FLLT Journal

Volume 1, Number 1, 2012

The Language Institute
Thammasat University
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We welcome articles which address theoretical, empirical, and/or practical aspects of ELT or ESP including (but not restricted to) foreign language acquisition, foreign language skill development, language testing and evaluation, the teaching of English for specific purposes, and the application of English for career development, language testing and evaluation, the teaching of English for specific purposes, and the application of English for career development.

This journal is sponsored by the Language Institute, Thammasat University. However, authors are solely responsible for the opinions expressed. Interested persons are advised to consult the information concerning manuscript preparation provided at the back of this journal.

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*FLLT Journal* is published by the Language Institute, Thammasat University.

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Thammasat University  Thammasat University  
Tha Prachan Campus  Rangsit Campus  
2 Prachan Road  99 M. 18 Paholyothin Road  
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E-mail: flttjournal@yahoo.com  E-mail: flttjournal@yahoo.com  

*FLLT Journal* is printed by Chok Chai Creation Printing Group Co. Ltd., 2012.  
Tha Prachan  Tel. 0-2224-1350  Fax: 0-2224-7357 Ext. 106  
Rangsit Campus  Tel. 0-2564-3105-11  Fax: 0-2564-3119
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Editorial

As Editor-in-Chief, I would like to extend my greetings and a welcome to you to the inaugural volume of the *FLLT Journal* (*Foreign Language and Language Teaching Journal*), a new publication of the Language Institute of Thammasat University, which provides a unique collection of academic and research articles in various fields of study relating to English Language Teaching (ELT), Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Education, and Communication. *FLLT Journal* is intended to present recent theoretical concepts and empirical findings to promote the dissemination of academic and research-oriented projects completed by international scholars and researchers.

In celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Language Institute, this journal has been named after the Institute’s international conference (*FLLT Conference*), which is organized biennially in Thailand. This first volume was produced painstakingly and laboriously to express voices and perspectives in the related fields of study. All the selected articles had been peer-reviewed and edited before being arranged into their final form.

The articles presented in this issue are concerned with various perspectives on the practice of ELT, education, and second language acquisition. Nearly all of the articles presented in this volume are based on research methodologies in Applied Linguistics. The very first article is an invited paper by Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, who presents issues in the development of partnerships, inquiry, and research for curricular and pedagogic reform. This paper effectively presents the basic principles of pedagogy and the vital role learning partnerships play in authentic language learning and assessment. This featured article also provides a research framework for the investigation of partnerships for the improvement of student learning outcomes.

The following articles report research results in diverse areas of language teaching and learning. First, Sasan Baleghizadeh and Amir Hossein Rahami vividly presented their experimental results with regard to EFL student writing performance as a consequence of cooperative writing strategies. The study revealed the positive effects of writing instruction using cooperative learning on students’ writing proficiency. In the subsequent article,
Piyawan Rungwaraphong presented her interesting research findings based on her thorough inquiry of Thai language teachers’ beliefs, confidence, and practices. Insights can be gained into learner autonomy, and mismatches between teachers’ beliefs and practices. In the article by Freek Olaf de Groot, research findings from an experimental study provided various aspects of evidence advocating dynamic interaction with the target language as a means of improving L2 writing. Detailed discussions of the development of complexity, accuracy, and fluency are provided. The final paper by Chomraj Patanasorn clearly illustrates how effectively focused tasks created language-related episodes among ESL learners. Two types of focused tasks were compared, and the research results revealed that the consciousness-raising task was more effective than the structure-based production task.

The journal ends with my own book review on a book on classroom discourse by Steve Walsh. The review includes summaries and presents the main issues of all the chapters in the book. It also explains how useful this book would be to the target audience.

I would like to thank all the reviewers for their valuable time and informed feedback they provided for the better versions of the articles. Many thanks also go to my colleagues in the advisory board for their useful opinions and advice, and those in the editorial board for evaluating and editing these articles with commitment and dedication. I am confident that we have fulfilled institutional objectives and expectations that will lead to significant academic development.

All these efforts are expected to yield profit for any interested audience, build closer connections among ESL/EFL teachers and researchers, and stimulate academic discussions to be carried out in our community.

Supong Tangkiengsirisin

Editor-in-Chief
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Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action by Steve Walsh, Routledge Introductions to Applied Linguistics
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Partnerships, Inquiry and Research for Improved Student Learning and Classroom Practice

Brenda Cherednichenko
Deakin University

Plenary Address to the 2nd International Conference on Foreign Language Learning and Teaching, Ambassador Hotel, Thailand, 11-12 March 2011

Abstract

This presentation discusses the opportunities for the development of partnerships, inquiry and research for reform of curriculum and pedagogy in school and university classrooms. It addresses the fundamental principles of good pedagogy and illustrates how inquiry-based, authentic language learning and assessment can be achieved in partnership with community and professions. Learning partnerships are mutually beneficial for all partners, respond directly to the learning needs of students and build on the strengths of teachers. Significantly, it is also critical that teacher education reflects these approaches too, and so modelling responsive pedagogy for improved learning for all students. Learning partnerships provide the context, motivation and need to deliver realistic outcomes for all partners and so serve to improve the learning experience. Understanding the impact and outcome of learning partnerships for all stakeholders requires a rigorous research framework to be established to enable the structure, content and influence of the partnerships to be established. The paper will outline the key principles for effective learning partnerships and a research framework which informs improved practice and outcomes.

Keywords: Education, Equity, Partnerships for Learning
**Introduction**

Learning is… “what students do with what they learn, when they can do what they want to do” (Eisner, 2001, p. 371).

Education is the social practice of learning. It is defined by relationships which support the development of knowledge, in school, in family and in community. Effective learning occurs when relationships are developed between individuals and groups respectfully, locally and personally. Such relationships enable and benefit all partners and are reciprocal and authoritative (Kruger & Cherednichenko, 2006).

As educators, our challenge is to enable the development of learning and the relationships which deliver on the promise of governments to provide access to education for all. Yet, not everyone has access to education. In Australia only 32% of young adults have been to university. In contrast, Sweden has a national target to have 50% of all people up to the age of 25 participating in higher education – a target they have almost achieved. In the UK the target is to have 50% of all those up to the age of 20 by 2010 – they are currently at 43%. And in Ireland, the target is to have 72% in the tertiary relevant cohort with a tertiary qualification by 2015. They’re already at 55%. Australia’s aspiration is 40% of all 25-34 year olds attain a higher education qualification by 2025 (Gillard, 3 March 2009).

People from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds in Australia are only one-third as likely to participate in higher education as those from high socio-economic backgrounds.

- Low SES: 25% of population, 15% of uni places
- High SES: 25% of population, 45% of uni places
- Low SES: 10% of postgraduate places

There has been no change in the proportion of university places held by the low SES quartile 1989-2006. As well, Indigenous Australian commencement rates in higher education are about half the rate suggested by population share with completion rates below 50% (James, Bexley, Marginson, Maxwell, Anderson, Devlin & Garnett, 2008).
Sweet (in Leach, 2008) argues that “we have not created institutions that can foster a joy in learning among the full range of young people after the age of compulsory schooling, not just among those who find (traditional) academic achievement easy” (Leach, 2008, p. 30).

Understanding learning, and how we create an environment of joy, is based on six propositions developed by Kolb & Kolb (2005) drawn from the work of Dewey (2000) and Freire (1972). They include:

1. Learning is best conceived as a process not an outcome
2. All learning is relearning
3. Conflict, difference, and disagreement are what drives the learner
4. Learning is an holistic process of adaptation to the world
5. Learning results from synergetic transformation between the person and the environment
6. Learning is the process of creating knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194).

This paper draws from the work of Kolb & Kolb (2005), as well as that of Freire (1972) and Dewey (2000), to argue for teaching practices which focus on the needs of learners. Such a focus requires a close relationship among learners, learning, teachers and community and supports improved academic access and success.

**Learning and Learners**

As early as 1938, Dewey, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, imagined an education for everyone, and for life. This philosophy of education for all, as empowerment for citizens to choose for themselves consciously, encompassed the notion that education occurred not only in school, but critically, in society of which school was a part: education as a social practice. Dewey’s goal was to ensure that every experience was a learning experience and that choice was realised through education. School was a site of formal learning: social institutions which informed and further enabled citizens to participate in society, including work and politics. For Dewey, learning grew from
the examination of experience. Kolb extends the ideas of Dewey describing learning from and through experience, or experiential learning as “the practice whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

Kolb, in examining how authentic and effective learning occurs, identified four stages of learning which result in knowledge developing from experience. They are concrete experience or what is happening to me now; the collection of data or what learners feel, see, know and do in an experience; observation and reflection or making explicit what learners feel, see, know and do in an experience; and testing new behaviours and perceptions which lead to confirmation of knowledge gained and the ability to use the this knowledge to transform behaviour in future experiences.

Figure 1. Kolb’s Four Stage Process of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984)

Similarly, Giddens (1984) constructs the experience of learning as social, and as transference from unconscious action to critically conscious action and significantly to discursive critical action. In this way, Giddens argues practitioners are able to move from the unconscious to discursive critical consciousness and social action: confidently knowing why, how and for whom learning serves. Critical consciousness for social action is developed when

- unconscious social action leads to
- practical consciousness which leads to
- discursive critical consciousness and social action.
Supporting actors or learners in the transition from experience to knowledge, from unconscious action to critically conscious action, is the teacher. Good teacher facilitation, explicit self-awareness as reflexivity, strengthens the opportunities for learning to be transformative and effective. In analysing the traits of effective facilitation, Carpenter & Pryor’s (2004) study of learners and teachers in outdoor adventure programs revealed a number of characteristics and behaviours which support, enhance and enable learning to be realised and so empower learners to new and improved understandings, knowledge, skills and actions. The desirable personal attributes of the facilitator working with learners in extended ways and in social learning environments are described as:

- a sense of humor;
- an openness to new ideas, flexible thinking;
- caring for others, an affinity with young people and respect for all people;
- a sense of life journey and commitment to learning in the outdoors;
- a client responsive leadership, non-judgmental and non-directive leadership;
- maturity; and
- physical capability or engagement (Carpenter & Pryor, 2004).

Applying these elements to the classroom, the importance of humor, empathy, leadership and relationships which support and underpin experience for knowledge development is highlighted. Classroom pedagogy that supports authentic learning is well documented through the work of Newmann & Associates (1996) and the productive pedagogies study (Hayes, Mills, Ladwig, Luke & Lingard, 1999) in Australia. As well, these studies confirm the significant layers of learning environments which empower learners and teachers. Such environments are built through inquiry and research driven engagement with knowledge, and partnerships with community, industry and professions. This practice-theory framework can be established in classrooms so that knowledge is developed in learning partnership-based pedagogies which empower learners and enhance their capacity and capability, and their aspirations and achievement.
Understanding Capacity and Capability, Aspiration and Achievement

That all learners are different is today considered an oxymoron. All people are different. They are shaped by their inherited characteristics, their environment and those whom they meet and observe throughout their lives. All these elements shape the capacity and capability of each person. Without exposure to books and language, high culture pursuits and rich social capital, learners may present as of less capability and capacity than their more affluent peers. Indeed, deciding what behaviours indicate capability and which capacity is complex. Capability is often present in educational achievement, but many who do not experience high educational achievement do not have the resources and the educational capital in their background to secure high levels of achievement. Their capacity for success can therefore be diminished.

Figure 2. Relationships between Aspiration and Achievement in Education (Cherednichenko, 2009)
**Quadrant A: High Aspiration, High Achievement**

These students typically are highly capable in academic studies and have a strong capacity for success. They are often aware of what they want to do and what is needed educationally to get there. They present as motivated and successful at school with high scores on assessed tasks. They are likely to continue to tertiary studies and may often be interested in high profile courses and careers. However, they can face challenges, including pressure to enrol in high profile courses which may not reflect their true aspirations.

**Quadrant B: High Aspiration, Low Achievement**

These students are aware of the need to continue their studies, often aware of the tertiary courses that have high profiles and can potentially deliver good employment opportunities and income to them in the future. They may demonstrate an interest in and capacity to do well, yet, for many reasons do not experience the academic success needed for many high profile programs. They are keen to enter these professions even if they often do not always know what is really required to gain entry.

**Quadrant C: Low Aspiration, High Achievement**

Although these students present as academically capable on most standard measures of academic achievement, some students do not aspire to continue to further studies. The reasons for this diminished capacity are complex and can include parental expectation and family circumstances, including the need to work.

**Quadrant D: Low Aspiration, Low Achievement**

Traditional school based learning does not usually engage these learners. They are frequently not happy at school and usually are keen to leave as soon as possible. They either underperform or perform poorly on academic tasks. In many cases their capacity for success and their demonstrated capability may be masked by disinterest and poor performance. They may have few aspirations with regard to work or study and are influenced by their prior experiences of education and its role in their lives.
In keeping with the concept of aspiration and opportunity for achievement in Australia, McGaw (2005) explains that OECD results indicate that Australian schools are of reasonably high quality with rankings in the top 10-15 countries in the 2003 PISA analysis. However, Australia performs poorly on equity indicators, and this is associated with social background more than economic disadvantage. That is, family education, wealth, employment and social capital have a direct impact on the schooling achievement of young people (Teese, 2003).

In Victoria, Australia, a study in 2007 of young people aged 15-18 years old revealed the key reasons for their low participation in schooling, including:

1. Not ready ~70%
2. Hard to support self ~ 45%
3. Cost of study ~ 35%
4. Need Youth Allowance ~30%
5. Cost of Travel ~ 30%
6. Leave home ~ 30%
7. Too much travel ~ 25%
8. Not sure I can cope ~ 20%

(Victoria University, 2007)

Similarly, the key issues facing young Australians in 2010 are focussed on very personal factors: body image, family conflict and coping with stress (Mission Australia, 2010). Combined, these two studies reveal a very different experience of Australia for many young people from the ‘Lucky Country’ myth that dominated much of the 20th century.

These reasons further identify the needs and experiences of learners and support the need for quality teaching and for successful engagement in education. If young people mainly attribute a lack of readiness as the reason for discontinuing schooling, then there is definitely something educators can do to improve outcomes.
Pedagogy of Empowerment through Partnerships

Developing a pedagogy of empowerment for all learners then demands that the different backgrounds, experiences and access to educational resources is a fundamental consideration in deciding how and what we teach. Significantly, it is critical that learner responsive pedagogy (Kruger & Cherednichenko, 2006) drives improved learning for all students. Strong interpersonal relationships between learners and teachers are central to empowering outcomes for students and can be developed over time to support and inform teaching for learning that is reflexive: learner responsive and research informed (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Kinchloe, 2004; Loughran, 2006). Further, these relationships have the capacity to result in institutional responsiveness, responsibility, rigour and authentic pedagogy (Newmann & Associates, 1996) in schools and universities. In other words, it is essential that the dominant partner in the relationship, that is the teacher, or the educational organisation, school or university is also able to change to accommodate the needs of learners. Such a pedagogy moves from didactic approaches to the development of critical inquiry, from practice or experience. In university learning, there is a need to move from the input-output model of lectures and exams to the nurturing of professional conversations which initiate with rich descriptions of practice, inquiry and reflection. Reflective dialogue then develops between teacher and learner involving active listening and emerging as a discursive environment which becomes evident as a shared focus identifies issues and questions arising from practical inquiry about knowledge as it is applied in practice (Kruger & Cherednichenko, 2006).

The discursive environment is an inquiry-centred learning partnership which provides context, motivation and need to deliver realistic outcomes for all partners and so serves to improve the learning experience and learning outcomes. These learning partnerships are mutually beneficial for all partners, respond directly to the learning needs of students, and build on the strengths of teachers.
The educators and administrators leading and facilitating this pedagogy through these partnerships are working to provide rigour \textit{and} relevance for learning (Stone, Alfeld & Pearson, 2008, p. 767). Research about the development of learning partnerships (Kruger & Cherednichenko, 2006) experiences reveal a number of principles which assist the initiation of effective learning through partnerships. These principles are:

- Communicate: the development of the discursive environment (Kruger & Cherednichenko, 2006) is essential for relationship and knowledge development
- Collaborate: working together in partnership achieves positive outcomes for everyone
- Construct curriculum and learning from authentic and relevant experience: learning that is of interest to the learning is more respectful of all partners and has an increased change of success
- Capacity building: consider each partners’ needs, interests and strengths to develop enriching and engaged learning activities for high quality outcomes
- Capability development: be clear about the learning goals and start with the end in mind to increase motivation and connections between practice and new knowledge
- Commitment: maintain focus on student learning outcomes and meeting their needs for sustained success
- Chances: encourage courage, risk taking and learning from errors for improvement.

Developing successful and effective learning partnerships depends on building respectful relationships with colleagues, communities and often corporations. Effective partnerships take account of the needs of all stakeholders, and while learner responsive pedagogy is a central learning and teaching practice, negotiation with all stakeholders is also required. Research on partnerships (Teaching Australia, 2006) identifies behaviours which support and strengthen relationships, including:

- \textit{Democratic engagement}
- \textit{Inclusive of all stakeholders, including pre-service teachers and parents}
- \textit{Team oriented}
- Active listening
- Reasonableness
- Open to and critical of ideas
- Willingness to change mind in light of evidence
- Understanding of the world
- Basis for informed social action
- Research informed and led.

Research-informed Leadership for Change: Praxis-Inquiry

Understanding the impact and outcome of learning partnerships for all stakeholders requires a rigorous research framework to be established to enable the structure, content and influence of the partnerships to be established. Stenhouse’s (1975) definition that research is systematic inquiry made public enables relationships between teacher education and teacher professional learning to focus on inquiry, local and personal action, leading to the improvement of student learning outcomes.

This link between inquiry and action, practice and theory, enables the development of teacher theorising for changed and improved practice: praxis-inquiry. Effective change is driven by the power to make decisions and to access the appropriate resources to work against the prevailing culture to act critically to construct positive experience and outcomes. In 1995, Lingard coined the phrase, ‘reform fatigue’ to describe the over-emphasis on whether the process is focused on reform for student learning improvement and not economic rationalism driven change. Such change begins with a critical understanding of personal practice. There are several layers of this development which are critical for students and teachers alike to make sense of and improve.

In a praxis-inquiry based education program, learning is present for all partners. It is represented by a roundtable of learners, and draws on the community of practice model (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Praxis-inquiry involves the practitioner reflecting post-event on their practice. Being able to look back on the event enables the practitioner to describe, explain and theorise about the event with hindsight and
access to resources, including discussions with colleagues, reference to research, and comparison with other events.

**Figure 3. Praxis Inquiry Cycle with the Experiential Learning Cycle**
*(Burridge, Carpenter, Cherndichenko & Kruger, 2007)*

The critical analysis of praxis-inquiry is research, and notably, practitioner research. Following the work of Freire, Dewey and others, the core principles of supporting the emergence of practitioners who learn from practice and who are critical, discursive, informed agents for change in their own practice. The creation of learning in a university as situated in a discursive environment would no doubt please many constructivist educators. The learning organization discourse of Senge (1990) and colleagues, stimulated ways of working which supported this goal of local and personal learning. Hence, the notion of praxis in a community of inquiry is nurtured as a pedagogy for teacher education…. *Building relationships begins with a genuine concern to listen, to be aware of the changing nature of the teaching and learning context, and to be interested in, and responsive to, the needs of students* (Loughran, 2006, p. 87). Teaching and learning practices – such as active listening, dialogue and engagement with ideas; demonstration of reasonableness; critique of ideas not people, including the right to change your mind in the light of new knowledge; and connections to and understanding of the world – frame the intention to create democratic communities of inquiry in both the university and school setting, and the basis for informed educational and social decision making and action.
While reflective practice and action research have long been standard approaches in developing metacognition in teachers, the critical practice of Collaborative Practitioner Research (Kruger, Cherednichenko, Cacciatolo, Davies & Williams, 2007) is the engagement of the practitioner or teacher as a co-researcher, notably in the collaborative analysis of data and the generation of new findings which inform changed practices. This embeds achievement of trustworthiness and validity in the research outcomes for and within the profession.

Kinchloe argues for the development of a critical pedagogy in which teachers are researchers of their own practice and of their students “so that they might know how to teach them better” (2004, p. 17). The agency of individuals, teachers and learners is most powerful when it comes from within. Friere’s (1972, 1973) critical pedagogy has been a founding principle for the development of practices in teacher education and now as the basis for engaging the whole university/school/community in the advancement of education for young people. Without a central focus on the needs of learners, the education profession is locally and globally doomed to continue the search for success.

**Empowering Learners and Teachers**

The development of the conscious reflexivity that Giddens proposes creates a catalyst for change in the curriculum and to act on the discrepancies which are identified. For educators, the potential for innovation is derived from the professional need to discover better ways to foster student learning. Teachers’ deep concern for student well-being and development is evident in the critical reflection and construction of the curriculum. However, systems often act to thwart any sustained attempt at change for improvement. The development of authority in action is derived from the establishment of personal goals and collective partnerships, the challenge of professional inquiry through praxis, and collaborative practitioner research.
Personal Goals

The definition, articulation and refinement of personal goals as an outcome of critical thought and collaborative communication. Developing what Udvari-Solner (1996, p. 245) describes as a personal ‘reflexive orientation’ to change enables teachers to identify and develop solutions to challenges in their everyday practice. Such a reflexive practice is a determined reflection on practice and instigates ‘a reflective conversation with the situation’ (Schon, 1983, p. 76). Reflexivity implies a desire and willingness to consider practices and their impact and also to initiate responsive changes for improvement. Where decisions have been taken to include philosophical inquiry and thinking skills programs in the curriculum, this has in most cases arisen from a quite deliberate desire to change, to nurture a student responsive pedagogy rather than simply deliver the prescribed one. The relationship between thinking and action is characterised the following sets of relationships:

- Personal Philosophy - Personal Practice which leads to
- Professional Philosophy - Teaching Practice which enables
- Student Philosophical Thinking - Student Learning Outcomes which deliver
- Democratic and Socially Just Education - Equity of Educational Opportunity and Outcomes for all Students

Professional Inquiry

Practitioner research (Kemmis, 2000), self-study (Loughran, 2004) and collaborative practitioner research (Kruger et al., 2007) form the basis of informed decision-making with regard to a range of professional issues. Knowing our own students and their needs, and appropriate practices, are critical in constructing the power to change. By initiating critical inquiry, which is public and systematic (research) about our practice, we have the opportunity to collectively understand and to identify anomalies and change practice for improvement. This enables individuals to participate in and contribute to the shared professional discourse of teaching and learning, and so drive reform for improvement. By engaging with others in the development and critique of
ideas and practices, a discourse of change for improvement is generated, based on professional inquiry, reflection and research which empowers both individuals and groups to critical social action as student responsive education and community responsive action for individuals and students.

The critical partnership between teaching and learning is defined as personal agency, shaped by a range of structures – curriculum, resources and policy. The ability to act is shaped by knowledge and experience. Teachers, as agents of change, make choices. They will act to change and disturb the curriculum, or to reinforce the existing curriculum. It is the way in which this agency is exercised that determines the curriculum that is delivered and the impact it will have on student learning outcomes. When teachers in working class schools actively pursue curriculum change to re-direct the outcomes of the curriculum, to achieve more effectively the strong literacy, numeracy and personal outcomes which are described as of priority, they are using their agency to initiate innovation for improvement.

References


About the Author

Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, PhD, is Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Arts and Education at Deakin University, Australia. Previously, she was Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Engagement, Equity and Indigenous and Executive Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts at Edith Cowan University. Her research is in educational equity and learning and teaching for improved educational outcomes. She is a member of two international journal editorial boards, is currently a chief investigator on the ARC linkage project, Enhancing the Social Inclusion of Disadvantaged Australians. Correspondence concerning this article can be emailed to: b.cherednichenko@deakin.edu.au.
The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Strategies on the Writing Performance of EFL Students

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&  
Amir Hossein Rahimi  
*Allameh Tabataba’i University*

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of cooperative learning strategies on the composition writing performance by a group of the Iranian EFL learners. The participants were 60 upper-intermediate students at Kishiran English Language Institute in Pakdasht, Iran. Data were collected using compositions written by students. The participants in the experimental group had the opportunity to utilize cooperative writing strategies, while the students in the control group worked individually on their final product. The posttest score of both groups revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group ($p < 0.05$).

**Keywords:** Writing, Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Writing Strategies
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Writing has been a major concern for both English language teachers and learners. There are many students who are fluent speakers of English but perform poorly when it comes to writing. One way to solve this problem is to utilize cooperative learning techniques and ask students to write in small groups. There is also a close relationship between teaching and testing. In recent years, some researchers have proposed a new approach to testing called alternative assessment. Brown (2004) discusses several techniques under the heading of alternatives in assessment, one of which is peer assessment. In cooperative writing, students discuss the topics, give their opinions, and receive responses from their classmates or the teacher. Thus, there exists peer assessment in cooperative writing. Cooperative writing provides students with the opportunity to become aware of the strategies used by their peers and to exchange and create new ideas, which is not possible in individual writing. To provide students with a non-threatening learning environment, the teachers should replace the traditional methods of testing writing with alternative assessment techniques. Process writing has been suggested as an approach to teaching writing, the principles of which can be used in writing assessment. It should be mentioned that the element of cooperation exists in process writing, too. Cooperation helps students learn while being assessed. It is not a “one-shot” testing as is the case with composition writing.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In the EFL context of Iran, the method most often utilized to teach writing is to assign students to write a composition on different topics and then rate their final product based on different scales. Students often complain about the pressure and anxiety they feel when it comes to writing in another language. Sometimes nothing comes to their mind about the assigned topic or they cannot express their ideas in another language efficiently. Therefore, research needs to be conducted in search of more effective writing instruction, including investigation of cooperative writing techniques.
1.3 Objectives of the study

This study would be helpful in improving students’ writing performance and introducing a new method of instruction to be used by second and foreign language teachers. Thus, it aims to investigate the effect of cooperative writing strategies on the writing performance of Iranian EFL learners, and it seeks to answer the following research question: What is the effect of cooperative learning strategies on the writing performance of Iranian EFL learners?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Key concepts

Cooperative learning is defined as "group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially-structured exchange of information between learners in groups, and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others" (Olsen & Kagan, 1992, p.8). It is considered to be an effective teaching method in ESL/EFL settings by many scholars (Brown, 2001; Chien, 2004; Holguin, 1997; Kagan, 1995; Liao, 2003).

Kagan & McGroarty (1993) have mentioned that cooperative learning offers students more opportunities to discuss, share, and communicate with their peers and teachers using the target language. Jacobs & Hall (1994) have pointed out that cooperative learning principles and techniques are tools which teachers use to encourage mutual active participation among all members of a group. They mention these advantages for cooperative learning: increased student discussion, more varied discussion, a more relaxed atmosphere, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amount of comprehensible input. Kagan (1994) argues that cooperative learning is less threatening, increases the amount of participation, and reduces the amount of competitiveness.
Cooperative learning is based on some theoretical perspectives including cognitive developmental perspective, and the social interdependence perspective (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Cognitive developmental perspective is grounded in the cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget and social developmental theory of Lev Vygotsky. The focus of Piaget's theory is on the construction of personal meaning or understanding made possible through personal experiences (Williams & Burden, 1997). According to Piaget (1965), as cited in Johnson & Johnson (1994), "when individuals cooperate on the environment, sociocognitive conflict occurs that creates cognitive disequilibrium, which in turn stimulates perspective-taking ability and cognitive development" (p.39). Social developmental theory is about the interaction of an individual with social environment. Vygotsky's most widely known concept, the Zone of Proximal Development, is defined as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult supervision, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.85). Vygotsky believed that assistance and cooperation have a big impact on the cognitive development of individuals.

According to the social interdependence perspective, "the way in which goals are structured determines how individuals interact, which in turn creates outcomes” (Johnson, 2003, p. 934). This theory was introduced by Kurt Koffka in the early twentieth century. He proposed that interdependence among group members can differ and in turn change the way the group acts as a whole. He suggested that the group was made interdependent by common goals, and the pressure to reach those goals was what motivated cooperation among group members (Johnson, 2003).

For cooperative learning to be effective, several factors should be present. Equal participation, positive interdependence, simultaneous interaction, and individual accountability are four of these factors (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan, 1994; Slavin, 1995). Each member of the group should participate equally in the class work. The same is true when students have a discussion or conversation. Each student should have equal access to input and time to express his/her opinion and contribute
to the class work or the task at hand. Each member of the group needs the other members to succeed, which refers to the positive interdependence factor. There should be a mutual relationship between students and a positive correlation between their goals. Simultaneous interaction refers to the active engagement of the group members in activities and tasks. All the students should contribute to the completion of the task. Individual accountability has to do with each member's responsibility in the activity and share of work. Each student should have a specific job to do and never refrain from accomplishing what has been assigned.

Several activities and techniques for employing cooperative learning have been developed, some of which will be discussed briefly below.

(a) Johnson and Johnson's learning together. The focus of this method is on explicit teaching of social skills, team building activities, individual roles for each member and group reflection (Kirk, 2001).

(b) Slavin's team learning. Slavin (1995) states that team learning techniques include Student Team-Achievement Divisions (STAD), Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), and Jigsaw II. In STAD and TGT there are three stages: instruction, cooperation, and evaluation. Each group consists of four students. At first, the teacher explains the topic of the unit. During the cooperation stage, students are engaged in teaching, reviewing, and studying the material. STAD evaluation is carried out through different quizzes which are completed individually by each student. The group score is the sum of individuals’ scores. In TGT evaluation group, members compete with members from other groups. In Jigsaw II, each member of the group is responsible for a specific part of the activity. The students share their ideas with other members of other groups who are assigned those specific parts. Then each student returns to his/her group and explains and teaches that specific part. The evaluation process is the same as STAD.

(c) Aronson's jigsaw teaching. In this method, the topic or puzzle of each unit is divided into sub-topics and each part is assigned to a group. Within each group that part is again subdivided and assigned to different members of the group. After each member has a clear understanding of the assigned part of the puzzle, he/she
teaches that part to other members of his/her group. Evaluation is carried out through individual quizzes and tests. Group members receive as a score the average group score (Kirk, 2001).

(d) **Sharan and Sharan's group investigation.** Four elements comprise the basis of this method: investigation, interaction, interpretation, and intrinsic motivation. In the group investigation activity, students focus on oral communication, social skills, and intrinsic motivation. In this method, each student becomes "an investigator who coordinates his or her inquiry with the class common purpose" (Sharan & Sharan, 1994, p. 98). Students explore the facts and through group interaction express their own interpretation of the information.

Second and foreign language learners can benefit from classes taught through cooperative learning methods. They have the opportunity to naturally practice the second or foreign language and improve their language skills, social skills, and communicative ability. Educators have mentioned the benefits of cooperative language learning in second or foreign language settings (Kagan, 1995; McGroarty, 1993). Speaking and communicating in a second or foreign language is a necessity to express personal feelings, to improve understanding, and to clarify ideas. Cooperative learning creates a less threatening and more comfortable environment for students to speak. Through interacting with group members, students receive feedback which proved to be useful for language learning. The feeling of independence is fostered in the students by the need to acquire necessary information from other groups and group members. Students learn to inspire, encourage, and assist each other. This is conducive to the intrinsic motivation which has a great impact on language acquisition.

### 2.2 Related studies

Sahin (2010) examined the effect of the cooperative technique Jigsaw II on the performance of Turkish ESL students. A Written Expression Achievement Test (WEAT) was used to collect information on the writing performance of the experimental group (n=42) and control group (n=38). The data revealed that there was
a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of academic achievement in favor of the experimental group.

Wigglesworth & Storch (2009) compared the writing performance of two groups of learners, one working individually and the other in pairs. Both groups were supposed to write an argumentative essay. The performance of the individuals and the pairs were compared in terms of fluency, complexity, and accuracy. The results revealed that collaboration had a positive impact on accuracy, but no significant difference was found in fluency or complexity.

Storch (2005) investigated the writing performance of 23 ESL students completing degree courses. The participants were given a choice to write in pairs or individually. Texts produced by pairs were compared with those produced by individual learners. The results showed that the pairs produced shorter but better texts in terms of task fulfillment, complexity, and accuracy. Most of the students had a positive attitude toward the experience.

Finally, Kagan & High (2002) conducted a study at Catalina Ventura School in Phoenix. Most of the students were ESL students. The study found that the eighth graders showed remarkable improvement in writing, from 49% to 82% in their mastery level when cooperative learning strategies were incorporated in the course.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Sixty upper-intermediate Iranian EFL students with an average TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score of 550 and an average age of 22 participated in this study. The participants were all male and were studying English at Kishiran Language Institute in Pakdasht, Iran at the time of the experiment. The participants were randomly assigned to experimental (n=30) and control (n=30) groups. There was also a rater who was an experienced English teacher with an MA degree in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language).
3.2 Materials/Research tools

For the pretest and posttest, the students were assigned to write compositions. Other materials included a whiteboard, a marker, and answer sheets. Students used paper and pencil to write. The rater recorded their scores on a separate evaluation form.

3.3 Procedure

In the first session of the treatment period, which lasted for three weeks, the students wrote a 200- to 300-word composition as a pretest to show that they were at the same level of writing ability. The topic of the pretest was “Why do you want to learn English?” The rater gave a score to each composition using analytic marking. In this kind of evaluation, grades are assigned to various components of writing including organization, logical development of ideas, structure, punctuation, spelling, mechanics, style, and quality of expression. Brown (2001) has proposed six general categories (see Appendix A) which were used as evaluation guidelines. The participants in the experimental group were divided into subgroups for cooperative work and were given a topic to write about. During each session, the teacher reviewed various parts of paragraph structure such as introduction, body, and conclusion. This was the case for the control group, too. However, they did not have a chance for cooperation. They were simply given a topic to write about. The participants in the experimental group brainstormed the topic and discussed it in depth. They could exchange their ideas and sought help whenever needed. They had a chance for revising and editing their first draft within each session. Moreover, they could have individual conferences with their teacher and were allowed to give their drafts to a classmate to comment on. Part of the treatment was based on Kagan’s (1994) model. The cooperative learning approach named the Co-op Jigsaw II Project Lesson design was utilized, which includes these stages: Round Robin, Rally Robin, Timed Pair Square, and Paraphrase Passport structures. In Round Robin, students discuss and share their opinions one by one in their groups. In Rally Robin, students form pairs in their groups and discuss ideas. In Timed Pair Square, as the name suggests, students have to provide the information within a specific time duration. In Paraphrase
Passport, each student should paraphrase the ideas stated by the previous group member and then is allowed to present his or her own ideas.

In the present study, the students in the experimental group were divided into groups of six. Each member of the group was assigned to find materials and information about a specific topic. The students who had to acquire the same information discussed the topic together. After the discussion, the students returned to their own group and discussed the information gathered with their group members. One student in each group was selected to act as the presenter to communicate the group performance to the teacher and other students. Students gave comment and feedback on each other's performances. Finally, the teacher gave feedback and announced the best performance. The participants in the control group did not undergo these stages. They worked individually to hand in a final product, a one-shot assessment of their writing ability. The topics for both groups during the three-week treatment period were the same. At the end of the treatment, the final product of both groups was evaluated by the rater to see whether there was a significant difference between them. Thus, the final product of both groups functioned as the posttest. The students wrote a composition about friendship.

The participants in the experimental group utilized the cooperative learning strategies described above to create the final product, while the participants in the control group wrote their compositions individually.

4. Results

The research question sought to investigate the effect of cooperative writing strategies on the writing performance of the participants. In order to answer this question, the first step was to homogenize the participants. As mentioned in the previous section, the pretest of this study, a composition writing task, was utilized to stream the students into groups of roughly equal ability. Based on the result of the pretest, the students were randomly assigned to experimental and control conditions. To see if the control and experimental groups were in equal levels before the treatment began, it was decided to compare the mean scores of both groups. To investigate equality of means for two independent populations, the means were compared using a two-tailed
$t$-test. The results obtained indicated that there was not a significant difference between the mean scores of both groups $t(58)=0.87$, $p=0.34$. Table 1 presents a summary of statistical findings utilized to investigate the equality of means.

**Table 1. Independent t-test for the Comparison of Pretest Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$Df$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$sig$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46.60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p < 0.05$

Thus, it can be concluded that the two groups were similar in terms of their writing ability.

After it was confirmed that the two groups were at the same level of writing ability before the treatment period, it was time to see whether the participants in the experimental group had improved their writing ability. To this end, the mean scores of the final product (described in the previous section) of both groups were compared. Table 2 presents the results of the statistical analysis obtained, suggesting that there was a significant difference between the performances of both groups, $t (58)=2.84$, $p=0.001$.

**Table 2. Independent t-test for the Comparison of Posttest Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>$Df$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$sig$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>51.65</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p < 0.05$
5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the relative effectiveness of cooperative writing strategies on the achievement scores of students in English composition writing. The data analysis revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the final product or the post-test ($p < 0.05$). In this study, the overall performance of the students in terms of six categories (see Appendix A) was subjected to statistical analysis. However, it was observed that the categories which improved significantly in the experimental group were content and organization. In terms of other categories, especially syntax and mechanics, the experimental group had a better performance as well. The reason is that in cooperative learning, the students' texts are subjected to review by group members and peers. This kind of interaction has been proven to be useful in writing (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

The enhancement of the students' writing performance could be attributed to the fact that cooperative learning provides a platform for students to analyze and synthesize ideas which could lead to higher level thinking and understanding. Johnson and Johnson (1985) state that when students work together, each member of the group is motivated to contribute to his or her own learning and enhance the other members’ learning. In this way, each member can function as a tutor for the others. Because each member is responsible for the learning of other members, he/she is intrinsically motivated to go and gain some information related to the task. Cooperative learning helps students in terms of generating ideas and realizing their own errors when writing (Mohamed Nor & Kepol, 2005).

When students have a discussion about a common goal, topic, or issue, they gain a better understanding of the goal or task at hand. When a writing class is conducted through cooperative writing, students have the opportunity to brainstorm and generate novel ideas, understand the discourse better, and give and receive assistance. Through these processes, the students receive input and the quality of their output is enhanced. Cooperative writing involves negotiation of meaning among students and between
students and teachers. Thus, they receive a great amount of feedback both directly and indirectly. These processes of negotiation about meaning and receiving feedback help students to generate a more meaningful and accurate output in both written and spoken modes.

5.2 Conclusion

We can conclude that teaching writing through team work (cooperative learning) enables students to write better. Writing collaboratively arms students to evaluate their writing. It provides a friendly atmosphere for them to learn how to write. One reason is that peer correction is prevalent in collaborative writing. Many students feel more comfortable with their friends. In collaborative writing, students discuss the topics and write better through exchanging ideas with a partner. The findings of this study would be useful for teachers in utilizing cooperative learning strategies as an alternative method in teaching writing.

5.3 Recommendations for further research

To continue in this line of research, other models of cooperative learning strategies can be utilized and their effectiveness can be examined and compared. More useful information for improving students’ writing ability with respect to the effect of cooperative writing strategies can be obtained through using larger samples as well as working with students of other levels of English language proficiency.

References


Appendix A

Categories for evaluating writing (Brown, 2001, p. 357)

Content
- thesis statement
- related ideas
- development of ideas through personal experience, illustration, facts, opinions
- use of description, cause/effect, comparison/contrast
- consistent focus

Organization
- effectiveness of introduction
- logical sequence of ideas
- conclusion
- appropriate length

Discourse
- topic sentences
- paragraph unity
- transitions
- discourse markers
- cohesion
- rhetorical conventions
- reference
- fluency
- economy
- variation

Syntax

Vocabulary

Mechanics
- spelling
- punctuation
- citation of reference
- neatness and appearance
About the Authors

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Towards Learner Autonomy: An Investigation of Thai Lecturers’ Beliefs, Confidence, and Practices

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Abstract

This paper reports a survey study which sought to investigate Thai lecturers’ perspectives and practices related to learner autonomy. The questionnaire used was focused on beliefs, confidence and practices related to various aspects of learning. The findings indicate that learner autonomy is highly valued by Thai lecturers, but not highly promoted in real practices. In addition, Thai teachers are not very confident in their students’ ability to be autonomous learners. The study suggests that the intentions and beliefs alone cannot determine the actual practices of a teacher.

Keywords: Belief, Confidence, Learner Autonomy, Practice, Teachers
1. Introduction

Learner autonomy can be either a means to effective language learning, or the actual goal of language learning. It is a means because it requires participation from learners in their language study (Tudor, 1996), which, in turn, leads to success in their studies. Alternatively, learner autonomy is one of the key goals of many modes of learning. In particular, learner autonomy can become an end goal of language learning. However, no matter what the goal is, autonomy should be viewed neither as a form of teaching, nor the outcome of a particular mode of teaching (Auerbach, 2007). It should not be treated as a way of organizing teaching or learning, because if it is, it becomes a “method” that can be abandoned when it is judged unsuccessful (Little, 2007, p.7).

Literature has illustrated the importance of teachers in the development of learner autonomy. The paradox here is when autonomous learning suggests the idea of students learning on their own. But in order to do so, they need assistance from the teacher. In learning contexts which aim to promote learner autonomy, the teacher is there to aid learners to learn autonomously. In recognition of the essential role that teachers play in developing leaner autonomy, a number of studies suggest the need for the examination of teachers in parallel with the development of learner autonomy.

In Thailand, however, learner autonomy was introduced in the Thai National Education Act in 1999 and has become a topic of interest in the country’s educational sphere. How autonomy has been perceived, valued, and practiced has been under-researched. In addition, investigation of learner autonomy in Thailand has been focused more on learners, rather than on the teachers’ perspectives and practices. This has occurred despite the recognition of the crucial role that teachers play in the development of learner autonomy.

This study, thus, is an attempt to investigate Thai teachers’ perspectives and practices of learner autonomy. It is premised on my belief that learner autonomy will not be fostered if the teacher does not believe in learner autonomy and incorporate it into their actual classroom practices.
2. Review of Literature

2.1 Teachers and learner autonomy

The introduction of learner autonomy in class entails changes in teacher roles. Arellado, Bradley & Lane (1996) state that teachers can never change their students as long as they still deliver their instruction in traditional teacher-centred ways. Teachers should no longer be transmitters of knowledge. A transmission teacher, according to Barnes (1992), believes it is their duty to transmit knowledge and to test whether students have received it. Students then play a passive role. An interpretation teacher, in contrast, sees and values students as an active and crucial part in the learning process. Knowledge, for an interpretation teacher, thus can be reshaped and organized by learners (Lo, 2010).

Voller (1997) describes the roles of autonomy-supportive teachers as facilitator, counselor, and resource. When teachers function as a facilitator, they provide support for learning, either technical or psycho-social. Teacher as a counselor places an emphasis on one-to-one interaction. When teachers act as counselors, they give students suggestions regarding aspects of learning e.g. materials, methodology, sources, and self-assessment techniques. They become good listeners by carefully listening to their students and providing assistance. Rather than answering questions, counseling teachers offer alternatives for students to make decisions on their own (Riley, 1997). When the teacher acts as a resource, the teacher is seen as a source of knowledge and expertise (Benson & Voller, 1997). To optimize learning conditions for the development of learner autonomy, the teacher has to raise learners’ awareness of a wide range of knowledge materials and learning strategies.

2.2 Autonomy-inviting activities/tools

There might not be one single best way to promote learner autonomy. An activity that promotes learner autonomy in one setting may fail to do so in other settings. An example of this is evident in Bakar’s (2007) study, which examined the use of computers in learning English. Findings from Bakar’s study suggest that the use of computers might not be appropriate for all students. A similar study by Walters & Bozkurt (2009) was carried out to examine the use of vocabulary notebooks in higher education in Turkey. Its findings indicate that the use of vocabulary notebooks which are believed to facilitate learners to control their own learning is
not effective in the context of Turkey. Taken together, findings from these two studies suggest that strategies for developing learner autonomy need to be contextualized and the use of one strategy to enhance learner autonomy might not be enough.

Findings from the above studies are confirmed by a later study by Lo (2010), which examined the use of reflective portfolios in the contexts of Taiwan. Though reflective portfolios have been claimed as being able to enhance student autonomy, Taiwanese students’ inability to complete critical reflection parts of their portfolios shows that this tool might not be effective in Taiwanese contexts. Using portfolios alone cannot lead to the successful pursuit of learner autonomy, and teachers, as suggested in the study, need to enhance critical thinking skills and change students’ perception of evaluations from learning as an ‘end-product’ to ‘process-oriented’ (Lo, 2010, p.90).

Taken together, all these studies indicate that the idea of helping students to become autonomous by the teacher devising a specific framework and strictly following it may not be workable. In Murphey’s (2003) point of view, managing or teaching autonomy is “anti-autonomous” (p.7). Rather than a fixed framework, Murphey proposes what he regards as “autonomy-inviting structures”, which should include “possibilities for autonomous action at different developmental stages and offer as many choices as possible” (p.4). One tool that might be workable in an environment might not be so in other environments; thus, strategies for promoting learner autonomy cannot be rigidly prescribed.

3. Research Questions

The present study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Thai lecturers believe in learner autonomy?

2. To what extent are Thai lecturers confident in their students’ ability to learn autonomously?

3. To what extent do Thai lecturers allow their students to learn autonomously?
4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

Participants in this study were 297 language-studies lecturers in Thailand, 79.8% of whom were female and 20.2% of whom were male. The majority of the participants (78.8%) worked in government universities; whereas the rest worked in private universities.

4.2 Research tool

The instrument for this study was a survey questionnaire. It was adapted from Cotterall’s questionnaire (1999). The respondents of the questionnaire were ESL learners learning in New Zealand. The questionnaire employed in the present study was designed to suit the investigation of lecturers in Thailand.

The adapted version comprises 3 subscales for measuring beliefs, confidence and practices regarding 13 aspects of teaching-learning processor which have been identified in literature as conducive to learner autonomy. These aspects included skill practices, learning goals, learning plans, learning strategies, decisions about times, choices, activities purposes, checking works, identification of one’s own strengths and weaknesses, learning from mistakes, self-evaluation, learning monitor and measuring one’s own learning progress. Each scale consisted of 13 items. In total, there were 39 items in closed – ended and 5-points Likert scale. All items were in English.

Before the questionnaire was distributed to the participants, a trial of the questionnaire was carried out with 15 people who shared the characteristics of the sample to determine how long it would take to complete and to get feedback on clarity and layout. By conducting a trial with these people, I was able ensure the questionnaire was understandable and suitable for the investigation in a Thai setting and Thai frame of reference.

4.3 Procedures

The participants’ codes were put on the questionnaire to ensure confidentiality. Participants were mailed the questionnaire with a stamped and addressed envelope. They were asked to return the filled-in questionnaire by using this enclosed envelope.
4.4 Reliability of the study

Reliability of the questionnaire was assessed via three subscales underpinning the questionnaire. Each subscale was analyzed with Conbach’s internal consistency coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis was conducted with SPSS 17. According to the SPSS output, all three subscales underpinning the questionnaire have strong internal consistency and there was no need to delete any items from the questionnaire. The scales for measuring lecturers’ beliefs, confidence, and practice of learner autonomy have internal consistency at $\alpha = 0.78$, $\alpha = 0.86$, and $\alpha = 0.85$, respectively.

The validity and reliability of the findings of the present survey are also strengthened by the representativeness of the sample. This is because parameter characteristics which I used as the sampling frame for recruiting sampling lecturers were set clearly in the first place, and strictly and systematically followed. As Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) suggest, the high representativeness of a sample can be achieved through a clear sampling frame which needs to be set in the first place. The results of the survey, therefore, can be considered as reliable and valid on these grounds.

5. Results

Findings from the survey are presented according to the research questions. The average score of each item is interpreted as:

- 0.00 – 2.99 Weakly support the examined aspect
- 3.00 – 3.50 Being natural with the examined aspect
- 3.51 – 3.80 Averagely support the examined aspect
- 3.81 – 5.00 Strongly support the examined aspect

To what extent do Thai lecturers believe in learner autonomy?

Findings regarding the participants’ beliefs in learner autonomy are listed in Table 1.
### Table 1. Survey Results of the Lecturers’ Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Degree of Agreement (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe that students should know how to find their own ways of practising their language skills.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I believe students need to set their own goals for learning another language.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I believe that students should know how to plan their learning.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I believe that training about learning strategies is really helpful for students.</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I believe that the length of time for an activity should be decided by students.</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I believe that teachers should provide a choice of activities for students.</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I believe that students should identify the purpose of doing activities.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I believe students should check their own work for the mistakes.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I believe that students should know how to identify their strengths and weaknesses as a language learner.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I believe that students can learn from their own mistakes.</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I believe that students should evaluate their own work.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe that test results should be viewed as a way for students to monitor their own learning.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I believe that students should know how to measure their language learning progress.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that all aspects of learning, except decisions about time, received mean scores higher than 3.80. This indicates that the participants strongly believed that the responsibility to carry out these aspects of learning should be given to students. Among these, learning strategies (Item 4), learning plans (Item 3), and learning goals (Item 2) received the highest mean scores (4.23, 4.22, and 4.20 respectively). In contrast, the participants did not believe that students should make their own decisions about time, as this item (Item 5) received the lowest mean, 2.92.

Thus, it can be assumed that the Thai lecturers strongly believed in learner autonomy. They believed that students should take charge of their learning process, except when deciding about the length of time for an activity.
To what extent are Thai lecturers confident in their students’ ability to learn autonomously?

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to state how confident they were in their students’ ability to perform the examined learning activities. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Survey Results of the Lecturers’ Confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Degree of Agreement (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. I am confident that my students are able to find out their own effective ways of practising their language skills</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>4.4 19.5 46.8 24.9 4.4</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I am confident that my students can set their own goals for learning another language.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>5.1 21.5 37.0 30.3 6.1</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I am confident that my students are able to plan their learning.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>4.1 17.6 50.8 25.8 1.7</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I am confident that my students can effectively use learning strategies in their language learning.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>4.4 19.5 47.8 24.2 4.0</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I am confident that my students are able to effectively decide how much they need to spend on an activity.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>2.0 18.5 44.8 30.0 4.7</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I am confident that my students can make appropriate choices to fit their learning needs.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>2.0 16.6 50.7 28.0 2.7</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I am confident that my students can identify the purpose of doing activities.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>4.7 22.2 46.8 24.6 1.7</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I am confident that my students can check their work for mistakes.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>4.1 22.0 39.3 26.4 8.1</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I am confident that my students know how to identify their strengths and weaknesses as a language learner.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>1.7 19.9 33.0 40.1 5.4</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I am confident that my students can learn from their own mistakes.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>2.4 7.1 32.5 38.0 20.0</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I am confident that my students are able to evaluate their own work.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>3.4 26.7 43.6 22.0 4.4</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I am confident my students are able to use test results to monitor their own learning.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>1.0 10.8 35.0 40.4 12.8</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I am confident that my students are able to effectively measure their language learning progress.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>2.4 16.5 48.5 28.3 4.4</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 2, the participants were not very confident that their students were able to carry out those aspects of learning on their own. Among the examined 13 aspects of learning, learning from mistakes (Item 23) and using test results to monitor learning progress (Item 25) received the highest means (3.67 and 3.53, respectively). Self-evaluation (Item 24) and identification of activities purposes (Item 20) were the areas that the participants were least
confident in their students’ ability to carry out independently (Means 2.97 and 2.96, respectively).

Thus, it can be concluded that the surveyed lecturers were very confident in their students’ ability to learn autonomously.

**To what extent do Thai lecturers allow their students to learn autonomously?**

Table 3 shows the mean scores of the extent to which Thai lecturers allow their students to learn autonomously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Degree of Agreement (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27. I give my students opportunities to find out their own ways of practicing their language skills.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>1.0 7.1 27.9 51.2 12.8</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I allow my students to set their own goals for learning another language.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>1.7 9.2 33.2 38.6 17.3</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I give my students opportunities to plan their learning.</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>2.0 8.8 35.4 41.8 11.9</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I give my students opportunities to use their own learning strategies in their language learning.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>1.3 6.7 27.6 43.1 21.2</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. In my class, the length of time for an activity is decided by students.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>14.3 43.9 29.1 10.8 1.4</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I provide opportunities for my students to select from a variety of learning activities.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>0.7 10.1 30.7 46.3 12.2</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I give my students opportunities to understand the purpose of doing activities.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>0 1.7 17.3 52.2 28.8</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I give opportunities for my students to check their work for mistakes.</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>0 4.4 32.7 43.5 19.4</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I encourage my students to identify their strengths and weaknesses as a language learner.</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>0.7 5.4 20.3 53.9 19.7</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I allow my students to learn from their own mistakes.</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>1.4 5.8 15.6 48.6 28.6</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I give my students opportunities to evaluate their own work.</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1.0 9.9 30.7 46.1 12.3</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I give opportunities for students to use test results to make decisions about their learning.</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>3.7 9.1 29.6 42.4 15.2</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I give my students opportunities to measure their language learning progress.</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>1.0 4.8 27.3 51.5 15.4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3, only Items 33, 35, and 36 received mean scores higher than 3.80. Item 31, which was making decision about time, was the only item that received the mean score.
lower than 2.99. The remaining aspects of learning received average mean scores i.e. from 3.51 - 3.80. This suggests that students were given a great deal of opportunity to understand the purposes of doing activities, to learn from mistakes, and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, whereas they were given an average amount of opportunity to carry out other aspects of their learning process. Making decisions about time seems to be the area in which Thai students were given the least amount of independence.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from the survey suggest that Thai lecturers strongly believe in learner autonomy. That is, they perceive the necessity of allowing learners to direct their own learning process and are aware of the importance of providing a learning environment conducive to do so. However, there exists a disparity between their beliefs and practices. In practices, Thai lecturers may not provide many opportunities for their students to learn autonomously.

Comparison of the mean scores of belief, confidence and practices in each aspect of the teaching/learning process reveals interesting findings regarding the participants’ beliefs, confidence, and practices (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Comparison of Beliefs, Confidence and Practices
According to Figure 1, the means of beliefs in the majority of the examined 13 aspects of learning-teaching process are higher than those of practices. This indicates that while the participants believe their students should be autonomous in these areas of their own learning, in practice the participants do not give their students the opportunities to do so. Interestingly, the issue of time either in terms of beliefs or practices receives the lowest mean scores among all areas of the teaching/learning process.

With regards to confidence and practices, inconsistencies are also found in almost every area of the teaching/learning process. The extent to which the participants allow their students to be autonomous is higher than the extent to which the participants are confident in their students’ ability to do so. In other words, the participants allow their students to take responsibilities to manage almost every aspect of the teaching/learning process although they are not sure whether or not their students are able to do so.

Making decisions about time is the only area in which the mean of confidence is higher than that of practice. This indicates that although to some extent the participants are confident that their students are able to decide about the length of time for an activity, they actually do not allow their students to decide in actual practices. In this sense, time seems to be the most challenging area in the development of learner autonomy because Thai students will not be given power to make their own decisions about time. The finding about time is not hard to explain when educational systems and the atmosphere in Thai classrooms is taken into account. Fearing the inability to complete all the assigned units or to keep up with the course syllabus, lecturers may keep control of decisions about time.

It can be concluded that learner autonomy in Thailand is not highly promoted even though Thai lecturers strongly recognize and believe in the importance of learner autonomy. Furthermore, most of the lecturers are not confident in their students’ ability to take charge of their own learning. This suggests that intentions and beliefs alone cannot determine the actual practices of a teacher. Rather, there might be hidden mechanisms that prevent teachers from putting what they believe into practice.

However, given the fact that closed-ended questions in the survey have limited the “breadth” of the participants’ responses (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 462), the data from this survey is not able to explain why Thai lecturers do not translate their beliefs into practice and why they are not confident that their students can learn autonomously. This may be the area that needs further investigation.
Though the current study was carried out in a Thai context, its findings yield an insight into the implementation of autonomy in any educational context. Any university aiming to encourage its lecturers to implement learner autonomy needs to take into consideration the fact that there are some lecturers who do not act on their beliefs; hence, they need to investigate what factors contribute to the inconsistencies between the beliefs and practices of their lecturers.

References


About the Author

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Intra-Individual Learner Variation in English L2 Writing: A Case Study of Complexity, and Accuracy Development in Intensive English Language Programs

Freek Olaf de Groot
Asian University

Abstract

A Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) perspective of second language acquisition views the process of a learner’s inter-language development as non-linear, and subject to variation due to its dynamic interaction between external and internal factors in an individual learner’s language system. This study investigated the intra-individual learner variation in L2 writing of one learner of English on an intensive English course over a period of four weeks. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of intensive exposure and interaction with the target language on variation in complexity, accuracy and fluency of L2 writing from a DST perspective. The present study seeks to find evidence that developmental growth patterns in language subsystems can be observed within a smaller time frame, as opposed to earlier short term studies, under the condition that intensive exposure and instruction to the target language is provided. The findings of the present study provide evidence for connected growers between and within subsystems of complexity, accuracy and fluency measures which are similar to those observed in longitudinal studies. However, the measures of complexity, accuracy and fluency failed to yield evidence for developmental leaps.

Keywords: Dynamic Systems Theory, L2 Writing, Complexity, Accuracy, Development
1. Rationale

Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) (De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2007; Larsen-Freeman (1997, 2006); Van Geert, 2008; Thelen & Smith, 1994) has gained much attention over the last decade as a complementary view on second language acquisition (SLA). Microgenetic studies on intra-individual variation have argued that variation is the driving force behind the developmental process from a dynamic systems perspective. Studies by Verspoor, De Bot & Lowie (2004); Verspoor, Lowie & Van Dijk (2008) and Spoelman & Verspoor (2010) have illustrated that degrees in variability and the patterns that emerge from this variation can provide us with valuable insights in the developmental processes of individual learners. Previous intra-individual variation studies have mainly collected long term data. A short term study by Verspoor et al. (2004) failed to elicit any effects and it was argued that due to a lack of focus on the task and the sheer time frame of observation the study remained inconclusive. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of intensive exposure and interaction with the target language on the development of variation in complexity, accuracy and fluency of L2 writing. The present study seeks to find evidence that developmental growth patterns within and between language subsystems of complexity, accuracy and fluency, such as connected growers and developmental leaps, can be observed within a smaller time frame under the condition that intensive exposure and instruction to the target language is provided. This intensified exposure to the target language is expected to provide enough resources for dynamic systems to sustain growth and exhibit these patterns accordingly. This paper argues that the carrying capacity of intensive exposure is higher than in a normal instructional environment and therefore provides enough substance for development to take place and to be observed over a shorter time span.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Dynamic systems theory and second language acquisition

Interest in Dynamic Systems Theory in second language acquisition has grown over the last two decades. A DST approach within the field of SLA is not completely new. Previous claims on the dynamic nature of factors influencing language learning have been made in subareas of SLA such as the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge (Paradis, 1994) and motivation research (Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997; Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant & Mihic, 2004). One of the earliest calls for a DST approach to SLA came from Larsen-Freeman (1997). She argued that among the many different factors responsible for the development of interlanguages and the many different factors that influence the success of this development, “no one of these is by itself a determining factor. The interaction of them; however, has a very profound effect” (p. 151). DST attempts to provide a dynamic account of development in which systems are constantly changing in a non-linear fashion through the dynamic interaction with other variables within the environment and the interaction with the environment itself. In turn, these developing systems, or subsystems, are in constant interaction with each other, subsequently influencing their development. Van Geert (2008) argues that “dynamic system is not a specific theory but … it is a general view on change, change in complex systems, in particular, or, systems consisting of many interacting components, the properties of which can change over the course of time” (p. 183). This view on change can provide us with insights in developmental patterns of learner language in much more detail than the more traditional approaches. As regards languages as dynamic systems, both L1 and interlanguages can be considered dynamic systems in their own right in the sense that languages develop through the interaction between and among individuals (Ellis, 1985, 1994; Huebner, 1985, Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Dynamic systems theory is compatible with an emergentist approach to second language acquisition. Emergentists claim that languages are learned not on the basis of a predisposed ability to learner languages. Rather, languages are learned on the basis of language use and interaction with the environment (Elman 1995, 2005). Input, among many other factors, plays an elementary role
in this process as language development is dependent on and receptive to environmental factors due to its usage-based nature.

2.2 The role of variability in SLA from a dynamic systems perspective

Variability in SLA has only recently become a real subject of interest. More traditional approaches to language research claim that variability in language production and achievement should be regarded as noise or outliers and is accounted for by interference of contextual factors. It is assumed these outliers are not representative for the sample. Recent views, such as De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor (2007); Larsen-Freeman (2006); Van Geert (2008); Verspoor et al. (2008), argue that variability in performance and production is meaningful and can illustrate developmental patterns within the language system. Attributing variability to environmental or contextual factors is according to them “too simplistic and too linear”. They argue that it is the interaction with the environment that leads to variability and change within the system. This variability in language systems through interaction with the environment is the driving force behind development. Thelen & Smith (1994) argue that within SLA this variability is needed to explore and select various options in the learning process.

2.2.1 Patterns and developments in variation

Ellis (1985, 1994) was one of the first to identify a stage of ‘free variation’ preceding the formation of a more organized system and found that this variability could not be attributed to any other factors. He explained his findings by arguing that learners go through a stage of reconceptualization of linguistic features and that variation offers them the choice to try out forms in different contexts before moving on to more organized systems. This self-organizing quality of dynamic systems has been described in more detail by Van Geert (1994, 2008) who argues that learners set goals and make choices accordingly. Setting goals i.e. attractor states (e.g., a desired level of proficiency) limits the number of options to achieve these goals and subsequently creates patterns in the system, a form of self-organization. High amounts of variation are often good indicators for an increasing self-organization of the system (Van
Dijk & Van Geert, 2007). These transitional stages, marked by different amounts of variability, sudden jumps and developmental leaps, are clear indicators that a system is in development and moving towards a new attractor state. Verspoor et al. (2008) illustrate how transitional phases and the self-organizing characteristic of dynamic systems can be identified and visualized. Using a variety of advanced visualization techniques, they illustrated that periods of relative high amounts of variation are followed by stages of more systematic variation with lower amounts of variation. A widening in the bandwidth of the variation is a good indicator of this process. The leveling off (narrowing the bandwidth of variability) is an indication of the system reaching an attractor state, a desired state in which lower amounts of variability are observed. However, even relatively stable stages are still subject to variation albeit to a lesser extent and with no clear direction.

2.2.2 Resources and connected growers

Systems grow by virtue of the minimal growth condition (Van Geert, 1991). He argued that in order for a system to develop, there needs to be a substance that can grow and that the only condition under which this growth can take place is when the collective interaction between resources can supply the system with enough resources to develop. This is called the carrying capacity of a system. Important to note here is that not all growers require the same amounts of resources to initiate or sustain development, nor do they grow in similar trends. Furthermore, some systems are mutually dependent in terms of growth. Connected growers (Van Geert, 1991, 1995) are subsystems that mutually support each other’s growth or compete for resources to grow. This mutually supportive relationship can occur between subsystems, for instance, accuracy and complexity, or within subsystems, i.e., various measures of complexity. De Bot et al. (2005) argue that the development, or growth, is restricted by the availability of the amount of resources. Resources can be seen in the light of amount and quality of input, memory capacity, motivation, parental support, interaction with caretakers/caregivers, attitudes toward the L2 learning environment, etc. Verspoor et al. (2008) were able to visualize the presence of connected growers in their case study on an advanced learner in measures of fluency and two measures for complexity. The study yielded evidence in support of the existence of both competitive relationships between fluency and
lexical complexity. They pointed out that the relationship between the connected growers is dynamic as well and that these relationships can change over time, depending on the level of proficiency and strategies used by the learners. In addition, trade-off effects are more likely to be visible at lower proficiency levels and less prominent at higher levels of proficiency.

Another study (Spoelman & Verspoor, 2010) investigating the development of accuracy and complexity measures in the acquisition of Finnish L2 writing found evidence for the presence of connected growers and competitive growers within the same subsystem of complexity. Following Norris & Ortega’s (2009) multidimensional approach, complexity was measured at three different levels: word level, noun phrase level and sentence level. Results indicated that complexity development at the lexical level and the sentence level, and complexity development at the lexical level and the noun phrase level were mutually supportive growers. Complexity development at the noun phrase level and the sentence level tended to show a competitive relationship. The latter provided extra evidence that the competitive relationship in itself was variable in its nature and tended to level off towards the end of the study. These results were explained by a change in embedding strategies, i.e. nominalization versus the use of dependent clauses.

Research within the field of task-based instruction and task design has long focused on the interaction between complexity, accuracy and fluency measures (see Ellis, 2003 for a comprehensive overview). Although often the effects are based on the interaction between task features (Skehan, 1998), general trade-off effects can be predicted on the basis of the limited capacity in which individuals have to spread their attention to either focus on form or meaning. This reasoning is in line with De Bot et al. (2005) and Van Geert (1994, 2008) who argue that learners have limited resources to be allocated to various systems. Determining which factor is responsible is often difficult as all three measures are in competition for resources and the sum of interaction between the environment, the task and the task design features define the allocation of resources in the end (Foster & Skehan, 1999; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Ellis, 2003). This is a view that is compatible with Larsen-Freeman’s argument that no final call can be made on one single factor responsible for development but that it is the collective interaction between the factors which is paramount.
3. Methodology

3.1 Participant

The present study included one female Thai learner of English. She enrolled in a five-week intensive English course during the months of August and September at an English-medium university Southeast of Bangkok. She did not receive additional English intensive instruction after leaving high school and enrolled the course voluntarily as she believed it would improve her career opportunities. The participant was admitted to the pre-intermediate level on the basis of an entrance test.

3.2 Data collection

Written samples of spontaneous language production were collected every Tuesday and Thursday at the end of the class for a period of four weeks, totaling 8 samples of writing with a 100% completion rate. No feedback was given on her writing during the period of data collection. Data collection started in the second week of the course. The participant received 6 hours of English language instruction per day for 5 days a week totaling 120 hours of intensive instruction during the course and 90 hours during the data collection. She resided on campus, which is a complete English language environment.

3.3 Data analysis

The data analysis focuses on variability of accuracy measures, variability of complexity measures and the interaction between complexity, accuracy and fluency.

3.3.1 Accuracy

Accuracy, defined as the amount of control a learner has over the language (Skehan, 1998), has been calculated according to the concept of target-like use ratios in which the number of correct suppliance in contexts is divided by the sum of the number of obligatory contexts and the number of suppliance in non-obligatory contexts. Target-like use ratios also include ‘over use’ of a certain form and provide a more accurate view of the percentage of correct use of a
certain form. Four categories have been selected that are typical problematic features for Thai learners of English: prepositions, articles, use of *be* as a lexical verb, and pronouns.

**3.3.2 Complexity**

Complexity is defined as the learner’s willingness to use more challenging and difficult language, the willingness to use a variety of forms and the preparedness to take risks in experimenting linguistically (Skehan, 1998). Three distinct phases of complexity development can be identified and need to be taken into account when operationalizing the construct of complexity (Wolfe-Quintero, Inagaki & Kim, 1998 as cited in Norris and Ortega, 2009). The first stage is coordination which involves the sequencing of lexical items in sentences and clauses. The second stage involves subordination to express connections between parts of texts. The third stage of complexity development would occur at the noun phrase level through nominalization. As the participant is at the pre-intermediate level, she is likely to show development of complexity at the first two stages, hence the current research has chosen word level complexity and sentence complexity. Following a recent call by Norris & Ortega (2009) to measure syntactic complexity as a multilevel dynamic measure, the construct is operationalized into two variables at two levels: the word level (the number of added morphemes per sentence) and the sentence level (the ratio of the number of dependent clauses per text divided by the number of sentences per text).

**3.3.3 Fluency**

Fluency is defined as the speed of written language production (Skehan, 1998). Fluency is operationalized through the variable average sentence length in words. In the present study, the average sentence length in words is measured against the development of lexical complexity in the form of type token ratios. An analysis of this type indicates the relationship between lexical complexification through the number of different types words used and the average number of words in a sentence. Typical patterns reveal that for beginners a trade-off effect is found between the measures but at later stages more complex lexical use is not necessarily related to longer sentences (Verspoor et al., 2008).
3.4 Methods of analysis

The data is analyzed with advanced visualization techniques, using detrended data and min-max moving windows. Detrended data visualizes the net growth of data set without the influence of an upward or downward trend. It is calculated by measuring the distance of individual data points from the linear regression line of the dataset. Min-max moving windows indicate the bandwidth of variation within the context of a window of time frames rather than a static point. This is realized by visualizing the minimum and maximum scores over a moving window i.e., data points 1-3, 2-4, 3-6, 4-7, 5-8. For a detailed overview of the techniques, see Van Geert & Van Dijik (2002) and for its application, see Verspoor et al. (2008).

4. Results

4.1 Development and variability in accuracy levels

Figure 1 shows an interesting developmental pattern of the four categories of accuracy scores. Three measures, (personal pronouns, lexical verb to be, and prepositions) tend to show high amounts of individual variability, nonetheless there is a coherent pattern between the measures. Average accuracy rates of more than 50% are observed for personal pronouns (77.6%), average accuracy levels for prepositions (56.6%) and the lexical verb to be (50.1%), whereas articles did not yield more than 33.9%. The last measure follows a particularly different pattern from the other three measures. The similar trends in variability for the three mentioned accuracy measures could indicate that these three categories are connected growers. To investigate the relationship between the growers, detrended data is used. Figure 2 shows the variation of the data and a clear pattern can be observed for the three categories. Correlation tests reaffirm these observations for personal pronouns and the lexical verb to be (r=0.628; p=.048), for personal pronouns and prepositions (r=0.736; p=.019) and for the lexical verb to be and personal pronouns (r=0.865; p=.003). However, the multivariate correlation failed to yield a significant score (r=0.737; p=.142).
The accuracy rates for articles show a variability pattern that levels off after text 4, i.e., after halfway through the course. Using min-max graphs over a moving time frame provides further insight into the bandwidth of variation. Figure 3 shows the min-max graph over a moving time frame for accuracy scores on articles. The pattern reveals a widening of the bandwidth from Text 2 up until Text 5 where it seems to narrow again and remain stable until the end of the observations. Patterns of this kind, an increase in variability before a leap in
development, show signs of self-organization and an attractor state. The other measures fail to produce this effect in spontaneous language production and are subject to high amounts of variation. However, the distinct coherent patterns of variability indicate that the learner not only has to divide resources over subsets within a subsystem but possibly also across various subsystems and that accuracy scores are compromised by higher performances on other subsystems.

**Figure 3. Min Max Graph over a Moving Window for Accuracy Rates of Articles**

![Graph showing accuracy rates over time]

4.2 Development of variability in complexity

Figure 4 shows the variability in complexity development at the word level and sentence levels. At first glance, it seems that a downward trend in complexity can be observed at both levels. However, it needs to be noted that the variation present in the initial measurements are possibly part of variation that started earlier in the first week of instruction. Over the first texts, (Texts 1-4) high amounts of variation can be observed, with highs (Text 3) alternating with lows (Text 4). After Text 4 the amount of variation seems to level off until a sudden increase in Text 8 in both word level and sentence level complexity, indicating that variation is ongoing and has not reached an attractor state. Despite considerable variability in the measures, the trend seems to be consistent, a pattern much similar to a connected grower.
Figure 4. Complexity Development at the Word Level and the Sentence Level

Detrended data is used to visualize this relationship and Figure 5 confirms the connected grower trend observed in Figure 4. The correlation between the measures turns out to be strong and statistically significant ($r = .835; p = 0.005$). This finding implies that the learner is developing the syntactic complexity of her language at two levels at the same time (the word level and the amount of subordination that takes place) and that she shows willingness to take risks and use fewer controlled language subsystems. Interesting to observe here is that the high peaks in complexity in text 3 and 8 correspond with very low accuracy scores. This could imply that due to an increased amount of resources allocated to complexity, the attention and resources distributed over controlled language subsystems might be compromised. This relationship will be examined in the next section.
4.3 Interaction between complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures

To investigate the interaction between complexity, accuracy and fluency, two additional analyses were carried out: the first was conducted between complexity and accuracy measures, and the second between complexity and fluency measures. First, the accumulative measures of accuracy scores were mapped against word level complexity. Figure 6 indicates that in cases where word complexity increases (Texts 1-3 and 8), accuracy scores seem to suffer. The reverse is also observed when word complexity decreases, accuracy scores seem to increase (Texts 4 and 5). Detrended data in Figure 7 shows the relationship between the accuracy scores and word complexity levels and confirms this observation. A correlation confirmed the negative correlation between accuracy and complexity ($r = -0.682; p = 0.031$).
In the second analysis investigating the interaction between complexity and fluency, type token ratios as a measure of lexical complexity were mapped against the average sentence length in words as a fluency measure. Figure 8 illustrates the relationship between the two measures and yields a complicated picture. Up until Text 4, a seeming competitive relationship is present. Starting from Text 5, the effect seems to level off as the average sentence length in words seems to level off and the type token ratio shows little variation.
Figure 8. Type Token Ratio and Average Sentence Length in Words

Detrended data in Figure 9 confirms the dual relationship between the measures. Texts 1-4 seem to indicate a competitive relationship in which an increase in sentence length is paired with a decrease in lexical complexity. Texts 5-8 are indicative of a more supportive relationship. Correlation coefficients for the effects turned out rather ambiguous ($r = -0.142, p = .369$) with no clear resolution.

Figure 9. Detrended Data for Type Token Ratio and Average Sentence Length in Words
5. Discussion of the Results

A few issues stand out in the present results. First of all, as argued by Van Geert (1995), cognitive ecosystems have limited resources and these limited resources have to be divided over of various subsystems. In the present study for this particular learner, this has been found as well through a trade-off effect between accuracy and complexity. Although the interaction of the factors is likely to be responsible for the effect, some possible explanations will be provided. To begin with, the trade-off effect could be explained by the findings of Skehan & Foster (1997), who claimed that online planning, in this case the spontaneous production of writing without prior planning, elicits more complex language use. This could be the case for some instances, whereas in others the learner might have engaged in some form of preplanning. The student knew the days on which she was asked to write, hence the higher accuracy levels. In addition, following Foster & Skehan (1999) and Bygate (1999), narrative discourse modes elicit more complex language use than argumentative or descriptive discourse modes. Texts 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 are written in a narrative discourse mode, whereas the others are in either argumentative (4) or descriptive (5, 6) mode. Another explanation that needs to be mentioned here is that this could be a measurement at a particular moment in time at a particular state in which lower levels of proficiency trade-off effects are found, whereas at higher levels of proficiency these effects tend to marginalize for various reasons. Spoelman & Verspoor (2010) indicate this as well and point out the highly variable relationship between accuracy and complexity and its changing nature over the course of development.

A second finding indicated that while the connected growers within accuracy subsets exhibit a supportive growth relationship between various measures. At the same time, independent growers are present as well, showing a clear leveling off effect into an attractor state. This clearly indicates that accuracy development in itself is highly variable in its subsets. An explanation is not easily found for these patterns except that uptake from input and exposure to the language does not directly translate into grammatically accurate language use.

Finally, the dynamic relationship between lexical complexity and fluency shows a trend similar to findings by Verspoor et al. (2008). Initially, both subsystems compete for resources
whereas later on this effect seems to fade away. They argue that this could occur as longer sentences at higher level proficiency are not necessarily associated with higher levels of complexity. However, it can be doubted whether this amount of development is likely to occur within a time period of four weeks of intensive instruction. A more plausible explanation would be to assume that with smaller intervals of data collection and intensified exposure to the language, connected growers show more variability in their relationship depending on the interaction between the systems. This is highly unpredictable and needs further investigation, e.g., a series of connected intensive language courses comprising a longer period of time.

6. Conclusion

This paper has illustrated that the development of complexity, accuracy and fluency during intensive exposure to the language yields high amounts of variation, connected growers, and competitive growers which in turn tend to be dynamic and variable in its relationship. The time frame of observation, as argued by Verspoor et al. (2004), did not negatively affect the present study as distinct patterns of growth and connected growers were observed. From a language teaching perspective, this study aimed to show the highly variable nature of the development of learner language especially with intensive exposure to the language. Regarding variability as the motor of development, language teachers should provide an environment which allows for intensive interaction to satisfy the minimal growth condition and to sustain development. In addition, findings from studies mentioned in this paper and the present results should be food for thought for a different view to language evaluation considering the high amounts of variation within and between subsystems of learner language. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, from a language teaching perspective, the present findings show that even after receiving 120 hours of instruction, one can safely state that instruction and learning do not take place at the same time.
Notes

1. I would like to thank the students and teachers of the September module of the English Intensive Program at Asian University for their cooperation in this study.

2. I would like to thank Willard Vandebogart for his invaluable comments and contributions during the revision.

References


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Comparing Focused Tasks on Eliciting Targeted LREs during Learner-Learner Interaction

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Abstract

Previous studies have demonstrated that tasks to some extent can be designed to elicit targeted forms. However, it is unclear which interaction task types are more efficient in generating targeted linguistic forms, especially less salient forms. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of different interaction task types on generating metalanguage of articles, passive voice, and subject-verb agreement. Four tasks were created based on two types of focused task, namely structure-based production and consciousness-raising task. Fifteen ESL learners engaged in each task and their performance was analyzed for language-related episodes (LREs). Results revealed that consciousness-raising tasks elicited more LREs on targeted linguistic forms. The discussion of results and pedagogical implications are presented.

Keywords: Focused Task, Learner-learner Interaction, Structure-Based Production Task, Consciousness-raising Task
1. Introduction

1.1 Background and statement of problem

Previous interaction-based research studies have provided empirical support for communicative approaches to second language instruction such as communicative language teaching, form-focused instruction (Long & Robinson, 1998), and task-based language teaching (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). One of the goals of these instructional approaches is to create opportunities for conversational interaction in classrooms. Conversational interaction has been suggested to facilitate second language learning by providing learners with input, feedback, and opportunities for output (e.g., Gass & Mackey, 2007; Leeman, 2007; Long, 1981, 1983, 1996; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996; Swain, 1993, 2000). There is now surmounting evidence of the benefits of interactional feedback (e.g., Iwashita, 2003; Lyster & Ranta, 1997), effects of different types of feedback (e.g., Loewen & Philips, 2006; Lyster, 1998; McDonough, 2007), the facilitative role of output (e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 1995, 1998), and emerging evidence of syntactic priming during interaction (e.g., McDonough & Mackey, 2006, 2008).

One approach to promote conversational interaction is the use of tasks. Tasks can be described as pedagogical activities that engage learners in meaningful use of language to achieve a communicative goal with an overall aim of promoting learning through practice or product (for a review of definitions of task, see Sumada & Bygate, 2008; Bygate et al., 2001; Ellis, 2003). Exploiting tasks to direct learners towards meaning is beneficial, especially in low communicative classes. On the other hand, in many ESL/EFL contexts, instructors may desire to promote not only conversational interaction in general but also interaction that could lead learners to focus on targeted linguistic features. However, tasks are usually more meaning and learner oriented, making it challenging to push learners to focus on predetermined form. For example, Breen (1987) observed that often there is a difference between outcomes derived from task design (task-as-workplan) and actual outcomes derived from learners (task-in-process). He suggested that this divergence is a result of an unpredictable interaction between the learner, task, and situation. That is, learners will often
arrive at a task with different assumptions about what their roles are, the demand of the task, and personal definition of the situation. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that tasks can be designed to have learners focus on target structures (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993; Ellis, 2003). Accordingly, it remains unclear how effectively tasks are able to draw learners to attend to targeted structures. Furthermore, it is also worth examining whether certain types of tasks are more effective at eliciting target structures than others.

1.2 Objectives of the study
The objectives of the study are to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do different focused tasks elicit discussion of grammatical forms during learner-learner interaction?

2. Are certain types of focused tasks more effective in eliciting discussion of grammatical forms during learner-learner interaction?

3. To what extent are focused tasks able to elicit discussion of grammatical forms that are targeted in the design?

2. Review of Literature
As suggested earlier, there is no guarantee that tasks will elicit targeted features because tasks are heavily meaning and learner oriented. However, it is possible that certain tasks are more capable of drawing attention to targeted forms than other tasks. Loschky & Bley-Vroman (1993) proposed three characteristics of task design that can promote the production of target structures to varying degrees: naturalness, usefulness, and essentialness. Tasks that are natural put the least constraint on the production of a particular structure. The target grammatical structure may arise while learners engage in this type of task, but it is not necessary for completing the task. Tasks that are useful help elicit the use of the target structures because target structures make it easier for learners to complete the task. Tasks that are essential are said to force learners to use the target structures because without them the task cannot be completed. Similarly, Ellis (2003) believes that tasks can be designed to
constrain the use of certain types of linguistic features, albeit their main focus should still be on achieving communication. Ellis puts forth what he calls *focused tasks*, which are designed to elicit or raise the awareness of target linguistic features. However, it remains unclear how tasks can be designed to elicit the use and negotiation of predetermined forms effectively.

Focused tasks are tasks that are used to elicit specific linguistic features, either by design or by the use of methodological procedures that focus attention to form during the implementation of a task. Ellis separates focused tasks into three types: structure-based production tasks, comprehension tasks, and consciousness-raising tasks. Structure-based production tasks are designed to incorporate specific linguistic features for learners to reproduce. Examples of structure-based production tasks are dictogloss, picture differences, picture description, and story completion tasks. Previous studies have investigated the use of structure-based production tasks. For example, Fortune (2005) compared advanced and intermediate learners’ use of metalanguage in four dictogloss tasks. Eight advanced EFL learners from various L1 backgrounds worked in pairs to reconstruct texts read aloud. Learners were informed that their writing was grammatically correct, but that they were not required to use the same type of syntactic structure or lexical items. The performances of advanced and intermediate learners were compared. Analysis of the frequency of LREs revealed that advanced EFL learners generated more LREs on both lexical and grammatical items. As a result, it could be inferred that dictogloss is able to generate metalinguistic talk but more advanced learners would more readily focus on form on this type of task.

The second type of focused task is the comprehension task. Comprehension tasks are based on the concept of *processing instruction* (VanPatten, 2004). They are designed to make learners attend to specific linguistic features in the input. Learners are not required to produce any language, whether written or oral. There are two types of comprehension task; input enrichment and input-processing instruction. The latter type of task has been widely investigated and has shown positive effects on learning targeted forms (see VanPatten, 1996, 2004 for review of studies). For example, VanPatten & Cadierno (1993) investigated whether processing instruction could alter how learners process Spanish word order and whether it
would affect learners’ comprehension and production. Eighty English learners of Spanish were separated into a processing instruction, traditional instruction, and control group. The processing instruction group was given explicit instruction on how to interpret OVS strings correctly and emphasize the contrast between the English and Spanish word order. They were also given receptive practice. The traditional instruction group was given explicit instruction but not explanation about the contrasts between the English and Spanish word order. The control group was given no instruction or practice. Three posttests including both interpretation and production were given after the treatment. Results revealed that the processing instruction group scored significantly higher than the traditional instruction and control group on the interpretation test. In the production test, the processing instruction group and the traditional group showed significant gains on the production posttests, but no difference between the two groups was found. In short, comprehension tasks were able to draw learners’ attention to form. In addition, they helped improve learners’ production skills despite not requiring learners to produce the form.

The third type of task according to Ellis’s framework is the consciousness-raising task. Consciousness-raising tasks differ from structure-based production tasks and comprehension tasks in two ways. First, consciousness-raising tasks draw upon explicit learning while structure-based production tasks and comprehension tasks draw on implicit learning. Secondly, consciousness-raising tasks are built around targeted language features as opposed to content (e.g., a film, a picture). In consciousness-raising tasks, exemplars of targeted forms are embedded in the task and learners are required to identify these structures to complete the task. Therefore, in this type of task, learners are guided to talk about the language form of interest. Examples of consciousness-raising tasks are crossword puzzles and language editing tasks. Fotos (1994) compared the effectiveness of consciousness-raising tasks to traditional grammar instruction in terms of promoting gain in knowledge of adverb placement, indirect objects, and relative clause structures and compared its ability to stimulate conversations with communicative tasks. One hundred and sixty Japanese EFL learners were separated into three groups: teacher-fronted grammatical lessons, task-based grammar practice, and communicative task practice. The two task-based groups were comparable in terms of task
features (e.g., +/- information gap). To measure learners’ gain in grammatical knowledge, the grammar-based groups were administered a pre-test and post-test. Results showed no significant differences between the grammar-based groups. To compare the task-based groups’ ability to generate production and negotiation (e.g., comprehension checks, confirmation checks), the number of negotiation and L2 words were counted and compared. Results revealed no significant difference between the two task-based groups.

In another study, Pilar & Mayo (2002) compared the efficacy of a dictogloss task and consciousness-raising task in drawing learners’ attention to form. Fourteen Spanish EFL learners were asked to perform both types of tasks on two different occasions. Both the dictogloss and consciousness-raising tasks were designed to draw learners’ attention to specific grammatical forms including articles, prepositions, clausal connectors, relative clause structures, and adverbs. Since learners were unfamiliar with engaging in both types of tasks, they were given a training session that emphasized text reconstruction. To measure learners’ attention, their conversations were analyzed for LREs. Results revealed that consciousness-raising tasks were able to generate more instances of LREs than the dictogloss task. In sum, both studies that compared consciousness-raising tasks to other task types have yielded diverging results. Further research on different task types’ ability to draw learners’ attention to targeted forms is needed.

The purpose of the current investigation is to compare the effectiveness of two types of tasks in learner-learner interaction, the structure-based production task and the consciousness-raising task. The goal is to determine which task type is able to draw more attention to form and which task type is able to draw attention to forms that were intentionally embedded in the tasks. Therefore, unlike previous studies, this study examined whether learners attended to the forms that were targeted by the tasks, and whether there was any difference between task types.
3. Procedures

3.1 Participants

The participants were 15 ESL learners, 5 males and 10 females, studying in an intensive English program at a regional university in the southwest United States. The program focused on four English skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) as well as a content-based course and a TOEFL preparation course. Participants’ mean age was 19.8 and ranged from 17 to 22. The average number of months they had stayed in the US was 6.5 and ranged from 3 to 18 months at the time of the study. They came from a variety of L1 backgrounds including Mandarin ($n=8$), African dialect ($n=1$), Arabic ($n=3$), Japanese ($n=2$), and Vietnamese ($n=1$). They can be classified as intermediate level learners. Before the study they were debriefed about the procedures and objective of the study. All participants signed a consent form issued by the institutional review board at an accredited university in the US stating that they agree to participate in the study and be audio recorded.

3.2 Materials/Research tools

3.2.1 Target structures

The target structures were English articles, the passive voice structure, and subject verb agreement. These structures were selected based on the processing principles in VanPatten’s input processing model (1996, 2004). The model consists of second language processing principles that are believed to constrain how learners process incoming language regardless of mode. Accordingly, the structures selected were presumed to be less salient to learners and thus more difficult to process. The specific processing principles relevant for each structure are described in the following sections.

*Articles:* Articles were selected based on Principle 1a: The Primacy of Content Words. The principle states that learners process content words in the input before anything else. VanPatten (2004) explains that learners are primarily driven to look for meaning in the input. Accordingly, they would attend to words that possess the most communicative value, which are usually content words. As a result, function words such as articles may be skipped over or
partially processed and erased from working memory. In English, there are indefinite (i.e., *a*, *an*) and definite articles (i.e., *the*) (Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002). *A* and *an* are used with singular and countable nouns and show indefinite meanings. *The* can be used with both singular and plural, countable and uncountable nouns but they show definite meaning.

**Subject-verb agreement:** The difficulty in processing subject-verb agreement structure falls under the Lexical Preference Principle which states that learners will tend to rely on lexical items as opposed to grammatical form to get meaning when both encode the same semantic information. In English, if the subject of the sentence is a third person singular noun (e.g., *he*, *Mary*, *the book*), the verb must agree with it by inserting the bound morpheme -*s* at the end of a lexical verb or using the appropriate form for auxiliary verbs (e.g., *the book is on the table*). Hence, in a sentence, the third person singular notion is marked twice; first by the subject and then by the verb. As a result, learners can obtain the information that another person is the topic of the sentence from the subject.

**Passive voice:** The difficulty in processing passive voice statements falls under the First Noun Principle which states that learners tend to process the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence as the agent. Accordingly, in passive voice statements, learners may misinterpret the first noun they see in the sentence as the doer of the action when it is in fact the recipient of the action. The structure for the English passive voice is Subject + be + past participle (+ complement) (e.g., *Microsoft was founded in 1975 by Bill Gates and Paul Allen*). In the passive structure the subject of the sentence is not the doer of the action but the recipient.

### 3.2.2 Tasks

The tasks in this study were designed according to Ellis’ (2003) *focused tasks* framework. Focused tasks are tasks designed to elicit particular linguistic features but learners are not informed of the specific features. Learners are expected to pay primary attention to the content of the message but also attend to form. Two types of focused tasks were used in this study: a structure-based production task and a consciousness-raising task as defined in the literature review. Each task type consisted of two different tasks. The structure-based
production tasks included a dictogloss and a written film recall task. The consciousness-raising tasks included a clause matching task and editing task.

**Dictogloss:** In this task, participants listened to a short passage read by the researcher twice. In the first listening, participants were asked to listen for the main idea only. In the second listening, they were allowed to take notes. Afterwards, they worked in pairs to reconstruct the passage as accurately as possible. The passage was designed to elicit use of articles, subject-verb agreement and the passive voice structure. The passage was about 150 words long and included at least five instances of each structure. The passage is about Big Foot—a half-man-half-ape creature that is believed to exist in certain parts of the United States. The passage was taken from one of the passages from a learner’s TOEFL preparation textbook.

**Written film recall:** In this task, participants watched an episode of the animation comedy series ‘Family Guy’. The episode was about 22 minutes long and told a story of a husband going back in time to save his marriage. While watching, they were asked to take notes and told that they would be working in pairs to retell the story in writing. After watching they were given 15 minutes to work with a partner to write a summary of the movie.

**Matching task:** In this task, participants worked in small groups (i.e., 3-4) to match clauses to make complete sentences. Each member in a group was given a set of incomplete sentences. Members in the group were to match their clauses with those in the stack in the middle of the group to make complete logical sentences. Each time one of the incomplete sentences was flipped over to see, members in the group had to decide whether the sentence they held matched with the one they had just flipped up. The separation of the sentences was designed in such a way that participants would attend to the target forms. For example, to have participants focus on subject-verb agreement the first clause ended with the subject that was a third person singular noun and the second clause began with a verb that agreed with it. Consequently, the task was designed to encourage participants to focus on both the meaning of the clauses and the form of the verb to determine the correct match. There were seven sentences for each target structure. The task lasted approximately ten minutes.
Editing task: In the final task, participants worked in pairs to edit a piece of writing. They were given a scenario as editors at a famous magazine where their job was to edit articles before they were published. The passage was designed to guide participants to attend to targeted forms. For example, articles would be missing or used incorrectly. There were mismatches between subject and verb agreement. The copula *be* was absent from some passive voice forms. Participants were given approximately 15 minutes to complete the task.

3.3 Procedures

Each task was performed during participants’ classroom session and used as a grammar focus activity between lessons. Therefore, one task was given per one session. The dictogloss was given on day one, the written film recall on day two, the matching task on day three, and the editing task on day four. The drawback was that attendance was not the same each day. As a result, certain tasks had more learners participating than other tasks. The data was audio recorded using an MP3 digital recorder. Before the tasks, participants had been recorded on previous days while performing regular classroom activities in order to make participants become used to the presence of the recorder. The recorder was placed between each pair of students. Before each task, the researcher walked around the room to press the “record” button and when the task was completed, the researcher asked students to stop the recording. During the task, students were encouraged to talk to each other to complete the task. They were not informed about the target structure they were supposed to focus on during the task. After the data was collected, the audio files were downloaded on a computer and the researcher transcribed instances of language-related episodes (LREs).

3.4 Data analysis

The data was coded for LREs. Swain & Lapkin (1998) defined LREs as any part of the language where students talk about the language they are producing, their language use, or correct themselves or others. After an LRE was identified, it was categorized into either one of the three target structures (i.e., articles, subject-verb agreement, and passives) or other (see examples 1, 2, and 3 below), which was defined as other form focus LREs. LREs that
focused on the meaning of words, expressions, or spellings were not included in the analysis. After being categorized, the LREs were quantified within task and category. The mean and standard deviation for the number of LREs for each task and structure were calculated.

1. LRE: articles
   S1: a or the
   S2: we can use a or the maybe a poll is okay.

2. LRE: subject-verb agreement
   S1: So so what about include? Most people include what include or includes
   S2: include is fine
   S1: include or includes
   S2: no –s
   S1: no -s no -s

3. LRE: passive voice
   S1: and I think this one is you are warned. You are not just.
   S2: were or are
   S1: were. Let me see let me see
   S2: were
   S1: were. You are I think you are is okay use are

4. LRE: other
   S1: most of people most people most of people most people of most of people
   S2: Most people.
   S1: of?
   S2: No of
   S1: Okay

To determine the difference between the number of LREs each task was able to generate, the Friedman test was employed. The Friedman test is a non-parametric test that compares the same group of learners’ performances on different occasions. It is the counterpart of the Repeated Measures ANOVA parametric test. However, since there were unequal and small sizes of students per tasks, the data did not meet the assumptions of a parametric test.
4. Results

To answer research question one (to what extent do focused tasks elicit learners’ discussion of grammatical forms during the tasks in learner-learner interaction?), the number of LREs for each task type and structure was tallied and the mean and standard deviation were calculated (See Table 1). According to the total mean scores, the number of LREs of structure-based production tasks, dictogloss ($M = 0.08$, $S.D. = 0.28$) and film recall ($M = 0.60$, $S.D. = 0.97$) is relatively low, especially when compared to the consciousness-raising tasks, matching ($M = 1.00$, $S.D. = 0.00$) and editing ($M = 10.83$, $S.D. = 4.41$).

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of LREs by Task and Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Type</th>
<th>Dictogloss ($n = 13$)</th>
<th>Film Recall ($n = 10$)</th>
<th>Matching ($n = 6$)</th>
<th>Editing ($n = 12$)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-verb</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passives</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To answer research question two (certain types of focused tasks are more effective in eliciting discussion of grammatical forms during learner-learner interaction?), a Friedman test was conducted to evaluate the differences in medians among the task types for dictogloss task
(Median = 0.00), film recall (Median = 0.00), matching (Median = 1.00), and editing (Median = 10.50). The test was significant ($\chi^2 (3, N = 5) = 12.38, p < .01$), and the Kendall’s coefficient of concordance of .83 indicated strong differences among the four task types.

Follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Wilcoxon test and controlling for the Type I error across these comparisons at the .025 level using the Bonferroni procedure. The median for editing was significantly greater than the median for dictogloss, and the median for film recall, but it was not significantly higher than matching ($p = .027$). Also, it was found that the median for matching was greater than the median for dictogloss. Other pairwise comparisons, however, were not significantly different. Although significant difference was apparent in the Friedman test, pairwise comparisons were unable to show any matched differences. This is probably due to the Bonferroni adjustments in the post hoc analysis.

To answer research question three (to what extent are focused tasks able to elicit discussion of grammatical forms that are targeted in the design?), Friedman analyses were conducted for each target structure by task types.

A Friedman test for articles was significant, $\chi^2 (3, N = 5) = 12.95, p < .01$, and the Kendall’s coefficient of concordance of .86 indicated strong differences among the four task types. Follow-up tests indicated that only the median for editing was significantly greater than the median for dictogloss, $p < .01$. The rest were not significantly different.

With regard to passive voice, a Friedman test showed a significant difference among task types, $\chi^2 (3, N = 5) = 12.00, p < .01$, and the Kendall’s coefficient of concordance of .80 indicated strong differences. However, after adjusting for Type I error of $p < .01$, no significant pairwise comparisons were found.

A Friedman test for subject-verb agreement showed a significant difference among task types, $\chi^2 (3, N = 5) = 12.00, p < .01$, and the Kendall’s coefficient of concordance of .80 indicated strong differences. Adjusted for Type I error, two comparisons of median were found significantly different: editing and dictogloss, and editing and film recall, $p < .01$. 


Finally, a Friedman analysis for other structures also found them to be significantly different, \( \chi^2 (3, N = 5) = 13.80, p < .01 \), and the Kendall’s coefficient of concordance of .92 indicated strong differences. Only one pairwise comparison between the median for editing and dictogloss was found significant, \( p < .01 \).

5. Discussions and Conclusion

5.1 Discussions

The purpose of the current investigation was to compare the effectiveness of two types of focused tasks in learner-learner interaction, the structure-based production task and the consciousness-raising task. The goal was to determine which task type drew more attention to form and which task type was able to draw attention to forms that were intentionally embedded in the tasks.

Regarding the different types of focus tasks, results revealed that the structure-based production tasks generated a very low number of LREs. The matching task was not so different with a mean of one. However, the editing task was able to generate on average approximately ten LREs. The fact that dictogloss was unable to elicit more LREs may be due to the level of learners. Fortune (2005) found that advanced learners were much more inclined to use metalanguage while reconstructing texts. Learners in the current study could be considered less advanced than in Fortune’s study as they were still in a TOEFL prep class. The fact that learners used more LREs in editing tasks may be because the nature of the task that focuses on explicit learning encourages learners to be more assertive in discussion language forms.

In addition, the findings regarding the effectiveness of focused tasks are in line with Pilar & Mayo (2002), who found that dictogloss tasks were much less effective than consciousness-raising tasks in drawing learners’ attention to form. According to Ellis (2003), consciousness-raising tasks draw upon explicit learning. To be able to complete the editing task, learners in the current study were required to identify incorrect grammatical structures and correct them.
Therefore, there seemed to be more awareness of forms when compared to the dictogloss and film recall task which presumably did not draw explicit learning. In these tasks, learners may have been more concerned with the content and completion of the stories. For these tasks, meaning may have been so primary that form may have been irrelevant to the completion of the tasks.

The matching task, although a consciousness-raising task, was fairly equal to the dictogloss and film recall tasks in drawing discussion of forms. This may have been due to how the materials were designed and how learners approach the task. Although the separation of the sentences was designed to have learners focus on form, learners may have also been able to match the sentences in terms of meaning. For example, the sentence, The car on the other side of the road is parked in a non-parking zone was separated after the word road. It was thus expected that learners would focus on the verb agreement for The car to match the sentence. However, it is clear that learners would be able to match the sentence by recognizing the relationship between car and parking. Another possible reason why this type of consciousness-raising task was less effective than the editing task was how learners followed the task. As opposed to holding each half of the sentence, learners spread them out after a short while. There seemed to be a lot of pointing and moving the sentences around like a jigsaw rather than discussing the form. This aspect of the task may be controlled for future studies by providing clearer instructions.

With regards to focused tasks that can elicit discussion of grammatical forms that are targeted in the design, it was found that LREs on articles were generated the most when compared to subject-verb agreement and passive voice. When taking a closer examination of each task type, it was found that this was due to the editing task. Again, the editing task was able to elicit more LREs. In addition, another reason could be that the objective of the editing tasks was more linguistically oriented. That is, the goal was actually examining language itself. The structure-based production tasks were much more meaning oriented. Even the matching task had a meaning-oriented feature to it. Furthermore, editing tasks may have been more effective because learners were more familiar with it. As mentioned earlier, learners in this study were in TOEFL preparation classes at the time of the study. One of the major exercises
in the class was identifying correct and incorrect sentences. Task familiarity may affect the amount of LREs generated by learners. Mackey, Kanagas & Oliver (2007), for example, found that procedural familiarity can lead to more interactional features by learners than tasks that are less familiar. Since learners had previously worked on identifying correct and incorrect structures in their TOEFL classes, it would seem that they probably had much more practice than the other types of tasks.

5.2 Limitations

The results from this study must be interpreted with caution. First, the study consisted of a small number of participants. Any generalization of the results should take learners’ characteristics and their instructional context into consideration. Second, each task did not have an equivalent number of participants, which could have impacted the results. The matching task consisted of only six participants. If it had consisted of more, it might have been more comparable to the other consciousness-raising task, the editing task. Results showed that the matching task has potential to elicit more LREs than the two structure-based production tasks, but the number of students, and design of sentences mentioned earlier could have prevented it from doing so. Third, learners only engaged in each task once. To compare the effects of tasks, learners should engage in the task multiple times. Finally, learners were in different pairs from task to task. This may have also affected how learners interact from task to task. On the other hand, switching partners is also common in language classrooms. So, researchers may be sacrificing some authenticity for more rigid control.

5.3 Pedagogical implications

Despite the limitations, certain pedagogical implications can be drawn from the current study. If teachers are looking for learners to focus on form, consciousness-raising tasks, especially editing tasks, seem to fare better than structure-based tasks. Though both being focused tasks, dictogloss and film recall tasks do not seem to be adequate for drawing learners attention to form, whether targeted on not. On the other hand, learners who perform an editing task should have a better opportunity to focus on language through a familiar and meaningful task.
However, it should be noted that, in this study, learners were not aware which structures were being targeted. As a result, learners barely negotiated the targeted forms. Accordingly, if teachers insist on having learners focus on a predetermined form, learners should be made aware of it. For example, the instruction could state that there are five mistakes on the use of articles.

Next, since the overall number of LREs across tasks was relatively low, it is not recommended that teachers rely solely on focused tasks. It is recommended that teachers include explicit instruction and other types of practice. Finally, tasks should require learners to reproduce language to some extent. The matching task, for example, turned out to be ineffective in part because learners were not required to reconstruct new sentences. As a result, it may have allowed learners to complete the task without going through the language production process.

5. 4 Recommendations for further research

Future studies should investigate the relationship between these different types of tasks and learning. The current study examined tasks’ ability to elicit interactional features, but not whether tasks would lead to learning the targeted structures. Although previous interaction-based studies mentioned in the background of the study support the relationship between interaction and learning, it is still important to continue investigating different types of interaction tasks and their effects on learning. In addition, it would be interesting to examine whether there is a relationship between learner’s proficiency level and appropriateness of task type. Learners in the current study could be described as intermediate. It could be possible that they favored the editing task more because both the dictogloss and film recall tasks placed more demand on reconstructing content as well as language. The matching and editing tasks, on the other hand, had written content ready for learners. As a result, the structure-based tasks may have been appropriate for more advanced learners. However, this issue remains to be investigated in the future.
5.5 Conclusion

The current study investigated whether there would be any differences between two types of focus tasks in eliciting interactional features. Results revealed overall a low number of LREs across tasks on the non-salient targeted structures. However, in comparison, it was found that the editing task was more effective in drawing LREs than the dictogloss, film recall, and matching tasks. Although both the editing and matching tasks were designed as consciousness-raising tasks, the editing task seemed to have a distinct advantage. This could have been because the editing task was more linguistically oriented than the other three tasks. The matching task may have been less effective because it did not require learners to reproduce language. This was reflected by how learners engaged in the task. Regarding tasks’ ability to draw discussion on targeted forms, it was found that LRE’s on articles were drawn out the most and that most were from the editing task. Finally, more research is needed on examining focused tasks and their ability to draw learners’ attention to form and in turn facilitate the acquisition of targeted structures.

References


About the Author

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Book Review

Title: Exploring classroom discourse: Language in action

Author: Steve Walsh

Publisher: NY: Routledge (2011)

Number of pages: 239 pp.

Price: $33.52

ISBN: 978-0-41557067-1

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Exploring classroom discourse: Language in action discusses the role that interaction plays in effective language teaching. The main focus of the book is on the relationship between language, interaction, and learning. It introduces the concept of classroom interactional competence (CIC) and describes how it can facilitate and promote learning.

The book consists of nine chapters on a variety of topics addressing the issues concerning classroom discourse. Each chapter is organized in much the same manner so that readers can develop more understanding of classroom discourse and gain more insights into the positive effects of classroom interaction on language learning. To attain this goal, the author begins each chapter with an introduction that makes references to earlier chapters or to information coming up in subsequent chapters to enable readers to establish clearer relationships between concepts, issues, and salient points involving classroom discourse. After the introduction to each chapter, the author poses thought-provoking questions regarding the main theme of the chapter in the section entitled “Personal reflection”. In the main body of each chapter, he offers a discussion of the issues from theoretical viewpoints accompanied by illustrations.
through extracts of authentic spoken discourse in various language classes. The author also provides a number of tasks that call for critical thinking and thoughtful discussions on the major topics presented in each chapter. The author ends each chapter with a summary that reviews crucial issues and provides comments and suggestions with regard to the importance of classroom interaction to language teaching and learning.

The first chapter provides a general introduction to the overall concept of classroom discourse with respect to control of patterns of communication, teachers’ modified language, elicitation, and repair, which are all representative features of common types of classroom interaction. Following this chapter are topic-based chapters that discuss a wide range of relevant issues.

Chapter 2 discusses the importance of teacher interactions with students. It presents interaction as part of task-based language teaching (TBLT) that can lead to effective language teaching and teacher development, and suggests that fluid micro-contexts can be created by teachers and learners to promote enticing learning environments and enhance the learning of a foreign language.

Chapter 3 examines the relationship between interaction and learning, particularly in the context of an L2 classroom. It also discusses the two differing views toward interaction: cognitive and social perspectives. The theoretical framework for language learning involving the Zone of Proximal Development is discussed thoroughly in the final part of the chapter to highlight the contribution of socio-cultural theories of learning to classroom-based second language acquisition. This clearly mirrors a Vygotskian perspective, which maintains that a major role of schooling is to create social contexts in classrooms, for learners will be able to master and develop conscious awareness of the use of cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978).

Chapters 4 to 6 investigate different approaches to studying classroom interaction. In chapter 4, the author critically reviews the approach to using recording and transcribing interaction in the L2 classroom. This section includes vivid discussions of four alternatives available for research that focuses on interactional analysis: audio-recordings, video-recordings, observation, and narrative. Then, a critical evaluation of transcription of recordings is
provided with an emphasis on technical difficulties that a researcher is likely to encounter. This chapter ends with a critique of discourse analysis traditions and considers conversational analysis as a more effective approach to recording interaction in language classrooms. Following Ellis (1994), conversational analysis is a useful tool for the study of interaction as it can “investigate the nature of the learning opportunities made available to learners” (p. 244).

Chapter 5 evaluates other approaches to recording classroom discourse and compares them in terms of merits and drawbacks. The body of this chapter is primarily devoted to brief discussions of these approaches, which are mainly based on the study of corpus linguistics, prior to the suggestion for the combination of all these approaches in interaction analysis. This chapter finally provides a summary of studies advocating variable approaches that recognize the interplay between classroom discourse and pedagogic goals.

Chapter 6 presents the SETT framework (SETT: self-evaluation of teacher talk), which is useful for professional practice. This framework is thoroughly described and discussed in terms of micro-contexts, or modes, and interactional features that contribute to teacher development through classroom interaction. Classroom modes presented in this chapter were discussed according to pedagogic goals and interactional features, and were described in details in Walsh (2006). The SETT framework is also presented as a means of facilitating the understanding of interaction in the form of dynamic modes and enabling teachers to design appropriate talk in their language classrooms to achieve pedagogic goals.

Chapter 7 focuses on reflective practice based on classroom discourse. The chapter is divided into two main parts: a critical discussion of teachers as reflective practitioners and a class-based approach to reflective practice. Extracts of classroom discourse are analyzed with an assertion that reflective practice is beneficial for all language teachers, who can research and improve their own talk in classrooms.

Chapter 8 vividly describes Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), which is considered to be very important to the improvement of learning and learning opportunities. This chapter is divided into three parts: (1) the discussion of CIC based on earlier studies, (2) the analysis
of CIC and its role in promoting classroom interaction, and (3) a consideration for ways in which teachers and learners can develop their own CIC in their own contexts. The author strongly recommends that teachers improve their classroom interational skills so they can enhance learning and learning opportunities more effectively. His discussions of CIC are in line with Allwright and Bailey’s (1991) model, which proposes that classroom interactions mediate between plans (syllabus, methods, and atmosphere), and outcomes (input, practice opportunities, and receptivity).

In chapter 9, the last chapter, the author concludes the entire book by revisiting the main themes presented earlier and presenting some thoughts for the future investigation of classroom discourse. In the former section, the author effectively establishes the relationship among all the issues concerning classroom discourse through detailed discussions and analyses. In the latter section, the author provides critical discussions and analyses of future challenges facing language teachers and researchers in the area of classroom interaction, as well as future directions in the methods to be employed in the investigation of classroom discourse.

Overall, Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action provides deeper insights into how classroom discourse should be taken into account if more effective language learning is to be promoted. It is a very useful book for novice language teachers who need to develop interactional competence in their classrooms. This book is also of much value to experienced language teachers who might have overlooked this aspect of language teaching and have placed too much emphasis on strengthening students’ linguistic competence without realizing that interaction also plays a vital role in second language acquisition. Although this book lacks discussions of culturally specific scenarios, it provides a critical overview of issues that reveal the significance of classroom interaction and its impact on language learning. It is a comprehensive book that will certainly raise the readers’ awareness and develop more understanding of classroom discourse, and provides a great opportunity for teachers to improve their professional practice.
References


About the Reviewer

Supong Tangkiengsirisin is an Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics at the Language Institute of Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand, where he currently serves as Director. He earned his B.A. and M.A. in English from Chulalongkorn University and earned his Ph.D. in English Studies from the University of Nottingham. With over 20 years of teaching experience at the tertiary level, he has covered a wide range of areas in his teaching including academic writing, written business communication, English for Specific Purposes, and career-related English skills, both in the undergraduate and graduate levels. His research interests involve second language writing, genre analysis, and interlanguage pragmatics.
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