

**EGYPTIAN EFL STUDENT TEACHERS' WRITING
PROCESSES AND PRODUCTS: THE ROLE OF
LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE AND WRITING AFFECT**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
Language Teaching

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January, 2009

Summary of the Study

1. Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction

Effective teaching of L2/FL writing requires knowing the factors that influence both its process and product. There is scarcity of studies on the explanatory variables of Arab ESL/EFL students' writing processes and products in general and on how those students' linguistic knowledge and affect influence such processes and products in particular. Research on the Arab ESL/EFL students' writing process is still in its infancy and there remains much to be explored about that process. Though the writing product studies of the Arab ESL/EFL students have remarkably outnumbered those ones of their writing process, these product studies have not given much attention to the relationship of writers' linguistic knowledge and affect with their text characteristics.

The present study tried to fill in these research gaps by investigating the relationship of two types of linguistic knowledge (grammar knowledge and vocabulary knowledge) and two affective traits of writing (writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy) with Egyptian EFL student teachers' writing process and product. In addition, the study has compared the influence exerted by linguistic knowledge and writing affect on the students' text length and composing processes to that of their text quality. Accordingly, the study attempted to answer the following product and process questions:

a- Product Questions:

1. Are there any differences in the writing affect (i.e. writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy) levels of Egyptian EFL student teachers? If so, what are the factors accounting for these differences?
2. Is there a relationship between Egyptian EFL student teachers' linguistic knowledge (grammar knowledge and vocabulary knowledge) and writing affect, and their writing quality profiles?
3. Is there a relationship between Egyptian EFL student teachers' linguistic knowledge, writing affect and text quality, and their text length aspects?

b- Process Questions:

4. Is there a relationship between Egyptian EFL student teachers' linguistic knowledge, writing affect and text quality, and their writing fluency?
5. Is there a relationship between Egyptian EFL student teachers' linguistic knowledge, writing affect, writing fluency and text quality, and the time they spend composing and allocate to writing stages?
6. What are the most frequent and least purposes for Egyptian EFL student teachers' language-switching in their composing?
7. Is there a relationship between Egyptian EFL student teachers' linguistic knowledge, writing affect, writing fluency and text quality, and their language-switching?
8. What are the most and least frequently used composing components/behaviours by Egyptian EFL student teachers'?
9. Is there a relationship between Egyptian EFL student teachers' linguistic knowledge, writing affect, writing fluency and text quality, and their composing components/behaviours?

2. Methodology and Design of the Study

2.1 The Participants

The participants can be described as prospective teachers or student teachers who were receiving pre-service English language teacher education at an Egyptian university at the time of conducting the study. They were all Egyptian male students whose native language is Arabic. Focusing on the male participants in the present study was intended to control for gender differences. The total number of the sample taking part in the study is 57 participants.

2.2 The Instruments of the Study

2.2.1 The linguistic tests: Allan's (1992) Oxford Placement Test (OPT) 2 (the Grammar Test), Laufer and Nation's (1999) Productive Vocabulary Levels Test (PVL) and Schmitt *et al.*'s (2001) Receptive Vocabulary Levels Test (RVLT).

2.2.2 The instruments used for measuring writing affect: a 12-item English Writing Apprehension Scale (EWAS), an 18-item English Writing Self-Efficacy Scale (EWSS) and the writing background and affect interview (semi-structured). The items of the two scales were synthesized and adapted from some other previous scales in light of the definitions adopted for the two affective constructs, and the validity and reliability were verified.

2.2.3 The writing process instruments: the think-aloud method and the semi-structured retrospective interview.

2.2.4 The argumentative writing tasks: using the argumentative tasks was based on the assumption that they require more organizational skills and higher-order thinking abilities. Three compulsory argumentative writing tasks were used in the non-think aloud or collective sessions to obtain more reliable data about the participants' writing products. On the other hand, the participants were asked to write one argumentative task in the individual think-aloud sessions. All the writing tasks used in the present study were selected from the sample writing topics of the TOEFL accessed on Education Testing Service (ETS) official website.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

2.3.1 Conducting the collective sessions: the three linguistic tests, two affective scales and compulsory writing tasks were administered to the participants in three sessions (number of the participants attending these three sessions is 57). An hour was allowed as a maximal time for completing each test/writing task and no word limit was imposed in the writing tasks.

2.3.2 Conducting the individual think-aloud and interview sessions: these individual sessions were conducted for three weeks with the 40 participants whose scores on the linguistic and affective measures falling into their two extremes and near middle points. Each individual session began with giving the participant the think-aloud warm-up training and the instructions for verbalizing his thoughts while performing the writing task. After finishing the task (time allowed = an hour) immediately, each participant was interviewed (for 20-30 minutes) in Arabic about his writing process, and his writing background and affect.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

2.4.1 Rating the essays written and analyzing the text length aspects in them

The three essays that the 57 participants wrote in the non-think-aloud collective sessions as well as the essays written by 30 participants in the think-aloud session were rated using Jacobs *et al.*'s (1981) ESL Composition Profile (inter-rating reliability was verified). Using Polio's (1997: 140) word count guidelines, the three text length measures were applied to final draft the participants produced in case more than one was written.

2.4.2 Transcribing and analyzing the writing background and affect interview data

Thirty-one of the 40 participants interviewed were identified as either having either positive writing affect (PWA) or negative writing affect (NWA) since their scores on the two scales fell a half standard deviation below and above the means of the two scales. The writing

background and affect interviews of those 31 participants were transcribed and analyzed to identify the factors accounting for their negative or positive English writing affect levels.

2.4.3 Transcribing and analyzing the think-aloud and retrospective interview data

Only 30 out of the 40 participants who attended the think-aloud sessions were found to have verbalized their thoughts appropriately. Therefore, the think-aloud data transcribed and analyzed was limited to the protocols generated by those 30 participants (time = 19.61 hours). In addition, their retrospective interviews were transcribed and analyzed to supplement the think-aloud data

2.4.4 Developing a coding scheme for analyzing the think-aloud protocols

The coding scheme developed for the present study is a comprehensive one that is mainly derived from the ones reviewed previously and based on the behaviours identified in the participants' think-aloud protocols. The final version of the scheme developed has eight main components: planning, monitoring, retrieving, reviewing, text-changing, writing and affective behaviours, and silent pausing. The coding scheme developed offers some advantages. It is probably the most comprehensive and most analytic coding scheme proposed in writing process research so far. Each of its major components can be used on their own by future researchers. It also shows the 'why' of the composing process in that it identifies the purpose of each by the component in which it is included and therefore it helps in identifying the efforts allocated by writers to each composing component. This coding scheme allows the researcher to compare writers' composing behaviours at three levels: the major component level, the behaviour group level and individual behaviour level. (Validity and reliability of the scheme were verified).

2.4.5 Analyzing the participants' language-switching

The participants' switches to Arabic while composing in English were identified in their think-aloud protocols. The language-switching aspects analyzed include: purpose for language-switching and the language-switching occurrence which is defined as any oral or written switching from English to Arabic while performing the task.

2.4.6 Analyzing the participants' composing time and process-based writing fluency

The four composing time variables were measured in the participants' protocols are: pre-writing time, writing time, after-writing time and total time of writing. Polio's (1997) guidelines were used for counting the word/s in the translating episodes. All the episodes or segments translated by the participants were counted except for the revising and editing operations because they are more likely not produced a result of natural flow of written language but in response to spotting an error or discovering a need to refining the text.

3. Results of the Study

3.1 The factors accounting for the different levels of writing affect

The standard deviations of participants' scores on the EWAS and the EWSS as well as the scores of some of them falling on the extremes of the two scales showed that they had different levels of writing affect. Analyzing the writing background and affect interview protocols of 16 participants with NWA and 15 ones with PWA and the scores of the whole sample on the linguistic and affective measures showed there are three categories of factors accounting for their levels of English writing affect, these are: a) three factors accounting for the differences in the levels of both affective traits: linguistic knowledge, perceived linguistic knowledge or language competence, and the history of writing achievement and perceived writing performance improvement; b) three factors accounting for the differences in English writing apprehension only: English writing self-efficacy, instructional practices of English

writing and fear of criticism; and c) a factor accounting for the differences in English writing self-efficacy only: others' evaluation of the student's writing.

3.2 Results of text quality data analysis

The results revealed that the participants' text quality aspects correlate positively with their linguistic knowledge and writing self-efficacy, and negatively with their writing apprehension. On the other hand, the correlations of the participants' linguistic knowledge with the writing quality profile were remarkably higher than those of their writing affect, and the mean correlations of the grammar and productive vocabulary tests were higher than those of the receptive vocabulary test. The results showed also that linguistic knowledge and writing affect correlate higher with the vocabulary, language use and organization aspects in the participants' written texts than with the content and mechanics aspects, respectively.

3.3 Results of text length data analysis

The results of the participants' text length data analysis indicated that their linguistic knowledge and writing competence were strongly related to two text length aspects, i.e. word count and the number of sentences written. Contrarily, the participants' linguistic knowledge did not correlate significantly with the mean sentence length in their essays. On the other hand, no significant correlations were found between the three text length aspects and the two measures of writing affect with the exception of the significant positive correlation between writing self-efficacy and the mean sentence number. As for text quality, the results revealed it had significant positive correlations with text quantity and the mean number of the sentences but not with the mean sentence length. The students' answers to the interview question about the text quantity showed that they had different strategies and decisions regarding the amount of text to be included in their essays.

3.4 Results of the translating episode length (writing fluency) analysis

Analyzing the participants' writing fluency sheets showed that the mean translating episode length of the most fluent writer is 4.77 words while that of the least fluent writer is 1.39 words. The correlational analyses revealed that the mean length of the participants' translating episode correlates significantly with their linguistic knowledge, writing affect and some of their essay quality profiles (organization, vocabulary, language use and total quality). The stronger and positive correlations of the translating episode mean length with linguistic knowledge and the language-related aspects in the written texts suggests that it may be a more valid indicator for measuring EFL writers' fluency than the text-quantity based ones, e.g. composing rate and text quantity, extensively used in the previous writing studies.

3.5 Results of the composing time data analysis

The results showed that the participants' linguistic knowledge, affect and text quality correlate significantly with the total time they spent writing, and on the writing stage but not with the time they devote to their pre-writing or post-writing stages. The significant correlations of these two variables suggest that writers' apprehension is more likely to influence their composing time than their linguistic knowledge or self-efficacy and that the ideational content of their texts is more likely to be influenced by the time they spend composing than the other organizational or language-related aspects.

3.6 Results of the language-switching data analysis

The study found that the participants switched to Arabic in 19.28 % of their composing behaviours and that they used it for monitoring purposes more than for retrieving ones. The frequency of language-switching in these two components of the composing process outnumbered those of planning and reviewing, while the affective component had the lowest language-switching frequency. Additionally, there was a variation in the frequency of language-switching in the behaviours in each composing component. The correlational results revealed that participants' linguistic knowledge and text quality do not correlate significantly

with the frequency of their use of Arabic in English composing. Their fluency, however, was associated negatively with this frequent use of Arabic. On the other hand, linguistic knowledge and writing competence (i.e. fluency and text quality) levels were found to influence the purposes for language-switching. Meanwhile, writing affect was not found to influence the frequency or the different purposes of L1 use. The study showed that while the participants with higher linguistic knowledge and writing competence used Arabic more in monitoring and ideational planning behaviours (e.g. self-questioning for evaluation, clarification, global planning), the participants with lower linguistic knowledge and writing competence switched to L1 more in textual planning and retrieving behaviours (e.g. planning text in L1, repeating the L1 meaning of last part of text written).

3.7 Results of the composing components/behaviours data analysis

The most frequent component of the participants' composing process was retrieving (34.38 %), while the least frequent component was the affective (0.28 %). The writing component (26.11 %) was more frequent than planning (20.33 %), revising-editing (3.55 %) monitoring (8.97 %), reviewing (6.38 %). On the other hand, the frequency of the participants' textual planning (18.69 %) and revising (2.71 %) were more frequent than their ideational planning (1.65 %) and editing (0.84 %), respectively. Variation was also found in the frequencies of the individual composing behaviours. As for the correlational analyses, the study showed that the participants' linguistic knowledge, writing affect and competence correlate with many of their composing components and behaviour use. The participants with higher linguistic knowledge and writing competence and PWA levels were found to use more ideational planning, monitoring, reviewing, revising and affective behaviours and less retrieving and textual planning and editing behaviours than the ones with lower linguistic knowledge, writing performance and NWA levels. Additionally, the participants' linguistic knowledge, writing affect and competence levels were found to correlate positively with the variety, or different types, of the composing behaviours demonstrated and negatively with the total frequency of these behaviours. The differences in the participants' linguistic knowledge, writing competence and affect were also found to correlate with some of behaviours in each composing component. For example, the writers with positive affect and higher levels of competence and linguistic knowledge rehearsed more at the sentence level, used more self-questioning behaviours for monitoring purposes, got involved in more assessing, reasoning and task-management behaviours, retrieved ideas or linguistic structures by self-questioning, reviewed their text more, and made more addition, substitution and after-writing revising changes, particularly at the phrase level, and inter-sentential editing changes. Contrarily, the writers with negative affect and lower levels of competence and linguistic knowledge were found to rehearse text more at the word level, use more word spelling behaviours, retrieve ideas or linguistic structures by repetition, hesitation or self-dictating, make more deletion revising changes, and more substitution and inter-sentential editing changes, and to make more intra-sentential text-changes. The interviews showed that the writers with negative affect and lower levels of competence and linguistic knowledge had more linguistic composing problems than and considered audience differently from the writers with positive affect and higher levels of competence and linguistic levels.

4. Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study has some implications for L2/FL writing process and product research. The results indicate that the different levels of writing affect are shaped by the differences in linguistic knowledge and writing skills levels and the beliefs about them as well as some other instructional and social factors. The writing product results generally indicate that writers' linguistic knowledge has a more influential role in shaping L2/FL writers' text quality and

their text length aspects than their affect. Accordingly, it can be argued that the relationship of writers' affect with their text quality and text length is likely to be influenced by the relationship patterns of these product variables with their linguistic knowledge, i.e. the way writers' affect correlates with these product features seems to be contingent upon how they correlate with their linguistic knowledge. Similarly, L2/FL written fluency correlates higher with writers' linguistic knowledge and the language-related aspects in their texts than with their affect. On the other hand, L2/FL writers' affect seems to exert lower influence than that of their linguistic knowledge on their composing processes but it has stronger correlations with the time they spend on the whole writing process and on the writing stage and to some of their text-changing and reviewing behaviours. In many cases, the text produced by writers is more likely to be more influenced by these behaviours than to influence them, i.e. the quality of writers' texts seems to be a consequence rather than a cause of their composing behaviours, and the same applies to their fluency.

The results of the present study emphasize the integrative nature of the L2/FL writing skill. The students with limited English linguistic knowledge were found to have higher writing apprehension and lower writing self-efficacy due to their low language ability self-esteem, communication apprehension and poor writing achievement history. On the other hand, the competent writers, at both the process and product levels, had higher levels of linguistic knowledge and positive affect. Accordingly, writers' linguistic knowledge seems to be the variable playing the central role in this net of relationships as it is a prerequisite for facilitating the composing process and for producing a text with good quality.

The results of the study also indicate that the mean length of writers' translating chunks may be a more valid measure of their fluency than the other ones used in the previous studies. On the other hand, the interview excerpts about the participants' strategies of their text quantity and the correlational pattern found between their composing rates and their linguistic, affective and text quality scores raise questions about the validity of using these rates in assessing writers' fluency. Meanwhile, the participants' writing background and affect interviews, and the correlations of text quality and length scores, and composing process aspects provided evidence for the validity of the two adapted scales the study used to measure their writing apprehension and writing self-efficacy. Likewise, the consistency of the process results with those of many of the previous studies reviewed enhances the validity of the comprehensive coding scheme developed to analyze the participants' composing behaviours.

Given that the significant correlations of the mean length of the translating episode with the text quality aspects (r ranging from .473 to .594) are strong but not very high, it can be concluded that writers' ability to produce their text fluently seem to be different from their ability to produce texts with high quality. That is, some students writing texts with high quality may not be able to produce their texts fluently. The correlational analyses of the writing process data revealed some of the composing process characteristics of fluent versus less fluent, and skilled versus less skilled EFL writers. These data-driven descriptions are supported by the findings of previous L2/FL writing process research.

The results reached stress the dire need for raising the target population's linguistic knowledge levels to them to overcome their composing problems, write more fluently, to produce texts with better quality. The present study recommends that the way EFL writing teachers focus on using the linguistic activities in their classes need to be dependent on their students' proficiency levels. In addition to dealing with the students' linguistic difficulties, the results of the study emphasize the need for addressing the causes of writers' negative affect by adopting a comprehensive process-product approach to teaching writing that could meet their strategic, linguistic and psychological needs. The question remains: what writing strategies can be taught to the students? In light of the data analyzed the study views that ideational

planning, reviewing, revising and editing strategies are teachable ones. As for the retrieving, textual planning and monitoring behaviours, these seem to result from the overloading of the writer's working memory; therefore they do not seem to be teachable and the best way to enhance student writers' optimal use of them is to enhance their linguistic knowledge levels.

In light of the results reached, the study presents some suggestions for further research. These suggestions were related to conducting research that deals with the results reported by the study as testable hypotheses and to examine new areas related to writing process and product research in similar and non-similar L2/FL learning contexts.