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Applying translanguaging pedagogy to scaffold non-English major juniors on writing scripts for English presentations

Bio data



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Abstract

To tackle students' English writing problems while they are drafting scripts for presentations, in this project, we propose applying translanguaging pedagogy as well as smartly utilizing Google Translate to scaffold college juniors on writing scripts for their presentations. The participants are from three intact classes of non-English major juniors taking the required "Advanced English Expression" course, where each participant will draft their scripts in Chinese first, then translate them both on their own and through Google Translate. During the revision period, teacher's consultation will also be offered. By referring to their Google-translated version text, the students revise their self-written English scripts to achieve what they want to express. We believe that through such curriculum planning and design, the students can learn to make good use of their mother tongue and technology, cultivate critical thinking skills, and improve their knowledge and skills in English writing. This study is based on an action research method and goes to great lengths to increase teaching quality in the long run. Three versions (self-written version, Google translated version and post-edited version) of scripts from each participant in the three intact classes will be collected and further divided into two groups according to the students' English proficiency levels for analysis. Two online writing assessment software (VocabProfiler and Scribens) are used for quantitative analysis to

compare the differences in grammar and vocabulary of the three texts. Also, three trained raters employ qualitative text analysis by closely examining any improved changes in grammar and word use from each participant's self-written to post-edited versions of scripts. Both the quantitative and qualitative results will be triangulated with the ones from the questionnaires and interviews to gain further insights. It is hoped that this research will shed light on how translanguaging pedagogy can scaffold EFL students on their writing skills and how the students of two different proficiency levels perceive toward this practice. The results of the study can be a great reference to teachers who teach ESL/ EFL writing.

Conference paper

Introduction

Among the four skills of English, writing is often considered the most difficult skill to acquire, especially for low-proficiency EFL learners at universities of technology in Taiwan. Since vocational students, if not English majors, didn't need to prepare for writing tests in the general subject of English for their college entrance exam, they got very limited practice and experience of writing in English during their vocational high school studies. With scant knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, when they are asked to write in English in college, they often directly insert inadequate words as well as grammatically incorrect sentences from online translation without checking the usage, which leads to ineffective communication. It is also worth noting that in a survey conducted in Taiwan, among the 17,000 university participants from universities of technology, only 20 percent of them passed the elementary level of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), which is equivalent to A2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) (Wu & Liao, 2003). Nonetheless, in today's era of information technology, writing has become one of the most used forms in communication. Therefore, how to assist the EFL students, especially the low-proficiency students to overcome the English writing barrier has become an urgent issue to tackle.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debate on using students' first language in the English classroom, the smart way of using it might be a light at the end of the tunnel. Even though many still believe that maximizing the input of the target language provides the optimal environment for the English learners during the instruction, advocates and scholars of translanguaging remind us of the goal when teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Li (2017) pointed out that it appears the goal of teaching and learning EFL is not to get the learners to become another monolingual speaker in English only or to replace their first language, but to make them become bilinguals or even multilinguals. As early as the 1980s, psycholinguist Francois Grosjean (1989) stated that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one person. Recent brain science studies have revealed that the bilingual or multilingual brain integrates elements of different languages together, and to reach communicative purposes it coordinates, activates, and selects certain parts of the bilingual or multilingual repertoire (Kroll & De Groot, 2009 as cited in Li, 2017). As Canagarajah (2011) noted, for multilinguals, languages are not discrete and separated parts in their repertoires but are an integrated system. For their communicative purposes, multilingual competence, which does not consist of separate competencies for each language, emerges, and this multicompetence functions symbiotically for the different languages in a multilingual's repertoire. For instance, a bilingual is able to use the appropriate language when and with whom. Also, multilinguals are capable of using other resources like paralinguistic such as gesture, emotion, etc. for communication (Li, 2017), and this practice is called translanguaging.

Researchers in second language acquisition have found the value in translanguaging to scaffold second language learning for decades (Daniel et al., 2017). Nonetheless, most of the studies were conducted with bilingual learners in an ESL context. Expanding

translanguaging pedagogy to a wider population, namely EFL learners, and investigating its effect in improving EFL writing are worth researching. Thus, the current context of this study can be summarized as follows: the demand for applying translanguaging pedagogy in promoting EFL students' writing skills is increasing, but the reliability of how to smartly incorporate machine translation (MT) like Google Translate (GT) as a tool in the writing process has not yet been fully investigated. We need to determine, for example, how best to use GT, a handy and useful tool with imperfections, to produce the best learning outcomes in students' English writing. Up to now, few studies regarding this issue have been conducted. Hence, it is pivotal to investigate how GT can be incorporated in translanguaging pedagogy to facilitate students' writing process based on empirical evidence and acknowledge its potential benefits, as well as its limitations, in practice. Since most studies regarding L2 writing have been conducted before Google launched its new version of AI-based Google Translate in November 2016, which offers better, more natural translation in whole-sentence translation (Tsai, 2020), consequently, these studies (e.g., Niño, 2004, 2009) reported MT as a bad reference with many lexico-grammatical errors which require much post-editing effort. Two recent significant studies conducted by Lee (2020) and Tsai (2020), respectively, examined the impact of using GT in EFL students' writing. Both studies had the students first write their draft in their L1 and later translate it without the help of GT. Then, the students revised the draft by referring to the GT translated counterparts. In Lee's study, she employed text analysis to examine and compare the differences between the students' first English version and their final version, whereas in Tsai's study he utilized the automated writing evaluation software, VocabProfilier (VP) and 1 Checker, to evaluate students' writing performance for the three versions of texts (self-written, Google-translated, and revised self-written). They both found revised texts showed a significant improvement over the self-written texts and concluded MT such as GT could be a useful aid to English writing provided that the instructors can guide the students to be aware of its limitations and offer adequate guidance. This research, on the other hand, does not merely explore the three versions of texts written by two groups (high-and low-proficiency) of EFL non-English majors in university but also investigates whether the inclusion of the instructors or teaching assistants' (TA) consultation in the students' revising process is necessary. In addition, this study employed both the automated writing evaluation software, VP and Scribens, and the text analysis to evaluate the participants' writing performance.

Literature Review

Lee (2020) employed the design where students translated their L1 writing into L2 both with and without the help of MT and then they corrected their L2 writing by referring to the MT translation. She adopted text analysis to analyze both versions of students' writing. The results indicated that using MT helped students correct lexico-grammatical errors in their writing so students' final versions improved significantly in vocabulary, grammar and expressions. In addition, the study also found MT had a positive impact on student writing strategies while the students were editing with MT. She concluded that MT could be a useful aid to language learning; nonetheless, the instructors should make the students aware of its drawbacks and limitations and offer proper guidance while letting students use it. Tsai (2020) investigates the effectiveness of using GT in EFL writing on the university students of both English majors and non-English majors. The participants were asked to write a reflection about a movie in Chinese first, and then their reflection texts were translated both by themselves and by using GT. Finally, they revised their self-translated texts by referring to their GT texts. The analysis of two online computational assessments revealed that, compared with self-translated texts, GT texts showed significantly better writing performance in content, vocabulary and grammar. The revised texts also indicated a significant improvement over self-translated versions, which was especially evident for the non-English major students, who showed significantly positive attitudes toward the use of GT. Moreover, the study suggested a teaching implication of using GT as a revision tool in EFL writing. Although previous studies have found educational benefits of using GT, more research needs to be done on

several related issues, like the bigger sample size, different proficiency levels, and so on (Lee, 2020). Therefore, this study investigates GT as a translingual tool in facilitating EFL learners of non-English majors to write their scripts for English presentations. The current study is unique in that it will adopt both text analysis used in Lee (2020) and the automated online computational assessment tools, VocabProfiler and Scribens, to measure how much the students' L2 writing improve across three versions of the scripts with the help of GT and teaching assistants and teachers' consultation. The reason why we incorporate teaching assistants and teachers' consultation into the students' script-rewriting stage is because half of the participants' English proficiency is around A2 in CEFR. Therefore, it could be difficult for them to rewrite and revise the self-written scripts by referring to GT translation scripts on their own. In addition, the participants were divided into the higher proficiency level and lower proficiency level to compare the differences between the two groups on their perceptions toward utilizing GT in English writing. Hence, the following research questions were raised:

1. Is there any significant difference among the three versions of scripts (self-translated version, Google Translate version, and post-edited version), written by the participants in terms of writing quality and lexical features?
2. Is there any significant difference between the scripts written by the higher proficiency group and the lower proficiency group in terms of writing quality and lexical features?
3. What are students' overall perceptions toward using GT as a translingual tool as well as their consultation with the instructor or TA during the revising stage?

Method

Participants and task description

Data for the present study were collected over ten weeks from three intact classes of the same course, English for Professional Communication and Presentation, at a university of technology in southern Taiwan. Each class met for two hours per week over one semester, with the objective of preparing the students with English presentation skills for future careers. The total 146 participants with the same L1, Mandarin Chinese, from three classes were all non-English majors. Their English proficiency levels range between A2 to B1 in CEFR (between high-beginning to intermediate). In order to investigate the effectiveness of using GT to facilitate L2 writing, which may differ based on students' proficiency levels, we gave students a pre-test at the beginning of the semester to divide them into a higher-proficiency (HP) group and a lower-proficiency (LP) group. The HP group comprises 74 students while the LP group consists of 72 students. Since in this course, all the students had to do a 3-minute oral presentation on their chosen topics as their final evaluation, they had to write out the scripts for their presentation first. Therefore, the script-writing activity will involve GT as the translingual tool to facilitate the students' writing and revising process in the current study, which comprised three steps and lasted for nine weeks: Step 1: After the students were instructed with the basic structure and organization of the introductory paragraph for their presentation, in week 3, the students first wrote their introduction in Chinese in class and uploaded their Chinese draft to the school's learning platform, the FlipClass, as their homework. Then, the TA of each class would first check the overall quality of each student's Chinese introduction based on the content and meaning of it. Step 2: In week 4, the students translated in class their Chinese introduction into English without the help of GT or other online dictionaries, and this version is referred to as the self-written (SW) version. Also, the students were asked to translate their Chinese introduction into English solely using GT as the GT version as their homework. Step 3: In week 5, the students edited and revised in class their SW version by comparing it with the GT version. During this week in class and after class, the students can consult with the instructor or TA through LINE to ask questions which they encountered in the editing and revising process. Students were also allowed to use other online resources to help them revise their SW versions. For

homework, the students had to upload the revised draft as the post-edited (PE) version to the FlipClass as well. In the following six weeks, the three steps of script-writing activity were repeated for two rounds for writing up the body and conclusion parts of the scripts. Then, the completion of the students' presentation scripts of the three versions (SW, GT, and PE) were collected for further text analysis.

Data collection and analysis

This study employed both the automatic writing evaluation software and manual qualitative text analysis to compare the differences among the three versions of the students' scripts. In addition, data collected from interviews and a survey questionnaire were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively as well. All versions of the students' scripts were first analyzed using two types of online assessment freeware, VocabProfiler(VP) <http://www.lex tutor.ca/vp/eng/> and Scribens (<https://www.scribens.com/>). The writing parameters measured by VP include the number of words in the text and the percentage of word appearances in the text of four different categories (K1=the most frequent 1000 words, K2=the second most frequent 1000 words, AWL=academic word list, and off-list words) as well as lexical density. According to Tsai (2020), if the students gain additional information or ideas through the use of their L1, this improvement could be shown by comparing the students' VP writing parameters among different versions of scripts; in addition, these parameters could also reveal vocabulary use. He also noted words in K2 are thought to be more advanced than those in K1. In the current study we adopted the data analysis approach used in Tsai's (2019) study, so the AWL and off-list words will be combined into one category since they are less frequent and involve professional words that students are usually not familiar with. On top of that, lexical density and the numbers and frequencies of different words will also be calculated. The higher the lexical density is, the more information the text is trying to convey. Moreover, grammatical, spelling and punctuation mistakes of the texts could be counted through Scribens, which is a free web-based automated writing assessment tool and detects mistakes in typography & punctuation and grammar immediately. To further compare the differences in writing parameters and errors concerning SW vs. GT, and SW vs. PE scripts, the independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test were employed.

To further investigate the improved changes in grammar and word use from students' SW versions to PE versions, the study also employed qualitative text analysis. Three trained raters examined each participant's SW and PE scripts and identified the improved changes by categorizing them with examples as evidence manually. After the students completed the final scripts of the PE version, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 24 questions and six open-ended questions was administered. In all, 18 voluntary participants (nine from the high-proficiency and nine from the low proficiency group, respectively) from each of the three intact classes were interviewed. Each interview took about 15 minutes based on 18 interview questions, which covered the advantages and disadvantages of GT in L2 writing, the help of consultation with the instructor or TA during revision, and the writing strategies they used. Interviews were conducted individually in the instructor's office and recorded. The results of the survey questionnaire and interviews helped to elucidate the students' perceptions toward the use of GT in L2 writing and the grammatical and lexical errors they successfully corrected in their final versions. The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using the EXCEL while the qualitative data gained from open-ended questions and interviews were coded with multiple steps to identify emerging themes and used to triangulate with the results of script analysis. This study is still ongoing and currently in the phase of data analysis.

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