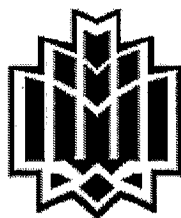


In the Name of the Most High

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Thesis title:

**The Effect of
Creative Writing Instruction on
Lexical Density
of Advanced EFL Learners' Writing**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts(MA) in Teaching English as a
Foreign Language(TEFL)

Department of Foreign Languages

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We certify that this thesis entitled "The Effect of Creative Writing Instruction on Lexical Density of Advanced EFL Learners' Writing" by Saeedeh Zokaei is accepted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts(MA) in Teaching English as a Foreign Language(TEFL)

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To :
My Family
With Love and Respect

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Abstract

This study investigated the probable changes in lexical density of two groups of 50 EFL learners' writings after a 10 session treatment of writing. These students of English Literature studying at Sabzevar Tarbiat Moallem University were available samples to participate in this study. One group was randomly chosen as the experimental group (n=20) and the other one as the control group (n=30). The participants in the experimental group were taught techniques like narrative structure in writing short stories and its specific elements like character development, conflict/plot, setting, point-of-view based on a creative writing task. Finally, they were required to write a short story based on a poem named "A Child Half-Asleep". These short stories were the focal point of the data analysis. The study specifically focused on lexical density as the main criterion to judge the lexical complexity of the written text. It was measured by dividing the lexical words to the total number of words. Statistical analysis of the data using a series of independent and matched t-tests showed no significant changes in lexical density of creative writing class after the treatment. Students in control group followed the principles of current- traditional approach. They showed a slight increase in the lexical density of their writings.

In spite of the fact that students in creative writing class wrote longer texts in terms of number of words, lexical density of their written products did not increase. The findings promise some pedagogical implications for those who look for enhancing second language writing development through creative writing.

Key words: Lexical density, lexical words, function words, current traditional rhetoric approach, creative writing, short story

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Being literate is the ability to participate in communication, both orally and in writing. Participating in written communication involves reading and writing. This means that while reading, a person actively mobilizes one's background knowledge in order to negotiate or to comprehend a text, and while writing, one needs to make use of the same knowledge to create a text. Writing has been regarded as the definite sign of literacy (Rivers, 1981, p.291). As Chastain (1988, p.244) holds, "writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language." He adds, "Writing, like listening, is often slighted in language classes. Especially since the inception of audio-lingual movement, the oral skills have received major attention and writing has been considered less important"(ibid, pp.244-245). Actually, writing has been put at the bottom of the hierarchy of language teaching. Silva (1990, p.12) notes that "In the early years of applied linguistics, writing was not considered to be one of the proper goals of language learning. Writing was used only to the extent that it assisted the learning of speech. It was assumed that anyone who had the knowledge of spelling and grammar would be able to write." But writing is a complex activity which needs a complex basket of skills, from the mechanistic skills of making marks on paper, through careful editing to essential text revision. In addition, during the history of language teaching, finding a way to enhance writing skill has been the subject of so many

studies (Messenger, 1989; Frodesen, 2001; Kroll, 2001; Olshtain, 2001; Reid, 2001, to cite a few).

Just as there are different attitudes toward the nature of language, there are different approaches to teaching writing to second or foreign language learners like free writing, process writing, paragraph writing, etc. Creative writing is not a new name among these approaches, Creative writing creates comfort and confidence in the mind of the student. Through creating new writing habits, the student overcomes the fear of writing and possibilities for creativity and growth open up. The ultimate goal of creative writing is to help students explore their creativity and follow what professional writers usually use it. The purpose here is to free the students from the disabling restrictions they have suffered in writing classes.

People are attracted to what interests them, so students will naturally want to explore personal interests. This simple observation is the foundation of creative writing. Macrorie (1980), a renowned writing process theorist, maintains that writing activities should stem from students' interest so that education can take advantage of a natural need-to-know inclination in the human heart. Exploratory writing begins the creative writing process.

Creative writing can be defined as an academic discipline of training people to write as an art (Coolney, 2003). It provides opportunities for students and writers to study and practice fiction and nonfiction. They may

write poetry, personal stories, animal stories, etc. The creative writing tasks aim at teaching the skills necessary for this kind of writing. The main purposes for creative writing are to train professional writers, to do some literary writing and develop writing as a means of self-expression. Creating poems from stories and vice versa is an example of creative writing tasks. As Coolney (2003) maintains,

A creative writing task approaches writing as an activity which tries to help students express ones' ideas through literary forms like poetry, prose, short story, drama, etc. Creative writing aims at training professional writers, developing communication skills, developing creativity and illuminating criticism . In this way, it is going to provide the writers opportunities to write in a different way , in which the focus is on literature. (pp. 99-103)

In exploring the benefits of using creative writing activities, five key benefits are identified. Austen (2005, p.139) mentions them as:

Creative writing (1) dispels the awe of literature and creates active learners; (2) develops critical readers; (3) furthers student understanding of literary criticism; (4) inspires deeper commitment to excellence; and (5) motivates class bonding and dismantles the classroom hierarchy.

1.2. Statement of the problem

While writing is interlocked with learning, many L2 students don't know really how to write and put their ideas together. Writing has been at the bottom of the hierarchy of teaching: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Moreover, writing has not achieved its right place among other skills as Reid (2001) says, "even as late as 1970s , L2 writing was not viewed as a language skill to be taught to the learners It was used as a support for skill in language learning "(cited in Carter & Nunan 2002: 29). Many students in Iran don't know why they are writing (Birjandi et al. 2004, p.3). The reason might be the lack of sufficient exposure to native speakers of English or the great need for speaking rather than writing.

The study of the literature of a foreign language is valuable for students of that language. In addition to the introduction to the foreign culture, it provides students with extensive authentic passages in a wide range of contexts. Moreover, reading literature improves their command of foreign language if the passages are slightly beyond their current reading level (Lewis, 1999, p.198). Literary writing is a subset of creative writing.

Language learners' problems in writing and finding ways to solve these problems have been an open field in the domain of language teaching. During the history of language teaching a lot of time and energy has been invested on finding some practical and effective solutions to the existing

problems of writing. To do so, new methods and approaches were introduced among which creative writing is one. The principal reason for these methods is the observed inadequacies of previous ones, which is reflected in writing classes.

Creative writing lets the students feel free from all the restrictions and conventions imposed by other approaches to writing. Students use writing as a means of self-expression to express themselves. As Doloughan (2006) from Institute of Education, University of London asserts ,
".... What has perhaps been less well documented to date is the challenge posed to strict constructionist views of academic discourse by writing in the creative disciplines. This challenge is both timely and inevitable given the competing interests at stake: the demands of rational argumentation and sequenced presentation of ideas on the one hand and the desire for cognitive and stylistic flexibility and freedom from constraint on the other."

On the other hand, students improve their knowledge of English through writing and rewriting activities, fostering syntactic and lexical development and through discussion of their work. Therefore, if writing in certain contexts is seen as a tool for general language improvement, one area in which it may be of especial value is vocabulary. Even though receptive vocabulary develops through a variety of sources, Laufer (1998) claimed that productive vocabulary does not necessarily develop. Converting receptive vocabulary into productive vocabulary is the final

stage of vocabulary learning (Brown and Payne, 1994), and a writing course would be the obvious place for this to happen. Writing allows for greater experimentation with productive use of new words than speaking does, as students have greater use of resources such as dictionaries and time. This extra time which writers have available to them may also enable them to activate less frequent but more appropriate words which are in their passive vocabulary but not yet fully part of their active vocabulary (Corson, 1997, p. 699).

Assuming that a writing course could therefore have a valuable role to play in extending and consolidating students' vocabulary, it seems worthwhile investigating which techniques to writing show greater success in students' lexical development.

At the same time, finding objective measures for evaluating writing has been always an important issue. *Lexical density* is one of text characteristics which is a measure of how much information there is in a particular piece of writing. It is defined as the proportion of the content (lexical) words over the total words (McCarthy, 1990).

1.3. Research Questions & Null Hypothesis

In keeping with the objectives of the study, two basic research questions are dealt with:

1- Does creative writing have any effect on lexical density of advanced Iranian EFL learners' writings?

2- Is there any difference between lexical density of creative writing pieces and those of current traditional rhetoric approach?

1- Creative writing does has no effect on lexical density of advanced Iranian EFL learners' writing products.

2- There is no difference between lexical density of creative writing pieces and those of current-traditional rhetoric approach.

1.4. Significance of the study

The existing problems of writing are not inevitable but many approaches show some success among which creative writing is one. According to Applebee (1981) and Britton (1975) most of classroom writings are transactional that is to give some factual information to the teacher in a regular form. Therefore, there is no place for creativity of students to write as they like.

Creative writing, first proposed in 1970s, has tried to find another definition for writing. Marshal (1992) considers some aims for it:

To train professional writers; to develop communication skills, a good command of language; to do some literary writing; to develop imagination and creativity; to illuminate criticism by learning experientially about the construction of a text; and to teach literary writing.

Creative writing lets the students feel free from all restrictions they have had in the previous approaches to writing. It inspires the students to write as a means of self-expression. They are not required in creative writing class to satisfy teachers' demands. They write for themselves, to express themselves and introduce themselves through writing. Creative writing is more reflective in nature and open in form.

Monteith (1992) regards the problematic nature of creative writing and social pressure as factors that led some educationists to avoid its use. But she finally believes "creative writing should remain as an entity within new courses ". (p.26)

Austen (2005, p.181) in her study probed the value of using creative writing assignments as correlatives to the traditional essay assignment in university English literature courses. She argues that "Although the term creative writing can be interpreted to mean many different things, what I will take creative writing to mean is work that requires the writing of fiction, poetry, drama or various other breeds of literature creative writing assignments require students to write in the genres of literature that they are studying".

Crème and Hunt (2002, p.146) carried a study at Sussex University. Their subjects were eight students, and it was a qualitative study. They concluded that in their study participants felt more empowered with creativity and writing could be helpful in this way. Actually, students' attitudes toward writing had changed.

The relation between creative writing and sentence structure development in advanced Iranian EFL learners has been studied by Tatar (2004). He in his study has investigated the effect of creative writing instruction on syntactic complexity of learners' writing.

Laufer (1998) conducted a study to see if a process writing approach was useful in improving the vocabulary of students at a Japanese university. A timed composition, and the first and final drafts of a composition written through process writing, were analyzed using the Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP). The first and final drafts were also analyzed together. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the LFPs of the three compositions.

Up to now, lexical density of creative writing products has not been studied in university level. One of the purposes of creative writing is developing writing skill. On the other hand, lexical density is an objective measurement which can be used to estimate the difficulty level of a written text. This research aims at investigating whether having students receive and practice creative writing tasks and assignments has any role in their lexical density, i.e. number of lexical words per clause to show their improvement in writing .