

2. Literature Review

The features of deductive and inductive approaches, as described by researchers over the last twenty years, are highlighted as follows. DeKeyser (2003) viewed the two approaches from the dimension of explicitness and implicitness in terms of introducing general rules governing the use of a target language: *explicit inductive* involves the generating of rules explicitly whereas *implicit inductive* refers to unconscious acquisition of some general rules by exposing students to linguistic materials. The notion of *Implicit inductive* seems to have rooted in Krashen's (1982) notion of *unconscious acquisition*, which is triggered by exposing students to authentic language use. Takimoto (2008) further points out that implicitness and explicitness in introducing general rules are conceptualized as a process on a continuum rather than constituting a dichotomy; similarly, deduction and induction also reflect a continuum.

Decoo (1996, pp. 2-3) described 5 modalities on the continuum with respect to deductive and inductive approaches:

Modality A involves actual deduction.

Modality B refers to conscious induction as guided discovery. Students first encounter various examples, often sentences, sometimes embedded in a text. The conscious discovery of the grammar is then directed by the teacher to guide students to formulate the rules.

Modality C is characterized by induction leading to an explicit "summary of behavior" (Decoo, 1996, p. 2). The learner first practices a certain structure in an intense way. Through this practice the rule is somehow induced and internalized. At the end of the learning segment, the teacher summarizes the rule explicitly.

Modality D features subconscious induction using structured materials.

Modality E refers to subconscious induction using unstructured materials.

In addition to theoretical concepts concerning what constitutes deductive and inductive approaches, there have also been empirical research studies investigating the pedagogical effects of the two approaches. The explicit inductive approach was found to be more effective in raising post-test scores than did the deductive approach for both university and high school levels ((Alzubi, 2015; Jong-Won, 2007; Qi & Lai, 2017; Tammenga-Helmantel, 2014; Vogel et al., 2011). However, the implicit inductive approach was found to be less effective than did the deductive approach in raising post-test scores (Erlam, 2005; Robinson, 1996; Rosa & O'Neill, 1999).

Concerning students' preference over the two approaches, research results have varied. A number of studies have found that the majority of the participants preferred the deductive approach. Vogel, et al. (2011) found that 80% of the participants preferred the deductive approach; similarly, Haight (2008) found 73% of the participants favored the deductive approach. Reasons suggested by participants in support of the deductive approach included: Not requiring problem solving; more used to it (Jean & Simard, 2013); preferred authoritarian style (Rahmatian & Zarekar, 2016). Yet, some studies (e.g., Valijärvi & Tarsoly, 2015; Mohamed, 2004) found that students showed no particular inclination over

the two approaches.

With respect to teachers' preference, Thornbury (1999) believed that a deductive approach is efficient and clear (p. 55). Muthusamy and Farashaiyan's (2016) study revealed that Iranian EFL instructors mostly used inductive approach (65%) to teach interlanguage pragmatics.

Effectiveness of input enhancement for a lesson constitutes another equally important consideration conducive to learning. Sharwood-Smith (1993) classified input into positive and negative input. The former refers to input that can "make salient certain correct form of the input" (p. 177), whereas the latter refers to flagging "given forms as incorrect, thus signalling to the learner that they have violated the targeted norms" (p. 177). Takahashi (2001) proposed four input enhancement conditions in terms of degree of input enhancement when teaching L2 pragmatics (making requests): a) explicit instructions; b) form comparison; c) form searched; and d) meaning-focused conditions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Tools

Two research tools were used in the present study. a) End-of-course writing examination scripts (19 copies from the control group and also 19 copies randomly selected from the experimental group to match the size of the control group. Markers of the exam scripts were the language teachers in the English Language Centre of the City University of Hong Kong. A marker training session was held before markers started to mark the scripts. Class teachers were not assigned to mark their own students' scripts. b) A questionnaire completed by all the participants in the experimental group. A total of 44 copies were collected.

3.2 End-of-Course Writing Examination

The genre was a 700-word problem-solution essay. Students wrote on one of the two topics provided:

Topic 1: Identify one of the problem(s) of the student canteen at City U, suggest at least two solutions and justify the solution you would recommend.

Topic 2: Identify one of the problem(s) of having too many brand-name chain stores in the shopping malls in HK, suggest at least two solutions and justify the solution you would recommend.

3.3 Questionnaire

Questions 1 and 2 required respondents to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement with the following two statements on a 5-point Likert Scale

Statement 1: During the experience of learning to write academic English, I have become AWARE that the following expressions are informal and therefore should not be used in academic writing.

Statement 2: The process of learning to write academic English has improved my ability to CORRECT MY OWN ERRORS in using the following informal expressions.

The complete version of the questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

3.4 Participants

The participants were Associate Degree students, scoring Level 3 in the subject English Language in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE).

In the summer term 2017-18 (June, 2017), there were a total of five classes of English Enhancement Course for Associate Degree Students II (EECAD II), which was a reading and writing course. The course assignment included writing a problem-solution essay (incorporating external sources) using a process writing approach. There was an end-of-course writing examination, which required students to write a problem-solution essay.

Two classes taught by the present researcher constituted the experimental group and two classes taught by another teacher the control group. The experimental group consisted of 44 students, and the control group 19 students (Table 1):

Table 1. The Makeup of the Control and Experimental Groups

Control group	19 EECAD II students	Taught by Teacher A (2 classes totaling 19 students)
Experimental group	19 EECAD II students (Out of a total of 44 students, 19 were chosen at random to match the size of the control group)	Taught by the present researcher (2 classes totaling 44 students)

3.5 Treatment Applied to the Experimental Group

PHASE 1: The deductive approach (Modality A, Decoo, 1996)

Stage 1: Teacher-front explicit explanations about seven types of informal expressions.

- Seven types of informal expressions;
- Teaching material: structured input.

The teaching of tone formality to the experimental group included several phases. In Phase 1, Modality A (Decoo, 1996) was adopted, in which the teacher explicitly pointed out to students seven types of informal expressions and the corresponding neutral/formal expressions using a table contrasting the two versions of expressions (Appendix B). The seven types of informal expressions are underlined below for easy reference:

- 1) Informal words, for example, “kids”, “a lot of”;
- 2) Sentence-initial connectives, for example, “And”, “But” and “So”;
- 3) The omission of “that” before a noun clause, for example, “I agree (that) parents should take the major responsibility to monitor their children’s use of the Internet”;
- 4) Contraction, for example, “What’s more”;
- 5) Starting a sentence with a verb, for example, “Talk to your parents”;

6) Rhetorical questions, for example, “Should parents take responsibility to monitor their children’s use of the Internet?”

7) The use of “I” in stating one’s opinion in the body of an essay, for example, “I think that the housing prices in Hong Kong is too high.”

Stage 2: Teacher-front explicit explanations about the coding system used as a tool for error correction

- The coding system included thirteen types of errors (e.g., organization, informal words, hedging, conjunctions (Appendix C);
- Teaching material: structured input.

A handout was distributed to the students in the experimental group in the first hour of the lesson designated for peer review. Before peer review started, the thirteen types of errors, including the use of informal expressions in an academic essay, had been explained to students using the handout on the coding system.

Examples of errors included in the coding system are as follows: *“The tone is considered too strong and thus not academic enough due to the lack of sufficient support. (Rule no. 7). Hedges (e.g., probably) should be used to weaken the tone. Refer to the handout on hedges for more examples.”*

“Informal expressions should be avoided (Rule no. 8). For correction, please refer to the handout on informal and formal expressions.”

Because of the use of Arabic numerals to refer to errors, the coding system would allow students to see the types of their errors at one glance. Furthermore, as can be seen in the examples above, guidance for self-correction is provided (e.g., words underlined in Rules 7 and 8 above).

Stage 3: Student practice

Students reviewed their peers’ essays, aiming to identify the thirteen types of errors appearing in the essays. In this exercise, the teaching materials were in fact their peers’ essays, which can be considered as “unstructured input” – one of the features of Modality E (Decoo, 1996).

Phase 2: Process writing approach

Stage 3 also constituted the onset of the process-writing approach. After the peer review, students were supposed to make corrections focusing especially on the thirteen types of errors before the submission of the second draft of their essays to the class teacher. After the class teacher read the second draft of the essays, Individual teacher-student consultations, which lasted about 15 minutes, were held before the final submission, which would be marked and returned before the end-of-course writing examination.

The course materials used with the control group

The control group was taught with the materials provided by the course. The teaching materials provided in the course book could be regarded as a manifestation of Modality Band Modality C (Decoo, 1996). The very first exercise in Unit 2 entitled “Distinguishing Text Genre” included two texts containing formal and informal expressions, and students were instructed to determine which expressions were formal/informal based on their prior knowledge. The second part of the question

asked students to suggest features of formal/informal expressions. Generally, in Modalities B and C (Decoo, 1996), learners are provided with examples and then they are expected to induce rules underlying the examples with the guidance of the teacher (Modality B), or the teacher himself/herself summarizes the rules to the learners (Modality C). As such, the design of the first exercise in the course book can be regarded as a realization of these two modalities. The remaining exercises in Unit 2 of the course book involved: a) matching “Dos and Don’ts” with the corresponding formal/informal expressions; and b) determining the formality level of individual expressions in texts of different genres.

All of the seven types of informal expressions taught to the experimental group also appeared in the various sample texts in Unit 2. The process writing approach was also applied to the control group – that is, Individual teacher-student consultations lasting about fifteen minutes each were also conducted among the control group.

A brief interview with the class of teacher of the control group confirmed that he used only the teaching materials in the course book, and the process writing approach, which was required by the course, was also adopted. This is to say, two drafts were also prepared by the students before the final submission.

3.6 Results

The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis involved T-test and frequency count using IBM SPSS version 24, whereas qualitative analysis was done manually.

Findings of the end-of-course writing exam

As can be seen in Table 2, the experimental group used significantly fewer informal expressions in their problem-solutions essays written in the end-of-course writing examination than did the control group, as measured by a) the total number of informal expressions; and b) two component measures: informal vocabulary and sentence-initial *And/But/So* ($p \leq 0.05$).

1) The total number of informal expressions;

The total number of informal expressions used by the experimental group ($M=0.21$; $SD=0.123$) was significantly lower ($t=4.013$, $df=36$, 2-tailed $p=0.000$) than that used by the control group ($M=2.42$; $SD=0.537$)

2) Two component measures:

a) The use of informal vocabulary

The use of informal vocabulary by the experimental group ($M=0.00$; $SD=.000$) was significantly fewer ($t=3.369$, $df=36$, 2-tailed $p=0.002$) than that used by the control group ($M=0.68$; $SD=.203$).

b) The use of *And/So/But* at sentence-initial position

The use of *And/So/But* at sentence-initial position by the experimental group ($M=0.00$; $SD=.000$) was significantly fewer ($t=2.600$, $df=36$, 2-tailed $p=0.013$) than that used by the control group ($M=1.11$; $SD=.425$).

Table 2. Informal Expressions Used by the Experimental and Control Groups in the Examination Essays

	Group	Group Mean	Sig. (2-tailed) (Equal variances assumed)	df	t-value	SD
Short Form	1	0.37	0.136	36	1.532	.684
	2	0.11				.072
Informal vocabulary	1	0.68	0.002*	36	3.369	.203
	2	0.00				.000
And/But/So (sentence-initial position)	1	1.11	0.013*	36	2.600	.425
	2	0.00				0.000
Omission of the conjunction <i>that</i> to introduce a clause which shows what someone says or thinks, or states a fact or reason	1	0.00		36		0.000
	2	0.00				0.000
Starting a sentence with a verb	1	0.21	0.364	36	0.919	0.164
	2	0.05				0.053
Asking a rhetorical question	1	0.00		36		0.000
	2	0.00				0.000
The use of first-person and second-person pronouns in the body	1	0.11	0.560	36	0.598	0.072
	2	0.05				0.053
Total number of informal	1	2.42	0.000*	36	4.013	0.537
	2	0.21				0.123

expressions

(Group 1: Control group; Group 2: Experimental Group)

It is worth noting that the experimental group did not score significantly higher marks in the total score of the writing exam and in other such domains as content, organization, coherence and language at $p \leq 0.05$ than did the control group (Table 3).

Table 3. Breakdown of the Total Scores of the End-of-Course Writing Examination

	Group	Group Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)		Group	Group Mean
Content	1	3.32	0.37	36	2.165	0.110
(25%)	2	3.05				0.053
Organization	1	3.11	0.419	36	0.818	0.130
(25%)	2	2.95				0.143
Coherence	1	3.16	0.329	36	0.990	0.158
(25%)	2	2.95				0.143
Language	1	2.84	0.417	36	0.822	0.158
(25%)	2	2.68				0.110
Total score of the	1	12.32	0.182	36	1.360	0.398
essay	2	11.63				0.308

(Group 1: Control group; Group 2: Experimental Group).

The insignificance in the various scores of the two groups in Table 3 seems to support the observation that the deductive-cum-process writing approach applied to the experimental group in the teaching of tone formality appears to have benefited the students in the group. The reason is that the experimental group, as indicated in the scores in Table 3, was not stronger than the control group in writing proficiency as measured by the four domains shown in Table 3, but the former was able to use significantly fewer informal words at $p \leq 0.05$.

The insignificant difference in “Language” might be explained as follows: “the use of formal expressions for an academic register” was not stipulated explicitly in the descriptors for “Language”, which is copied from the course rubric verbatim below:

“1) Accuracy and variety in grammatical structures and sentence types; 2) Accuracy (collocation, word form and spelling), appropriacy and variety in vocabulary use; and 3) Impact of errors on readability” (ELC Process Writing Essay & Final Writing Exam Rubric, 2017).

Although the assessment of “appropriacy and variety in vocabulary use” might be argued as inclusive of tone formality, the weighting of tone formality to be attributed to “language” did not appear to be clear to the markers; furthermore, it remains doubtful whether tone formality would indeed constitute a

factor that markers would consider when assigning a mark to the domain “Language” given the lack of the actual words “tone formality” in the rubric.

Questionnaire findings: (percentages of ratings of “4” and “5” combined)

Questions 1 and 2

Questions 1 and 2 required respondents to indicate their agreement/disagreement to the following two statements on a 5-point Likert Scale:

Statement 1: During the experience of learning to write academic English, I have become AWARE that Items A-G (listed in the left column of this table) are informal and therefore should not be used in academic writing. (1=Totally disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Totally agree)

Statement 2: The process of learning to write academic English has improved my ability to CORRECT my own errors in using informal expressions (Items A-G listed in the left column of this table). (1=Totally disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Totally agree)

Findings:

Question 1

The informal expressions (in descending order of percentages) that the participants have become *aware* of in the process of learning to use a formal tone are shown in the following Table:

Table 4. Informal Expressions the Participants became Aware of (in Descending Order)

Informal expression	Percentage of participants choosing that type of informal expression
Short Form	77.3%
Informal vocabulary	77.3%
And/But/So at sentence-initial position	77.3%
Verbs to start a sentence	75%
The use of first- person and second-person pronouns in the body of an academic essay	70.5%
Omission of “that” to introduce a noun clause	56.8%
Rhetorical questions	54.5%

As can be seen in Table 4, the three types of informal expressions the participants most aware of are: short form (77.3%), informal vocabulary (77.3%), and And/But/So at sentence-initial position (77.3%).

Question 2

The informal expressions (in descending order of percentages) that the participants believed that they had developed the ability to *correct* their own errors in the process of learning to use a formal tone are shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Informal Expressions That the Participants Believed They Can Correct (in Descending Order)

Informal expression	Percentage of participants choosing that type of informal expression
And/But/So at sentence-initial position	74.5%
The use first- person and second-person pronouns in the body	70.4%
Verbs to start a sentence	69.7%
Short form	68.2%
Informal vocabulary	63.6%
Omission of “that” to introduce a noun clause	61.4%
Rhetorical questions	47.8%

From Table 4 and Table 5, it can be seen that the easiest informal expressions to the participants to discern were:

- Short Form (77.3%)
- Informal vocabulary (77.3%)
- And/But/So at sentence-initial position (77.3%)

The informal expressions that the participants believed that they could correct were:

- Informal vocabulary (63.6%)
- Omission of “that” to introduce a noun clause (61.4%)
- Rhetorical questions (47.8%)

It is interesting to observe that the participants found it very easy to discern informal vocabulary (the highest-ranking), but they found it the third hardest to correct. This might be due to their lack of formal vocabulary. This difficulty was also reported by some participants in their open-ended comments.

Table 4 and Table 5 show that the use of rhetorical questions was the most difficult for the participants to discern as well as to make corrections. This item was ranked the lowest for both statements in the questionnaire.

Q3a Do you find the handout listing the types of informal expressions and the formal expressions useful to you?

Yes – 97.7%

Q3b Do you think introducing the aforementioned handout just before the peer feedback session is the appropriate time to do so?

Yes – 86.4%

Q3c Compared with having your teacher supply the formal expressions to replace the informal expressions you have written, do you think it would be more useful to correct your own mistakes based on the prompts given by your teacher?

Yes – 97.7%

The majority of the participants thought that it was useful to be provided with a table contrasting informal and formal expressions before they started to practice identifying to identify informal expressions in the peers' essays. The majority of students also believed that it would be more useful to correct their own errors of using informal words based on the prompts provided rather than having the class teacher provide the corrections directly.

Question 4

Do you think you will continue to have difficulty identifying informal expressions in your future writing?

Yes – 50%

No – 50%

Question 5

Do you think you will continue to have difficulties correcting informal expressions in your future writing?

Yes - 40.9%

No – 59.1%

The participants seemed to need more teaching and practice concerning the use of formal words. About an equal number of the students thought that they would continue to have difficulties identifying and correcting informal expressions in the future writing.

Written comments provided by questionnaire respondents

The participants indicated the following comments: more examples of what constitutes informal words and formal words; more exercises to correct informal words; more model essays demonstrating the use of formal words; and more advice on how to handle their difficulty in memorizing the expressions that are generally considered informal (Table 6).

Table 6. Written Comments Provided by Questionnaire Respondents (Number of Participants Indicating the Suggestion)

Question 4 - identifying informal expression	Question 5 - an correcting an informal expression	Question 6 - other suggestions
Hard to find informal expressions (2)	Hard to find informal expressions Ideas	Need more examples of informal expressions (4)
Hard to learn all informal expressions	English is difficulty Too many	More practice/more incorrect use of informal expressions(2)
Some verbs		A table contrasting informal and formal expressions
Grammar (3)		
Easy to forget		
Vocab		
Lots of things		More model essays

4. Discussion

There might be two possible reasons why deductive-cum-process writing approach used in this study seem to have benefited the participants in the experimental group. First, the participants in this study possessed a low level of English proficiency. As such, it might be easier for them to discern the differences between informal and formal expressions when they were directed to the inappropriate and appropriate expressions at the start of the lesson with the aid of a handout unambiguously contrasting informal expressions (i.e., “negative input”) (Sharwood-Smith, 1993, p. 177) with the corresponding corrections (i.e., “positive input”) (Sharwood Smith, 1993, p.177). unambiguously. On the other hand, an inductive approach would require learners to generate rules from random instances provided. Such a requirement might be difficult for learners possessing a low level of English proficiency and thus possibly not effective for learning. Second, the integration of the process writing approach with the deductive approach might have contributed to the less use of informal words by the experimental group. In the individual teacher-student consultation sessions, the teaching of informal/formal words was reinforced by the teacher’s referral to the table constructed under the principle of a deductive approach. This view in support of the deductive approach is in line with Thornbury’s (1999) view that a deductive approach is efficient and clear (p. 55). Also, the finding derived from this present study that the deductive approach helped students achieve higher scores than did the inductive approach was consistent with the findings that higher post-test scores were achieved for both students taught with the deductive approach at university and school levels (Erlam, 2005; Robinson, 1996; Rosa & O’Neill, 1999). Some studies, however, found students taught with the explicit inductive approach scored higher marks in the post-test (e.g., Alzubi, 2015; Jong-Won, 2007; Qi & Lai, 2017; Tammenga-Helmantel,

2014; Vogel et al., 2011). The difference in findings might be due to English proficiency, the mental capabilities of learners and the subject matter being taught.

Pedagogically, a deductive approach in which negative input and positive input are contrasted in a table is recommended for learners who possess a low level of English proficiency to improve tone formality in writing problem-solution essays. To reinforce the learning effect, individual teacher-student consultation sessions—a practice commonly used in the process-writing approach—could be incorporated in the course schedule, in which teachers might guide students to correct their own mistakes concerning tone formality as a further learning opportunity. It is also recommended that teaching practitioners emphasize to students that the information with respect to formal/informal usage of word is available in dictionaries, thus possibly allaying students' fear for having to learn by rote a large number of informal expressions.

Recommendations for future researchers are threefold. First, such other language features of problem-solution essays as the use of complex noun phrases, subordination, and hedging might be investigated. Second, other genres such as argumentative essays might also constitute an interesting research area with respect to tone formality. Third, the involvement of learners possessing a higher level of English proficiency might reveal more pedagogical information about the effects of a deductive-cum- process writing approach.

5. Conclusion

This research study aimed to investigate whether a deductive-cum-process writing approach would benefit participants more than did an inductive-cum-process-writing approach. It was found that the former appeared to have reduced the experimental group's use of informal expressions effectively, as reflected in the significantly fewer informal expressions appearing in the end-of-course writing exam compared with those used by the control group ($p \leq 0.05$). Questionnaire findings reveal that the students in the experimental group were in favor of the deductive approach in which a handout contrasting inappropriate use of informal expressions with corresponding alternatives was first explained to students, followed by practice in the form of peer review using a grammatical coding system. Questionnaire findings also indicated that the three informal expressions the participants believed that they would be able to discern the most easily include: short form, informal vocabulary and And/But/So at sentence-initial position. On the other hand, the three informal expressions that the participants found most difficult to correct (in order of difficulty) include: rhetorical questions, omission of "that" to introduce a noun clause and informal vocabulary.

It is recommended that a deductive-cum-process writing approach be adopted when teaching tone formality to lower-intermediate or intermediate learners of English learning to write academic essays for the possible benefit of directness as well as explicitness. The input enhancement could incorporate both negative and positive inputs for learners to discern the differences between errors and the corresponding corrections.

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Appendix A.

Questionnaire to Collect the Experimental Group's Views on the Deductive-Cum-Writing Process Approach

INFORMAL EXPRESSIONS

Dear EECAD II Students,

You are cordially invited to participate in a research study investigating the effectiveness of the teaching materials I developed on teaching informal and formal expressions. Hopefully, the findings can contribute to the teaching of academic English in the future. Students' responses elicited in the questionnaire will be analyzed collectively and anonymously. No individuals will be identified in the report of findings. I would be happy to share the findings with you when they are ready upon your request.

Read the Questions Below and Indicate Your Agreement/Disagreement with the Following Statements by Circling the Appropriate Number

	1. During the experience of learning to write academic English, I have become <u>AWARE</u> that it is <i>inappropriate</i> to use such informal expressions as the following:					2. The process of learning to write academic English has helped me improve my ability to <u>CORRECT</u> such informal structures as the following:				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1=Totally disagree 3=Neutral 5=Totally agree a) Short form (e.g., <i>isn't</i>);										
b) Informal words (e.g., <i>kids, a lot of</i>)										
c) The use of "AND, BUT, SO" at the beginning of a sentence (e.g., <i>But it is arguable whether to legalize same-sex marriage.</i>)										
d) A noun clause without the word "that" to										

introduce it (e.g., <i>Many people believe <u>critical thinking is one of the important abilities to be developed.</u></i>)											
e) The use of a verb to start a sentence (e.g., <i>Talk to the children.</i>)	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5
f) The use of a question (e.g., <i>Is it really necessary for parents to monitor their children's Internet use?</i>)	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5
g) The use of "I, you, we" in the body of an academic essay	1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5

3. Your evaluation of the teaching materials

a) Do you find the handout listing the types of informal expressions and formal expressions (hereafter named Handout A) useful to you?

☐ Yes. The handout is useful.

☐ No. The handout is not useful.

☐ Other (please specify): _____

b) Do you think that it is an appropriate time to introduce Handout A just before the peer feedback session?

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

☐ Other (please specify): _____

c) Compared with having your teacher supply the formal expressions to replace the informal expressions you have written, do you think it is useful to correct your own mistakes based on the prompts given by your teacher?

☐ Yes.

☐ No.

☐ Other (please specify): _____

4. Do you think you will still have difficulty identifying informal expressions in your future writing?

☐ Yes. What do you think the difficulties will be? _____

☐ No. I don't think I will have problems identifying informal words.

5. Do you think you will still have difficulties correcting informal expressions in your future writing?

☐ Yes. What do you think the difficulties will be? _____

☐ No. I don't think I will have problems correcting informal words.

6. Do you have any suggestions about how your teacher can help you write fewer informal expressions?

THANK YOU!

Appendix B

Student Handout Contrasting Informal Expressions with the Corresponding Appropriate Expressions for Tone Formality

INFORMAL EXPRESSIONS TO BE AVOIDED IN ACADEMIC WRITING	SUGGESTED STRUCTURE
A lot of, lots of	[C] Many students plenty of students a number of students [U] Much information Plenty of information A large amount of information A great deal of information
kids	Children Adolescents Teenagers
nowadays	At the present time In contrast with the past In the modern world In the modern times In contemporary society These days In these times Today
It would be useful for parents to take the main responsibility. <u>But</u> parents are busy.	It would be useful for parents to take the main responsibility, <u>but</u> parents are busy. It would be useful for parents to take the main responsibility. <u>However</u> , parents are busy. It would be useful for parents to take the main responsibility; <u>however</u> , parents are busy. <u>Despite</u> the fact that it would be useful for parents to take the main responsibility, parents are busy.
It would be useful for parents to buy a filtering device. <u>And</u> it would also be effective for them to browse the Internet together with their sons	It would be useful for parents to buy a filtering device, <u>and it</u> would also be effective for them to

and daughters. Most parents have to work long hours in Hong Kong. <u>So</u> parents have not time to take care of their children's use of the Internet.	browse the Internet together with their sons and daughters. It would be useful for parents to buy a filtering device. <u>In addition</u>, it would also be effective for them to browse the Internet together with their sons and daughters. It would be useful for parents to buy a filtering device; <u>in addition</u>, it would also be effective for them to browse the Internet together with their sons and daughters. <u>In addition to</u> buying a filtering device, it would also be effective for parents to browse the Internet together with their sons and daughters Most parents have to work long hours in Hong Kong, <u>so</u> parents are too tired to look after their children after work. Most parents have to work long hours in Hong Kong. <u>As a result/ as a consequence/ consequently</u>, parents are too tired to monitor their children's use of the Internet after work. Most parents have to work long hours in Hong Kong; <u>as a result / as a consequence/ consequently</u>, parents are too tired to monitor their children's use of the Internet after work. Most parents have to work long hours in Hong Kong, <u>resulting in being</u> too tired to monitor their children's use of the Internet after work. <u>As a result of</u> having to work long hours in Hong Kong, Parents are too tired to monitor their children's use of the Internet after work. Wrong: x Most parents have to work long hours in Hong Kong; <u>therefore</u>, parents are too tired to monitor their children's use of the Internet after work.
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It is probably inappropriate to think <u>children can be self-disciplined.</u>	It is probably inappropriate to think that <u>children can be self-disciplined.</u>
I agree <u>parents should take the main responsibility...</u>	I agree that <u>parents should take the main responsibility...</u>
<u>What's</u> more	What is more
<u>Talk</u> to your kids.	<u>It is important that</u> parents talk to their children.
<u>Should</u> parents take the main responsibility to monitor their children's use of the Internet?	<u>It is arguable/controversial/debatable/ questionable</u> whether parents should take the main responsibility to monitor their children's use of the <u>Internet.</u>

Appendix C

Coding System Used for Error Correction

Explanatory notes for error correction

1. The thesis statement is ineffective.

A thesis statement should be written in one single sentence, stating your position and the scope of the essay succinctly. For example:

This essay argues that ...should..... because A, B, and C.

2. The topic sentence/a mini topic sentence is too long.

- Use only simple sentences (i.e., containing NO conjunction).
- Less important ideas packed into a topic sentence should be put in the next sentence (i.e., the *elaboration part*).

3. **The topic sentence is too specific.** A topic sentence should be comprehensive yet precise enough to cover all the sub-points in that paragraph.

4. The Conclusion does not include basic required information, which includes:

- Restatement of your stance; The restatement of the two/three solutions;
- The (three) major reasons;
- General statements to round off the essay naturally, e.g. by expressing a hope/ a recommendation or stating a condition.

E.g., It is hoped that

If (the Hong Kong government can expand the funding to be allocated to the educational sector), (exchange programs should be made compulsory for all university students).

5. The relationship between paragraphs was not indicated clearly.

Correction: Add a linking word/a transition expression between the two paragraphs.

6. This sentence does not cohere* with previous sentences.

*cohere – meaning “connected with other ideas in a clear and reasonable way.

7. The tone is not academic. Hedges (e.g., *probably*) should be used to weaken the tone. Refer to the handout on hedges for more examples.

8. Informal expressions should be avoided.

Please refer to the handout on informal and formal expressions.

9. The basic sentence structure of the sentence is poor, e.g. having two verbs, two subjects.

10. Avoid the use of AND because it is a weak conjunction.

Use other linking words or sentence structures.

E.g.,

- House prices are too high and many citizens cannot afford to buy a flat.



- House prices are too high; as a consequence, many citizens cannot afford to buy a flat.
- House prices are so high that many citizens cannot afford to buy a flat.
- Because/since/as house prices are so high, many citizens cannot afford to buy a flat.
- As a result of high housing prices, many citizens cannot afford to buy a flat.
- Because of high housing prices, many citizens cannot afford to buy a flat.

11. The two clauses are not linked up correctly because of the wrong use of the comma.

Try to use a conjunction, connective or preposition to link up the two clauses.

Wrong: The project lacks funding, it will be scrapped.

Correct: The project lacks funding, so it will be scrapped.

12. No main verb or subject in the sentence can be identified.

Wrong: There are many temples in Hong Kong. For example, Wong Tai Sin Temple.

Correct: There are many temples in Hong Kong, for example, Wong Tai Sin Temple.

13. No main clause can be identified.

Wrong: I have decided to withdraw from the course. So that I can look after my mother, who is ill.

Correct: I have decided to withdraw from the course, so that I can look after my mother, who is ill.