



A Comparative Study on the Assessment of Writing Skill in English at Graduate Level

KEYWORDS

writing skill, content words, learning problems, errors, quantitative analysis

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this research work is to find out the problem of the students in writing skill in both English and other major students at graduate level. Communicative skills can be grouped under two sections namely, Receptive skills and Productive skills. Writing involves the learner's ability to communicate appropriately in response to a real need, which comes under the productive skill. The questionnaire is prepared with an aim of testing the second language learners writing skill through content words using descriptive methodology. It is to identify the learning problems of the students indicating the "errors" committed in relation to writing skills. The test wise distribution of the students who attended and not attended and those who gave right and wrong answers are given within quantitative analysis.

Introduction

Writing as a skill helps the learners to know more about the ways of writing; it can gradually give ideas and sharpens thinking. A good piece of writing is precise, accurate and interesting, because it is necessary to put thought and organization together. Writing is a primitive art form that dates back to our earliest ancestors. So writing skill is essential for achieving career and business goals. Writing is an important medium of communication, but this skill was neglected in the earlier days. It is evident that the teaching of writing is a complex process involving many activities such as initial probing into a meaningful sequence, and finally expression in language.

Byrne, (1979) defines writing as the production of a sequence of sentence arrangements' in a particular order and linked together in certain ways to form a coherent whole; that is, a text, according to him writing starts with the use of "graphic symbols" or "letters" to form words; which are then arranged in a particular order and linked together to form sentence.

Writing skill can be divided into three stages, manipulation, structuring and communication. Each of these three stages roughly corresponds to the three stages of reading. They correspond to recognition, structuring and interpretation respectively. The development of the writing skill should proceed gradually and progressively through all the three stages. It leads to the art of self-expression. The writing activity as a private activity is broadly seen as comprising four main stages; they are planning, drafting, revising and editing. In fact as researcher has suggested, "many good writers employ a recursive, on-line approach-writing of a draft may be interrupted by more planning and revision may lead to reformulation, with a great deal of recycling to earlier stages" (Krashen, 1984). The researcher has analyzed the writing skill and collected data from the errors committed by the respondents.

English for Under Graduate Students

In Tamil Nadu college education took major role. In Arts and Science colleges government follow the semester system. In all the Arts and Science colleges in Tamil Nadu have English as a one paper up to 4th semester. In the third year of graduation students only concentrate on their major subject. If final year students have fluency in English the teachers can say our educational system works well. In first two years pupils practiced and thought all the language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. But the students fail to learn and practice the language skills due to some problems. Especially students' face more problems in writing compare with other skills because students took very less practice in writing. So the students' attention on English language learning is very less at final year of the graduation. At the end of their graduation when students attend the campus interview they lack in language skills. Undergraduate

students face more problems in English language learning especially in writing.

Aim of the Research

The aim of the research is to identify the learning problems in writing skills encountered by the second year under graduate students of English and other major subjects (Commerce, Maths, Biotechnology and Tamil) in Coimbatore district. It is to identify the learning problems of the students indicating the "errors" committed in relation to writing skills. This research is mainly done to find out the problems and to provide remedial measures/strategies to overcome the problems faced by the second language learners in language skills particularly in writing.

Objectives of the Present Research

1. To test the performance of the students in identifying content words in written composition.
2. To evaluate the use of content words in compositions.
3. To analyse the problems involved in framing sentences and their transformations.
4. To identify the reasons for the errors committed by the students and suggest remedial measures to overcome the problems.

Methodology

Any type of research problem requires a series of rigorous steps to arrive at accurate results. As far as this study is concerned, the researcher has selected the descriptive method of analysis and error analysis for the present research.

By using the descriptive method, the present study was carried out in the following order, Construction of questionnaire, Selection of informants, Data elicitation and Data analysis

Review of Literature

1. Kamala Suganya Kumari, (2005) studied the problems of writing committed by the graduate students of Coimbatore district in the different areas of written language. To judge the errors in their proper context, sentences were examined in free compositions.

2. Malathy (2009), 'A study on Technical English Writing Skill of Engineering Students in Coimbatore - Call Perspective', is taken to identify the difficulties encountered by the students for Engineering and Technology in comprehending producing technical English exclusively revealed through their writings. She focused to explore the proficiency level of the students of engineering and technology in technical English writing skill through manual testing.

3. Leopoldina Fortunati, Jane Vincent (2013) in the article "Sociological insights on the comparison of writing/reading on paper with writing/reading digitally" talks about the impact of digital technologies on writing and reading skills. The analysis is based on an exploratory study carried out with a class of master's students.

Linguistics Problems

First language learners have linguistic problems in their second language writing. The first language linguistic knowledge may help to motivate, facilitate second language writing. On the other hand, the process of writing in first language is not equal in the process of writing in second language. But it helps in understanding the particular meaning of a words, sentence of the second language. The second language learners have major linguistic problems in second language writing. The linguistic complexity is more for the learners as their does not help them to immediately understand English.

Errors found in writing skill using content words

There are four content words is seen (Noun, Verb, Adjectives and Adverb)

Errors in use of Noun

Nouns or noun phrases typically function as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects and subject complements. The error which is found in noun is *Overgeneralization of noun forms*. The students tend to over generalize the rules where there is an irregularity in forming plurals as: childs – children, foots – feet.

Errors in use of Verb

Verbs carry a great deal of information; they describe actions, events, and states and place these in a time frame. They state whether actions or events, have been completed or going on and they say whether a state is current or regulative. They help to command, request, speculate, wish and predict. The students have not properly handled the verbs also. Most of the sentences produced by the students have lost their meanings and functions due to inappropriate use of the verb forms.

Errors in use of Adjective

Adjective qualifies a noun or another adjective. The reader, in a fast pace, does not pay heed on those secondary items. It happens quite often. For example: I saw a beautiful girl, I met a fat major's wife, she loved an old man.

In these constructions, 'beautiful', 'fat', or 'fat major's and 'old' are adjectives. In the process of meaning making, the role of these adjectives is minimum rather optional or secondary. But the word I, she, girl, saw, met, wife, love, man are very imperative parts of sentences. Without them the basic meaning of those sentences cannot be held. In the first reading the basic meaning is obtained and in the second reading the secondary meaning, rather minute intricacies of meaning is obtained.

Errors in use of Adverb

An adverb is 'a word used to add something to the meaning of the verb'. The function of an adverb in a sentence is significant because of its impact on the verb it qualifies. The effectiveness and vitality of the action reflected by the sentences is denoted by the use of adverbs. Sometimes adverbs qualify the adjectives also. The errors in the use of adverbs are given below.

Over generalization of -ly ending

He went regularly to the temple

In some cases, the Adjectives used as adverb

Adverbs are also skipped by the students; the student gets the meaning of the adjectives or adverbs in his second visit to the sentence as a second thought.

Examples of errors in the subjects' writing

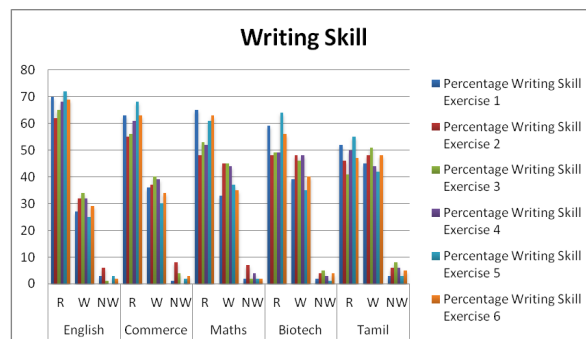
Table 1:

| Error Types | Example | Total number of errors |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Missing noun word | Our team received a large for winning the baseball tournament. | 155 |
| Missing plural forms of noun | The student were paying attention to the teacher. | 108 |
| Double and omission verbs | I like go college and spend time | 324 |
| Omission and Misplaced adjectives | She packed her clothes in a green flimsy cardboard box | 228 |
| Misplacing the adverb | We watch always the news at 6 pm. | 193 |
| | | 1008 |

This table displays the categories of error types in student's essays. As indicated in table, each error category was further classified in detail. As seen clearly the major cause of errors made by the students in second language performance is due to the interference of the mother language. Before the students have become fully familiar with the grammar of the target language, they tend to transfer the grammatical rules of native language to the target language. The major source of errors in the following samples is that in verbs, it has been found that the students under this study make errors in verbs in different ways like double verbs, omitting the verbs, usage of irrelevant verbs in the sentence.

Comparison of both English and other major students performance in writing skills is given below in a chart:

Chart 1:



Conclusion

From the quantitative analysis of the data it is evident that English major students have better writing skill, especially in content words than other major students. Most of the students in other major have difficulty in finding the relevant word to construct the sentence in the second language. The lack of this competence has become a barrier to the students in communicative English and most of the students have failed to answer the questions using the content words. This reveals the poor writing skills of the students.

In the case of English major students although majority of the students attempted the questions, they have difficulty in constructing the sentence of their own using verbs. They focus only in identifying the meaning of the words and they fail to place the word in an appropriate space. They were not aware the grammar rules and its formation. A close analysis of the students' ability in manipulating the appropriate use of words in a sentence is incompetent. Majority of students reproduce the linguistic forms rather than communicating effectively in their writing. To avoid errors in writings, informants should be given practice to write stories and the written items should be spotted by the teachers, and then the reasons for the errors should be explained to the informants. The

performance of the English major students was better compared the other major students.

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