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The Relationship between Reading in L1 and EFL Writing Performance

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Introduction and Problem Statement

Earlier studies on reading and writing relationship have shown that what is learned in reading changes as students come to terms with the process (Chall, 1996). Beginning readers are much more word bound or word oriented than those who are proficient readers and writers. As readers develop a comfortable grasp of basic word recognition and spelling, their attention begin to shift to other issues of interpretation and communication. The developmental lines of reading and writing, according to Shanahan, (1997), are sufficiently similar that the two activities can be combined successfully, in different ways, throughout literacy education.

The current research and theory about writing have not made serious attempts to define either mechanisms or consequences of the interplay between reading and writing. This lack of attention to this essential bond of literacy results in part from the various disciplinary separation of language studies.

The area of L2 writing research, nevertheless, provides complementary as well as contradictory evidence. A glance at the syntheses in current L2 research database indicates that problems or inaccuracies in L2 text processing and writing exist. Transfer and interference data parallel a long-running debate in L2 acquisition in general. The extent to which L1 strategies facilitate acquisition and the extent to which they impede acquisition are still unclear and much needs to be researched. Problems in L1 reading and L2 writing may also be differentially linked to L2 literacy development. In short these reveal that different kinds of skills may be characteristics of certain stages of progression in reading and writing and a synthesis of this research area, thus seems extremely troublesome. Perhaps most problematic, in any attempt to compare and contrast reading and writing performance, is in text variability, in language background, both culturally and orthographically, and in the proficiency level of subjects.

Research Questions

From the discussion above, several research questions can be generated:

- a. What aspects of Meta knowledge or the pragmatics do writers who read in their L1 and write in L2 put to use when they write in L2?
- b. What is the relationship between domain knowledge and knowledge gained when students read in their L1 and write in L2?
- c. What is the relationship between students' procedural knowledge and skill to negotiate reading and writing when they read in L1 and write in L2?
- d. What elements of students' linguistic knowledge affect them when they read in their L1 and write in L2?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are mainly:

- a. To understand the different dimensions in ESL/EFL students' writing performance.
- b. To investigate critically about L1 reading and its relationship with L2 performance
- c. To identify aspects of reading and writing skills that can lead to better understanding of L2 students' employment of their own writing performance.

Hypotheses of the Study

Several hypotheses were tested in the study

Hypothesis 1: (*H₀*)

There is no significant difference in L2 writing performance between students who use Meta knowledge and those who do not use Meta knowledge when they write in L1 and write in L2.

Hypothesis 2: (*H₀*)

There is no significant difference in the relationship between domain knowledge in L2 writing performance between students who are domain knowledge competent in their L1 and L2 and those who are not.

Hypothesis 3: (*H₀*)

There is no significant difference in L2 writing performance between students who possess procedural knowledge and skill to negotiate reading and writing and those who do not.

Hypothesis 4: (*H₀*)

There is no significant difference in L2 writing performance between students who have linguistic knowledge and those who do not.

Theoretical Framework

Primarily, the basis for theories governing ESL/EFL writing has largely been adopted on the theories of research in L1 writing (Krapels, 1990, Kroll, 1990, Bernhardt, 1994). Most prevalent is the view that writing activity contains multiple actions and strategies found in L2 writing instruction which holds that when writing, writers identify the problem, plan explore and reach to a conclusion (Flower & Hayes, 1980).

Various assumptions have been made when discussing second language literacy. Firstly, second language literacy theory assumes that second language text processing abilities develop over time. In other words, text-processing abilities are not learned as unitary entities. Secondly, the theory assumes that the abilities exhibit different facets of all features of text processing over time. This presupposes the interactive, and the multidimensional dynamics of literacy elements. Thirdly, the theory assumes that errors in understanding can reveal development in literacy. Fourthly, the theory assumes commonalities in second language text processing between literate learners and languages.

Finally, the theory assumes that no reader would ever be hundred percent proficient with zero percent error rate: concomitantly, no first language literate reader would be zero percent proficient with a hundred percent error rate in their L2 reading.

A multifactor theory of L2 literacy exists. Three language-based features have been identified as representing growth in knowledge of L2 literacy studies. The three language-based features used as organizing principles above are: word recognition, phonemic/graphemic features, and syntactic feature recognition, which are described as having curvilinear relationships with L2 relationship. Word recognition, represented as an exponential curve, posits that in the early stages of proficiency, problems can be attributed to vocabulary difficulties. As proficiency increases, development occurs. The phonemic/graphemic confusions posit that the problem in understanding related to sound and word-shape features quickly diminish as proficiency increases.

Syntax on the other hand, behaves differently. The increase in syntactic errors is seemed to develop as a function of greater exposure and growth in the language. As knowledge of the language increases, the risk taking and the potential for misusing and misunderstanding complex syntactic form also increases. However, as proficiency develops further the problem rate begins to decline. Similarly, the problems both in content knowledge and knowledge constructed during comprehension decreases as proficiency increases.

Theories on cognitive development, psycholinguistic constraints and communicative models undergird the constructs of this study. The cognitive development implies mental processes such as thinking, learning, remembering, and problem solving (Byrnes, 2001). On the other hand, psychological constraints govern emotion, perception, beliefs, values and pattern of thought (Porter & Samovar, 1991). Communicative models underlie both speech and writing behavior. While spoken interaction is seldom planned, (De Beaugrande, Ong 1983), written communication is affected by factors such as, language transfer, (Gass & Selinker, 1992), intralingual interference, sociolinguistic constraints, modality, and age. When writers write in L2 they have to overcome and solve complexity of various factors such as distance, place and audience (Reid, 1993). Research by Kerns and Schultz, (1992), on writing as a cognitive process suggests that “writing skills in a foreign language may in fact be more closely tied to writer’s ability to write in the native language than to a general level of linguistic competence in a foreign language”.

Literature Review

Reading-writing Relations at College Level

The theoretical model of the reciprocity of reading and writing at different stages of proficiency is referred, Chall, (1996), proposed broad developmental stages of reading, which begins from birth to adulthood. Although researchers in the two areas are scant, researchers have formulated theories of writing and these sometimes had developmental components (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Flower, 1994; King & Rentel, 1979), no broad and comprehensive stage theory of writing development covering a wide range of levels or areas of growth. Furthermore, very little theoretical or empirical work has been conducted to examine the ways in which reading and writing are related across different stages. However, it is possible to build a preliminary developmental model that describes critical cognitive features or markers that are important to both reading and writing proficiency at different stages. The developmental model fuses the interactive model of reading and writing (Shanahan & Lomax, 1986, 1988). The identified common categories used by readers and writers include categories listed by Fitzgerald, 1990, 1992), and Chall’s (1996) stages of reading development.

The essence of reading and writing relation of the stage is that individuals develop an increased capacity to construct knowledge by reading and writing through deeper analysis, synthesis and application of personal judgment. Simultaneously, and increased understanding of reading and writing for specific purposes develops. Readers and writers at this stage are to be aware of text and context insertion and text and context deletion. Readers and writers

understanding of such comes from a growing knowledge of what it means for readers to read on the premises of the author and writers to write on the premises of the reader (Nystrand, 1989). The pivotal knowledge at this stage includes Meta knowledge, that is, about how readers and writers interact, and about knowledge, which allows increasing depth of understanding when applied to problems of reading and writing. Procedural knowledge is critical in knowing how to see from the other's viewpoints and knowing how to analyze and critique.

Reading and Writing in Second Language Studies

Research on L2 writing points to an absence of a complete natural process for writing. Hence a writer may employ his/her own unique approach and uses different strategies to produce a text. Nevertheless, according to Scott (1996), writing in general is not an easy act. Student writers are not always aware of the strategies they use in either L1 or L2 writing. Student writers are more concerned about their writing finished text, rather than on cognitive strategies that they employ in finishing the text. As such, many student writers engage themselves in the complex process of writing in L1 or L2 without a clear sense of employing either effective or ineffective writing strategies.

Studies in second language (L2) writing suggest that students who read a great deal and enjoy reading are often better writers (Scott, 1996). Subsequently, other studies which state that writing competence is not language specific implies that a good first language (L1) reader may also be a good L2 writer. However, L2 teachers do not view themselves as L1 writing teachers, and therefore tend to teach L2 or foreign language (FL) by focusing more on the surface level features than on the global dimension of interactiveness of the texts. In fact, L2 and FL teachers are generally teaching language, not writing.

Reading in L1 and Writing in L2

Studies that analyze behavior in L1 and compare these studies of behavior in L2 find that all good native language strategies are transferred to L2 Clarke, (1979, 1980), Elley (1984), Groebel (1980), Roller (1988), Sarig (1978). These studies investigated issues using cloze testing and oral reading (Clarke, 1979, 1980); on correlation between standardized test scores in two languages, Elley (1984), and Groebel (1980); and on a vocabulary measure, Roller, (1988).

Other studies on reading and writing in L1 and L2 looked at aspects of interlingual and first language interference. Irujo, (1986) found that when figures of speech were similar but not identical in two language, the first language meaning interfered with the development of the second. On the same line, de Suarez, (1985), found that translation tasks were guided by first language syntax rather than by meaning. Other studies on interlingual and language interference in indicated that L1 processing tend to be dominated throughout the

development of proficiency in a second language reading. Maclean and d'Anglejan, (1996), found that strategies for using intratextual information did not transfer consistently higher cloze test score in L1 than in L2 reading. Dank and McEarher, (1979), in their study which were supported by McDougall and Bruck, (1979), conclude that L2 instruction facilitated L1 language reading skill acquisition.

Methodology

A total of seventy-nine BEL 420 students participated as subjects in the study. Subjects were enrolled in the faculty of Arts and Design, and in the faculty of mathematics and quantitative science.

Research Design

The study employs a completely randomized posttest only design. The type of research design is appropriate as the nature of the study is based on examining the degree of relationship between different variables in reading and writing. Each participant serves in only one research condition and contributes only one score to the analysis. This means that each participant is tested only one level of independent variable, which is writing in L2.

Students were also requested to complete a set of questionnaire on students' perception of their reading and writing ability. This is to assist the researcher's understanding of the students' perception of their own abilities in reading and writing.

Data Gathering

Data were gathered from subjects who completed L2 writing task, and from subjects completed questionnaire based on their perception of L1 and L2 reading and writing. Subjects were at first given an L1 reading text titled "misteri gen-gen ganjil dalam genetic manusia" (the mysteries of abnormal genes in human genetics). They were requested to read the text and they were given enough time to read the text. Most subjects took between forty to forty-five minutes to complete this task. Upon completion of the reading task, subjects were asked to return all the L1 reading text. This was to ensure that subjects did not attempt to translate literally from the L1 text into their L2 writing. All writing tasks were collected and marked by two experienced English language raters. The composition was marked according to an analytical scale method adapted from Harris, (1968).

Next, the subjects were requested to write an L2 composition based on a similar topic as in L1. Subjects were given sixty to ninety minutes to attempt this

task. Most subjects completed this task within sixty minutes. Upon completion of their writing task, subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to investigate the perception of their L1 and L2 reading and their L1 and L2 writing abilities. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; the reading and the writing section. Each section of the questionnaire was subdivided into two categorical columns, and each contains items which question their current Bahasa Melayu (L1) reading practices and L1 writing habits as well as their English (L2) reading practices and L2 writing habits. The reading section contains twenty-eight different items covering aspects of meta knowledge, domain knowledge, procedural knowledge and linguistic knowledge areas such as students' ability to identify alphabets, pronounce words, understand the language grammatical aspects, differentiate the different types of writing, understand sentences, recognize words and their meaning, restate ideas, translate words, outline main ideas, and so on. The writing section on the other hand contains twenty-three items which cover questions on students' perception of their writing ability in both L1 and L2.

Instrument and Data Analysis

The analytical scoring method used in this study was adapted from Harris, (1968), as it was perceived to have several advantages. Firstly, it might assist the researcher in investigating the uneven development of sub skills in the individual students. Secondly, the scale forced the examiners to consider aspects of the students writing performance. The reading and writing questionnaires were adapted from reading instrument from Beldin, (1997). Several items were included to provide the researcher the different perspectives of the students' abilities in reading and writing in both L1 and L2. data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-tests.

Findings

The study was conducted based on the belief that reading and writing are two separate, but overlapping ways of thinking about the world (McGinley & Tierney, 1989). The study also aims at investigating reading and writing relationship, (see appendices i-vi), and in this case reading in L1 and writing in L2. In this study several traits of reading and writing abilities could be seen working in harmony to render subjects as successful readers and writing. This is in agreement with Shanahan's (1997), earlier contention that these two activities can be combined successfully, in different ways, throughout the literacy education. Nevertheless, in many instances, the extent to which L1 reading strategies facilitate acquisition of L2 writing process and the extent they impede acquisition of L2 writing process is still unclear and it shows further research work is needed.

An important issue in the study is rater consistency and reliability over time in evaluating the subjects' writing. This means looking into the degree at which different raters would agree about the quality of the text, hence achieving the inter-rater reliability. Several aspects of inter-rater correlation was tested. The Pearson Correlation for content scores, organization scores, vocabulary scores, language use scores, and mechanics scores between the raters were calculated. The Pearson correlation of 0.89 for content scores, 0.859 for organization scores, 0.845 for vocabulary scores, 0.872 for language use scores and 0.803 for mechanics scores show positive relationship between the two raters. Subsequently there was also a strong correlation value of 0.949 between the raters for total scores given to the respective subjects in the writing tasks. The raters experience both with the teaching of English as a second language and their experience in evaluating students L2 writing could have contributed to the acceptably high degree of reliability.

In this study, it was also found that there were some significant differences between students L1 reading abilities and their L2 reading abilities. These were shown in areas where; a,) students ignore the L1 and L2 words they don't recognize, (0.255), b), look to a word in L1 and L2 that they don't recognize immediately, (0.52), and c), students ability to translate word for word from L1 to L2, (0.32).

The most significant findings in the study of L1 reading and its relationship with L2 writing abilities were seen in these areas; a), when subjects enjoy writing in both L1 and L2, b), When subjects perceive their L1 and L2 writing don't match up to some real good writing which they have read, c), when subjects like the opportunity to express their ideas in L1 and L2, d), when subjects sometimes take over two hours to write the first paragraph in L1 and L2 writing, e), when subjects were able to write good compositions in L1 and L2, f), when subjects were able to edit their writing in L1 and L2, g), when subjects experience difficulty to start writing in L1 and L2, h), when subjects perceive people react positively to their writing in L1 and L2, i), when subjects have pleasant experience writing in L1 and L2, and finally, j), when subjects like to write in L1 and L2.

The mean, the median and the mode from the total scores were 58.37, 59 and 45.5 respectively. The result of the t tests for independent samples between subjects in the two faculties shows significant difference in total scores between the two faculties. The result of the t test for independent samples between the subjects by gender for total scores shows no significant difference between them. However, there is a significant difference in content scores between subjects in the two faculties. On the other hand, there is no significant difference in content scores by gender in both faculties. Additionally, the result of the t test for independent samples between subjects. in the two faculties show significant difference in vocabulary scores There is however no significant difference in vocabulary scores between subjects by gender.

The study found significant differences in L2 content score variables and L1 reading abilities in areas where, (a), subjects make attempts to understand the text, (b), subjects ability to restart their own idea while reading, and (c), subjects ability to outline the main ideas. However, for L2 organization score variable with L1 reading abilities, the study found no relationship. Nevertheless, for L2 vocabulary score variable with L1 reading ability, the study found significant relationship exists when; (a), subjects read for enjoyment, (b), subjects ability to relate the present reading with the one they have read before, (c), subjects ability to outline the main ideas when reading, and (d), subjects ability to translate word for word from L1 to L2.

Finally, the study has also shown that there is no relationship between L2 language use and mechanics with L1 reading abilities.

Discussion and Recommendation

In retrospect, the study on L1 reading and L2 writing relationship above, has in part supported the theoretical contention that reading and writing rely on certain mental processes and knowledge. As such several implications arise, and potential for future educational programs can be recommended, such as:

- a. L1 reading and L2 writing programs could be incorporated in the current classrooms aimed at developing the individual capacity to construct knowledge by employing reading programs which emphasize deeper analysis and synthesis.
- b. Reading and writing programs should focus on learning experience that embed L1 reading and L2 writing skills, and since several variance between L1 reading and L2 writing exist, specific instructional attention should be aimed at developing the common critical thinking process.
- c. Instructions on reading and writing connections could also consider the separations of reading and writing as well, since the two activities of recognizing and producing are so cognitively different. Thus, it is good to consider the role of different types of practice or experience on learning.
- d. Instructions on reading in L1 could also consider the overlapping functions which may be employed in L2 reading and their cognitive contributions in L2 reading, and L2 writing.

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