

Writing to Learn Language

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ABSTRACT: *The present article makes a survey on the recent research that asserts that writing has a facilitative and effective role in second language (L2) development. 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: *writing; implicit and explicit knowledge; language development; knowledge internalization*

1. Write to Learn

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, Swain, & Smith, 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 New 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).

Second, it is also possible that production through collaboration promotes students towards repacking and reprocessing of implicit knowledge (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 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 about 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 or page 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 research 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.

7. 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 make use of new structures which they have not yet mastered completely over them. Writing is essential and vital in inetrnalization 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 facilitate L2 learning and leads to the promotion and development of second language skills from different aspects.

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