

## RESEARCHING TYPES AND CAUSES OF ERRORS IN ARABIC SPEAKERS' WRITINGS

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### **1. Abstract**

This study addresses the problem students and teachers face constantly in the Department of Foreign Languages at Qatar University. It is related to the performance of students in the writing courses, namely Writing I, Writing II, and Advanced Writing. The data of the study is 40 exam scripts of the first Writing Course. The study uses error analysis as a method/ a technique to analyze the students' writing. There are a number of published common errors for Arab students of English. However, this is the first study carried out at the English department at Qatar University. The results show that, the students' performance errors are systematic and classifiable. This, in turn, implies that both teachers and learners must see errors as the key to understanding and solving accuracy problems in English writing courses. It is the teachers' responsibility to adopt, modify or even develop remedial procedures and techniques that can minimize the learner's errors and elevate the students' level. Students should always be encouraged to do remedial exercises in order to improve their writing ability. Brief grammar rules may be essential to help students realize the errors that result from overgeneralization and wrong parallel.

### **2. Introduction**

The purpose of this study is not merely to analyze the students' errors but also to provide suggestions on how to help students improve their write skills. This article is an outcome of teachers' concerns and efforts to identify the problem and to understand the key issues to EFL writing to suggest a remedial procedure that may help the learners to express themselves in better English. It aims at finding areas of difficulty in writing among the students and to work out remedial procedures to help them overcome their weaknesses.

Many researchers discussed grammatical errors made by Arabs learning English as a second language ( for a review refer to : Emam, 1972; Elhibir, 1976; Meziani, 1973; Scott and Tucker, 1974; Ibrahim, 1978; Mattar, 1978; Kharma, 1981; Mukattash, 1978, 1981; Tushyeh, 1993; Shaheen, 1984; Abdeljawad, 1986; Al-Buainain, 1988; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989; Elhibir and Altaha,1992; Altaha, 1993; Hassan et al. 1993; Bagdady, 1994 ; Altaha, 1994 and 1996; Ghrib, 2001 and Mahmoud, 2002).

### **3. Empirical Data**

The data is forty exam scripts of the first Writing Course. The departmental objectives, program objectives and learning outcomes are give in Appendix (4). The subjects of the study are Arab female students majoring in English (no male students were enrolled in this course during that time). Their ages range from eighteen to twenty years. These students have finished six years of English language instruction at school and are taking English courses including reading, grammar and lab. The students 'language proficiency level ranges from 450 to 500 scores on TOEFL. This is an admission requirement to the program (i.e. students are only accepted if they score 450 and above).

**Two topics were given to the students:**

*(1) You have just come back from England, where you took a language course at a summer school. However, you were disappointed because your course was not as advertised. Write a letter to the school director complaining about four different things you were not satisfied with: Explain the problems in detail and suggest what he/she can do to make you happy. (20 Marks)*

*(2) Write on one of the following topics: (30 Marks):*

*a) The advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad (350-400 words). You can talk about the cost, cultural issues, academic benefits or difficulties, influence on one's character and influence on one's native country.*

*b) Write a narrative (400-500 words) about the following series of events (Refer to Appendix 1).*

*Note: Your work will be evaluated for: (a) layout; (b) structure, punctuation and spelling; (c) logic and coherence and (d) style.*

*Refer to Appendix (1).*

In the first topic, students wrote a letter of 200 to 250 words and in the second topic, students wrote a text of 350 to 400 words in a time pressure of two hours. The students were asked to write freely and to express their positive and negative points of view about the above- mentioned topics.

**4. Evaluation criteria**

For many years, teachers of writing courses have relied on impressionistic criteria to evaluate the students' work. These included structure of sentences, punctuation, spelling, layout of the essay, coherence, cohesion and the aesthetic dimension of the linguistic expression selected. Hughes (1989:86-96) states that the impressionistic or holistic method is the criteria used by the British Council's ELTS as a requirement for acceptance in British Universities. They consist of a ten-point scale, ranging from 0- nine.

The second type of evaluating writing is analytical. It dissects writing skill into subskills: grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, fluency and organization. Each skill is given an equal weight. The British Council developed another analytical skill. It evaluates the communicative quality, organization, argument, linguistic accuracy and linguistic appropriateness (Hughes, ibid).

Examination of these two approaches shows that both share common areas that are crucial to the success of the writing activity such as structure, selection of vocabulary items, spelling, punctuation, organization, adequacy of ideas and variety of sentence structure, logic and strength of argument. The only difference is that in the impressionistic approach, the scorers do not mark each subskill separately, but, instead, they score the overall performance without being specific about each aspect.

In a diagnostic study, the researcher needs to explicate exactly the areas of weaknesses. Therefore, there is a strong reason for opting for an analytical approach in evaluating the students' performance. Some teachers specify the proportion that each aspect should take, and in most cases, they give weight to the grammatical dimension of the written work. This trend might be justifiable since the students are mostly freshmen and sophomores and their basic preoccupation is to master the English language first before moving to other technicalities of writing.

Moreover, since there is some discrepancy among language pedagogues with regard to the exact aspects that should be considered for writing evaluation, the researcher found that it is wiser to devise her own criteria of evaluation drawing insights from the scales mentioned above.

For this purpose, a ten-point scale was developed to evaluate each aspect, and then the average of the scores was calculated. The breakdown of the marks of the areas covered is given below:

Structure: this refers to sentences well-formedness (2 points).

Spelling: refers to the correct alphabetical representation of words (1 point).

Punctuation: the correct use of commas, periods, semi-colons, question marks; ...etc. (1 point).

Coherence: the logical sequence of ideas (2 points).

Cohesion: the grammatical connectedness of sentences. (1 point).

Strength of argument: the persuasiveness of the ideas represented (2 points).

Aesthetic dimension: the beauty of expressions as represented in the selection of vocabulary items, figurative use of language and variety of sentence structures. (1 point).

*Refer to Appendix (2) for results.*

## **5. Method of Analysis**

Data for all calculations are based on the occurrences of target-like forms (Appendix 2). Quantitative differences show the acquisition of variable structures, distinction based on accuracy and showing variability according to different factors. Accuracy data, however, do not show *How* and *Why* the learners differ. At this point, it is necessary to stress that there is a need to find answers to these questions in SLA studies. Hence, a central component of the theoretical framework of this study is the assumption that errors constitute an important part of SLA and this is indeed the fundamental claim of the Interlanguage (IL) hypothesis (Corder, 1967).

In this sense, the nature of the analysis is qualitative rather than quantitative. The results of the following analysis look much more like psychological data than linguistic data, but an evaluation of the learners incorrect answers should help us to discover the acquisition process

involved in the learning of the syntactic features under investigation. It is hoped that by classifying the errors that learners made, researcher could learn a great deal about the SLA process by inferring the strategies that learners were adopting.

In this study, the researcher intends to discuss briefly types and major causes of errors. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in error analysis as an important branch in the rapidly expanding field of applied linguistics (Tushyeh, 1996). Error analysis is a technique accounting for almost all errors made by the second language learners including those resulting from the first language learning and those which are not traced to the learners' native language. It provides "explanation for the many as yet unexplained but frequently observed students' errors" (Dulay et al. 1982). Errors are important in three ways. They are important for the researchers, as these errors shed light on how learners learn the second language and what strategies they employ. Also, they are important to the teachers since errors are indications of learning (Corder, 1981); i.e. to imply to teachers how far towards the goal their students have progressed; and finally, errors are significant to the learners themselves as these errors are indications of hypotheses testing by the learners about the second language.

It should be clear here that the error analysis is used as a technique to study learners' errors since it provides data from which inferences about the language learning process can be made. Furthermore, it indicates the points where the language system is easily subject to disturbances or especially difficult to be acquired. Error Analysis, however, has some limitations. Shachter and Celece-Murcia (1977) identified six weaknesses concerning Error Analysis. These are as follows 1) the analysis of errors in isolation produced only partial accounts of learners' Interlanguages (e.g. Andersen's 1977 study); 2) emphasizing on systematic errors led to ignore avoidance phenomenon; 3) the classification of identified errors was often subjective; 4) comparisons of the absolute frequencies of errors attributable to either negative transfer or developmental processes, underestimated transfer influence on IL development, because transfer usually operates over longer linguistic domains (e.g. word order); 5) the identification of points of difficulty in the target Language was often impressionistic and vague. More than one source of errors possible, but analysts sometimes chose just one; and 6) the biased nature of sampling procedures with over presentation of certain Interlanguages, certain types of subjects and certain types of data.

## **6. Types of errors**

Before presenting the errors, there is one issue to remember. There are serious problems in categorizing 'errors' and attributing their presence to one or the other factors (e.g. the teaching situation, Native Language transfer, SL learners' strategies or the interaction of two or more causes). According to Corder (1967), there are two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors. The first are not serious as they are made when learners are tired or hurried. The latter are more serious since they reflect inadequate learning. A distinction is made by Burt and Kiparsky (1972) between *Global* errors which hinder communication by causing confusion in the relationships between and among the parts of discourse; e.g. wrong word order in a sentence and *Local* errors, (i.e. those that do not go beyond the clause or sentence level. Thus, global errors should be corrected while local ones should not be.

Errors are the flawed side of learner's speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of natural language performance. Making errors is an inevitable part of learning, since people cannot learn languages without first systematically committing errors. Thus, they are different from mistakes which are unsystematic deviations (Corder, 1967). Mistakes are committed by native speakers of the language. They could be due to memory lapses, physical states and so forth; of which the speaker is immediately aware and is able to correct them. Errors, on the other hand, are committed by learners due to lack of the knowledge of the rule and therefore learners are unable to correct their errors.

Dulay et al. (1982) discuss four types of errors: developmental, interlingual, ambiguous and others errors. Developmental/intralingual errors are "similar to those made by children learning a target language as their first language" (p. 165). Interlingual errors are similar in structure to a semantically equivalent phrase or sentence in the learner's NL; i.e. what Silnker (1972) calls interference (negative transfer). To identify interlingual errors, researchers usually translate the learner's production (e.g. phrases, sentences etc) into the learner's native language to examine whether similarities exist (which is more or less what the Weak Version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis does).

The third type is ambiguous errors, which are those that could be classified either as developmental or interlingual; since they reflect the learner's native language structure and at the same time are of the type found in the speech of children acquiring their first language. The last type of errors is categorized as others. Dulay and Burt (1973) classified such errors as "unique". Errors of this type are item that do not fit into any other category. Furthermore, they are unique to second language learners.

## **7. Causes of Errors**

There are two main causes of errors. The first is Interlingual, i.e. interference from L1, the second is Intralingual i.e. the difficulty comes from the second language itself (Dulay and Burt, 1974). Scott and Tucker (1974) suggest that interference in written English by Arab learners comes from the High variety (*alfusha*) while interference in spoken English by these learners results from the interference of colloquial Arabic. According to Ancker (2000:21), errors occur for many reasons, for example, interference from the native language, overgeneralization, incomplete knowledge of the target language and the complexity of the target language itself.

## **8. Data Analysis**

### **A. Identification of Errors**

The analysis of the data involved the separation and classification of errors to identify their type. Sentence-level grammatical errors committed by the learners involve some syntactic features, namely verbs, relative clauses, articles, fragments, noun modifiers, and prepositions. The samples present the commonest or most frequent Arabic (Qatari) errors in English. Many of these errors are, of course, common to all non-native users of English.

#### ***i) Verbs***

In the present data there are many cases exemplifying the misuse of verb tenses in English. Our students had a hard time selecting the appropriate verb form. Tense errors were due to the substitution of one tense for another. These errors may have resulted from negative transfer (i.e. interference according to Selinker, 1969) from Arabic which has different concepts of time. In Arabic, there are only the perfect and the imperfect (past and non-past). Progressive and perfect tenses are especially difficult for Arab learners of English (Mukattash, 1978). The following are some examples taken from the data.

### 1. *Continuous Versus Simple Present Verb Tenses*

ESL students have difficulty distinguishing the meanings of these tenses and knowing when to use one over the other:

A. \* They always shouting and open my room.

(Student no. 23; Topic 1)

B. \* Because the good students are knowing the disadvantages.

(Student no. 30; Topic 2)

C. \* I am writing this letter and I hope that I receiving apology.

(Student no. 30; Topic 1)

D. \* When I was seeing the newspaper, I found your advertisement).

(Student no. 1; Topic 1)

### 2. *Present/Past Perfect Versus Simple Present/past Verb Tense*

ESL students have difficulty understanding the notion of a frame of time:

A. \* I was very disappointed of what I have seen there and very annoyed of what I have found.

(Student no. 8; Topic 1)

B. \* Since I came to your school, I was unhappy.

(Student no. 2; Topic 1)

C. \* I have read an ad in the "Gulf Times" which has published.

(Student no. 30; Topic 1)

### 3. *Omission/Addition of verb to be*

A. \* So it is cost money.

(Student no. 20; Topic 2)

B. \* I interested.

(Student no. 20; Topic 1)

C. \* He was really wanted to continue his postgraduate study. (*This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper*)

(Student no. 2; Topic 2)

D. \* When the person he boring cannot go to visit friends such as what he do in his country.

(Student no. 6; Topic 2).

E. \* It's really depends on the person's character.

(Student no. 1; Topic 2)

F. \* They may disappoint.

(Student no. 31; Topic 2)

G. \* I am really feel disappointing.

(Student no. 31; Topic 1)

#### 4. Lack of Subject/Verb Agreement (Omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular)

Concord errors may be due to simplification strategy and overgeneralization of the Target Language rules. Some substitution errors (e.g. *has* instead of *have* as in Example A below must have resulted from hypercorrection:

A. \* Their markets and shopping centres has ....

(Student no. 4; Topic 2)

B. \*It give you ....

(Student no. 4; Topic 2)

C. \* Then he have to get used to.....

(Student no. 2; Topic 2)

D. \*Some student are send to forgién countries. (This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper)

(Student no. 3; Topic 2)

E. \*The rain haven't come and that was terrifying.

(Student no. 10; Topic 2)

F. \* [...]and they was offered them a good house.

(Student no. 5; Topic 2)

G. \* I found that the number of student in each group are more than 20.

(Student no. 8; Topic 1)

H. \* [...] because the books was not enough.

(Student no. 27; Topic 1)

#### 5. Modal Auxiliaries

Some students had difficulty forming verb phrases containing modal auxiliaries, and choosing the correct modal auxiliaries according to their shades of meaning. In many cases the form of the main verb in the sentence was incorrect:

A. \* Also the teachers were not enough experienced because they cannot control the students in the class.

(Student no. 7; Topic 1) This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper)

B. \*In each group there was more than 20 students that you can not heard what the teacher said.

(Student no. 1; Topic 1) This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper)

C. \*It's might get problems.

(Student no. 25; Topic 1)

D. \* [...] students can also enjoyed [...]

(Student no. 31; Topic 2)

E. \*You couldn't find any faithful person.

(Student no. 25; Topic 2)

F. \* There are more difficult things you'll can't do it if you were alone.

(Student no. 6; Topic 2)

G. \* When you go to live in another country you will want more time to make alive in that country.

(Student no. 8; Topic 2)

H. \* [...] will went abroad.

(Student no. 4; Topic 2)

K. \* I should took [...]

\* I must said [...]

(Student no. 4; Topic 1)

### ii) Relative Clauses:

ESL students had difficulty constructing adjective clauses correctly. The following errors in English relative clauses were made by our students:

A. \* I'm writing this letter to complain about the school which I suffered from it.

(Student no. 7; Topic 1)

B. \* Moreover, I stayed with an English family whom their children didn't let me study or sleep.

(Student no. 12; Topic 1.)

C. \* In a small village there was a chief his name is Labongo.

(Student no. 1; Topic 2.)

D. \* When students stay with people have bad habits, this can have influence on their characters.

(Student no. 11; Topic 1.)

E. \* Sometimes the country needs someone who studied in a branch that the country doesn't have it.

(Student no. 11; Topic 1.)

F. \* I went to London where my friends live in.

(Student no.23; Topic 1)

G. \* I'm writing to complain about your school which I were there before 2 months ago.

(Student no. 28; Topic 1)

H. \* You will find that school can provide books easily, which that the students won't have any difficulty to get their books.

(Student no. 40; Topic 1)

### iii. Articles:

ESL students had difficulty deciding if a definite article is needed for a noun in a particular context. In some cases, our students overcorrected themselves by using articles in a redundant way; they also omitted them to simplify their tasks or replaced them with each other. This showed that the students still had difficulty in understanding the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness. In Arabic, the use of the definite article differs from that of English.

A. \* I think studying abroad is good thing.



(Student no. 25; Topic 2)

B. \* In the fact [...].

(Student no. 30; Topic 1)

C. \* There was old woman and she was ill and weak.

(Student no. 30; Topic 2)

D. \* When you study in such good well-known country with the high level of good education, you will be well qualified person.

(Student no. 2; Topic 2)

E. \* We have good university in Qatar.

(Student no. 4; Topic 2)

F. \* You can enter a university you like to choose.

(Student no. 8; Topic 2)

G. \* Student may get married from the country he is staying in.

(Student no. 11; Topic 2)

H. \* So education is necessary for the all. **This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper)**

(Student no. 13; Topic 2)

#### **iv. Fragments:**

Some students had problems with fragments:

A. \* May be see the young people so he want to be like them.

(Student no. 23; Topic 2)

B. \* Although there are many advantages.

(Student no. 9; Topic 2)

D. \* He couldn't tell his daughter but after studying with himself.

(Student no. 10; Topic 2)

E. \* I spend my time dreaming to study abroad in England or America but no longer.

(Student no. 4; Topic 2)

F. \* When I arrived at school.

(Student no. 4; Topic 1)

G. \* Most of the teachers here are qualified and such a wonderful.

(Student no. 3; Topic 1)

#### **v. Noun Modifiers:**

Some students did not always know that demonstrative adjectives must agree with nouns and that adjectives do not agree with plural nouns:

A. \* This professors are helpful.

(Student no. 4; Topic 1.)

B. \* The beautifuls sunsets make Laguanda happy. **This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper)**

(Student no. 10; Topic 2.)

C. \* Other example of the disadvantages is the bad influence on one's character.

(Student no. 2; Topic 2)

D. \* The meals weren't a healthy one.

(Student no. 12; Topic 1)

\* She will indeed see some strange habbit. *This is the original spelling taken from the student's Exam paper*

E. (Student no. 12; Topic 2)

#### **vi. Countable (Regular and Irregular) /Uncountable Nouns:**

ESL students can have difficulty distinguishing which nouns are countable and which are not. Our learners had problems with noun form. They used the singular instead of the plural may be to simplify their linguistic task. They also overgeneralized the use of the plural in some cases. In addition, there were errors of irregular plural that may be due to lack of knowledge of the rule.

A. \* The teacher gave me an advice.

(Student no. 2; Topic 1)

B. \* Beside mens who study out there are a lot of girls or womens who study out.

(Student no. 13; Topic 2)

C. \* There are many peoples who travel [...]

(Student no. 14; Topic 2)

#### **vii. Prepositions:**

There were many errors in learners' interlanguage under this category. Most of the errors were due to the students' lack of knowledge of the English prepositional system:

A. \* Should be to the one who has expereince on his life.

(Student no. 4; Topic 2)

B. \* [...] without knowing anything for the country.

(Student no. 7; Topic 2)

C. \* [...] to know the character of the people and how to react with them.

(Student no. 8; Topic 2)

D. \* I saw your ad at the newspaper.

(Student no. 2; Topic 1)

E. \* It also gives us more experience at our life.

(Student no. 28; Topic 2)

F. \* In the other side [...]

(Student no. 30; Topic 2)

G. \* Some of them go to outside the country.

(Student no. 23; Topic 1)

## **B. Frequency of Errors**

Frequency of errors will not be discussed here since it is out of the scope of this paper.

## **9. Discussion**

According to Widdowson (1986: 56), communication is a matter of transferring information of various kinds from the context of X's world knowledge to that of Y and those linguistic rules facilitate the transference. It is not enough to have knowledge of linguistic rules: one also needs knowledge of how to use them. Pincas and Hadfield (1993:5) state, "Writing is an instrument of both communication and self-expression"

Communicating with each other in writing is not the only reason to include writing as a part of our second-language syllabus. In fact, writing helps our students to learn in many different areas. First, it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that we have been teaching. Second, when writing, students have to be adventurous with the language, to go beyond what they have just learned to say, to take risks. Third, students become very involved with the new language and the effort to express ideas. They discover a real need for finding the right word and the right sentence. The close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of any language course (Raimes, 1983:3). Rabideau (1993:2) asserts, "Writing allows learners opportunities to experiment with the language and try different constructions to make themselves understood".

We would expect students to have the ability to express themselves effectively and logically only if these objectives were achieved. However, it is unrealistic to expect that many of the language learners entering the university will be able to make great strides toward original or creative writing unless they are particularly gifted. In fact, writing is a difficult skill for both native and nonnative speakers. Writers must balance different issues at the same time; e.g. content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, etc. "Writing is especially difficult for nonnative speakers because they are expected to create written products that demonstrate mastery of the [above mentioned issues] in a new language" (Abu Rass, 2001:30). However, all students can be helped toward writing for practical or functional purposes (letters, outlines, notes, summaries) and for creative self-expression to the best of their ability.

***How long before writing skill is introduced?*** The answer will depend on several factors: (1) the students' age upon entering the writing course; (2) their degree of literacy in English; and (3) the writing system in their native language (Finocchiaro, 1969). For the first and second factors, answers are given in *Empirical Data (Refer to item 3 of the Present Study)*. However, for the third factor Arabs learning English find more difficulty in learning the writing system of English than native speakers of Romance languages; e.g. French, Spanish and Italian (Thompson-Panos and Thomas- Ruzic, 1983). The Roman alphabet is different from the Arabic alphabet. Arabic has 28 characters while English has 26. In Arabic, there is no distinction between print and script and between upper case and lower case letters. Arabic, unlike English, is written by a series of strokes rather than continuous flow. All these differences are important in speed of writing. Koda (1999), investigating the differences among adult English learners with alphabetic and non-alphabetic L1 backgrounds in understanding the internal orthographic structure of words, concluded that when designing materials or curricula for L2 instruction, educators need to take the L1 backgrounds of their students into account rather than using materials developed for native speakers of the language.

Now let us turn to another important issue in teaching writing, which is **Methods of Teaching Writing**. There are several approaches to teaching writing that are presented by (Raimes, 1983) as follows:

#### a-The Controlled-to-Free Approach

In the 1950s and early 1960, the audio-lingual method dominated second-language learning. This method emphasized speech and writing served to achieve mastery of grammatical and syntactic forms. Hence, teachers developed and used techniques to enable student to achieve this mastery. The controlled-to-free approach is sequential: students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words to clauses or combine sentences. With these controlled compositions, it is relatively easy to for students write and yet avoid errors, which makes error correction easy. Students are allowed to try some free composition after they have reached an intermediate level of proficiency. As such, this approach stress on grammar, syntax, and mechanics. It emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency or originality.

#### b-The Free-Writing Approach

This approach stresses writing quantity rather than quality. Teachers who use this approach assign vast amounts of free writing on given topics with only minimal correction. The emphasis in this approach is on content and fluency rather than on accuracy and form. Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy and organization follow. Thus, teachers may begin their classes by asking students to write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes. The teachers do not correct these pieces of free writing. They simply read them and may comment on the ideas the writer expressed. Alternatively, some students may volunteer to read their own writing aloud to the class. Concern for “audience” and “content” are seen as important in this approach.

#### c-The Paragraph-Pattern Approach

Instead of accuracy of grammar or fluency of content, the Paragraph-Pattern-Approach stresses on organization. Students copy paragraphs and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into paragraph order. They identify general and specific statements and choose to invent an appropriate topic sentence or insert or delete sentences. This approach is based on the principle that in different cultures people construct and organize communication with each other in different ways.

#### d-The Grammar-Syntax-Organization Approach

This approach stresses on simultaneous work on more than one composition feature. Teachers who follow this approach maintain that writing cannot be seen as composed of separate skills that are learned sequentially. Therefore, student should be trained to pay attention to organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. This approach links the purpose of writing to the forms that are needed to convey message.

#### e-The Communicative Approach

This approach stresses the purpose of writing and the audience for it. Student writers are encouraged to behave like writers in real life and ask themselves the crucial questions about purpose and audience:

Why am I writing this?  
Who will read it?

Traditionally, the teacher alone has been the audience for student writing. Nevertheless, some feel that writers do their best when writing is truly a communicative act, with a writer writing for a real reader. As such, the readership may be extended to classmates and pen pals.

### f-The Process Approach

In this approach, the teaching of writing moves away from a concentration on written product to an emphasis on the process of writing. Thus, writers ask themselves:

How do I write this? / How do I get started?

Students are trained to generate ideas for writing, think of the purpose and audience, and write multiple drafts in order to present written products that communicate their own ideas. Teachers who use this approach give students time to try ideas and feedback on the content of what they write in their drafts. As such, writing becomes a process of discovery for the students as they discover new ideas and new language forms to express them. Furthermore, learning to write is seen as a developmental process that helps students to write as professional authors do, choosing their own topics and genres, and writing from their own experiences or observations. A writing process approach requires that teachers give students greater responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning. Students make decisions about genre and choice of topics, and collaborate as they write.

During the writing process, students engage in pre-writing, planning, drafting, and post-writing activities. However, as the writing process is recursive in nature, they do not necessarily engage in these activities in that order.

## **10. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

Writing is a dynamic, nonlinear process. It proceeds at its own pace. It involves multiple processes. Therefore, it is obvious that not everyone can become a writer. However, everyone can learn to write better and to write, well organized, flowing essays with clear language. Students must be given what any writer needs, an understanding of their capacity to write, motivation, self-confidence and courage.

**Motivation** is a very important factor in teaching writing. It is probably the longest stage in this process. Motivating students is somewhat like being parents to a baby that has taken a first step. A first baby step brings with it claps and screams of joy even though the step is not perfect. A positive reaction from parents will get the baby to attempt another step, just as a positive reaction from the teacher will get students to go a step further. Without realizing it with each step the student will gain courage. Tasks that allow students to narrow down their expectations and move systematically toward the final goal of success, will show them what they can do rather than what they cannot. According to Krashen (1982), learning takes place only when we teach (i+1), therefore each writing task should be set at a level

higher than the previous one. Thus with each task students will build confidence and become motivated to move on to the next step.

Once motivation has taken the student gradually toward higher achievement and self-confidence, fear and insecurity will have been replaced with courage and students will feel the need to show what they can do. Maintaining student courage at a specific level is very important. If students have been pushed toward unattainable goals then they will have gained a false sense of courage and their initial attempt at the final goal will bring disappointment to both the teacher and the student. If all steps in the motivation stage were attainable given the student's ability, then by the time students have reached the final goal they will have the necessary courage to attempt writing that final essay.

It is true that focusing merely on grammar and sentence structure is not the key to making better writers of our students. However, students should have workshops focus on usage and mechanics in the writing classroom: i.e. how to introduce, explore and assess elements such as grammar and sentence structure so that students are able to improve their writing by applying what they learn to what they write. They must have a grasp of the correct usage to apply in appropriate situations.

Some important elements a writing teacher needs to consider (among others) are the objectives and the outcomes from the course s/he is teaching. Objectives are established according to our learners' needs. There are always various purposes as well as different audiences. A good course plan helps the teacher puts his/her goals for the year into action.

As it is well known not every student writes at the same level due to individual variations. Therefore, teachers must meet students at their level of ability and move them forward. Teachers should always remember that their students are not identical. They have to allow for individual variation. Success in writing for each student should be measured by individual realistic goals set at the onset of the process. These goals should be attainable by the student given the student's capacity to write. At this stage, students should no longer be comparing their writing to those of people who have a better grasp of the art. It is also important that students understand that the level of writing they have achieved in English may not equal their ability to write in a native language. With time and effort that may be the next goal for the student to aim for.

Another important issue is the method of teaching. The Writing method should reflect our needs. The writing activities need to be simple and predictable so that students can be active and playful. Teachers may plan some mini-lessons for the class because the teacher has determined the need for students to have specific information that supports their learning or the unit of study. In addition, teachers should keep records (lesson plan sheets, checklists) of mini lesson topics to whom were they presented.

Supporting and Managing the Writing Process is another essential issue that teachers should take into consideration when teaching writing. Teachers should take time to ensure that students understand how the classroom structure and instructional activities work together in a writing process workshop. During the writing workshop, the teacher plays an interactive role and builds scaffolds when needed. It is also important to create an atmosphere that allows and encourages students to feel safe taking risks in order to develop a community of writers who support each other and share with each other (the teacher is a part of this community)( <http://www.learner.org>.)

Providing feedback on students writing is an important constituent in teaching writing. In fact, as much as students need the opportunity to write, teachers also need the opportunity to respond to that writing. Teachers can use different ways of feedback. They can respond to student work in writing or through personal conversation. It is always helpful to provide writing rubrics for the students since they need to know how their work will be evaluated and assessed.

Writing and technology is one of the most developing areas nowadays. Many articles and books explore the relationship between rhetoric, technology and pedagogy. It is always helpful to encourage students to use different activities and strategies to improve their writing e.g. keep a journal, get a pen-friend, keep copies of everything you write, use a word processor, ... etc (refer to Ellis and Sinclair 1991: 106). In fact using computers to teach writing is very popular nowadays. As Cook (cited in King: 1997:2) suggests "there's more to computer technology than simply word processing software, and if you're not using it, you're missing out on some exciting and valuable ways of teaching writing." Computers can be used to teach writing effectively in many different ways e.g. word processing for writing and revising, e-mail for peer response, journal writing, online class discussion, and communication ( King op. cit). Belisle, (1996:1) listed different email writing activities from which his students (Japanese English majors) benefited. The implication of this approach, then, is that teachers should require frequent writing exercises from their students. Teachers need to spend a great deal of time checking, marking and giving feedback to their students. If we are serious about improving writing, teachers should have an idea of each student's individual writing problems and this is not at all an easy task.

Internet resources are also extremely valuable especially that many of our students are using the Internet. Tennant (2001) listed a number of online resources that are available.

There is no doubt that a departmental library with books, periodicals and magazines on many subjects of interest and on many ability levels will contribute to the development of a love for reading- the fundamental prerequisite for further language growth.

It is very helpful to ask other writing teachers about whatever is in your mind as a writing teacher. Meeting and exchanging thoughts and ideas are important for learners as well as teachers.

As it could be noticed, the implications are general and might apply to any writing course and to all SL learners. This is however inevitable, since errors of second language learners are similar. Therefore, the implications are similar. Certainly, they are not identical. Some of these implications could be suitable for some learners and not for the others. This depends on many different factors; for example, the learning environment, the learners themselves, the teachers, etc.

In addition to the above mentioned implications, there are more specific ones for the subjects in the present study. In a departmental meeting, Moody (2000:1), states that " issues concerned with improvements to the teaching in the English Department can be considered in two ways: (1) What should be done in the individual writing courses and (2) What should be done in regard to the overall teaching programme to improve students' writing abilities." It was suggested that all linguistics and literature courses should demand a piece of writing, e.g. a paper, a project or a review. Another suggestion was to closely coordinate items/ structures in other relevant courses at the department; e.g. grammar, reading, core course and so forth. As a result of the learners' weakness in writhing, a helping course was designed for

them to help those who are having difficulty in coping with writing assignments ( refer to Appendix 6).

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**APPENDIX 1**

January 15, 2001  
.....  
Autumn 2000/2001  
.....

Writing 114:  
Final Examination

Name:  
Group:

(I) You have just come back from England, where you took a language course at a summer school. below is the advertisement you saw before you went.

**Oxford House School of English**

Based in the beautiful English countryside

- \* Special eight - week advanced courses for university students.
- \* Free course materials and use of library and language lab.
- \* Accommodation with an English family with two meals a day.
- \* Sports and social activities (all included in your fees)
- \* All teachers are qualified and experienced native speakers.
- \* Maximum 10 students per group.

For further information/registration write to:

Oxford House School of English, 14

Victoria Street, Plymouth, UK

However, you were disappointed because your course was not as advertised. Write a letter to the school director complaining about four different things you were not satisfied with. Explain the problems in detail and suggest what he/she can do to make you happy. (20 marks)

(II). Write on one of the following topics: (30 marks).

- a. The advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad. 350-400 Words).

You can talk about the cost, cultural issues, academic benefits or difficulties, influence on one's character and influence on one's native country.

- b. Write a narrative (400-500 words) about the following series of events.

1. Labongo was the chief of a village.
2. One year, the village witnessed a horrible famine.
3. Ndhiti, the medicine-man, told Labongo that his ancestors appeared to him in his dream and told him that in order for the rain to fall, Labongo had to sacrifice his only daughter Oganda.
4. The chief was dismayed, but he had to obey the will of his forefathers if he wanted his people to survive.
5. He told Oganda. She was horrified, but she yielded to the desire of her ancestors.
6. On the assigned day, all people gathered to bid her farewell except Osinda, the young man whom she loved.
7. The people of the village sent her to the desert and asked her to keep walking till she arrived near the river where she should drown herself.
8. She kept walking until she arrived near the river.
9. She felt someone walking behind her.
10. It was Osinda. They fled away.
11. That night, rain fell heavily.

**Note:** Your work will be evaluated for:

1. Layout
2. Structure, punctuation and spelling.
3. Logic and coherence
4. Style

We wish you the best of luck



**APPENDIX 2**

Number of Student	First Topic 20 Marks	Second Topic 30 Marks	Total 50 Marks
1	14	20	34
2	15	20	35
3	15	22	37
4	12	15	27
5	15	20	35
6	12	12	24
7	12	15	27
8	12	20	32
9	15	23	38
10	18	25	43
11	17	25	42
12	14	20	34
13	12	20	32
14	18	22	40
15	13	15	28
16	13	12	25
17	15	20	35
18	13	15	28
19	15	22	37
20	12	17	29
21	13	10	23
22	14	14	28
23	9	14	23
24	12	10	22
25	16	22	38
26	17	23	40
27	15	15	30
28	10	15	25
29	19	27	46
30	14	15	29
31	12	17	29
32	13	12	25
33	15	22	37
34	15	22	37
35	13	23	36
36	5	10	15
37	14	20	34
38	18	20	38
39	15	20	35
40	10	15	25

### APPENDIX 3

#### BA 212114 Writing, (1)

2 credit hours, 4 contact hours, prerequisite: none

The goal of this course is the writing of paragraphs. Students will work on sentences and the combination of sentences, paying additional attention to punctuation and spelling. They will also work on the discovery or creation of ideas and in organizing them into paragraphs showing clear topics, developmental points and conclusions.

#### BA 212115 Writing, (2)

2 credit hours, 4 contact hours, prerequisite: *BA 212114 Writing (1)*

Building on the paragraph-writing skills of BA Writing (1), this course will concentrate on short essays of three paragraphs. The students will develop their abilities further to construct more complex sentences and to combine them using suitable transitions. The course will move toward more formal outlining or organizing ideas into clearly stated themes, or purpose, supporting statements and conclusionary remarks.

#### BA212214 Advanced Writing

2 credit hours, 4 contact hours, prerequisite: *BA 212115 Writing (2)*

The course will focus on the development of more elaborate essays of five paragraphs or more. Students will continue to develop the skills begun in *BA Writing (2)* and will be introduced to the conventions of incorporating references into their essays.

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **UNIVERSITY OF QATAR DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND MODERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES**

**AUTUMN SEMESTER, 2002**

**COURSE: 212114 (WRITING 1)**

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The goal of this course is the writing of paragraphs. Students will work on sentences and the combination of sentence, paying additional attention to punctuation and spelling. They will also work on the discovery and creation of ideas and on organizing them into paragraphs, showing clear topics, development, points and conclusion.

(The course meets three times each week, for a total of four hours per week.)

#### **DEPARTMENTAL OBJECTIVES**

- To provide students .  
with a broad  
grounding in English |  
language,  
translation, linguistics, English Literature and research methodologies as a platform for a  
variety of professional careers and community  
service.
- To cultivate creativity and critical thinking.

#### **PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES**

##### **1. Language**

Developing all four basic communication skills in English.

##### **2. Linguistics**

- Familiarizing students with linguistics, its sub branches, applications, and relations with other disciplines.
- Training students to do research.

##### **3. Translation**

- Enabling students to translate texts from English into Arabic and vice versa.

##### **4. Literature**

- Familiarizing students with the various literary genres in their historical, cultural and artistic contexts.
- Appreciating literary texts of diverse genres.
- Training students to do research.

#### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

##### **1. Language**

- 1.1. Perform in speaking,  
listening and reading  
activities.
- 1.2. Identify sentence elements, their inter-relationships, and apply the proper syntactic rules to grasp meaning
- 1.3. Identify words and their structure in context
- 1.4. Understand and produce written English.



1.5. Understand and produce oral English.

**2. Linguistics**

- 2.1. Develop some ability to analyse and describe sound and language structure.
- 2.2. Develop some understanding of language function and its role in social contexts.
- 2.3. Develop some understanding of language change.
- 2.4. Write a properly-documented research paper in linguistics.

**3. Translation**

Translate texts from English into Arabic and vice versa.

**4. Literature**

- 4.1. Distinguish the periods and development of English literature in its artistic, social and intellectual context.
- 4.2. Distinguish the periods of American literature and cultural, artistic and social characteristics.
- 4.3. Develop aesthetic appreciation of English prose, poetry, novel and drama.
- 4.4. Write a properly documented research paper in literature.

**APPENDIX 5**

**UNIVERSITY OF QATAR  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND MODERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES**

**COURSE: ENGLISH 114 (WRITING 1)**

**REQUIREMENTS FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS**

The following requirements must be observed for all written assignments:

1. Only A4 lined white paper is to be used. Smaller sizes and other colours are not acceptable.
2. No decorations or fancy borders are to appear on the paper. Perforated paper is not allowed.
3. If more than one sheet of paper is needed, the sheets must be numbered at the top of each page, in the middle, and stapled together in the **top left-hand corner**. Paper clips should **not** be used.
4. Students should write clearly the following information in the **top right-hand corner** of the first page: their full name (as it appears on the class registration list), the course number (E114), their group number, and the date.
5. Space should be left between the lines on the paper, by skipping a line, for the instructor's comments.
6. All assignments must be handwritten. Typed work will not be accepted.

7. Dark coloured ink (blue or black) should be used. Light coloured or shiny ink should not be used.
8. Assignments must be handed in by the date required. Extensions can only be granted by the instructor in exceptional circumstances and after consultation with the student, preferably **before** the date due.

**NOTE:** Students should keep all returned and marked assignments. These will be important for revision and to keep track of your specific writing problems and your progress

## APPENDIX 6

### THE UNIVERSITY OF QAT AR DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AUTUMN SEMESTER, 2006

#### HELP WITH WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

**TO: Members of Staff**  
**9<sup>TH</sup> October 2006**

**FROM: James Moody**

Please refer to me students who you think need help with writing assignments. Could you let me have the following information for these students?

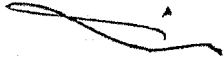
1. Her[ name and computer number
2. The course she is taking with you (number and name)
3. The assignment(s)! question(s) she has been given
4. A photocopy of the answer(s) she has submitted, together with your markings! corrections
5. The nature of her writing problem as clearly as you can define it (handwriting, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, coherence, organization, logic, etc.) and what you would like her to be able to do
6. If possible a copy of a sample text which you believe fulfils the requirements of the assignment-perhaps a copy of the work of a student who did well on the same assignment

Please tell the student to see me in Room 206, during my office hours, as follows, so that we can arrange a time to meet to develop a strategy for dealing with her problems.

Sundays - third and fourth periods Mondays -

second and fourth periods Tuesdays - third  
and fourth periods Wednesdays - second and  
fourth periods Thursdays - fourth period

I shall keep you informed of the student's work and progress.



James Moody