

THE EFFECT OF ORAL AND WRITTEN SUMMARIES OF SHORT STORIES ON LEARNING TRANSITION MARKERS AMONG EFL LEARNERS: THE CASE OF WRITING ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of oral and written summaries of short stories on learning transition markers (TMs) in writing argumentative essays among English as foreign language (EFL) learners. To this end, 90 economic students were selected among 120 learners who enrolled in EGP courses through a homogeneity test. Then, the participants were randomly divided into two experimental groups called oral and written and a control group. Three groups were asked to write an argumentative essay on the given topics as a pre-test at the beginning of the treatment period. Oral group received the treatment on reading the story and do the exercises. Then they were asked to retell the story summary in the classroom orally. The written group did the same but the presentation of the activity was in the summary of the written form. The control group received regular classroom in reading comprehension such as reading short stories, working on vocabularies and answering the reading comprehension questions. The short stories included transition markers which were implicitly taught among all the three groups. The materials and time allocated to all groups were similar. After ten sessions of the treatment, the three groups were asked to write a post-test argumentative essay on one of the given topics to evaluate students' writing argumentative essays while the scores noticed their uses of transition markers in their writing in order to investigate if there was any significant difference among the three groups. Results showed that the written group who wrote summaries of short stories used transitions in their writing effectively more than the other groups. In effect, conducting ANCOVA test analysis led to significant difference between oral and written group on using transition markers in writing argumentative essays. This study may help EFL teachers to teach TMs more effectively through written tasks.

KEYWORDS: *Oral and Written Summaries, Short Stories, TMs, Argumentative Essays*

INTRODUCTION

Writing, among other language skills, is the most difficult skill for teaching and learning. According to Lindsay and Knight (2007) writing is the process of combing letters in a particular order to form words, phrases, clauses, and sentences and put sentences together to make a coherent text. Kamari (2012) classified writing as narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive and argumentative. The focus of this study is on argumentative writing.

Wu (2012) considers the argumentative essay is the most common genre that undergraduate students have to write. According to Wood (2001), argumentative essay it's a kind of writing that writers states a claim by evidence in order to convince the audience.

Most teachers in English class focus on grammar rather than structure of essays in their teaching writing. Actually, writing is not considered as a communication in learning and teaching process. So there are many sentences that are not easy to understand. A common problem in their writing is that there are no logical relations between sentences. There are different ways to solve this problem such as using Transition Markers.

Transitions as one of the most used interactional meta-discourse are used to arrange propositions in the text and involve the reader (Burneikaite, 2009). According to (Parrot, 2004), transitions are words and phrases which indicate relationships and sequences as "textual discourse and markers" and their main functions and numbering and ordering points, adding something, linking similar things together, generalizing, exemplifying and narrowing down, re-stating and rounding off. Bikeline (2008) said that using of connectors is one of the ways of ensure cohesion. By connectors, the listeners or the reader can connect units together and make sense of the text (Altenberg & Tapper, 1998, p.80). Short story and literature as a whole expand language awareness. Custodio and Sutton (1998, p.20) explained that short stories as genre of literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect and explore. With short stories, instructors can teach literacy, cultural, and higher-order thing aspects (Erkaya, 2005). A story can provide an authentic context for presenting grammar and holds and focuses students' attention in a way that no other techniques can (Soleimani & Khandan, 2013).

Many EFL learners have writing difficulty. Most of students are unable to write a connected essay after graduation from universities while they can read well. In Iran, most of students do not have a lot of opportunities to practice writing just in the writing class and just English major students are requested to take English writing classes. In this study, the researcher attempts to consider the effect of oral and written summaries of short stories for effective awareness of TMs in writing argumentative essays.

Although several works (e.g. Bahrami, 2012; Tavanapour & Gorjian, 2014) have been done about TMs but very few studies have been conducted to investigate the role of oral and written summaries of short stories on learning TMs in writing argumentative essay among EFL learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chen (2009) investigated the effect of story summarizing on English writing class. In this study, students took an English writing class for the first time before entering college. The students were asked to summarize a story when they were accustomed to composing their writing in English. The researcher understood that writing a complete composition is difficult for beginner writers. Therefore, instead of creating brand writing, the author gave her students a short story and then reproduced it using their own words. After, two semesters practicing, most students made great progress on their writing composition. At the end of the second semester, students were given open-ended questioners to understand their perspective of story summarizing in writing class. Among 21 students, one of them had negative attitude and others had positive attitude toward story summarizing that had positive effect on English writing.

Abo Skhela (2010) conducted a study at Gaza Middle Governorate in order to find whether using storytelling techniques enhance listening comprehension. This study consisted of 74 female students. They were divided into two groups; experimental and control group. In experimental class, instruction was by storytelling, while in control group, traditional method was used. Eight stories, which represent the proposed program, were used to measure the four sub-skills; predicting, telling the main idea, recognizing characters and summarizing the events. The pre-test and post-test were used as instrumentations to collect data. The results showed that there were significant differences in the listening comprehension due to storytelling techniques. Therefore, storytelling can be used as a technique to enhance listening comprehension sub-skills.

Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2011) studied the effect of teaching L2 reading comprehension through story. They proposed that short story can provide EFL learner a suitable study resource which is both delightful and instructive to improve their linguistic proficiency and reading comprehension. They concluded that the exposure of students to literature as EFL material can ensure that they enjoy, understand and appreciate a life like material while they are improving their linguistic proficiency.

Mubarak Pathan (2012) examined the advantages of using short stories in ELT class and Libyan EFL learners' attitude towards them for improving reading comprehension skills. 50 students participated in this study as participants. These students were given questionnaires to find out their perceptions towards reading comprehension, the kind of material used for reading comprehension and their perceptions towards short stories. After collecting data about their perceptions, the researcher taught reading comprehension by short stories for three months. After that, the participants were offered another questionnaire to find out their attitude towards teaching reading comprehension by short stories. From the investigation, it was observed that the Libyan EFL learners have positive attitudes towards use of short stories. Also, it showed that if short stories were selected appropriately, not only they can develop reading comprehension but also socio-cultural, moral and other personal traits of Libyan EFL learners.

Another study was conducted by Kharaghani (2013) on the effect of short stories on reading comprehension. It was conducted in Azad University of Mashhad. It was done with help of 100 students. They were divided into two groups of fifty students. One group was instructed by

reading-based textbook, while the other group by short stories as the texts to be covered in their classrooms during the course. At the end of course, a reading comprehension text was given to the students that included of both reading passage similar to the pre-university textbook and pieces of short stories. Also, it was followed by a questionnaire which administered to the participants to tape their personal feelings toward these two types of text. Results showed that the group which received short stories as reading text outperformed the other group.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there any difference between oral and written summaries of short stories in developing writing argumentative essay?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were 120 learners who enrolled in English General Purposes (EGP) at Abadan Azad University. All participants were the sophomore of economic students. The homogeneity test developed by Richards, Lesley, Hansen, Sandy and Zukowski (2008), i.e. "Interchange passages placement and evaluation package" administered to 120 students to indicate their homogeneity level. Then 90 students whose scores were one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean were selected as the participants of this study. Ages of them were about 20 to 30 and they included both males and females. The participants were randomly divided into three groups: Two experimental groups called oral and written and a control group. Each group included 30 students.

Instrumentation

In this study several instruments were used in the process of the development. First, the participants were taken a homogenous test in order to determine their homogeneity of the groups at the intermediate level based on "Interchange passages placement and evaluation package" extracted from (Richards et al, 2008). There were 50 multiple-choice items of grammar in the test. Its reliability was computed through KR-21 to make sure of the sample homogeneity. The second instrument was pre-test which measured the students' argumentative essay before the treatment. The test included two topics. Each of the students was asked to choose one of the topics and write an argumentative essay which included at least 150 words. The third instrument was a post-test to see if there was any improvement in learners' argumentative writing ability after treatment. It included two topics. And each of the students was also asked to choose one of the topics and write an argumentative essay which included at least 150 words. Therefore, students progress in argumentative writing was evaluated according to the proper use of transitions in their argumentative writing. The total score of the pre-test and post-test was 20. The essays were scored by two raters. They scored the pre-test and post-test by using the checklist extracted from Rassouli and Abbasvandi (2013). And, inter-rater reliability of the pre-test and post-test of essay type tests were computed through Pearson correlation coefficient.

Materials

In this study material that was used for three groups consisted of short stories from Step to Understanding (Hill, 2004). This book included four level: introductory, elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. Short stories for this study were from Intermediate level. Each unit in addition to short story included some exercises for checking learners understanding on each short story.

Procedure

120 male and female economic students who studied English for General Purposes at Abadan Azad University were selected for this study. The subjects were taken a test in order to determine their homogeneity regarding their levels of proficiency at the intermediate level based on "Interchange passages placement and evaluation packages" from Richards (2008). Students whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected and they were divided into two experimental groups of oral and written and a control group.

After homogeneity test, a pre-test of essay writing was administered to show learners knowledge of using TMs in their writing. They were assigned to write an argumentative essay included at least 150 words in their essay. The course was about 12 sessions; the first and last sessions were administered the pre-test and post-test. Each session was about 60 minutes. The teacher taught a short story from Steps to Understanding (Hill, 2004). Oral group after reading the story and doing exercises they were asked to retell the story summary in the classroom orally. The written group received the treatment the same as oral group but the presentation of the activity was in the summary of the written form. The control group received regular classroom in reading comprehension such as reading the text, working on vocabularies and answering the reading comprehension. The participants of control group were not asked to make a summary of short story. Each short story included some transition markers which were implicitly taught among all the groups. After ten sessions, all groups were asked to write an argumentative essay as a post-test to evaluate student's writing argumentative essays through the using of transition markers in their writing in order to investigate if there was any significant difference among the three groups. Therefore, the students' argumentative essays were evaluated in terms of the proper use of TMs in their writing. Two raters read the student's essays and then score them by using the checklist extracted from Rassouli and Abbasvandi (2013) in order to account for inter-rater reliability. In other word, each participant was scored two times. The average of their scores to each essay was considered as the final score for each participant's essay. All of the scores were listed and analyzed through the descriptive and inferential statistics

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research question of the study, the researchers had to compare the written group (WG), spoken group (SG), and control group (CG), for which a one-way ANOVA could be used. However, to control for any possible differences between the WG, SG, and CG learners prior to the commencement of the intervention, one-way ANCOVA was conducted. This way the researchers could control for any possible differences between the three groups on the pretest and then compare their posttest scores. The results of the ANCOVA test are presented below:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Posttest Scores of the WG, SG, and CG

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
WG	30	17.85	1.25
SG	30	15.70	1.05
CG	30	13.31	1.15

Such descriptive statistics as mean and standard deviation are shown for the three groups of learners in Table 1. The posttest mean score of the WG ($M = 17.85$) was the highest mean score out there, with the posttest mean score of the CG ($M = 13.31$) being the lowest mean score, and the SG learners' mean score in between ($M = 15.70$). To find out whether the differences among the three groups of learners were of statistical significance or not, the researchers needed to look down the Sig (2-tailed) column across the row in which Groups is placed in the ANCOVA table below:

Table 2: Results of One-Way ANCOVA for Comparing Posttest Scores of the WG, SG, and CG

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	308.63	3	102.87	75.93	.000	.72
Intercept	266.50	1	266.50	196.70	.000	.69
Pretest	.09	1	.09	.07	.78	.001
Groups	278.99	2	139.49	102.96	.000	.70
Error	116.51	86	1.35			
Total	22390.00	90				
Corrected Total	425.15	89				

In Table 2, if you find Groups in the leftmost column and read across this row, under Sig. column, you can find the p value, which should be compared against the significance level. The p value here was smaller than the specified level of significance ($.000 < .05$), indicating that being in different groups did affect the posttest scores of the WG, SG, and CG learners. Under Partial Eta Squared, the relevant value was .70, which shows that being in different groups accounted for 70% of the variance in the posttest scores of the learners in the three groups. The exact location of the differences among the three groups is shown in the post hoc test table below:

Table 3: Post Hoc Test Results for Comparing the Posttest Scores of the WG, SG, and CG

Groups		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
WG	SG	2.13*	.30	.000	1.39	2.88
	CG	4.50*	.31	.000	3.74	5.27
SG	WG	-2.13*	.30	.000	-2.88	-1.39
	CG	2.37*	.30	.000	1.63	3.11
CG	WG	-4.50*	.31	.000	-5.27	-3.74
	SG	-2.37*	.30	.000	-3.11	-1.63

Table 3 shows the pair-wise comparisons of the three groups of learners. The difference between the WG learners ($M = 17.85$) and SG learners ($M = 15.70$) was statistically significant ($p = .000 < .05$), and so was the difference between the WG and CG ($M = 13.31$). Additionally, the

difference between SG and CG reached statistical significance. The differences among the three groups of learners are also displayed in Figure 1 below:

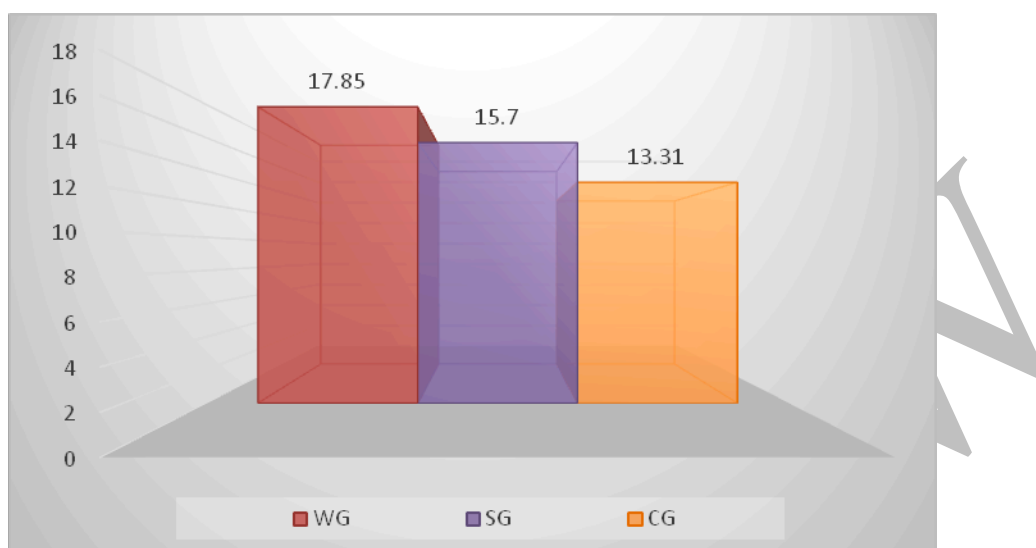


Figure 1: The Posttest Mean Scores of the WG, SG, and CG Learners

As it could be seen in Figure 1, on the posttest, the WG learners significantly outperformed the SG learners, who in turn excelled those in the CG significantly.

Discussion

This section of study presents a discussion on obtained results to answer the question. The research question and its answer are as follows:

Is there any difference between oral and written summaries of short stories in developing writing argumentative essay?

After analyzing data, the results showed that there was a significant difference among student's writing in the posttest. According to table 2, the result of the posttest showed that all groups were not homogenous at the end of the treatment period. Thus there was a difference among the three groups. To know how significant this change was and how difference they behaved in learning TMs in writing argumentative essays, table 3, is useful. In this table, two experimental groups and the control group compared with each other. There was a significant difference between oral and written summaries of short stories in learning TMs and using them in writing argumentative essays. Therefore, the research null hypothesis was rejected. The group of written summaries of short stories outperformed than the oral and control groups. As it is observable, writing summaries of short stories was beneficial for learning TMs in argumentative essays because written group was significantly different from oral and control groups. Also, oral summaries were useful but not as much as written summaries because they performed summaries of short stories orally and they did not have any writing activity. This finding is agree with Hidi and Anderson (1986) that stated that "writing a summary is very special activity in that quality of production depends not only on one's ability to write but also in the extent to which the original material to be summarized is comprehended" (p. 475). Also, this agrees with Kamil's

(2004) idea that writing summary is an exercise of using structures and paraphrasing them in actual use. Summarization is an effective learning strategy that can help students to construct and retain a succinct summary of important propositions from text (Pakzadian,2012). Meyers (2006, p.231) states that summarizing is important professional skill and its often assignment in college's composition course and it play important role in essay examination. What obtained in this study is in contrast with Feng (2010) who reported impact of instruction of discourse connectives on success in language writing.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher employed oral and written summaries of short stories but participants in the control group were not asked to tell summary and teacher taught TMs during answering reading comprehension questions. After the post test, the results indicated that written and oral summaries have different effect on learning transition markers in argumentative essays. Both of them beneficial for learning TMs in argumentative essays but written group outperform than oral group. One possible reason can be due to the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) because speaking in front of other learners may raise stress, anxiety, making mistakes and shyness. Also another factor might be due to number of the students and time limitation. As it was mentioned, every group included 30 students and it took a lot of time to ask every student to tell the summary orally. Therefore, the conclusions can be made are written summaries of short stories should be more highly emphasized than oral summaries and teaching TMs traditionally where using TMs in argumentative essays is the focus of the study.

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