〔論文〕

Effects of EFL Writing Fluency Development Activities on a Student's Language Accuracy

Neal Newbill

Abstract

This paper investigates the potential effects of timed writing activities on students' language accuracy by assessing the quality of a student's work in an optional university seminar（ゼミ）over the course of 30 weeks of instruction. This paper will first discuss the background of this research and the rationale for examining accuracy within these activities, then the specific context in which these activities were conducted, and finally the analysis and future considerations.

1. Introduction

In previous research Dolan and Newbill（2019）assessed the effectiveness of timed writing activities for fluency development among first-year students enrolled in mandatory English classes at a medium-sized Japanese university, finding that while students' writing speed increased, improvements in writing quality were anecdotal as the large volume of writing material could not be directly assessed due to high teacher workload. These writing activities were adapted from Paul Nation's work,

integrating his criteria for fluency development：low difficulty, time pressure, meaning-focus, and repetition（Nation, 2013）, and were again applied for the subject of this research paper to more directly assess the effects of timed writing exercises on the quality of student's writing.

The research conducted in this paper took place in an optional 30-week seminar at a small university in Japan during the 2022 academic year, isolated from any larger cohesive English curriculum. The specific curriculum of this course consisted of speed reading, speed writing, error correction, Extensive Reading, and four-paragraph essay writing in preparation for the Eiken Test in Practical English Proficiency（実用英語技能検定）. Due to the optional nature of this course and the post-pandemic transition from remote teaching to face-to-face teaching, only one student was able to consistently participate in the course, limiting this research to a glimpse of the potential impact timed writing activities can have on students' writing accuracy in the hopes that it will promote further research on the topic.

1 . 1　Accuracy and Fluency

The purpose of timed writing exercises and other fluency development activities is to promote language fluency, which is the ability to quickly and spontaneously produce communicative language. However, fluency must be combined with accuracy and complexity to achieve language fluency. While "complexity" is a somewhat ambiguous aspect of language learning that can be split into various subcategories, accuracy is more easily assessed as it involves correct usage of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Within the context of second language acquisition, a balance of fluency and accuracy must be taken into consideration as development of one can interfere with the development of the other（Ellis, 1994）. For

example, if a student were asked "What are you doing tomorrow?" and they quickly responded, "I go skateboard," the student demonstrates communicative fluency while lacking accuracy due to the inaccurate verb usage. On the other hand, if the student deliberates on a response for some time, and responds "I'm going skateboarding," the student demonstrates grammatical accuracy at the expense of fluency by not responding in a timely manner. While fluency development activities focus on quickly and fluidly producing communicative language with feedback focused on content rather than language accuracy, it has been argued that high volumes of writing output can improve writing quality (Nation, 2013). Writing quality is a broad term that includes content, language proficiency, and writing mechanics, however for the purposes of this research paper the focus is on language proficiency, more specifically the language accuracy component.

1 . 2　Importance of Accuracy and Treatment of Error

When discussing accuracy in language learning there is a challenge in determining the degree to which accuracy is expected and how to treat errors in accuracy. In the classroom, some instructors may prioritize comprehensibility over accuracy, as the main communicative goal of language is accomplished, however other instructors may prioritize accuracy due to real-world expectations in academic or professional settings (Ferris, 2002). Research has overwhelmingly found that feedback or correction on errors aids the student in mastering the target language and avoiding fossilization of errors that had previously gone uncorrected (Ferris and Hedgecock, 2005). There are many methods to giving this feedback, ranging from the type of errors to prioritize to how the feedback itself is given, which the instructor can use according to students' needs.

Among these methods, Ferris and Hedgecock（2005）describe direct feedback and indirect feedback in the context of assessing students' writing. Direct feedback, as the name implies, directly corrects the students' errors. Indirect feedback marks the location of the error— sometimes with a label indicating the error type—so that the student can learn via self-editing.

Normally in the context of fluency development activities, error correction should be avoided and any feedback should be focused on content（Nation, 2013）, however the purpose of this research is to quantify a student's writing quality over the course of multiple writing sessions, and therefore more attention than is typical was given to error feedback.

2．Procedure and Methodology

For this research, the student completed 28 timed writing activities over the course of a 30-week academic year. During each session a list of three or four topics was presented to the student, and the student chose one topic to write about for 10 minutes with no preparation time. After the session, the instructor gave indirect feedback of errors by using shorthand denoting the type of error present. For example an error in verb tense would be marked "vt," a spelling error would be marked "sp," etc. After marking, the teacher and student had a short 1-on-1 conference to facilitate the student's ability to self-edit and respond to the error feedback. While the majority of error feedback was done indirectly, some situations required direct feedback, such as idiom usage, uncommon or advanced grammatical structures, or word choice.

The total data collected for this research consists of the student's writing logs showing the number of words produced per writing activity

and the number of errors marked in each writing activity. The errors were recorded as raw data regardless of the error's type, severity, or impact on comprehensibility to reduce inconsistency in evaluating what is comprehensible and what is not : An experienced language teacher who teaches in a homogenous classroom where all students share an L1, or a teacher who is bilingual, may find an erroneous sentence comprehensible because they are accustomed to certain patterns in the L1, while another teacher who is not accustomed to the L1 may find the same sentence incomprehensible. While the errors were all marked equally regardless of type, they were recorded and categorized into the following 12 categories : spelling, missing word, capitalization, singular/plural, agreement, verb tense, word form, fragment, pronoun, article, preposition, and "other," which typically was an error that required more direct feedback and did not fit with any of the specific categories. The number of words produced per activity and the number of errors recorded per activity were monitored over the course of the 28 writing sessions to assess any trends.

3. Analysis

Over the course of 28 timed writing activities the student showed a minor increase in overall writing speed, as expected from previous research. While the increase itself was minimal at only 28.4%, it did not significantly deviate from the previous research, and the student's production frequently exceeded 100 words, peaking at 133 words produced (Figure 1). Also of note is the fluctuating pattern in writing speed, increasing then falling, then increasing and falling again. While not documented in the original research this is frequently seen at an individual
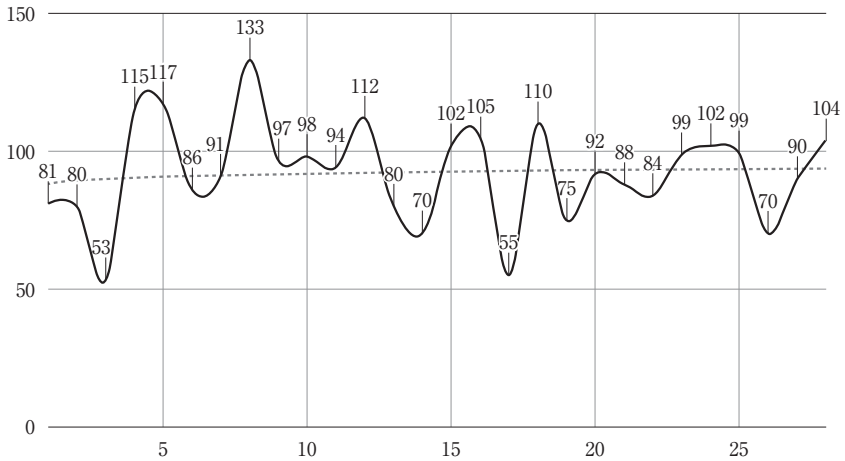
Word count per activity

Figure 1   Student's total words produced per timed writing task.

level when analyzing writing logs. The cause of this fluctuating pattern is currently unknown, though the author believes it could be influenced by the difficulty of the writing topic chosen.

 Upon reviewing the raw number of errors per activity, it could be seen that there was a decreasing trend in error count, with a 41.2% decrease in number of errors from the initial 17 errors to the final task's 10 errors (Figure 2), however a raw number of errors alone does not indictate an improvement in language accuracy, as each writing task differed in total word count. To contextualize the error count within each writing task, a percentage was calculated by dividing the total number of words produced in a task by the total number of errors observed in that task (Figure 3). This showed a decreasing trend in error frequency, with a 54.3% reduction in percentage of errors relative to total word count from an initial 21% inaccuracy rate in the first writing task to a 9.6% inaccuracy rate in the
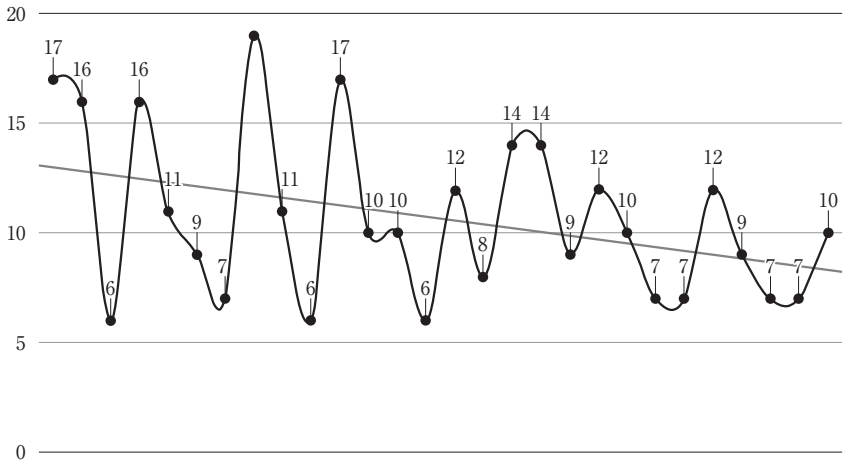
Number of errors per activity

Figure 2　Number of errors per timed writing task.
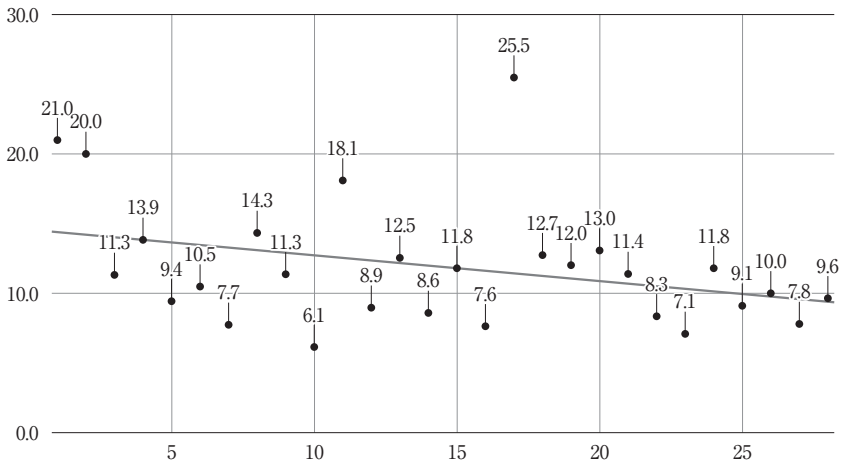
% Errors activity

Figure 3　Percentage of errors relative to total word count.

Error	sp	∧	cap	singl/pl	agr	vt	wf	frag	pro	art	prep	Other
Type												
Median	2.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	3.0

Figure 4　Median number of each error type per task.

final writing task.

　Additionally, the median of each type of error per writing task was recorded to investigate any trends in common types of errors, however the types of errors seemed fairly evenly distributed, with exception to the "other" category which was slightly higher than the others at a median of 3 "other" errors per writing task (Figure 4). See Appendix 1 for description of error correction shorthand.

4．Conclusion

　While this research shows the potential for timed writing fluency development activities to improve students' writing quality via a demonstrated 54.3% reduction in frequency of errors per writing task over the course of 28 sessions, it is still limited in sample size due to lingering environmental issues from the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of this research, as well as limited by the instructor's capacity to assess larger volumes of written work should the sample size be larger, as recognized in the initial research by Dolan and Newbill (2019). There are also further potential interactions that should be examined. Nation's intent in creating fluency development activities was to avoid error feedback and focus solely on communicative content (Nation, 2013), however in this research the student was given indirect error feedback, which may have encouraged more conscious effort in writing accurately, thus sacrificing

some level of fluency in order to improve writing quality. In absence of this error feedback, would the writing quality still improve, and to what degree? Additionally, the Extensive Reading component may have also impacted writing quality due to high volumes of reading being known to positively affect writing ability (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). During the course of this research the student read 21 graded readers for a total of approximately 112,000 words. Such a high volume of input could have also influenced the reduction in writing error frequency. Thus this research should be considered an initial glance into the potential for written fluency development activities to improve writing quality for more thorough observation and examination should the resources be available to assess larger volumes of student work.

References

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Appendix 1：Error Correction Shorthand

sp	error in spelling
∧	missing word
cap	error in capitalization
sing/pl	error in singular or plural usage
agr	error in subject-verb agreement
vt	error in verb tense, aspect, or mood
wf	error in word form；typically adjective, adverb, and noun forms
frag	sentence fragment
pro	error in pronoun usage
art	error in article usage
prep	error in preposition usage