

## The Effect of Proficiency in Writing on EFL Students' Translation

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**Abstract.** The *primary* purpose of the study is to examine the effect of proficiency in writing on EFL students' translation ability. The subjects of the study are sixty Iranian Junior students majoring in English language translation. First, to determine the students' knowledge of writing, a pretest of writing was administered to the whole participants. The test was administered in the form of two certain composition-writing topics on which the participants were asked to write a composition, each including 110-120 words. Upon administering the tests and observing their performance on the composition test, they were divided into two groups: Group I represented a score range of 15 to 18.5 out of 20, and group II, composed of thirty subjects, represented a score range of 10 to 14.5 out of 20. Each group, independently, was given some translation texts, in the post-test stage, to translate them into Farsi in order to determine the question of: (1) If the students in Group I in the pre-test, who scored high on writing, could/would they gain good scores on the post-test, too? And, also, if the Group 2 in the pre-test of writing, who had low scores on writing, would they gain similar performance on the post-test? According to the result of this study, it was revealed that, (I) there is a relationship between proficiency in writing and EFL students' translation ability; (H) the students of Group I performed better on the test of translation in the post-test than those of Group II because it was revealed that most of the high marks belonged to Group I.

**Keywords:** Proficiency in Writing, EFL students, Native-like, Authentic texts

### 1. Introduction

During the recent many years, linguists, methodologists, pedagogical authorities and other language specialists have devoted a great deal of their attention to reveal the nature of writing and raise assumptions and theories about it. They have, furthermore, pondered over the question of how writing may be important in the field of language teaching. Generally speaking, their purposive dealing with representing the theories and assumptions in the field of teaching writing has been to raise teaching specialists' awareness and knowledge of writing. Their attempts have substantially contributed to better understanding of general and specific areas of writing and nature of it. Writing, essentially regarded as one of the major skills in the field of language teaching, employs some linguistic and extra-linguistic properties which are inter-connected by some already-established linguistic and non-linguistic patterns. Our notion of the term "already-established linguistic and extra-linguistic patterns" is associated with Chomsky's highlighted linguistic school best entitled as Generativism (1957). Given the field of the linguistic school, an infinite number of sentences could be generated by the virtue of a finite set of linguistic and non-linguistic conventions and norms. In this regard, writing is composed of various codified symbols which are all helpful to form the meaningful entity of it.

As it is true in the case of other three skills, writing is viewed as a developmental process which could be improved over the course of time by adopting some well-defined techniques, each of which is treated as a task ( Brown, et al., 1985; Birjandi. et al., 2006 ). In addition, to support the process-oriented aspect of writing, Murray (1980:30) puts forward his idea, saying: "The process of making meaning with written

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language can not be understood by looking backward from a finished page. Process can not be inferred from product any more than a pig can be inferred from a sausage."

Writing is considered as greatly important for consolidating learning in the other skills and areas. Chastain (1988:244) contends "writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language." Furthermore, Widdowson (1978:62) describes writing as the "use of the visual medium to manifest the graphological and grammatical systems of the language."

In fact, when we talk about the broad field of writing, we are concerned with some inter-connected linguistic and extra-linguistic patterns ranging from, at least, single sentences to the largest unit of academic writing - discourse. The patterns, as composite elements in writing, could be assumed as propositional clusters encoded by single and complex grammatical sentences. According to Clearly and Linn (1993), writing is considered as one of the most disciplined ways of making meaning and one of the most effective methods we can use to monitor our own thinking. *They* define writing as process, contending: "The process is not linear, but recursive. The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage. There is not one process, but many. The process varies with the personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of writing task." (1993:338-9)

## **2. Statement of the problem**

Each language maintains its own typically-preserved system linguistically and extra-linguistically, and each system keeps its own complexity. A great deal of the complexity in any language is substantially rooted in its grammatically represented features because they might be problematic in the task of translation. It has been occasionally observed directly and indirectly that the majority of Iranian students in academic institutions and at different levels of language proficiency are poor translators in some texts. Some problems and failures in not being able to do efficient and effective translation of source texts are the students' incomplete knowledge and mastery of the linguistic conventions. Given the fact, we suppose that students' proficiency in writing may improve their performance in translation. Therefore, for the sake of the present study, it is hypothesized that students' proficiency in writing provides them with some considerable insight into their effort of translation in order to produce acceptable translation, ensuring fluency in content and accuracy in grammar.

### **2.1. Research question**

This study is stimulated by some theoretical-oriented literature and assumptions which are available in the field of writing and translation, on one hand, and the Iranian students' need for developing their knowledge of language in English beyond that of linguistic rules prior their tendency to translation, on the other hand.

By the virtue of the two variables of proficiency in English writing and EFL students' translation, the question this study seeks to answer is expressed as follows:

"Does the proficiency in writing affect EFL students' translation skill?"

### **2.2. Statement of the hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the study, on the basis of the research question, is expressed in the following statement:

"There is a relationship between proficiency in writing and EFL students' translation skill."

The theoretical supposition of the study is that proficiency in writing affects EFL students' performance on translation.

### **2.3. Theoretical Perspectives on writing**

So much of what we write, under any title, is intended for other people in order to influence their thoughts and actions. Barras (1995:1) maintains "If you are to succeed as a student and afterwards, you will need to be able to express yourself clearly and persuasively in writing." somewhere else Barras(1995:3) states briefly, " By improving writing, all students should be able to improve the quality of their thinking because writing and thinking are very closely related and inter-connected and by submitting better written work for assessment, students of what are write under any title is intended for other should achieve higher

grades. Maley (1987:3) adds some points of great consideration to the concluding section of his book saying " writing is a discovery process. It is or it involves discovering ideas, discovering how to organize them and discovering what it is that you want to put over to your readers."

Viewing writing as a means of communication at intermediate and advanced levels, the communication takes place through language learners' comprehending non-linguistic and mastering linguistic or grammatical representation. The assertion is expressed by Chastain (1988:248) as the following:"The aim of language teaching with reference to writing at the communication level. is that such practice provides excellent preparation for oral communication activities in class. Because students have difficulty expressing themselves orally in class. Also writing at communicative level facilitates speaking at the communicative level because both require similar mental processes. "

As the topic in question in the present study and its nature exhibit, two different languages are taken into account: "Source Language" as opposed to" Target Language". It must be treated as a matter of great concern that languages vary greatly in that they maintain their own typically structural manifestation and system. Since different languages preserve and demand different structural combinations, we have to treat cautiously and knowledgeably dealing with the complicated process of translation because translation, apart from being an art, is thought of as a complicated process which requires translators to be fully aware of the great variety and uniqueness of each language in form. The assertion that being able to write effectively and appropriately in a certain language demands writer's mastering the language grammatical norms and extra-linguistic conventions is true in the case of translation, too. Supporting the view, Larson (1984:22) quoting Jerome proposes: "Two things are necessary for a good translator-an adequate understanding of the original language (the source language) and an adequate command of the language into which one is translating (the receptor language).

Upon considering the complexity and uniqueness of each language and its internally-manifested features, a good translator can avoid literal translation. This aim could be achieved by careful analysis of source language. The idea, as argued here, is highlighted in Larson's words (1984:22), saying that "a faithful translator will not translate word-for-word". Concerning translators' mastery of both first language (Source Language) and the second language (Target Language), there are some other assertions, namely, "the number of people who consider themselves competent to undertake translation most exacting task is legion, whilst the number who really master the technique is small, indeed. The idea so hopefully entertained that mere knowledge of a foreign language is all-sufficient is a complete fallacy; even the most exhaustive knowledge is inadequate unless associated with the real ability, first of all, to write one's own language" (Urwin quoted by Miremadi,1999:148). Miremadi (1999:193) and Newmark ( 1981 ) underline the expectation, declaring mere knowledge of language (in its limited sense) is not by itself sufficient to make one capable of handling translation from one language into another.

Chastain (1988), Celce - Murcia (1991), Rivers (1981) and Hedge (1988) all think of writing as an act of communication by suggesting that writing is an interactive process between writer and reader through the medium of text. Obviously, writing to communicate can be possible only when students have significant control of the writing system and the grammar to make themselves understood. For a second language learner ,writing is described as a developmental process analogous to the process of reading. Some scholars like Browen et al.(1985) and Littlewood ( 2007 ) define writing as a developmental process and intend to view and study writing from four different perspectives which are mechanics, elementary, intermediate and advanced stages of development. Larson (1984:22) stresses the importance of grammatical relations analysis of the source text maintaining, " two things are necessary for a translator and for a good translation - an adequate understanding of the original language (the source language) and an adequate command of the language into which one is translating (the receptor language).

### **3. Method and procedures**

To carry out this study, sixty Iranian EFL students majoring in English Translation Field were chosen randomly. They all had already passed writing subjects in their academic instructional design. In order to investigate the effect of proficiency in writing on EFL students' translation, in the per-test stage, the sixty junior students were offered two samples of composition topics and they were asked to write a composition

about either of the given topics including 110 to 120 words. The two composition tests were administered in two different settings (sessions) with an interval of two days. According to Harris (1968:77) "normally two or more short compositions will prove to be more reliable than one long one. And having the compositions written at different times will yield better results than having them written at one sitting. Upon administering the composition test based on the pre-conditional terms, the whole participants were categorized into two separate groups according to the scores on the test. Group one: This group included students who scored high on the writing test ranging from 15 to 18.5 out of 20. This group was considered as proficient in writing. Group two: This group was composed of students with low scores whose score range was between 10 to 14.5 out of 20. The students in this group were defined as non-proficient or less-proficient in writing.

In brief, out of the 60 participants who took the composition test in the pre-test stage, thirty candidates scored between 15 to 18.5, and thirty candidates had a score range of 10 to 14.5. The composition tests were scored and assessed according to some linguistic criteria (accuracy) and non-linguistic or extra-linguistic criteria (Fluency). Given the nature of the study, the participants were not exposed to any treatment or teaching course between the pre-test and post-test because all of the participants chosen randomly were homogeneous in that they all had already passed the English writing subjects in university.

In the post-test stage, two samples of English translation texts were given to either of the groups separately, and they were asked to translate them into their own language. The results achieved from the post-test period revealed that the group one in the post-test had a score range of 12 to 19, and the group two in the post-test represented a score range of between 11 to 18. Therefore, it was revealed that the participants in the Group one of pre-test who gained high scores on composition test could gain high scores on the post-test of translation. The participants in the Group Two in the pre-test of composition who gained low scores could have had low or similar scores on the post-test of translation.

The point of great concern to be taken into view is that of the rating officials. The translation tests were assessed and rated by two independent raters or intra-raters who have been teaching English at the university where the study was carried out.

#### 4. Result

Using a t-test (Hatch and Farhady, 1982) case (2) in order to compare the two means of the data obtained a t-observed of 5.25 was obtained. It is evident that the t-observed stands to be more than the already-established t-critical or the critical value of t. Briefly stating, the t-observed = 5.25 > t-critical = 2.00 considering a degree of freedom of 58.

The data are shown in the following schematic representation:

Table 1: Result of the tests

	Group 1	Group 2
Mean	16	13.90
Standard D	1.58	1.70

Since the study comprises 60-person subjects divided into two 30-person groups in the post-test, the subjects in Group 1 scored between 12 to 19 and the subjects in the Group 2 scored between 11 to 18.

#### 5. Conclusion

The hypothesis on which the research is based states that there is a relationship between proficiency in writing and EFL students' translation ability. Upon carrying out the research, it is revealed that there exists a relationship between the two variables of proficiency in writing and translation because the t-observed of 5.25, which stands more than the t-critical of 2.000, perfectly supports the directional (positive) relationship between these two variables and rejects the null hypothesis. The result of the students' performance indicated that the subjects of Group I, who gained good marks ranging from 15 to 18.5 in the pre-test, had similar performance on the post-test of translation. The same procedure but a reverse result occurred to the performance of Group II, i.e., the subjects of Group II, who had a score range of 10 to 14.5 on the pre-test could exhibit a nearly similar performance on the post-test. So as the finding and fulfillment of

the study indicate, the English students who are good at writing are found to be good at translation. In other words, being able to write appropriately and fluently means being able to translate well from one language into another one.

It is occasionally observed that writing courses or subjects, ranked prior to translation subjects in the English syllabus design, are treated with disfavor. That is, teachers and instructors attach less importance to the writing courses in English. Therefore, the merits of the study are more for enhancing students' knowledge and mastery of grammar and writing, in a wider sense, before they have to pass the translation lessons. Teachers are supposed to adopt measures to introduce their students to the important linguistic rules together with the pragmatic norms which are recognized helpful to allow them to get meaning across through writing. Furthermore, students must be given the necessary information so that they can deal with translation appropriately and effectively. In brief, the findings of this study are useful for English instructors at college level, English translators, syllabus designers and English learners themselves. They all can draw attention to the effect of proficiency in writing on translation in EFL contexts.

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