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The Skill of Writing from a Linguistic and Cognitive perspective

مهارة الكتابة من منظور لغوي وإدراكي

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Abstract

Writing a text is a challenging task, accomplished through a complex writing process that is subtended by a number of skill, the aim of this study to view whether writing is both a linguistic and cognitive ability or not, through The writing samples of six students have been taken for the purpose of analysis.. The six students fall into two categories, The analysis of the 6 student transcripts have been divided into two sections Linguistic Analysis and Cognitive Analysis. The result of the study showed linguistic and cognitive are two, One cannot separate them from each other. Both play an equal part in writing.

ملخص

تعد كتابة النص مهمة صعبة، حيث يتم إنجازها من خلال عملية كتابة معقدة يتم ترجمتها بواسطة عدد من المهارت، والهدف من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة ما إذا كانت الكتابة هي قدرة لغوية وإدراكية أم لا، من خلال عينات كتابة لستة طلاب، و تحليل هذه العينات.. ينقسم الطلاب الستة إلى فئتين، وقد تم تقسيم تحليل نصوص الطلاب الستة إلى قسمين، التحليل اللغوي، والتحليل المعرفي. أظهرت نتيجة الدراسة أنالمهارة اللغوية والإدراكية هما اثنان، لا يمكن للفرد فصلهما عن بعضهما البعض. كلاهما يلعب دورا مساويا في الكتابة.

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Introduction

Writing is a very complex process which involves numerous linguistic and cognitive activities. There are certain basic requirements which a writer has to fulfill for writing. The writer must know the language thoroughly enough to be able to clearly state his ideas. Language, thus, becomes a linguistic tool, as defined by SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS —

“Language can be said to provide a framework for our thoughts and according to the theory of linguistic determinism, it is very difficult to think outside that framework.” (Language, Society and Power,1999,24)

The cognitive aspect of language is brought out by SAUSSURE in, “Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to separate sound from thought, or thought from sound.” (Paper Machine,2005.53)

Both these quotations bring out the importance of linguistic and cognitive skills of a writer.

Linguistic skills refer to the ability to perform adequately in all kinds of communicative situations (compare Lammers, 1991). Perfetti and McCutchen (1987) state that vocabulary size; semantic precision and syntax are affected by schooling. Furthermore, they state that three types of linguistic knowledge contribute to actual writing performance: discourse schemes, lexical and syntactic knowledge.

But Jackendoff (2005) states that “Linguistic knowledge is a part of general cognitive.”

Cognitive and metacognitive activities, for instance, brainstorming, planning, outlining, organizing, drafting, revising and so on take place while writing. Cognitive processes include three basic processes: planning what to say and how to say it; translating plans into written text; and reviewing to improve existing text. Planning, in turn, is composed of three ingredients; setting goals, generating ideas, and organizing ideas into a writing plan, whereas reviewing includes reading and editing text.

The writing process of young, inexperienced writers seems to evolve qualitatively in a different way than the writing process of expert writers. During the writing process, experienced writers plan (in advance), structure and revise extensively (Flower and Hayes, 1981; Hayes and Flower, 1980). Young writers only generate ideas in order to write them down directly (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). According to Bereiter and Scardamalia(1987), for young writers planning cannot be seen as distinct from the text. Furthermore, young

writers tend to undertake little revision. When revising, the changes made often concern the formal aspects of the text and not the content (Faigley and Witte, 1981; Fitzgerald, 1987; Monahan, 1982). Hence their compositions are replete with errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, handwriting and more. Furthermore, these students seem to have considerable difficulty with content generation, text production, framing text, and revising (Graham, Harris, MacArthur and Schwartz, 1991; MacArthur, Schwartz and Graham, 1991; Sawyer, Graham and Harris, 1992).

Methodology

The writing samples of six students have been taken for the purpose of analysis. These students come from a non-English medium school, the student are males and females,. They belong to the age group of 19 to 22 years, All these students completed the writing 1, The six students fall into two categories:

- a) those who scored more than 60 marks in English in the previous year exam;
- b) those who scored less than 60 marks in English in the previous year exam.

An argumentative topic, “**Advantages and Disadvantages of Television**”, was given to the students.

The time duration given was an hour. The venue was their school classroom.

The essays, thus, obtained were analysed on linguistic and cognitive basis.

The 6 students for the purpose of analysis have been referred to as S1, S2 and so on. The following table gives their referred number:

Marks obtained	Referred as
89	S1
76	S2
80	S3
56	S4
59	S5
58	S6

Analysis and Findings

Analysis:

The analysis of the 6 student transcripts have been divided into two sections:-

- a) Linguistic Analysis
- b) Cognitive Analysis.

a) Linguistic Analysis:-

The linguistic analysis focusing on spellings, punctuations, grammar (syntax as well as discourse level), has been tabulated as follows:

	Spellings	Punctuation	Syntax
S1	Hardly any mistake	Makes mistake for e.g.(P3S6); Uses only full stop	Good in articles; Good in prepositions; Uses only present tense
S2	Hardly any mistake	Hardly any mistake	Misuses article 'the' for e.g.(P1S2); Good in preposition; Uses only present tense
S3	Hardly any mistake	Hardly any mistake	Misuse of articles for e.g. (P3S12); Makes mistakes in prepositions for e.g. (P3S2); Uses only present tense
S4	Sometimes makes mistakes for e.g. (P1,Pt1)	Makes mistake for e.g. (P2,Pt4)	Misuse of articles for e.g. (P3,Pt6); Mistakes in preposition for e.g. (P2,Pt1); Uses present tense
S5	Hardly any mistake	Makes mistake for e.g. (P2,Pt2)	Less usage of articles; Mistakes in preposition for e.g. (P2,Pt2); Keeps shifting tenses
S6	Hardly any mistake	Hardly any mistake	Omits and misuses articles(P2,Pt4); Mixes preposition(P2,Pt3); Uses present tense

b) Cognitive Analysis:-

The cognitive analysis focusing on discourse, organization (introduction, body and conclusion) and coherence is tabulated as follows:-

	Introduction	Body	Conclusion	Coherence
S1	P1 and P2	P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6	P7	Proper
S2	P1	P2	P3	Proper
S3	P1 and P2	P2 and P3	P4	At times gets diverted
S4	P1	P2 and P3	—	Proper
S5	P1	P2 and P3	—	Proper
S6	P1	P2 and P3	—	Improper

Findings:

On the basis of the analysis of the 6 student transcripts, the findings were obtained. The findings, too, are divided into two sections:

- a) Linguistic Findings
- b) Cognitive Findings

a) Linguistic Findings:

The 6 student transcripts, from a linguistic perspective, show the following characteristics:

	Spelling	Punctuation	Syntax
Students(S1, S2 and S3) scoring above 60 marks	S1, S2 and S3 hardly make any mistake.	S1 makes mistake, while S2 and S3 hardly make mistake.	S2 and S3 misuse articles, while S1 doesn't; S3 makes mistake in prepositions, while S1 and S2 are good; S1, S2 and S3 use present tense.
Students(S4, S5 and S6) scoring less than 60 marks	S4 at times makes mistake, while S5 and S6 hardly make any mistake.	S4 and S5 make mistakes while S6 hardly makes mistake.	S4, S5 and S6 have problems in using articles and prepositions; S4 and S6 use present tense while S5 keeps on shifting tenses.

The above table shows:

- i. Students scoring above as well as below 60 do not make much spelling mistakes.
- ii. Though all students make mistakes in punctuation; students scoring below 60 make more mistakes than students scoring above 60.
- iii. At the syntactic level all 6 students have problems but students scoring above 60 make fewer mistakes. The correct use of tenses is a problem with all 6 students as they all mostly use present tense throughout.

b) Cognitive Findings:

The 6 student transcripts, from a cognitive perspective, show the following characteristics:

	Introduction	Body	Conclusion	Coherence
Students(S1, S2 and S3) scoring above 60 marks	S1, S2 and S3 write introduction, S1 and S3 write introductory points in body, too.	S1, S2 and S3 write essays which have a body, S1 and S3 bring in introductory points in body, too.	S1, S2 and S3 write essays with a conclusion.	S1 and S2 write coherently. S3 diverts from point, at times.
Students(S4, S5 and S6) scoring less than 60 marks	S4, S5 and S6 write proper introductory points.	S4, S5 and S6 write essays which have proper body points.	S4, S5 and S6 lack writing a conclusion.	While S4 and S5 coherently, S6 lacks writing coherently.

The above table shows:

- i. All the students are capable at making introductory and body paragraphs or points but only students scoring above 60 marks have concluded their essays.
- ii. From coherence perspective, all 6 students are almost on the same level.
- iii. Only students scoring more than 60 marks have made paragraphs. Students scoring less than 60 marks have written the essays in the point form.

The above findings can be topped by saying that at the linguistic level students scoring below 60 marks have more problems but at the cognitive level all students fare almost the same.

Conclusion

The findings show that at the linguistic level the below 60 group has more problems but at the cognitive level both the groups are almost at the same level. This shows that while exam percentage does reflect linguistic abilities; cognitive abilities are not reflected in exam marks. The more than 60 marks students are better at both linguistic and cognitive skills and hence their writings enable them to score better. The less than 60 marks students lack linguistic skills and hence, though they have cognitive skills, their writings do not enable them to score marks.

In short, linguistic and cognitive aspects are two sides of a coin. One cannot separate them from each other. Both play an equal part in writing. One can

conclude by re-affirming the thesis statement that writing is both a linguistic and a cognitive skill.

My research project is based on the analysis of 6 essays by students, so it is a small scale work, and hence cannot be taken as a generalized statement. A project on a large scale must be done to arrive at an opinion that can be more generalized.

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