A case study
On Metacognitive Learning Strategies Employed by Sri Lankan Learners in Arabic Composition

N.Gafoordeen[1] and Dr. Kaseh Abubakar[2]

[1]University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, PhD Candidate @ UKM
[2] The National University of Malaysia, UKM

Introduction

In the earlier period, study into the process of writing has dealt mainly with a product, that is, L2 learners' writing samples, to determine the writers' language ability and proficiency development. However, a change in study orientation has emerged; with some researchers now taking a closer look at the way L2 learners take on techniques and procedures to produce written works (Leki 1995). Observing how L2 learners carry out the act of writing provides L2 instructors as well as researchers with insights about the difficulties L2 learners come upon. The area of strategy use in L2 learning has become a main area of exploration. For example, Leki (1995) examined the strategies English as a second language (ESL) student's use when implementing writing tasks across the curriculum. She indicated from interview with students that these learners use one or more of 10 strategy types. Research on L2 writing is inconclusive. Much research is needed in this to increase our understanding of the processes L2 learners employ when executing an L2 activity In addition, it is important to explore the relationship between strategy use and success in the development of writing skill. According to Leki, "We need a picture of the fullest range possible of strategies employed, that is, a catalogue." (1995, 240). However, research on writing in Arabic as an L2 is still in its early years. Few studies have dealt with essays written in Arabic as a final product and described deficiencies that surfaced. (Shakir and Obeidat 1992; Salim khalidein, 2012). Hence, this study focused on investigates the types of metacognitive strategies used by Sri Lankan learners of Arabic as a foreign language when they writing essay in Arabic.

Literature

In the area of second language learning strategies, well known researchers like Rubin 1975; Stern 1975; Niaman 1978; Hosenfeld et.al 1981; Arnold and Kirchofer 1981; O'Malley & chamot 1990;

Oxford 1990 are considered as the founding fathers. One of the earlier works to consider is that of Rubin (1975) who set out to identify the strategies of successful learners so that these could be made available to less successful learners. Among the factors considered were psychological, communications, social and cognitive strategies. Stern (1975) used list of 10 strategies necessary for second language competence and interviews with good language learners, while Naiman set out on more empirical work on this field.

Hosenfeld et.al, Arnold and Kirchofer (1981) are some of the first Second language learning strategies researchers who attempted to train learners the use of efficient reading strategies. They used 'think-aloud' protocols reported on the reading strategies of successful and unsuccessful second language learners and, more specifically, on a metacognitive strategy in which good learners evaluate their thinking using logic. O"Malley et al. (1985) provided the first clear distinction between metacognitive and cognitive strategies by working with beginning and intermediate level ESL learners to assess their strategy use for oral language tasks. Oxford (1990) identified and introduced the type of learning strategies of four skills (Listening, reading, speaking and writing). Oxford (1990) type of learning strategies widely used today in learning strategies research.

In writing strategy, several studies conducted in deferent perception. The following are some of the studies; Srijongjai (2011) studied learning styles of Thai English major students in English as a foreign language writing class. Data analysis showed that the average primary and secondary learning styles of the students were social and cultural and there were no significant differences of the students' learning styles based on their achievement levels in the writing class. Another comparative study was conducted by Wong (2011). This study was as comparative investigation into the learning styles and strategies of effective and ineffective language learners. It found the differences in learning

strategy preferences, learning styles and patterns of language used in writing class. The above study focused on primary and secondary students writing strategies as well as focused on basic writing skill development rather than proficient writing skills. Nami (2012) tested a model showing the direction from process to effect in writing by evaluating the path from learning approaches to self-regulation as used in composition writing in English. The finding of this study showed that the learning approaches were significantly correlated with the factors of self-regulation aspects: Memory Strategy, Goal-setting, Self-evaluation, Seeking Assistance, Environmental Structure, Responsibility and Organizing. This study help to understand the writing processes which are important when writing an essay, letter and argument document. Arndt (1987) investigated the composing activities of 6 Chinese postgraduate EFL students as they produced academic written texts in both their first and foreign. The study found that they adopted eight categories of the strategies in their writing. This study focused on postgraduate academic writing text. The finding of this study is not appropriate to undergraduates, because undergraduates and advanced level are at the beginning of their academic writing level. Their writing ability and thinking are different compared to that of post graduates.

Wenden (1991) investigated the 8 students of ESL, requiring them to write a composition using the computer and to introspect as they wrote. She studied how the students used metacognitive strategies in their writing and discussed what task knowledge they searched for before and while writing. This study found that Cognitive strategies are mental operations or steps used by learners to learn new information and apply it to specific learning tasks. Think aloud protocol, retrospective interview method were used. This study focused on computer base writing and not manual or personal writing strategies. The computer will help the student when writing incorrectly. But when student write in his own way, he can make mistake on writing task. Therefore, personal writing skills is very important than computer base writing.

Aini (2008) investigated 8 less proficient learners' usage of learning strategies on four skills. She found less proficient learners are able to use LLS while performing writing task. However, they were unable to use the whole LLS and needed teacher assistance. Classroom observations, think aloud protocol, retrospective interview method were used. This study also helps to conduct research on writing strategies. However this study focused on less proficiency using four skills in the

study. Therefore it is unable to concentrate deeply in specific skills; how the students used the strategies for their success. Yu 2011; Cho & Schunn 2007; Lipstein and Renninger 2007 studies are encouraged to learn about person's writing talent, role of curriculum to develop the writing skills as well as learner's opinion about writing strategies.

The study of Jassem (1999) about error analytical study of AFL learner indicated the problems on their language ability due to lack of consideration on learning strategies. AFL learners in Fathih institute of Sri Lanka (FISL) also do not except from this argument. Hence, this study pressed to study writing strategies of FISL learners with special reference to metacognitive writing strategies.

Metacognitive strategies are essential for the leaner to plan, monitor and evaluate learning. They are employed for managing the learning process. Learners are required to centre, arrange, plan and evaluate their learning. It refers to learners' automatic awareness of their own knowledge and their ability to understand, control, and manipulate their own cognitive processes. It is essential that an effective manager be a person who has learned to learn (Oxford 1990: 135).

Research problem

The present study focuses on what type of metacognitive writing strategies used by proficient, average learner and less proficient learner of AFL when composing an essay in Arabic.

Methods

This was a pilot study and conducted as case study employing thinking aloud protocol interview, observation and retrospective interview to elicit data. The case study mode was chosen because it clearly delineates what is to be studied and what is not to be studied.

Findings and discussion

The following table indicates the type of metacognitive writing strategies employed by learners. A1, A2,A3 indicate the proficient learners and B1, B2, B3 indicate the average learners as well as C1,C2,C3 indicate the less proficient learners' strategy use.

The result indicates that all learners were active users of different learning strategies to varying degrees. The proficient learners seem to use a

wider variety of metacognitive strategies than average and less proficient learners in a same class. The less proficient writers experienced a high level of anxiety, adopted a negative attitude toward writing and did not show complete control and mastery of the language structures of Arabic as foreign language. However, the average learners took more efficient to plan, rewrite and evaluate the task to complete successfully compare with less proficient learners. Brainstorming, evaluating strategies were used by all.

It is inequitable to state that the classroom hinders absolutely the development of L2/FL writing skills. In fact it does give in its own way. Thus comes the role of strategies. Strategies would transform the formal classroom into a place that can help develop writing skills. Even though the development may not be as great as outside the classroom environment, at least learners can strengthen the language foundation that is required for good writing skills.

The findings revealed that there is still a lot to be done to improve the Arabic writing skill of Sri Lankan learners. Among the actions that can be done by teachers are Introducing students to Arabic writing skill learning strategies. Students should be directed as to how to direct their awareness away from self- anxiety when they are writing Arabic. The formal teaching of the strategies will expose to the poor Arabic writer prospective strategies that they can perform to develop their Arabic writing skills. As for good Arabic writers they will be able to increase the strategies being used. The strategies should be applicable both inside as well as outside the classroom.

Bibliography

1. Arndt, V., 1987. Six writers in search of texts: A protocol-based study of L1 and L2 writing.*ELT Journal, 41*, 257-267.

2. Arnold, J., 2000. Seeing through listening comprehension exam anxiety. *TESOL* Quarterly 34 (4), 777–786.

3. Cho, K., & Schunn, C. D. 2007. Scaffolded writing and rewriting in the discipline: A web-based reciprocal peer review *system*. Computers & Education. 48(3). 409-426.

4. Hosenfeld, C., 1976. Learning about learning: discovering our students' strategies. *Foreign Language Annals, 9*, 117-29.

5. Jassem, A. J., 1999. An Error Analysisof the Arabic verb phras: A case study of the writing of fourth year literary stream students at Kuala lumpur National Religious Secondary School. *PhD Thesis.* Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

6. Kubota, R., & Lehner, A. 2004. Toward critical contrastive rhetoric. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 13*: 7-27.

7. Leki, I. 1997. Cross-talk: ESL issues and contrastive rhetoric. In C. Severino, J. C. Guerra & J. e. Butler (Eds.). *Writing in multicultural settings* (pp. 234-244). New York: The Modern Language Association of America.

8. Leki, I. 1999. "Techniques for Reducing Second Language Writing Anxiety," 64-88 in D. J. Young, ed., Affect in Foreign Language and Second Language Learning. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

9. Naiman, N. 1978. *The Good Language Learner*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

10. Nami, Y., Enayati, T., & Ashouri, M., 2012. The Relationship Between Self-Regulation Approaches and Learning Approaches in English Writing Tasks on English Foreign Language Students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences. 47*(0), 614-618.

11. O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. 1990. *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

12. Oxford, R., 1990. *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House.

13. Rubin, Joan 1975. "What the "Good Language Learner" Can Teach Us". *TESOL Quarterly* **9** (1): 41–51

14. Stern, H. H.,1975. "What Can We Learn from the Good Language Learner?". *Canadian Modern Language Review* 31 (4): 304–318

15. Srijongjai, A., 2011. Learning styles of language learners in an EFL writing class. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences. 29*(0), 1555-1560.

16. Wang, L. 2003. Switching to first language among writers with differing second-language proficiency. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12*(4), 347-375.

17. Wenden, A. L. 1991. Metacognitive strategies in L2 Writing: A case for task knowledge.
18. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.),*Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1991* (pp. 302-322). Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press.

19. Yu-Feng LAN. 2011. Effects of guided writing strategies on students' writing attitudes based on media richness theory. The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology. (10) 4.148-164.

Annexed - 01

strategy	Sub strategy
Planning	1. Global planning - Detailed planning of overall organization 2. Thematic planning - Less detailed planning of overall organization 3. Local planning -Planning what to write next 4. Organizing - Organizing the generated ideas 5. Conclusion planning - Planning of the conclusion
Monitoring	1.Checking and identifying problems 2. Exchanging work with friend. 3. Proof reading the friend writing task. 4. Giving common about the work.
Evaluating	1.Evaluating own strength and weakness after writing 2. Evaluating own writing performance by Identify the way to write. 3.Stating the success/failure after completing writing task. 4. Stating encountered problem after completing writing task.
Rewriting	1.Rewriting the task again and again
Keeping awareness	1. Keeping awareness on writing task 2. Keeping awareness on language aspects 3. keeping awareness on own conditions
Brainstorming	1.Writing ideas or listing out ideas based on the given task