

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale of the Study

English language pedagogy denotes four basic language skills to be learned: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is one of those skills that is not less important than the others. Reid (1993) expressed her idea about the importance of writing by stating that although writing was not as important for many public uses as it was in the past, it would still be valuable in education because it facilitated thought. Bell and Burnaby (citing in Nunan, 1989. p. 36) points out that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of content, format, sentence, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter information. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information using cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts. Writing can help one to think critically. It also helps one to perceive relationship, to make more clear perception, to solve problems, to give order to experience. It can help one to clarify his thoughts. Often you discover what you really think and feel about people, ideas, issues, and events only in the actual process of writing (Pimsam, 1987).

Argumentation is a kind of writing which has often been defined as the process of supporting or weakening another statement whose validity is questionable or contentious (Hatch, 1992). Kirszer and Stephen (1989. p. 461) also defines argumentation as a reasoned, logical way of convincing an audience of the soundness of a position, belief, or conclusion. Argumentation takes a stand-supported by evidence and urges people to share the writer's perspective and insights.

Traditionally, argumentation has been thought of as the means we use to justify our opinions and express those opinions to others. European scholars are exploring how we use argumentation in our day-to-day activities. These scholars see

argumentation as "a collaborative, constructive working out of disagreements by verbal interactions in order to resolve a conflict of opinions" (Walton, 1992. p. xi).

In addition to the traditional perspective on using argumentation to prove opinions, scholars from many nations are beginning to think of argumentation as a means individuals, citizen's groups, and scientists use to actually discover knowledge (Rowland, 1987).

As mentioned above, argumentation is an important type of written discourse which is interesting to be studied. Argumentative discourse has been a neglected, though very promising, research area because it requires the writer to be aware of both audience and personal constructs (Connor and Kaplan, 1987). Connor's study dealt with argumentative patterns in student essays: cross-cultural differences and the study showed that, to explain writing quality, it is useful to combine linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic perspectives in text analysis. The difficulties faced by EFL/ESL students when asked to produce a piece of writing such as an argumentative essay are often due to an inadequate understanding of how texts are organized (Hyland, 1990). In Hyland's study, it was found that the argumentative essay is characterized by a three-stage structure, which represents the organizing principles of the genre: Thesis, Argument and Conclusion. In turn, each stage has a structure expressed in terms of moves, some of which are optional elements in the system.

The elements of structure of the argumentative essays that Hyland found are reliable because the data was supplemented by an informal sample of journalistic material from the British and American press, partly to ascertain if the model could be generalized beyond the second language school essays.

Therefore, this present study was conducted to analyze argumentative patterns written by the fourth-year English major students with the quest to see if Thai students in a Thai university can write an argumentative essay in a pattern expected by an English native speaking audience. The model proposed by Hyland (1990) was adopted to analyze the fourth-year English majors' argumentative essays.

## Statement of the problem

Among the four skills in teaching and learning in Thailand, writing seems to be the most disregarded and therefore the least advanced (Nipitkul, 1995). Generally, writing is treated as the most arduous task in English teaching and learning. Thai students have a lot of difficulties in writing. Pimsam (1987, p. 2) stated that most Thai students had writing problems because they were anxious about what to write and how to start writing. In particular, argumentative writing is considered more difficult than other kinds of writings since it needs to apply many genres such as narration and description. In argumentative writing, the purpose is to persuade the reader to accept your views on a debatable subject and try to prove that your views are right. (Theresa & Judith, 1987) In its simplest form, argumentative writing is a statement of personal opinions backed up by facts and reasons. In its elaborate form, it is a skillfully planned, tightly reasoned type of writing frequently designed not only to convince an audience but also persuade it to action. It may appeal to emotions as well as reasons. (Rottenberg, 1997)

To facilitate effective argumentative writing, teachers may therefore need to familiarize students with its rhetorical structures which are an important part of the meanings of the texts. Thus, this study was conducted to analyze the patterns in argumentative essays of the fourth-year English major students with the quest to see if Thai students in a Thai university could write an argumentative essay in a pattern expected by an English native speaking audience and if the characteristics of the argumentative essays corresponded to the framework proposed by Hyland (1990).

## Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the argumentative pattern written by the fourth-year English major students at Naresuan University.

Precisely, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What were the major characteristics of the argumentative pattern written by Thai fourth-year English major students?

2. To what extent did the argumentative patterns written by Thai fourth-year English major students corresponded to the framework of the argumentative pattern proposed by Hyland?

3. In terms of argumentative patterns, what were the differences between high-rated and low-rated essays written by the fourth-year English major students?

### Significance of the Study

In this study, the researcher was interested in analyzing the elements of structure of the fourth-year English major students' argumentative essays. The significance of this study might include the following:

1. It would provide us with the information about how an argumentative composition written by a group of Thai college students look like and if the way they wrote was effective as evaluated by native speakers.

2. This information would provide the teachers with information about what problems Thai students had when writing an argumentative essay and what characteristics of argumentative writing they should adhere to when asked to produce this kind of writing.

3. The findings could be used as a concrete guideline for evaluating argumentative composition by using the findings to determine whether or not the essays had the characteristics corresponding to those accepted as contributing to a good argumentative essay.

### Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the fourth-year English major students' argumentative essays of Thai students with the following limitations:

1. Forty-three participants were fourth-year English major students in the 2001 academic year at Naresuan University in Phitsanulok. The subjects were only forty-three

English majors from two groups out of the total of three groups using purposive sampling. Consequently, they might not represent all the fourth year English majors.

2. Patterns of argumentative essays might have been proposed by many scholars but this study adopted the elements of structure of the argumentative essays in the research of Hyland (1990) to analyze the fourth-year English major students' argumentative essays.

### Definition of Terms

1. Argumentation is a form of instrumental communication relying on reasoning and proof to influence belief or behavior through the use of spoken or written messages (Rybacki, 1996. p. 2).

2. Macro structure refers to the organization of ideas in a composition. (Seedokmai, 1999) The structure of an essay usually has three parts: beginning or introduction, body and conclusion. But in this study these three elements were referred to as thesis, argument and conclusion.