



AN INVESTIGATION OF THE WRITING PROCESSES OF STUDENTS WITH HEARING LOSS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING OF WRITING

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Abstract

This study explores the writing processes of students with hearing impairment. Students were given an expository essay for writing. The students produced two data sets: first was obtained at entrance test and second on the completion of the course. All data sets were scored with the help of a scoring guide that was provided by the English department of Govt. Training College for Teachers of the Deaf. Findings have revealed that although the students texts had very clear errors of language and vocabulary, they improved the organization and content of their texts. This presentation reviews literature on deaf adolescents' writing before exploring the structural gains the students in this study demonstrated. Sample papers and their rating scores will be used.

Keywords: writing processes, organization, content, hearing impaired students

Introduction

It has ever been a challenge for writers to give a productive meaning to a blank paper. This activity demands a hectic struggle to focus on purpose and audience for the meaningful production of a text. Writing especially in English which is taught as Second Language in Pakistan, seems to be one of the biggest challenges that many students face but it is often posited that the reading and writing of English are difficult for deaf children because they are tempting to read and write a language they “don’t know” (Mayer, 1999). Writing is also one of the criteria used to measure progress and make major academic decisions (Leki, 2007). Writing has always been seen as an important skill for the achievement of academic grades in schools. Case studies in second language (L2) writing with hearing students also reveal how difficult it is for non-native English-speaking (NNES) students to write in English despite their time and effort invested in writing and high English language test scores (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Connor, 1999; Leki, 2007; Spack, 1997).

Writing is certainly an important element of learning English as a second language. This importance is eventually derived from the fact that it reinforces grammatical structures, vocabulary and idioms that we have been teaching to our students. Because many L2 writers, even those who possess adequate sentence-level knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, have difficulties writing well-organized essays just as Kaplan found in his L2 writing classes (Kaplan, 1966). Contrastive rhetoric (CR) has discussed this issue and explored written discourse beyond the sentence level or organization patterns of written texts. According to Matsuda, (2003) Kaplan’s attempted to look into L2 texts to find out why NNES students write with a “written accent” at the discourse level. After a careful examination of essays written by L2 writers, Kaplan (1966, 1987) reported that different cultures and languages have their preferred ways of organizing texts and those culture-specific rhetorical preferences transfer to L2 writing making L2 texts look different from L1 texts written by native English speakers. That is why it is claimed that writing should receive more attention in ESL classes in order to prepare learners to cope with the academic demands. Undoubtedly, the purpose of teaching writing skill in Pakistan is to prepare learners to attain a better academic achievement and produce a well-structured piece of writing which is recognized and accepted in their academic departments. Exposing the learners to the writing process itself is then a better way for achieving this goal. Writing skills can be developed when the learners' interests are recognized



and when they are exposed to situations where they can produce authentic piece of writing. Consequently, a writing program is expected to be structured in such an effective way to meet the expectations and needs of the learners. The literature has exposed a number of researchers addressed the need for ESL students (Hinkel, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). The Lahore Board syllabus of Inter class's English writing was found to mainly address classroom genres such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, and problem-solution, but it neglected writing for occupational purposes such as helping students to develop competence in the specific genres that can assist them in their academic study, workplace and their lives in general.

Writing is really seen as a process of discovery as the writers try to find their way while they are struggling to think, compose and put their ideas together. In that way, it is not looked at as a static process but as a cognitive, social and dynamic one. Olive, Favart, Beauvais and Beauvais (2009) in their study to investigate the cognitive effort of students while writing, found that the cognitive effort interacted with genres. They indicated that students' cognitive writing effort decreased or increased when they were writing certain types of texts such as argumentative and narrative texts. During the process of writing you may discover an idea which is new to you and you have never thought of before. Zamel (1983) argued that writers discover and formulate ideas as they go through the process of writing. Worldwide, it is common knowledge that deaf children struggle with language and reading/writing although the fairly recent development of equipment such as digital hearing aids and cochlear implants has made a significant difference to those who have access to such technology. However, these developments too have introduced many challenges, notably the ongoing battle between those advocating the teaching of spoken language and those recommending that deaf children learn sign language. For example, according to Woll (1998, 58), "how normal development can be best achieved, and which language or languages should be learnt, is a continuing source of controversy." Another challenge is that in order for the acquisition of either spoken language or sign language to be most successful, detection and intervention for the deaf child needs to happen as early as possible (cf. Marschark 1993, 17; Pauw 2002, abstract; Schröder 2004, abstract). Many developed countries, such as the United States, have made strides towards early detection and intervention with universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS) (Downs 2007, 161).

However, in Pakistan, a developing country, advanced technology, such as cochlear implants, is not available to many, and UNHS is still not a reality countrywide. Instead of deafness being identified by screening, in Pakistan most identification of hearing loss happens passively when parents become concerned that there is something wrong with their child. In addition, deafness may go undetected for some considerable time. In Pakistan sometimes deafness is only diagnosed when the child is between four and eight. As a child develops language best in the first two years of life, late diagnosis means that many Deaf children start Grade R with "little or no language" and the "average Deaf school-leaver leaves school with a reading age of 8". Consequently, three quarters of Deaf people are "functionally illiterate" and 70% do not have work.

The writing levels that children develop while at school determine their academic and career potential after completing their education, it is necessary to establish the extent of the challenges facing deaf children. The lack of research on the written English abilities of deaf learners in Pakistan is also an issue that demands attention. Due to these deficiencies an entire grade of deaf learners fail every to pass their final year at school.

Thus, a genuine writing task should place a learner in situations that require authentic use of language to communicate. The Compulsory English Syllabus of Punjab Text Book Board for HSSC has failed to prepare H.I students to cope with such demands. Students in Pakistani community are expected to be able



to produce an acceptable academic text by the time they start their academic courses in their colleges without exception of hearing impairment and without hearing impairment. However, many of them are found to fail to meet their examiners' requirements in producing an appropriate piece of writing which is both linguistically and communicatively valued by experts. Thus, exploring H.I students' writing processes will eventually lead to offer the right assistance. Extending the line of previous research (Connie Mayer1999), this study intends to investigate the H.I students' writing processes.

The Purpose of the Study

L2 writing is a complex process which involves various factors such as the writer, the writing process, sociocultural contexts, the text as a final product, and so on. Researchers for example; (Hinkel, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Ferris Hedgcock, 2005 and Wertsch, 1995) studied mostly texts, the final products, to find out why L2 texts differ from those written by native speakers. In these studies culture was viewed as the main source of the difference. However, culture is a complex notion to define and it might be dangerous to base a study on an uncertain concept. Thus, increasingly, there is need to look into more concrete evidence than culture to explain writing differences. Writing has been seen as the most challenging skill for number of Pakistani H.I students who have been studying English (compulsory) as part of the requirements of the HSSC. Hearing impaired children are always in the difficult position of having to learn the written form of English when they have only limited or partial access to the primary spoken code. Yet deaf students are required to read and write on a regular basis (Mayer,1999) although the products and processes of all this activity have been widely studied, the attention to the H.I students' cognitive and social processes of writing in English as Second Language has been less well investigated.

Hence, the main objective of the present study will be to investigate H.I students' writing processes, strengths and weaknesses in their texts and what improvement these students showed in the development of the organization and content of their text.

As shown in previous studies, it is important for L2 educators to know the writing processes of their students for effective teaching and learning. Writing is mostly learned in school, unlike other language skills. Since yet no research has investigated the writing processes of Pakistani H.I students, the main objective of the present study will be to investigate H.I students' writing processes, strengths and weaknesses in their texts and what improvement these students showed in the development of the organization and content of their text.

Literature Review

In the past much of the research on the language development of children who are deaf or hard of hearing consisted of analysis of their written language productions (Kretchmer&Kretschmer, 1978; Moores, 2001; Paul, 1998; Quigley & Kretschmer, 1982; Rose, McAnally&Qigley, 2004 and Wertsch, 1995 cited in Paul, 2009).

According to Chomsky (1988, 2006) language performance or production does not provide a complete accurate picture of language competence. Likewise the studies for example (Everhart&Marschark, 1988; Marschark, 2005, 2007, cited in Paul, 2009; Marschark, 2007; Marschark, Lang & Albertini, 2002; Moores, 2001, 2006; Rose et al., 2004; Schirmer, 1994, 2000; Stewart & Clarke, 2003 Stewart & Kluwin, 2001) discussed educational issues including language and literacy involving children with hearing impairment. Researchers for example (Moores, 2001, 2006 and Paul, 1998) stressed upon the fact that



lower writing skills are reflective of their (deaf students) reading skills. On the other hand Marschark, (2005, 2007) pointed out that the situation is much more complex than reading writing connection.

A compelling way to illustrate the writing problems of a number of deaf or hard of hearing students is to present a sample of their written language productions (Paul, 1999). These samples are drawn from the studies for example (Qigley&Kretchmer, 1982; Quigley, Wilbur, Powr, Montanelli& Steinkamp, 1976).

Despite a big variety of studies there is a tremendous amount of ambiguity involved in understanding and answering the questions about the perception of HI ESL student writers about writing in L2. Writing is not a unitary skill (Paul, 1999, pp, 322).

Researchers for example (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Tierney & Pearson, 1983) stress upon the view that reading and writing share underlying processes.

Researchers (Adams, 1990; Chall, Jacobs, & Baddwin, 1990; McGuinness, 2004, Snowling&Hulme, 2005; Treiman, 2006) have demonstrated that poor readers are also poor writers.

Researchers (Moore, 2001, 2006; Paul, 1998; Rose et al., 2004) have reported that students with severe to profound hearing impairment are poor writers because they are poor readers.

Writing is not merely a representation of an individual thought (Paul, 1999). This is supported by Vygostky, 1962; Paul, 1998; Williams, 1994, 2004; Aram, Korat & Levin, 2006; Graves, 1994; Sulzby & Teal, 1987, 2003).

Further the studies of (Bereiter& Scardamalia, 1983, 1987; Czerniewska, 1992) discussed natural instructional approach (Paul, 1999). The emphasis of these and other contemporary approaches to writing is on generating meaning (rather than correctly recording or transmitting what already exists)..... (Laine & SCHULTZ, 1985, pp, 16, CITED IN Paul, 1999, pp, 328).

In short a big number of studies on writing with deaf or hard of hearing learners (mentioned above) have revealed that deaf or hard of hearing students have lower performance on written language than younger hearing students and their writings vary greatly from standard English. Using a transformational grammar framework, the findings have revealed that a number of deaf or hard of hearing students have great difficulty in understanding and producing complex structure in writing (Paul, 1999, pp, 356).

All of the above mentioned studies have comprehensively discussed writing, perspective on writing two major aspects of writing but none has discussed the writing processes of HIC except Mayer (1999) who has explored the writing processes of deaf students. So the major objective of this literature review was to provide a discussion of the development of writing and to relate this to the writing processes of HI students. As in the words of Paul (1999) writing is even more difficult than reading for a number of these individuals. And if it is in L2 it becomes even more difficult and complex process for such individuals.

Method

Subjects

The participants of this study were the students of The subjects in this study consisted of 27 students at the Govt. Training College for Teachers of the Deaf, admittance to which depends in part on a hearing loss of 70 db or higher, unaided. All of the students entered Govt. Training College for Teachers of the Deaf in either 2000 or 2001 and all had tested into either a level A or B writing course upon entry at Govt.



Training College for Teachers of the Deaf. That is, they had scored either 39 or below out of a possible 100 points on the Writing Test (Albertini, Bochner, Cuneo, Hunt, Nielsen, Seago & Shannon, 1986) (Level A) or between 40 and 49 (Level B). Entry at these levels meant the students would have received at least two quarters of direct writing instruction in the English Department before writing the exit paper.

Procedure

First year students at Govt. Training College for Teachers of the Deaf produce a writing sample prior to the start of their first term for purposes of placement in the English Department program. To this end, students are given the Writing Test. Their writing is based on a prompt intended to elicit an expository essay based on personal experience (see Appendix A). They have approximately 30 minutes to complete the writing sample. They are encouraged to produce their best work and use the full amount of time. The writing sample is scored by three trained raters and given up to 25 points in each of the following areas: organization, content, language use and vocabulary. There are descriptors for each of the above areas as well as number guides to assist the scorers (Appendix B). The sub-scores are added for a total score. The totals from each of the three raters are then averaged to determine a final score. Students receiving an overall score of 39 or below are placed in Level A writing. Those receiving an overall score of 40 to 49 are placed in Level B. Those receiving 50-59 are placed in Level C and those receiving 60-67 are placed in Level D. Students receiving a score of 68 or above have satisfied the academic writing requirement of the department.

For the past two years, faculty members in the English Department have been assessing student readiness for Level D writing by eliciting a writing sample from students in Level C near the end of the term. Students are given three topics, told to choose one and spend the class (approximately 50 minutes) writing on their chosen topic. Papers are judged by the Writing C level instructors using a three-point system: ready (for Writing D), marginally ready, or not ready. The prompts are intended to elicit an expository essay of approximately four paragraphs based on personal experience.

Because the exit writing sample was only scored on a readiness scale, it was necessary to score the samples again using the rubric designed for the Writing Test. Following the procedure used with Writing Test, each sample was scored by three raters and the results averaged to obtain a final score.

These two writing samples, the placement test and the Writing C exit paper, were used for purposes of comparison.

Results

The students' average scores on each of the four rubrics from the Writing Test were compared with those on the Writing C exit paper. The complete results are presented on Table 1. An overview of this table shows that students' organization improved an average of 4 points, content improved an average of 3.5 points, language improved 2.4 points and vocabulary improved 2.8 points. These numbers, then suggest that students made slightly greater gains in the areas of organization and content than in language and vocabulary.

In organization, the greatest individual improvements were found with Students E and F who showed a gain of 8 points, while students N and P showed the least improvement, gaining only 1 point. Student E made the greatest improvement in content, gaining 7 points while student N lost 2 points in the same category. Student F made the greatest improvement in language, gaining 6 points while student N again



lost 2 points. Student E also made the greatest improvement in vocabulary, gaining 7 points while both Student S and Student N showed no improvement.

An average overall gain of 12.7 points was made across all four areas. Since 10 points separate each level for purposes of placement, such a gain would be sufficient to move a student to the next level, that is, say, from Academic Writing B to Academic Writing C.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to compare samples of deaf students' writing taken over time and using a four point rubric to see if, and to what extent, the students' writing improved in organization and content. A comparison of the scores from the Writing Test and the sample taken at the end of Academic Writing C showed slightly higher gains were made in organization and content than in language and vocabulary. Even slight gains, however, may not be surprising if the focus of the courses align with such gains. While it is certainly true that organization and content are taught at all four levels in the English Department, it is by no means all that is taught.

Both grammar and vocabulary also receive planned and incidental instruction. Students receive direct instruction on grammar rules and have follow-up practices. In addition, points for remediation are raised and discussed in class. Similar approaches are taken with vocabulary. The structure at each level of the Academic Writing courses, therefore, mimics the rubric used to assess student texts.

The issue of validity of the rubrics used is also important to the discussion of the results. According to Gormley&Sarachan- Deily (1987) there are only two methods for evaluating writing that produce consistency in results. The first kind is general impression or a holistic approach, and the second is feature analytical scoring. Feature analytical scoring, or rating sub-skills, provides a frame for deeper textual analysis because it allows the rater to focus on different aspects of the text and evaluate them differently (p. 158).

While feature analytical scoring provides a frame for analysis, it is important that such a scoring method be valid. Bochner, Albertini, Samar & Metz (1992) found that raters could not selectively score the quality of the four sub-skills used in the Writing Test. Using a principal component analysis (PCA) on the subscale ratings for the categories of organization, content, language use and vocabulary, these researchers found that each subscale "measured essentially the same underlying dimension of writing skill as every other subscale" (p.306). According to these researchers, their findings do not obviate the notion that organization, content, vocabulary and language form the basis for quality writing. The results of their work, rather, show that raters in their sample were not successfully able to separate the quality of one sub-skill from another when forming their opinions.

In terms of internal validity, a difference between the findings of Bochner et al (1992) and those of Heefner& Shaw (1998) may lie in the kind of data used for analysis. Bochner et al (1992) used information collected from raters scoring a single set of writing samples. Heefner& Shaw (1998), on the other hand, collected writing samples over a period of four years. These researchers used student growth over time as the indicator for rubric validity.

Even if the categories used for assessing student writing samples are not used diagnostically, the results of this study can be viewed in terms of trends. The differences in scoring results between the two sets of writing samples suggest that students generally made gains in all four areas. The numbers also suggest



that the area of greatest improvement was organization. Whether looking at categories of the rubric or the overall score, the numbers show that deaf students are able to make gains in written English in a relatively short amount of time.

Appendix A

The GOVT. TRAINING COLLEGE FOR TEACHES OF THE DEAF Writing Test

Directions:

1. Use a pen; do not use a pencil
2. You have 30 minutes to write.
3. Your test score will help place you in a writing course

Topic:

You are in a new place. Write an essay on your opinions of GOVT. TRAINING COLLEGE FOR TEACHES OF THE DEAF and the people here. Give reasons and examples.

Appendix B

GOVT. TRAINING COLLEGE FOR TEACHES OF THE DEAF Writing Test

Scoring Categories and Descriptors

Organization (25 pts.): This includes such features as:

- Clear statement of topic placed appropriately
- Intent is evident to readers
- Plan of paper could be outlined by reader (i.e., paper is unified and coherent)
- Appropriate transitions (i.e., transitional markers and clear paragraphing)

Content (25 pts.): This includes such features as:

- Paper addresses the assigned topic
- Generalizations are supported by examples
- No extraneous material
- Pertinence and noteworthiness of ideas

Language Use (25 pts.): This includes such features as:

- Correct use of grammatical structures (sentence and discourse level) and punctuation
- Correct use of complex structures
- Intelligible spelling
- Clarity of style and expression
- Clarity of reference

Vocabulary use (25 pts.): This includes such features as:

- Appropriate semantic use of vocabulary
- Consistent register
- Sophisticated choice of vocabulary



- Appropriate use of figurative and idiomatic expressions
- Table I
- NTID Writing Test Scores (SVP) and Academic Writing 3 (AW3) Scores

Table-1

Student	SVP Org.	AW3 Org	SVP Con.	AW3 Con.	SVP Lang	AW3 Lang	SVP Voc	AW3 Voc	SVP Total	AW3 Total
Student A	10	14	10	14	13	13	12	13	45	54
Student B	10	13	8	12	8	12	8	11	34	48
Student C	11	13	10	12	10	12	10	13	40	51
Student D	10	14	10	14	10	11	10	12	40	51
Student E	9	17	9	16	11	17	9	16	37	66
Student F	7	15	8	14	9	15	9	15	33	59
Student G	10	15	10	14	11	15	9	14	40	58
Student H	8	12	8	11	9	10	9	11	34	45
Student I	10	16	9	17	10	12	10	13	39	57
Student J	11	16	11	15	10	14	10	14	41	59
Student K	7	13	6	11	7	10	7	11	26	45
Student L	10	14	9	12	9	11	9	12	37	49
Student M	8	11	8	11	9	11	10	12	35	46
Student N	10	11	10	8	11	9	11	11	42	39
Student O	11	14	11	13	11	14	12	13	46	54
Student P	10	11	7	11	7	11	8	13	32	46
Student Q	10	13	7	10	7	10	8	11	32	44
Student R	9	11	9	11	10	10	10	12	37	43
Student S	12	14	12	13	12	12	12	12	47	51
Student T	10	15	10	15	13	14	12	14	45	58
Student U	6	12	5	10	6	9	6	9	23	39
Student V	11	16	11	14	12	15	12	13	46	58
Student W	10	14	10	14	12	15	12	14	45	57
Student X	11	13	11	13	10	11	11	12	44	50
Student Y	8	16	9	14	8	13	10	12	35	55
Student AA	10	14	11	13	9	12	9	13	38	52

Table-2

Student	% change in org.	% change in cont.	% change in lang.	% change in vocab.
Student A	16	16	0	4
Student B	12	16	16	12
Student C	8	8	8	12
Student D	16	16	4	8
Student E	32	28	20	28
Student F	32	24	24	24
Student G	20	16	16	20
Student H	16	12	4	8
Student I	24	32	8	12
Student J	20	16	16	16
Student K	24	20	12	16
Student L	16	12	8	12
Student M	12	12	8	8
Student N	4	-8	-8	0
Student O	12	8	12	4



Student P	4	16	16	16
Student Q	12	12	12	12
Student R	8	8	0	8
Student S	8	4	0	0
Student T	16	12	4	8
Student U	24	20	12	12
Student V	16	8	12	12
Student W	16	16	12	8
Student X	8	8	4	8
Student Y	24	20	20	12

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