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Found in 2023, BRU ELT Journal is a peer-reviewed and open-access electronic journal with the main aim to publish fully refereed high-quality original research articles in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) around the world for the benefit of English language teachers and researchers. The journal welcomes articles from local and foreign academics, researchers, graduate students, and policymakers. All articles are required to be in English.

The Thai Journal Citation Index Center (TCI) requested cooperation from journal editors in the selection of a specific journal's sub-areas stored in the TCI database. As a result, each journal is permitted to select 1-5 sub-areas for the papers published in the journal. In this regard, the "BRU ELT JOURNAL" would like to declare that beginning with the 1<sup>st</sup> Volume, 1<sup>st</sup> Issue (January-April 2023), articles covering the main subject area, Social Sciences, will be accepted for publication. Furthermore, these articles must be pertinent to the subject areas of Arts and Humanities, and they must cover these two sub-subject areas: 1) Language and Linguistics, and 2) Literature and Literary Theory.

BRU ELT Journal accepts articles relevant to the following themes: English as an International Language, World Englishes (WE), Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language (ESL), as an Additional Language (EAL) or as a Foreign Language (TEFL), ESP and EAP, Applied Linguistics and Corpus Linguistics, Approaches and Methods in English Education, Culture and Literature in English Education, English Language Curriculum and Teaching Materials, Language Learning and Acquisition, Language Testing and Evaluation, Life-long Language Learning, Multimedia and ICT in ELT, Teacher Training and Education, Interpretation and Translation Studies, and Discourse and Interlanguage Pragmatics.

The journal is published three times a year: January-April, May-August, and September-December. However, BRU ELT JOURNAL, with no more than two (2) issues per year, might be published as a special issue upon joining in the special academic events of national and international conferences held both in Thailand and other countries.

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## Modern Neurocognitive Theories for Teaching EFL

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### Abstract

This paper explores the application of modern neurocognitive theories in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It begins by examining traditional learning theories such as Behaviorism, Constructivism, and Sociocultural Theory, highlighting their contributions and limitations in EFL contexts. Recognizing the need for innovative approaches, the author presents the concepts and principles of neurocognitive theories, which offer evidence-based insights into the processing, storage, and retrieval of language by the brain. Moreover, the paper outlines the similarities, differences, and applications among 20 modern neurocognitive theories, emphasizing their relevance to EFL teaching. Practical applications are presented and discussed in detail, illustrating how concepts or principles such as multisensory learning, spaced repetition, and contextual engagement enhance language acquisition, retention, and fluency. In addition, the risks of oversimplification, the complexity of concepts, and the resource requirements that accompany the integration of these theories into real-world classrooms are examined. The study advocates for the integration of neurocognitive concepts to enhance EFL instruction, providing instructors with empirically supported techniques to promote learner engagement and achievement. The conclusion encourages educators and graduate students in EFL to embrace neurocognitive frameworks for designing effective lesson plans and conducting research, ensuring alignment with the latest advancements in language teaching.

**Keywords:** neurocognitive theories, EFL, traditional learning theories, applications of neurocognitive theories

### Introduction

Back in the early 1960s, language teachers, especially in the fields of EFL and ESL followed the concepts and principles of Behaviorism proposed by B.F. Skinner, a very famous behaviorist. In principle, Behaviorism focuses mainly on learners' observable behaviors and emphasizes learning through reinforcement and repetition. In EFL contexts, this often translates to drills and memorization. However, many researchers found that they have notable disadvantages that can impact their effectiveness. Critics highlight several limitations as follows:

1. Limited Cognitive Engagement: Behaviorism does not account for internal cognitive processes such as memory, problem-solving, and critical thinking, which are essential in language learning (Study.com, 2025).

2. Short-Term Focus: Behaviorist techniques may yield quick results in behavior change, but their effects might not be long-lasting. Students might revert to previous behaviors once external incentives are removed (National University, 2025).

3. Limited Applicability: Behaviorism is less effective for teaching complex cognitive skills that require understanding beyond rote memorization (Teachers Institute, 2023).

Later during 1896-1980, Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist proposed the concept of Constructivism as a learning theory that emphasizes the active role of learners in building their understanding. He proposed that knowledge is not something that can emerge from a single experience but is constructed through interaction with the environment (Brau, 2018). Constructivism has been adopted for teaching in EFL, especially in teaching reading and listening comprehension. While promoting active learning, presents challenges in EFL settings as follows:

1. Time-Consuming: Learning through trial and error is a time-consuming process. In the age of a crowded curriculum, teachers often don't have the time to organize sustained problem-based learning lessons (Drew, 2023).

2. Implementation Challenges: Implementing constructivist approaches requires significant time and effort from instructors, which can be a limitation in practice. (Brau, n.d.).

3. Teacher Preparedness: Teachers may face dilemmas in constructivist classrooms, including content mastery and incompatibility between constructivism and traditional teaching approaches (Nguyen & Le, 2024).

In addition, from 1896-1934, Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, introduced the Sociocultural Theory, emphasizing the fundamental role of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. The key concepts of Vygotsky's theory include the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what a learner can do without help and what they can achieve with guidance, and scaffolding, which involves providing support to learners as they develop new skills. The mentioned concepts have been adopted widely by educators and language teachers for EFL and ESL teaching. However, in the context of EFL education, several disadvantages of Vygotsky's theory have been identified. Here are some of them (Quizlet, 2024; Vygotsky ETEC 512, n.d.):

1. Overemphasis on Social Interaction: Vygotsky's theory places significant importance on social interaction for cognitive development. In EFL settings, this emphasis may overlook the value of individual learning strategies and the internal cognitive processes involved in language acquisition.

2. Cultural Bias: The theory is deeply rooted in the cultural context from which it originated. Applying it universally in diverse EFL classrooms can be challenging, as it may not account for cultural differences in communication styles, learning preferences, and educational values.

3. Lack of Clarity on Internalization Processes: Vygotsky's concept of internalization-the process by which social interactions become part of individual cognition-is not clearly defined. This vagueness can make it difficult for EFL educators to design effective instructional strategies that facilitate the internalization of language skills.

4. Limited Applicability to Individual Learning Differences: The theory may not adequately address individual differences in language aptitude, motivation, and learning styles among EFL students. This limitation can hinder the development of personalized teaching approaches that cater to diverse learner needs.

In summary, while Behaviorism, Constructivism, and Sociocultural Theory offer valuable insights into language learning, their limitations, for example, are neglecting cognitive processes, focusing on short-term behavior changes, being time-consuming, posing implementation challenges, overemphasis on social interaction and cultural bias, carefully considered EFL education. These limitations or disadvantages turn educators and language teachers in EFL to the applications of concepts from modern neurocognitive theories for teaching and learning. At present, there are at least 20 of them and some share similar concepts since this field of study is rather new. In this paper, their main concepts and applications for EFL will be presented so that language educators, English teachers, and graduate students in the fields of EFL/ESL and Applied Linguistics can learn some important fundamental concepts for their further studies.

However, since there are many new terms related to the neurocognitive theories and some of them carry both similar and different concepts, it would be better for us to learn their main concepts and functions to prevent confusion as follows:

**Table 1**

*Similarities and Differences between Cognitive, Cognitive Science, Neurocognitive, Neuroscience, Neurolinguistics, and Neurosemantics Theories with Applications in EFL*

No.	Name	Similarities	Differences	Citations
1	Cognitive Theory	Focuses on mental processes such as perception, memory, and problem-solving.	Emphasizes mental strategies and processes rather than physical brain structures.	Anderson, 1980
2	Cognitive Science	Interdisciplinary field combining psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, and AI to study cognition.	Broader in scope, integrating multiple disciplines beyond psychology.	Anderson, 1980
3	Neurocognitive Theory	Connects cognitive science and neuroscience, focusing on brain functions supporting cognitive processes.	Focuses specifically on the biological underpinnings of cognitive functions.	Friederici, 2011

**Table 1 (Continued)**

No.	Name	Similarities	Differences	Citations
4	Neuroscience Theory	Studies brain structures, neural networks, and their role in learning and memory.	Emphasizes brain anatomy and neural pathways over cognitive strategies.	Sousa, 2017
5	Neurolinguistics Theory	Explores brain regions involved in language processing and comprehension.	Concentrates on the relationship between brain structures and language functions.	Paradis, 2004
6	Neosemantics Theory	Investigates how meaning is constructed and processed neurologically.	Focuses specifically on semantic processing and neural encoding of meaning.	Pulvermüller, 2002

Applications in EFL for teaching a language skill:

1. Cognitive Theory: Teachers can design tasks that enhance problem-solving, memory retention, and metacognitive skills, such as comprehension exercises and reflective journaling.
2. Cognitive Science: Teachers can adopt interdisciplinary approaches, integrating AI tools and psycholinguistic models to enhance interactive and adaptive learning experiences.
3. Neurocognitive Theory: Activities like spaced repetition, multisensory teaching methods, and mnemonic devices can strengthen neural connections and improve retention.
4. Neuroscience Theory: Emotionally engaging lessons, reducing classroom anxiety, and creating a positive learning environment can foster brain plasticity and optimize language acquisition.
5. Neurolinguistics Theory: Teachers can use language drills, pronunciation exercises, and storytelling to activate specific language-processing areas in the brain.
6. Neosemantics Theory: Context-rich activities, semantic mapping, and multimedia tools can enhance learners' understanding of meaning and context in language.

#### Similarities:

1. All theories emphasize the brain and/or mental processes as central to learning and comprehension.
2. Cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and problem-solving are recognized as crucial in language acquisition.
3. The interconnection between cognitive strategies and neural mechanisms is acknowledged.

## Differences:

1. Cognitive Theory focuses on mental strategies.
2. Neuroscience emphasizes brain structures.
3. Cognitive Science takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining psychology, linguistics, and AI.
4. Neurocognitive bridges biological and cognitive perspectives.
5. Neurolinguistics zeroes in on language-specific brain regions.
6. Neurosemantics focuses on the neurological processing of meaning.

In conclusion, each theory offers unique insights into language acquisition. In EFL contexts, blending these principles allows educators to design evidence-based, brain-friendly, and cognitively engaging lesson plans, maximizing learning outcomes. However, for the rest of the paper, to make the readers catch up with a new trend in language teaching and learning in EFL, only the concepts, principles, and applications of some modern neurocognitive theories will be presented.

## Typical Characteristics of Neurocognitive Theories

The typical characteristics of the neurocognitive theories are as follows:

1. Integration of Neural and Cognitive Mechanisms: These theories explain cognitive processes (e.g., memory, learning, perception) in terms of brain structures and neural activity (Craik & Lockhart, 1972; Baddeley & Hitch, 1974).
2. Empirical Evidence: They rely on data from neuroimaging (e.g., fMRI, EEG) and lesion studies to support their claims (Friston, 2005; Squire, 1987).
3. Focus on Brain Plasticity: Many emphasize the brain's adaptability in response to experience and learning (Merzenich, 1998).
4. Computational Models: Some theories, like ACT-R (Anderson, 1996) and Connectionism (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986), use computational frameworks to simulate cognitive processes.
5. Hierarchical Processing: They often describe cognitive functions as arising from hierarchical brain networks (Friston, 2005).
6. Modularity vs. Distributed Processing: Some theories propose specialized brain modules e.g., Dual-Route Model (Coltheart, 2001), while others emphasize distributed processing networks e.g., Connectionism (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986).
7. Emphasis on Plasticity and Experience: Learning and adaptation are central themes (Hebb, 1949; Karmiloff-Smith, 1992).

In addition, neurocognitive theories provide valuable insights into the intricate relationship between neural mechanisms and cognitive functions, offering practical applications for teaching language skills in EFL settings. They focus on understanding how the brain processes language and learning, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying language acquisition. In addition, many advantages of neurocognitive theories in teaching EFL are as follows:

1. Facilitate Language Retention through Memory Optimization

They emphasize the importance of working memory and long-term memory in language learning. Techniques informed by these theories can enhance retention. For instance, repetition, retrieval practice, and spaced learning capitalize on the brain's natural mechanisms for consolidating information (Baddeley & Hitch, 2003). For

example, in EFL, integrating activities that repeatedly expose learners to vocabulary and grammar over time, boosts their ability to recall and use these elements in real-world contexts.

## 2. Promote Multisensory Learning

They highlight the value of engaging multiple sensory modalities to strengthen neural connections. Activities that combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements activate different brain regions, reinforcing learning. For example, in EFL teaching vocabulary through images, sounds, and physical actions creates stronger neural associations, making it easier for learners to remember and use the language.

## 3. Enhance Motivation and Reduce Cognitive Overload

They emphasize minimizing cognitive overload to keep learners engaged and motivated. Techniques such as chunking information into manageable units and scaffolding new material with prior knowledge align with how the brain processes information (Sweller & Kalyuga, 2011). EFL teachers can introduce new grammar rules or vocabulary in small, digestible segments, making the learning process less intimidating and more achievable for students.

## 4. Support Individualized Learning

They acknowledge the diversity in learners' brain structures and cognitive processes, promoting a tailored approach to teaching. For example, some students may excel in pattern recognition and learn grammar rules intuitively, while others benefit from explicit instruction and practice. Leveraging neurocognitive principles, EFL educators can identify these differences and adapt their teaching strategies to suit individual needs.

## 5. Encourage the Use of Contextual and Authentic Language

According to neurocognitive research, the brain is more likely to retain language learned in meaningful, real-world contexts. Authentic materials and immersive activities, such as storytelling or role-playing, stimulate the brain's episodic memory, which links language to experiences. In EFL, contextualizing lessons within relevant scenarios helps students understand not only the "what" but also the "why" of language use, fostering deeper comprehension and fluency.

## 6. Improve Focus and Attention through Brain-Based Techniques

They offer strategies for enhancing attention, a critical factor in effective language learning. Techniques such as incorporating novelty, using engaging stimuli, and providing frequent breaks align with the brain's natural attentional cycles. In an EFL classroom, activities like interactive games or multimedia resources can capture students' interest and maintain their focus, ensuring better absorption of material.

## 7. Foster Emotional Engagement for Deeper Learning

Emotions play a significant role in memory and learning, as emotional experiences activate the amygdala, enhancing information encoding. Neurocognitive principles suggest that creating a positive, low-stress learning environment can boost students' confidence and willingness to participate. EFL teachers can incorporate humor, collaborative projects, and encouragement to foster an emotionally supportive atmosphere.

Therefore, applying neurocognitive concepts or principles to EFL teaching ensures a brain-compatible approach, enhancing learning outcomes through improved retention, engagement, and adaptability. Below is an overview of 20 prominent neurocognitive theories, their founders, years of proposal, main concepts, and examples

of their application in EFL teaching. They are presented chronologically starting with the oldest one:

### 1. Neural Reuse Theory

This theory was proposed by Anderson (2010) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Neural circuits originally evolved for one function are often repurposed for new cognitive tasks.

2) Learning involves repurposing and reconfiguring existing neural networks.

3) Flexibility and adaptability are key aspects of brain function.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. writing skills:

Step 1: Repurpose Familiar Skills: Connect writing tasks with previously learned skills (e.g., storytelling or summarizing experiences).

Step 2: Scaffold Writing Tasks: Break tasks into smaller steps (e.g., brainstorming, drafting, revising).

Step 3: Use Multisensory Inputs: Combine writing with visual aids, gestures, and voice recordings.

Step 4: Interactive Writing Exercises: Include collaborative writing tasks where students repurpose spoken ideas into written form.

Step 5: Reflect and Adjust: Allow students to reflect on their writing strategies and adapt them for future tasks.

### 2. Hebbian Theory

This theory was proposed by D. Hebb in 1949 (Hebb, 1949) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) "Neurons that fire together, wire together."

2) Learning is based on strengthening connections between neurons when they are repeatedly activated simultaneously.

3) Synaptic plasticity is the foundation of learning and memory.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. vocabulary skills:

Step 1: Pair Words with Visual Stimuli: Use flashcards with images and words simultaneously.

Step 2: Repetition in Context: Repeat new words in sentences and stories.

Step 3: Group Words by Themes: Teach words in meaningful groups (e.g., words related to weather).

Step 4: Interactive Activities: Use group discussions or role-plays for active repetition.

Step 5: Regular Retrieval Practice: Include spaced repetition exercises.

### 3. Dual-Coding Theory

This theory was proposed by Paivio (1971) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) The brain processes information through two channels:

a. Verbal (Linguistic Channel): Processes spoken and written words.

b. Non-verbal (Imagery Channel): Processes images and other sensory information.

2) Learning is more effective when information is presented using both verbal and visual formats because they create dual mental representations, reinforcing memory and understanding.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. vocabulary skills:

Step 1: Introduce Words with Images: Present new vocabulary words alongside relevant images.

Step 2: Use Mnemonics: Associate words with memorable visuals.

Step 3: Encourage Visualization: Ask students to create mental images for words or phrases.

Step 4: Combine Verbal and Visual Practice: Pair spoken words with written text and pictures.

Step 5: Interactive Activities: Use flashcards, videos, and multimedia tools.

#### 4. Levels of Processing Theory

This theory was proposed by Craik and Lockhart (1972) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Memory retention depends on the depth of processing:

- a. Shallow Processing: Focus on surface details (e.g., spelling, sound).
- b. Deep Processing: Focus on meaning and connections.

2) Deeper levels of processing result in stronger memory traces.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. vocabulary skills:

Step 1: Shallow Processing: Start with repetition exercises (e.g., saying words aloud).

Step 2: Semantic Processing: Ask students to define words in their own words.

Step 3: Contextual Processing: Place words in meaningful sentences or stories.

Step 4: Personal Connection: Ask students to relate words to personal experiences.

Step 5: Collaborative Tasks: Use group activities to reinforce word usage in context.

#### 5. Working Memory Model

This theory was proposed by Baddeley and Hitch (1974) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

Working memory has four components:

- a. Phonological Loop: Processes auditory and verbal information.
- b. Visuospatial Sketchpad: Handles visual and spatial data.
- c. Central Executive: Controls attention and integrates information.
- d. Episodic Buffer: Links working memory with long-term memory.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. listening comprehension skills:

Step 1: Short Listening Tasks: Use brief audio clips to prevent cognitive overload.

Step 2: Note-taking Exercises: Have students jot down key points while listening.

Step 3: Multisensory Support: Use visuals alongside audio inputs.

Step 4: Chunking Information: Present audio content in small, manageable chunks.

Step 5: Immediate Practice: Encourage students to repeat or summarize audio material immediately.

## 6. Embodied Cognition Theory

This theory was proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Cognitive processes are deeply rooted in the body's sensorimotor experiences.

2) Abstract concepts are understood through bodily metaphors and experiences.

3) Learning is enhanced when physical actions accompany cognitive tasks.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. listening and speaking skills:

Step 1: Gesture-Based Speaking Practice: Encourage hand gestures when explaining ideas.

Step 2: Physical Role-Play: Have students physically act out dialogues.

Step 3: Metaphor Exploration: Discuss metaphors (e.g., "time flies") and act them out.

Step 4: Interactive Games: Use movement-based games for speaking prompts.

Step 5: Reflect on Physical Cues: Discuss how gestures and movement aided communication.

## 7. Connectionism

This theory was proposed by McClelland and Rumelhart (1986) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Cognitive processes are based on parallel distributed processing (PDP).

2) Knowledge is represented by connections between nodes in neural networks.

3) Learning occurs by adjusting the strength of these connections.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. grammar skills:

Step 1: Pattern Recognition: Use repeated exposure to grammatical structures in context.

Step 2: Interactive Exercises: Use cloze tests and sentence completion activities.

Step 3: Error Correction: Guide students to recognize and correct patterns of errors.

Step 4: Consistent Practice: Provide frequent practice with similar structures.

Step 5: Feedback Integration: Reinforce correct grammar usage through targeted feedback.

## 8. Cognitive Neuroscience of Memory

This theory was proposed by Squire (1987) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Memory is divided into declarative (explicit) and non-declarative (implicit) systems.

2) Declarative memory involves facts and events (e.g., vocabulary, grammar rules).

3) Non-declarative memory involves skills and habits (e.g., speaking fluently).

4) Brain structures: Hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and cerebellum.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. listening comprehension skills:

Step 1: Declarative Memory Focus: Teach students to recognize common phrases and grammar in listening exercises.

Step 2: Implicit Practice: Use repeated listening drills for automatic understanding.

Step 3: Interactive Activities: Use group listening tasks with discussions.

Step 4: Audio Repetition: Play recordings multiple times to reinforce memory.

Step 5: Reflection and Review: Discuss the listening task to solidify understanding.

## 9. Global Workspace Theory (GWT)

Main Concepts/Principles:

This theory was proposed by Baars (1988) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Consciousness emerges from the integration of information across distributed brain networks.

2) The global workspace acts like a "theater of the mind" where different cognitive processes share and broadcast information.

3) Focused attention is crucial for learning complex tasks.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. listening comprehension skills:

Step 1: Attention Warm-Up: Start with focused listening exercises (e.g., listen to a short story and identify key points).

Step 2: Highlight Key Information: Use auditory cues (e.g., pauses, intonation) to emphasize critical details.

Step 3: Integrate Multiple Inputs: Combine listening with visual aids (e.g., subtitles or images).

Step 4: Reflective Listening: Have students share what they understood and compare it with peers.

Step 5: Gradual Complexity: Increase listening task difficulty progressively to maintain attention without cognitive overload.

## 10. Neuroconstructivism Theory

This theory was proposed by Karmiloff-Smith (1992) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

- 1) Cognitive development emerges from the interaction between genes, the brain, and the environment.
- 2) Knowledge is progressively constructed through experience and repeated exposure.
- 3) Brain development is context-dependent, and learning occurs through neural specialization and plasticity.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. speaking skills:

Step 1: Start with Basic Conversations: Use simple, repeated phrases (e.g., greetings, introductions).

Step 2: Scaffold Speaking Tasks: Gradually increase complexity from simple dialogues to more extended discussions.

Step 3: Interactive Group Activities: Pair students for role-plays and conversation tasks.

Step 4: Contextual Practice: Link speaking tasks to meaningful contexts (e.g., ordering food, asking for directions).

Step 5: Reflect and Adapt: Provide reflective exercises after speaking tasks to strengthen neural pathways.

## 11. Somatic Marker Hypothesis

This theory was proposed by Damasio (1994) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Emotional and bodily states (somatic markers) influence decision-making and reasoning processes.

2) The ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) integrates emotional signals with cognitive processing.

3) Emotions act as shortcuts for decision-making, aiding cognitive functions like attention, memory, and problem-solving.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. speaking skills:

Step 1: Emotionally Engaging Scenarios: Use real-life or emotionally charged scenarios for speaking practice (e.g., describing a favorite childhood memory).

Step 2: Bodily Reactions Awareness: Encourage students to observe physical responses (e.g., nervousness, excitement) while speaking.

Step 3: Reflective Discussion: After speaking tasks, guide students to reflect on their emotional experiences during the task.

Step 4: Feedback Integration: Provide positive feedback linked to emotional and physical responses (e.g., "You sounded confident when you shared your story").

Step 5: Role-play Activities: Create role-plays based on emotionally engaging situations to anchor learning with emotional markers.

## 12. Theory of Mind (Neurocognitive Aspect)

This theory was proposed by (Baron-Cohen) 1995) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Theory of Mind (ToM) refers to the ability to understand others' mental states (e.g., beliefs, emotions, intentions).

2) It relies on specific brain regions: the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), temporoparietal junction (TPJ), and amygdala.

3) ToM is crucial for effective communication and social interaction.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. speaking skills:

Step 1: Role-Play Scenarios: Create conversations requiring students to infer others' intentions (e.g., asking for help, giving directions).

Step 2: Perspective-Taking Exercises: Ask students to retell a story from another character's viewpoint.

Step 3: Emotional Cues Practice: Use videos or images showing facial expressions and discuss the emotions displayed.

Step 4: Storytelling Activities: Have students create stories where characters have hidden motives.

Step 5: Reflective Discussion: After role-plays or tasks, discuss how understanding others' perspectives improved communication.

## 13. ACT-R Theory (Adaptive Control of Thought-Rational)

This theory was proposed by Anderson (1996) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) ACT-R explains how the brain organizes and retrieves knowledge to perform tasks.

2) It combines declarative memory (facts) and procedural memory (skills).

3) The brain uses production rules (if-then rules) for decision-making and learning.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. grammar structures, and sentence patterns:

Step 1: Explicit Instruction: Teach specific writing rules (e.g., grammar structures, sentence patterns).

Step 2: Guided Practice: Use fill-in-the-blank exercises to apply the rules.

Step 3: Procedural Practice: Provide writing prompts requiring repeated application of rules.

Step 4: Error Correction with Rules: Guide students to identify errors using specific production rules.

Step 5: Reflective Writing Practice: Ask students to evaluate their writing based on learned rules.

## 14. Multiple-Trace Theory (MTT)

This theory was proposed by Nadel and Moscovitch (1997) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Each time a memory is retrieved, a new trace is created in the hippocampus.

2) Episodic memories remain dependent on the hippocampus indefinitely.

3) Repeated retrieval strengthens and stabilizes memory traces.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. vocabulary skills:

Step 1: Frequent Retrieval Practice: Encourage repeated exposure and retrieval of vocabulary in different contexts.

Step 2: Use Mnemonics: Link vocabulary to visual or emotional cues to create stronger traces.

Step 3: Spaced Repetition: Revisit words periodically to reinforce traces.

Step 4: Contextual Usage: Incorporate vocabulary into sentences, stories, and conversations.

Step 5: Reflect on Learning: Have students assess how they remembered specific words and their strategies.

## 15. Theory of Neural Plasticity

This theory was proposed by Merzenich (1998) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) The brain is capable of adapting and reorganizing itself through experience and learning.

2) Neural pathways strengthen with repeated use and weaken without it.

3) Critical periods exist for certain types of learning.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. pronunciation skills:

Step 1: Repetitive Practice: Use pronunciation drills for challenging sounds.

Step 2: Auditory Discrimination: Train students to recognize subtle differences in sounds.

Step 3: Immediate Feedback: Provide real-time feedback on pronunciation.

Step 4: Role-Playing: Use real-life scenarios to practice pronunciation.

Step 5: Consistent Reinforcement: Regularly revisit challenging sounds.

## 16. Perceptual Symbol Systems Theory

This theory was proposed by Barsalou (1999) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Knowledge is represented in the brain as perceptual symbols derived from sensory experiences.

2) Understanding words or concepts involves activating sensory-motor representations.

3) Brain regions associated with sensory and motor functions are involved in conceptual processing.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. Vocabulary skills:

Step 1: Multisensory Vocabulary Practice: Teach words using images, sounds, and physical gestures.

Step 2: Action-Based Learning: Pair vocabulary words with actions (e.g., mime the word "jump").

Step 3: Real-Life Contexts: Use real objects (e.g., show an apple when teaching the word "apple").

**Step 4: Story Creation with Symbols:** Have students create stories using sensory-rich descriptions.

**Step 5: Reflect and Review:** Encourage students to recall vocabulary using associated sensory cues.

## 17. Declarative-Procedural Model

This theory was proposed by Ullman (2001) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Language learning relies on two brain memory systems:

a. Declarative Memory: Stores vocabulary and facts.

b. Procedural Memory: Manages grammar and automatic language skills.

2) Different brain regions are involved (e.g., hippocampus for declarative, basal ganglia for procedural).

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. grammar skills:

**Step 1: Teach Grammar Rules Explicitly:** Focus on declarative memory through rule explanation.

**Step 2: Practice Through Drills:** Use repeated grammar exercises for procedural memory.

**Step 3: Interactive Activities:** Apply grammar rules in conversations.

**Step 4: Story Creation:** Let students write or tell stories using grammar rules.

**Step 5: Reflect on Mistakes:** Guide students to identify and correct grammar errors.

## 18. Dual-Route Model of Reading Theory

This theory was proposed by Coltheart (2001) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Reading comprehension occurs through two routes:

a. Lexical Route: Recognizing whole words as visual patterns.

b. Non-Lexical Route: Decoding words using phonics rules.

2) Both routes are necessary for efficient reading comprehension.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. reading comprehension skills:

**Step 1: Phonics Training:** Teach students sound-letter correspondence.

**Step 2: Sight Words Practice:** Introduce high-frequency words for memorization.

**Step 3: Blended Reading Exercises:** Combine phonics and whole-word recognition tasks.

**Step 4: Guided Reading Sessions:** Provide texts with phonically decodable and irregular words.

**Step 5: Comprehension Activities:** Discuss content after reading exercises.

## 19. Predictive Coding Theory

This theory was proposed by Friston (2005) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) The brain creates internal models (predictions) about incoming sensory information.

2) Discrepancies between predictions and actual input (prediction errors) drive learning and adaptation.

3) The brain continuously adjusts its models to reduce prediction errors.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. listening comprehension skills:

Step 1: Prediction Exercises: Before listening, ask students to predict content based on the title or introduction.

Step 2: Active Listening Tasks: Play short audio clips and pause to discuss predictions.

Step 3: Focus on Gaps: Highlight and discuss moments where predictions were incorrect.

Step 4: Repeat Listening with Reflection: Replay audio to reinforce correct predictions.

Step 5: Summarization Task: Have students summarize the audio, focusing on corrected predictions.

## 20. Biopsychosocial Model of Stress and Cognition

This theory was proposed by Lupien et al. (2009) with its main concepts and principles as follows:

1) Stress hormones (e.g., cortisol) significantly impact memory, attention, and executive functions.

2) Chronic stress can impair cognitive functions, while moderate stress can enhance performance.

3) Emotional regulation and stress management are critical for effective learning.

The concepts/principles can be applied in EFL teaching, e.g. reading comprehension skills:

Step 1: Reduce Stressful Conditions: Create a relaxed and supportive reading environment.

Step 2: Scaffold Reading Tasks: Provide structured reading exercises with clear goals.

Step 3: Mindfulness Breaks: Include short mindfulness or breathing exercises before reading tasks.

Step 4: Positive Reinforcement: Offer encouragement to reduce anxiety related to comprehension struggles.

Step 5: Reflective Practice: Have students discuss their emotional state before and after reading tasks.

Although the neurocognitive theories are beneficial for teaching EFL, as mentioned above, they have some disadvantages in teaching EFL. Below are some of them, supported by scholarly evidence and examples.

## 1. Complexity of Theories and Lack of Practicality

Neurocognitive theories are often complex and require specialized knowledge to understand and apply effectively. Many educators lack the training in neuroscience needed to interpret and implement these theories in their teaching practices. For instance, while concepts like working memory and cognitive load are well-documented, translating them into classroom activities requires careful planning and may not be intuitive for teachers without formal neuroscience education.

## 2. Limited Empirical Evidence in Classroom Contexts

While neurocognitive theories are supported by laboratory research, their application in real-world EFL classrooms is still underdeveloped. Many studies are conducted in controlled environments, which do not account for the variability of classroom settings, such as cultural differences, resource availability, or student diversity. This gap between theories and practice makes it challenging for educators to rely solely on neurocognitive principles.

## 3. Overemphasis on Cognitive Processes Over Sociocultural Factors

Neurocognitive theories primarily focus on individual brain functions, often overlooking the sociocultural context of language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). EFL learners are influenced not only by cognitive processes but also by social interactions, cultural norms, and motivations. Solely applying neurocognitive principles may neglect these important external factors, leading to an incomplete approach to language teaching.

## 4. Resource-Intensive Implementation

Applying neurocognitive principles in the classroom often requires additional resources, such as advanced teaching materials, technology, or teacher training programs. For example, using multisensory techniques or immersive tools like virtual reality can be effective but may be prohibitively expensive for schools with limited budgets. This creates disparities in the quality of EFL instruction across different institutions.

## 5. Risk of Oversimplification or Misapplication

There is a risk that educators may oversimplify or misapply neurocognitive concepts due to a lack of understanding. For example, popular ideas like "learning styles" and "left-brain/right-brain dominance" have been debunked as myths but continue to influence classroom practices inaccurately. Misusing neurocognitive theories can lead to ineffective or even counterproductive teaching methods.

## 6. Challenges in Addressing Individual Differences

While neurocognitive theories emphasize the importance of tailoring instruction to individual learners, identifying and addressing these differences in a large, diverse classroom can be difficult. Teachers may find it impractical to design personalized activities for each student, particularly in under-resourced settings where class sizes are large, and individual attention is limited.

## 7. Time Constraints in Curriculum Delivery

Implementing neurocognitive strategies, such as spaced repetition and multisensory activities, often requires more time than traditional teaching methods. EFL teachers working within strict curriculum guidelines may struggle to balance these strategies with the need to cover all required material within a limited timeframe (Sweller & Kalyuga, 2011). This can lead to a conflict between applying brain-based techniques and meeting institutional demands.

## 8. Potential for Overgeneralization

Neurocognitive theories are based on generalized findings about the human brain, which may not apply equally to all learners. Factors like age, first language, prior education, and learning disabilities can significantly affect how students respond to neurocognitive approaches. For instance, adult learners may process language differently than children due to differences in neural plasticity. Overgeneralizing these theories can limit their effectiveness for diverse learner populations.

## Conclusion

Therefore, based on the application examples of modern neurocognitive theories in the aforementioned EFL, they can explicitly offer significant benefits for language educators, teachers, and graduate students in the field of Applied Linguistics and EFL, by providing evidence-based strategies for enhancing language acquisition and instruction. Theories such as Dual-Coding Theory (Paivio, 1971), Working Memory Theory (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974), and insights from neuroplasticity research (Draganski et al., 2004) highlight the intricate processes underlying how the brain processes, stores, and retrieves language information. For example, the Dual-Coding Theory emphasizes the importance of using both verbal and visual channels to reinforce learning, making it particularly effective for vocabulary instruction, where pairing words with images can create stronger mental associations (Paivio, 1971). Likewise, Working Memory Theory underscores the brain's limited capacity to hold and manipulate information in short-term memory, which emphasizes the importance of chunking information, providing repetition, and allowing sufficient time for processing in language lessons (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974). Furthermore, research on neuroplasticity demonstrates the brain's remarkable ability to adapt and reorganize itself in response to language exposure and practice, highlighting the importance of regular, meaningful engagement with language tasks to facilitate long-term retention and skill development (Draganski et al., 2004). For graduate students specializing in EFL, understanding these neurocognitive principles equips them with the tools to design scientifically informed lesson plans, create engaging materials, and conduct research grounded in brain-based evidence. By aligning teaching methodologies with these neurocognitive insights, educators can foster learning environments that enhance language comprehension, retention, and fluency, ultimately empowering students to achieve greater proficiency and confidence in their language skills (Paivio, 1971; Baddeley & Hitch, 1974; Draganski et al., 2004).

However, while neurocognitive theories offer valuable insights into EFL instruction, their practical application presents challenges such as complexity, resource requirements, and potential oversights of sociocultural influences. *To catch up with the modern trend in English teaching at all levels, it is strongly recommended for educators, language teachers, and graduate students in any fields related to EFL to further explore and apply the concepts or principles of the modern neurocognitive theories mentioned in this paper for their teaching including conducting some research studies to investigate their effectiveness. If not, their teaching techniques can be considered old-fashioned, outdated, and unprofessional!*

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## Transcending the Power of Language: A Metadiscourse Analysis of Selected Song of Taylor Swift

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### Abstract

This study qualitatively explores the use of metadiscourse in Taylor Swift's songwriting using a descriptive research approach. The primary objective is to examine how metadiscourse markers contribute to the narrative structure and emotional depth of her lyrics. Using the advanced text analysis tool Text Inspector, six songs—"Enchanted," "Mr. Perfectly Fine," "My Tears Ricochet," "Sparks Fly," "Electric Touch," and "Fifteen"—were analyzed to identify and interpret various metadiscourse elements. The results indicate that personal markers were the most frequently used metadiscourse type across the selected songs. "My Tears Ricochet" ranked the highest, containing four types (5.97%), followed by "Mr. Perfectly Fine" (4 types, 4.88%), "Electric Touch" (5 types, 3.94%), "Enchanted" (3 types, 3.95%), and "Sparks Fly" (3 types, 2.86%). "Fifteen" stood out due to its notable use of sequencing markers, which accounted for 4.23% of its textual markers. These findings highlight Taylor Swift's distinct songwriting style, particularly her strategic use of personal markers to establish emotional connections with her listeners. Her lyrics provide an introspective and expressive lens into her personal experiences, reinforcing the importance of metadiscourse in lyrical storytelling. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how linguistic markers enhance musical narratives. Future research is recommended to explore metadiscourse in the works of other artists to compare linguistic styles and their effects on audience engagement.

**Keywords:** metadiscourse analysis, Taylor Swift, personal markers, text inspector

### Introduction

Metadiscourse is often described by researchers as "the bridge between the writer's mind and the reader's understanding" because it helps structure communication in a way that enhances comprehension and engagement (Baguing, 2024). It allows writers to guide their audience through the text, making content accessible and meaningful (Hyland, 2017). With the rise of digital communication technologies, metadiscourse has become even more significant, as it provides new ways to present

information clearly and effectively. Digital platforms, such as social media and streaming services, have reshaped the writing landscape, emphasizing the need for reader-centered and purposeful text construction.

Despite extensive research on Taylor Swift's songwriting, few studies have explored her explicit use of metadiscourse. Most academic discussions focus on themes of love, separation, self-development, and personal discovery in her lyrics, overlooking the linguistic strategies she employs to connect with listeners. Given the narrative and emotional impact of metadiscourse, analyzing Swift's lyrics through this lens is essential. Understanding how she constructs meaning within her songs can reveal the meta-disciplinary role of language in music. While metadiscourse has been widely studied in academic writing (Liu & Chen, 2022), its role in song lyrics remains underexplored.

This study examines six of Taylor Swift's popular songs—"Enchanted," "Mr. Perfectly Fine," "My Tears Ricochet," "Sparks Fly," "Electric Touch," and \*"Fifteen"—to analyze how metadiscourse enhances lyrical storytelling. These songs were chosen based on their popularity, lyrical complexity, and thematic diversity, ensuring a well-rounded representation of Swift's songwriting techniques. By investigating the use of pronouns, hedges, boosters, and self-references, this research provides new insights into the relationship between language, music, and emotional engagement. The findings contribute to the existing literature on metadiscourse in music, offering a fresh perspective on how linguistic elements enhance both narrative and emotional depth in contemporary songwriting.

## Research Objective

This study aims to analyze metadiscourse usage in Taylor Swift's lyrics and how it contributes to the narrative and emotional depth of her songs. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Identify and examine the linguistic elements (pronouns, hedges, boosters, and self-references) that shape Swift's songwriting.
2. Explore how these elements help construct her lyrical identity and strengthen her connection with listeners.
3. Analyze selected songs ("Sparks Fly," "Mr. Perfectly Fine," "My Tears Ricochet," "Electric Touch," and "Fifteen") to determine the metadiscourse strategies used to evoke emotional responses and enhance storytelling.

## Methodology

Taylor Swift's songs have often been described as "music to braid your best friend's hair to" (Gutowitz, 2020), a phrase that captures the intensity and intimacy defining her songs. As one of the most influential pop artists of the 21st century, Swift possesses a rare talent for writing songs that brings intense feelings in listeners and forge a close bond with them through her words. Her songs are more than just catchy tunes; they tell tales and awaken feelings that allow her to express herself.

This study employs metadiscourse analysis to examine selected songs of Taylor Swift using a qualitative descriptive approach. Six popular songs were chosen based on their popularity with audiences, ensuring their relevance to the study's objectives (Billboard, n.d.). The analysis focuses primarily on the introductions and

choruses of the songs, as these sections are pivotal in establishing their narratives and emotional tones.

The data collection process involved selecting lyrics based on the specified criteria. Text Inspector, a tool that generates word lists and frequency counts for metadiscourse markers, processed these lyrics (Bax et al., 2019). The markers were categorized and prioritized for analysis according to their frequency and functional significance. Examples of metadiscourse elements analyzed included interactive features such as personal pronouns, hedges, boosters, and self-references, as well as interactional devices contributing to audience engagement and emotional impact. The number of tokens analyzed varied per song, with a maximum of 250 words, providing a thorough understanding of how metadiscourse shapes listeners' emotional and cognitive experiences. Furthermore, the results were presented through tables, which visually represented the distribution and significance of the analyzed metadiscourse markers. These visualizations thoroughly provided a comprehensive understanding of the language metadiscourse in Swift's songwriting, emphasizing how metadiscourse shapes the listener's emotional and cognitive experience.

## Results

This section outlines the results obtained from the study. The data were presented, analyzed, and interpreted using tables to provide a clear and comprehensive understanding of the findings.

**Table 1***Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Enchanted" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	All	69 (90.79%)	97 (80.83%)
Logical connective	And	1 (1.32%)	2 (1.67%)
Personal Marker	I	3 (3.95%)	10 (8.33%)
Relational marker	You	3 (3.95%)	11 (9.17%)
Total		7 (9.21%)	23 (19.17%)

Table 1 presents the overall results from the text inspector metadiscourse analysis of the song "Enchanted" by Taylor Swift, highlighting the frequent use of personal pronouns such as "I" and "you," which collectively account for 3 (3.95%) types and 10 (8.33%) of the total metadiscourse markers. This usage underscores the song's focus on individuality, with the singer's voice central to the narrative. As Shi, Y. (2021) suggests, first-person pronouns foster a sense of involvement on the part of the listener by engaging them in the artist's narrative. Supporting this, Graesser et al. (2018) point out that frequent personal pronouns in lyrics significantly boost listeners' engagement, while O'Sullivan (2019) further opines those personal experiences nurture more emotive significance. In contrast, metadiscourse elements like logical connectives are used less frequently, such as the word "and," making up only 1 (1.32%) type and 2 (1.67%) tokens of the total. According to Promova (n.d), the conjunction "and" links words, phrases, or clauses, contributing to logical coherence and the flow of ideas within a sentence. This indicates that the song emphasizes urgency, synonymous with emotions such as infatuation and awe, to pump emotion into the song for its audience.

**Table 2**

*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Mr. Perfectly Fine" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	Everything	68 (82.93%)	102 (80.31%)
Emphatic	Always	3 (3.66%)	3 (2.36%)
Endophoric	See	1 (1.22%)	1 (0.79%)
Hedge	Would	1 (1.22%)	1 (0.79%)
Logical connective	But	3 (3.66%)	5 (3.94%)
Person Marker	Me	4 (4.88%)	9 (7.06%)
Relational marker	Your	2 (2.44%)	6 (4.72%)
Total		14 (17.07%)	25 (19.69%)

For Table 2, the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's "Mr. Perfectly Fine" reveals significant findings, with the most frequently used word list "me," a person marker, which appears in 4 (4.88%) types and 9 (7.09%) tokens in total. Swift's use of "me" strengthens the emotional connection with listeners, positioning the song as an intimate reflection on personal heartbreak. This usage aligns with the narrative techniques observed in "In-the-Picture," where first-person pronouns immerse the audience in the subject's perspective (Parry, 2014; Altair, 2021). Furthermore, Swift's willingness to share her personal experiences through her music has strongly connected with her audience (Graham, 2023), making her songs emotional touchstones that help fans navigate their experiences. However, the least frequently used words were "see," categorized as an endophoric marker, and "would," classified as a hedge, each occurring 1 (0.79%) type and 1 (1.22%) token. Although these markers may appear insignificant, they are essential to the song as "see" aids in creating vivid imagery, making the song more relatable and emotionally engaging (Fitzpatrick, 2022), while "would" introduces a sense of possibility and emotional depth, encouraging reflection and connection with the listener (Daisie Team, 2023). Together, these metadiscourse elements help to craft a song that emotionally connects with its audience, deepening their connection to the song.

**Table 3**

*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "My Tears Ricochet" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	The	60 (89.55%)	70 (76.09%)
Attitude maker	Even	1 (1.49%)	1 (1.09%)
Logical connective	And	1 (1.49%)	3 (3.26%)
Person marker	I	4 (5.97%)	13 (14.13%)
Relational marker	You	1 (1.49%)	5 (5.43%)
Total		7 (10.45%)	22 (23.91%)

Moving on to Table 3, the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's "My Tears Ricochet" highlights the prominent use of personal markers such as "I," which accounts for 4 (5.97%) types and 13 (14.13%) tokens. The singular first-person pronoun "I" indicates an emotional connection between the artist and the song's

themes, particularly in expressing personal trauma and grief. As Nordquist (2023) noted, "I" in lyrical writing heightens the personal perspective, drawing listeners closer to the speaker's experience. This means that the frequent use of the word "I" conveys that Taylor Swift herself relates to the song's situation. On the other hand, attitude markers such as "even" appear infrequently, comprising just 1 (1.49%) type and 1 (1.09%) token. Thus, this minimal usage contributes to the song's emotional weight, drawing attention to the stark contrast between the narrator's vulnerability and the unjust cruelty she faces. Swift's careful use of "even" intensifies the emotional depth, highlighting themes of injustice and unresolved grief (Leach, 2020). Overall, these words reinforce the song's intimate, emotionally charged narrative, contributing to the betterment of the song.

**Table 4***Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Sparks Fly" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	The	93 (88.57%)	132 (71.74%)
Attitude Marker	Even	1 (0.95%)	1 (0.54%)
Emphatic	Know	2 (1.90%)	3 (1.63%)
Endophoric	See	1 (0.95%)	3 (1.63%)
Hedge	Would	2 (1.90%)	3 (1.63%)
Logical Connective	And	2 (1.90%)	7 (3.80%)
Person Marker	Me	3 (2.86%)	22 (11.96%)
Relational Marker	You	1 (0.95%)	13 (7.07%)
Total		12 (11.43%)	52 (28.26%)

Turning to Table 4, the results from the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's "Sparks Fly" show the frequent use of personal markers such as "I," "me," and "my," which collectively account for 3 (2.86%) types and 22 (11.96%) tokens. The use of "I" signifies the speaker as the subject of the action, "me" as the object, and "my" as a possessive marker, emphasizing the personal and introspective nature of the song (Pinto, n.d.; Carter et al., 2016). These pronouns help Taylor Swift convey an intensely personal narrative, allowing her to connect with the audience emotionally as she shares her feelings, experiences, and views through the music. In contrast, the other three that have the lowest average of 0.95% are classified as the attitude marker, "even" with a token of 1 (0.54%), endophoric, "see" with a total of 3 (1.63%) tokens and a relational marker, "you" has 13 (7.07%) tokens. Using these markers, she enhances the emotional connection with her listeners, allowing them to feel the nuances of her relationships and experiences. As Swift explores growth, love, heartbreak, and self-discovery themes in "Sparks Fly," these pronouns and markers draw listeners into her journey, fostering a sense of shared experience (Songfacts, n.d.; Kartika, 2024).

**Table 5**

*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Electric Touch" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	To	106 (83.46%)	170 (76.92%)
Emphatic	Know	3 (2.36%)	3 (1.36%)
Endophoric	See	1 (0.79%)	1 (0.45%)
Hedge	Could	4 (3.15%)	11 (4.98%)
Logical connective	And	4 (3.15%)	11 (4.98%)
Person Marker	I	5 (3.94%)	14 (6.33%)
Relational marker	Your	2 (1.57%)	9 (4.07%)
Sequencing	First	2 (1.57%)	2 (0.90%)
Total		21 (16.54%)	51 (23.08%)

Table 5 presents the overall results from the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of the "Electric Touch" song by Taylor Swift. It emphasizes the dominant use of person markers like "I" and "you," which account for 5 (3.94%) types and 14 (6.33%) tokens. This prevalence reflects the song's intimate and personal narrative, placing the speaker at the center of the emotional journey. In contrast, endophoric markers are the least frequent, with just 1(0.79%) type and 1(0.45%) token, highlighting a focus on emotional immediacy over textual cohesion. The frequent use of first-person markers underscores the deeply introspective nature of the lyrics, where the personal perspective fosters emotional authenticity and relatability (Stavrou, 2022). Similarly, Ransom (2021) observes that the repeated use of "I" and "me" in Electric Touch draws listeners into the speaker's vulnerability and reflection, enhancing the song's relatable and authentic appeal. Together, these linguistic features create a narrative that resonates emotionally with its audience.

**Table 6**

*Metadiscourse Analysis of the Song "Fifteen" by Taylor Swift*

Word List	Word Examples	Types	Tokens
Unlisted	Gonna	59 (85.51%)	75(75.00%)
Emphatic	Know	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Endophoric	Figure	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Evidential	Believe	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Logical Connective	And	1 (1.45%)	6 (6.00%)
Person Marker	I	1 (1.45%)	1 (1.00%)
Relational Marker	You	2 (2.90%)	12(12.00%)
Sequencing	Next	3 (4.35%)	3 (3.00%)
Total		10 (14.49%)	25 (25.00%)

Finally, Table 6 presents the overall results from the Text Inspector metadiscourse analysis of the song "Fifteen" by Taylor Swift. The study classifies the song's words into numerous linguistic types, totaling 69. The results revealed that multiple terms (85.51%) fell into the unlisted category, indicating that they did not fit into the pre-defined types used for the analysis. Among the categorized words, "you,"

as a relational marker, was the most often used word among the categorized words, appearing in 2 (2.90%) types out of a total of 12 (12%) tokens overall. It emphasizes how "you" connects the narrator and the listener, transforming the narrative into a shared experience. This style involves an imagined or recalled relationship where the narrator engages with the listener or a silent protagonist, establishing a mutual sense of presence and co-action Rembowska (2022). This perspective aligns with how Taylor Swift uses "you" in Fifteen to draw listeners into a reflective and personal dialogue. In contrast, the last words used in Fifteen were "known" as Emphatic, "figure" as Endophoric, "I" as Person Maker, and "believe" as an Evidential in the analysis. They all have the same number of occurrences, 1 (1.45%) type and 1 (1.00%) overall. These linguistic words emphasize the song's emotional depth and personal reflection, enhancing its ability to engage the listener meaningfully and authentically.

## Discussions

The metadiscourse analysis of Taylor Swift's selected songs reveals that personal markers are the most frequently used linguistic elements, emphasizing the artist's strong personal connection with her lyrics. Among the six songs analyzed, "My Tears Ricochet" contained the highest percentage of personal markers (5.97%), followed by "Mr. Perfectly Fine" (4.88%) and "Electric Touch" (3.94%). This highlights Swift's use of first-person pronouns like "I" and "me" to engage listeners emotionally and create a more personal storytelling experience.

In contrast, metadiscourse elements like logical connectives (e.g., "and") were used less frequently, indicating that Swift prioritizes emotional intensity over structural cohesion in her lyrics. Additionally, "Fifteen" stood out for its use of sequencing markers (4.23%), which contribute to its reflective storytelling style.

Overall, Swift's strategic use of metadiscourse enhances the narrative depth and emotional engagement of her lyrics, making them more relatable to listeners. The findings suggest that personal pronouns and relational markers play a crucial role in shaping the listener's experience, reinforcing the impact of her storytelling through music.

## Recommendations

By using the findings of the research that showed the existence of personal markers in Taylor Swift's lyrics, further studies may go into the different roles that these markers play. By studying personal pronouns, self-referential elements, and other markers, scholars can determine how they contribute to the development of the lyrical persona and create an emotional connection with the listener, thereby improving understanding of their role.

Other forms of metadiscourse markers such as hedges, boosters, and logical connectives would give a deeper understanding of the linguistic moves done by Taylor Swift and other musicians. The relationships among different types of markers can be seen to converge and produce specific rhetorical effects. For example, by comparing Taylor Swift's work with that of other authors, it is possible to determine unique and special traits in her songwriting artistry. Therefore, with such an investigation of metadiscourse in various styles of music and their specific cultural environments, one would be able to find what similarities and differences exist among those different musicians in the strategies to create meaning and evoke feeling in communication.

As subsequent research focuses on the metadiscourse discourse of the current popular music, given the changing popular music trends and the expanded roles of modern digital technologies in changing consumption behaviours, the windows into which researchers may see the degree by which the discursive dynamics of artists, music, audiences, and technology have changed are through the metadiscursive frameworks that take the shape of the current mass medias through which popular music audiences receive their favorite music.

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## **AI Tools for Content Creation in Presentations of Business English Students' Practices and Preferences in Thai EFL Context**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the content generation process for Business English presentations among Thai EFL students, with a focus on how these technologies support language learning and presentation skills development. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interview with 55 students enrolled in Business English Presentation courses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize quantitative data on students' usage patterns and preferences, while qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis to identify key themes. The findings reveal that students utilize AI tools extensively for grammar correction, content development, and paraphrasing, which significantly enhance the clarity, coherence, and professionalism of their presentations. These tools are particularly valued for their ability to automate error detection, offer creative content suggestions, and maintain consistency in tone and style, thereby enabling students to produce more polished and effective presentations. Furthermore, AI tools are instrumental in helping students condense complex information and create visually supportive materials, contributing to more engaging and comprehensible presentations. The research emphasizes the importance of integrating AI tools thoughtfully within the curriculum, ensuring that they complement rather than replace traditional language learning practices.

**Keywords:** AI tools for learning, content creation, presentation, Business English, Thai EFL learner

### **Introduction**

Effective communication skills are widely acknowledged as a crucial asset for university graduates, and this necessity is particularly emphasized in Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) institutions (Thongpan & Thumawongs, 2023). These educational settings now place a heightened emphasis on undergraduate students possessing proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The overarching goal is to equip students with a comprehensive linguistic toolkit that caters to the demands of their academic and professional journeys (Sarwanti et al., 2023). In Thai EFL institutions, language instruction prioritizes the active use of language, with a notable emphasis on refining students' speaking skills (Aprianto & Zaini, 2019). This emphasis becomes particularly noticeable for students enrolled in specialized programs such as Business English. In fields like Business English, where strong English skills

are essential and presentations are a common evaluation tool, clear and confident delivery of ideas is crucial.

Many courses require students to give presentations to be evaluated. These presentations can vary from individual deliveries to group presentations involving elements like program-generated slides, posters, or even video presentations (Wattananan & Tepsuriwong, 2015; Panyasai, 2023). However, a key challenge is ensuring that specific courses, with their inherent limitations, can adequately prepare students for the diverse speaking styles they'll encounter across their academic journeys. To address this challenge, alternative methods beyond traditional classrooms should be explored. Seeking alternative ways to assist students in comprehending and fulfilling the varied demands of academic speaking assignments becomes crucial (Gentner, 2019; Santos, 2020; Bean & Melzer, 2021). Furthermore, providing students with opportunities for practice and constructive feedback to enhance their oral communication skills is essential (Burns, 2019).

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has significantly impacted language education by offering innovative avenues for personalized learning and content creation (Perera & Lankathilaka, 2023; Michel-Villarreal et al., 2023). Other studies also highlight the necessity for more empirical research on the effectiveness of AI-assisted language instruction, particularly within specific skill areas such as presentations (Djamaliddinovna, 2025; Özdere, 2023). Addressing this gap not only contributes to scholarly understanding but also provides practical insights for educators, curriculum designers, and students aiming to optimize language learning through technology.

Particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context such as Thailand, where Business English presentations are crucial for students' professional success, the adoption of AI tools presents substantial benefits. However, a clear research gap remains regarding how these AI technologies specifically support Thai EFL learners in effectively preparing and delivering business-oriented presentations. Existing research has explored general AI applications in language education but has not sufficiently addressed the impacts of specific tools on enhancing presentation skills within Thai higher education.

This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the integration and effectiveness of specific AI tools—namely ChatGPT, Gemini, Grammarly, and QuillBot—in facilitating the preparation of Business English presentations among Thai undergraduate students. These tools provide several benefits: Grammarly and QuillBot enable students to enhance linguistic accuracy, refine their writing style, and effectively paraphrase content to achieve professional-quality presentations. ChatGPT and Gemini, on the other hand, assist in creative idea generation, efficient brainstorming, and overcoming writer's block through interactive dialogues. Furthermore, AI-driven feedback mechanisms provide immediate, personalized insights into students' language use, including pronunciation and grammar, complemented by interactive simulations via chatbots and virtual learning environments.

By integrating these accessible AI tools into a centralized learning platform tailored for Thai EFL undergraduate students, this study explores their practical use in content generation for Business English presentations. Moreover, the study investigates students' perspectives and preferences regarding AI tool utilization, contributing

valuable insights into enhancing pedagogical approaches and technology integration in EFL contexts. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

1) In what ways do students integrate AI tools into their content generation process for Business English presentations?

2) What are the students' preferences towards employing AI tools to support their Business English presentations?

## Research methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research approach to evaluate the perceptions of students regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to aid their Business English presentations. Quantitative data came from questionnaires that were conducted after they finished the course of the semester. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were derived from individual interviews by using semi-structured interview to deepen understanding of the students' preferences.

## Research Participants

In the study, the participants were divided into two groups based on their academic year and involvement in the Business English Presentation (BEP) course. The first group consisted of 55 students selected through purposive sampling due to their specific experience with the BEP course. This group included 21 fourth-year Business English students who responded to the questionnaire because they had completed the BEP course in the academic year 2023, as well as 34 third-year Business English students who were enrolled in the BEP course during the academic year 2024.

The second group was a smaller subset of third-year Business English students selected through criterion sampling, focusing on those with high performance levels in presentation tasks. This group comprised six volunteer students, who were assigned pseudonyms: *Manee*, *Jingjai*, *Thongchai*, *Mali*, *Aree*, and *Sukjai*. These students, who demonstrated exceptional skills and high scores in their presentation assignments, were chosen to provide more in-depth insights into the effectiveness of AI tools in supporting presentation skills.

## Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study include questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, both carefully designed to collect detailed data from Thai EFL undergraduate students regarding their use of AI tools in Business English presentations.

The questionnaire aimed to gather quantitative data about students' practices, preferences, and perceived effectiveness of AI tools in their presentation preparation processes. It combined multiple-choice items for clear, straightforward responses; Likert-scale statements to measure attitudes and levels of agreement systematically; and open-ended questions to capture more detailed, qualitative insights. Sample questions from the questionnaire include:

*Which AI tools do you frequently use when preparing Business English presentations? (Select all that apply: ChatGPT, Gemini, Grammarly, QuillBot, others)*

*What challenges, if any, have you experienced when integrating AI tools into your presentation preparations?*

Semi-structured interviews were selected for their flexibility, combining the structure necessary to guide discussions on relevant topics with the freedom to explore emerging insights. This approach allowed for obtaining in-depth qualitative insights into students' experiences, attitudes, and reflections on using AI tools, while enabling spontaneous follow-up based on participant responses. Examples of interview questions are:

*Can you describe how you typically use AI tools like Grammarly or ChatGPT in your presentation preparation process?*

*What specific benefits have you noticed when using these AI tools?*

*Have you encountered any challenges or limitations with these tools? Could you provide examples?*

*How do you feel about the impact of AI tools on your overall confidence and performance in delivering presentations?*

Interviews were scheduled according to students' convenience and conducted in both online and onsite formats. Although no significant differences were found between these modes concerning participant engagement or response quality, face-to-face interviews allowed for observation of non-verbal communication, enhancing contextual understanding. Additionally, spontaneous follow-up questions prompted by students' non-verbal cues during in-person interviews frequently provided deeper insights into their feelings. Informal conversations that occurred before and after onsite interviews also helped uncover additional details about students' experiences. To ensure content validity and linguistic accuracy of both research instruments, a rigorous validation process was conducted. Three experts specializing in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English Language Teaching (ELT) evaluated the instruments based on criteria such as clarity of instructions, relevance to research objectives, linguistic accuracy, and appropriateness for the targeted EFL context reviewed and evaluated the questionnaire and interview guidelines. Their feedback and recommendations were used to improve the instruments, ensuring they measured the intended constructs accurately and were suitable for the educational context of the study.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

The analytical process involved the use of descriptive statistical techniques, such as percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarize and interpret the quantitative data on how students integrate AI tools into their content generation process. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed through content analysis to identify themes and insights regarding students' use of AI tools in their presentations. This approach allowed for a detailed exploration of students' experiences and attitudes towards the integration of AI tools in their presentation practices.

The researcher first obtained verbal consent from Business English students for their participation in the study. Following this, formal invitation documents were provided for the students to sign. Participation in the survey and interviews took place after the students had completed their semester.

At the end of the semester, the questionnaires were distributed to the students. The researcher designed the questionnaire using Google Forms and generated a QR code for easy access. Students completed a five-minute questionnaire to identify how they integrated AI tools into their content generation process for Business English presentations.

To gain in-depth data on the students' preferences, six students were formed to schedule interviews, which could be conducted both online and onsite. These interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, during which students shared their preferences for using AI platforms.

The researcher then analyzed the collected data, both quantitative and qualitative, to address the research questions. Descriptive statistical techniques were used to summarize the quantitative data, while content analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data. This comprehensive approach provided a detailed understanding of how students integrate AI tools into their Business English presentations.

Ethical considerations are crucial in research to protect the rights of participants. This study strictly followed ethical guidelines by obtaining written informed consent, clearly communicating the research purpose, and maintaining confidentiality. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's goals, the timeline for data collection, and any potential benefits, with all personal information kept anonymous. Data was gathered using coded identifiers, and findings were reported in aggregate to safeguard individual identities, with secure storage protocols maintained throughout the research.

To ensure data reliability and credibility, triangulation was utilized, combining questionnaire responses and interview data to cross-check results. Also, member checking was also conducted to enhance validity, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy and consistency of the data in relation to their experiences.

## Results

### 1) In what ways do students integrate A.I. tools into their content generation process for Business English presentations?

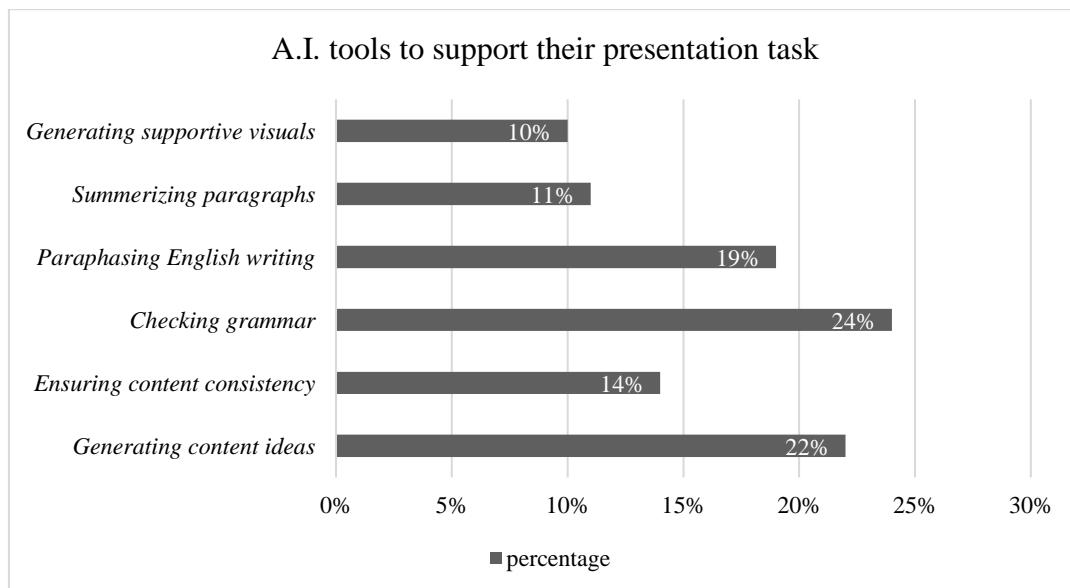
From the twenty-one responses, students reported that they often use AI tools to support their presentations. They highlighted various ways these tools assist them, including content creation and grammar correction. These functions significantly aid them during the preparation stage of their presentations, allowing them to produce more polished and cohesive work.

When asked about their preferred AI features, the students indicated several specific uses for content creation (See Figure 1):

Students (24%) use AI tools to correct grammatical errors in their presentations, ensuring clear and effective communication. These AI grammar checkers identify and correct mistakes such as punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and tense usage, helping to create polished, professional presentations that maintain credibility

and audience engagement. Additionally, these tools provide explanations for corrections, thereby enhancing students' writing skills and boosting their confidence. Moreover, AI tools play a crucial role in assisting students (22%) with brainstorming and developing new ideas, particularly during the initial stages of content creation. By analyzing vast amounts of information, these tools can provide suggestions based on relevant topics, trends, and keywords, helping students overcome writer's block and explore a wider range of ideas than they might generate on their own. Furthermore, students (19%) use AI tools to rephrase their writing, improving clarity and avoiding plagiarism. These paraphrasing tools make complex ideas more understandable and help maintain academic integrity by presenting information in original words, offering multiple rephrased versions, saving time, and enhancing writing skills. Consequently, AI paraphrasing tools lead to clearer, more polished presentations, thus improving communication and academic performance.

In addition, AI tools maintain a consistent tone and style in presentations (14%) by ensuring uniformity in writing, terminology, and formatting. They prevent shifts in voice, eliminate repetition, and offer real-time feedback, resulting in a polished, clear, and engaging presentation that enhances audience understanding and engagement. Similarly, AI summarization tools (11%) help students shorten information by highlighting key points and keeping presentations concise. These tools extract essential information, reduce information overload, and enhance clarity and brevity, ultimately saving preparation time, improving presentation structure, and aiding in better retention of information, which leads to more effective and engaging presentations. Lastly, AI tools assist students (10%) in creating custom visual aids, enhancing engagement and visual appeal. They save time, ensure design consistency, and provide creative solutions, with AI-generated visuals such as infographics and charts improving communication and making presentations more engaging and easier to understand.

**Figure 1***The Students Preferences in Using AI Tools to Support Their Presentation Task*

These insights underscore the valuable role AI tools play in various stages of presentation preparation, from initial idea generation to final edits and enhancements. The students' feedback suggests that AI significantly contributes to improving the quality and efficiency of their work, ultimately leading to better presentation outcomes.

## 2) What are the students' preferences towards employing A.I. tools to assist with their Business English presentations?

To further determine students' preferences for employing AI tools to assist with their Business English presentations, an interview session was conducted. The researcher invited an external observer with over seven years of experience in English language teaching, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), to participate in the comparison of the interview data.

Four groups of students from a Business English course were selected by the researcher, representing high, medium, and low performance levels. To ensure the reliability of the data obtained from the interviews, the quantitative data were first analyzed by the researcher and then jointly coded with the external rater. The data was tasked with confirming and providing qualitative feedback on the following data:

### (1) Checking grammar

Based on the interviews, students highlighted that AI tools significantly help in checking grammar for presentations by identifying and correcting errors such as punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and tense inconsistencies, both in the presentation script and on the slides. Tools like Grammarly, QuillBot, Scribbr, and ChatGPT not only suggest corrections but also offer explanations, aiding students in learning and improving their grammar skills. By enhancing clarity and readability, these AI tools make presentations more professional and easier to understand. This automation saves time, allowing students to focus more on content creation. Moreover, AI tools help maintain a consistent tone and style, which enhances credibility and audience engagement. Here are a few comments from this group of Business English students.

Excerpt 1: "*AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT catch grammar errors quickly, saving me time and making my presentations more professional.*" – Manee

Excerpt 2: "*QuillBot and Scribbr help keep my presentations consistent and error-free, boosting my confidence and audience engagement.*" – JingJai

As illustrated by the quotes, students found AI tools like Grammarly, QuillBot, Scribbr, and ChatGPT invaluable for improving the grammar, clarity, and professionalism of their presentations. These tools not only save time by automating error correction but also enhance confidence and audience engagement by maintaining consistency and producing high-quality, error-free content.

### (2) Generating content ideas

The research findings reveal that students benefit significantly from using AI tools to generate content ideas for their presentations and assignments. These tools, such as ChatGPT and Gemini, assist students by offering topic suggestions, outlining structures, and providing creative prompts that they can expand upon. This support not only sparks students' creativity but also helps them overcome writer's block, enabling them to explore diverse perspectives and angles that they might not have considered otherwise. Additionally, students use AI tools to facilitate brainstorming sessions, refining their ideas and leading to more comprehensive and well-rounded content.

Excerpt 1: “*AI tools like ChatGPT have really helped me brainstorm and come up with fresh ideas for my presentations.*” – Thongchai

Excerpt 2: “*When I’m stuck, AI tools offer creative prompts that spark new directions for my assignments.*” – Manee

Excerpt 3: “*Using AI for content generation has made my work more comprehensive and engaging.*” – Aree

As reflected in the quotes, the finding highlights the significant impact of AI tools, like ChatGPT and Gemini, in enhancing students’ ability to generate content for their presentations and assignments. These tools not only provide valuable support by suggesting topics and creative prompts but also help students overcome challenges like writer’s block, leading to more innovative and comprehensive work. The positive experiences shared by students underscore how AI integration in the content generation process fosters creativity and results in more engaging and well-rounded material.

#### (3) Paraphrasing English writing

The results highlight indicate that students benefit greatly from using AI tools to paraphrase English writing. These tools, such as QuillBot and Grammarly, assist students by offering alternative phrasing and rewording suggestions, which help them convey ideas more clearly and avoid plagiarism. Students use these AI tools to refine their writing, ensuring that their work remains original while accurately capturing the intended meaning. Additionally, AI paraphrasing tools provide real-time feedback, allowing students to learn different ways of expressing the same idea, thereby improving their language skills.

Excerpt 1: “*AI tools like QuillBot have been invaluable in helping me rephrase my sentences. They allow me to express my ideas more clearly and effectively, which has really improved my writing.*” – Mali

Excerpt 2: “*Using AI for paraphrasing not only helps me avoid plagiarism but also ensures that my writing remains original while accurately conveying the meaning I intend.*” – Jingjai

As supported by the quotes, the finding shows that AI tools like QuillBot and Grammarly significantly enhance students’ ability to paraphrase English writing. These tools not only help students express their ideas more clearly and effectively but also help them to avoid plagiarism and maintaining originality. The positive experiences shared by students highlight the valuable role AI plays in refining their writing and improving their language skills.

#### (4) Ensuring content consistency

The findings reveal that students benefit significantly from using AI tools to ensure content consistency in their writing. These tools, such as Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Gemini, assist students by identifying inconsistencies in tone, style, and terminology across their work. Students use AI to maintain a uniform voice and structure throughout their assignments, which enhances the overall coherence and readability of their content. Additionally, AI tools provide real-time feedback, helping students align their writing with specific guidelines or standards, whether for academic papers or presentations. By reorganization the editing process, AI tools enable students to produce polished, consistent, and professional-quality work.

Excerpt 1: “*AI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT help me keep my writing consistent, making sure the tone and style are the same throughout my work.*” – Thongchai

*Excerpt 2: "Using AI to check for content consistency has made my assignments more polished and professional, which really improves the overall quality." – Mali*

From the excerpts above, the finding demonstrates that AI tools like Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Gemini play a crucial role in helping students ensure content consistency in their writing. By identifying inconsistencies in tone, style, and terminology, these tools enable students to maintain a uniform voice and structure, resulting in more polished and professional-quality work. The positive feedback from students underscores the value of AI in enhancing the coherence and readability of their assignments.

### (5) Summarizing paragraph into order

The study reveals that students benefit considerably from using AI tools to summarize paragraphs when preparing slides for presentations. Tools like ChatGPT and SummarizeBot assist students by condensing lengthy text into concise, key points that are easier to present. Students use these AI tools to quickly identify the most important information, ensuring their slides are clear, focused, and impactful. This process not only saves time but also helps students refine their content, making their presentations more effective and engaging. Overall, AI tools significantly enhance students' ability to create well-structured and informative presentation slides.

*Excerpt 1: "AI tools like ChatGPT have been incredibly helpful in condensing long paragraphs into concise key points for my slides. This not only saves me time but also makes my presentations much clearer and more focused." – Sukjai*

*Excerpt 2: "Using AI to summarize content has really improved the quality of my presentations. It ensures that my slides are both clear and engaging, which helps me communicate my ideas more effectively." – Mali*

*Excerpt 3: "SummarizeBot allows me to quickly highlight the most important information from lengthy texts, making my slides well-structured and impactful. It's a game-changer for preparing presentations." – Aree*

According to the quotes, the study demonstrates that AI tools like ChatGPT and SummarizeBot play a crucial role in helping students effectively summarize paragraphs for their presentation slides. These tools not only save time by condensing lengthy text into concise, key points but also enhance the clarity and focus of the presentations. The positive feedback from students highlights how AI significantly improves the quality and impact of their slides, making their presentations more structured and engaging.

### (6) Generating Supportive Visuals

The findings indicate that students benefit greatly from using AI tools to generate supportive visuals for their presentation slides. Tools like Canva, Visme, and/or Jasper.ai assist students by offering templates, design suggestions, and even generating custom graphics that align with the content of their slides. Students use these AI tools to quickly create visually appealing and relevant images, charts, and infographics, which enhance the overall effectiveness of their presentations. This not only saves time but also helps students ensure that their visuals are professional and engaging, making their presentations more impactful and easier for audiences to understand.

Excerpt 1: “*AI tools like Canva have been incredibly useful for creating professional-looking visuals. They make my presentations not only more appealing but also more effective in conveying my ideas.*” – Sukjai

Excerpt 2: “*Using AI to generate charts and infographics has really improved my slides. The visuals are more engaging and help the audience grasp the content more easily.*” – Thongchai

Excerpt 3: “*With AI tools, I can design custom graphics that align perfectly with my content, which saves me a lot of time and makes my presentations look more creative and organized.*” – Jingjai

As conveyed in the quotes, the findings show that AI tools like Canva, Visme, and/or Jasper.ai significantly enhance students’ ability to create supportive visuals for their presentations. These tools enable students to quickly produce professional and engaging graphics, charts, and infographics that align with their content, making their presentations more impactful and easier for audiences to understand. The positive feedback from students underscores how AI tools streamline the design process, saving time while improving the overall quality and effectiveness of their slides.

## Discussion

The findings from both the questionnaire and interviews provide a thorough understanding of the integration of AI tools into students’ Business English presentations. These results underscore the critical role these technologies play in enhancing various aspects of content generation, but they also emphasize the necessity of a balanced approach in their application.

The questionnaire results demonstrate that AI tools are instrumental in supporting content generation, aligning with existing research on the transformative impact of AI in education. For instance, Alam (2023), and Sharadgah and Sa’di (2022) discuss the potential of AI in transforming educational practices, particularly in areas like writing and presentation skills. However, while the use of AI tools is highly beneficial, it is essential to consider both their advantages and limitations. The survey highlighted that 24% of students frequently use AI for grammar correction, significantly improving the professionalism and clarity of their presentations. This is consistent with Amin (2023), who found that AI-driven tools like Grammarly enhance the quality of student writing. Nonetheless, the over-reliance on these tools can impede the development of language proficiency and critical thinking skills, a concern echoed by Aprianto and Zaini (2019), who argue for the integration of AI as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for active learning.

The interviews further reveal students’ preferences for AI tools, particularly for grammar checking. Students frequently cited tools like Grammarly, QuillBot, Scribbr, and ChatGPT for their effectiveness in correcting grammatical errors and providing explanations that facilitate language learning over time. This reflects the findings of Santos (2020), who highlights the role of AI in supporting language acquisition. However, as Blau et al. (2020) suggest, an over-reliance on AI could diminish students’ ability to develop self-regulation and critical grammatical proficiency, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach in using these tools.

Moreover, the results highlight AI's role in brainstorming and content idea generation, with tools like ChatGPT and Gemini helping students overcome writer's block. This is in line with Kasneci et al. (2023), who discuss AI's potential in fostering creativity and idea generation. However, the caution that AI-generated ideas may sometimes lack the depth and originality that come from critical human thought, leading to superficial content, is also supported by Delgado et al. (2020), who stress the importance of human oversight in the content creation process.

In addition to content creation, AI tools were found to be crucial for paraphrasing and ensuring content consistency. Tools like QuillBot and Grammarly were noted for their ability to help students improve clarity and avoid plagiarism, contributing to more original work. This is supported by research from De La Vall and Araya (2023), who highlight the effectiveness of AI in maintaining content integrity. However, excessive reliance on these tools could lead to a mechanical approach to writing, where comprehension is sacrificed for rewording, as Mishra and Mishra (2020) notice.

Furthermore, AI tools were also beneficial in summarizing lengthy paragraphs for presentation slides. Tools like ChatGPT and SummarizeBot assist students in condensing complex information into key points, enhancing the clarity and focus of their presentations. This aligns with Panyasai (2023), who found that AI tools can streamline content for better audience engagement. Nevertheless, there is a risk that essential details might be oversimplified, potentially undermining the depth of the presentation, as noted by St Amant (2020).

Lastly, the generation of supportive visuals is another area where AI tools significantly enhance students' presentations. Tools like Canva, Visme, and Jasper.ai quickly produce professional-quality visuals that align with the presentation content, making complex information more accessible to audiences. Liu et al. (2018) support the idea that AI enhances the visual appeal of presentations, though there is a concern that this convenience might lead to generic designs lacking creativity, as highlighted by Gentner (2019).

In summary, AI tools can significantly enhance the quality, clarity, and effectiveness of Business English presentations, but their use requires a balanced approach. Educators should guide students to utilize these technologies as supplements rather than replacements for their skills, allowing students to benefit from AI while developing independent writing, critical thinking, and design abilities. This integration not only improves presentation quality but also prepares students for professional business communication scenarios by fostering essential skills like clarity, conciseness, and audience engagement. By leveraging AI in this manner, educators can ensure that students are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of modern business communication effectively.

## **Recommendations**

Future studies should investigate AI's impact on specific factors like student confidence, speaking fluency, and long-term language retention to provide deeper insights into AI-assisted learning effectiveness. Curriculum designers should strategically incorporate AI activities as complements to traditional teaching methods, balancing AI-generated content with instructor-led components to maintain critical thinking and creativity in language learning.

This study on Business English presentations has notable limitations, including its small sample size of 55 students from a specific academic program, which limits generalizability. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, and the research primarily highlights perceived benefits without thoroughly examining potential drawbacks such as over-reliance on AI tools or the erosion of fundamental language skills.

To build on these findings, future research should include larger, more diverse samples and conduct comparative studies across different disciplines to understand how AI effectiveness varies with academic demands. Researchers should examine potential downsides like AI dependence and its impact on critical thinking, design experimental studies comparing AI-assisted presentations with traditional methods and explore how educators can effectively guide AI tool implementation in educational settings.

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## Language Clues on the Surface: Behind the Message of Graffiti

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### Abstract

This is a qualitative descriptive paper anchored with semiological analysis that investigated the graffiti that has progressed from an art form to powerful way of expressing thoughts; this aimed to understand the meaning and interpretation of the graffiti of schools in Ermita, Manila. The study analyzed the symbolic elements and artistic styles used in different graffiti works. The researchers included six (6) pieces of graffiti found in school surfaces that featured meaningful phrases, creative elements, and artistic expression. The graffiti analyzed in this study revealed themes such as personal struggles and ambitions to socio-political issues. The study discovered that graffiti is a multi-dimensional expression, revealing personal thought, social criticism, and cultural representation. These findings highlight the reality of university life, shedding light on the challenges, aspirations, and creative tendencies of students. Furthermore, understanding the implication of graffiti as a medium of expression is educationally significant, as it offers insights into the social and cultural dynamics within academic institutions. Educators and administrators can use this understanding to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that values student perspectives. The study enhances the understanding of how graffiti conveys a wide range of messages and meanings to illustrate the role that art plays in constructing urban environments and reflecting societal values.

**Keywords:** Graffiti, urban art, self-expression, meaning

### Introduction

Graffiti is an art of writing, painting, drawing something on the wall, or various other surfaces. Because the only form of public expression in ancient times was to scratch a solid surface or a wall, it gets its name from the singular Italian word "graffito," which refers to the act of scratching. Graffiti is one form of visual communication not permitted where an individual or a group marks the public environment without authorization (Ferrell, 1996).

Navitas (2008) affirms that graffiti exists in urban cityscapes and through time as a communication form, meant to register existence, thoughts, and experience. Although its forms are changing, its nature does not change from its primitive stages to the present time.

Wall art, including graffiti and murals, is one of the common modes of expression in urban settings. Murals can relate viewers to local history or culture and strengthen community bonds. There is a sense of involvement and connection, allowing the viewer to engage with the artwork and its message (RevArt Team, 2023). According to Fiveable Inc. (2024), graffiti often is created without permission and serves as a form of expression in public spaces. Graffiti also serves as an "illicit cartography," reflecting the social, political, and cultural landscapes of urban areas (Soergel, 2021). Despite the subjective nature of impact and quality of murals and graffiti art, they remain powerful forms of public art that continue to enliven, inspire, and provoke urban environments (Editor, 2022).

Furthermore, graffiti originated as a form of open expression of artistic reactions to conflict, injustice, and life's hardships (Castleman, 1982). Often the voice of unprivileged people, it is a powerful medium for people or organizations to express social, political, or personal issues (Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987). According to Eden Gallery (2021), graffiti can also be political, funny, illegal, or even beautiful.

Graffiti art has become a strong medium for the illustration of urban environments and telling city narratives (Zhang, 2024). It can be as simple as phrases and messages or as complex as murals and designs. Graffiti can be a protest, social commentary, or personal expression that can counter the marginalization trends in media and society (Alhatimi Aleessawi, 2024). It is split into many categories according to its style, location, and even medium of conveyance, which are classified as tags, throw-ups, pieces, murals, stencils, street art, wild style, and many more. According to some studies, even stickers and posters have been referred to as graffiti (El Sayegh, 2021; Albaik, 2023).

In addition, it is also a way of communicating in urban spaces that connects with and informs new viewers. Artists use stylized language to tell stories that both the creators and the viewers must interpret (Alhatimi Aleessawi, 2024). Meanwhile, as Albaik (2023) indicated, graffiti's perception varies based on its impact on the environment. According to El Sayegh (2021), citing Bates (2014), graffiti can evoke surprise, joy, and laughter, but its connection to cultural heritage is often overlooked. It is traditionally considered as vandalism related to an undesirable subculture, graffiti is nowadays appreciated by some artists as helping in the fulfilment of movement goals through disseminating information, setting events, and stimulating activism (Alhatimi Aleessawi, 2024). Besides its emotional and social effect, graffiti may be considered as markers for neighbourhood spatial memory (Albaik, 2023).

Nevertheless, there is confusion among many regarding the distinction between vandalism and graffiti. Gomez (1992) reiterated that graffiti should not be stamped vandalistic or criminal-within itself but rather artistic expression. He believed that encouraging people to make use of authorized areas and equipment for legitimate uses while denouncing illegitimate acts could alleviate the concern for the negative effects of vandalism and distinguish street artists from taggers. More effort needs to be compelled in differentiating graffiti from vandalism within laws, public discourse, and the art community.

The study of Paudel and Neupane's (2019) explores the contents, and the language used in graffiti reveals its prevalence in urban areas worldwide, reflecting social, cultural, and political issues. The study uses Multimodal Discourse Analysis to analyze 44 graffiti artworks, revealing themes of culture, politics, gender inequality, and violence against women. The research is beneficial for scholars studying graffiti language and educators integrating it into teaching.

In addition, Hussien et al. (2024) study that analyzed textbook graffiti by UNRWA preparatory school students in Jordan from a sociolinguistic perspective, viewing it as an act of vandalism, and found that the student graffiti commonly addressed themes of love and hate, while faith and religion appeared less frequently. The analysis noted the use of antonyms, and a few swear words. These insights are crucial for understanding the social and cultural dynamics of the student community, helping educators create a supportive learning environment.

While there are a lot of insights to the graffiti as a wall art, the researchers observed that there are only limited research explores the role of graffiti in student self-expression and its impact on creativity, learning environments, and psychological well-being. Graffiti's potential as a meaningful form of self-expression and its effects for academic and personal growth are still not well understood, despite being frequently seen as an act of vandalism or rebellion. Additionally, there is a lack of research on integrating graffiti in educational settings to promote creativity and self-expression.

The research also points to the possibility of using graffiti as a means of bridging different disciplines and enriching learning, particularly art education that has to do with truly diverse and complex topics. This enables the students to learn more about art, improving their creativity and thinking skills; this also gives them the freedom of self-expression through making graffiti. It also provides an understanding of the skills and creativity of graffiti painters so that teachers can make use of graffiti types in the art education program. The study is a stepping stone for the research on the history and value of graffiti as an art form and contributes to our understanding of the cultural significance.

## **Research Objective**

This study aimed to provide a semiological analysis of graffiti of schools in Ermita, Manila, focusing on its meaning and symbolic significance. This considers the stylistic elements such as the colors and words, which serve as a powerful tool of expression to reveal the underlying thoughts and intentions.

## **Methodology**

This study employed qualitative descriptive research anchored by semiological analysis to comprehensively analyze various graffiti in schools in Ermita, Manila. Semiological analysis is a set of methods used to study of signs and symbols, both written and visual, with an emphasis on how they convey meaning. In this study, it was applied to search for the underlying messages and themes embedded in the graffiti, in line with the study's objective of exploring the social and artistic aspects of student expressions in the school environment. Following the comprehensive framework laid out by Dye (2021), the researchers rigorously applied the five steps of qualitative data analysis. These steps included the initial gathering and collection of qualitative data, the organization and connection of the gathered information into a

qualitative dataset, coding the qualitative data for systematic analysis, extracting insights from the analyzed data, and ultimately reporting these insights derived through meticulous analysis.

The data were collected using digital tools to visually document graffiti on surfaces like walls and barricades within the universities. This method of capturing images was a fundamental means of gathering and collecting qualitative data, aligning with the principles outlined by Dye (2021) in qualitative data analysis. The researchers included six graffiti found in the school surfaces. These pieces were chosen for their meaningful phrases, creative elements, and the potential to reveal personal expression and social commentary. Despite the seemingly small number of graffiti works, they were carefully selected to represent a variety of styles and themes, ensuring a well-rounded exploration of the graffiti culture present in the universities.

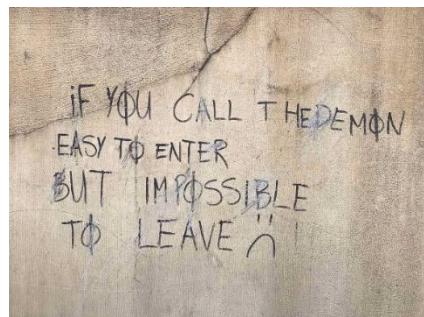
Upon collecting the visual data, the researchers systematically organized and classified the images based on their characteristics. Each piece of graffiti underwent a detailed examination to uncover its hidden meaning, considering aspects such as the words used, font styles and colors employed, elements incorporated, and symbolism conveyed. Subsequently, the researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of the graffiti, examining its visual and contextual elements, thematic expressions, and educational significance. By identifying patterns among the graffiti across various areas, they derived meaningful insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of the artistic and social landscape of schools in Ermita, Manila.

## Results

This section displays the collected data, presented, analyzed, and interpreted using figures and tables. It highlights the words, symbols, styles, and messages conveyed by six graffiti pieces which were organized and categorized.

**Table 1***Personal Expression Graffiti*

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
<b>Figure 1.1</b> "IF YOU CALL THE DEMON EASY TO ENTER BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO LEAVE"	<b>Color:</b> - Black - represents boldness <b>Word:</b> - Direct - Vulgar - "Demon" - in the graffiti, this word - symbolizes a negative trait that causes a great deal of grief or harm, effectively acting as an evil spirit torturing a person from within.	The artist wanted to convey a darkness of soul that becomes impossible to get rid of. The graffiti conveys a feeling of isolation that brings negative emotions, such as feeling of loneliness and suffocation. The graffiti can be related to students who have low self-esteem and tend to



**Table 1 (Continued)**

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
	<p><b>Other details:</b>  Sad face emoji - represent the whole context of the graffiti, it adds up to the vibe that the artist conveyed, which is the feeling of hopelessness.</p>	face inner struggles and feel like they are living in darkness. In addition, the artist also used a black letter and capital lettering to fully highlight the warning that the artist wanted to present and to show boldness in the message.
<p><b>Figure 1.2</b>  “FAUSTO”</p> 	<p><b>Color:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blue - blue as the dominant color can represent both calm and introspection, suggesting the depth of human emotions and the quiet moments we experience in our journey through life.</li> <li>- White - white highlights add a layer of contrast, bringing light and brightness to the piece.</li> <li>- Black - The black outline around the letters provides structure and definition, offering a sense of stability and order. Just as humans need boundaries and frameworks in their lives.</li> </ul>	<p>The artist intends to use bubble letters that evoke playfulness and innocence to symbolize the “FAUSTO” graffiti. Blue is a color that symbolize calm and introspection, white can represent hope and clarity, and black serves as a reminder that although life can be fluid and unpredictable, it is also necessary to have clarity and direction.</p> <p>The conflict between ambition and constraint, desire and consequence, and the pursuit of purpose in life can all be represented by this graffiti art. Fausto (lucky and fortunate)</p>

**Table 1 (Continued)**

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
<p>The black lining acts as a reminder that while life can be fluid and unpredictable, there is also a need for clarity and direction.</p> <p><b>Word:</b> “FAUSTO” - Symbolize as “Lucky” and “Fortunate”</p>	<p>represents the struggle between desire and fate as well as the pursuit of life's purpose. Hope for a fortunate break is often the source of desire for happiness or success, but the results can be unanticipated and bring with them unanticipated expenses or difficulties.</p>	<p>Although ambition frequently results in “lucky” or “fortunate” outcomes, it frequently fights with internal and external constraints, exposing the disconnect between our aspirations and realistic objectives. Consequently, the pursuit of meaning is influenced by the interaction of aiming higher, facing constraints, and negotiating the unpredictable influence of chance in our destiny.</p>

**Table 1** (*Continued*)

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
<p><b>Figure 1.3</b> “DEAD”</p> 	<p><b>Color:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The white letters stand out clearly against the black background, it represents mental clarity, which can feel overpowering or isolated during times of emotional distress.</li> <li>- The color black represents sadness, isolation, and problems related to mental health. Dark colors are sometimes associated with sadness, disorientation, or even negativity, which reflects the weight or finality that the word "DEAD" conveys. It could also represent a lack of hope when the future appears unknown and academic or personal stresses overshadow any feeling of positivity or possibility.</li> </ul> <p><b>Word:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “DEAD” - in the graffiti, it represents a perceived lack of passion or drive, implying a struggle to remain positive in the face of challenges</li> </ul>	<p>The word "DEAD" was artistically painted near the entrance to the campus, adding another layer of interpretation. The artist's work is focused on students and serves to address issues in academic life.</p> <p>It has more than one connotation in the student's language. These are the tiredness, burnout, and life-altering happenings that students go through when pursuing academic success under severe pressure.</p>

**Table 2**

*Social Commentary Graffiti*

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
<p><b>Figure 2.1</b>  <b>“SUICIDAL THOUGST” “SIN”</b></p>  <p><b>Color:</b>  - Black- signifies the dark and gloomy undertones behind the words. It emphasizes the intensity and seriousness of the message, particularly the phrase “SUICIDAL THOUGHTS” and “SIN.” The use of black reflects a heavy tone, effectively revealing the depth of the emotions connected with the words. Its bold presence ensures that the message is both visually striking and emotionally impactful, drawing attention to the weight of the subject matter being expressed.</p> <p><b>Word:</b>  - “SUICIDAL THOUGST” (suicidal thoughts)- it is an explicit expression of mental anguish.  - The word “SIN” refers to a behavior that diverts from accepted moral standards, frequently in a religious or ethical context.</p>		<p>The graffiti is located near a university gate, adding an additional layer of meaning. It may reflect not only the personal emotions of the creator but also their response to the pressures or challenges associated with academic life. The word "sin" may be connected, as in many cultural and religious contexts, suicide or even suicidal thoughts are often perceived as sinful, creating a conflict between the emotional distress expressed and the moral judgment implied.</p> <p>It could suggest that the artist himself is struggling with feeling of guilt as he added an exclamation point in the word “sin.” This combination shows a conflict between the person’s emotional pain and the pressure from society or religion to follow certain moral rules.</p>

**Table 2** (*Continued*)

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
	<p><b>Other details:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The “:( “emoticon, it is simple, yet it visually conveys sadness, in the graffiti it was placed after the words that could symbolize the emotional weight of the message.</li> <li>- “!!”, the exclamation points after the word “SIN,” emphasizing the strong point of the word.</li> <li>- The misspelling of “THOUGST” (instead of 'thoughts') could also carry significance. The creator may have intended to add a word or combine words, which could further connect to the meaning of their work.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Figure 2.2</b> “SEGGO!!?”</p> 	<p><b>Colors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black - this often symbolizes danger or death which aligns with the gas mask reflecting themes of survival.</li> <li>- White - this represents clarity or emptiness and highlights the graffiti resembling metallic tones.</li> </ul> <p><b>Word:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “SEGGO”</li> </ul>	<p>The word "seggo" can be considered an abstract signature, a common detail in street art to express a coded or hidden message.</p> <p>The graffiti could be a call to awareness about global threats such as environmental issues or pandemic because of the gas mask that symbolizes the need for protection and the</p>

**Table 2** (*Continued*)

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
	<p><b>Other details:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "!!?" - the exclamation and question marks at the bottom convey a tone of surprise, disbelief, or confusion.</li> <li>- Central gas mask symbol - Symbolized the threat of war, pollution, and the lengths humanity would go to for survival (The Nevard, n.d.).</li> </ul>	"!!?" as if demanding immediate action or questioning about the current issues like threats, pandemics, and societal issues.
<p><b>Figure 2.3</b> "MAD"</p> 	<p><b>Color:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monochrome Palette - The graffiti applies only black outlines without any fill colors, meaning either simplicity or that it is not complete.</li> </ul> <p><b>Word:</b></p> <p>"MAD" - implies raw emotions inside a school by students like frustration, anger, or the pressure of dealing with feelings academically and socially.</p>	<p>This graffiti is rendered in obnoxious bubble letters on a wall, possessing elements of rebellion, individuality, and urban decay. The simplistic single-color scheme indicates that it was done spontaneously probably because of the covert and unauthorized nature of graffiti art, highlighting more on the aspect of putting one's signature rather than doing good art. Furthermore, the graffiti word represents growing up as a haywire phase when students feel 'mad' at the rules,</p>

**Table 2** (*Continued*)

Graffiti	Symbolism and Style	Analysis
		expectations, or the mishaps they bear in that process. Yet another touch to graffiti would be self-expression, reflecting how the students want their voices, emotions, and individual tendencies to be seen and heard.

## Discussion

### Personal Expression Graffiti

The Figure 1 focuses on the graffiti artist's self-expression, which could be philosophical or literal. According to Alonso (1998), it is classified as "existential" or "expressive" graffiti that includes unique personal commentary. These graffiti pieces tend to be created by students as they are found close to schools. Figures 1.1 and 1.3 illustrate the difficulties students have in their academic lives; they are nervous and tensed, and they struggle in today's collegiate environment. It expresses their emotions, focusing most often on their academic lives, using crude language. However, Figure 1.2, which is blue in hue and conveys the word "Fausto," which translates to "lucky and fortunate," is seen as a positive message about a student currently improving their education. There is also a more complex meaning for "Fausto," as it may also mean "shabby" or "worn out," which presents a more pessimistic perspective. A more balanced understanding of the term is required considering of this duality, which highlights the personal nature of graffiti interpretations and how it can change based on the viewpoint of a viewer.

Stylistically, Figures 1.2 and 1.3 are written in "Throw-ups," which are composed of bubble letters filled in with solid colors, frequently accompanied by shadows or 3D effects (Albaik, 2023). Both graffiti integrate the usage of bubble lettering and sharp edges, which create a depth in appearance and a dramatic contrast. The former makes a nice contrast with the blue background by employing black as their first outline and shadows with white as their second outline. The lettering is partially filled in with white, giving it a light blue fill. The latter has a simpler design, with only white outlines and the subtle elements of the "D" being inverted crosses, which could give the piece an anti-Catholic connotation, revealing a deeper cultural or ideological issue. The graffiti in Figure 1, on the other hand, is categorized as "Tagging" since it is written in plain English with all letters capitalized except for the first one, which is ironic. This indicates that the creator prioritized the message over aesthetics. Crossing the "O"s is a stylistic decision that has no specific meaning. Additionally, it included the sad emoticon that establishes the tone for the entire piece.

This is in line with the conclusions of the study of Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2017) about the exploration of graffiti on university walls that showed how students utilize graffiti to convey humor, symbolism, irony, short forms, acronyms, and abbreviations to convey their feelings. Most of the graffiti in the research often depicts personal subjects like oneself, family, and friends. They are expressions of the artist's emotional, mental, or physical condition. For students, some of the graffiti represents the difficulties and achievements of living at the university. The researchers will be able to study the core recurring themes and contextual meanings of students' graffiti by first classifying the "raw" data into meaningful concepts and then putting them into appropriate categories using thematic analysis.

### **Social Commentary Graffiti**

The second table presents graffiti that depicts a social commentary theme. In Figure 2.1, it directly addresses the significant issue of suicidal ideation, underscoring the stigma surrounding mental illness and the importance of seeking help. As stated in the study of Delaware (2024), graffiti like that alleviates the negative perceptions surrounding mental health. Meanwhile, the Figure 2.2 signify a symbolic drawing—the gas mask—to draw attention to pressing global issues such as pandemics and environmental concerns. The design around "Seggo," especially with the gas mask, could signal themes of survival, anonymity, or critique of environmental and societal crisis. It serves as a call to action, urging people to consider the implications of these challenges. The nature of this graffiti highlights the urgency and intensity of the message, implying that the artist or the environment are unsecure of collapse or notable change. Like the goal of the second graffiti, many other graffiti works often described to make public statements and as a form of art for expressing ideas and emotions (Zolner, 2007).

Collectively, these graffiti pieces utilize public spaces to address pressing social issues, challenging societal norms, and provoking thought (Grosz, 2001). By doing so, they provide insight into the struggles of individuals in urban environments, touching on issues such as mental health, environmental concerns, and systemic neglect. This graffiti, often dismissed as vandalism, emerges as a powerful medium for social commentary (Tsilimpounidi, 2015; Zhang, 2017).

The first graffiti, categorized as "Tagging," is a contrast to the other two. According to Poon (2023), "Tagging" is the most basic form of graffiti. In Figure 2.1, it features the bold message "SUICIDAL THOUGST," its handwritten style, bold lettering, and the use of black ink create a sense of urgency and despair. The misspelled term "thougst" adds to the raw and unfiltered emotion of the piece and the added religious connotation with the word "SIN" draws attention to the depth of the artist's emotional turmoil. In contrast, Figures 2.2 and 2.3 exhibit a more stylized and playful approach. Both are "Throw-ups" that employ bubble letters. This style is the popular technique in graffiti art since it allows the artists to leave a recognizable mark quickly (Archambeau & Kagan, n.d.). Figure 2 portrays a gas mask, a symbol often linked to themes like environmental pollution, warfare, and public health crises. Its intricate and exaggerated design, along with the stark black-and-white color scheme, creates a striking and unsettling effect. The third graffiti with its simple, monochrome palette, and bold lettering of the word "Mad" reflects common graffiti elements often associated with rebellion against societal norms and rules. This act of unauthorized expression

symbolizes a form of resistance, challenging societal structures while asserting a voice that cannot be ignored (Wrest, 2012).

This aligns with the findings of the study that explores the evolution of street art from graffiti to social commentary by Wanjiku (2024). It examines how graffiti has developed from its origins into a compelling medium for social discourse. Despite being perceived as vandalism, graffiti evolved into a valid art form that subverts social conventions and reclaims public areas. Das (2023) asserts that street art and graffiti are effective means of elevating underrepresented voices, challenging established social systems, and fostering social change.

These findings highlight the reality of university life, shedding light on the challenges, aspirations, and creative tendencies of students. Understanding graffiti as a medium of expression is educationally significant, as it offers insights into the social and cultural dynamics within academic institutions. Educators and administrators can use this understanding to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment that values student perspectives. However, this paper is only limited to selected graffiti landmarks of the schools in Ermita, Manila. The findings of this study may not be generalizable to other contexts of graffiti.

## Recommendations

The researchers recommend further exploration and analysis of graffiti to uncover the messages they convey. Appreciating such works can help promote creative expression and contribute to a broader understanding. Future research should examine the impact of graffiti on university communities across National Capital Region, potentially leading to initiatives that celebrate and integrate student creativity into the educational landscape. Further research could expand on this study by using different research framework and approach of the graphical representations not only on its aesthetic aspect but also to the framework and dimensions. This could also enhance exploration and appreciation of graffiti as a legitimate art form and cultural expression. Deeper understanding of the social, emotional, and cultural importance of graffiti may be possible through research methodologies such as mixed methods, ethnographic approaches, and qualitative interviews. Furthermore, examining graffiti's role as a medium for cultural expression and social commentary beyond its visual characteristics using frameworks like semiotic or discourse analysis may reveal more.

Additionally, institutions could encourage inclusiveness and encourage students to express themselves through programs, such workshops or academic courses that appreciate graffiti. In ultimately, further studies on graffiti might contribute to its perception as a significant cultural activity and a tool for societal change.

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## **Spiritual Crisis in Modernism: A Study of W. B. Yeats's Poetic Vision**

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### **Abstract**

This research paper aims to explore the depiction of spiritual crisis in W. B. Yeats's poetry. William Butler Yeats is one of the prominent modernist poets of the English literary canon. Yeats is renowned for his intricate language, vivid imagery, and symbolic richness. He largely used a great deal of symbols to depict the modern man's moral, political, and spiritual crisis of his time. In this study, the author selects two great poems of W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming' and 'Sailing to Byzantium.' The study critically examines these poems from a modernist perspective. Yeats clearly depicts the moral degradation, spiritual sterility, fragmentation, alienation, and disillusionment of early twentieth-century post-war modern Europe. Methodologically, the study is based on a descriptive-analytical approach. In the light of the poems' analysis, the findings of the study show that Yeats's poetic expression mirrors the modernist spiritual vacuum. This study offers fresh insight into the spiritual crisis of modernism through Yeats's poetic lens.

**Keywords:** modernist poetry, spiritual crisis, symbolism, The Second Coming, Sailing to Byzantium,

### **Introduction**

William Butler Yeats is a prominent modernist poet, whose poetry reflects political, moral and spiritual plight of the modern man. The 20th century literature is characterized by historical and social changes that greatly affected its writers. These changes were the World War I and the scientific discoveries, particular the intellectual theories. This negative influence leads to the modern man's disillusionment and alienation. Not only has the modern man been greatly affected by these transformations, but modernist literature has also absorbed their impact. Thus, the modernist writers became obsessive of the decline of modern man's values.

Modernist literature is largely influenced by these scientific discoveries that have completely shaken the modernist writers' religious beliefs in Christianity. The Biblical origin stories were disproved by Charles Darwin's book the *Origin of Species* (1859). In addition, Sigmund Freud's psychological theories have profound effects on the 20th century literature. In the early twentieth century, Freud's ideas changed how we perceive human behaviour. He created and developed many theories, including the

three levels of consciousness, the theory of personality as well as the Oedipus Complex. He also tried to explain the human needs, fears, and anxieties of the modern man. Accordingly, these ideas or worries have created a kind of uncertainty, disillusionment, alienation and loss of religious values in a world that became morally fragmented.

Yeats is often grouped with fellow modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden. Those writers have underscored how spiritual barrenness was a widespread modernist concern. As modernist poets, they have portrayed the themes of decay, disillusionment, alienation and the moral decline of the modern's man. Yeats's *The Second Coming* and *Sailing to Byzantium* as well as Eliot's *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* have realistically depicted the collapse of modernist civilization.

On a similar vein, W. H. Auden depicted spiritual loss of the modern man in his poetry. This depiction can be clearly seen through the themes of disillusionment, alienation, uncertainty, and decline of religious beliefs. He portrayed modern life as devoid of true and deep meaning, highlighting how individuals constantly struggle to find a purpose in a world that is dominated by science, war and materialism. A clear example of Auden's depiction is his poem "September 1, 1939", where he captures the anxiety of a world on the brink of war and the lack of morality and spirituality. This poem is considered one of the most popular poems that Auden has ever written, which was a response of the outbreak of World War II. In addition, Auden's poem "Museé des Beaux Arts," expresses a profound exploration of spiritual loss, suffering and struggle in a shattered world that is filled with disillusionment, tragedy and agony.

The collapse of spirituality and tradition makes the modern world sterile, lustful, and money oriented. It is clear that materialistic attitude and spirituality that vividly depicts the prevalent maladies of the modern civilization as reflected in Yeats and Eliot's poetry. Both poets trace the crises of the modern man deepened by robotic and routinized life. Their poetry clearly reflects the attitude and culture of the 20th century. It began to question everything about the hardships of modern life and individual's plight that is caught by materialism, hopelessness and loss of faith.

## William Butler Yeats as a Modernist Poet (1865-1939)

William Butler Yeats is considered by many poets, critics, and scholars as one of the greatest English language poets in the 20th century and most certainly, Ireland's greatest poetic treasure. Though he was born in Dublin, Ireland, he was raised and studied in London, where he met intellectual figures who contributed to shape his artistic talent as a modernist writer. In his early education, Yeats read the works of great writers such as William Shakespeare, John Donne, William Blake, George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde. His family had greatly impacted him and created his unique personality.

His father, John Butler Yeats, was a lawyer turned to a precariously successful well-known painter, as well as an intellectual, a skeptic, an agnostic, and a wit. His mother, Susan Pollexfen was a quiet, religious woman of deep, intuitive feelings. She learnt him to write and paint his own feelings freely. Besides, his life in London was a great station in his life which exposed him to cultural and literary influence, a matter which later shaped his intellectual and artistic growth.

Yeats was not a literary figure in Ireland, but also a political nationalist. He became a Senator in the Irish Free State for two terms. In December 1923, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. He wrote special poetry which reflects his nation's history and aspiration. His poetry was praised by the Nobel Prize Committee as an "inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation".

Yeats's poetic evolution was shaped by the political climate of his era. Initially, his poetry reflected an idealized, aesthetically rich world inspired by Romanticism, expressing a deep longing for a utopian realm and a desire to escape the harsh realities of life. This shift in his poetic style resulted in him being awarded the Nobel Prize in literature (Kelly, 2003, p. 231). His works were enriched with the use of myths and symbols which were regarded as complex. His volume of poetry includes, *The Wild Swans at Coole*, *The Tower*, *Michael Robartes and the Dancers* and other great ones.

When Yeats died in January 1939, he quickly emerged as a lingering presence within Modernism. The first to acknowledge his spectral influence was W. H. Auden, who composed his renowned elegy, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, a month later, in February 1939:

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities  
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections. . . .  
The words of a dead man  
Are modified in the guts of the living. . . . (Howes, 2006, p. 1)

For Auden, Yeats is a distasteful Orpheus, whose corpse dismembers into the scattered leaves of his volumes of poetry, undergoing a queasy process of digestion in the guts of his readers (Howes, 2006, p. 59). Yeats's poetry is very difficult to understand easily because it is shaped by different periods and circumstances. In this regard, Ramji Lall (2004) states, "W. B. Yeats stands out as a dominant figure of his times. The circumstances of his life and his unique temperament led him through all the movements and influences of his age, from decadent nineties, to almost catastrophic forties" (p. 7). Yeats's literary career covers three historical periods, each it has its own features. In this context, Howes (2006) says:

Few modern writers have had careers as long, varied, and complex as W. B. Yeats. Born in 1865, he produced works that arguably belong to each of three major literary historical periods or traditions: the Romantic, the Victorian, and the Modernist. (p. 1).

This quotation clearly emphasizes the significant evolution of Yeats's literary career. His transition from one period to another contributes to artistic depth. These stages have greatly influenced his literary career. This influence is clearly seen in his poetry which reflects the Irish folklore, myths, mysticism, and modern's man dilemma. It is his later period which polished his artistic and aesthetic skill. He adopts modernist features such as objectivity, individuality, simplicity and symbolism. These features are crucial to Modernist poetry where the poets emphasize the personal imagination, culture, emotions, memories and every day's problems.

As a modernist figure, Yeats has influenced his contemporaries and successors such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W. H. Auden. His love for his country and Irish nationalism deepen his sadness for the postwar negative state, chaotic world and modern man's crisis. He emphasizes the moral, spiritual and decline of humanity and civilization. His poetry embodies the spirit of the modern man and age. He goes further to explore profound themes of immortality, chaos, and loss of faith. After math the war, people became shattered, disappointed, alienated, anxious, and loneliness. Yeats reflects different landscapes he has experienced in his poetry as symbolic representations of spiritual, moral and psychological states of modern humanity.

Yeats's literary career is the most famous one in the history of modernist poetry. He begins as a Romantic visionary where his first works show the influence of Romantic poets. According to some scholars, the Romantic Period began with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This was one of the first collections of poems that strayed from the more formal poetic diction of the Neoclassical Period.

By examining the main features of Romanticism, one considers Yeats as a late-Romantic poet, because of the methodological and thematic similarities his poetry displays with the conventions of Romanticism. This tendency, however, was the beginning of Yeats's writing career. In his later poetry, he depicts modernist themes and practices modernist techniques. That is why he is widely regarded as a modernist writer, alongside T. S. Yeats.

Under the pressure of political, social and cultural crisis, he becomes a heroic realist and nationalist. Being an old man, he changes his writing style. Yeats's poetry draws deeply from ancient Irish legends and folklore, blending them with mystical and spiritual themes. This kind of poetry is quite different from his contemporaries. Unlike modernists who explored free verse, Yeats remained committed to traditional poetic forms such as structure, meter, rhyme scheme, rhythm and figures of speech. He even employed modernist techniques in his later poems, a matter which makes him the unique poet who could combine between the old and the modern.

Indeed, the influence of modernism on Yeats's poetry is quite clear. The gradual shift from the traditional language of his early poetry to a modern style has an evidence in his later poems. This shift makes him directly explore complex themes. This style can be clearly seen in his works such as *In the Seven Woods*, *Responsibilities*, *The Green Helmet*, *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *The Tower* (1928), *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), and *Last Poems and Plays* (1940). These works have established him as a leading figure among the 20th century English-language modernist poets.

## **The Concept of Spiritual Crisis**

Spirituality as a religious concept, is highly related to religious faith. In this case, it is connected to the Christian values and traditional biblical wisdom. The history of Christian spirituality is of great significance. A great part of what makes Christian spirituality distinctive is its underlying beliefs-in other words, how it understands the reality of God, the values of Christianity, the human nature, and how these components interconnect. This obligation implies a complete belief in God, His prophets and divine

books, specially, the principles of Christianity in this context. Thus, religious spirituality can be seen as a doctrine.

Broadly speaking, the term "spirituality" is totally connected to religion which holds an important place for most of the believers. Religion, generally referred as an organized belief system within a relationship with the Creator who has the power and controls the whole universe, and shapes the individual's fate and actions. In this regard, it generally entails a sense of connection to something greater than oneself and often involves a quest for meaning in life. As a universal human experience, spirituality deeply resonates with our emotions, souls, and minds.

Spirituality encompasses the exploration of universal themes such as love, compassion, altruism, life after death, wisdom, and truth. It is also associated with a deep awareness of divine reverence, inspiring religious individuals and saints to strive for higher levels of piety and wisdom. In this regard, it means the lack of spiritual values and true love that the modern man does not have. It further reflects our inability to take part in the spiritual tasks that God has assigned to us as believers.

In the field of literature, spirituality explores the deep relationship between human existence and the spiritual realm. In this case, it reflects the existential crises, loss of faith, and the decline of personal, social, cultural and religious identity. In the field of poetry, the theme of spiritual sterility is realistically depicted by prominent poets who profoundly have been drastically influenced by this state. For instance, Yeats contends that the decline of spirituality and tradition has rendered the modern world sterile, lustful, naïve, and materialistic. His poems explore the maladies of modern civilization, depicting the struggles of the individual who adopts capitalism as a new belief system, ultimately abandoning Christian values. This shift leads to spiritual emptiness, sexual corruption, and psychological alienation to those people who placed wealth and material possessions above all other concerns.

Indeed, not only Yeats who depicts the moral disintegration of the modern man, but also Eliot's in his poems. *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925) explore disillusionment, moral and spiritual condition of the modern humanity. This desperate state of individuals is spiritually described as empty, hollow and disconnected from divine presence (Hinchliffe, 1987, p. 10). By using fragmented language and rich symbols, Eliot highlights the moral and religious decay, frustration, alienation, and despair of the modern man. The collapse of traditional values have been widely depicted in both poems.

## Intellectual Background

During his literary career, Yeats experienced several hard times that shaped his personality, ideology, philosophy, and melancholy. These hardships have profoundly affected his emotions and writing. One of the most painful experiences that Yeats went through was the story of his failing love which shook his life entirely. Thus, Yeats's emotional experience is largely marked by personal struggle and achieving dreams.

Yeats fell in love with Maud Gonne the moment he met her. She was well known for being the muse and long-time love interest of W. B. Yeats. She was twenty-two year old when she arrived at the Yeats's family home to visit his father. In his memoirs titled "Autobiographies," in the section titled "Reveries Over Childhood and Youth" (1914), Yeats wrote, "I had never thought to see in a living woman so great

beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, poetry, to some legendary past." Apparently, his deep love for Maud Gonne had left him heart broken. This strong emotional love remains as a source of heartache and long suffering.

In spite of marrying Georgie Hyde-Lees, their relationship did not fill the emotional gap in his heart. These painful experiences, emotional distance, true love and romance have largely created many challenges in his life. Not only failed marriages, but also temporary romantic relationships that had deeply created tension and struggle between his idealistic views of love and the realities of his personal life, a matter which was significantly marked by sadness, alienation and disappointment.

Yeats wrote poems that were filled with bitterness and distress during the period between 1922-1927. He was greatly influenced by his father's death in 1922. In addition, he was badly touched by the severe Irish Civil War, which erupted in June, 1922 and had impacted him profoundly. This harsh war remains as a significant source of distress, not only for him but also for the all Irish people. Moreover, alongside his concerns for his country, Yeats harbored deep resentment toward aging. In a society like Ireland's- or indeed, anywhere in Europe or America at the time-Christian values were nearly inescapable. Although Yeats was raised in a Protestant household, his father's atheism likely instilled a sense of doubt in him. The concept of pilgrimage-an inevitable journey every individual must undertake through life and beyond-became a fundamental element of his symbolism and philosophy, serving as a unifying theme in both poems.

### **Yeats's Personal Vision**

Yeats emerged to prominence as one of the most significant poets of the era, whose vision seeks deeper meaning beyond conventional belief. Deeply shaped by mysticism, mythology and personal insights, as revealed in his esoteric work *A Vision*, Yeats created a poetic landscape that confronted disorder by turning toward eternity, spirituality, symbolism, and transcendence.

The poems are analyzed through explaining symbolism, thematic content, and poetic structure. In the light of the poems' analysis, symbolism emerges as a fundamental device in Yeats's poetry. He uses it to enrich the poems and serve his thematic structure. In each poem, he employs certain symbols to serve his thematic structure. For example, he refers to second coming of Christ Jesus as in the Bible revelation and idealizes Byzantium as a symbol for spiritual life by a metaphorical journey to that city. Yeats draws from symbolism the ability to create universal, mythic symbols that, in his view, serve to redeem the decline of the modern world.

Unlike his contemporaries, Yeats clearly responded with a sense of detachment and ironic despair. He countered the spiritual sterility of his time with a vibrant imaginative approach that resisted the modern crisis. The author argues that Yeats's poetic vision offers a unique response to the spiritual crisis of modernism through myth, symbolism, and metaphysical systems.

Yeats's poetic vision is deeply rooted when he blends various themes in his works. They include myth, mysticism, history, and personal experience, through which he sought to explore the spiritual and emotional depths of human life. Yeats suggests that poetry should be connected the physical world with the spiritual one. That is why he often turned to Irish folklore, mythology, and occult philosophy. He often expresses his vision by using symbols in his works. Being an old man, his vision is totally

changed. Whereas his early poems are marked by romantic and idealistic tones, his later poems are filled with political tension, aging, disillusionment and quest for spirituality.

Broadly speaking, Yeats presents contrasting visions of the spiritual crisis of modernism in his two great poems "The Second Coming" and "Sailing to Byzantium." For instance, he depicts a state of spiritual collapse of the world in The Second Coming. This pessimistic view of the brittle world causes chaos and violence, symbolized by the apocalyptic vision of a monstrous 'second coming'. This vision clearly shows his belief in the cyclical nature of history and the decline of the spiritual values.

On the contrary, he gives an optimistic vision of spiritual transcendence in Sailing to Byzantium. The speaker in the poem tends to escape from the decay of physical world to the spiritual world where he finds eternal beauty representing by art, philosophy, purity and morality of the sacred city. In these poems, Yeats reveals his dual poetic vision of the modern world: one is marked by despair and destruction, and the other by hope and spiritual rebirth through art and mysticism.

### **Discussion and Textual Analysis**

This section implies close reading of the poems chosen for discussion. Textual analysis is a broad term which uses for describing, interpreting and understanding texts. All kinds of information can be gleaned from a text-from its literal meaning of the text, symbolism, figures of speech and the themes it reveals.

As previously stated, the aim of this paper is to explore the spiritual crisis depicted in W. B. Yeats's celebrated poems The Second Coming and Sailing to Byzantium. These poems are chosen as case studies of the spiritual crisis of modernism. The methodology of this present study is a descriptive-analytical approach. The poems' theme mainly focus on spiritual crisis which embodies in the physical, mental, and spiritual level of the modernism. The spiritual crisis in these two poems is critically highlighted.

#### **"The Second Coming"(1921)**

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,*

*Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (The Collected Poems of W. B.  
Yeats, 1989)*

*The Second Coming* was written in 1919 and published in 1921 in his collection poems. It is regarded as one of Yeats's most famous poems, which symbolizes the turmoil of the early 20th century. The poem consists of two unrhymed stanzas that reflect a world descending into chaos and the emergence of a new, ominous order. The first stanza describes the chaotic state of the world, while the second introduces the ominous vision of a rough beast slouching toward Bethlehem.

In his poetry, Yeats has remarkably portrayed the theme of spiritual and moral decline so as to convey a deep sense of the modern man's traditional values and beliefs. This spiritual barrenness in modern life causes a kind of disconnection between the modern man and religion. The historical context of the "The Second Coming" refers to major change after World War I. It created the sense of chaos, disillusionment and decline of old values.

Like other writers, Yeats was an eye witness of the social unrest and disintegration of modern civilization. As a sensitive figure, he perceived a chaotic world that has increasingly become destabilized. This disturbing world has lost its balance and become totally beyond human control. Thus, the poem largely reflects his response to an impending crisis that permeates into the political, cultural and moral ground. The basic idea of this poem is related to the "system" which Yeats explained in *A Vision*. He had a theory regarding the rise and fall of civilizations. It begins with a movement of inspiration or revelation, such as the birth of Christ. This is clearly depicted in "The Second Coming."

Following World War I, individuals were left shattered, grappling with feelings of frustration, boredom, anxiety, and loneliness. Yeats used various landscapes to symbolize the spiritual and psychological states of modern individuals. *The Second Coming* is a prime example of Yeats' modernism, where he depicts the chaotic and disordered state of the world post-war, with the poet expressing a desire to escape from this bleak reality.

The poem begins with the image of a falcon flying out of control. The spiritual sterility in modern life leads to a wide distance from religion. He says, "*Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ the falcon cannot hear the falconer.*" Yeats clearly refers to the loss of control. The falcon, which is a bird of prey, no longer listens to its master. Yeats used this image "falconry" to suggest the situation of the modern world, which is like the distant, circling falcon. The falcon is symbolic of human technology going beyond human control. The falcon is a representative of all people who moved away from God and came back to their pagan roots.

The falcon also symbolizes the spiritual emptiness of the modern man, and the loss of spiritual values in this age, where man became interested only in material things. A man forgot values and plunged into the world of materialism. The system becomes chaotic everywhere. What dominates and controls modern life is disorder and spiritual sterility. There are no values, so the earth is dominated with evil. Yeats shows his concern that technology has advanced to the point where mankind can do a great deal of harm with relative ease. The world had never seen destruction of the World War I, and most people were shocked at the extensive loss of human life during the war.

The futile war has drastically destroyed the world. This destruction represents the spiritual decay of modern era. Consequently, life has turned empty and devoid of meaning. The world is filled with violence and hatred where the modern man became morally and spiritually corrupt.

The question which arises here is 'what is the use of life without spiritual values or purpose in life'?! It is a world where spiritual emptiness is spreading everywhere. People no longer care for religious duties. Religion and spiritual affairs are fading away. The present condition evokes doubt, disappointment and uncertainty. Modern humanity has deserted God's commands and drifted away from him.

God has sent messengers, each with a distinct religion so as to guide humanity. For example, Jesus Christ was sent to the Christian people and his sacred scripture was the Bible. His mission was to deliver this message to his followers. Religion serves as the foundation of society, and when people deviate from the righteous path, harmony is disrupted. The further we move away, the more lost we become. This is the condition in which modern humanity has distanced itself from God, forgetting the purpose of its creation. People have overlooked the blessings that God has bestowed upon them, abandoning their spiritual values. Therefore, they have defied the Creator and fallen into wrongdoing, committing various sins and crimes. Consequently, his purpose in life has become more materialistic than spiritual.

The word "gyre" is a rare term for circular motion. It suggests a sense of circling, inexorable movement. The opening lines of the poem depict a picture of disintegration that has overtaken the Christian civilization. The diminishing force of Christianity is conveyed to us through the idea that Christianity is like a falcon that has lost touch with the falconer, so it becomes directionless. The lines "*things fall apart; the center cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*" appear to mirror both the circling falcon and Yeats's concept of historical cycles. They also suggest there is no stabilizing force. The poem's speaker seems, at the very least, uncertain about the chaotic events unfolding before him.

*"The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned; the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."* These lines portray the prevailing death and great devastation of humanity. This pessimistic view predicts an era of huge battles, where chaos spreads, morality declines, and destructive forces dominate. The poet declares that all this chaos, confusion, and disintegration must surely be a sign that a revelation, a second coming of Christ, is at hand. The poet considers Christ as the savior and redeemer of the world. It refers to the Second Coming of Jesus to liberate the earth from corruption, as life is empty of religion and a lack of spirituality.

The lines "*A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, is moving its slow thighs, while all about it Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds. The darkness drops again; but now I know that twenty centuries of stony sleep,*" clearly depict the world's barrenness. In a loud cry, the speaker exclaims the second coming as his voice summons a sphinx creature, a powerful, half-animal sphinx. Its body is that of a "lion", only the head of a man is left. It could also be Christ, who will be strict with people, and that is what they deserve. They do not deserve his mercy and his kind heart.

The poem concludes with an open question, leaving its meaning to different interpretations: "*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*" This open question probably evokes a sense of uncertainty and inevitability. It predicts an ominous change because of the arrival of a big force that can reshape the world completely. These lines also suggest that the history moves in regular cycles. The poem's title carries a symbolic significance, which suggests an ominous disaster in the future. Apparently, Yeats escapes the harsh reality towards a secular place. He seems to pass the tragic past, the bleak present, and contemplates future. It is clear that the poem is a deep lament for the spiritual sterility of the modern age.

Yeats's second poem "Sailing to Byzantium", has a similar theme, but with a different view. Yeats seeks to escape into the past rather than living the bleak present and dreadful future. Instead, he prefers not to confront these harsh realities as he seeks refuge in an idealized world. According to Yeats's vision, the new world is 'Byzantium', a visionary city that exists only in his imagination. This sacred city symbolizes an artistic and spiritual haven. This is Yeats's view and criticism of Western civilization, which is likely to decline and vanish.

### **"Sailing to Byzantium" (1928)**

I *That is no country for old men. The young  
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
-Those dying generations-at their song,  
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,  
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long  
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.  
Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unageing intellect.*

II *An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but studying  
Monuments of its own magnificence;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come  
To the holy city of Byzantium.*

III *O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away; sick with desire  
And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is; and gather me  
Into the artifice of eternity.*

IV *Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.* (The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats, 1989)

Yeats composed *Sailing to Byzantium* in 1926 and it was published in 1928. It is regarded as one of Yeats's finest works which was included in his collection *The Tower*. This poem consists of four stanzas, each written in ottava rima, an eight-line stanza with a rhyme scheme of ABABABCC. In this context, Helen Vendler says the poem finds its most complete and beautiful form in the ottava rima. It consists of eight-line stanzas written in iambic pentameter, with a rhyme scheme of two asymmetric parts: a sestet and a couplet (quoted in Marjorie Howes and John Kelly's *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats*, p. 82). In her essay titled, "The Later Poetry," Howes contributes in writing critical views in Yeats's poetry.

The poem closely explores the contrast between old age and youth, sensuality and spirituality. According to the poet, youth is a time of enjoyment of worldly pleasures, while the old age is a time for enjoying inner peace and spiritual serenity. The poem's main concern is Yeats's oldest theme-aging, passing time, man's mortality. In the poem, the poet describes someone who approaches his old agedness. He says, "That is no country for old men." The old man realizes that youth and sensual life are no longer an option for him. Therefore, he seeks a spiritual journey to the ideal world of Byzantium. As the title suggests, Byzantium is the ancient city of Byzantine, the capital city of Eastern Roman Empire during the rule of Romans (330-1453 CE). It is known in the past as *Constantinople* and in the present time is called Istanbul, Turkey. This city was the shining centre of art, wisdom, philosophy and knowledge.

The poem was composed in a critical period in the later days of Yeats's life. He wrote *Sailing to Byzantium* in 1926 when he was sixty-one, twelve years before his death in 1938. This period is noticeably marked by a sudden shift from romantic nationalism to a more profound and mystical exploration of the nature of existence. It reflects the difficulty of keeping one's soul alive in a fragile, failing human body. The speaker describes as an old man, who leaves behind the country of the young for a visionary quest to Byzantium, the ancient city that was a major seat of early Christianity. The poem explicitly expresses the agony which come with old agedness.

"Byzantium" is founded on paradox; the real world of mortal human beings and the ideal world of art and spiritual perfection. The poem's hidden meaning is clearly based on the Platonic one. It delves into the theme of aging, mortality, the desire for spiritual tranquility.

For Plato, the ideal city was one which mirrored the cosmos, on the one hand, and the individual on the other one. As he described in *The Republic*, the ideal city, or polis, was one based on justice and human virtue. Like Plato, Yeats longs for a place where he will find acceptance and peace of mind. This longing grants him self-satisfaction and a sense of eternity. For Yeats, Byzantium is the place where he finds pleasure and happiness. This great ancient city of Byzantium is a symbol of eternal culture and spiritual fulfillment. The old man usually longs for 'heaven' as death approaches him. In heaven, the man rests peacefully and comfortably as there is no worry, grief, fatigue, fear, and sadness.

The best comment on the poem is found in a paragraph Yeats wrote for a broadcast of his poems (B.B.C. Belfast, 8 Sept. 1931) which was not included in the final version of the script:

Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called 'Sailing to Byzantium'. When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells [in the eighth century] and making the jeweled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilisation and the source of its spiritual philosophy, so I symbolise the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city. (pp. 253-54)

This excerpt is cited in A. Norman Jeffares's essay on "Sailing to Byzantium," where he notes that the paragraph was not included in the final broadcast script. A. Norman Jeffares (1984) writes insightful essays on Yeats's poetry. In his essay titled "The Tower: 'Sailing to Byzantium,'" Jeffares explores the geographical, historical, literary, and religious sources and allusions present in "Sailing to Byzantium" (pp. 211-16).

Yeats's uses new techniques in his later poems. He uses refined and formal language, adopting a melancholic tone to convey the contrast between the fleeting nature of life and the eternal world of art. Byzantium had a rich cultural and artistic heritage as it was the centre of European civilization. It was the source of spirituality, philosophy, art, wisdom and intellectuality. Thus, Yeats uses the word "Byzantium," as a metaphor for a realm of timeless wisdom and artistic immortality. It is the holy city where art and spiritual life are ultimately fused. The main theme of the poem suggests longing for a distant place, where he can find his proper position. Yeats writes, "I think if I could give a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium" (Coles Notes, 2001, p. 59).

Accordingly, the poem can be metaphorically interpreted as a journey from the material, mortal world to the spiritual realm of eternity; from a world of chaos and decay to one of art and perfection. Byzantium, in this sense, exists only as a holy city in the poet's imagination, akin to Plato's ideal Utopia. The poet desires to sail to Byzantium, a sacred realm where he will be honored. In doing so, he seeks escape from the harsh reality of the world to one of creativity and vitality. In this context, Byzantium

is seen as a significantly symbol of giving joy, wisdom, knowledge and happiness to the poet.

In the opening line of the poem, Yeats states: "*That is no country for old men*". His mention for old men indicates his obsession with old agedness. The speaker lost his youth and feels that he is a stranger in his country because he is not cared by the young. As he is an old man, he is not happy with his present life. The idea of sailing is still flashing in his mind. He contemplates the holy city 'Byzantium.' Yeats clearly escapes from the material life into the spiritual one. For Yeats, this life is regarded as the last stage in his lifetime. That is why he wants to enjoy it as he can as possible, because it is vital, eternal and spiritual.

The stanza continues by painting a picture of teaming life, the sensuous world of youth, vitality, reproduction, decay and death. Yeats describes the young people, men, women, girls and boys are all interested in their sensual joy, but he cannot do such things because he is an old man. The poet calls this kind of people as "*dying generation*" because they do not appreciate the value of art and literature. Even the birds on trees, and animals in farms and fish on the sea are indulged in the process of birth. Yeats writes, "*The young/ in one another's arms, birds in the trees.. The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,/ fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long/ whatever is begotten, born and dies*".

Yeats strongly asserts why he has rejected the land of eternal youth in the second stanza. He justifies his choice when intends to sail "*To the holy city of Byzantium.*" He has grown old and approaching his death and feels being out of place in the land he has left. The old man, according to Yeats, is "*a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick.*"

One can find the poet claims that the old man in the old city is despised and not respected. That is why he is longing to travel into a new city where he can find love, comfort and respect. Yeats discusses an old man as something of little consequence: "*An aged man is but a paltry thing*". He uses an analogy with a scarecrow, to represent the lifelessness of someone old. It is as if the marrow has been sucked from the bones. This life for Yeats is the inevitability of old age, unless "*soul clap its hands and sing*". Yeats's focus on intellectuality, spirituality and transcendentalism grants him the right decision to escape from the constraints of the human body; secularism and sensualism. Hence, he has decided to attempt such journey, a metaphorical voyage: "*I have sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium.*"

The poet, in the third stanza, shouts at the "sages standing in God's holy fire", the agents of his transition from the land of the living, to free his soul from his mortal body and desires. Yeats here addresses the great artists in the history. He imagines them as they are standing in front of him in the holy fire. This fire does not burn or hurt them but it rather purifies their souls from all the worldly ills. He wants to be part of the holy fire to purify his soul. He addresses the wise men to come from their higher place and take him to the spiritual life; to come from the fire and take him to purify his sick soul and heart from sensual joys. He imagines them coming to teach him how to understand and appreciate art and literature.

In the final stanza, the poet envisions himself transformed into a timeless artistic creation after death, symbolizing his desire for spiritual transcendence. As a writer of art and literature, he wants to immortalize himself through history. He begins by declaring that in this world of art, he would not take the form of any natural things.

The images of the opening stanza, would be susceptible to the ravages of time, decay and death. Instead, he would take the form of a golden bird, “such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make”. Such an escape would enable the bird to sing and entertain the lords and ladies of Byzantium, singing “of what is past, or passing, or to come”. This final image is a contrast to the living birds (and other creatures) in the first stanza. It is similar to the “scarecrow that represents the dying generation who seeks only pleasure.

The poem clearly emphasizes the superiority of art over modernism, which represents materialism. He wants to show that permanence can be achieved through art as in Byzantium, and that human life by contrast is transient. Yeats uses symbolism throughout the poem to highlight this contrast. The title of the poem “Sailing to Byzantium” has two important symbols: (1) Sailing which depicts a metaphorical physical voyage by the sea; and (2) Byzantium which symbolizes a world of artistic magnificence. The images of birds, fish and young lovers used by the poet in the first stanza symbolize transience and mortality. Besides, the symbol of a scarecrow represents the decrepitude of old age. It is also a repulsive lifeless image symbolizing everything that Yeats wants to reject in his mortal existence. His strong desire to sail to Byzantium clearly describes his intellectual will to leave the sensual world behind him. Everything around him is spiritual emptiness and barrenness, so the right decision for him is to escape to the glorious past, which is impossible to obtain, but metaphorically can be achieved according to Yeats's view.

In short, the poet metaphorically used "Byzantium" as a holy city of art, peace, purity, spirituality, philosophy and serenity. It is a golden land, both literally and symbolically, where the elderly and wise people through this spiritual and physical journey reach the highest point of knowledge. Yeats's *Sailing to Byzantium* also resembles Dante's purgatory, where individuals undergo a cathartic process to cleanse themselves of earthly sins.

The results and discussions presented can be concluded in the following points:

William Butler Yeats is considered one of the modernist writers of the 20th-century English literature. He was not only a symbolist and modernist poet, but also a great dramatist and essayist. He has largely used allusive imagery and symbolic structures throughout his poetic career. He left a significant impact on the English writers, critics and readers. His great legacy continues to widely inspire writers and scholars. His poetry is rich of various modernist facets; Irish legends, myths and mysticism. As a prominent modernist, he infused his poetry with layers of political, cultural and spiritual depth.

Two of Yeats's great poems have been critically studied as a manifestation of modern man's spiritual crisis. His great interest in modern civilization decline and spiritual barrenness is quite clear in these poems "The Second Coming" and "Sailing to Byzantium". They clearly show the decline of spirituality and the rise of materialism in the modern world. Modern people begin to lose faith in religion, and consequently become hollow and fragile in terms of spirituality, morality, and tradition. The poems also represent a search for utopian ideals and an idealized refuge so as to escape from the harsh realities of a war-torn, materialistic world. Through his poems, Yeats suggests searching for moral ideals, traditional norms and spiritual values.

In both poems, Yeats skillfully employs striking images and symbols to explore spiritual emptiness of the materialistic world. In *The Second Coming*, the breakdown of society's spiritual and moral core results in a chaotic world where destructive forces rise to power. In *Sailing to Byzantium*, Yeats skillfully depicts the speaker's alienation, disillusionment, moral and spiritual disintegration. Therefore, the poet suggests an escape from the physical world which awaits its inevitable decline and seeks a quest for spiritual immortality through art and transcendence. Yeats explores the conflict between decline and transcendence in both poems. According to Yeats's poetic vision, he envisions the modern man's crisis when he plunged into the material world, which is full of desires and pleasures.

## **Recommendations**

This study is of great interest to both academics and students in the field of English language study. In the colleges of languages or education, W. B. Yeats's poetry can be effectively studied in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classes. In this context, English poetry is taught as one of the basic courses of the English department. Students study poetry in different historical eras, therefore, W. B. Yeats should be studied in the modernist period as a representative of modernism. The course's instructor may focus on the following areas: (1) historical and cultural context; (2) rich language and vocabulary; (3) style and themes; (4) pronunciation and rhythm; (5) figures of speech; and (6) critical thinking. In this case, students will be exposed to various poetic devices and terminology.

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