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WRITING BACKGROUND SURVEY

I. About studying English

1. So far how long have you studied English at school?

2. Have you studied in an English- speaking country (even for a short time)?

If so, when, where, and for how long?

II. About Writing in English.

1. Which of the following activities did you do regularly in high school and for preparation for entrance exams? (Check as many apply).

a. translating individual Persian sentences into English.

b. writing English sentences to practice grammar and / or vocabulary)

c. combining short sentences into one longer (complex/compound) sentences

d. writing more than one paragrahp

e. other (please specify)

2. Which of the following kinds of writing did you do? (Check as many as apply)

a. journal

b. personal impressions of materials read

d. summaries of paraphrases of materials read

e. short expository papers

f. letters

g. other (please specify)

3. Please estimate the amount of required writing (not translation into English) that you did while in high school? (Check only one)

a. more than ten pages per term.

b. 5-10 pages per term.

c. 2-5 pages per term.

d. about a page per term.

e. none.

4. Which of the following kinds of writing did you do on your own (not connected to school work) before coming to the university (Check as many as apply)

a. journal

b. personal impreosions of materials read

c. literary work (stories, poems, etc).

d. summaries or paraphrases of materials read

e. short expository papers

f. letters

g. other (please specify)

h. none

5. Please estimate the amount of self-initiated writing that you did before you enter the university? (Check only one)

a. more than ten pages per term

b. 5-10 pages per term

c. 2-5 pages per term

d. about the page per term

e. none

6. How difficult is it for you to write for academic purposes (Such as writing a term paper)?

a. very difficult

b. difficult

c. not very difficult

d. not at all difficult

7. How difficults is it for you to write for personal purposes (such as writing a personal letter)? (Check only one).

a. very difficult

b. difficult

c. not very difficult

d. not at all difficult

8. Which of the following activities did you do in the English classes you took before comming to the university? (Check as many apply)

a. summarizing

b. outlining before writing

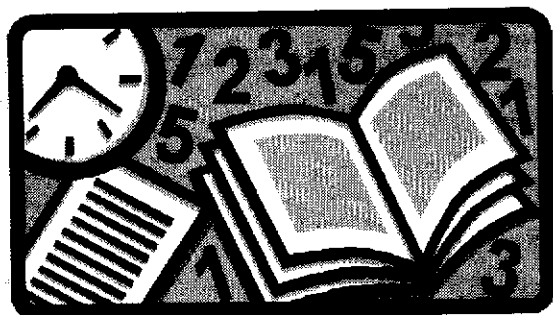
c. discussing the topic of writing in class

d. developing a paragraph so that the readers can follow it easily

f. organizing a paragraph centered on one main idea

f. revising after writing

g. writing term papers



Persian essay scores and English essay scores, it is highly probable to predict that the students who show a high degree of ability in L1 essay writing will show the same degree of ability in L2 essay writing. Thus, improving the first language essay writing can be associated with the improving of the second language essay writing.

The second hypothesis, that students' L1 writing ability and L2 proficiency both influence their L2 writing ability, was confirmed. L2 proficiency plays a major role in explaining L2 writing ability.

In qualitative analysis, according to the subjects' responses to the writing background questionnaire, two main characteristics differentiated good and weak writers:

1. Having previous writing experience beyond a paragraph level, 2. practicing writing summaries to paraphrases.

First, good Iranian EFL writers were characterized by their writing experience beyond a paragraph level. This implies that weak writers may become more proficient by doing the same thing. Second, the researcher also found that the good writers were characterized by their experience in summary writing and paraphrasing. These findings suggest that L2 writing ability may be related to some types of L2 writing experience.

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the "Cronbach Alpha Method" was used for determining this reliability. In this study the inter - rater reliability for the English and Persian; essay scores in both topics were acceptably high as follows:

English Essays	Persian Essays
First topic: Alpha = 95.93	First topic: Alpha = 94.99
Second topic: Alpha = 94.28	Second topic: Alpha = 94.56

Thus, the researcher used the following scores as the variables for the final quantitative analysis: TOEFL scores, English essays' holistic and analytical scores, and Persian essays' holistic and analytical scores.

In the qualitative analysis, the researcher compared the good and weak writers in terms of their responses to the writing background questionnaire. To check the reliability of the questionnaire used in study the instrument was administered on four different occasions, and the consistency of the responses was checked by the researcher.

Statistical Procedure

To determine whether the relationship between the first language essay writing and the second language essay writing some correlational analyses were conducted. The results of these analyses are shown on the table below:

	First topic	Second topic
English essay scores & Persian essay scores	r = .84	r = .81

For proving the second hypothesis the researcher correlated the two independent variables - the TOEFL scores, and the Persian essay (holistic and analytical) scores in both topics - with the dependent variable - English essay (holistic and analytical) scores in both topics. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient

matrix revealed that the two independent variables had positive significant correlations with the dependent variable. The results are summarized in the following table:

	First topic	Second topic
TOEFL scores & holistic Scores of English essays	r = .38	r = .36
TOEFL Scores & analytical Scores of English essays	r = .32	r = .31
Holistic scores of English & Persian essays	r = .68	r = .61
Analytical scores of English & Persian essays	r = .76	r = .73

p<.001

Also, the two independent variables - the TOEFL scores, and the Persian essays (holistic and analytical) scores were highly correlate with each other (r = .89, p<.001.) Thus, the second hypothesis in the present study, Iranian (EFL students' L1 writing ability and L2 proficiency are dependent to each other,; was confirmed:

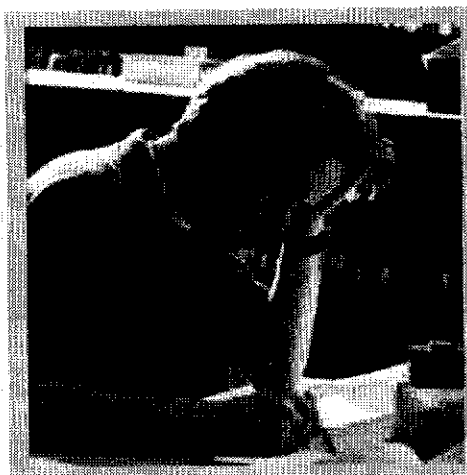
	First topic	Second topic
TOEFL scores & holistic Scores of Persian essays	r = .89	r = .87
TOEFL Scores & analytical Scores of Persian essays	r = .84	r = .83

p<.001

For testing the differences for significance between good and weak writers in the qualitative analysis, some chi - square analyses were carried out. The researcher also compared the good and weak writers in terms of their responses to the writing background questionnaire. There were two significant differences between the two groups: 70% of the good writers had previous writing experiences beyond a paragraph level X (1, n=111) = 1.16, p<.01, and 79% of the good writers practiced writing summaries or paraphrases X (1, n=111) = 1.20, p<.01

Conclusions

According to the positive correlation between



Procedure

The researcher collected all data by giving the subjects five distinct tests over a five - week period in six classes at two different branches of the Islamic Azad University.

The researcher chose the same topics in L1 and L2 because different topics might affect both quality and quantity of writing. The researcher chose these topics because they were the most popular among Iranian fourth - year university students. She counterbalanced L1 and L2 tasks in order to avoid a possible order effect. Fifty - nine participants from three classes first wrote in L2, and then in L1, after a one week delay and the remaining 52 from three classes wrote in the opposite order (L1 -> L2). For both tasks, the researcher did not inform the participants beforehand what topic they were going to write on. They were not allowed to use a dictionary and had 30 minutes to complete each task. Some might argue that the 30- minute writing time was not sufficient to complete all of the activities questioned in the post writing questionnaires. The researcher allocated 30 minutes for writing each composition, so that presumably all students could afford to complete the whole writing procedure. The rationale behind using 30 minutes time limit was that in most in - class compositions and essay - writing tests the time allocated was 30 minutes. Even in standard proficiency test such as TOEFL this time limit is observed.

Also, the subjects filled out a questionnaire asking for information on previous writing experience, attitude toward writing, and self - evaluation of writing ability in L2.

Data Collection

The evaluation of the subjects' performance on the TOEFL was perfectly objective because any item of the test had only one correct response. However, for the evaluation of the essays, the two different methods were utilized: a holistic rating and an analytical method. Kondo - Brown (2002) suggested that the raters should have similar professional backgrounds and have many years of teaching experience and graduate degree in a language related area. Three English L2 writing specialists, with the above mentioned conditions, scored the English essays, according to H. Jacobs, Zinkgraf Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey's (1981) ESL composition profile. They assigned ratings for five criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Each participant's score was the sum of the three raters' scores, with a possible range of 40 to 90 points. Similarly, three Iranian L1 writing specialists rated the Persian essays, on the basis of the translated version of Jacobs, et al.'s (1981). ESL composition profile (the translation was checked by some experts to ensure its content validity. (Each participant's Persian essay score, like the English essay score, was the sum of the three raters' scores, with a range of 48 to 97 points.

The essays were also assessed holistically by these experienced raters. The raters assigned each composition to one of seven levels of proficiency based on the " Writing Scale" proposed by Carroll and Hall(1985). This scale was employed because it seemed the most appropriate for the holistic evaluations of compositions and essays.

For computing the inter - rater reliability of the essay scores assigned by the six raters

students, typical in freshman writing courses, often write about topics related to their native language background; the evidence suggests that information on such topics is more readily retrieved in the first language.

In another study concerning the relationship between L1 and L2 writing Hirose and Sasaki (1996), investigated the factors that influence Japanese university students' expository writing in English. They examined 70 students of weak, intermediate, to advanced English proficiency along a variety of dimensions, namely, second language (L2) proficiency, first language (L1) writing ability, writing strategies in L1 and L2, metaknowledge of L2 expository writing, past writing experience, and instructional background. They considered these multiple factors as possible explanatory variables for L2 writing. Quantitative analysis revealed that students' L2 proficiency, L1 writing ability, and metaknowledge were all significant in explaining the L2 writing ability. Qualitative analysis indicated that good writers significantly different from weak writers in that good writers paid more attention to overall organization while writing in L1 and L2; wrote more fluently in L1 and L2; exhibited greater confidence in L2 writing for academic purposes; and had regularly written more than one English paragraph while in high school.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 111 Iranian senior university students (26 men and 85 women) majoring in English participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 30 years, with an average age of 25.5 years. They had studied English for an average of 9.5 years, mainly through education in Iran. The students were from the Islamic Azad University, Tehran Branch and Roodehen Branch. The subjects were assumed to be able to write essays because of having

passed the courses of Paragraph Writing and Essay Writing.

The subjects were administered a TOEFL proficiency test by which they were divided into three levels of proficiency based on their obtained scores: Advanced, those whose scores were two standard deviations above the mean, Intermediate, those whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean, Weak, those whose scores were two standard deviations below the mean.

Out of the 111 participants, the researcher chose the writers she judged to be "good" (60 students: 10 men and 50 women), and "weak" (51 students: 16 men and 35 women) for the qualitative analysis. The subjects were selected on the basis of their English essay scores: "good" writers had scores more than 1 standard deviations above the mean, whereas "weak" writers were 1 standard deviations or more below the mean.

Both the good and weak writer groups were similar in age, and instructional background. The two groups were homogeneous in that were typical Iranian fourth-year university students who had studied English through formal instruction in an EFL environment.

Instrumentation

The following instruments were utilized in this study:

1. The TOEFL Test (1992) that measured and determined the subjects' level of general English proficiency. L2 proficiency was measured through the sum of the three subscores of structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension tests.
2. Two essay writing tests both on the same topic, but one was to be written in English and the other in Persian.
3. Two essay writing tests, exactly the same as above, but with different topics.
4. A questionnaire eliciting the participants' instructional/personal writing backgrounds.

quantity of planning. They noted that weaker writers' failure to use writing strategies in English was based on their failure to use these strategies in their first language. In other words, strategies that were never acquired in their first language could not be transferred to the second language.

As Flower and Hayes (1981) have indicated with writers of English as a first language, writing processes are ongoing throughout a writing task, and writing does not begin and end with one draft. Traditional approaches to writing, such as modes of discourse or grammar - based approaches falter because they do not help students to see writing as an evolving process. Rather they place constraints in the path of writers. Such constraints can hinder the development of writing skills, particularly for those writers whose first language is not English. One constraint on composing process faced by all ESL writers is language. If ESL writers retrieve information about a writing topic from memory in their first language and then have to translate into English before writing anything down, this act of translation can lead to an overload of their short - term memory and a diminishment in the quality of the content of their writing.

But evidence of a first language assisting writers can be found in some studies of ESL adults. Chelala (1981), Lay (1982), Johnson (1985) and Jones and Tetroe (1987) found that switches to the first language aided ESL writers in retrieval of topic information. While the first two studies report these findings peripherally, Lay's study directly addresses the issue of first language use while composing. Her study, limited to four Chinese subjects and their composing in English, investigated, among other questions, how much the first language is used and whether there are any patterns in the use of the first language. She found that her Chinese subjects tended to switch to using their first language

when writing about a topic studied or acquired in their first language background. She also reports that their first language served as an aid and not a hindrance to writing, since her subjects used Chinese when they were stuck in English - to find a key word, for instance Lay notes that the greater the number of switches into the first language, the better the quality of the essays in terms of organization and ideas. Lay's results suggest that foreign students will be able to plan more easily and will have one less constraint on composing in English if they write about topics acquired in an English language setting.

In another study, Friedlander (1987) suggests that certain writing situations will be improved if ESL writers are able to use their first language at certain points while they are generating their texts. This study suggests that planning and preliminary considerations of a topic can be enhanced if ESL writers understand that using the language of topic - area knowledge can have a positive effect on their planning and writing. This study also suggests some directions that can impact on classroom pedagogy. First, planning on certain language topics seems to be enhanced when writers use the language of topic- area knowledge. In this case, if writers are writing on topics related to their first language experience, their writing should be assisted and they should be able to draw on a greater amount of topic area information if they create a portion of their plan or preliminary draft in their first language. Second, translation from the native language into English appears to help rather than hinder writers when the topic - area knowledge is in the first language. Writers would thus lose little by writing in their first language and then translating into English at the appropriate time for their emerging texts. Third, the writers in this study were able to access more information when working in their first language on a first language topic. Newly arrived foreign



appropriate rhetorical and linguistic means to express them. However, a closer examination of L1 and L2 writing will reveal salient and important differences drawn from the intuition of ESL writers (Silva, 1993), and ESL writing practitioners (Raines, 1985). In first language writing a great deal of emphasis is placed on originality of thought, the development of ideas, and the soundness of the writer's logic. In contrast, the same cannot be said of second language writing because of the wide variety of situations in which people learn and use second language. As Cushing Weigle (2002) has suggested second language learners can be distinguished by age, by level of education and first language literacy, and by the real world need for writing outside the classroom. In addition to these factors, the ability and opportunity to write in a second language are also determined by other considerations. One important factor is the stage or level of acquisition of the second language. One can not write in the second language without knowing at least something about the grammar and vocabulary of that language. If such differences exist, then in order to make intelligent decisions about adopting and / or adapting L1 practices, EFL writing practitioners need to have a clear understanding of the unique nature of L2 writing, of how and to what extent L2 writing differs from L1 writing.

Review of the Related Literature

Traditionally, ESL teachers have emphasized the need for ESL writers to think and write as completely as possible in English. The belief is that if ESL writers do any of their work in their first language, this will inhibit acquisition of the second language (L2) and will interfere with the generation of L2 structures, due to transfer of structures and vocabulary from the first language in an incorrect way. For instance, Arapoff (1967) suggested that students should avoid topics related to firsthand experience because they may then translate from their first language into English.

However, a number of studies have indicated that, regardless of a language prescription, writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies, whether good or deficient, from their first language to their second language. Mohan and Lo (1985), for instance, cite a study by Das which indicated that students who lacked first language strategies displayed a similar lack of strategies for writing in their second language. Mohan and Lo suggest that this deficiency may be developmental - students who have not developed good strategies for writing in their first language will not have appropriate strategies to transfer to their second language. Edelsky's study (1982) of the writing of first, second, and third graders in bilingual program also indicates that writing knowledge transfers across languages. Her results show that writers apply their knowledge about writing from their first language to writing in their second language, in order to form hypotheses about writing in the second language.

In another study, Jones and Tetroe (1987) looked at ESL writers generating texts in their first and second languages; they found that these ESL writers transferred both good and weak writing skills from their first language to English. This transfer was independent of language proficiency, which affected only

Abstract

Writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language. In learning second language skills, learners face two different systems: system of mother tongue and that of target language. As a matter of fact, students should understand similarities and difference between the languages concerned and the process through which they learn to write. The present study aimed at: 1) investigating the relationship between the first language essay writing ability of the Iranian EFL students and their essay writing performance in English; 2) investigating the impact of Iranian EFL students' L1 writing ability and their L2 proficiency on the quality of their English essay writing; 3) investigating the impact of Iranian EFL students' previous L2 writing experience on the quality of their English essay writing. In order to arrive at a logical answer to the aforementioned problems 111 university students were chosen from a pool of 200 students. They were divided into three groups of advanced, intermediate, and elementary based on their test scores in TOEFL.

To evaluate the two first factors - second language proficiency and first language writing ability - the subjects were given two English essay writing tests as well as two Persian essay writing tests with in an interval of about two weeks. But of evaluating the third factor - past writing experience - the subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire to reveal their essay writing ability.

Analyses revealed that: there is a positive relationship between the first language essay writing ability and second language essay writing, Iranian EFL students' L2 proficiency and their L1 writing ability both influence the quality of their L2 writing ; and good writers were significantly different from weak writers in that good writers: a) had previous writing experience beyond a paragraph level, and b) practiced writing summaries or paraphrases .

Key Words: Writing, first language (Persian), second language (English) , previous writing experience, second language proficiency.

Introduction

Writing is viewed as an instrument through which people communicate with one another in time and space, transmitting their accumulated culture from one generation to another. When we view writing in this broad perspective, we can see how vitally related our written language is not only to the life of the individual but to the total life of the community. Until recently, however, little is offered in terms of methodology or practical application for helping the ESL/EFL students develop this important skill. Reasons for this may lie in the lack of emphasis on teaching writing in language textbooks in general, as well as in the lack of materials specifically developed for and focused on the teaching writing. During the last decade, steps were taken to gradually draw the attention of

teachers towards highlighting writing as a required skill to fulfill the scholastic purposes of learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL) as well as an important means for the mastery of the target language.

In recent years, EFL writing practitioners have frequently been advised to adopt practices from L1 writing. Underlying this advice seems to be the important assumption that L1 and L2 writing are particularly identical or at least very similar. At a superficial level, such an assumption seems warranted. There is evidence to suggest that L1 and L2 writing are similar in their broad outlines; that is, it has been shown that both L1 and L2 writers employ a recursive composing process, involving planning, writing and revising, in order to adapt their ideas and find the



On The Relationship Between First Language Essay Writing (Persian) and Second Language Essay Writing (English)

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چکیده

نگارش یک مهارت اصلی ارتباطی است. در یادگیری مهارت های زبان دوم، زبان آموز با دو نظام متفاوت، یعنی نظام زبان مادری و نظام زبان هدف مواجه است. نه تنها باید شباهت ها و تفاوت های بین دو زبان را بفهمد، بلکه فرایندی را که از طریق آن فن نگارش را می آموزد، درک کند. هدف این تحقیق عبارت است از:

۱. بررسی ارتباط توانایی نگارش بین زبان فارسی و زبان انگلیسی دانشجویان ایرانی رشته زبان انگلیسی.
۲. بررسی اثر توانایی نگارش در زبان فارسی و مهارت زبان دوم دانشجویان ایرانی رشته زبان انگلیسی،
۳. بررسی اثر تجربه های قبلی نگارش به زبان انگلیسی دانشجویان ایرانی رشته زبان انگلیسی در کیفیت نگارش آن ها به زبان انگلیسی.

به منظور دستیابی به پاسخ های منطقی سه سؤال فوق، ۱۱۱ دانشجو از بین ۲۰۰ دانشجو انتخاب و بر مبنای نمره «تست تافل»، به سه گروه ضعیف، متوسط و قوی تقسیم شدند. برای بررسی ارتباط نگارش بین زبان فارسی و زبان انگلیسی و همچنین، ارزیابی دو عامل اول، یعنی میزان تسلط دانشجویان به زبان انگلیسی و توانایی آنان در نگارش به زبان فارسی، دو موضوع انشا به زبان فارسی و همین دو موضوع به زبان انگلیسی به فاصله دو هفته به آنان داده شد. اما برای ارزیابی عامل سوم، یعنی تجربه های کلی دانشجویان در امر نگارش به زبان دوم (انگلیسی)، از دانشجویان خواسته شد، پرسشنامه ای را در این رابطه کامل کنند. بررسی ها نشان دادند که

۱. ارتباطی مثبت بین توانایی نگارش دانشجویان به زبان فارسی و توانایی آنان در نگارش به زبان انگلیسی وجود دارد.
 ۲. مهارت زبان دوم دانشجویان رشته زبان انگلیسی و توانایی نگارش آنان در زبان فارسی، هر دو روی کیفیت نگارش به زبان دوم (انگلیسی) مؤثرند.
 ۳. دانشجویانی که از لحاظ مهارت نگارش جزو گروه خوب قرار داشتند، نسبت به دانشجویانی که در گروه ضعیف قرار گرفته بودند، از لحاظ دو عامل متفاوت بودند: الف) در مقاله نویسی (نگارش) بیش از یک پاراگراف تجربه های لازم قبلی را داشتند و ب) در امر خلاصه نویسی و نقل بیان (از زبان خود دانشجو) به حد کافی تمرین داشتند.
- کلید واژه ها: نگارش، زبان اول (فارسی)، زبان دوم (انگلیسی)، تجربه های نگارش، مهارت زبان دوم.