

CONCEPT OF WRITING AS ONE OF LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract: Writing is one of four language skills and together with speaking, it is a productive skill. Chan and Abdullah state that it is a skill which has not been explored enough (Chan and Abdullah, 2004). Some trainers and teachers of writing skills tend to assume writing as motor skill practice, particularly important with children, however, the others emphasize that the purpose of writing is communication. In 'A Dictionary of Terms, An A-Z of ELT' Thornbury defines two vital concepts of this productive skill: product approach and process approach (Thornbury, 2010). Improvement of students is not possible without their teacher's help and giving clear, simple and logical instructions, which reveals an inseparable relationship between teaching and learning. Writing has its own set of tricks: dashes (-); exclamation marks (!); new paragraphs; commas (,); CAPITAL letters etc. All of them are important for creating effect and rhythm (Scrivener, 2011). Cultural impact has an important role in the process of learning language and with the choice of specific topics, the students feel emotional cultural affinity. This paper also outlines the importance of knowing the audience when writing or preparing to write and elaborates the distinction between formal and informal writing. Students usually find it difficult to start writing process, claiming that a good plan and brainstorming take a lot of time. Brainstorming is a way to get the ideas, 'ideas creation engine' running. It means 'opening your mind and letting ideas pour out' (Scrivener, 2011). This paper also gives the answer to the question: "Why do students show a tendency to learn different writing techniques and styles?" Students mostly show enthusiasm for learning writing and improving their writing skills. On the other hand, they all learn English in primary or secondary school (or both), which implies that they are extrinsic learners; they only learn when they have to. Rarely have they started learning it recently and the reason for this is employment. Some students need English for further education and after several breaks during their learning history, they come back to the classroom to improve their English skills. In the beginning they are afraid of making mistakes and the outcome. All students make mistakes at various stages of their language learning (Harmer, 1998). Harmer mentions a couple of reasons for this. One of the most common reasons is that they are affected by their own language, particularly in terms of 'false friends'. Some students are accustomed to using certain expressions or phrases and terms regardless of the fact that they adopted them in the wrong way. The paper also elaborates the difference between these two terms: a mistake and an error. In the cognitive approach, errors refer to a clue to what is happening in the mind. They are a natural phenomenon that must occur and they are indicators that learning is taking place. So errors are no longer "bad" but "good" or natural just as natural as errors that occur in learning a first language. The insight that errors are a natural and important part of the learning process itself, and do not all come from mother tongue interference, is very important. It is concluded that students need to put in focus writing skills in accordance with their requirements and affinity. Moreover, they should be aware of the fact that all students make mistakes and these are encouraging in the process of writing, as the students learn much through the analysis of the mistakes, errors and corrections.

Keywords: writing, skill, mistake, writing style.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is not just important to be a good teacher, but a good learner as well. There is variation in learners' performance depending on the task. Learners may have more control over linguistic forms for certain tasks, while for others they may be more prone to error. Writing involves a different kind of mental process. There is more time to think, to reflect, to prepare, to rehearse, to make mistakes and to find alternative and better solution (Scrivener, 2011). There

are several reasons that explain why writing should be taught to students of English as a foreign language. They include reinforcement, language development, learning style and writing as a skill. The most important reason for teaching writing lies in the fact that it is a basic language skill, equally important as speaking, listening and reading. Learners need to know how to write a letter, whether formal or informal, reports, articles, reviews etc.

2. SPANNING BETWEEN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE PROCESS OF WRITING

The type of writing that we teach to our students depends on their age, interests and level, as the teacher must know what language the students have at their command and what can be achieved with this language (Scrivener, 2011). Different level requires different type of writing, provided that the students are motivated. Students' interests play an important role in their choice of writing task. In the situation when all the learners in the classroom are journalists, for example, the teacher might choose writing newspapers articles. On the other hand, if the teachers deal with a more mixed group, the best option is to give generally useful topics to students. The success of students' writing particularly has its roots in the way we teach. The process of writing covers a number of strategies, but without a good plan, no student will be able to respond to the task properly. All this starts with **brainstorming** and making keyword lists, where the students in pairs or groups share their ideas through discussion. Besides this, working in groups and pairs encourages them to participate in the task more confidently (Harmer, 2008). Using diagrams and sketches, concept maps, lists and headings, writing frames provided by teacher and based on known text structures from reading are some of the beneficial tools. **Drafting** is the first version of the writing process, performed individually or collaboratively. Some students have a preference for writing sections, however, some write the composition from start to finish. Final drafting stage is aimed at transcription, organization, spelling and grammar. In the **editing** stage, students work on their own texts individually and they compare their piece of work with the one created by their teacher, finally they show changes by marking the text. Rivers (1968) argues that any academic writer must meet four major conditions: The student must learn:

- 1 - the graphic systems of the foreign language;
- 2 - they must learn to spell according to the conventions of the language;
- 3 - they must learn to control the structure of the language so that what they write is comprehensible to the reader; and
- 4 - they must learn to select from among possible combinations of words and phrases, those which will convey the nuances they have in mind in the register which is most appropriate.

3. WHY DO STUDENTS MAKE MISTAKES IN WRITING?

There is a distinction between mistakes and errors. Brown states that mistakes are "a failure to utilize a known system correctly", whereas errors refer to "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner" (Brown, 1994). According to Corder (1967, 1971) and James (1998) "A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot". Errors are "systematic," i.e. likely to happen regularly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would detect them, the learner would not (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Norrish (1983) stated that errors are "systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong." Norrish defined mistakes as "inconsistent deviation."

The categories for description of errors cited by Brown (1994) and others help to distinguish between writing errors originating in a student's first language and others within the target language itself. In general, errors can be categorized as ones of addition, omission, substitution and ordering at either the sentence or discourse level. Within these, different levels of language can be considered including phonology, orthography, lexicon, grammar and discourse.

The type of language produced by second and foreign language learners is often described as 'interlanguage.' Brown (1994) states that interlanguage refers to the "separateness of a second language learner's system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages." Within this intermediate language, learner errors may be caused by many different processes including borrowing patterns from the mother tongue and extending patterns from the target language, or over-generalizing a learner rule.

Connor (1996) states that analyses of "interlanguage" systems of learners' actual performance suggest that the influence of transfer on acquisition of the target language is quite complex. Other aspects now considered include knowledge about the target language itself, the learner's communicative strategies, the instructional situation, and the combined effects of these factors. Therefore, she says, a learner is seen as "an active participant in the learning

process, one who is forming and testing hypotheses in the process of creating an internalized system of how the target language works.” Errors as part of students’ writing are mostly the result of faulty or partial learning of the target language. Such errors may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another.

Usage mistakes are the final type of error often seen in ESL students’ writing. A usage mistake does not break a grammar “rule”, but is a word or string of words that a native speaker would never use to express the particular meaning that the ESL student is trying to convey <http://esl.fis.edu/learners/advice/mistakes.htm>.

4. DIFFERENT WRITING STYLES REQUIRE A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THIS SKILL

There are two main styles of writing in English – formal and informal. When do we use Formal and Informal Writing? A formal writing style is not necessarily “better” than an informal style, each style is used for a different purpose. Writing for professional purposes requires the formal style, although individual communications can use the informal style once you are familiar with the recipient. Different situations require different ways of combining words in order to compose a sentence. Formal style is used in Academic Writing and Business Communications, whereas Informal style is appropriate for communication with friends and other close people. The selection of the style should depend on the issue that we are writing to and the person to whom we are writing to. In Informal Writing Style language is colloquial, it is similar to a spoken conversation. Informal writing may include slang, figures of speech, broken syntax and so on. It takes a personal tone as if we are speaking directly to our audience (the reader). We are likely to address the reader using second person (you and your). Sentences are short and simple, in that way they are acceptable and sometimes essential to making a point in informal writing. It is strongly recommended to simplify words in terms of contractions (for example, I’m, doesn’t, it’s) and abbreviations (e.g. TV) whenever possible. The author can show empathy towards the reader regarding the complexity of a thought and help them through that complexity. Unlike Informal Style of Writing, in Formal Style sentences are more complex. We need to be as thorough as possible with our approach to any topic when we intend to use a formal style. Each main point needs to be introduced, elaborated and concluded. Stating main points confidently and offering full support arguments are inevitable in Formal Writing. Generally, it shows a limited range of emotions and avoids emotive punctuation such as exclamation points, ellipsis, etc., apart from the case when they are being cited from another source. No contractions should be used to simplify words (in other words use "It is" rather than "It's"). Abbreviations must be spelt out in full when first used, the only exceptions being when the acronym is better known than the full name (BBC, ITV or NATO for example). Formal writing is not a personal writing style, third person is the symbol of this style.

5. CONCLUSION

Writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that we have been teaching our students. The conventions of English essays are more formulaic than we might think. The drafting stage is used to get initial ideas from the pre-writing phase into more formal sentence structure. Students can write out each major point first and then connect them all together in their task, or they can simply start in the beginning and work their way around the cluster map filling out the ideas with full sentences. If a student has done a great job of a cluster map, then all the ideas for the paper are already written down and the student only needs to develop sentences, to match each circle on the map. One of the most crucial issues in the classroom is the teacher that is a leader in the process of writing and gives the students good guidelines and instructions. Despite the fact that, as Shakespeare said, "The pen is mightier than the sword," the pen itself is not enough to make an effective writer. In fact, inspiration alone is not the key to effective essay writing. Mistakes are part of writing skill. Mistakes do far more to help us learn and improve than successes. If we treat each mistake not as a failure but as a learning experience, the possibilities for self-improvement are immense. The major difference between a mistake and an error is that students themselves are able to correct their own mistakes, however, they cannot correct their errors, as they are not aware of them, that is, they do not recognize them. A fact is that non-native speakers are more prone to committing errors. Lynn Holaday (in Stephen Tchudi, 1997) points out "the way to become a better writer is to write". She remarks "students who feel incompetent at writing avoid writing. Practice is the key to successful writing.

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