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An Exploratory Study of Chinese Adolescent ESL Learners' L2 Writing: Functional Text Analysis Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present study reports on the findings of the functional text analysis of Chinese adolescent ESL learners' L2 writing. I will start with a presentation of literature that focuses on studies of text types and genres in language learning, which helps conceptualize and frame the research questions that pertain to the domain of functional text analysis. Then, I will explain the methodology and theoretical framework: context-based text typology adopted by the present study. After that, I will summarize the results and findings by mapping out the contextual parameters that the students deployed. Finally, I will discuss the features and problems that have been identified in this study.

KEYWORDS: Systemic Functional Linguistics, Second Language Writing, Adolescent L2 Writing

1   INTRODUCTION

In a functional perspective, there are at least two major aspects in learning a language — learning how to mean, and learning how to mean in different registers. First, learning a language means learning how to mean in the language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Meaning making is the heart of language learning, especially in how to make different texts function in different contexts. Mastering different types of texts operating in different contexts can help learners to make full use the linguistic resources in meaning making. Second, learning a language also means accumulating different registers operating in different contexts, thus gradually expanding one's registerial repertoire (Matthiessen, 1999). In order to expand their learners' registerial repertoires, language instructors must empower the learners by facilitating their engagement with different types of texts in different contexts. The present study will report on how the students demonstrated their active linguistic repertoire of text types in the course of one year of writing.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally, there are three major schools of genres that are widely recognized in the field of education (Hyon, 1996). They are the ESP school of genre (Swales, 1981), the North American school of genre (Miller, 1984) and the Sydney school of genre (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987). These different schools of genres offer different frameworks and target different users. I will elaborate on them with more details from the perspective of educational linguistics.

2.1   Genre studies in primary and secondary education

Among the three schools of genre, the Sydney school is the only one that investigates primary and secondary school texts (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987). Its philosophies and conceptions of genre were originated from a project that explored students' written texts in various subjects in a disadvantage school in Sydney, Australia. The purpose of the project was to help the underachievers to become competent in their learning through mastering different genres that primary and secondary education required. This school of genre has exerted tremendous influence on academics in Australia and is gradually receiving more attention from the rest of the world. Over the past decades, numerous studies have been conducted with this framework. The most influential study is probably the latest conducted by Christie & Derewianka (2008) and Christie (2012). This study sampled students' texts from primary to late secondary school across different subjects in Australia to investigate how students' writing develops and what genres they need to write across the school years before university. They have identified typical genres in the students' writing from different subjects. Furthermore, they have also summarized the linguistic features of these typical genres. Similar studies for example investigating the genres of history and English have also been conducted. Coffin (1996) identified the genres of history texts from secondary history textbooks to investigate how the discourse of history is construed, and summarized the challenges these genres posed for students. In subject English, Christie & Derewianka (2008) summarized all the genres that students were required to write in the

Australian context. In addition, they also mapped out the developmental changes of the linguistic resources in learning these typical genres in English across the school years.

These recent studies in the Sydney school of genre have broadened and deepened our understanding of how to apply the model of genre to the investigation of texts that students are required to learn at school. In addition, they have also provided us with important insights into how students' writing develops ontogenetically throughout the school years, such as the developmental trajectory of students' genres and related lexicogrammatical resources in meaning making.

In the past decades, the Sydney school of genre has played an important role in identifying genres that students have to master in their schooling, which has helped educationalists and teachers to sequence the students' learning paths by arranging different genres at different stages. However, the Sydney school of genre hasn't yet provided us with a holistic view of what is the general distribution of text types or genres in students' learning. To be more scientific and accurate in sequencing all these texts, we need a more comprehensive model.

2.2   Genre studies in tertiary education

The ESP and the North America schools of genre dealt mostly with tertiary texts in language education.

The ESP school of genre originated in the teaching of academic writing to speakers of non native English speakers who pursue their academic degrees in English-speaking countries (Swales, 1981; Swales, 1986; Swales, 1990a; Swales, 1990b; Swales, 1993; Swales & Feak, 1994) In the past decades, we have seen a proliferation of studies in this field emerge, like studies of research articles (Swales, 1981, 1990, 1993; Swales & Feak, 1994), science dissertations (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988), medical abstracts (Salager-Meyer, 1990), medical reports (Nwogu, 1991) and business letters (Bhatia, 1993). All these studies have exponentially boosted the teaching of academic writing in the ESL context. They have helped numerous students from all over the world who struggle with academic writing in English.

The North American school of genre has gained less popularity in ESL contexts. It has focused on the teaching of L1 freshman composition (Miller, 1984), investigating texts from different institutions: hospitals (Schryer, 1993), scientific research institutes (Bazerman, 1988), tax accounting firms (Devitt, 1991) and bank offices (Smart, 1992; Smart, 1993).

Generally speaking, this school of genre deals with native speakers' texts, focusing on the rhetoric of the texts. Their purpose and aim are different from the present study.

2.3   Text typology studies

As well as the genre studies, we also have other theoretical lenses for looking at texts, like text typology (Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam, 2010; Matthiessen, 2013). Earlier in 2006,

Matthiessen (2006) attempted to conceptualize second language learning as the gradual expansion of a learner's registerial repertoire. Pun (2011) applied the context-based text typology to investigate texts from Hong Kong secondary chemistry textbooks and identified the major text types and their lexicogrammatical features. The text types and the lexicogrammatical features are of great importance to educationalists to summarize what are the linguistic challenges for ESL students in learning chemistry through English and how language functions in knowledge construal in chemistry learning. Teruya (2009) applied text typology to investigate how adult intermediate Japanese learners progress from intermediate to advanced language learning by engaging with different text types. Guo (In press) investigated the registerial profiling of ESL textbooks from successive years of school in Hong Kong, which provided us with another perspective to see how input is arranged for ESL teaching and learning. However, as far as I can ascertain, no studies investigating learners' texts have adopted this model. This model is the one that has been adopted to conduct text type analysis with the data in the current study.

3   METHODOLOGY

3.1   The study

The current study focused on texts written by junior secondary Chinese EFL learners at a school in Guangzhou. From the perspective of functional text analysis (Byrnes, 2013), it aimed to explore what kinds of text types the students deployed in their L2 writing to construe L2 meanings at junior secondary three. The research questions were:

(1) Over a one-year longitudinal study, what kinds of text types have students accomplished in their English writing?

(2) For the identified text types, how do the students configure each piece of text based on the three contextual variables of a register: field, tenor and mode?

(3) What pedagogical and curriculum design implications can I obtain from the present study?

3.2   Context-based text typology

I will employ a context-based text typology (Matthiessen 2006, Matthiessen 2013, Matthiessen & Teruya 2014, Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam, 2010; Teruya 2007) to analyse students' writing in this study.

As Figure 1 indicates, there are eight socio-semiotic processes based on different fields of activity in human life. The eight main types can be grouped into two superordinate categories, which are social process and semiotic process (Matthiessen, 2013). Social process is realized by doing in this model, while semiotic process is realized by expounding, reporting, recreating, sharing, recommending, enabling and exploring.

socio-semiotic process

explaining   categorizing

arguing

inventorying

reviewing   expounding   surveying

chronicling

exploring   reporting

promoting   narrating

recommend-   recreating

ing

advising   dramatizing

enabling   sharing

instructing   sharing
experiences

doing

sharing
values

regulating

directing   collaborating

Figure 1: Context-based text typology — field of activity
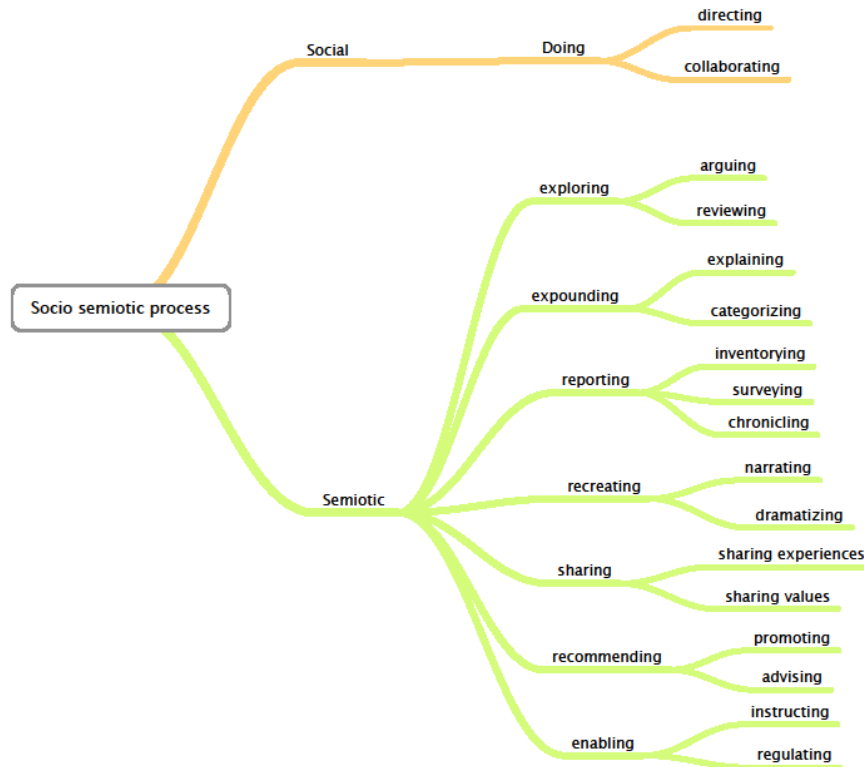
Figure 2: Socio-semiotic Process

3.2.1 Social process

Under the subcategory of social process, there is only one type: doing. Following Matthiessen, Teruya, and Lam (2010) and Matthiessen (2013), doing means we use language to facilitate our social behavior, for example, social activities that are interactive and most of the time are teamwork to accomplish a task by cooperating with a team of members or a team of members directed by a person.

3.2.2 Semiotic process

Under semiotic processes, there are seven main types: exploring, expounding, reporting, sharing, enabling, recommending and recreating. Each of these seven main types is further divided into subtypes.

3.2.2.1   Exploring

Exploring means exploring public views, values and ideas. Under exploring, there are two subtypes, which are reviewing and arguing. Reviewing means expressing our values, opinions and thoughts on something, such as through a movie or book review. Arguing means argue our positions and ideas on some points, as in a public debate.

3.2.2.2   Expounding

Expounding means expounding general knowledge about the world. There are two subtypes under expounding, which are categorizing and explaining. Expounding means to categorize our knowledge or explain a theory or phenomenon. For example, most academic articles belong to expounding, as do science textbooks.

3.2.2.3   Reporting

Reporting can be defined as reporting on particular phenomena. There are three subtypes under the sector of reporting, which are chronicling, surveying and inventorying. Chronicling means chronicling particular events, as in news reports, personal biographies and historical recounts. Surveying means creating verbal maps of places, as in a guidebook. Inventorying means listing particular entities.

3.2.2.4   Recreating

Recreating means recreating aspects of human life, typically imaginatively. There are two subtypes, which are dramatizing and narrating.

3.2.2.5   Sharing

Sharing means sharing our experiences and values in our life to maintain, negotiate and establish our interpersonal relationships. There are two subtypes, which are sharing experiences and sharing values.

3.2.2.6   Enabling

Enabling means enabling people to undertake some activities or actions. There are two subtypes, which are instructing and regulating. Instructing means giving directions on how to do something, while regulating means regulating people's behaviors.

3.2.2.7   Recommending

Recommending means recommending people to undertake some action. There are two subtypes, which are advising and promoting.

3.3   Research context and data collection

3.3.1   Research context

3.3.1.1   Adolescent L2 English education in China

Ever since the opening up reform, English has been taught widely in China (Liardet, 2013). Studies by Wang & Gao (2008) found that China has the largest number of English learners in the world, amounting to approximately 400 million. English has become a compulsory subject from grade 3 for all primary and secondary school students (Liardet, 2013). It is a major component of the National College Entrance Examination and has the same importance as Chinese and mathematics (Fang, 2001), weighted as one-third of the final credits that students use when they apply for colleges. Since the examination plays an extremely important role in students' future development, the whole English curriculum serves the examination (Lee, 2013; You, 2004).

After conducting a thorough study of a mid-west Chinese university English program, You (2004) found that, in China, English teachers do not teach language but teach language knowledge and test-taking skills. From our experience, this is even more the case for secondary school teachers in China. Among such test-taking skills, writing has become one of the testing items from secondary 3 onwards, amounting to approximately 30% of the final score. Thus, the teaching of writing tends to focus only on the skills needed in tests and examinations e.g., the typical text type and grammatical knowledge for the exam writing. Writing has become one of the biggest components in English teaching. Needless to say, if students want to be successful in China, being able to write the English composition section of the examination is vital (Harklau, 2011).

3.3.1.2   Research site and participants

The present study was conducted in No.X high school in Guangzhou, which is one of the top five high schools in Guangzhou. The school consists of junior secondary and senior secondary school education. A class of the 50 best students from secondary junior 3 was chosen as the participants for the present study. The class consisted of 24 boy and 26 girls. They were in the final year of their junior high school, which is the end of the 9 years compulsory education in China. The choice of such a school was inspired by what Christie & Derewianka (2008) did in Australia. They targeted their study to the best students in each grade and delineated the possible linguistic repertoire that the students have mastered, aiming to feedback to the curriculum design that that is the possible proficiency level the students could achieve.

The students receive 40 minutes of English instruction every day, from Monday to Friday. At junior secondary level most of the instruction focuses on grammar and vocabulary learning, similar to what You (2004) found at the tertiary level. The students do endless multiple-choice questions to assess the accuracy of their grammar. Compared with grammar and vocabulary learning, actually practicing writing seems to take up less time in the current school system. The head of the English department told me during our discussion that the students would practice writing once in a month.

3.3.2   Data collection

Systemic functional text analysis (Byrnes, 2009; Christie, 2012; Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Liardet, 2013; Ryshina-Pankova & Byrnes, 2013) was adopted for the present study. I collected the participants' English compositions for a whole academic year, yielding longitudinal data for more in-depth and elaborated understanding of the participants' L2 meaning repertoires (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008). For this reason, I collected 10 English compositions from each participant during the data collection period (2011-2012 academic year). In this paper I will focus on the analysis of text types written by the students.

4   RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1   Background of the writing journey

This section will deal with the ten writing tasks that the students addressed in their writing.

Table 1 Writing tasks that students accomplished

Time	Topic	Details
11th Sep 2011	Learn to smile	Advise others to smile
11th Oct 2011	A letter to Mike	Write a letter to a friend, who is sick recently.
11th Nov 2011	Trip to Hangzhou	Sharing your travelling experiences to Hangzhou with your friends.
11th Dec 2011	Steve Jobs	Describe Steve Jobs and his life.
12th Jan 2012	Lifelong learning	Discuss lifelong learning and how to practice it.
12th Feb 2012	An activity	Share an interesting activity.
12th Mar 2012	A letter to Alice	Write a letter to Alice and explain how to improve her relationship with her Mum.
8th Apr 2012	How to be a good learner?	State your views on how to be a good learner.
9th May 2012	Micro blog	Explore the advantages and disadvantages of micro blog. State your views on it.
10th Jun 2012	Charity sale	Share the charity sale took place in your school.

Table 1 shows the writing journey that the participants undertook during the two semesters at junior three. As indicated by the table, there were altogether ten writing tasks amounting to almost one per month. Most of the writing tasks were exam test writing tasks. However, the first and sixth were take-home assignments.

In writing task one; the students were required to discuss the benefits of keeping smiling and how to keep such a nice habit of smiling at everyone and everything. The second task required the students to write a letter to provide some advice to a friend called Mike who has

often been sick recently, advising him how to lead a healthy lifestyle and maintain good health. The subsequent task was about sharing one's experience of a trip to Hangzhou. The students were required to retell the whole trip to Hangzhou to their friends. This provided opportunities for the students to practice using past tense and different verbs and adjectives to describe their past experiences. The fourth task was on the topic of Steve Jobs, who is the deceased CEO of Apple. Students were required to recount Steve Jobs bio-information chronologically and comment on his life. The last writing task of the first semester was on the topic of lifelong learning. It required the students to interpret lifelong learning according to their own understanding and to give ideas on how to accomplish lifelong learning. These are the first semester's writing tasks.

For the second semester, the first task was about retelling an activity that the students had experienced. The second writing task was a letter to a friend named Alice, who had communication problems with her mum. The students were required to write a letter and give some ideas on how to improve the relationship between Alice and her mum. The third writing task of the second semester was about learning. The topic focused on how to be a good learner. The students were required to provide different kinds of advice on how to be a good learner. The fourth writing task was about micro blog (a Chinese version of Twitter). The students were asked to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of micro blog and state their own opinions on it. The last writing prompt was about a charity sale. The students were asked to report the charity sale that they had experienced in their school.

These are the ten writing prompts that the students wrote in response to over a year of schooling, the period of my one-year longitudinal study. I am going to deconstruct the students' writing within the frameworks of the context-based text typology (Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam, 2010; Matthiessen, 2013), genre (Martin (2008)) and the theory of register provided by Halliday (1978).

4.2   Field of activity: socio-semiotic process

Figure 4.1 maps out the writing journey in the "fortunate pie" that the students have gone through. Among the eight socio-semiotic processes classified by Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam (2010) and Matthiessen (2013), I have identified four text types that are deployed in the students' writing. Characterized in terms of the eight socio-semiotic processes within context, they are recommending, sharing, reporting and exploring. Recommending is the most favored text type in the students' writing. It accounts for 50% of all the writing tasks. The second most favored type of text type is sharing, which accounts for 30% of all the students' writing. The fourth most favored types are exploring and reporting, which each accounts for 10% respectively. For the rest of the other text types, I found no instances of deployment in year of writing that's the focus of my longitudinal study.
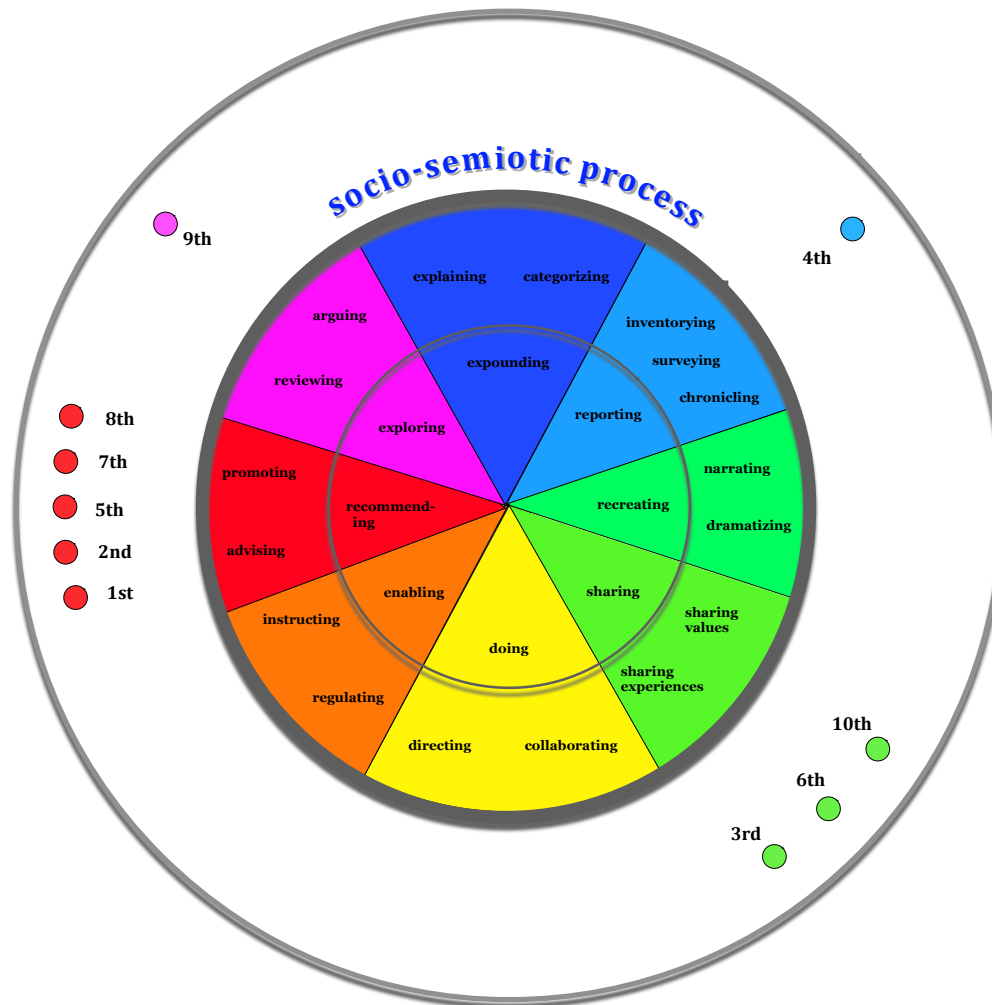
Figure 3: Students' writing tasks across the whole academic year

I then classified the text types according to the text typology to a further degree of delicacy, as shown in Figure 3. In the context of recommending, most of the writing tasks are advising. The students were required to state their opinions on some issues that are related to their daily lives and provide their suggestions and ideas on how to solve the problems. All of the sharing texts belong to sharing experiences rather than sharing values, where students were required to retell or talk about their personal experiences. Under exploring, students were required to argue rather than review. For example, under the topic the 'advantages and disadvantages of micro blog', the students were required to support their identification of advantages or disadvantages with argumentation. Under reporting, the writing task involved is chronicling. The students were asked to recount Steve Job's biographical information chronologically and state their opinions of Steve in the end of the biographical recount.
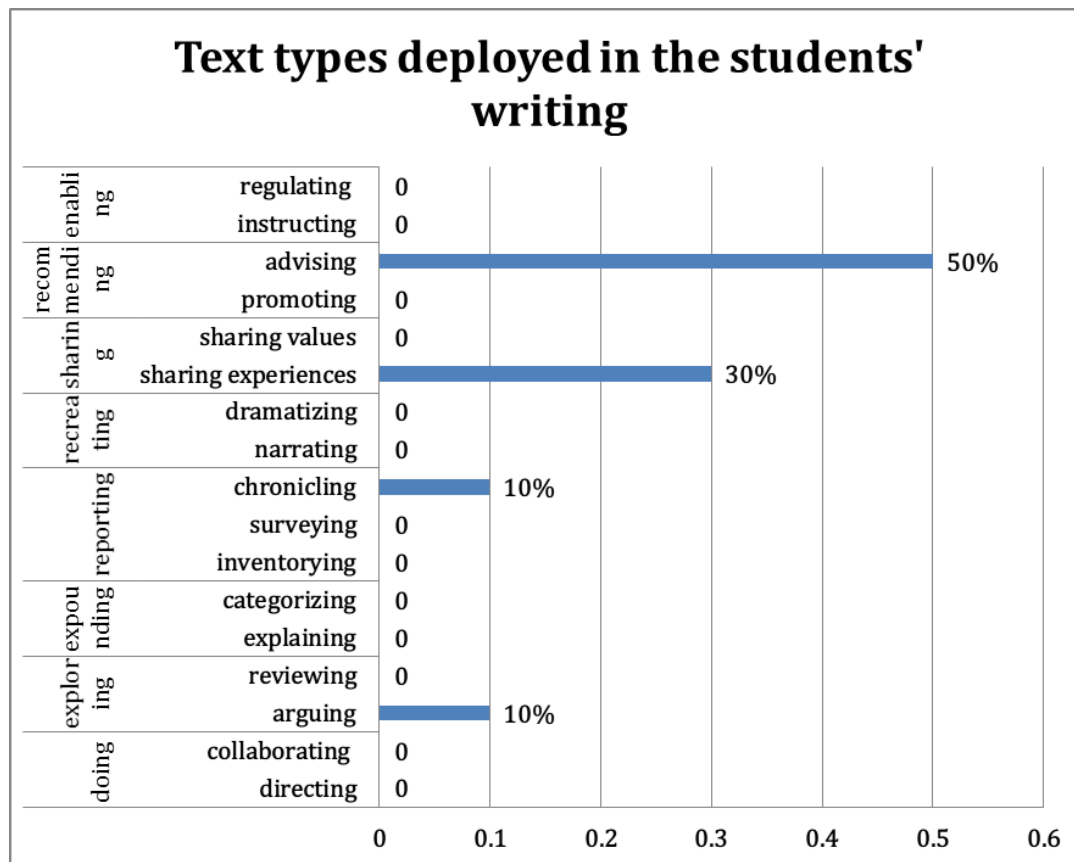
Figure 4: Text types that deployed in the students' writing

I will use two cases from the students' writing to illustrate the two most favored text types: recommending and sharing. These two examples represent the two pieces of typical texts from the same student in my study:

Student Number: No.1, Title: A letter to Mike, Text type: recommending

Dear Mike,

[1] I am sorry to hear that you get sick easily these days. [2] Here are some advice about how to have a healthy lifestyle.

[3] First of all, pay attention to what you eat. [4] Having a balanced diet is quite important. [5] Drink at least eight glasses of water per day. [6] Avoid food which are high in salt or sugar. [7] They can make you get ill easily.

[8] Second, having a good rest do good to your health. [9] It's necessary for you to go to bed early. [10] Then you can get up early without feeling tired the next day. [11] Make sure you get plenty of rest--at least 8 hours everyday.

[12] Third, you should do some sports, for example, doing morning exercise carefully. [13] I've been having the habit of going jogging very morning for years. [14] It makes me stay healthy. [15.0] So I'll be very pleased [15.1] if you would like to join me.

[16.0] Though it might be take time to get used to the following advice, [16.1] if you

insist, [16.2] I'm sure you'll be healthier soon.

Best wishes!

Yours,

Simon

Student Number: No.1, Title: Trip to Hangzhou, Text type: sharing

Dear Friend,

[1] Last summer holiday, I went to Hangzhou by air with my parents for a trip. [2] Let me introduce my adventure to you. [3] I'm sure you will fall in love with Hangzhou as I do!

[4] On the first day of the trip, I went to the famous West Lake to go boating. [5] It was relaxing to see all the beautiful scenery, including the bridges and houses built in traditional style. [6] I took lots of photos in order to memorize the amazing views.

[7] The next day, I visited a small village with houses which have a long history. [8.0] I met a foreign tourist excitedly [8.1] and even became friends! [9] It was such a valuable experience for me.

[10.0] Hangzhou is not only famous for its beautiful views, [10.1]but also its delicious food. [11] I got a chance to try the famous Dongpo Pork. [12] It was named by Su Dongo, a great poet as well as a meat-lover in ancient China. [13] Dishes like the West lake fish and the Lion Head were worth trying too. [14] The food were so attractive that I put on much weight!

[15.0] Since Hangzhou was famous for its Dragon Well tea, [15.1] we went to shopping and bought some as gifts to friends. [16.0] Although the tea tasted good, [16.1] it was so expensive that I was shocked [16.2] when I saw the price!

[17] The trip to Hangzhou really made a deep impression on me. [18] It was one of the most fantastic cities I've ever been! [19] And I'm looking forward to visiting it again!

Yours,

Simon

These are two typical text types that I have identified in the students' writing. The first sample is recommending. The writer wrote a letter to his or her friend Mike, who was sick recently. The purpose of the letter is to greet Mike as well as to give him some advice on how to keep healthy. The writer started the letter with her greetings and continued to provide advice on how to keep healthy by listing the dos and don'ts. This is a piece of typical recommending text in the students' writing.

The second writing prompt is about sharing the writer's experiences of traveling to Hangzhou. It is a piece of typical text of sharing: sharing experiences. The writer shared her experiences by writing a letter to her friend. She recounted her whole trip to her friend in a chronological way. She signaled the chronological organization of the text by deploying circumstances of time.

4.3 Findings based on Halliday's theory of register and Martin's genre

Drawing on Halliday's (1978) framework of context, I have deconstructed the writing tasks to see how the students configure a piece of text according to the requirements of the settings of the contextual variables of field, tenor and mode. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show the details of the outer, educational contexts of the writing tasks and the inner contexts of the texts produced in response to the different writing tasks.

Table 2 "Outer" context of the students' writing across the year

"Outer", educational context	Learn to smile	Letter to a Mike	Trip to Hangzhou	Steve Jobs	Lifelong learning	An Activity	A Letter to Mum	How to be a Good Learner	Advantages and Disadvantages of Micro-blog	Charity Sale
Field	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition	Practicing English composition
Tenor	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student	Teacher-student
Mode	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction	Spoken or written instruction

As indicated in Table 2, the "outer" context of the students' writing is the same under the three variables: field, tenor and mode. The field is about practicing English composition. The tenor is teacher and students relations. The mode is spoken or written instruction. Therefore, there is no difference in the "outer" educational context among these writing tasks.

Table 3 "Inner" context of the students' writing across the year

"Inner", Context of text		Learn to smile	Letter to a Mike	Trip to Hangzhou	Steve Jobs	Lifelong learning	An Activity	A letter to Mum	How to be a good learner?	Advantages and disadvantages of micro blog	Charity sale
Field	Social-semiotic process	Recommending course of action: advising readers	Recommending course of action: advising readers	Sharing personal experiences	Reporting: chronicling events	Recommend-ing course of action: advising readers	Sharing personal experiences	Sharing personal feelings	Recommend-ing course of action: advising reader	Exploring the advantages and disadvantages of blog	Sharing an event
	Experiential domain	Effective social behavior: smile	Health	Trip to Hangzhou	Job's life	Lifelong learning: suggestions and ideas	Extracurricular activities	Communication problems	Ways to be a good learner	Personal opinions on micro blog	Charity sale
Tenor	Institutional roles	Not clear	Friend to friend	Friend to friend	Not clear	Not clear	Not clear	Child to Mum	Not clear	Not clear	Not clear
	Power	Not clear	Equal	Equal	Not clear	Not clear	Not clear	Unequal	Not clear	Not clear	Not clear
	Familiarity	Not clear	Familiar	Familiar	Not clear	Not clear	Not clear	Familiar	Not clear	Not clear	Not clear
	Affect	Engaging readers: positive	Engaging reader: positive	Neutral	Neutral	Engaging reader: positive	Neutral	Neutral	Engaging readers: Positive	Engaging readers: Positive	Neutral
Mode	Orientation	Tenor-oriented	Tenor-oriented	Field-oriented	Field-oriented	Tenor-oriented	Field-oriented	Tenor-oriented	Field-oriented	Field-oriented	Field-oriented
	Division of socio-semiotic labor	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context	Text constitutive of context
	Division of semiotic labor	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only	Language only
	Medium	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written	Written
	Channel	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written	Hand-written
Genre		Advice column	Advice column	Recount	Biographical Recount	Advice column	Recount	Advice column	Advice column	Exposition	Recount

Based on the "outer" context to the "inner" context, Table 2 provides detailed information about each writing task. The following are the major findings of the inner context analyses.

4.3.1 Field

There are two sub-categories under field, which are socio-semiotic process and experiential domain. Socio-semiotic process is illustrated in Section 4.4.2. The experiential domains are interpersonal behaviour (smiling), health, traveling, Jobs' life, lifelong learning, extracurricular activities, communication, good learner, micro blog and charity sale. All these experiential domains are relevant to the students' daily lives.

4.3.2 Tenor

According to Halliday (1978, p142-152), tenor is comprised of four sub-categories, which are institutional roles, power, familiarity and affect. As for institutional roles, 70% of them are not clear. Only the second, the third and the seventh writing tasks are clear. They are all letters by the students addressing their friends or family members. Power relations are also ambiguous. 70% of them are not clear while just 30% are clear. The three letters are equal in terms of power, as they are all letters to friends. It is the same with 'familiarity'. 70% of all the writing tasks are not so clear on the degree of familiarity between readers and the writers. The three letters are clear in terms of the degree of familiarity, which accounts for 30% of all the writing tasks. For affect, half of the writing tasks involve engaging the readers positively, while the rest of the writing tasks are neutral. The 1st, 3rd, 5th, 8th and 9th writing tasks engage the reader positively by writing about smiling, lifelong learning, health, be a good learner and opinions on micro blog. The rest of the writing tasks are neutral in affect.

4.3.3 Mode

According to Halliday (1978, p142-152), there are five variables constituting mode. They are orientation, division of socio-semiotic labor, division of semiotic labor, medium and channel. As indicated in Table 2, most of the writing tasks are the same with these five variables, except orientation. In orientation, half of the writing tasks are tenor-oriented, such as the letters that the students were asked to write. The other half of the writing tasks are field oriented, such as trip to Hangzhou, Steve Jobs. The students were required to construe their experiences to realize the meaning potentials in these writing tasks. The division of socio-semiotic labor is text constitutive of context. The division of semiotic labor is language only. The medium is written. The channel of the communication is hand-written. These are all the same in these writing tasks.

4.3.4 Genre

I shall now draw on Martin's description of genres (e.g. Martin & Rose 2008) to identify genres in the students' writing and to map their generic stages. Three such genres can be identified in the students' writing. They are advice, recount and exposition. The 1st, 2nd, 5th, 7th and 8th writing tasks are advice genre. The 3rd, 4th, 6th and 10th are recount genre. The 9th is exposition genre. I will now illustrate the schematic structure of a typical text of each genre that I have identified in these texts.

Table 4 Comparison between the two models: socio-semiotic process and genre

field: socio-semiotic process		genre	generic stages	writing tasks
reporting	chronicling	biographical recount	(1) Orientation (2) Recount of the events (3) Moral lesson	4th
sharing	experiences	personal recount	(1) Orientation (2) Recount of the events	3rd, 6th and 10th
recommending	advising	advice	(1) Statement of the purpose (2) Suggestions (1.2.3…) (3) Ending	1st, 2nd, 5th, 7th and 8th
exploring	arguing	exposition	(1) Specification of the issue (2) Pro and cons (3) Statement of opinion	9th

Sample one: Genre of Advice
Title: A letter to Mike, Student: No.1 Time of writing: 2nd

Generic stages	Sample text
Statement of the purpose	Dear Mike, [1] I am sorry to hear that you get sick easily these days. [2] Here are some advice about how to have a healthy lifestyle.
Suggestion one	[3] First of all, pay attention to what you eat. [4] Having a balanced diet is quite important. [5] Drink at least eight glasses of water per day. [6] Avoid food which are high in salt or sugar. [7] They can make you get ill easily.
Suggestions two	[8] Second, having a good rest do good to your health. [9] It's necessary for you to go to bed early. [10] Then you can get up early without feeling tired the next day. [11] Make sure you get plenty of rest--at least 8 hours everyday.
Suggestion three	[12] Third, you should do some sports, for example, doing morning exercise carefully. [13] I've been having the habit of going jogging very morning for years. [14] It makes me stay healthy. [15.0] So I'll be very pleased [15.1] if you would like to join me.
End of the letter	[16.0] Though it might be take time to get used to the following advice, [16.1] if you insist, [16.2] I'm sure you'll be healthier soon. Best wishes! Yours, Simon

Sample two: Genre of recount
Title: Steve Jobs, Student: No.1 Time of writing: 4th.

Generic stages	Sample text
Orientation	[1] Steve Jobs was famous as the former CEO of Apple Inc. [2] He was a man full of wisdom. [3] During his life, he never gave up.
Recount of the events	[4] In his 20s, he set up Apple Inc. in his parents' garage. [5] Nine years later, he was fired unfortunately. [6] However, failure didn't knock him down. [7] He found his aim again several months later. [8.0] He tried his best to work hard [8.1] and set up two more companies within five years. [9] The companies achieved great success. [10] Jobs soon became popular all around the world.
Moral recommendation	[11] "Nothing is impossible to a willing heart." [12] According to Jobs's story, we can learn that nothing is really over until the moment we stop trying. [13] So don't be afraid of fighting against difficulties. [14.0] Our dream will surely come true [14.1] as long as we insist.

These are the two typical instances of genres that I have identified in the students' writing.

5   DISCUSSION

In this section, I will present a discussion based on the analysis and findings presented in section 4.

5.1   Recommending is the dominant text type

Among the four text types that I have identified, recommending is the most favored text type in the students' writing. Surprisingly, what I have found in the present study is quite different from what Christie & Derewianka (2008) found in the Australian context. In the Australian context, secondary school students write more recreating texts. According to Christie & Derewianka (2008), there is no instance of a recommending text found in the whole writing journey at secondary level. However, half of the writing prompts in the present study are recommending texts. Teachers favor assigning tasks in which the students should provide suggestions or advice, such as how to keep smiling, how to be a good learner. The reason why teachers favor this type of writing tasks is because of the exam driven culture. In China, the exam still plays an essential role in assessing students' academic performance (Lee, 2013). Most of these writing tasks follow the style writing exam requirement. That is why the students in my study have written so many texts that are similar in terms of field of activity in their writing practice.

5.2   Tenor awareness

Through the analysis of the "inner" context, I have found some very important details about tenor building in the students' writing. Based on what I have found, most of the writing tasks are not clear about tenor relations building. From the perspectives of outside observer, they didn't provide enough tenor information with the writing prompts that they assigned to the students. No tenor awareness is demonstrated in these writing prompts. From the perspectives of the students, due to the lack of explicit information from the writing prompts provided, the students were never taught about the importance of developing the ability to write texts in contexts characterized by an increasing range of tenor values over time as they continue to learn to write texts belonging to different registers. Because of this, the texts written by them were ambiguous about who is the addressee of the writing task. That is why we don't know whom are they addressing when we read their writing. So, if the teachers are aware of this and provide more detailed information on tenor to the students, the students definitely will be more informed on how to build up the field and the interpersonal relations between them and their imagined readers.

5.3   Culturally marked text

From the contextual analysis of these texts, we can learn that all these compositions are culturally marked. The students tend to end their texts with a part that focuses on moral or educational lesson. They attempt to educate their cohorts by concluding their writing on the topic or issues arising in their writing tasks. I will illustrate this with some sample extracts from their writing.

In the reporting texts, after recounting Jobs' life, the writers like to end their writing by exhorting their cohorts to learn from Jobs:

[12] According to Jobs's story, we can learn that nothing is really over until the moment we stop trying.
[13] So don't be afraid of fighting against difficulties.
[14.0] Our dream will surely come true [14.1] as long as we insist.
(Extract from student No.1, 4th writing)

In recommending, after discussing the advantages of lifelong learning, the writers end their texts by advising their fellow students to practice the principle of lifelong learning. Here is an example from a student's extract:

[12] In the way remembering that" the secret of success is the constancy of hard work,"
[13] we may have a more positive attitude towards lifelong learning.
[14] I think the idea of lifelong learning should be widespread in order to live a more well-being life.
(Extract from student No. 6, 5th writing)

As we can see from the samples above, no matter in which context, the students tend to address similar moral lessons at the end of their texts. This is quite interesting finding in the present study.

5.4   Variations of genres

The genres that I have identified in the present study have their own characteristics. Motivated by the methodology deployed by Martin & Rose (2008) in describing genres, I have summarized the students' texts. Genres of advice, recount and exposition have been identified. However, when I attempted to map out their generic stages, I found that genres from the present study have differences and similarities to the genres described by Martin & Rose (2008), or Christie & Derewianka (2008). As we can see from the generic stages set out in Section 4.3.4, some of the differences are as follows: in addition to the typical stages in a specific genre, in every genre the writers tend to end their writing with some suggestions or ideas to seek to educate their cohorts. Furthermore, most of the advice appears in the form of a letter. Some of the advice is configured by different pieces of suggestions throughout the letter, while others are constituted of explanation of phenomenon and then suggestions. These are the variations that I have found in the ESL context.

6   CONCLUSION

This paper has summarized the text types and genres that the students have written in this longitudinal study. The findings from text type analysis indicate that there is an uneven distribution of text types in the students' learning. Of all the ten writing tasks I have investigated, recommending is the most favoured text type. Moreover, only four text types have been identified in the students' writing. They are recommending, sharing, exploring and reporting. The contextual analysis shows that the teachers and the students lack tenor awareness in the L2 writing instruction and writing. At the end of the paper, I have proposed the adoption the framework of register theory to empower the teachers to improve their instruction. Furthermore, teachers or educationalists could arrange the writing tasks in a more scientific way that they could track how well the students' progress, which is aligned with what Matthiessen (2006) pointed that learners expand their personal meaning potentials by adding registers to their registerial repertoires. The findings from this paper have shed some light on the teaching of ESL writing and the design of the writing curriculum.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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