UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**COMPOSING THROUGH
THE TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUE**

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COMPOSING THROUGH THE TRANSFORMATION TECHNIQUE

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This project paper is an investigation of how language teachers can effectively utilise transformations of stories to motivate students to generate ideas, and write creatively a story of their own using what they have read as a guide or model. Twenty form one volunteers wrote two transformations based on the original story, "The Silkie." The transformations were then compared with the original story in terms of changes made.

This study indicates that transformations can be used in Malaysia as a means to motivate ESL students to generate ideas and increase their fluency in writing as students wrote interesting stories of their own using culturally familiar ideas. This study

also reveals that students can be trained to write, if fluency and not correctness is emphasised in the writing classroom.

Abstrak projek yang dikemukakan kepada Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan
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Ijazah Master Sains.

MENGARANG MELALUI TEKNIK TRANSFORMASI

Oleh

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FEBRUARI 1998

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Projek ini merupakan satu tinjauan bagaimana guru-guru boleh menggunakan teknik transformasi untuk menggalakkan murid-murid untuk melahirkan buah fikiran dan menulis cerita sendiri. Setiap daripada dua puluh sukarelawan tingkatan satu telah menulis dua transformasi dan hasil penulisan mereka dibandingkan dengan cerita asal bertajuk "The Silkie", untuk mengkaji perubahan yang dilakukan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa transformasi boleh digunakan di Malaysia untuk menggalakkan murid-murid Bahasa Inggeris untuk melahirkan buah fikiran dan menambahkan kelancaran menulis.Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa murid-murid boleh dilatih untuk menulis jika kelancaran dan bukan nahu yang betul, diberi tumpuan.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many students encounter difficulty when they have to write because they have not been given due attention, that is, they have very little coaching on how to write. It has been the accepted norm for teachers to give more emphasis on oral skills and grammar in the primary and lower secondary schools.

Writing is a difficult skill to master. Teachers themselves admit the need to improve this skill according to a verbal interview conducted by the researcher on five experienced teachers who have been teaching for more than ten years. Thus, it is evident that teachers also realise the need to help students in the writing process. According to Chitravelu (in Tickoo, 1994), writing research has not been given the priority that it deserves compared to other skills. She believes this was due to the change in the medium of instruction which made English play a minor role in education compared to Bahasa Melayu. Chitravelu feels that the writing skill is still mistaken as means of reinforcing grammar rather than the students understanding. This further reveals that there is a serious need to do research in writing to help students to write and guide teachers on how to teach writing.

According to the Unesco 1993 World Education Report, Malaysia's illiteracy rate was the highest in the ASEAN region at 21.6 percent. In the Education section of Sunday Mail dated 30th of June, 1996, it was reported that 2.39 million Malaysians aged 15 and above are not able to read and write. These findings are also in line with a statement made by Dato' Murad Mohd Noor at the Curricular Development Center on the 24th of October, 1981 (Ucapan di Upacara Penutup Orientasi KBSR, kepada Pegawai Pelajaran Negeri). He stated that fifty percent of the students failed to read, write or count even upon completion of their six year primary education. These revelations emphasise the need to motivate students to read and write in schools.

The four essential skills for communication in a language are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. While a normal child can acquire the skill of listening and speaking their first language or mother tongue, the child has to be taught to read and write. Learning to read is a complex, receptive skill which needs a lot of time and practice. In order to respond to a text a reader must understand the meaning of what has been written. Writing on the other hand, is a difficult, productive skill which requires the mastery of many sub- skills which also needs time and practice besides interest and motivation. Reading and writing are usually integrated and students find it difficult to do tasks with the combined use of these two skills.

Students who are weak are afraid of making mistakes or errors. Once the students are afraid of using the language in one skill, they will transfer the fear to other skills, making it difficult to teach them the language as their affective filters are high.

The students will lack self confidence. These students have to be given motivation to boost their confidence and self esteem so that they are willing to learn. One way of doing this is by providing materials that interest them and are suitable for their level.

Nuttal (1982) says that in order for a child to understand a reading text, the text must be written in familiar code or language and content, and at an appropriate level in terms of concepts and vocabulary. The teacher is therefore responsible for selecting reading texts that are suitable for her students and motivating them to read as much as possible. If we can tempt students to read and enjoy it, like Nuttal (1982) says, students will read more and escape the "vicious circle of the weak readers." If the students start reading, the teachers can introduce various kinds of reading materials for the students to read and enjoy while cultivating the reading habit.

Nuttal (1982) states that a writing task based on the reading text is a good and interesting way of testing if a reader has comprehended the text that has been read. However, Malaysian ESL students are apprehensive to write lest they make grammatical errors. Students can overcome their apprehension of writing if the teacher focuses on fluency rather than correctness. The students will then be able to generate ideas freely without the additional chore of thinking about the grammar. Thus, it is essential to strengthen the students' skill in reading so that the students can use reading to assimilate further learning experiences.

Sipe (1993) in his article states that a project using traditional tales and transformations of these stories that connected reading and writing, conducted at a Newfoundland school with 24 sixth - grade students produced very encouraging results. Sipe says that transformations are new stories created based on old stories which can be "parallel, deconstructed, or extended versions of the original tale, or the tale may be transformed through the illustrations ."

Transformations which connect reading and writing will be useful in making students use what they have read, and their background knowledge creatively to write a story that they have invented. The need to use the information gathered via the interaction between the text and the student and the recalling of the schema already stored in the long term memory will make the student realise the meaningful way in which the student can utilise the schema gathered and stored through reading for writing assignments. Transformations perhaps can also remove the writer's block and help the writers find joy when they discover that they can now write freely, without worrying too much about grammar or errors.

Statement Of The Problem

The process approach which involves writing and rewriting has been introduced in our Malaysian schools. The pupils who are inhibited or lack enough background knowledge in terms of language and vocabulary simply refuse to write or rewrite or do

it very badly. Leki (in Leeds, 1996) discovered that students who lacked vocabulary and language wrote very poor essays that were not reflective of their thoughts and intentions as their lack of language and vocabulary limited their ability to generate ideas for their writing assignments. The teacher has to spend a lot of time with these students as the correction of errors and feedback alone will consume a lot of time and effort.

Apart from this a teacher who has a large class and students who are reluctant to write will definitely face problems getting the students motivated enough to go through the tedious process of writing and rewriting. According to Meyer (in Leeds, 1996) reading enables the students to develop ideas that help the students to write and convey their thoughts and intentions fluently. Thus, this study investigates the effects of using transformations to motivate the students to generate ideas and write creatively using what the students have read as support material or guide. This will encourage students to think and generate ideas for their writing assignments using the schema they have gathered from their reading.

Objectives Of The Study

a) To study the ability of the students to write based on the story they have read using the transformation technique.

b) To study the ability of students to create stories of their own by generating ideas from the stories they have read.

c) To study the influence of students' cultural background in their writing.

d) To study the increase in fluency and skill in writing by individuals.

Research Questions

From the above objectives, this study hopes to answer the following research questions:-

a) Can transformations be used to motivate students to write?

b) Can the students use the transformation technique to generate ideas for their own stories?

c) Can the stories written by the students be used as reading materials for classroom libraries?

d) Can the transformation technique be used for testing writing in school examinations?

Limitations Of The Study

This study involves only twenty subjects from a list of two hundred form one volunteers, therefore the findings although very promising cannot be generalised.

Secondly, it is not possible for the researcher to select a fairytale or story that all the subjects like within the research period, as the subjects come from different races and backgrounds. The subjects also come from different types of schools from all over the Kuala Langat District. The researcher had to choose a story based on the selections of the majority instead of individual preference as it provided a valid means of comparing the writing produced by the subjects.

Significance Of The Study

This study will show the implication of having a good link between reading and writing to help students to write which will be useful to English teachers who face difficulty in motivating students to write.

Next, it will show teachers how to manage a large writing class when teaching process writing. As a result, the teacher will be able to monitor a bigger class and have a lighter load of marking as the students take control of the learning process and the teacher becomes a facilitator.

This study will also show the feasibility of using the transformation technique to test the writing skills of the students at the beginning stage when the students need input in terms of language and vocabulary to help them to generate ideas of their own.

Finally, this study will show the influence of the students cultural background in their writing. This will confirm that readers interact with the text and associate the information from the text with previous knowledge or schemata.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Approaches to the Teaching of Writing :
The Traditional Approach and the Process Approach

The process of writing and how it should be taught was only investigated in the seventies. The teachers who taught earlier than this depended on the traditional approach where accuracy rather than fluency was focused. Students wrote essays on teacher selected topics and almost similar sentences as the essay was completely discussed by the teacher and the students were forced to follow the guidelines strictly.

The traditional composition teaching method which focused on form and correctness of the finished composition made the students produce writing which was not reflective of the actual writing process. The students were forced to write on teacher selected topics and with limited time to generate ideas or rewrite their compositions. According to Graves (in Stotsky, 1995) however, students write better on the topics chosen by themselves rather than those selected by their teachers. Grave states that students perform better just because the topics are selected by them or because the topics have a connection with their personal lives which is worthwhile sharing with others. Spack and Sadow (1983) also recommend that students be given enough opportunities for expressive writing besides expository writing. Expressive writing promotes the use of students' imagination and experience which leads to creative writing that is less stressful to the students whose affective filters are high.

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The traditional writing lesson trains the students to write grammatically correct sentences using correct vocabulary with very little emphasis on the purpose of writing or the students response to the topic. The teacher only teaches the students how to construct sentences but expects the students to produce a good piece of composition within a fixed, limited period of time which would be a problem even for a professional writer to produce. According to Spencer (1984), writing before the emergence of the 1980's modern education systems was essentially used for storing and recalling information needed for the purpose of evaluation sometime later. Thus, in the traditional approach there was emphasis on correcting errors when evaluating compositions. This hinders generation of ideas leading to poor quality writing. Kelly (1984) agrees with Spencer's reasoning. She says that poor writers are produced by product-based approaches because these approaches ignore the actual way people compose, that is, through using drafting, rewriting and editing.

Students are very often apprehensive about getting started on a composition and this seems to be the most difficult part of the writing assignment. According to Reid (1995), the mental block or "writer's block" can result from various factors. It can be due to a lack of appropriate skills such as syntactic immaturity, inconsistent tense and mood and generally poor organisation and development. The apprehensive writer may also have a poor self - perception due to perhaps, his poor language competency. This, Daly (1979) says, is the result of teachers stressing on correctness, the tendency to link writing with negative consequences and teachers' negative reactions to the contents of compositions. The over-emphasis on mechanics, usage and correct choice of words for the composition are the various other factors that may result in writing apprehension.

The process approach which is in line with the Communicative Approach to language teaching seeks to rectify the shortcomings of the traditional approach to writing. In the process approach, the students are provided with a purpose for writing. and given time to generate ideas, write and check their compositions before handing in the finished compositions. The teacher in the process approach plays the role of a facilitator and guide who responds and monitors the students writing throughout the writing process unlike the traditional approach where the teacher instructs students at the start of the lesson and evaluates the finished composition at the end of the lesson. The teacher, although only a facilitator, also faces problems as the teacher does not have enough time to guide and respond to her students due to the large number of students in the class. If transformations are used to generate ideas, the students will become less dependent on the teacher and more dependent on the text provided as a guide and their peers. This will ease the teachers burden of having too much work to do.

The Process Approach which involves free - writing or prewriting, writing and rewriting which leads to the discovery of writer's ideas. This is in line with the expressive school of thought which emerged in the sixties. Freewriting has been noted by many researchers as being very vital in the writing process. It is also a means of overcoming students' fear of writing. According to Elbow (1981) freewriting is the simplest way of getting words on paper. Freewriting helps the writer deal with the problem of finding words in his head and writing them down. Elbow also states that freewriting helps a person to write without thinking about writing . It also helps him to improve writing through frequent practice which eliminates the habit of editing while

attempting to write. Freewriting which encourages the free flow of ideas should focus on fluency not correctness so that students who are apprehensive about writing, can try to write. Tyner (1985) and Raimes (1983) also share a similar view. They feel students practicing freewriting will write fluently and faster and with less fear and effort. Thus it is evident that students will be able to write more fluently if there is no or less emphasis on correctness. Britton (1975) believes in the importance of using freewriting in helping students develop their ability to write. According to him, freewriting can be used at any stage to help students explore and discover ideas.

Freewriting shifts the students concentration to content rather than form, encouraging them to invent and generate ideas liberating them from fear. Viet (1981) suggests using freewriting when starting a writing class on a interesting topic to divert apprehensive writers from self-consciousness. Thus, the Process Approach through freewriting also helps students to gain self confidence, get involved in the task, and increase their fluency in writing.

The Process Approach is a good method of teaching writing but in Malaysian schools where teachers have to deal with large classes, a lot of correction and limited time makes teaching the Process Approach a difficult challenge to the teacher. Thus, the researcher considering all the above problems has tested out the viability of using transformations which incorporates the process approach to motivate students to write without apprehension while helping teachers to cope with teaching large classes. The use of peer feedback and group work would also lighten the teachers' heavy load of editing and correcting.

The Reading and Writing Connection

Transformations help students to make a connection between the Reading Component and the Writing Component in the writing class because the students have to read a story before writing.

Reading is a receptive skill. It is a process of getting the message that is the meaning or what the writer wants to say from the text. Reading is also a process of interaction. On the one hand, the reader has to get the message from the text and on the other, the reader has to bring the meaning to the text by using his own background knowledge or previous knowledge.

Reading promotes better learning skills and overall good academic performance. Salimbene (1969) states that the ability to read effectively is an achievement of great value as it allows access to knowledge which provides educational and social opportunity. Although television and video can supply information fast, all the information in the world cannot be supplied by the mass media. Teachers shoulder the responsibility of choosing appropriate reading materials based on the students background and interest. Once the students cultivate the reading habit, they will enjoy reading and prefer reading quietly or silently rather than watching television or video.

Johnson (1973) says that a primary school student who has a good foundation in the basic reading skills has the path cleared for almost hundred percent attention on

meaning and the use of reading as a means of learning. The practice of reading efficiently with good understanding will help students to do well not only in their study of the English Language but in all other subjects, thus, improving their academic performance as a whole. As humans grow, mature and become active agents of the society, most of them are motivated to improve their own levels of learning as they desire to impress others with their abilities. Reading is a key to any learning.

According to Pikulski (1994), all the five programmes of early intervention for the prevention of reading problems conducted in the USA include the writing component as writing reinforces the reading ability of particularly at-risk students. This shows that writing is an important skill to learn as well especially since it helps slow readers.

Writing is an extension and a record of spoken language. It is a productive skill. In writing, a student is required to produce sentences which are linked to make meaningful text. For whatever text has been written, the writer must ensure that it can be understood by the readers.

Writing plays a vital role in the language classroom. Writing helps learners recall for example, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar which they have learnt in the present and previous lessons. Writing aids in consolidating language learnt through the integration of skills. Integration of writing with the other skills help to take away boredom, arouse interest and increase motivation. Writing also promotes language learning beyond the classroom as writing tasks can require students to write down

real-life examples of language use outside the classroom. Writing also helps the students and the teachers to check and note the students' progress in language learning in written form. Besides this, writing is an effective method of testing a big number of students within a limited period of time. This saves both time and energy. It is true, however that the low proficiency students do not enjoy writing because they lack vocabulary and knowledge . Everytime they try to write, they face a lot of difficulties.

According to Chitravelu, Sithamparam and Teh (1995) writing is a difficult skill which many students face problems mastering. Writing aids Malaysian students mainly in their career in future . As this is too far in the future, students are less interested or motivated to learn it. The teacher must make writing lessons interesting so that the writing tasks fulfills the immediate social needs of the students. They say that even as the students proficiency increases they can learn the various forms of writing which is useful to them so that they become aware of the benefits and importance of learning to write. However, Chitravelu et al. further stress that since there is lack of social needs in most areas, the teachers have to take it upon themselves to invent writing assignments that requires the individual students to " identify with the situation and have something to say ". Writing is a task which is often imposed on students. This not only has a psychological effect but also causes a problem in terms of content that is what to say. Being at a loss for ideas is a familiar experience to most students when they are forced to write. Speech is the natural and normal medium of communication for students in most circumstances and accustoms them to having someone physically present when the students use language and to getting feedback of some kind. Writing, on the other hand, is essentially a solitary activity. The fact that the students are required to write

on their own, without the possibility of interaction or the benefit of feedback, makes the act of writing difficult.

Hedge (1992) characterises good writers as writers who have in mind a purpose, the audience and a direction in their writing. She says writing involves communicating with the readers so we have to train our students to write well using the process approach either as individuals or in a group. When students write together in a group they have a lot to gain from their peers which in turn will help them improve their individual efforts. When students work in groups they tend to take an active part because in a group there are fewer students compared to the whole class. This gives the students more confidence to put forward their thoughts and ideas in the target language.

Collie and Slatter (1987) say that pair and group work increases the students' confidence in the second language and also makes this language personal to them as they increase their experiences with the language as they use it. When students get together they share and discuss ideas. This helps them to assist each other in gaining an insight into the text. Each student brings into the group an idea from his personal experience which could differ from that of the other members of the group. The group members understand each other better. Thus, the students while learning to write exchange their cultural values and thoughts. They also improve and bond good interaction and relationships with each other which creates a stress free environment for present and future writing assignments. The teacher who acts as a facilitator, however, has to monitor the groups' activity to ensure that the group uses the target