

A comparison between English demonstratives and Vietnamese demonstratives in argumentative essays

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ABSTRACT

In English and Vietnamese, demonstratives are considered one of the most important linguistic items for their ability to enhance writing coherence. Crucial as they are, few investigations have been conducted to analyze the differences in their uses in English and Vietnamese written discourse. This research attempts to investigate the differences in the use of Vietnamese demonstratives and English demonstratives in model Vietnamese (MV) and model American English (MA) argumentative essays. Adopting both quantitative and qualitative analyses, it focuses on the frequency and pragmatic uses of proximal and distal demonstratives in the two languages. It was discovered that English essays had significantly more proximal and cataphoric uses of demonstratives than Vietnamese essays. While English proximal demonstratives *this(these)* indicated topic shifting and distal demonstratives *that(those)* signaled topic continuity, a contrary pattern was observed in Vietnamese. Moreover, in investigating the referential uses of demonstratives, it was revealed that the use of Vietnamese demonstratives differed from English in the sense that they could act as discourse connectives facilitating the interpretation process of the readers. The study's results contribute to the cross-language analysis and comparison of demonstratives and provide implications for the teaching of English demonstratives in academic writing in Vietnam.

Keywords: Discourse connectives; English demonstratives; Vietnamese demonstratives; writing coherence

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INTRODUCTION

It has been widely agreed among scholars and researchers that demonstratives are of great significance to text reference, thus enhancing text cohesion in written discourse (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976). However, similar to other groups of EFL learners, Vietnamese students have been found to share some problems in using demonstratives properly in writing English argumentative essays (Nguyen & Lee, 2020). Therefore, it is worth questioning

whether these problems are related to language transfer, or L1 interference; in other words, whether Vietnamese EFL learners are affected by the way demonstratives in their native language function in written discourse. A cross-language comparison of the use of demonstratives in both English and Vietnamese is expected to shed light on this matter.

The study of demonstratives, one important linguistic category of referring expressions, has been attracting the attention of many scholars and researchers from various backgrounds. From a

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philosophical viewpoint, demonstratives could be considered a domain of indexicality indicating the connection between language and the world (Kaplan, 1989, as cited in Wolter, 2009, p. 452; whereas in linguistics, they were identified as spatial deixis, serving as a device to locate other subjects to the deictic center (Diessel, 1999). It was also emphasized that demonstratives played a fundamental part in social interaction (Diessel & Coventry, 2020). Apart from such universal uses shared by most languages, demonstratives were found to have other uses across different languages; for example, as a hesitation signal in Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin (Diessel, 1999).

Studies of English Demonstratives

English demonstratives were traditionally discussed within the notion of proximity, in which the proximal *this(these)* referred to something near the speaker while the distal demonstrative *that(those)* was used when the referent was far from the speaker (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The near-distant polarity conveyed in the choice of proximal and distal demonstratives could be spatial, temporal, psychological, or sequential, as illustrated in examples (1) to (4) compiled by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999).

- (1) I like *this* car better than *that* one over there. [spatial]
- (2) I like *this* movie better than *that* concert last night. [temporal]
- (3) I like *this* candidate, which is why I didn't vote for *that* one. [psychological]
- (4) *This* dress is less attractive than *that* one. [sequential]

Proximal demonstrative *this* goes with referents that are physically near the speaker, at present, more preferred and first mentioned; while distal demonstrative *that* indicates referents that are spatially far from the speaker, in the past, less preferred and second mentioned in discourse.

Since the notion of distance distinction in languages was regarded as a basic semantic feature of spatial deixis, from which “a variety of metaphorical extensions into other domains” could be represented (Anderson & Keenan, 1985, p. 278), rather than just indicating place, demonstratives could be utilized to carry a wider range of information, through four basic uses: exophoric (situational), anaphoric (tracking the nominal referent), discourse deictic (referring to a proposition in the preceding text) and recognitional (emotional) (Diessel, 1999).

However, this distinction could not account for various uses of *this* and *that* in discourse, which led to other alternative approaches, such as the idea of “focus” and speaker’s attention as the deictic center (McCarthy, 1994; Sidner, 1983; Strauss, 2002). According to this viewpoint, *this* is used for the

current focus, signaling a shift from the old to the present topic while *that* is a marker of middle focus, in which little new information is needed and the focus of attention is maintained for the old topic. This framework was later supported by analyses of different corpus data (Oh, 2001). Accumulated studies on both constructed examples and spoken as well as written discourse data have contributed to the study of demonstratives and their semantic, pragmatic and discourse functions.

Studies of Vietnamese Demonstratives

A few decades ago, the study of Vietnamese demonstratives (*chỉ định từ* in Vietnamese) was generally constrained to the syntactic field with analyses of examples derived from classical poetry (Nguyen, 1992). He suggested classifying Vietnamese demonstratives into three categories in accordance with their degree of distance: proximal *đây(này)*, medial *đấy(đó)*, *ấy* and distal *kia*; and implied that this distinction also had some relevance with the demonstratives’ morphological features. However, this approach was revisited and refuted by Bui (2014) with a more comprehensive analysis of examples from various sources of written discourse (journals, poetry, conversations recorded in books). She argued that it was not appropriate to use the morphological approach to distinguish demonstratives, and there was no significant difference between the medial *đấy(đó)*, *ấy* and distal demonstratives *kia* as Nguyen (1992) had proposed. Bui (2014) then presented a new distinction of Vietnamese demonstratives as shown in Table 1:

Table 1
Vietnamese Proximal and Distal Demonstratives
(adapted from Bui, 2014)

Syntactic use	Proximal (<i>this</i>)	Distal (<i>that</i>)
Pronominal use	<i>đây</i>	<i>đấy (đó)</i> <i>kia</i>
Adjectival use	<i>này</i>	<i>đấy/ đó</i> <i>ấy</i> <i>kia</i>

While the proximal demonstrative *đây* can appear in the head position and act as a pronoun, the only possible position of the other proximal demonstrative *này* is a determiner for nouns or noun phrases. For distal demonstratives, there are commonly four words, in which *đấy* and *đó* are interchangeable in most cases; together with *kia*, these three demonstratives can appear in both head and determiner position. The last distal demonstrative *ấy* can only occur in adjectival use rather than pronominal use.

In her study, Bui (2014) also offered accounts for the metaphoric extensions of proximal and distal demonstratives by analyzing their spatial, temporal, presentational, and discourse usage from the

perspectives of semantics and pragmatics. Additionally, the role of demonstratives as sentence-final particles was also discussed in Nguyen (2021), revealing that they were used to express the psychological distance between the speaker and the statement.

It is concluded that Vietnamese demonstratives can greatly contribute to other domains of linguistics with their various functions, from expressing contrastiveness, person deictic distinctions, emotional distance, temporal relations in time, to textual relations in discourse.

The complicated yet interesting uses of demonstratives in written discourse of different languages have been observed. Some comparative studies have also been conducted to analyze how English demonstratives are different from those of other languages, like Arabic (Rabadi, 2016) and Korean (Hwang & Park, 2019). However, there have been few cross-linguistic studies between English and Vietnamese demonstratives. While the forms and discourse functions of demonstratives in each language have been extensively studied, there is yet a cross-linguistic comparison of the use of demonstratives in written discourse between the two languages.

A comparative analysis of how English demonstratives and Vietnamese demonstratives are used diversely in a certain type of written discourse may contribute to the heritage of cross-linguistic studies on demonstratives. The analysis is also expected to offer insights into the distinct uses and discourse functions of demonstratives in different languages. More importantly, it may help to explain the causes for some problems that Vietnamese EFL learners may encounter when using demonstratives in writing English argumentative essays.

In this study, the differences in the (1) frequency of demonstratives use, (2) the preference towards proximal and distal demonstratives, and (3) distinct referential uses of demonstratives in English argumentative essays and Vietnamese argumentative essays were discussed.

METHOD

Data

Writing samples for the study were retrieved from published reference books for training argumentative essay writing skills, including 10 essays written in Vietnamese and 10 essays written in American English, with the length varying between 600 words and 1100 words. Particularly, model American essays (MA) were randomly taken from *Elements of Argument* by Rottenberg and Winchell (2008), while model Vietnamese essays (MV) were selected from Tran's *Model essays* (2008). The topics of essays chosen were varied, ranging from computer, violent games, immigration issues, and education (sample American essays) to values of book, modesty, solidarity, and

environment protection (sample Vietnamese essays), which guarantees the desirable diversity of the dataset. Moreover, these books have been commonly used as a reference material by both writing instructors and students to improve argumentative writing skills in their native language (Ho, 2011). Since the compositions are written by native expert writers and can be considered great models of the genre, the influence of proficiency interference is excluded. Comparing two sets of qualified writings is expected to reveal objective results on the differences in the uses of demonstratives in two languages.

Data Analysis

This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative research methods with an attempt to receive both conclusive statistics that establish a "relationship between or within variables" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 137) and a detailed, profound analysis of the research matter. Additionally, as mixed methods research allows writers to adopt a variety of data collection tools, the result seems to be more comprehensive (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

First, all demonstratives employed in 20 essays were manually identified and classified into proximal and distal groups. The frequency of each category was then calculated and compared using independent samples t-test to see if there was any statistically significant difference between the two languages. Third, the tokens of two types of demonstratives were sorted according to their exophoric, anaphoric, or cataphoric uses; before the t-test was carried out again to estimate the statistical significance of the differences in frequency. Lastly, to get an insight into these uses, particular examples from the writing samples were extracted to qualitatively analyze the potential differences in the use of demonstratives between the two languages. The preference towards distal or proximal, exophoric and cataphoric reference, as well as the distinct use as discourse connectives of Vietnamese demonstratives were investigated at this stage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Use of Proximal and Distal Demonstratives *Overall Frequencies*

The total number of demonstratives employed in the two groups is presented in the Table 2, in raw and normalized (per 10,000 words) frequencies.

Table 2

Overall Statistics of Demonstratives Used in 20 Essays

	MA	MV
Total number of essays	10	10
Total number of words	8203	8611
Total number of demonstratives	71 (0.87%)	55 (0.64%)
Frequency per 10,000 words	87	64

Although it can be inferred from Table 2 that demonstratives were generally used with a higher frequency in American English essays than Vietnamese essays; the difference was found to be statistically insignificant ($F=1.47$, $Sig.=.241$).

However, when demonstratives were compared in the categories of proximal and distal, a different result was observed (Table 3).

Table 3
Comparison of Proximal and Distal Demonstratives Frequencies

	Mean frequency (per 10,000 words) (N=10)		F	Sig.
	MA	MV		
Proximal	47.2	15.43	4.815	.042
Distal	38.7	48.51	.215	.648

While there was no significant difference in the use of distal demonstratives between the two groups, the t-test result suggested that English argumentative essays used proximal demonstratives much more frequently than Vietnamese essays ($F=4.815$, $p<0.05$).

Interestingly, a similar pattern in the frequency of proximal demonstratives was observed when comparing English argumentative essays written by native English speakers and Vietnamese EFL learners (Nguyen & Lee, 2020). Specifically, the use of proximal demonstratives *this(these)* by native English writers was statistically higher than non-native English learners with a low level of writing proficiency, while this difference was insignificant for the high score group. In other words, the gap between native and non-native writers increased when the writing proficiency level decreased. There is a likelihood that Vietnamese EFL students with low English writing proficiency are influenced by the tendency to use less proximal demonstratives in their native language, leading to the underuse of proximal demonstratives *this(these)* in English argumentative essays. Learners with higher writing proficiency levels do not seem to have this problem since the effect of L1 transfer is not as considerable as low-level students. At the moment, however, this is only an assumption that requires more comprehensive investigation with larger corpora to validate.

Within groups, the different proportion between proximal and distal demonstratives in the two essay sets was also worth noticing. In English essays, the percentage of proximal demonstratives and distal demonstratives was 56% and 44% respectively, a roughly equal proportion though proximal demonstratives were a bit more frequently used. However, it was observed that the number of distal demonstratives used in Vietnamese essays tripled the number of proximal demonstratives (particularly 76% and 24%), revealing a

contradictory preference towards distal over proximal demonstratives in Vietnamese essays. This frequency disparity will be further discussed with the following qualitative analysis, which focuses on proximal and distal demonstratives' different functions in topic continuity/shifting.

Different Uses in Topic Continuity/Discontinuity

The choice of proximal and distal demonstratives in the spatial domain can be attributed to the physical position of the referent, whether it is being near or far from the speaker. Similarly, demonstratives in discourse are selected according to the characteristics and status of the referent it denotes, rather than in a random manner. This selection was recognized to depend on the values of topic continuity/ discontinuity, as suggested by Givón (1983). He proposed that differences in syntactic constructions used to express topics could signal different values of continuity; that is, a topic could be maintained or discontinued and shifted to another one, depending on different uses of syntactic features.

The qualitative analysis of the data revealed that there was a contradictory tendency in using demonstratives to mark topic continuity between English essays and Vietnamese essays. In English, proximal demonstratives *this(these)* indicated topic shifting while distal demonstratives *that(those)* maintained old focus; however, in Vietnamese, proximal demonstratives *đây(này)* were signals of topic continuity whereas distal demonstratives *đây(đó)*, *kia*, *ấy* marked topic discontinuity.

In English essays, it was found that proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were used to signal topic discontinuity, or a shift of focus, from what was mentioned in the preceding discourse to a new topic that was being discussed in the current text. Meanwhile, distal demonstratives took the responsibility of maintaining the old focus and continuing the topic that was previously presented. Some examples of proximal demonstratives used in English essays are presented in extracts (5) and (6).

(5) Today there are eighty-four women's colleges scattered throughout the United States, including two that are public. **These** colleges defend their programs as necessary to help women overcome intangible barriers in male-dominated professions. (MA1)

(6) One study found that 28 percent of Americans live in what nutritionists call "food deserts," places where big supermarkets are at least ten miles, or a twenty-minute drive, away. People who live in **these** places wind up buying much of their daily groceries from convenience stores or gas stations, where they can find Chef Boyardee but not baby carrots. Some communities are trying to remedy **this**. (MA4)

In (5), the topic of the existence of women's colleges in the United States was switched into the argument that supported the single-sex education system, which was signaled by the use of the proximal demonstrative **these**. It helped connect two different themes in two sentences by denoting "women's colleges" – the only discourse item related to both sentences, functioning as the focus of the first sentence but not the second one. Likewise, **these** in (6) referred to the antecedent "food deserts", the topic of the previous composition, before jumping into another topic about the phenomenon that processed food was more accessible to people in the United States. This topic was then indicated not to be mentioned again by the use of *this* in the sentence "Some communities are trying to remedy **this**". The focus was now supposedly moved to the solutions to the problem of inaccessible quality food.

The use of proximal demonstratives in English essays to signal the end of one topic and indicate that the focus would be moved on to another new topic was prevalent, as further illustrated in example (7):

(7) In secondary schools, students move from one teacher to the next every 50 minutes (or 80 to 100 minutes with block periods). Five or six teachers a day; for many students, new teachers each semester. No wonder that 50 to 70 percent of students pass through their high-school years without developing a single important relationship with an adult in their school. We dump teens into industrially configured high schools, and then we complain that teens are disconnected and alienated from adults.

No Child Left Behind will not change any of *this*. In its single-minded focus on accountability and testing, it does not address the key issue of moving from an industrial model of school to a post-industrial model that integrates relationships and personalization with academic and personal success for every child. (MA7)

In this example, *this* referred to the whole preceding paragraph, whose topic was the widespread problems on loose bonding between students and teachers in the current US education system. It also indicated that the focus of the following discourse was shifted to another topic of the No Child Left Behind reform and the reasons why it could not solve the previous issues.

While proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were used to signal a topic shift, distal demonstratives *that(those)* marked topic continuity, as revealed in examples (8) to (11).

(8) In this country, the majority – obviously not everyone, but most of us – have been over-threshold in wealth and information for several generations, roughly since the end of World War II. **That** is a remarkable achievement; it ought to make us proud and thankful. (MA3)

(9) After school, working parents would rather their kids stay inside watching TV than play outside in unsafe streets. **Those** hours in front of the tube, meanwhile, feed them a diet of ads heavy on sugary cereals and greasy burgers.

(10) Turnitin stresses that they do not accuse or punish students for plagiarism – **that's** up to be teachers and professors. (MA9)

(11) We need, Naisbett says, to reinvent education by teaching students 'how to think...to be creative.' **That** means personalization, small schools, and relationships between students and teachers developed over several years. (MA7)

The topics in the three examples above remained the same even with the interference of such referring devices as demonstrative. In (8), the focus maintained to be the development in economy and information technology in the US, with the second sentence acted solely as an additive phrase. The topic of both sentences in (9) was children of working parents in afterschool hours, while in (10), *that* referred to the punishment for plagiarism – the unchanged focus of both phrases. The same pattern could be observed in (11), where *that* was followed by a sentence explaining what was stated in the preceding discourse.

The finding that in English argumentative essays, proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were used to signal topic discontinuity or focus shift; whereas distal demonstratives *that(those)* indicated topic continuity, or maintaining the old focus agrees with what was previously suggested by several scholars (McCarthy, 1994; Sidner, 1983; Strauss, 2002). Proposing the notion of focus, Sidner (1983) asserted that when appearing alone, *this* moved the focus from old to new topic whereas *that* kept the old focus. Similarly, Strauss (2002) described *this* as a marker of high focus, which required more new information for a new topic, while *that* required less new information and attention from the hearer, thus normally maintaining the old focus.

A completely contradictory pattern of demonstrative use could be recognized in Vietnamese essays when proximal demonstratives *đây(này)* tended to mark topic continuity and distal demonstratives *đó(đó)*, *kia*, *ấy* tended to signal topic discontinuity, which is similar to what was suggested by Bui (2014). She examined all instances of anaphoric demonstratives from various written discourse materials and concluded that while proximal demonstrative *này* expressed more important topics which were likely to be discussed again in the following discourse, distal demonstrative *ấy* indicated less important topics which were not likely to appear again. The same pattern could be observed in 10 model Vietnamese argumentative essays in this study. Examples of proximal demonstratives marking topics that were

more important and continued to persist longer in the discourse are presented in extract (12)..

(12) *Câu tục ngữ trên đây*
 sentence proverb above DEM.PRO
vừa là quan niệm đúng đắn của
 CONJ is perception right of
nhân dân ta về công hiến và
 our people about devotion and
hưởng thụ, vừa là lời cảnh cáo phê phán
 enjoyment, CONJ is warning criticize
những kẻ bóc lột, ăn bám. [...] Ý nghĩa
 exploiters, sponger Meaning
đúng đắn và tích cực của quan niệm
 right and positive of perception
này hoàn toàn phù hợp với
 DEM.PRO completely suitable with
nguyên tắc phân phối trong xã hội ta
 principle distribution in our society
ngày nay: làm nhiều hưởng nhiều, làm
 nowadays: work much earn much, work
ít hưởng ít, không làm không hưởng
 little earn little, no work no earn

This proverb above expresses both our people's right perception about devoting and enjoying and a warning against exploiters and spongers [...] The right and positive meaning of **this** perception is completely consistent with the principle of distribution in our society today: if you work much, you can earn much; if you work less, you enjoy less; if you do not work, you cannot earn anything. (MV5)

In example (12), proximal demonstratives *đây* and *này* were both used to refer to a single perception, the shared viewpoint between Vietnamese people about equality in society. This was the main focus of the whole essay; thus, it was repeatedly mentioned to maintain the topic. Proximal demonstratives marked its great importance and showed that this topic would remain longer in the discourse. Similarly, in example (13), *này* and *đây* denoted the same issue, the value of modesty:

(13) *Bàn về vấn đề này,*
 Discuss about issue DEM.PRO
Lâm Ngữ Đường, một học giả đã
 PROPER NAME, a/one scholar PAST
viết: Lòng khiêm tốn có thể coi là
 write: Modesty probably look is
một bản tính căn bản cho con người
 a/one nature basic for humans
trong nghệ thuật xử thế và
 in art behaviors and
đối đãi với sự vật. Đây là
 treatment with things. DEM.PRO is

một nhận xét chí lí, một
 a/one comment reasonable, a/one
lời khuyên thiết thực cho mọi người,
 advice practical for everyone,
nhất là tuổi trẻ. (MV10)
 first is youth.
 Discussing **this** issue, Lin Yutang, a Chinese scholar wrote: Modesty can be considered a fundamental

human virtue in the art of treating and dealing with things. **This** is a wise saying, a piece of practical advice for everyone, especially young people.

With the use of proximal demonstratives, the writer attempted to give further explanation on the topic of modesty, without any potential shift of focus. The indication of that important topic helped the writer to orient the readers' attention towards following discourse, where other discussions on the topic of modesty could be found.

While proximal demonstratives *đây*(*này*) helped maintain the topic continuity, distal demonstratives *đấy*(*đó*), *kia*, *ấy* in Vietnamese argumentative essays were likely to mark topic discontinuity, or focus shift.

(14) *Chặt cây lấy gỗ, mở mang diện tích*
 Cut tree take wood, expand area
trồng trọt, canh tác; đốt nương làm
 planting, cultivation; burn hills make
rẫy, săn bắn thú quý... những
 fields, hunting rare animals... PLURAL
việc làm đó kéo dài trong nhiều
 activities DEM.DIS last in many
năm sẽ làm cho diện tích rừng
 years FUTURE make area forest
tự nhiên ngày càng thu hẹp lại,
 nature more and more narrow,
ảnh hưởng nghiêm trọng đến
 affect serious to
sự cân bằng sinh thái. (MV1)
 balance ecology

Cutting down trees for timber, expanding the cultivation area, slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting animals... **those** activities lasting for many years will cause the natural forest area to shrink, seriously affecting the ecological balance. (MV1)

In example (14), from the point that was marked by the distal demonstrative *đó*, the topic of activities that harmed the environment did not appear again in the following discourse; instead, a new topic on negative consequences of these activities was expected to be presented. Rather than the same topic, what was expressed after distal demonstratives was just associated information forming another topic.

(15) *Thực tế cho thấy Hồ*
 Reality show PROPER N
Chủ tịch là một lãnh tụ Cách mạng
 President is a/one leader revolution
vĩ đại, một bậc hiền triết, một
 great, a/one philosopher, a/one
nhà văn hóa lớn của dân tộc
 cultural activist great of peoples
và nhân loại. Tất cả những điều
 and mankind. All PLURAL thing
ấy kết tinh trong một
 DEM.DIS crystalize in a/one
con người rất mực giản dị và khiêm tốn.
 human very simple and humble.

The fact is that President Ho was a great revolutionary leader, philosopher, and cultural activist of our people and mankind. All of those

things were included in a perfectly simple and humble being. (MA10)

In example (15), the distal demonstrative *ấy* referred to all the great titles that President Ho achieved, which also marked the end of that topic and the shift of focus to another topic of President’s modesty. From this point forward, readers were not likely to read about President Ho’s great achievements anymore, but a new topic of his modesty would become evident in the following discourse.

To conclude, the disparity in the choice of proximal and distal demonstratives indicated the difference in topic continuity/ discontinuity function in the written discourse of the two languages. While in English proximal demonstratives *this(these)* signaled topic shifting and distal demonstratives *that(those)* maintained old focus, a contrast case was observed in Vietnamese. Proximal demonstratives *đây(này)* were indicators of topic continuity, whereas distal demonstratives *đấy(đó), kia, ấy* were used to mark topic discontinuity.

This finding can somehow account for the previous observation that distal demonstratives were much more frequently used in Vietnamese than in English. In argumentative essays, the practice of moving from one point to another argument is commonly seen, and one of the devices frequently used is demonstratives. Since in English proximal demonstratives are responsible for topic shifting, English writers tend to utilize this function to connect the preceding points to the next ones. However, in Vietnamese, distal demonstratives signal topic shifting, or a change in focus; therefore, they may be more preferred than proximal demonstratives in linking ideas in argumentative essays.

Referential Uses of Demonstratives
Exophoric, Anaphoric, and Cataphoric Uses

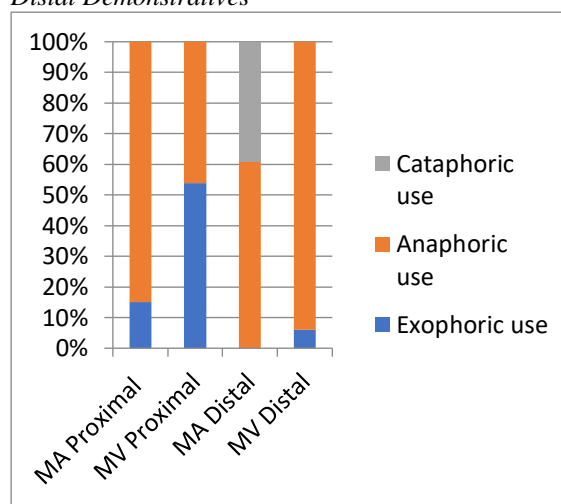
When comparing across groups, the exophoric and anaphoric uses of demonstratives showed almost no significant difference between the two groups (Table 4); however, a critically higher frequency of cataphoric uses was observed in the English essay group (F=15.296, p<0.001). In fact, there was no cataphoric use of demonstratives found in Vietnamese essays; whereas English essays had 12 cases in total.

Table 4
Comparison of Exophoric, Anaphoric, and Cataphoric Frequencies

	Mean frequency (per 10,000 words) (N=10)		F	Sig.
	MA	MV		
Exophoric	7.59	10.53	2.524	.130
Anaphoric	65.32	53.41	.926	.349
Cataphoric	13.00	0.00	15.296	.001

The proportions between the three uses of proximal and distal demonstratives in the two essay groups are presented in Figure 1. Both groups showed a very high percentage of anaphoric use, indicating that demonstratives were most commonly used to refer anaphorically in discourse. However, the result also revealed interesting dissimilarity between proximal and distal demonstratives in exophoric uses, which will be further discussed in the following part.

Figure 1
The Proportion of Three Uses in Proximal and Distal Demonstratives



In Vietnamese essays, both distal and proximal demonstratives were used to denote physical referents which did not have antecedents in discourse, with a remarkable percentage (54%) of proximal demonstratives *đây(này)*. In contrast, no English distal demonstratives *that(those)* used exophorically were found; and only 6 out of 40, accounting for 15% of English proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were observed to make exophoric reference.

In six cases of exophoric uses of English proximal demonstratives, *this* had such temporal referents as “this century” (MA3), “**this** week” (MA6), “**this** fall” (MA9), or “**this** day” (MA10). The first referent could be easily identified by the readers, since “century” indicated a long period, even longer than a person’s lifetime, so the term “**this** century” absolutely referred to the 21st century all of us are living in; however, the latter three expressions were highly dependent on the context, particularly the time when essays were written. Other exophoric uses in English essays included “**this** country” (MA8) and “**this** column” (MA9), from which their referents could also be found even without any specification.

(16) But what about the millions of unskilled laborers who arrive in **this** country every year? (MA8)

(17) Computers and the Internet have certainly revolutionized writing in general and research in particular. To get the fact for just **this** column, for instance, I checked dozens of websites, downloaded new stories, and read Turnitin’s own promotional literature – right here in my den. (MA9)

In Vietnamese essays, apart from one case of exophoric use that had spatial referent: “*cuộc đời này*” (MV10), which could be translated into “**this** life”, all other cases were temporal adverbial expressions defining deictic time. Since the deictic center was defined as the present, proximal demonstratives *đây* also indicated the present, while distal demonstratives (in this study’s sample, only *kia* was identified) signaled the past.

To perform a temporal reference function, Vietnamese proximal demonstrative *đây* normally combined with lexical terms indicating proximity in the past direction. For example, to express a very short time right before utterance time, *đây* went with adjectives of nearness like *gần* (‘near’), which formed the temporal adverbial expression *gần đây* (‘recently’) (Example 18). Other cases involved the use of *trước đây* (‘front/ahead’ + proximal demonstrative *đây* □ ‘in the past’), a temporal adverbial denoted a time span which was placed in front of the deictic center (as in example 19)

(18) *Những năm gần đây*,
PLURAL year near DEM.PRO
vòng tay nhân ái của cộng đồng....
arms loving of community....
In recent years, loving arms of the community....
(MV2)

(19) *Nông thôn trước đây*
Rural areas front DEM.PRO
thường được coi là không gian
often PASSIVE look is space
trong lành.... (MV1)

fresh
In the past, rural areas were considered fresh spaces....

With regards to distal demonstrative *kia*, it was used to indicate a further time back in the past, not near to present, as illustrated in example (20). The noun “*xưa*” (‘ancient time’) was combined with *kia* to refer to a very old time before the present.

(20) *Trong xã hội phong kiến xưa*
In society feudality ancient
kia, phần lớn của cải do
DEM.DIS, majority goods because
người lao động làm ra.... (MV5)
human labor make
In the old feudal society, most of the goods were made by laborers.

One interesting observation about the exophoric uses of Vietnamese demonstratives in this study’s writing samples was that no matter what type of demonstrative was used, proximal or distal, the temporal referents denoted by the demonstratives were easily identified, unlike some temporal deictic expressions formed by proximal demonstratives in English argumentative writings in this study, which required more information about the context to detect their exophoric referents.

Vietnamese Distal Demonstratives *đó* as Discourse Connectives

One distinct referential use of Vietnamese demonstratives observed in this study’s writing samples was the involvement of distal demonstrative *đó* in constructing different discourse connectives, which can be summarized and displayed in Table 5.

Table 5
*Discourse Connectives Marked by Demonstrative *đó**

Demonstrative	Discourse connectives	Meaning	Function
<i>đó</i>	<i>trong khi đó</i>	‘whereas’ (lit. in-time-that)	adversive
	<i>do đó</i>	‘therefore’ (lit. because-that)	causal
	<i>từ đó</i>	‘thus’ (lit. from-that)	
	<i>sau đó</i>	‘then’ (lit. after-that)	temporal

In these cases, the information that the demonstrative referred to in the preceding text could be considered the source of semantic relations marked by these connectives (Bui, 2014). Take excerpt (21) as an example, the linking phrase *từ đó* (‘thus’) indicated a causal relation, in which the subsequent information (having the spirit of self-control, self-confidence, and creativity) was the consequence of the previously mentioned one (the ability of self-assessment).

(21) *Đồng thời mỗi cá nhân*
At the same time each individual
sẽ tự đánh giá được
FUTURE self assess obtain

năng lực bản thân, từ đó
capacity self, from DEM.DIS
có tinh thần tự chủ, tự tin
have spirit self-control self-confidence
sáng tạo trong lao động. (MV5)
creativity in labor

At the same time, each individual will be able to self-assess his or her own capacity, thus having the spirit of self-control, self-confidence, and creativity in labor.

Furthermore, the demonstrative *đó* could also be used to form aversive conjunction, as illustrated in example (22). The situation stated in the first

sentence, denoted by the distal demonstrative *đó* was put in contradiction with the situation presented in the second sentence; in other words, a contrasting relation was indicated with the connective *trong khi đó*.

(22) *Người làm ra của cải vật chất lại phải sống nghèo khổ, thiếu thốn.*
 Human make goods material again have to live poor lack
Trong khi đó, kẻ không làm thì lại được hưởng thụ rất nhiều.
 In time DEM.DIS, human no work CONJ again obtain enjoy a lot.
 The people who make material wealth have to live in poverty and deprivation. Meanwhile, those who do not work can receive a lot. (MA5)

Last but not least, distal demonstrative *đó* also formed temporal connectives, like *sau đó* ('after that') in example (23). The distal demonstrative *đó* here referred to "feeding themselves", a preceding action before "contributing to the community" – the following action which was presented in the second sentence.

(23) *Con người phải làm việc, trước hết là để nuôi sống bản thân, sau đó là góp phần xây dựng cuộc sống chung của cả cộng đồng.*
 People have to work first is to feed self after DEM.DIS is contribute build life common of all community.
 People have to work, first to feed themselves, then contribute to build up the common life of the community. (MV5)

It is observed in the sample's data that the distal demonstratives provide both explicit connectives and anaphoric referents as hints for readers to interpret the relationship between propositions in discourse. As Bui (2014) pointed out, it does not only have a referring-tracking function, but also contributes to the interpretation process of readers.

This distinct function of Vietnamese distal demonstratives may also explain its higher proportion over proximal demonstratives in Vietnamese argumentative essays. Since distal demonstrative *đó* can constitute common linking phrases in Vietnamese, they are used more frequently than proximal demonstratives.

CONCLUSION

With the data of 20 compositions, the study attempted to investigate the differences in the use of Vietnamese demonstratives in comparison with English demonstratives in Vietnamese and English argumentative essays. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were both conducted to generate objective

and insightful results in the comparison of the two languages.

First, regarding the use of proximal and distal demonstratives, the quantitative test discovered that English proximal demonstratives *this(these)* enjoyed a significantly higher frequency than Vietnamese proximal demonstratives *đây(này)* in argumentative essay discourse. This is assumed to be the contributing factor for the underuse of *this(these)* in English argumentative essays written by Vietnamese EFL learners with a low level of writing English, since they may be affected by the interference of their native language.

Moreover, the preference towards proximal and distal demonstratives shown in two languages contradicted each other. While English writers utilized both types of demonstratives, and proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were used a bit more frequently than distal demonstratives *that(those)*, Vietnamese essays showed a clear preference towards distal demonstratives *đấy(đó)*, *kia*, *ấy* with much higher frequency than proximal demonstratives *đây(này)*. Second, the function of proximal and distal demonstratives in topic continuity was also different between English and Vietnamese essays, as revealed by the qualitative analysis. In English, proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were indicators of topic shifting and distal demonstratives *that(those)* maintained old focus; whereas Vietnamese proximal demonstratives *đây(này)* signaled topic continuity and distal demonstratives *đấy(đó)*, *kia*, *ấy* were used to mark topic discontinuity.

In terms of referential uses, anaphora was the most frequent use of demonstratives in both languages. Cases of cataphoric demonstratives in English argumentative essays were common, whereas no single cataphoric use of Vietnamese demonstratives was found in the study. Regarding exophoric use, only English proximal demonstratives *this(these)* were found to be used while both types of Vietnamese demonstratives contributed to denote both temporal and spatial referents out of discourse context.

In analyzing another use of Vietnamese demonstratives, it was found that the distal demonstrative *đó* facilitated the interpretation process of the readers by both referring to the antecedents and acting as discourse connectives presenting the relationship between what was stated in the preceding text and what was followed in discourse.

The study's findings provide a source of reference for researchers who are interested in the study of demonstratives in different languages. Indeed, when putting English demonstratives in comparison with demonstratives of other languages, both similarities and differences in their uses and functions in written discourse can be discovered,

which opens more room for linguistic researchers to investigate.

More notably, the study's results can also account for the problem that Vietnamese EFL learners face in using demonstratives in writing English essays, particularly the underemployment of *this(these)* as a connecting device improving text coherence. Therefore, the study's discussion may be useful for teachers and learners of languages. Specifically, when introducing the uses of demonstratives in written discourse to Vietnamese EFL learners, teachers can anticipate students' difficulties caused by L1 interference and prepare appropriate materials and instructions to help non-native students, especially low-level ones to avoid influence from their mother tongue.

The study only deals with a rather small number of data, which cannot well represent the matter, thus somehow prevents the researcher to reach a profound conclusion. More in-depth studies with larger data size should be conducted on the use of demonstratives between the two languages, especially the difference in anaphoric use, which has not been mentioned in this research.

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