Nominalization Versus Clause Usage in CALL Technology-Mediated Acquisition of EFL Learners’ Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

To help EFL learners realize the use of nominals and clauses in practicing productive skills of academic writing in English writing tests, experiments have been exploited using the tasks similar to those of internet-based test of English as a foreign language to determine the nominal and clause level information during sentence and paragraph processing. Subjects were placed in two groups (the treatment group and the control group) and comprised English intermediate level students at a university in Vietnam performing compositions that were of lexical and clausal congruence but the congruence with discourse context was manipulated. The results indicated that lexical and clausal processing and discourse congruence have an effect on each other and influence writing skills. The study was undertaken as a basis for improving the technology-linguistics combined intake of learners’ knowledge in order to accelerate the acquisition of foreign languages and will benefit future research related to computerized writing and assessment of writing.

KEYWORDS

CALL, Clauses, Congruence, Discourse Congruence, Incongruence, Lexical and Clausal Processing, Metaphor, Nominalization, Post-Test, Pre-Test

1. INTRODUCTION

There is increasing concern that students taking tests of English as foreign language are incapable of applying the productive language skills that they have gained from their English classes. This has set teachers of English thinking more about their ways of teaching productive writing skills. The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the application of congruence and incongruence of written communication in teaching and learning English towards taking Internet-based tests of English as a foreign language. This study investigates whether students at a university in Vietnam can realize the use of nominals and clausal structures in their performance of written tasks. It is usually difficult for Vietnamese EFL learners to acquire a strong command of English as there is some mother-tongue interference in learning a foreign language.

Vietnamese and English belong to different language systems. While English is an inflectional language, Vietnamese is a non-inflectional language. Vietnamese EFL learners often treat language units as separate and full-meaning ones instead of clauses, which often leads them to inaccurate use

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of English grammatical structures (Cao, 2007). Instead, Vietnamese EFL learners would rather use nouns than other parts of speech in writing, which can be treated with the help of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). This study uncovered a significant systematic relationship between Vietnamese EFL students’ use of English and the number of class hours taught in the traditional teaching method and the CALL technology – based approach of writing. The use of Microsoft Word can enhance their writing, namely: from beyond the sentences to clauses, within clauses and to nominals. Consequently, the students can improve their English through practice from the perspective of cognitive learning style (Brown, 1987), leading to their better writing skills.

The literature review in this study provides an analysis of investigations of students’ awareness and use of linguistic features such as nominals and clauses in their acquisition of writing ability. In this discussion, the relationship between the issues of CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and SLA (second language acquisition) theory are also clarified. This article discusses written discourse that includes aspects of language development regarding Vietnamese EFL learners’ writing skills with technological support.

The research only focuses on the aspect of students using nominals and clauses in practicing integrated writing tasks (i.e. tasks that require integrated language skills like listening, reading and writing) so that more tasks could be designed in preparation for future tests. The theoretical review on the congruence and the incongruence of English is directly related to the questions concerning the students’ usage of nominalization and clauses in performing integrated writing tasks. In this study, the linguistic aspects involved with nominalization in the form of grammatical metaphor are included. It is hoped that students will improve their language skills if they are provided with more knowledge of language and more practice with technological support. This investigation is merited regarding the students’ writing performance which shows a relationship between the writing post-test and the application of CALL in English courses. With such a relationship, it may be possible for the future deployment of better computerized writing skills. Therefore, the hypothesis is that EFL learners who have worked with the use of CALL technology will benefit more in getting broader knowledge of language and getting better scores than those who learn without using computer. This study will lead to forming a basis for a future objective computerized method of writing instruction and assessment, which does not involve much participation of subjective human factors (Pham, 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. What is Congruence?

When semantic concepts and the lexico-grammatical means are used interchangeably to express the meaning of a word, the concept of lexico-grammatical metaphors is formed (Halliday, 1985). Semantic resources are realized in lexico-grammar in the form of typical means of expressions associated with participants and processes and circumstances, and this is called ‘congruent’. Specifically, the meaning of a word is realized by a selection of other words which is not the same as the original one. The use of different lexico-grammatical devices to realize the same semantic configuration leads to the creation of a congruent and an incongruent realization (as cited in Bavali & Sadighi, 2008.) as seen in the following example (1) extracted from Halliday (1985):

1a. The cast acted brilliantly so the audience applauded for a long time (congruent);
1b. The cast’s brilliant acting drew lengthy applause from the audience (incongruent).

In sentence 1b), the verbal phrase “acted brilliantly” becomes the noun phrase “brilliant acting”, and the clause “the audience applauded for a long time” becomes the noun phrase “lengthy applause from the audience”. Sentence 1b), thus, becomes more cohesive than sentence 1a).
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