Language Performance in Writing of Pre-Service Teachers Using Email

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Abstract: **Technologies like email promotes language learning and teaching. Accordingly, the following are the advantages for both teachers and students: first, when students use email in the classroom for language learning, they become familiar with the tool, especially how the tool would guide them to enhance their language learning; second, at more convenient times, a teacher could interact with a student or a group of students working on a project; finally, email saves time for some assignments (Rokni, 2013).**

This study aimed to find out the language performance in writing of selected e-mails of English major freshman to junior students of the College of Education. The writing inventory was used in assessing the writing activities of the respondents and analyzed on the different levels of language and lexical forms.

Results revealed that the level of language used by the students in this study varied ranging from inquiry to reactions, while organization, vocabulary, and mechanics adopted to the hybrid form of communication. On the lexical forms in their writing outputs, the students used short responses and code-switching.

Keywords: **Language performance, writing, electronic mails, writing inventory, levels of language, lexical forms.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Technologies like email promotes language learning and teaching. Accordingly, the following are the advantages for both teachers and students: first, when students use email in the classroom for language learning, they become familiar with the tool, especially how the tool would guide them to enhance their language learning; second, at more convenient times, a teacher could interact with a student or a group of students working on a project; finally, email saves time for some assignments (Rokni, 2013). In the study of Price and Petre (1997), they identified a number of advantages of electronic assignment handling as more efficient in administration, improved turnaround time, more environmentally friendly (paper less), and improved accountability and better assignment tracking and security. Furthermore, Barker, Fiedler, & Johnson (2008) confirmed in their study that students prefer a paperless approach to marking.

Likewise, the use of emails requires diverse skills and allows students the opportunity to communicate, collaborate and inform. While using computer technology, the students would have the chance to use many senses during the learning process. Further, the learners are able to receive feedback more easily, thus, developing their self-reliance skills (Hayati and Guran, 2014).

As Noraien (2007) postulates that email can be used in many forms of communication including informal discussions, dialogs, journal, and writing conferences. Communication with teachers or consulting with teachers is difficult because students are shy, however, through this medium, students may write more, ask more questions and use more language functions.

On the other hand, Gomaa (2010) posits that writing is an intricate and complex task, it is the most difficult of all the language abilities to acquire. The student's first language affects the learning of the target language, hence, they make mistakes and repeat them. Further, writing tasks require more elaboration and clarity compared to other skills.

Many students are able to understand the language but most of the students face the problem of communicating their ideas effectively (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000). Accordingly, the lack of adequate vocabulary and creativity in writing causes communication breakdown.

Pennington (1995) asserts that most Asian countries usually employ a traditionally product-oriented, examination-centered approach with strong emphasis on grammar. Traditional teacher-centered approaches may reflect the teachers' attempts to satisfy the needs and desires of students. However, the interest of the students for learning the language is for them to be highly competitive in standardized examinations.

Thus, there is a need to investigate and explore a new approach in writing that is away from teacher-centered and that is the use of email. Hence, this study aimed to explore the language performance in writing of selected emails of English major freshman to junior of the College of Education. Specifically, it answered the questions:

1. What is the level of language used by the BSE freshman to junior English major students of IFSU Main Campus considering the following: content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics?

2. What are observations on the lexical forms in the writing outputs of the students based on their interactive conversations?

II. METHOD

Research Design:

This was a qualitative-descriptive research. It made use of the writing inventory of the students as primary data.

Participants and Locale:

The participants of the study consisted of 39 students ranging from freshman to junior year in the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSE) program majoring in English of the College of Education. This institutional research was conducted at Ifugao State University, Main Campus, Lamut, Ifugao during the Second Semester 2015-2016.

Instrument:

The primary instrument used to gather the data was the screenshot copies of the students' interactive conversation using their email. The writing inventory prepared by the researchers was used to analyze the data. Areas considered in the writing inventory were content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The lexical form also was observed focusing on grammar.

Procedure:

The students enrolled for in semester were asked to voluntarily submit sample shots of their email conversations. The conversations were sorted according to topic. These were then analyzed based on their language level and lexical forms. Under levels of language, the content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics were analyzed. In addition, lexical forms included language use focusing on grammar.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Level of language used:

Content:

The writing inventory of the students revealed that their topics were varied, however, the most dominant discourse revolved around three areas namely invitation, inquiry and reactions, hence, discourse often start either with a question, an experience, or an inspirational quote.

Result complements Shen, et.al. (2007) statement that an email starting with a greeting helps create a friendly tone and an email that ends politely has endings such as "best regards". Other email writers used smileys to convey emotional content such as sarcasm, laughter and other feelings.

This implies that students can write but are often constrained by language limitations to include vocabulary and grammar but through emails, "the delay allows students time to think and compose a message". According to Kupelian (2001) this

delay reduces anxiety that students may otherwise feel if using other forms of communication, such as face-to-face encounters or conversations by telephone. As Shang (2007) revealed that through email tasks, students can have more practice in writing, more social interaction and communication with peers and more vocabulary to learn and more self-monitoring.

Hoffman as quoted by Shang mentioned that the "anonymous quality of network communication can be face-saving as well, relieving that learners of the inhibitions associated with face-to-face communications are able to express themselves more freely.

Organization:

The inventory revealed a hybrid form of communication exhibiting characteristics of both oral and written discourse. These attributes influence informal, causal structured messages sent via email with the permanence of a written document.

Shen, et.al. (2007) stated that there are no mandatory formulas for writing emails. Not all social and business emails feature exactly one format since emails strike a balance between the conventional format and the writer's own personal style. Crystal (2001) also posited that written materials mixed with oral elements included in email lead to messages that are more spontaneous, less inhibited, and more carefree than traditional written communication.

Vocabulary:

The non-standard form of English manifested in discourse was often used. Since the manner of writing is imitated, the manner of conversations, words used during the correspondence was a combination of L1 or the mother tongue and L2 or English. In addition, the conjugation of words followed the conjugation rules in their L1 or in Filipino. Further, the discourse reflected the use of onomatopoeia like hahaha, hihihi to imitate the act of laughing.

Mechanics:

Mechanics included rules on punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviation. Punctuation marks were used a lot; often, they were doubled e.g. double questions marks, double exclamation points and a combination of question and exclamation mark.

Lexical forms in the writing:

The writing inventory revealed short responses. Clauses and phrases were often used but punctuation marks were not used.

Moreover, articles, prepositions and conjunction were omitted and were substituted with a series of dots.

Evident also in the discourse was code switching; a discourse may start with L2 and end with L1 or may begin with L1 and end with L2. Similar with short message sending (SMS), the inventory revealed a series of discourse where words containing the vowels were clipped- the vowels were omitted.

It was also noted that writers are fond of using mixed language where part of the sentence was expressed using the L1 and the later part were written using their L2 then vice versa. The length of their composition also depended on the prompt or the topic they were discussing.

Because e-medium reduces the intimidation factor (Leibowitz,1999) and offers attractive features, it improves students attitudes towards writing and practicing the target language (Kupelian, 2001) and encourages students to produce more text (Trupe, 2002; Goldberg, et. al.,2003). In a study, Gonzalez and Perez (2001), they found that second language learners using e-mail for their dialogue journals generated more language than those who used pencil and paper.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Findings revealed that the level of language used by the students in this study considering content varied ranging from inquiry to reactions, while organization, vocabulary, and mechanics adopted to the hybrid form of communication. On the lexical forms in their writing outputs, the students used short responses and code-switching.

In writing pedagogy, email may be used as a means of conducting discussions and assessment. However, topics should be selected or agreed upon between and among students and with emphasis on academic writing. Also, short responses and code switching may be adopted during the prewriting process so that the learners would be able to generate many ideas that could be polished for the writing stage.

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