

The Impact of Generic Features of Task and Proficiency Level on EFL Learners' Written Task Accuracy

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Variations in L2 Learners Performance

Individual factors: Concerned with the learners themselves.

- Affective filters

- Aptitude

- Attitude

- Stress

- Proficiency

Non-individual factors: Concerned with the context of language learning one of which is task-induced varieties:

- **Task and task features**
- ❖ Task structure
- ❖ Task condition
- ❖ Planning time
- ❖ Task complexity
- ❖ Generic features of task

□ *Tasks and their different features can have distinctive effects on L2 learners' oral and written performance in terms of three linguistic domains:*

- ❖ Accuracy
- ❖ Complexity
- ❖ Fluency

□ *The research questions guiding this study were:*

- 1. What is the impact of generic features of task on EFL learners' written task performance in terms of accuracy?
- 2. What is the impact of proficiency on EFL learners' written task performance in terms of accuracy?

Participants

- The participants of the study were 40 male EFL learners.
- 20 Intermediate and 20 Advanced, in an English Institute in Tehran, Iran
- Age range of 18-28 years.
- They were selected out of four classes after taking proficiency test (those whose scores fell between one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected).
- They all spoke Persian as their first language
- They had been taking English classes for at least a year.

Instruments

- TOEFL proficiency test was given to advanced students
- PET test was administered to intermediate students to serve homogeneity purpose.
- Plus, two pictorial tasks were employed as the means of data collection.

Procedures

- The participants of both groups were instructed according to task-based language teaching principles and strategies by the researcher for a term of sixteen sessions.
- Intermediate students were taking Top Notch 3A course and Advanced students were taking *Summit 2B*.
- They did the writing tasks from the books.

- We waited for the end of the course so that they would learn all types of writing tasks assigned by the books.
- **Two tasks** were used as the means of the study. The first task was a **narrative picture prompt** which required the learners to narrate the story of the pictures.
- **The other task**, which was taken from *Four Corners (4)* written by Richards and Bohik (2010), was a **descriptive task** that required the learners to describe what they saw in the pictures.

- First, the participants of the study were asked to do the narrative task and narrate the story of the picture prompt.
- Each learner was given the picture and the necessary explanations on how to do the task.
- Having performed the first task, the participants were asked to perform the second task, descriptive task.
- In this stage of the data collection process, the participants were provided with the pictorial descriptive task and the necessary elaborations on how they should perform this task by the researcher.

- The written performance of the participants was analyzed in accordance with the purpose of the study and the measure of accuracy.
- Accuracy was measured by the number of error-free T-unit per T-units (Ellis, R. , 2003).
- T-unit is defined as “the main clauses plus subordinate clauses attached to or embedded in them” and error-free T-units are those that contain no grammatical, lexical, or spelling errors (Ellis, R. , 2003).

Data Analysis

- After quantifying the written production of the participants in the study, the raw scores of accuracy of the participants' written task performance were fed into SPSS (Version 19) for further analysis.
- T-test and ANCOVA were employed as the statistical means of analysis.

The comparison of the means of written task accuracy of the advanced and intermediate male learners performing descriptive task.

Proficiency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Advanced	20	0.41	0.04
Intermediate	20	0.33	0.07

- As the data presented in table 1 indicates, male learners of advanced proficiency level produced more accurate language (0.41) than intermediate male learners (0.33) when they performed descriptive task.
- That is, the advanced male learners performed better than intermediate male learners in terms of written task accuracy.

The comparison of the means of written task accuracy of the advanced and intermediate male learners performing narrative task

Proficiency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Advanced	20	0.48	0.04
Intermediate	20	0.38	0.06

- As the data presented in table 2 shows, male learners of advanced proficiency level produced more accurate language (0.48) than Intermediate male learners (0.38) when they performed narrative task.
- That is, the advanced male learners performed better than intermediate male learners in terms of written task accuracy of narrative task performance.

- As the data in both tables reveal although advanced students outperformed intermediate learners in both narrative and descriptive tasks in terms of written task accuracy due to their proficiency level, **both groups did better on narrative task than descriptive task.**

Descriptive task

Narrative task

<i>Proficiency</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
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<i>Advanced</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>0.41</i>	<i>0.04</i>	<i>0.48</i>	<i>0.04</i>
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<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>0.33</i>	<i>0.07</i>	<i>0.38</i>	<i>0.06</i>
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Discussion

- Therefore, it can be concluded that although advanced learners outperformed intermediate learners in both narrative and descriptive written task due to their proficiency level, both groups did better on narrative tasks than descriptive tasks, which means generic features of task had significant effects on both advanced and intermediate learners' written task performance in terms of accuracy.

- This result, among other reasons, can be attributed to the fact that the content of narratives has a high correspondence with people's experience in everyday life (Li, 2014), so it's familiar for the learners.
- This familiarity may facilitate the activation of appropriate schemata in students' memory.
- Therefore, researchers believe that narrative competence develops more quickly than other types (Hidi & Hildyard, 1993) including descriptive tasks.
- In contrast, unfamiliarity with the characteristics of a particular genre may also make the expected response more difficult (Bachman, 1990; Brown & Yule, 2003).

Implications

- ❑ The findings of this study can be useful for **language teachers** in that they can adapt their teaching practice in the classroom with different proficiency levels.
- ❑ They can employ tasks with different generic features to make their learners familiar with them and make them practice and produce language in different forms that tasks with different generic features require.
- ❑ The results, also, can be of use for **task designers and task-based researchers**.

• THANK YOU FOR YOUR
PATIENCE