



1st Asia Pacific Symposium on Academic Research (APSAR-2019)

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ISBN :978-0-6482404-2-6

Asia Pacific Institute of Advanced Research (APIAR)

www.apiar.org.au

WRITING TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Hamzeh Moradi

Nanfang College of Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China.

Corresponding Email: hamzeh.m701@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present paper makes a survey on recent research regarding the facilitative and effective role of writing in second language (L2) improvement. It highlights the substantial role of writing in L2 development. The study opens up a critical debate regarding the significant role of explicit knowledge in L2 writing and L2 learning; and as well the main function of interface in realizing the relationship between them.

Keywords: Implicit and Explicit Knowledge, Knowledge Internalization, Language Learning, Writing.

1. Introduction

According to Manchon (2011), there is a difference between writing to learn content and writing to learn language. In fact, writing to learn language is of the concern of the present study. An increasing body of recent research indicates that output has a significant and essential role in all of these procedures (Lapkin et al, 2002; Fortune, 2005; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Swain, 1998, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). For instance, research by Swain and her colleagues (Swain, 1998, 2000, 2006; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005; Swain & Lapkin, 1995, 2002) depicts that output can influence initial stages of language acquisition (internalization). Furthermore, recent studies which focus on the influence of various output activities on global measures of fluency and proficiency (Housen & Kuiken, 2009) reveal an influence on forms which are already parts of developing system (knowledge modification & consolidation). Improving proficiency and fluency is likely the least debatable assertion regarding output. As DeKeyser (2007) illustrates, it is generally approved that repeated and recurring retrieval and as well enhancing knowledge and output practice can result in integration of knowledge. The subsequent discussion, thus, is restricted to the more controversial function of writing in the establishing, restructuring, and developing of second language knowledge.

2. Creation of A Second Language Knowledge

One of the most substantial questions in language learning is whether knowledge can be created as an outcome of production process. In several studies (e.g., VanPatten, 2007), it has already been claimed that a direct effect for output, written or oral, on this first stage in second language improvement is impossible. The evidence which writing can easily facilitate and help knowledge creation still keeps growing. First, it has already been claimed that it is possible for the students to co-construct knowledge, often substantiated as augmented target-like use, when they take part in collaborative or scaffolded tasks. Together students may possibly produce and develop new knowledge (either restructured or initial knowledge) not distinctively held by anyone of them prior to the task (Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). In most of the studies which demonstrate this, the new knowledge production is motivated and induced by collaborative tasks that involve writing. Certainly, writing is not a requirement for this to happen, however to the extent that the everlasting record left by writing boosts the requirement regarding awareness of formal language characteristics. Therefore, writing appears to be very helpful in providing the ideal environment for such co-constructed knowledge.

Reflection is the first step in knowledge co-construction. As previously mentioned, writers have the chance to consult their explicit and direct knowledge to make decisions about composing. Nevertheless, collaborative tasks or activities are often more appropriate and effective methods for creating new knowledge compared to solitary activities, due to the fact that collaboration entails the particular pooling of knowledge from a number of sources, as well as interactional actions considered to assist and facilitate language learning. Many of the recent studies have demonstrated that collaborative writing or writing together in compare to individual writing has a superior result especially in the case of accuracy (Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Brooks & Swain, 2009; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Kuiken & Vedder, 2005).

Secondly, it is also possible that production through collaboration promotes students towards repacking and reprocessing of implicit knowledge (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Swain et al, 2009). Swain (2006) introduces this as languaging, which is making use of production to mediate cognitively complicated ideas. Students may make use of production processes for analyzing implicit knowledge that exists in long term memory, making it much more explicit and readily available for use, and finally utilizing it in more creative, efficient and systematic ways.

These two types of second language knowledge, namely: (a) implicit or unanalyzed knowledge and (b) explicit or analyzed knowledge are commonly recognized and approved. However, the nature of the interface between these two kinds of second language knowledge is still very controversial. In the present study, it is argued that writing can stimulate and encourage second language learners to consult their explicit and as well it demonstrates that collaborative activities can effectively promote analysis of implicit knowledge. Therefore, it discusses the impact of writing on second/foreign language development. Can the retrieval, creation or use of explicit knowledge lead to a change to the improvement of second/foreign language? To be in line with N. Ellis (2011), there is a large number of recent researches of L2 learning demonstrating that explicit knowledge can actually become implicit.

3. Knowledge Internalization

According to Qi and Lapkin (2001), it is, in fact, the noticing quality generated by reformulation which develops subsequent production. They declare that the greater processing of noticed input that they operationalize as giving reasons for revision is actually more likely result in learning. As Adams (2003) mentions, reformulation causes more noticing than just repetition. Sachs and Polio (2007) in their study made a comparison between error correction and reformulation and found out that though the error correction led to more noticing but that reformulation was better and greater to the control condition. They also found that the noticing created by reformulation was in fact related to revision. Hanoaka (2007) discovered that the writers were prone to scan and check out reformulated models for answers and solutions to problems which they had identified for themselves during output, and make revisions according to these suggestions, then revise the problems identified by native speakers who reformulated the models. Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2005) depict that the cognitive conflict produced by this comparison of written students output and reformulated input encourages a level of reflection and noticing which would not be possible in spoken interactions.

4. Processing and Responding to Feedback

There is a lack of sufficient research regarding the investigation of direct comparison between written and oral corrective feedback on written production. However, Sheen (2010) in a research of the effect of written or oral feedback on accuracy and preciseness of article production, has found out that the explicitness of the corrective feedback was in fact a better predictor of this influence on performance than modality. Nevertheless, from the comparison of the implicit feedback, written reformulations were more efficient than oral ones in developing the performance of learners on a number of delayed and immediate post-tests.

Another research by Truscott (2007), claims that corrective feedback is not effective. Once again, we go back to important interface issue. Can corrective feedback motivate students to take advantage of existing explicit knowledge? Truscott presumes that doing this can have

merely a superficial impact and it cannot have substantial effect on language development. Nonetheless, if there exist interface between implicit explicit knowledge, then using and retrieving explicit knowledge in response to corrective feedback may help the student to develop their L2 and it indirectly will facilitate second language improvement, even if it may have no direct impact.

5. Hypothesis Testing

Swain (1998) asserts that the students use their own production or output to evaluate their second language hypothesis and depending on their success, modify them. Applying this specific view to writing demonstrates how exactly students make use of the writing process to test new structures.

The recent research on the function of working memory in second language acquisition has mainly stress on the consideration of individual differences in progress and success.

According to Schoonen et al. (2009), a written production is a momentary extension of working memory. They also mentioned that limits on memory even continue to be within the writing context. Kuiken and Vedder (2011) demonstrate that students can also use time to access and retrieve knowledge from long term memory. It might be true to claim that the cognitive window is considerably open and therefore students have a better opportunity for testing their hypotheses when they are writing as compared to the time when they are speaking. They are able to cognitively compare their feedback and output at the pace which is convenient to them. To some extent, this can also reveal the success and progress of reformulation as a pedagogical strategy and it depicts the substantial advantages of hypothesis testing in writing.

6. Focus on Form

As Bulte and Housen (2009) mention writing is 5-8 times slower than speaking. A significant outcome of this extra time is that writers can plan. According to Kuiken and Vedder (2011, p 92) “the writer has the opportunity to stop the grapho-motoric process and to focus only on either on planning processes or retrieval”.

A large number of previous researches on task influences of planning was within the limited capacity model (Skehan,1998), which is on the basis of the notion that brain possesses only that much capacity to allocate to tasks at any one time. Increased planning time, thus, is likely to release attentional resources to pay more attention to particular facets of production including accuracy, preciseness or the usage of recently acquired form. Another important model is the Cognitive Hypothesis (Robinson, 2001, 2007) which depicts that there are multiple pools of attentional resources. According to this particular model, there is no trade-off among these facets of production if task intricacy augments, provided that the intricacy augments along resources directing dimensions. Resource-directing features of task complexity can connect students’ cognitive resources; include memory and attention, with linguistic resources, consequently pushing language improvement. Such kind of tasks potentially boots various facets of production simultaneously, for instance, intricacy and accuracy. In fact, increasing the intricacy of writing tasks besides this dimension has been proven to lead to a superior performance in terms of accuracy, syntactic and lexical intricacy (Zhang, 1987; Kuiken & Vedder, 2007, 2008). On the other hand, insufficient planning time is regarded to cause scattering of attentional recourses.

Conclusion

One of the significant features of writing is its slow pace and the existence of its long-lasting records which can significantly influence L2 learning and facilitate learning process. It positively impacts language learning process and helps the learners to promote their language skills from various facets. Writing can help students to check out new and more complex forms while using their second language; it can facilitate and stimulate learners to retrieve the second language and to make use of new structures which they have not yet mastered completely. Writing is essential and vital in internalization and incorporation of knowledge. It can play a substantial role in the process of language learning. It easily incorporates the transformation

of explicit to implicit knowledge which ultimately facilitates L2 learning and leads to the promotion and development of second language skills from different aspects.



References

- i. Adams, R. 2003. L2 output, reformulation and noticing: Implications for L2 development. *Language Teaching Research*, vol. 7, pp. 347–376.
- ii. Brooks, L., and Swain, M. 2009. Language in a collaborative setting. In A. Mackey & C. Polio (Eds.), *Multiple perspectives on interaction: Second language research in honor of Susan M. Gass*. New York: Taylor & Francis/Routledge, pp. 58–89
- iii. Bulte, B., and Housen, A. 2009. *The development of lexical proficiency in L2 speaking and writing tasks by Dutch-speaking learners of French in Brussels*. Paper presented at Task-based language teaching conference, Lancaster, England.
- iv. DeKeyser, R. 2007. Skill acquisition theory. In B. VanPatten & J. Williams Eds. *Theories in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 97–112.
- v. Ellis, N. 2011. Implicit and explicit SLA and their interface. In C. Sanz & R. Leow Eds. *Implicit and explicit language learning*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 35–47.
- vi. Fortune, A. 2005. Learners' use of metalanguage in collaborative form-focused L2 output tasks. *Language Awareness*, vol. 14, pp. 21–38.
- vii. Hanaoka, O. 2007. Output, noticing, and learning: An investigation into the role of spontaneous attention to form in a four-stage writing task. *Language Teaching Research*, vol. 11, pp. 459–479.
- viii. Housen, A., and Kuiken, F. 2009. Complexity, accuracy and fluency in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 30, pp. 461–473.
- ix. Izumi, S., and Bigelow, M. 2000. Does output promote noticing and second language acquisition? *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 34, pp. 239–278.
- x. Kuiken, F., and Vedder, I. 2005. Noticing and the role of interaction in promoting language learning. In A. Housen & M. Pierrard Eds. *Investigations in instructed second language acquisition*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 357–381.
- xi. Kuiken, F., and Vedder, I. 2007. Task complexity and measures of linguistic performance in L2 writing. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 45, pp. 261–284.
- xii. Kuiken, F., and Vedder, I. 2008. Cognitive task complexity and written output in Italian and French as a foreign language. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 17, pp. 48–60.
- xiii. Kuiken, F., and Vedder, I. 2011. Task performance and linguistic performance in L2 writing and speaking: The effect of mode. In P. Robinson Ed. *Second language task complexity: Researching the Cognition Hypothesis of language learning and performance*. Philadelphia/Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 91–104.
- xiv. Lapkin, S., Swain, M., and Smith, M. 2002. Reformulation and the learning of French pronominal verbs in a Canadian immersion context. *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 86, pp. 485–507.
- xv. Nassaji, H., and Tian, J. 2010. Collaborative and individual output tasks and their effects on learning English phrasal verbs. *Language Teaching Research*, vol. 14, pp. 397–419.
- xvi. Manchon, R. M., and Roca Larios, J. 2011. Writing to learn in EFL contexts: Exploring learners' perceptions of the learning potential of L2 writing. In R. M. Manchon (Ed.), *Learning-to-write and writing-to-learn in an additional language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 181–207.
- xvii. Qi, D., and Lapkin, S. 2001. Exploring the role of noticing in a three-stage second language writing task. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 10, pp. 277–303.
- xviii. Robinson, P. 2001. Task complexity, task difficulty and task production: Exploring interactions in a componential framework. *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 22, pp. 27–57.
- xix. Robinson, P. 2007. Criteria for classifying and sequencing pedagogical tasks. In M. Garcia de Mayo Ed. *Investigating tasks in formal language learning*. Clevedon, Avon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 7–26.

- xx. Sachs, R., and Polio, C. 2007. Learners' uses of two types of written feedback on a L2 writing revision task. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, vol. 29, pp. 67–100.
- xxi. Schoonen, R., Snellings, P., Stevenson, M., and van Gelderen, A. 2009. Toward a blueprint of the foreign language writer: The linguistic and cognitive demands of foreign language writing. In R. Manchon Ed. *Writing in foreign language contexts* Bristol: MultilingualMatters, pp. 77–101
- xxii. Sheen, Y. 2010. Differential effects of oral and written corrective feedback in the ESL classroom. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, vol. 32, pp. 203–234.
- xxiii. Skehan, P. 1998. *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- xxiv. Storch, N., and Wigglesworth, G. 2007. Writing tasks: The effects of collaboration. In M. Garcia de Mayo Ed. *Investigating tasks in formal Language learning*. Clevedon, Avon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 157–177.
- xxv. Swain, M. 1985. Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden Eds. *Input in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 235–253
- xxvi. Swain, M. 1998. Focus on form through conscious reflection. In C. Doughty & J. Williams Eds. *Focus on form in classroom second language. Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–81
- xxvii. Swain, M. 2000. The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue. In J. Lantolf Ed. *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 97–114.
- xxviii. Swain, M. 2006. Languaging, agency and collaboration in advanced second language learning. In H. Byrnes Ed. *Advanced language learning: The contributions of Halliday and Vygotsky*. London, UK: Continuum, pp. 95–108.
- xxix. Swain, M., and Lapkin, S. 1995. Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate: A step toward second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 16, pp. 371–391.
- xxx. Swain, M., and Lapkin, S. 2002. Talking it through: Two French immersion students' response to reformulation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 3/4, pp. 285–304.
- xxxi. Swain, M., Lapkin, S., Knouzi, I., Suzuki, W., and Brooks, L. 2009. Languaging: University students learn the grammatical concept of voice in French. *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 93, pp. 5–29.
- xxxii. Tocalli-Beller, A., & Swain, M. 2005. Reformulation: The cognitive conflict and L2 learning that it generates. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 15, pp. 5–28.
- xxxiii. Truscott, J. 2007. The effect of error correction on learners' ability to write accurately. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 16, pp. 255–272.
- xxxiv. VanPatten, B. 2007. Input processing in adult second language acquisition. In B. VanPatten & J. Williams Eds., *Theories in second language acquisition*, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 115–135.
- xxxv. Zhang, S. 1987. Cognitive complexity and written production in English as a second language. *Language Learning*, vol. 37, pp. 469–481.