

Enhancing Students' Fluency in Writing: Learning to Use Transition Words

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Abstract:

This study uses experimental and control group data to investigate whether learning to use transition words can help students. In enhancing students' fluency in writing common sentences were chosen in order that students learn the use of transition words in text and improve their writing fluency. 36 first-year university students were placed in an intermediate class: 18 control group students and 18 experimental group students. After six weeks, both groups were given identical types of feedback and comments. Fluency was measured by the number of written tasks and successful corrections (SCs). These results were analyzed to determine if there was a significance in fluency between the two groups. Findings suggested that teachers should teach students the effectiveness of using transition words in EFL writing classes, and this may in part help to improve students' fluency.

Keywords: *writing fluency; feedback; transition words*

Introduction

English education in Japan has traditionally emphasized teaching sentence patterns, vocabulary and grammatical rules, and thus has focused mostly on accuracy in teaching English. In the field of writing instruction, a large survey conducted on 1,027 Japanese university students revealed that more than 90% of the students practiced translation of Japanese into English in writing classrooms and more than 80% of the students had no experiences in longer paragraph writing (Hirota et al, 1995). moreover, a survey conducted to examine 786 Japanese university level writing teachers, view on the instruction resulted in structure and expressing practice (31.7%), translation from Japanese to English (31.2%), free composition (17.6%), item replacement (6.6%), and others (JACET,1993).these survey results indicate that most Japanese teachers of English have

considered writing instruction to be characterized by accuracy centered activities in order to reinforce the teaching of grammatical structures or vocabulary.

As globalization proceeds, it is quite likely that Japanese students will have to learn and use English for the purpose of international communication. In accordance with such social needs the importance of developing students' practical communication abilities has been emphasized, and many researchers and educators in Japan have proposed a paradigm shift from accuracy-oriented to fluency-oriented writing instruction

(e.g. Isono, 1991; Kurihara, 1994; Ooi, 2004). As a result of their efforts, this evolution of writing pedagogy for Japanese learners of English is clearly reflected in the government guidelines for foreign language teaching published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The objective of "writing" is a good example to illustrate the fluency-oriented instruction: to further develop students' abilities to write down information, ideas, etc. in English in accordance with the situation and the purpose, and to foster a positive attitude toward communicating by utilizing these abilities.

However, considering the results of 2003 and those of 1995 given above, the same leniency can be seen in the experiences of word-by-word translation (83.9% - 77.1%) and longer paragraph writing (31.9% - 34.6%). These figures may reflect the fact that the shift in emphasis from accuracy to fluency in writing has not strongly reinforced fluency-oriented instruction in writing classrooms (Hayashi et al. 2003). Consequently, researchers and educators in Japan need to consider again the practical demands of the learning situation and contribute to this pedagogic transformation by facilitating improvement in students' writing fluency.

Conceptual Frameworks

The primary purpose of this is to investigate whether learning to use transition words results in enhancing students' fluency in writing. The conceptual framework is based on the work of Halliday and Hassan (1976), and Halliday (1994). The set of Halliday and Hassan's cohesive relations is comprised of reference, substitutions, ellipsis, conjunctions and lexical relations. Reference is the relation between a linguistic expression and its pronoun. Substitution is marked as representing a preceding expression by a pro-form like one, do or so. Ellipsis is the omission of part of a sentence whose meaning will be retrievable from the preceding text. A conjunction is a cohesive device which marks logical-semantic relations between linguistic expressions and links paragraphs. Lexical cohesion is the writer's choice of particular lexical items.