In the Name of God,

the Compassionate, the Merciful

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THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG EFL LEARNERS' AUTONOMY, FIRST LANGUAGE ESSAY WRITING TASKS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ESSAY WRITING TASKS IN TASK/CONTENT BASED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

The ability of composing a coherent and extended piece of writing in second language is considered as a fundamental factor to convey information and ideas of learners through the academic issues. Although learners may achieve a perfect academic writing skill through assigning the L2 tasks in Content Based Instruction, but demonstration of their abilities may be related to their ability in L1 essay writing and their level of autonomy. The purpose of the present study was investigating the relationship among EFL learners' autonomy, first language essay writing and second language essay writing in Task/Content Based Instruction. To this aim first, 145 EFL university students (99 female and 46male) of Teaching and Translation English of two branches of Islamic Azad Universities, were selected based on of their performance on a sample of piloted TOEFL test and a sample test of written English (TWE) from among 210 participants at advanced level. Subsequently, a piloted autonomy questionnaire and eight L1 and L2 essay writing tests were administered (four tests of essay writing in L2 and four tests of essay writing in L1). Correlation and regression analyses were used to analyze the data. Consequently, the results of this research revealed that, there is a positive and significant relationship among EFL learners' autonomy, first language essay writing and second language essay writing in Task/Content Based Instruction. Also it was shown in the data analysis that autonomy was a better predictor of English essay writing as compared to Persian essay writing.

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CHAPTER I

Background and purpose

1.1 Introduction

Learner autonomy has been considered as an essential part of learning in the last ten years based on the learners themselves, their needs, interests and reasons to learn a subject (Guevara de Leon, 2010). The word "learner autonomy" was first created in 1981 by Holec, as the father of learner autonomy. It has been considered as a personal characteristic, or as an educational step, because autonomy seems as a means or as an end in education. The definition of learner autonomy by Holec (1981) is :"to take charge of one's own learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e. determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.) , evaluating what has been acquired" (p.3).Little (1995) argues that autonomy is not only for the way of learning but: "essentially, autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of this learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way learner learns and in the way he/she transfers what

has been learned to wider contexts" (p. 124).As Benson (2001) mentions there are some approaches to learner autonomy like resource based approaches, technology based approaches, learner based approaches, classroom based approaches, curriculum based approaches, and teacher based approaches. These approaches show more consideration and attention shifting methodologies from teachers to students. This shift is known as a move from teacher centered instruction to learner centered instruction, and also showing greater attention on the learning process rather than products, so there is a shifting from product oriented to process oriented instruction through the learning process. Content Based Instruction and Task Based Instruction are also as approaches which include some aspects of language instruction to develop learners' communicative competence in the process oriented instruction. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), Content-based instruction (CBI) approach in second language teaching is based on content or knowledge that students will acquire, instead of linguistic syllabus learning. Content in Content-based instruction consists of the information that is learnt through communication activities rather than language use. According to Nunan (2004), Task Based Language Teaching (TBLI) is also an approach that is included some activities which help facilitating and increasing learner autonomy by using the tasks.

Decision making and classroom autonomy will happen while doing the tasks by learners. Also as Nunan (2004) notes, a task is: "a piece of classroom

work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand along as a communicative act in its own right" (p.4).Nunan (2004) adds, integrating TBLI and CBI is a united effort to learning the four skills as well as making promotion in language learning in the real situation, not just the dissection of language forms, so TBLI and CBI principals are related to common objectives of second language learning, therefore, there can be combination of TBLI and CBI as Task/content Based method.Also "The theatrical importance of CBI is that learners can interact with authentic contextualized, linguistically challenging materials in a communicative and academic context" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p.4).Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) define CBI as "the integration of particular content with language teaching aims, or as the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills "(p. 2). Moreover, according to Oxford (2001), although the nature of the content may be different in the proficiency levels but CBI is precious at all levels of proficiency. For example, the content in beginner courses needs to basic social and interpersonal communication skills, but the content at intermediate or advanced proficiency levels, can be more academic in nature.

Also, according to Sherris (2008), the academic language consists of the concepts, key vocabulary, grammar and discourse as the necessity to assigning the tasks, moreover, second language learners can develop their speaking ,writing skills and proficiency in understanding and producing the types of texts specific to that area through integrating content and language instruction. As Oxford (2001) about integrating approach notes, "learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. Moreover, this approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people"(p.5). Shih (1986) states " Five approaches for structuring content-based writing instruction are defined: topic-centered modules or minicourses, content-based academic writing courses (reading and writing intensive), content centered English for special purposes courses, composition or multiskill courses/tutorials as adjuncts to designated university courses, and individualized help with course-related writing at times of need (through faculty in writing across the curriculum programs, tutors, and writing center staff)" (p.617).

Moreover, according to Myles (2002), obviously, the four language skills are the main parts of EFL classes and the ability of speaking and writing second language among them are as more important skills to communication and writing in second language learning is more standard system than speaking,

listening and reading for education through special instruction or as communicative competence tool. According to Maftoon and Akef (2010), creating "a coherent and extended piece of L2 writing" seems as the most difficult tasks and mastery in writing among the four major language skills for native speakers is hard too. On the language learners point of view writing seems as a highly difficult and challenging task in academic purposes. Also Bereiter and Scardmalia (1987) believed that the act of composing in a second language about new ideas in academic contexts can be difficult because of transforming information .The writer engages in a two–way interaction between developing knowledge and developing text by solving problems and gathering concepts. As Weigle (2002) notes: "Thus ,in first language education ,learning to write involves learning a specialized version of a language already known to students ….The value of being able to write effectively increases as students progress through compulsory education on to higher education …In first language writing instruction, therefore , particularly in higher education ,a great deal of emphasis is placed on originality of thought ,the development of ideas ,and the soundness of the writers' logic…In contrast, the same cannot be said of second –language writing because of the wide variety of the situations in which people learn and use second language ,both as children and adults , in schools and in other settings" (pp.4, 5).As Silva (1993) states, L1 and L2 writings are similar in their outlines so both L1 and L2 writers maintain their ideas, repeat composing process, planning writing and find the appropriate "rhetorical" and

"linguistic means" to explain them. The similarities between the strategies of first language essay writing (L1 essay writing) and second language essay writing (L2 essay writing) may be related to each other and learner autonomy too. As a result according to Nunan (2004), combining TBLI and CBI is as a communicative method which establishes tasks in Task Based Instruction through content in Content Based Instruction and may improve and develop the communicative objectives such as improving writing ability and learner autonomy too ,so the present study investigated the relationship among EFL learners' autonomy, first language essay writing tasks and second language essay writing tasks in Task/Content Based Language Instruction which may help to draw curriculum designers attention more about instruction in second language learning.

1.2 Statement of the problem and the Purpose of the Study

Writing has long been a problem among the four language skills for EFL learners, even those who are at high language proficiency. As Myles (2002) states, "It is undoubtedly the act of composing, though, which can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language (L2) in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling" (p.1).Moreover, according to Hashemnezhad and Hashemnezhad (2012), Scholars and researchers carried out the research about

the complexity of L2 writing and its relationship to other factors like L1 writing, also Hashemnezhad. and Hashemnezhad (2012) state, "With the development of second language literacy research, writing in ESL/EFL settings has gained much attention. Scholars and researchers are trying to find ways of teaching writing to a growing number of ESL and EFL students".(p.723). Furthermore, Langan (2005) states: "Writing in a second language is a complex, challenging, and difficult process. This difficulty and complexity arise from the fact that writing includes discovering a thesis, developing support for it, organizing, revising, and finally editing it to ensure an effective, error-free piece of writing" (cited in Alsamadani, 2010, p.53). Also there are some attitudes about the role of autonomy in learning and autonomous learning such as, "the keystones of autonomous learning are reflection and self-evaluation. This includes planning, considering and setting goals, making decisions about methodology, working in authentic situations and, finally, continuously evaluating the learning process and progress" (Karlsson, Kjisik, and Nordlund, 2007, cited in Fahim and Behdani, 2011, p .62). As a result the effective management of learning depends directly on the control of decision-making related to the content of learning or creating a coherent piece of writing in L1 and l2. According to Schumenk (2005), there are three levels of important descriptions of autonomy which seem suitable for learners to exercise control, a) "the management of learning" b) "the cognitive processes," and c) "the content of learning" (cited in Fahim and Behdani, 2011, P. 63). As Khabiri and Tonekaboni (2009) note, "foreign

language learners, especially those who want to continue their education in academic contexts, usually find writing a highly difficult and challenging task. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that most students receive minimal or no instruction in learning how to write" (p.54).Although the problem can see in the academic contexts and instruction but the other part of difficulty is in the students mind as Alsamadani (2010) states, because "various oral and written L1elements are transferred during L2 linguistic production" (p.53). "Whether L1 writing processes are different from L2 writing processes has long been a controversial issue in L2 writing research" (Casanava, 2004, cited in Zare-ee and Farvardin 2009, p.144). Consequently, the main purpose of the present study was to determine whether there is relationship among EFL learners' autonomy, first language essay writing and second language essay writing in Task/Content Based Language Instruction which may help curriculum designers, EFL teachers and L2 instructors to solve the problems about essay writing instruction in academic issues.

1.3 Statement of the Research Question

Q: Is there any significant relationship among EFL learners' autonomy, first language essay writing and second language essay writing in Task/Content Based Language Instruction?