Original Paper

The Grammatical Forms Connection between Writing and Speaking from EFL Perspectives

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Abstract

The goal of this research is to examine whether Saudi undergraduates who use certain grammatical forms in their writing are able to reproduce the same forms with similar accuracy in their speaking. The sample of the study comprised 180 EFL undergraduates' (male/female) at the undergraduate level from the Institute of languages at the University of Tabuk. The researchers used varied research instruments including Holistic Proficiency Scores and grammatical Use and Accuracy. The data was analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and SPSS.

The findings of the research showed that there is a strong relationship between writing and speaking at varied proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced) but the beginners level revealed a noticeable difference in terms of writing and speaking proficiencies' development in which some of these learners indicated better improvement in writing compared to speaking and vice versa. In relevance to the explicit existence of grammatical items and their use by beginner learners; they were shown to use a considerable number of these grammatical items in their writing, but revealed comparable accuracy in both writing and speaking. This study recommended that further future research should include a similar longitudinal study looking at how the relationship between speaking and writing may change over time for each individual learner, a finding that is merely hypothesized in the present study. Also, the present study investigates this problem through holistic proficiency assessment and grammatical use and accuracy.

1. Introduction

English is taught in Saudi Arabia as a foreign language from the fourth grade in public schools to higher education sectors including schools, colleges, and universities (Alharbi, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, English is used as a foreign language all through the academic institutions right from fourth grade to the first year of college. EFL students in Saudi Arabia need to master all the basic language skills that include writing, reading, speaking, and listening that is as usual as any other language learner does. As such, most Saudi EFL students study English language for nine years at school level. This helps them acquire sufficient mastery over the grammatical competence of the language. Hence, although they find that they are good at the grammar of the language. However, they find they are unable to make grammatically and syntactically accurate expressions in both speaking and writing (Al-Seghayer, 2012). This pinpoints that the Saudi Arabian EFL students who learn English language for many years at schools and universities may acquire the skills and abilities that are just enough to pass the grammar exams and see high scores in the score cards after the final exams. In spite of the high score, they are aware that they haven't acquired the knowledge for effectively demonstrating the essential skills of writing and speaking. They cannot use English competently in their day to day activities. Such linguistic phenomenon of inadequate learning has attracted the attention of language teachers and decision makers in Saudi Arabia (Naser, 2018). Therefore, many research work were carried out in order to help and support the EFL students with the theoretical background for developing their linguistic and communicative competence. Such researched were conducted in order to bring about the necessary modifications to the teaching methods and adoptions of new teaching methods that emphasize the use of the productive skills of writing and speaking rather than focusing on the receptive skills such as listening and reading (Alharbi, 2015).

2. Literature Review

The writing process itself can be demanding since effective writing requires a high degree of organisation in building ideas and information and a high degree of accuracy so that sentential and discourse structures contain no ambiguity of the words' meaning within sentences across a written text. Inevitably, the correct use of grammatical patterns, lexical choices and sentence structures will establish a coherent and meaningful written text for the readers (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Basically, a written text can be considered to be coherent to its readers when both form and content are unified and meaningful and when it fulfils certain communicative functions (Briton, 19). In the researcher's opinion, understanding the process of writing is a difficult skill for students to develop and learn, particularly in an EFL context. This is because their experience and exposure to the English language is limited to classroom settings. Students learning English composition in an EFL context face difficulties in many structural issues especially when selecting words and phrases, formulating appropriate and correct grammatical structures,

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generating ideas and thoughts, and building ideas about a particular writing topic. More importantly, they face difficulties in expanding functional language skills, such as the appropriate use of language in a natural situation within varied social contexts in a creative manner. These difficulties of functional language use are worsened because teachers of EFL writing tend to emphasise extensively on teaching grammar, and appropriate language structures (Lee, 2002a). Also, they typically view their students as passive EFL writers. 75; Leki, 1995a).

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These problems, however, tend to hinder students from developing their classroom interaction and hamper them from building more active learning in writing. Because of this gap between students' needs and teachers' instructional methods, teachers of writing are not sure how to help their students communicate fluently, to write cohesively, and to be more autonomous writers of academic and workplace written texts. In addition, the problem is how EFL teachers can help their students understand social functions; make their written work cohesive and more meaningful as well as productive in varied social contexts. Thus, there is an essential need for writing classes to assist students to develop their skills and knowledge by experiencing a whole writing process and the knowledge of the context in which the writing takes place.

Based on the above teaching learning context, the researcher argues that a writer should have the appropriate communicative skills and ability to produce a coherent piece of writing and to fulfil the requirements of a writing task. A coherent piece of writing will rely heavily on the grammatical aspect (form) and the meaning of ideas conveyed (content). An incoherent piece of writing will result in "a communication breakdown" between the writer and the reader (Martin, 2001; Brazilay & Elhadad, 1999). Therefore, it is important that the writer has the ability to produce an effective piece of writing in order to fulfil specific communicative needs within specific contexts. Hence, the writer of a text should give importance to both the grammatical aspects of language and meaning of ideas to make a written text coherent and meaningful. According to scholars such as (Phillips and Hardy 2002), coherent writing should be accurate in both content and form, in which the syntactic and semantic aspects of language are maintained. Such pieces of writing would normally meet the demands and expectations of the reader, decoder, or audience (Lee, 1996).

In line with the above arguments, Naser (2017) argues that researchers who wish to carry out research that is related to the writing skill could focus on specific issues such as what makes a good writing, how to produce a good piece of writing, what are the requirements for creating a coherent, unified, organised, and well-developed piece of writing and so on and so forth. The information obtained from such research can be used to devise plans and strategies to improve and develop the writing ability of students (Berzlamovich, Egg, & Redeker, 2008). Basically, writers would need the necessary linguistic competence to be able to communicate a piece of information to his/her reader effectively. They should be competent in both form and content to be creative writers as being competent in one without the other is not enough to produce a coherent and unified written product (Zamel, 1983; Bex, 1996; Leki, 2002). Research on linguistic issues in SLA has developed rapidly over the past two decades. Investigation of the relationship between writing and speaking skills from a language acquisition perspective is one of the more specific areas that have gained prominence (Silva & Leki, 2004). This significance of such studies cannot be denied as linguistic knowledge can be a helpful insight to provide solutions for language based-problems (Weissberg, 2006). In the investigation of the relationship between writing and speaking skills in foreign language acquisition, many language learning and teaching theories have been adapted to investigate the relationship between writing and speaking with the aim of providing a solution to language problems such as developing students' writing and speaking abilities and skills. In this way, they can produce overall coherent written products and use the language fluently (Carter & McCarthy, 1995). Cleland and Pickering (2006) examined how adult L1 speakers produce language in different modalities. They found that L1 speakers use the same mechanism for syntactic encoding in.

Similarly, Koonz (2008) examined the relationship between grade-level reading comprehension and writing quality at grades 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12. Data were collected from a total 521 students in one school district in Mississippi. Two essay scores in each narrative, informative, and persuasive writing were obtained for each student, which enabled a close examination of the relationship between overall writing quality and discourse mode. The relationship between reading comprehension and writing quality was not affected in a systematic way by the discourse mode of the writing prompt. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to model the relationship between reading comprehension and writing quality and evaluate the factor loadings between writing quality and the discourse mode indicator variables. The model in which the factor loadings for adjacent grades were held constant was found to fit for all adjacent-grade comparisons except between grade 4 and grade 6, suggesting an invariant factor structure for grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. Comparisons between male/female groups and black/white groups produced similar results. Implications of these findings for future research, measurement practice, and classroom instruction and assessment are provided.

Muluk and Ashin (2009), show that the foundation of receptive (reading) and expressive (writing) skills are built upon speaking and listening skills. They argue that written language skills hardly develop without realizing the infrastructure of a language - the sounds. They conclude that listening ability strongly influences speaking, reading and writing ability. Now that classroom based research

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indicates the significance of listening in English as a foreign language learning, the following section discusses the IELTS research and specifically the relationship between listening and other language skills.

Likewise, Gee et al. (2010) examined the association of language proficiency and language preference with self-rated health among Asian American immigrants. Also, the study examined whether modeling preference or proficiency as continuous or categorical variables changed our inferences. Data came from the 2002-2003 National Latino and Asian American Study (n=1639). Researchers focused on participants' proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing English and on their language preference when thinking or speaking with family or friends. They examined the relation between language measures and self-rated health with ordered and binary logistic regression. Findings showed that all English proficiency measures were associated with self-rated health across all models. By contrast, associations between language preference and self-rated health varied depending on the model considered. Although many studies create composite scores aggregated across measures of English proficiency and language preference, this practice may not always be conceptually or empirically warranted.

3. Method

This study used quantitative method to investigate the relationship between writing and speaking in the Saudi universities generated by 180 third year Saudi male and female students at the department of English language skills at the University of Tabuk. According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009, p. 426), a case study research "is a quantitative research approach in which researchers focus on a unity of study known as a bounded system (e.g., individual teachers, a classroom, or a school)". In other words, it is an investigation of a phenomenon that occurs within a specific context that is bounded, identifiable, and appropriately studied.
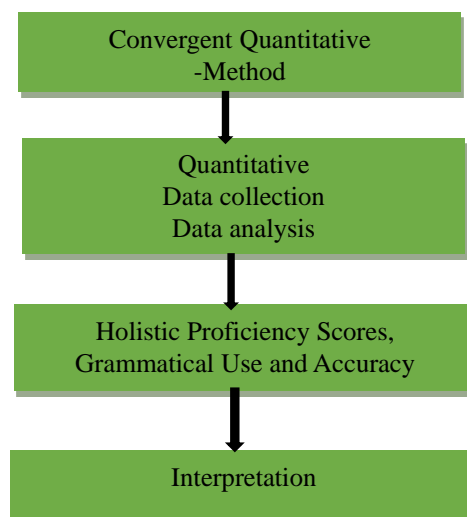

Figure 1. The Research Approach

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As depicted in the above figure this study follows quantitative research design. It uses quantitative approach to collect data on the relationship between writing and speaking skills about language learning among Saudi EFL undergraduates at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. The researcher uses two different research instruments, respectively; Holistic Proficiency Scores, Grammatical Use and Accuracy.

3.1 Grammar Use and Accuracy

Each undergraduate writing sample and voice recording were analysed to determine the extent that each participant employed the grammatical structures targeted by his/her normal classroom routine in their writing and speaking, as well as the accuracy with which these structures were used. This analysis was carried out by the present researcher in an objective, point-by-point manner. The present study divided participants into two categories depending on their current course of enrolment in order to answer Research Questions (To examine whether Saudi undergraduates who use certain grammatical forms in their writing are able to reproduce the same forms with similar accuracy in their speaking. And Do Saudi undergraduates who use certain grammatical forms in their writing are able to reproduce the same forms with similar accuracy in their speaking?).

4. Discussion

Each participant's writing sample and voice recording (speaking samples) were analysed to determine to which extent the participants would use the grammatical structures chosen for his/her formal writing in their speaking as well as the extent of accuracy with which these structures would be used in both the writing and speaking contexts. This analysis was carried out by the researcher in an objective, point-by-point manner using the second research instrument; Grammar Use and Accuracy Data.

All the writing and speaking samples from the whole group of participants were also analyzed to determine the grammatical items that had been explicitly presented to the participants in their target language instruction as part of their regularly-scheduled EFL course curricula were used in their language production, as well as the accuracy with which these structures were used. Accuracy in the use of the grammatical items was calculated both in terms of their surface structural forms and of their appropriateness of use relevant to the context. For example, if a certain form should have been employed in the context of the rest of the sentence but was not, the usage was counted as incorrect. Also, many of these structures were not produced by any of the 180 participants in either of the production modalities and are therefore not included in the following charts. (writing and speaking samples which have been taken from participants of the study). Figure 2 in the following section indicates that the students' use of certain grammatical forms in writing and their ability to reproduce the same forms with similar accuracy in speaking. That is, the findings of the analysis showed that some students have the ability to write accurately in certain grammatical forms, but were not able to use them in speaking, whilst there are some others who can use some grammatical items accurately in speaking and couldn't use them in their writing with the same accuracy.
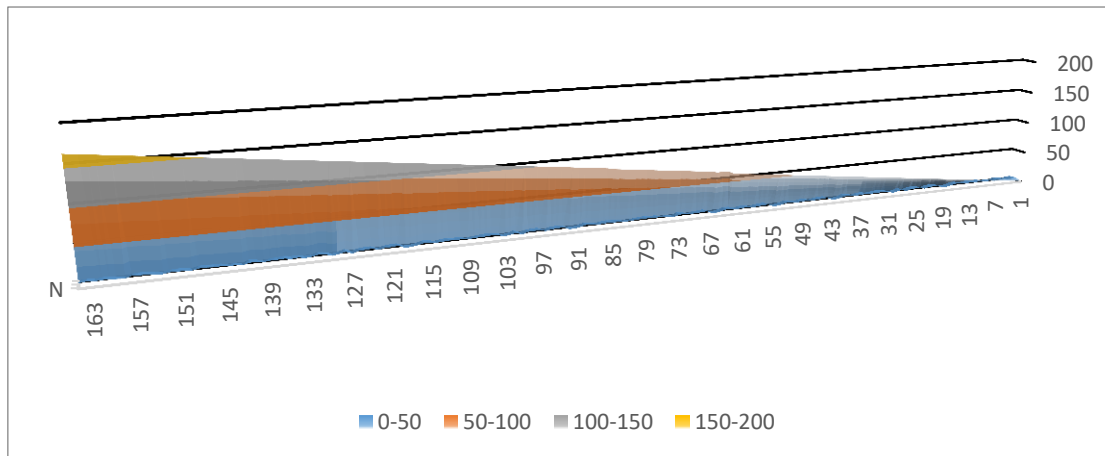
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Figure 2. The Use of Certain Grammatical Forms in Writing to Reproduce Same Forms with Similar Accuracy in Speaking

The above figure shows the relationship between writing proficiency and the speaking proficiency in terms of using certain grammatical forms in writing to reproduce same forms with similar accuracy in speaking. The analysis of the findings as revealed in the chart indicates that some of the participants/students showed that they may have the ability to use certain grammatical forms correctly in a number of sentences in writing, but may not have the same accuracy level in speaking; and so the usage was counted as incorrect. Moreover, certain structures were not produced accurately by any of the 165 participants (students) in either of the production modalities and are therefore not included in the discussion of the earlier or forthcoming charts in the context of this study.

5. How do Saudi Undergraduates' Self-report Writing Improve Their Speaking Skills?

As part of the data collection for this study a survey was administered in the beginning for obtaining the participants' proportion of self-report writing in the total amount of writing tasks in English that they are usually engaged in both formal and informal ways. In addition, survey participants were requested to choose between several ranged answers in order to describe their English writing habits compared to speaking habits. The results of this survey have been prepared and ultimately compared against both holistic and grammar proficiency scores in order to answer the third research question.

At the beginning of data collection, a survey tool of writing behavior was administered to all the participants agreeing to participate in the study, a much larger number than those eventually included for final analysis. This survey required each participant to self-report the amount of writing in English performed both during the formal classroom time and on their own for both classroom-related reasons and other functional motivations by first choosing between several ranged answers in order to describe the different amounts of writing in which they involve. They were then asked to provide any aspect, positive or negative, of their Writing learning experience. In answering research question three, the Table below shows the means and standards deviations of the participants'/students' responses to the

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items of the questionnaires. The questionnaires in the following section consisted of 26 items that measure the extent of influence that self-report writing tasks exerted in improving the speaking performances of the English language and literature students, and the measure was not as compared to that of their writing skills as depicted in table below in the next section:

Table 1. The Pearson Correlation and Spearman's Correlation Coefficient between the Participants' Performance in Writing and Speaking Skills

Writing Proficiency		Speaking proficiency
	Pearson Correlation	.926[**]
Writing	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	n	180
	Spearman's Rho	.955[**]
Writing	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	n	180

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above depicts the Pearson correlation and Spearman's correlation coefficient between the participants' performance in writing and speaking at (0.926) at means (0.000) which is less than (0.01). These findings showed that there are statistically negative significant differences in the responses of the participants.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, discussing these results and their relationship to the research questions originally introduced in chapter one. Shortcomings of the present study were also discussed, followed by suggestions for building on these findings through future related research. The findings of the research showed that there is a strong correlation between writing and speaking at varied proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced) but the beginners level revealed a noticeable difference in terms of writing and speaking proficiencies' development in which some of these learners indicated better improvement in writing compared to speaking and vice versa. In relevance to the explicit existence of grammatical items and their use by beginner learners; they were shown to use a considerable number of these grammatical items in their writing, but reveal comparable accuracy in both writing and speaking. Finally, the existing sample of study does not provide adequate difference in either their in-class or outside the classroom's writing habits to conclude whether or not extra writing activities are of great help to their acquisition of English as a foreign language.

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