UNIVERSITY PUTRA MALAYSIA

CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN ESL/EFL FEMALE LEARNERS
PRODUCT, PROCESS, AND PERCEPTIONS IN COLLABORATIVE TASKS

SEYED YASIN YAZDI AMIRKHIZ

FPP 2012 12
CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN ESL/EFL FEMALE LEARNERS
PRODUCT, PROCESS, AND PERCEPTIONS IN COLLABORATIVE TASKS

By
SEYED YASIN YAZDI AMIRKHIZ

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2012
Dedicated to:

My Leila

My Parents

My Teachers
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN ESL/EFL FEMALE LEARNERS PRODUCT, PROCESS, AND PERCEPTIONS IN COLLABORATIVE TASKS

By

SEYED YASIN YAZDI AMIRKHIZ

September 2012

Chairman: Professor Kamariah Abu Bakar, PhD
Faculty: Educational Studies

Collaborative writing has been approached and investigated from various perspectives in the relevant literature. The purpose of this study was three-fold: to investigate the influence of collaborative writing on the quality of individual writing (Product), the verbal interactions between the peers during collaborative writing sessions (Process), and Perceptions of participants towards collaborative writing (learning). The study involved eight participants who were divided into two EFL (i.e., Iranian) and two ESL (i.e., Malaysian) homogeneous dyads.

To investigate the Product, the dyads performed collaborative writing for 15 sessions; after any three consecutive collaborative writing sessions, each participant was asked to carry out a writing task individually. The tasks used in both collaborative and individual writing were isomorphic graphic prompts (IELTS
Academic Module task 1). The writing quality of five individually-produced texts was determined in terms of task achievement (TA), cohesion/coherence (C/C), grammatical range/accuracy (GR/A), and lexical resources (LR). The findings showed the most positively-affected areas among all the participants were TA front, followed by C/C front. GR/A did not display any improvement among EFL/ESL participants, and LR showed minor improvement only among three of ESL participants. Also, regression was a frequent incident among the participants. The findings are discussed in the light of the socio-cultural perspective of learning, emergentist perspective (one that is informed by chaos complexity theory), cultural background of the participants, the typology of tasks used, the role of the participants' language proficiency, and participants' collaborative dynamics during collaborative writing sessions.

To examine the Process, the pair talk was audio-recorded and transcribed for each dyad. The transcribed data were segmented at three levels (type of talk, type of activity and episodes). The findings indicated certain similarities and differences among the EFL and ESL dyads. The most remarkable discrepancy was related to the Language Related Episodes (LREs). It was revealed that EFL/ESL dyads had different orientations towards metatalk; EFL dyads tended to focus considerably more on meta-linguistic features of language than ESL dyads. The findings are discussed with a reference to the different status of the English
language in the two contexts of Iran and Malaysia (i.e., EFL vs. ESL) as well as the effect of previous educational experiences of the learners.

To investigate the Perceptions, data came from a number of sources: interviews, observations, stimulated recalls, participants’ language learning histories and content analysis of the pair talk for the pronouns (i.e., first-person and second person pronouns). Existence of numerous sources of data and methods made triangulation of the findings possible. Interviews revealed that despite some similarities in the mindset of EFL/ESL participants towards collaborative learning, there were notable divergent attitudes towards the practice as well. Observations of the collaborative sessions and stimulated recall showed that the collaborative behavior of Malaysian participants was following a seamless pattern of acquiescence, lack of criticism and non-confrontation, whereas there were numerous instances of confrontation, inflexibility and mutual criticisms in the interactional behaviors of Iranian participants. The content analysis of the pair talk for pronouns indicated that EFL participants tended to use “I” and “YOU” considerably more than their Malaysian counterparts, whereas Malaysian participants were found to have a stronger tendency to use “WE” more. Comparing language learning histories of EFL/ESL participants revealed certain discrepancies. Juxtaposing these findings led the researcher to conclude that the collectivist orientation was tangibly stronger among Malaysian participants than
among their Iranian counterparts. The findings are discussed with regard to the macro-cultural dichotomy of world cultures (collectivist/individualist).

The findings of this study could have a number of implications (theoretical/pedagogical). The study adds to the previous attempts to extend the socio-cultural perspective of language learning from the traditionally predominant spoken discourse to written discourse, and also extends the boundaries of the benefits of collaborative writing. The benefits go beyond lexico-grammatical level as addressed by previous studies, and encompass task achievement and cohesion/coherence fronts of writing proficiency as well. Another significant implication of the study is that a universalistic perception that learners of similar proficiency dealing with the identical tasks generate more or less similar patterns of LREs was challenged. More importantly, the relatively contrasting perceptions of Malaysian and Iranian students towards collaborative learning could be seen as a caution against the invariable utilization of this modality of learning in all the contexts. This in turn highlights the fact that "one size might not fit all" all the time, and learning and teaching should be seen as context-bound and situation-based.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

VARIASI ANTARA BUDAYA DALAM PRODUK, PROSES DAN PERSEPSI SEMASA PELAKSANAAN TUGASAN KOLABORATIF DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR WANITA ESL / EFL

Oleh

SEYED YASIN YAZDI AMIRKHIZ
September 2012

Pengerusi: Profesor Kamariah Abu Bakar, PhD
Fakulti: Pengajian Pendidikan

Penyiasatan dan pendekatan dari pelbagai perspektif dalam literatur yang berkaitan telah dijalankan ke atas penulisan secara kolaboratif. Tujuan kajian ini mempunyai tiga lapisan: yang pertama adalah untuk menyiasat pengaruh penulisan secara kolaboratif ke atas kualiti penulisan individu (Produk), kedua adalah untuk melihat interaksi secara lisan diantara para peserta semasa sesi penulisan kolaboratif dijalankan (Proses), dan ketiga adalah untuk mendapatkan pandangan para peserta terhadap penulisan kolaboratif (pembelajaran). Kajian ini melibatkan lapan orang peserta yang terdiri dalam kalangan pasangan homogen, iaitu dua orang peserta yang merupakan pengguna Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) (warganegara Iran) dan dua orang peserta yang
merupakan pengguna Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa kedua (ESL)(warganegara Malaysia).

Untuk meneliti produk, pasangan tersebut mengusahakan penulisan muafakat selama 15 sessi. Selepas setiap tiga sessi penulisan muafakat yang bertuturut, setiap peserta dikehendaki mengusahakan tugas penulisan secara perseorangan. Tugas yang digunakan di dalam cara penulisan muafakat dan perseorangan adalah grafik isomorfik meminta (Tugas 1 Modul Akademik IELTS). Mutu penulisan daripada lima teks ciptaan perseorangan ditentukan dari segi pencapaian tugas (PT/TA), perpaduan/koheren (P/K/C/C), pelbagai tatabahasa/ketepatan (PT/K/GR/A) dan sumber leksikal (SL/LR). Penemuan menunjukkan kawasan yang terjejas adalah secara positif diantara kesemua peserta ialah kawasan PT, diikuti dengan kawasan P/K. Kawasan PT/K tidak menunjukkan sebarang peningkatan dikalangan peserta EFL/ESL, dan SL menunjukan peningkatan kecil dikalangan tiga orang peserta ESL. Didapati juga penurunan pencapaian adalah satu kejadian yang kerap berlaku dikalangan peserta. Penemuan yang diperolehi adalah dibincangkan dari kaca mata perspektif pembelajaran sosio-budaya, perspektif emergentist (suatu yang dimaklumkan oleh teori kerumitan huru-hara), latar belakang budaya peserta, tipologi tugas yang digunakan, peranan kemahiran bahasa peserta-peserta dan dinamik kemuaafakatan peserta-peserta semasa beberapa sessi penulisan muafakat.

viii
Untuk memeriksa proses, bualan pasangan di rakam-audio dan di salin bagi setiap pasangan. Data yang disalin di bahagikan kepada tiga tahap (jenis bualan, jenis aktiviti, dan episod). Penemuan menunjukkan persamaan dan perbezaan tertentu dikalangan pasangan EFL dan ESL. Percanggahan yang amat luar biasa adalah berkaitan dengan Episod Bahasa yang Berkaitan (EBB). Ia mendedahkan bahawa pasangan EFL/ESL mempunyai orientasi berlainan terhadap metatalk; pasangan EFL cenderung memberi tumpuan ketara lebih kepada ciri linguistik meta daripada pasangan ESL. Penemuan dibincangkan dengan rujukan kepada status bahasa Inggeris yang berbeza di dalam konteks Malaysia dan Iran (iaitu FL lwn. SL) serta kesan pengalaman pendidikan pelajar.

Untuk menyiasat persepsi perserta terhadap penulisan muafakat (pembelajaran), data diperolehi daripada beberapa sumber: temubual, pemerhatian, dirangsang mengimbas kembali, sejarah pembelajaran bahasa peserta dan analisis kandungan perbualan pasangan berkaitan dengan kata ganti nama (iaitu kata ganti nama pertama dan kata ganti nama kedua). Triangulasi boleh dilakukan dengan adanya kepelbagaian sumber data dan kaedah. Walau pun temubual mendedahkan sedikit sebanyak persamaan minda peserta EFL/ESL terhadap pembelajaran bermuafakat, ada juga terdapat sikap menyerak tertentu berkenaan amalan ini. Contohnya, manakala peserta Iran mempunyai keraguan yang signifikan berkenaan pembelajaran berkumpulan, peserta Malaysia nampaknya bersetuju dengan cara pembelajaran ini. Daripada kaedah

Dapatan kajian ini boleh mempunyai beberapa implikasi (dari segi teori/pedagogi). Kajian ini menambah kepada cubaan terdahulu untuk melanjutkan perspektif sosio-budaya pembelajaran bahasa daripada wacana utama yang dituturkan secara tradisional kepada wacana bertulis, dan juga memperluaskan sempadan manfaat penulisan kolaboratif. Manfaatnya melampaui tahap lexico-tatabahasa seperti yang diperhatikan oleh kajian sebelum ini, dan merangkumi pencapaian tugas dan perpaduan dalam bidang
penguasaan penulisan juga. Satu lagi implikasi yang signifikan delam kajian ini adalah bahawa persepsi sejagat bahawa pelajar yang mempunyai tahap kemahiran yang melakukan tugas-tugas yang sama boleh menjana lebih kurang corak LREs yang serupa telah dicabar. Lebih penting lagi, persepsi yang agak berbeza dia antara pelajar Malaysia dan pelajar Iran terhadap pembelajaran kolaboratif boleh dilihat sebagai satu amaran terhadap penggunaan yang sama modality pembelajaran delam semua konteks. Ini seterusnya menekankan hakikat bahawa “satu saiz mungkin tidak muat untuk semua” sepanjang masa, dan pembelajaran dan pengajaran harus dilihat berasaskan konteks dan situasi.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mostly to God, the Compassionate the Merciful, through Him all is possible. Now that this thesis is finally finished I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all who have contributed to bringing this academic endeavor to fruition, in one way or another. Undoubtedly, without each and everyone’s role and part this task would have been insurmountable.

Special thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Kamariah Abu Bakar, for her patience and understanding of my ‘personal situation’ in my ‘very tough’ times. Many a times it was her gentle words of motivation and optimism that gave me encouragement and fortitude at critical times. I am also thankful to her for all her constructive suggestions, the meticulous feedback, historical wisdom, and intellectual rigor.

I am also very grateful to my two ‘wonderful’ committee members, Associate Professor Dr. Arshad Abd. Samad and Dr. Roselan Baki for their insightful comments and creative suggestions that steered me towards the completion of this exercise. Dr. Arshad’s comments were usually laconic, but very astute, calculated and enlightening. Likewise, Dr. Roselan, who is reputed to be the ‘man’ of qualitative research in the English department, was very instrumental in shaping up my initial thinking as well as developing my understanding of the
subject. His thoughtfulness, uncompromising intellect and warm heart shall never be forgotten.

I would also say a very special thank you to Professor Dr. Jayakaran Mukundan and Dr. Nooreen Noordin as the examiners of the early research proposal. With no doubt, this study would not have been what it is now without their constructive suggestions and insightful advice. Their astute comments proved indescribably fruitful and enlightening throughout the research process.

I would certainly be remiss if I fail to gratefully acknowledge intellectual modesty and generous mentorship of Professor Sharan Merriam (a well-known figure in qualitative research) and Professor Ali Shehadeh (the co-editor of the international journal of TESOL Quarterly). I met Professor Merriam, upon my supervisor’s recommendation, when she was at Universiti Putra Malaysia as a visiting professor. She kindly shared her valuable time with me and provided me with some insightful suggestions on the design of the study and the number of the participants. However, I corresponded with Professor Shehadeh through e-mail. He enthusiastically replied to my questions and shared his profound knowledge and keen insight with me.
My heartfelt thanks are also due to the colleagues and friends who inspired me with the resolution and supported me in bringing the seed of this project to fruition. Although they are too many to be named, I must mention Dr. Vahid Nimechisalem, Mr. Vahid Sarmadi, Mr. Mahdi Jafarlou, Mr. Omid Hajhashemi and Mr. Reza Maleki. The students who agreed to participate in this study also deserve acknowledgement. I am grateful to them for their time and cooperation.

Lastly, I wish to thank my family. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my wife Leila who despite her own heavy workload as a PhD student has made a lot of generous sacrifices and has supported and understood me in any respect. I am also indebted to my parents and my two very kind sisters whose encouragement, unconditional love and prayers have always been with me.

Last but not least, for any errors and inadequacies contained in this study, the responsibility is exclusively my own.
I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on (February 2012) to conduct the final examination of Seyed Yasin Yazdi Amirkhiz on his thesis entitled “Cross-cultural Variations in Product, Process, and Perceptions of EFL/ESL Learners in Performing Collaborative Writing Tasks” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

**Nooreen Noordin, PhD**
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

**Jayakaran a/l A.P.Mukundan, PhD**
Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
/Internal Examiner

**Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD**
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
/Internal Examiner

**Bronwyn T. Williams, PhD**
Professor
Department of English
University of Louisville, USA.
(External Examiner)

_______________________________
Zulkarnain Zainal, PhD
Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 17 February 2011
This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Kamaria Abu Bakar, PhD
Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Arshad Abd. Samad, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Roselan Baki, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
University Putra Malaysia
(Member)

BUJANG BIN KIM HUAT, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
Date: 22 October 2012
DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institutions.

SEYED YASIN YAZDI AMIRKHIZ

Date: 12 September 2012
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xxiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xxiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>xxv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xxvi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1

### 1 INTRODUCTION

1. Background of the Study
   - 1.1 The Rationale behind Collaboration
   - 1.1.2 Collaboration and Writing
     - 1.1.2.1 Product
     - 1.1.2.2 Process (Verbal Interactions)
     - 1.1.2.3 Perceptions
   - 1.2 Statement of the Problem
   - 1.3 Research Questions
   - 1.4 Significance of the Study
   - 1.5 Limitations of the Study
   - 1.6 Definition of Terms

## CHAPTER 2

### 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

- 2.1 Collaboration and Writing

xviii
2.1.1 Collaborative Learning: A Synopsis of Paradigmatic Origin 22
2.1.2 Vygotsky’s Constructivist Perspective and its Implications 24
2.1.3 Collaborative Writing: Theoretical Underpinnings 27
2.1.4 Collaborative Writing: Definitions 29
2.1.5 Forms of Collaborative Writing 30
2.1.5.1 Collaborative Writing (Writing Conferences) 31
2.1.5.2 Peer-to-peer Collaborative Writing 33
2.2 Verbal Interactions 42
2.2.1 Collaborative Dynamics and Language Related Episodes (LREs) 42
2.3 Perceptions towards Collaborative Writing 49
2.3.1 Learners’ Perceptions (peer feedback) 49
2.3.2 Learners’ Perceptions (Entire Writing Process) 51
2.3.3 Learners’ Perceptions and Behaviors: Socio-cultural Dimensions 53
2.4 Some Fundamental Considerations in Cultural Studies 57
2.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study 63

CHAPTER 3 67

3 METHODOLOGY 67

3.1 Research Design 67
3.2 Participants 69
3.3 Setting 74
3.4 Pilot Study 75
3.5 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure 77
3.5.1 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure for Research Question 1 77
3.5.1.1 IELTS and its Academic Module Writing Test 77
3.5.1.2 The Rationale for Using Academic Module Task 1 79
3.5.1.3 Data Collection Procedure 80
3.5.2 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure for Research Question 2

3.5.2.1 Why Writing Tasks? 82
3.5.2.2 Data Collection procedure 83

3.6 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure for Research Question 3

3.6.1 Interviews 84
3.6.2 Observation and Stimulated Recall 85
3.6.3 Participants: English Learning Histories 86

3.7 Validity and Reliability Issues 88

3.7.1 Validity and Reliability Issues for Research Question 1 88
3.7.2 Validity and Reliability Issues for Research Question 2 90
3.7.3 Validity and Reliability Issues for Research Question 3 91

3.8 Data Analysis 92

3.8.1 Data Analysis for Research Question 1 92
3.8.2 Data Analysis for Research Question 2 93
3.8.2.1 Type of Talk 95
3.8.2.2 Types of Activities 97
3.8.2.3 Episodes 98
3.8.2.4 Linguistic Features: Pronouns and Directives 101

3.8.3 Data Analysis for Research Question 3 104

CHAPTER 4 106

4 RESULTS 106

4.1 Influence of Collaboration on Individual Writing Performance 106
4.1.1 Summary 113

4.2 The Nature of Verbal Interactions during Collaboration 114
4.2.1 Type of Talk 114
4.2.2 Types of Activities 116
4.2.3 Type of Episodes (About-task and On-task Talk Episodes) 119
4.2.3.1 The Taxonomy of *About-task* Talk Episodes for Iranian and Malaysian Dyads 120

4.2.3.2 The taxonomy of *On-task* Talk Episodes for Iranian and Malaysian Dyads 125

4.2.4 Findings for the Language Related Episodes (LREs) in the Collaborative Discourse of the Dyads 136

4.2.5 Linguistic Features: Pronouns and Directives 137

4.2.6 Summary 140

4.3 Perceptions towards Collaborative Writing (Learning) 142

4.3.1 Findings of Interviews 142

4.3.1.1 Interview Findings for Azadeh 143

4.3.1.2 Interview Findings for Sadaf 148

4.3.1.3 Interview Findings for Negar 152

4.3.1.4 Interview Findings for Niloofar 156

4.3.1.5 A Synopsis of Interview Findings for Iranian Participants 159

4.3.1.6 Interview Findings for Mei 162

4.3.1.7 Interview Findings for Teng 165

4.3.1.8 Interview Findings for Gin 167

4.3.1.9 Interview Findings for Wai 169

4.3.1.10 A Synopsis of Interview Findings for Malaysian Participants 172

4.3.2 Findings of Observations and Stimulated Recalls 175

4.3.2.1 Dyad A (Azadeh & Sadaf) 175

4.3.2.2 Dyad B (Negar & Niloofar) 179

4.3.2.3 Dyad C (Mei and Teng) 182

4.3.2.4 Dyad D (Gin & Wai) 184

4.3.3 Findings of Participants’ Language Learning Histories 186

CHAPTER 5 189

5 DISCUSSION 189

5.1 Collaboration and Individual Writing Performance 189

5.2 The Nature of Verbal Interactions during Collaboration 201
5.2.1 Summary and Discussion of Findings for Types of Talk 202
5.2.2 Summary and Discussion of Findings for Type of Activity 202
5.2.3 Summary and Discussion of Findings for Episodes 205
5.2.4 Summary and Discussion of the Findings for LREs 207
5.2.5 Linguistic Features: Pronouns and Directives 210

5.3 Perceptions towards Collaborative Learning 213
5.3.1 Participants’ Perceptions towards Collaborative Learning (Interview Findings) 213
   5.3.1.1 Participants’ Definition of Collaborative Learning 213
   5.3.1.2 Participants’ Inner Tendency towards Collaborative Learning 217
   5.3.1.3 The participants’ Desired Group Size 222
   5.3.1.4 Perceptions about Positive Aspects of Collaborative Learning 224
   5.3.1.5 Perceptions about Negative Aspects of Collaborative Learning 225
   5.3.1.6 Desired Characteristics of a Peer 226
5.3.2 A Summary and Discussion of Findings for Observations and Stimulated Recalls 227
5.3.3 A Summary and Discussion of Participants’ Language Learning Histories 240

CHAPTER 6  242

6 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH 242
6.1 Conclusions 242
6.2 Implications 243
6.3 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research 248

REFERENCES  254
APPENDICES  273
BIODATA OF STUDENT  282
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS  282