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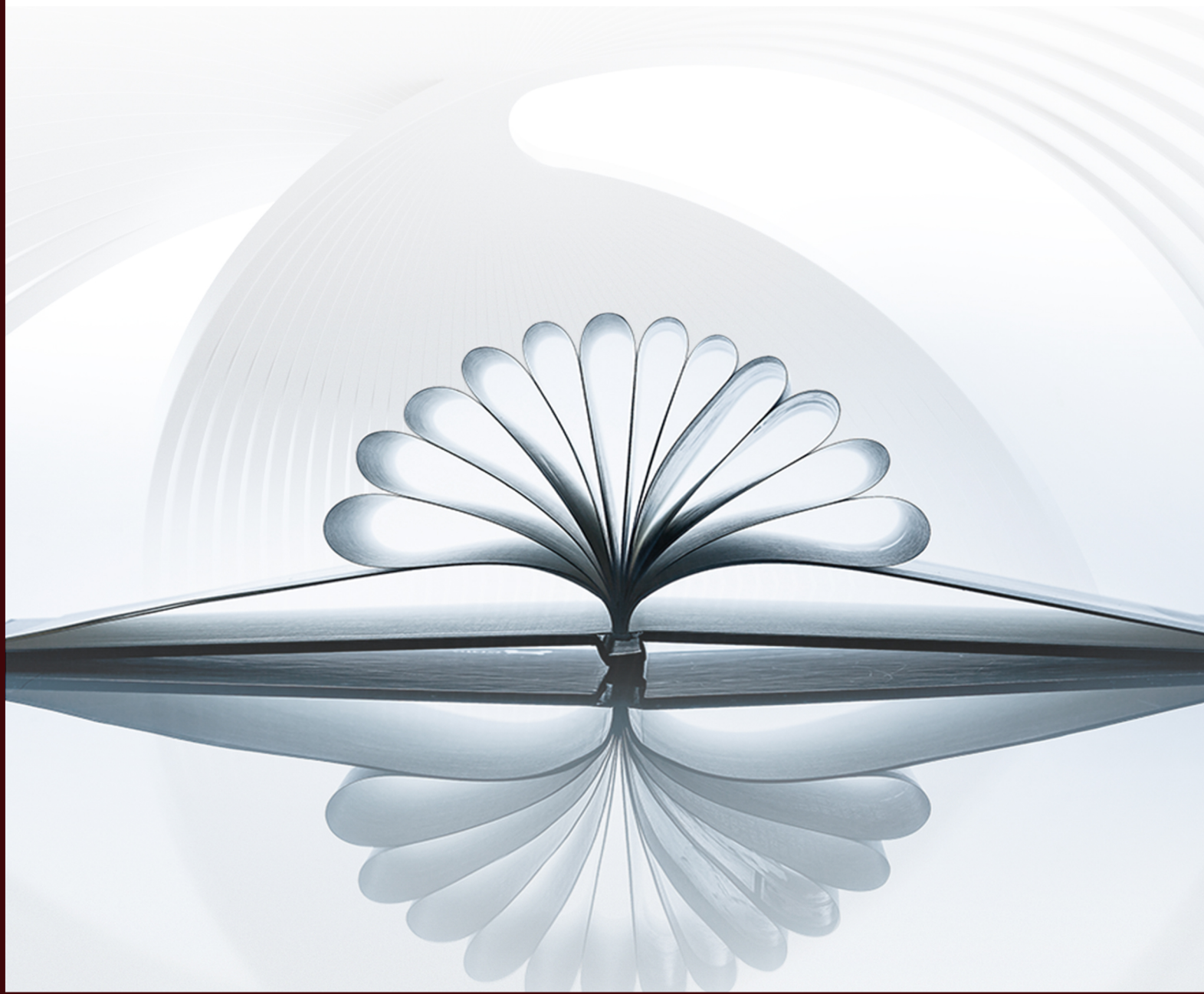

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ARTICLE

On the Relationship between Iranian EFL Students' Writing Strategies and Writing Ability

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between writing strategies, and writing ability of Iranian EFL students. The participants were 120 students learning English in the Iranian EFL context. Data were gathered by means of a writing strategies questionnaire and an IELTS writing task. The results of Pearson correlation test revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between writing strategies, and writing abilities of the participants. The results have some implications for teaching writing in the EFL context.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most important skills in learning English as a foreign language. In some researchers' opinion, there is a relationship between learners' success and their writing abilities (Lerstorm, 1990).[8] In writing a passage in English, learners utilize writing strategies to write a text better. These strategies are different in different students. For example, proficient students have more awareness of writing process than novice ones. Lipstein and Renninger (2007)[9] mentioned that successful learners develop a better understanding of writing skill, set writing goals, and use diverse writing strategies.

Writing Strategies are cognitive and meta-cognitive procedures that writers use to control the production of writing (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).[13] It can be defined as a sequence of engaging a writer in planning, composing, and revising activities in a writing task (Torrance, Thomas & Robinson, 2000).[14]

Today one can find some university EFL students who cannot write even a simple coherent English sentence after four years of study at the university level and the grades they get in the norm-referenced assessment culture of Iran do not have accountability. This problem might be due to their unfamiliarity with strategies involved in writing process. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL students' use of writing strategies and their writing ability. Therefore, the following research question was formulated:

Is there any statistically significant relationship

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between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing ability?

Accordingly, the following null hypothesis could be presented:

There is no statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing ability.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Writing

Richards and Schmidt (2002)[13] defined writing as strategies, procedures, and decision making processes which are utilized when the authors write about a topic. They mentioned that writing included planning, drafting, reviewing and revising processes.

Heaton (1975)[6] explains that a writer needs four fundamental skills to write about a topic. The first skill is grammatical skill which helps the writer to write grammatically correct sentences. The second skill is stylistic skill which is about the ability to manipulate the sentences and use the language efficiently. Mechanical skill is the third necessary skill in writing process. Writers should use conventions peculiar to written language. Judgment skill is the last skill which is related to appropriate manner of writing according to the purpose of writing.

Writing is a complex process which is considered as one of the most essential skills in language learning. Shopping lists, letters and academic texts are some forms of writing. Each of these forms have a variety of features regarding their levels of grammar or structure. Nunan (1999)[11] stated that writing is productive skill and shares some functional characteristics with spoken discourse. Halliday (as cited in Nunan, 1999)[11] described three purposes for writing. Action, information, and entertainment are the main purposes of writing a text. Action includes public signs, product labels, and so on. Information is related to the newspapers and magazines, and entertainment includes comic strips, novels, and newspaper features. Emig (1977)[4] defines writing as a unique mode of learning and in this process both sides of brain should be used. Emig believed that writing a text increases thinking skills, it also helps the author to analyze and synthesize ideas better.

Students in EFL classes have lots of problems with writing. Lack of skills to write is the first problem that students may face. Students do not write in their L1, and this issue impacts their confidence and experience, so learners avoid writing which compounds the problem. Another factor which affects writing is previous learning experience. It impacts the learners' views about their capabilities, and this prevents them from experimenting writing skills. Nunan (1999)[11] said that written discourse is not an important problem, and, linguistically, written language tends to consist of clauses that are complex internally. Students also need to master new vocabulary, format and register conventions.

2.2 Writing Strategies

Writing Strategies include cognitive and metacognitive procedures that writers use to control the production of writing. There are eight categories of writing strategies. "Planning" is the first category in which the writer chooses what to write about. "Global planning" is about organizing the whole text. In "Rehearsing" the writer tries out ideas and in "Repeating" phase, they provide impetus to continue writing. Writers review what had already been written down in "Re-reading", and in "Questioning", ideas are classified and evaluated. "Revising" and "Editing" are the last categories which are related to making some changes to clarify meaning and correct syntax and spelling (Arndt, 1987).[1] She proposed the following table for describing her own categories of writing strategies.

Table 1. Arndt's Categories of ESL Writing Strategies

Category of strategies	Definition
Planning	Finding a focus, deciding what to write about
Global planning	Deciding how to organize the text as a whole
Rehearsing	Trying out ideas and the language in which to express them
Repeating	Of key words and phrases- an activity which often seemed to provide impetus to continue composing
Re-reading	Of what had already been written down
Questioning	As a means of classifying ideas, or evaluating what had been written
Revising	Making changes to the written text in order to clarify meaning
Editing	Making changes to the written text in order to correct the syntax or spelling

Wenden (1991)[16] asked eight students to write a text at the computer and investigated how metacognitive strategies impacted students' writing. She classified writing strategies in two sections. The first section includes metacognitive strategies such as planning, evaluation, and monitoring. Cognitive strategies are in the second part which include clarification, retrieval, resourcing, deferral, avoidance, and verification. Metacognitive strategies are mental operations that students use to regulate their learning process. They are used for execution of a writing task. Cognitive strategies are used for learning new information and using it in a particular task or situation. They are used to solve the problems during writing and help the implementation of the metacognitive strategies.

Victori (1995)[15] classified writing strategies into seven types. They included planning strategies, monitoring strategies, evaluating strategies, resourcing strategies, repeating strategies, reduction strategies, and the use of L1 strategies. In planning strategies, the writers decide about their ideas and state their aims for writing. The strategies which writers use for checking and identifying

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the problems are called monitoring strategies. Evaluating strategies include strategies that are used for changing the text and used after reconsidering the text and learners' objectives. Resourcing strategies means using external referencing sources of information. When writers are reviewing the text, they can apply repeating chunks of language. Reduction strategies involve removing some phrases in a text, trying to solve the problem, and paraphrasing. A writer can use L1 to generate new ideas and evaluate L2 or foreign language written text.

Riazi (1997)[12] asserted that some categories can be added to previous categories of writing strategies. He believed that the students can use these strategies for mental representations of writing task and social activities. He said that cognitive strategies include note taking, inferencing, elaboration, L1 use, and revising and editing multiple drafts of writing. He stated that students use their previous knowledge and called this a dynamic and interactive process. Metacognitive strategies lead to the control of writing tasks and the decrease of the levels of stress and anxiety. Social strategies included interaction with teachers and students for clarifying the task, problem solving, and discussing about comments in writing process. The last category of strategies i.e. search strategies deal with searching and using supporting sources. The composing strategies are displayed in table 2 below.

Table 2. Composing strategies (adapted from Riazi, 1997)

Composing strategies	Constituents	Phases of composing process
Cognitive strategies	Note-taking	Reading & Writing
	Elaboration	Reading & Writing
Interacting with the materials to be used in writing by manipulating them mentally or physically	Use of mother tongue	Reading & Writing
	Knowledge and skill transfer from L1	
	Inferencing	Reading
	Drafting	Writing
Metacognitive strategies	Assigning goals	Task representation and reading
Executive processes used to plan, monitor, and evaluate a writing task.	Planning	Writing
	Rationalizing appropriate Formats	Reading & Writing
	Monitoring and evaluation	Reading/Writing/ task representation
Social strategies	Appealing for clarifications	Task representation
Interacting with other persons to assist in performing the task or to gain affective control	Getting feedback from Professors & peers	Writing
Search strategies	Searching and using libraries	
	Using guidelines	Reading and writing
Searching and using supporting sources	Using others' writing as a model	

2.3 Empirical Studies

Gahungu (2007)[5] conducted a study to find the interrelationship among strategy use, self-efficacy, and language ability in foreign language learners in Northern Arizona University. Participants of this research were 37 students studying French. One of the researchers asked the students to fill out a forty-item questionnaire which was strategy inventory for language learning (SILL). They were also asked to complete a forty-item questionnaire about their levels of self-efficacy. Learners' levels and their abilities in French language were measured by a cloze test. Open-ended questions, interviews, and class observation were used in this research, too. He found that there was a positive and significant relationship between these three variables.

Yilmaz (2010)[18] aimed at investigating the relationship between language learning strategies, gender, proficiency and self-efficacy beliefs. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference for the strategies in favor of good learners. Also, it was shown that the highest and lowest ranks were for compensation strategies and affective strategies respectively.

Assadi Aidinlou and Massomi Far (2014)[2] investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, writing strategies, and correct use of conjunctions by Iranian EFL learners. The participants of this study were 67 EFL learners who studied English in a language school in Iran. They asked participants to fill out two questionnaires including self-efficacy beliefs questionnaire and a writing strategy questionnaire. They also used a writing task in which they asked students to complete it by using appropriate conjunctions. The findings showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and writing strategies but there was not any statistically significant relationship between writing strategies and appropriate use of conjunctions.

Bai, Hu, and Gu (2014)[3] found that there was a relationship between language proficiency and the choice of strategies in Singapore primary schools. As they said, a wide range of writing strategies is available to young writers. However, their reliance on and use of certain writing strategies might be different in different stages of proficiency development.

Kao and Reynolds (2017)[7] investigated the relationship between strategy use and perceived writing ability of Taiwanese university students. They found a statistically significant positive relationship between the use of cognitive/preparation strategies and students' self-rated writing ability.

It could be said that there have been contradictory findings in the literature with regard to the relationship between strategy use and language learning skills and sub-

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skills. Due to the paucity of research in the Iranian EFL context, the present study delved in to the issue of writing strategies to find out if there exists a positive relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and writing abilities.

3. Methodology

The study is of a correlational nature. The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and writing abilities. Data were obtained through the Persian version of writing strategies questionnaire (Assadi Aidinlou & Masoomi Far, 2014)[2] and an IELTS writing task.

3.1 Participants

The participants were 120 randomly selected intermediate EFL students at Iran Language Institute. The students had learned English formally at school for more than five years and they participated in English language classes in this institute.

3.2 Instrumentation

The following instruments were used to obtain valid and reliable data: Writing strategies questionnaire and an IELTS writing task. They are explained below:

3.2.1 Writing Strategies Questionnaire

The writing strategies questionnaire was taken from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2002).[21] Yoong (2010)[19] mentioned that this questionnaire has a high level of reliability as the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.91. The original questionnaire included ninety questions. It was divided into six parts based on six language skills of listening strategy, vocabulary strategy, speaking strategy, reading strategy, writing strategy, and translation strategy.

The second version of Language Strategy Use Questionnaire included 40 statements concerning four main English language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The adapted version used in this study includes ten statements for writing skill. This questionnaire is in the form of 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. It was validated by Assadi and Massoumi Far (2014)[2] in Iran (See appendices A & B).

3.2.2 IELTS Writing Task

Task 1 of an IELTS writing test was used to assess the learners' writing ability. The writing task was chosen from the book entitled Academic Writing Practice for IELTS (McCarter, 2002).[10] The students were supposed to write 150 words in 20 minutes to describe a graph. The writing samples were rated by two raters and the inter-rater reliability was found to be .95.

3.3 Data collection procedures

The students were asked to fill out the writing strategies questionnaires. They were informed that the items were about their personal views and there were no right or wrong answers. Also, they were given an IELTS writing test to elicit their writing samples.

3.4 Design

The design of the study was ex-post facto design. The variables of the study were writing strategies and writing abilities. Students' writing strategies and writing abilities were measured by giving them a writing strategies questionnaire and an IELTS writing task respectively. The minimum and maximum scores students could get on the writing strategies test were 10 and 50 respectively. To rate students' writing samples, public band descriptors of Cambridge University were used. Four main criteria including "Task achievement", "Coherence and cohesion", "Lexical Resource" and "Grammatical Range and accuracy" were used to assess writing samples. The minimum and maximum scores they could get on the test were 0 and 36 respectively.

3.5 Data analysis

As for data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The purpose of descriptive statistics was checking the underlying assumptions of the statistical procedures used in the study. As for the inferential statistics Pearson correlation test was used to check the hypothesis.

4. Results

As to this study, the writing strategies questionnaire was administered to indicate students' levels of using writing strategies. Table 3 below provides information about descriptive statistics for writing strategies used by Iranian EFL learners. In this table, the ranks and means of these items are summarized.

Table 3. Writing Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners

Item no	rank	Writing strategies	mean
1	10	Exercising the alphabet and/or new words in the second language	2.81
2	1	Designing in advance essay writing by preparing an outline for the essay	4.34
3	5	Writing different types of texts in the target language	3.86
4	6	Benefiting from notes taken in the classroom in the target language	3.65
5	3	Finding a different way for expressing the idea when not knowing the correct expression	4.12
6	4	Reviewing the written text before continuing	3.93
7	2	Using of reference issues such as a glossary, a dictionary, a thesaurus for finding words in the second or foreign language	4.23
8	7	Waiting to edit the writing until the ideas are down on paper	3.45
9	9	Modifying writing several times to change the language and content into a better format	2.97
10	8	Getting feedback from others, especially native speakers of language	3.24
		mean	3.66
SD		0.82	

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4.1 Test of Normality of distribution of data

The normality of distribution for writing strategies and writing scores are summarized in the following table.

Table 4. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Writing strategies	.157	120	.200
IELTS Writing task1	.114	120	.200

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As seen in the table above, the sig level for both writing strategies and IELTS writing scores were .20. Therefore, it could be said that the data were normally distributed.

4.2 Analysis of the Research Question

As stated in previous parts, students completed a writing strategies questionnaire to find out about their writing strategies use in foreign language. IELTS writing task 1 was used to elicit students' writing samples. Students wrote about a diagram to show their ability in foreign language writing. The results of writing strategies questionnaire and the students' IELTS writing task 1 would provide data and an answer to the research question i.e. whether there is any relationship between the students' writing strategies use and their writing ability. To find the relationship between writing strategies and writing ability, a Pearson correlation test was done. As shown in table 5 below, the correlation coefficient is .888 which suggests that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing ability.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Test for Writing Strategies Use and Writing ability

		IELTS Writing task1	Writing strategies
Writing ability	Pearson Correlation	1	.888**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	3502.3	449.73
	Covariance	29.43	3.77
	N	120	120
Writing strategies	Pearson Correlation	.888**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	449.73	94.96
	Covariance	3.77	.67
	N	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between Iranian EFL students' writing strategies and their writing abilities. The findings echo earlier findings in the literature. For example, the findings are in line with Yilmaz (2010)[18] and Bai, Hu, and Gu (2014)[3] that there is a relationship between language learning strategies and students' proficiency. Also, findings are in line with Kao and Reynolds (2017)[7] who found a statistically significant positive relationship between Taiwanese EFL students' use of cognitive/preparation strategies and their self-rated writing ability. However, the results are to some extent in contrast with Assadi Aidinlou and Massomi Far (2014)[2] who found that there was no statistically significant relationship between writing strategies and correct use of conjunctions. This might necessitate further research to find out more about the nature of the relationship between writing strategies and different components of writing including conjunctions.

Winne (1995)[17] recommended that students will obtain better results and scores in their learning process if they check how well they progress and control the impact and efficacy of their learning methods and strategies.

Moreover, Zimmerman and Bandura (1994)[20] mentioned that students should be aware of their abilities and the teachers should teach them to foster their writing strategies and self-efficacy. They believed that students should be aware of the effect of their own writing strategies and their relationship with self-efficacy beliefs.

The findings of this study will be insightful for teachers in that they will help them to find new ways to solve their problems in EFL writing. Most of the students are aware of writing strategies but they do not know how to use them. Teachers should teach them how to use these strategies in a proper context. Teaching these strategies and practicing them in writing classes can help the students to write in a more efficient way.

The study had some limitations. The first one concerned the data collection procedure. The students filled out the questionnaire but it is hard to know if the learners use these strategies in their own writing. The second limitation concerned the selection of participants. The participants were 120 EFL students in one language school. Dues to the limitations of the present study, caution needs to be exercised in generalizing the findings to the population of Iranian EFL learners.

Further studies could opt to choose more participants from different institutes across the country. Also, they could other instruments such as interviews to gauge students' writing strategies. The participants of this study were both males and females. It is suggested that further research deal with males and females separately or take into account the variable of gender which might have affected the results.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Writing Strategies Questionnaire

1.I practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in target language.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

2.I define an outline of the essay to design the way for writing.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

3.I try to write different kinds of texts in the target language.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

4.I take notes in the class in the target language as much as I'm able.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

5.I try to find different way of expressing the idea when not knowing the correct expression.

Never true of me Usually not true of me

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Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

6.I review what has already been written before continuing to write more.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

7.I use reference materials such as glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus for finding or verifying words in the target language.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

8.I wait to edit my writing until all the ideas are down on the paper.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

9.I revise my writing once or twice for improving the language and content.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

10.I try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.

Never true of me Usually not true of me
Sometimes true of me Usually true of me
Always true of me.

Appendix B- Persian Version of Writing Strategies Questionnaire

1- من نوشتن الفبا و/یا کلمات جدید را به زبان انگلیسی تمرین می کنم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

2- من برای طراحی نوشته ام ابتدا طرح و چارچوب کلی تعریف می کنم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

3- من سعی می کنم تا متون مختلفی را به انگلیسی بنویسم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

4- من در کلاس زبان انگلیسی تا جایی که بتوانم یادداشت برداری می کنم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

5- وقتی من اصطلاح صحیح را نمی دانم، سعی می کنم تا راه متفاوتی برای بیان ایده ام بیابم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

6- من متنی را که نوشته ام مرور می کنم و سپس به نوشتن ادامه می دهم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

7- من از منابع مرجع مانند واژه نامه،فرهنگ لغت و فرهنگ جامع لغات برای یافتن کلمات متنوع در زبان انگلیسی استفاده می کنم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

8- من تا زمانیکه همه ایده ها و نظراتم را به روی کاغذ بیاورم صبر می کنم و نوشته ام را ویرایش می کنم.
اصلا درباره من درست نیست معمولا درباره من درست نیست
گاهی اوقات درباره ام درست است معمولا درباره من درست است کاملا درباره ام درست است

9- من برای بهتر شدن زبان و محتوای نوشته ام یک یا دوباره بازبینی می کنم.
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ARTICLE

Teaching Hong Kong English before Teaching Academic English: The Gateway to Effective Learning of College Writing

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ABSTRACT

Owing to the negative view of Hong Kong English (HKE) in popular discourse, few English lecturers in Hong Kong universities directly acknowledge or discuss the variety in a non-linguistic course. This paper illustrates an action research study of how HKE may play a role in an academic writing course of a sub-degree program in Hong Kong. Focusing on 8 representatives from an academic writing course with 100 students, it employed the qualitative experiment method to examine whether students who had possessed basic linguistic knowledge of HKE from an additional tutorial would perceive HKE and academic writing differently from those who had not. Student representatives from each group were invited to a focus group to explore ideas about the two subjects discussed in class. Their conversations suggested that prior knowledge of the syntactic features of HKE might raise students' awareness of the grammatical differences between the variety and the standard. The analysis also suggested that introducing the linguistic view of HKE to students might render them optimistic about their variety, helping them identify the situations where the variety would be tolerant of and settings where Standard English would be expected. The study suggested that such an intervention might facilitate students' learning of Standard English for academic purposes and practices of English in actual professional communication. Upon the improvement or advancement, they will position themselves more powerfully in the dichotomy between the standard and non-standard. More formal research on a similar or relevant topic is required to validate the impact of understanding HKE on learning academic writing.

1. Introduction

I began to teach academic writing in Hong Kong five years ago. One of the common topics of such a university course is "how to proofread an essay" or the like. In my first lecture of this topic, I mentioned Hong Kong English (HKE) in passing. Although it was not a sociolinguistics course, I had thought that Hong Kong students' common mistakes in academic writing might originate from their own English variety, which was why I spent half an hour on it. After class, the students said that knowledge of HKE had facilitated their learning of writing. Nonetheless, when the course coordinator knew

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it in a casual conversation afterwards, she asked me not to discuss HKE in a non-linguistic course again.

It was actually after this lesson that I first became interested in HKE and academic writing. I wondered why she discouraged me from teaching something that should be beneficial to students and their learning. As a linguistics researcher, more importantly, I recognized that HKE should be a natural product of language in contact. I started reading scholarly works on HKE and academic writing respectively. Recently, I even conduct action research to examine any invisible links between them.

Just like other international cities, Hong Kong is a metropolis where English functions like a second language in many workplace settings. It is so widely used that Hong Kong people have developed their own variety of English, often called Hong Kong English (HKE). While the term often refers to the dialect (i.e. phonetic characteristics) of the English language spoken in Hong Kong, it also denotes the grammatical and vocabulary features of the English language used in different channels in the city. However, since English is not used as a lingua franca by the majority of Hong Kong people[1], the variety remains not officially codified[2]. The mass media, local commentators, and Netizens in Hong Kong usually criticize the phenomenon of HKE[3]. Its grammatical characteristics, together with the pronunciation "mistakes", are often considered "errors" from an English teaching perspective[4].

In the past, higher education in Hong Kong was for the elite, who could be somewhat "grammatically correct" or "near-native" when writing in English[5]. Nowadays, owing to mass tertiary education in Hong Kong, many secondary school graduates who do not have sufficient English proficiency are still able to have a place in a degree or an associate degree program[6]. Their use of English may contain HKE, and they are likely to find academic writing, which is often a compulsory course for all year one students, exceedingly challenging. They can be discouraged in the learning process because they find it so hard to get rid of the HKE label. Sometimes even graduating students may not be satisfied with their academic writing skills[7].

However, interdisciplinary studies on HKE and academic writing are scarcely found. The problem is that academic writing, compared to speaking, is not soft skills that can be acquired in an informal setting. There is clearly a need for more discussion on these two supposedly unrelated topics. This article illustrates an action research study of how basic knowledge of and linguistic discussions about HKE may help students learn English academic writing. It proposes that knowledge of the grammatical features of HKE would indirectly assist students, especially those who are weak in written English, in learning the standard norms of using tenses and sentences in academic writing. The paper also suggests that a linguistic, descriptive discussion about HKE could be conducive to the development of a holistic, critical view of using English in different contexts in the digital, globalization era.

2. The Role of English in Hong Kong

Although Cantonese is the mother tongue of most Hong Kong locals, English has become essential in higher education and career development across all disciplines in the city. Hong Kong was under British rule for about 150 years. Before the transfer of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on July 1, 1997, English was the official language of most formal settings, especially legal and governmental settings. This legitimated Standard British English to be a symbolic power that constructed a reality where different people in Hong Kong, regardless of their nationalities, had to agree on its superiority beyond question[8]. The historical reality, which was best suited to the particular interests of British in the colony, has engendered the perception that English is critical for going up in the social hierarchy. In the 1980s, international trade in Hong Kong started growing rapidly, and since then English has also played a practical, commercial role in the society[9]. People normally consider it an important (if not the most important) indicator of social mobility, career prospects, and economic opportunities[10]. Even with the increasing importance of Putonghua after the turnover, Hong Kong people still believe that English will determine whether or not a person will succeed in life, which mostly means being wealthy and enjoying high social status. Since English is seen as a tool for making a living, few people in Hong Kong are emotionally or affectionately attached to English[11]. As English is considered a tool for career development and social development as well, when it comes to education, the policy of English education in Hong Kong is rarely driven by educationists or applied linguists, but mainly by the business community, parents, and the upper or ruling class[12][13]. Despite the differences among their vested interests, their forces jointly consolidate the pragmatic and ideological importance of English in Hong Kong. The aforementioned three stakeholders, who are not authorities, mostly support Standard English, and they tend to claim that, albeit without sound or strong evidence, the English used by Hong Kong people (i.e. HKE) is inferior and destructive to competitiveness and international trade[14].

2.1 Negative Transfer and Hong Kong English

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As the second language of Hong Kong people, it is not exaggerated to say that HKE is a product of transfer. The concept "transfer" denotes how new learning proceeds based on previous learning[15]. In linguistics, "transfer" refers to the process in which a learner applies items or structures from his or her first language to speak or write a second language[16]. When the L1 is greatly different from the L2, the transfer outcome will be "negative", which makes the output deviant from the standard norms[17]. Although negative transfer does not entail communication failure from a linguistic perspective, it often equals "errors" or "mistakes" in popular discourse. This is likely the case in Hong Kong, where citizens normally learn English as a second language based on their previous acquisition of Cantonese as the first language. The significant differences between the two languages make a negative transfer in general, followed by a criticism from the abovementioned three dominant groups.

Because of the British rule before July 1, 1997, Standard British English was seen the Standard English variety in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the long period of being a British colony and the increasing use of English in the workplace have also provided the city with an opportunity for the development of its own variety of English[18]. It could be further classified as the educated HKE (native-like but locally distinctive with fewer negative transfers) and broad HKE (indicative of low language proficiency with more negative transfers)[19][20]. Nevertheless, since HKE has never been codified in the official circle, nor has it been consistently defined in scholarly studies, its meaning sometimes overlaps with Chinese English, code-mixing of Chinese and English, and transliteration of Chinese in English texts. Some lexical elements of HKE come from interactions between Hong Kong indigenous people with other countries, such as India and Malaysia[21]. In this article, Hong Kong English specifically refers to the non-standard English language carrying lexical and grammatical characteristics originating from Cantonese or Chinese, namely due to negative transfer. This understanding enables a discussion focused on the recurring structural patterns of HKE that permeate among the low-educated in informal conversation, especially in digital communication.

Applied linguists in Hong Kong have well discussed the pronunciation[22], grammar[23], and vocabulary[24] features of HKE (also see the next section). However, HKE is frequently considered a plague outside the linguistics circle, and its features are often considered to be indicators of incompetence or the failure of English education[25].This phenomenon, which echoes the understanding of negative transfer, comes as no surprise:

- Parents know too well about Standard English as a form of economic capital that determines their children's social mobility in Hong Kong[26];
- The mass media keep imposing and amplifying the effect of HKE on youngsters' "declining" English standards[27]; and
- Business enterprises always stress the supposed importance of Standard English to maintain international competitiveness[28].

The popular discourses about HKE are hardly neutral or positive, and the prescriptive criticisms of HKE permeate and are magnified on the Internet. The majority of Hong Kong people simply want to align or identify with the standard, without understanding the nature of language and the science of second language learning. Indeed, "[t]he local people have always also wanted to keep standards very high, refusing to admit the existence of features like a local accent or to treat local usages as normal or grammatical"[29]. In particular in the writing domain, grammatical correctness is given top priority over meaning[30]. Due to the prevalent negative view of HKE, few courses and few English teachers in Hong Kong universities directly acknowledge or discuss the variety. HKE seems to be a politically incorrect topic, except in a course on world Englishes or sociolinguistics.

2.2 English Learning in Hong Kong Universities

English is the official language in all Hong Kong tertiary institutions. It is used as the medium of instruction in most university courses (including sub-degree courses), and most students have to finish their written assignments (e.g., essays, projects), except for Chinese courses, in English[31]. Underlying this situation is the traditional belief that college graduates are supposed to be elites in Hong Kong, whose English abilities and literacy levels should be distinctive from other lower-educated people. To empower them and their shared interests, they should face English on campus every day. Even students not majoring in English or language studies have to take English courses, often known as general education (GE) English courses, in the first year of study. These GE English courses usually teach students academic writing and reading. The former is to teach how to compose an essay in a particular referencing style (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.). In line with other local English teachers, who normally defer to guides produced upon the standard exonormative models[32], university English teachers are also expected to teach the standard norms of academic writing. Students are in turn expected to write Standard English in their assignments. These expectations, unsurprisingly, have posed challenges to a considerable number of freshmen whose writing habits are influenced

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by Cantonese or Chinese, especially on the Internet or smartphone. They may pick up forms from HKE, which is used in spoken interaction and informal online talk, in their academic assignments without realizing they are non-standard. Teachers, on the other hand, spend time on correcting students' mistakes at the expense of training their abilities to reasoning[33]. The possible drawback is that some students keep receiving criticisms of their mistakes, feeling embarrassed, and unknowingly losing the passion for and confidence in moving up the academic ladder.

2.3 Summary of the Literature Review and Research Questions

The above brief review has delineated 1) the importance of English in Hong Kong society and higher education, 2) the negative label of HKE, and 3) its invisible impact on university students' learning of academic writing. As a linguistic capital, English represents not only the current interests of the adults who have the power to assess it but also the future interests of the youngsters who have the opportunities to reproduce it. However, the picture has been complicated by their attachment to Standard English, repulsion against HKE, lack of knowledge of negative transfer, and the societal move to mass tertiary education. While it is difficult to directly subvert the linguistic order or popular discourse, it is possible to effectively mediate between the dominant and suppressed voices. Scholarly voices have called for more space for discussing the local variety in the curriculum[34]. Such discussion will encourage students to accept (at least partially) the non-standard and advance their learning of the standard[35], cultivating the next generation of global citizens. Notwithstanding, virtually no studies in Hong Kong, an international and multicultural city, have directly explored the role of discussing HKE in higher education. In view of this knowledge gap, this action research is centered on higher education in Hong Kong, aiming at addressing two questions:

- How will a discussion about Hong Kong English benefit students in terms of grammar and essay writing?
- How will such a discussion benefit students in terms of English learning in general?

It is hope that through addressing these questions could English teachers and applied linguists be motivated to examine possible approaches to teach Standard English and acknowledge the non-standard Englishes shared by students. Such ways will be alternatives to the traditional ways of teaching English in the classroom.

3. Methods

This study was conducted in a non-government-funded tertiary institution in Hong Kong (the college henceforth). The college offered full-time associate degree (AD) programs for secondary school leavers and top-up degree programs for AD graduates. While English was the medium of instruction for most courses in the college, the AD students normally had obtained level 2 (i.e. marginal pass) in the English subject of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE). The level reflects their low proficiency in English[36]. In the college, approximately 85% of AD students were teenagers who had grown up in Hong Kong and tended to use HKE in daily English communication. All year-one AD students in the college had to take two compulsory courses, College Writing I and College Writing II. Both courses taught students English academic writing in APA (6th ed.) style. Compared to the former, the latter focused more on academic reading.

One hundred students from College Writing II were invited to participate in this study. It employed the qualitative experiment method to examine the possible impact of HKE on the academic writing classroom. The method has been conceptualized by Gerhard Kleinging's works on qualitative-heuristic methodology since the early 1980s[37]. Unlike the traditional quantitative experiment, the qualitative experiment enables researchers to use a qualitative technique (e.g., interviews, non-participant observation, text analysis) to examine whether the participants who have been executed a treatment will behave and/or think differently from those who have not[38][39]. If they do, the treatment is *arguably* correlated to such differences or transformations, subject to a follow-up and larger scale quantitative study to validate and structure the findings. This method aims at collecting unstructured and textual data, instead of numbers, to scrutinize the possible effect of an extra, intervening event that is difficult to immediately measure or objectively quantify. Although it lacks an authoritative code of practice and does not provide space for generalization to the target population, it has played an important role in the natural sciences[40]. It is also frequently used in innovation research that involves the perspective of practitioners in the social sciences[41].

The 100 participants were divided into two groups. In week 4 of the semester, Group A (n=48) learnt academic writing as scheduled, and the students were *not* given any additional knowledge of HKE in class. By contrast, Group B (n=52) was given an *additional* one-hour tutorial on the grammatical features of HKE and their deviations from Standard English. These features have been reported by sociolinguists in Hong Kong and are traditionally considered "negative transfers" from Cantonese, the participants' first language[42]. The typical HKE variants discussed in the tutorial are summarized as follows:

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- No tenses or incorrect tenses[43] *(e.g., Last weekend I go to Lantau Island.)*
- Incomplete verb phrases[44] *(e.g., He Ø arriving.)*
- Inappropriate linking verbs[45] *(e.g., There have two trees.)*
- Zero relative pronouns[46] *(e.g., Filial piety should be something Ø comes from heart.)*
- Zero conjunctions[47] *(e.g., WhatsApp is an important tool for communication, Ø every teenager use it to interact with friends, Ø however we cannot over reliant on it, even Ø it is so convenient.)*
- Double conjunctions[48] *(e.g., Although he is not my friend, but he helps me a lot.)*

The tutor who gave this extra session was an academic with substantial experience in teaching linguistics. At the end of the tutorial, the tutor also briefly discussed the *descriptive* linguistic view of such features (i.e. seeing them as "variants" vis-à-vis "errors").

One week afterwards, all the 100 participants from Groups A and B were given a two-hour mass lecture on common learner errors in essay writing. It was a regular lecture scheduled in week 5 of the semester, and the contents covered were part of the endorsed syllabus of College Writing II. Using the traditional grammar-translation method, the lecturer *prescriptively* discussed the grammatical mistakes commonly made by Hong Kong students in academic writing. Students learnt the following topics in the lecture: 1) inappropriate use of tenses in essay writing, and 2) run-ons and fragments in essay writing.

One week after the mass lecture (i.e. in week 6), four students from Group A and four students from Group B were further invited to a one-hour focus group discussion *separately*. They were selected by the convenience sampling method, based on three criteria: 1) the same number of males and females, 2) a similar English background, and 3) a similar level of English proficiency. The data collection was aimed at reducing the impacts of the particular context and individual difference (as in traditional quantitative experiment)[49]. The profiles of the students are summarized below:

Pseudonyms	Gender	Level in the DSE English examination	MoI of the secondary school	Participation in the HKE tutorial
Participant A1	M	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant A2	F	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant A3	M	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant A4	F	2	Chinese	No (Group A)
Participant B1	F	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)
Participant B2	M	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)
Participant B3	M	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)
Participant B4	F	2	Chinese	Yes (Group B)

The chair (the moderator) asked the participants to discuss the following questions in a relaxed manner:

- To what extent have you understood the use of tenses in academic writing?
- To what extent are you comfortable with writing long sentences in academic writing?
- How do you think about HKE and the use of it in communication?

These questions were designed to elicit textual information about participants' perceptions of academic writing and HKE. Any remarkable differences between the two groups would *discover* (rather than *verify*) a possible influence of the HKE tutorial on them; and by inference, would in turn *address* the two research questions. The chair did not intervene in the discussion, except when the participants were off topic or failed to understand the spontaneous questions emerging from the conversation. The focus group was conducted in a semi-structured manner; and mainly in English. The two groups had the discussion on different days in week 6. The process of each was audio-recorded and transcribed into written form for text analysis.

4. Results

To summarize the transcription result, the one-hour focus group for Group A generated approximately 3500 words of spoken discourse. Approximately 30 minutes and 2000 words were spent on discussing the first two questions about academic writing; approximately 20 minutes and 1500 words on the last question about Hong Kong English. The one-hour focus group for Group B generated approximately 3900 words of spoken discourse. Approximately 35 minutes and 2300 words were spent on discussing the first two questions; approximately 20 minutes and 1600 words on the last question.

The raw data contained obvious grammatical flaws, and for clarity purposes some of them were corrected when used as direct quotes in this article. The coding and cleaning stage generated two transcripts, one for Group A and another for Group B. The transcript of Group A was compared and contrasted with that of Group B for locating any obvious similarities and differences in the three aspects below:

- Ideas about using tenses in academic writing and the learning of it;
- Ideas about sentence length and grammar complexity in academic writing and the learning of them; and
- Ideas about HKE.

The two transcripts were read against each other several times. The analysis of Group A was especially centered on ideas surrounding common learner problems of academic writing; the analysis of Group B was especially focused on ideas relevant to the contents of the additional HKE

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tutorial. Based on the overall analysis, a number of quotations were purposefully selected on two criteria: 1) the perspective showed a sharp contrast with that from another group, and 2) the perspective referred to the HKE tutorial, something stated in the HKE tutorial, and/or the mass lecture. Both criteria were directed at capturing the *possible* existence of qualitative changes in and new experiences with the tutorial. The selection processes involved inductive interpretation, rather than instruments or deductive calculations. The following subsections discuss the major findings from the preliminary data analysis.

Possible Effects of the HKE Tutorial on Learning Tenses in Academic Writing

When asked to share their learning experience in using tenses in academic writing, most participants agreed that using tenses was a challenge. They said that the future tense was easier to use, and that continuous tenses were not common in academic writing. However, the participants who had attended the HKE tutorial showed more confidence in switching between different tenses in discussing previous research. They demonstrated more awareness of the present and past tenses in English academic writing. For example:

"I am sensitive to (the) change between tenses when writing essays… At least I am comfortable (with) shifting between simple past (and) simple present… Unlike (in) Chinese, When we mention publish(ed) finding(s), we should change to (use) simple present, because they are already consider(ed) knowledge. But the action verb(s) in (the) citations should be in (the) past tense because they refer to other scholars' past behaviors like reporting, finding, suggesting, etc." (Participant B2)

"I pay attention to tense(s) when I borrow an external point… Time of event(s) is not shown in Chinese, but it (is) carefully shown in English… Each tense has (a) different meaning to the sentence. [This] is very different from Chinese. When I write Chinese essay(s), I don't care (about) tenses." (Participant B3)

By contrast, the participants who were not given the HKE tutorial seemed to be more confused by the use of tenses in academic writing. In particular, they tended to inappropriately simplify the use of tenses in the literature review. They also said that English tenses made them "puzzled" or "confused". For instance:

"Even (when) you allow me to use Chinese to think, I am still not sure how to use tense(s) to discuss other studies correctly. To me, they (have been) already published. But their findings (are) paraphrase(d) sometimes to (the) present tense and sometimes (the) past tense, and even (the) present perfect (tense). It's very confusing to me. Why not just use (the) past tense all the time?" (Participant A1)

"It really puzzle(s) me (why) we have to change between tenses when we cite (previous studies). When I am writing the essay, the writing action is (ongoing) right now, so I think it should be in (the) present tense. When I refer to other people's research, they are all done, so I think it should be in (the) past tense… I also took the Chinese writing class. Their rules are easier." (Participant A3)

The results suggest that the HKE tutorial might render students attentive to the differences in tenses between HKE and Standard English. In the Oxford English Grammar, Greenbaum stated that "[g]ood English is good use of the resources available in the language."[50] Tenses are important resources in English. They not only function as time referencing in an essay, but also indicate the status of the existing studies being discussed[51]. On the other hand, Cantonese (Chinese) is a language without restricted rules of using tenses. In the Chinese language, time is often indicated by use of adverbs or inference from context. Although, from an ELF perspective, using no tenses or incorrect tenses in the English classroom may have become variants for Chinese[52], teaching academic writing aims at socializing students into the scholarly world in the written setting – where Standard English is normally expected[53]. This justifies the need to conform to the standard norms of utilizing tenses for time reference and stylistic purposes in academic writing[54]. The findings suggest that knowledge of HKE seems to play a subtle role in drawing Hong Kong students' attention to such a need, raising their awareness of using tenses properly in English. A discussion on HKE will be helpful to facilitate their learning of using tenses in English academic writing. Such learning, if successful, may also increase their cognitive skills in analyzing the features of English tenses, then decreasing part of the negative transfers, enhancing their grammatical competence, and empowering them as an English user in the Hong Kong context.

Possible Effects of the HKE Tutorial on Using Sentences in Academic Writing

The second discussion question concerns the use of sentences in academic writing. When asked to state their understanding of sentence use in academic writing, many participants recognized that long sentences could indicate the writer's complex thoughts more effectively and the logical relations more clearly than short sentences could. Yet, those who had been given the HKE tutorial appeared to be more comfortable with long sentences. They seemed to be particularly aware of the use of conjunctions in compound and/or complex English sentences. For example:

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"I think we need to use long sentence(s) in essay(s). We need to use long sentence(s) to discuss complex ideas… so I think I will not avoid long sentences but when I put (a) comma between two long sentences, I will think whether they should be connected by (a) conjunction… We always use (a) comma to separate sentences in Chinese, but we can't do the same thing to English. My grammar is not good but I know we should use a conjunction to connect two clauses. When I see two verbs in a sentence, I will be careful." (Participant B2)

"Long sentences may be bad in Chinese, but they are common in English… And there [are] logical relationships between ideas. For example, the meaning(s) of thesis statement and topic sentence are too complicate(d) to write in short sentences, and need to use one sentence to make a definition… of course we make (fewer) mistakes in short sentences but we can't always use short sentences like children." (Participant B4)

The participants who had *not* been given the HKE tutorial were more conservative of using long sentence in academic writing. Two of them even explicitly stated that they would avoid long sentences for the sake of not making grammatical mistakes. The use of conjunctions seemed to be the root. For instance:

"In the past, my teachers always (said)… the main verb (was) missing, the conjunction (was) missing, the conjunction should be delete(d)… Teachers often say I make a lot of mistakes when I write long sentences, so I prefer to use short sentences even (when) I talk about some complex things… Like (in) Chinese, we can use several short sentences together to describe the idea. When their meanings are combined correctly, they can still show complex idea(s). I think it's also okay in English." (Participant A2)

"I rather separate them (into) two to three sentence(s). In this way I can make sure that there (are) not many problems… Of course I (have) already learn(t) English conjunctions but I (am) unsure about (using) them correctly… When it is need(ed) (and) when it is not need(ed)… Anyway I was always wrong when I use(d) long sentence(s) in secondary school. I don't want to (lose) marks so I will use more short sentences for safety." (Participant A4)

The data suggest that the HKE tutorial might encourage students to use longer sentences when necessary in academic writing. In English academic writing, complexity and length of sentences often reveal academic maturity and ability to argue for or against a point[55]. This stylistic feature of academic writing is sometimes even more important than grammatical correctness, as the latter can be achieved by proofreading and professional editing. Students who are weak or unconfident in academic writing tend to separate a complex idea into different components[56]. While the tendency to use simple structure is a feature of all learner language, for Hong Kong students, especially students with low proficiency in language, the origin of the problem can be three-folded. First, short sentences are preferable in idiomatic or traditional Chinese, which may influence their preferences of sentence length in English. Additionally, in Chinese communication, conjunctions are often omitted when the logical relationships among clauses can be drawn from the co-text or context. Moreover, owing to their experiences in incorrect use or inappropriate omission of conjunctions, they may blindly avoid using long sentences in academic writing, which restricts their ability to make sense of information or data and participate in academic work. The topic sentence, for instance, is one sentence that "carries one or more propositions that the remaining contents prove, explain, illustrate, elaborate upon, or carry out in some way"[57]. The topic sentence of a sophisticated body paragraph, which frames the sub-argument, may be substantiated, and therefore, long and complex in terms of structure. To encourage Hong Kong students to deal with the difficulties in using long sentences or conjunctions correctly, probably one way is to let them understand the properties of their own variety but simultaneously teach them the standard norms of written English[58]. When they know how their first language has influenced their use of conjunctions in English, they will become more sensitive to the correct use of English conjunction, through which they will consciously avoid the transfer from Chinese and be more willing to compose longer, more complex sentences in academic writing, thereby increasing the cohesion, coherence, and finally readability of their essays and power of their positioning in academic conversation.

Possible Effects of the HKE Tutorial on Forming a Critical but Open View of English

In the last 20 minutes, the focus-group participants were asked to share their views of Hong Kong English. The sharing concentrated on the grammatical issues surrounding it. Although all participants said that they felt inferior and disadvantaged because of the HKE label, those who had understood the descriptive view of HKE from the extra tutorial showed a more open and optimistic attitude to their own variety. Two of them pointed out the differences in using HKE between the written and spoken settings. For example:

"I think Hong Kong English is not good to formal situation(s) but it is okay to (be used) between friends especially in WhatsApp… On (the) Internet we Hong Kong people use Hong Kong English because the environment

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is informal. And it shows (that) we are from Hong Kong. But in formal situation(s) like academic writing grammar is important… and so I think Hong Kong English should be accepted in oral, but we should not totally accept (it) in formal writing." (Participant B1)

"When it comes to writing, it means we have time to proofread (or) edit (it) before submitting the work. It's not like in oral… we have to continue speaking and we have no time to correct, so speak(ing) Hong Kong English is no problem if the listener understand(s)… But the mistakes should be avoided in academic writing because it is supposed to be read by foreigner(s), but sometimes they are not harmful in oral among Hong Kong people themselves. (Being) too worried about the mistakes will decrease our fluency." (Participant B3)

On the other hand, those who were not given the HKE tutorial equated HKE and "grammatical mistakes" or "poor language skills". They tended to emphasize that it was "incorrect", "wrong", and "impure". Three of them even reported that there should be no space for HKE in all forms of communication. For instance:

"You read newspapers and you know the mistakes, the errors of Hong Kong English are reported again and again… The errors can be document(ed) and summarize(d), so from another point of view they are so common and shameful and should not appear in all situations. I don't want other people (to) say my English is poor, my grammar is too bad, etc." (Participant A1)

"Hong Kong English is incorrect and not pure. People laugh at Hong Kong English all the time… People more often laugh at my pronunciation (of English) but (my) grammar is also a big problem. It's wrong. Then it's wrong, no matter in oral or writing… I never see teachers or famous people accept Hong Kong English… sometimes I feel sad that I (was) not born as a native English speaker." (Participant A3)

"I already try my best not (to) use Hong Kong English, because they always represent bad language skills. I try to listen (to) English songs and BBC (programmes) and I force myself to read English newspapers every week. But it seems (that) I am not successful… my pronunciation (is) still very bad and my grammar is always wrong." (Participant A4)

The final discussion in the focus group postulated that the HKE tutorial, which allowed the students to understand HKE from a linguistic perspective, probably helped them to look at their own variety more positively and objectively. Regardless of educational levels and professions, people who are not trained in linguistics are often unwilling to accept English varieties other than Standard English[59]. This affective factor makes them believe that non-standard norms are always inferior and therefore unacceptable. Sociolinguists, on the contrary, seldom see the features of HKE as intolerant "mistakes", but as the outcomes of negative transfer from modern Chinese structure and Chinese thought patterns[60]. They are invisible mediators (i.e. interlanguage) between existing knowledge of L1 and the new language, namely English, being learnt. Although the non-standard features of an English variety need not be formally taught to the learners[61], linguistic understanding of how those features are developed or fossilized may eventually help the users accept the variations that do not impede communication and take a less negative attitude to it. After all, no learner will feel pleasant when being criticized without knowing why. In addition, allowing students to address the linguistic view of HKE does not mean that the standard norms are given up[62], but the knowledge will help them evaluate which settings enable the variety and which contexts require the standard. This can help to develop a holistic view of how English is used in actual communication, especially in the expanding circles. Only after that can the students build confidence in using their variety as a tool to master the standard norms. When they develop communicative competence to utilize HKE to learn, they are likely to see the symbolic power of English they can possess in the future.

5. Discussions, Implications, and Conclusion

The study examined the viability of introducing the discussion about Hong Kong English into an academic writing course. It concentrated on AD students who tended to use HKE in their written assignments. Results of the qualitative experiment incorporating a focus group suggested that prior knowledge of the grammatical features of HKE might raise students' awareness of the grammatical similarities and differences between the variety and the standard, through which they might decrease negative transfer and become more confident and skillful in using tenses and sentences in English academic writing. The results also suggested that introducing the descriptive, linguistic view of HKE to students could render them more open to or less negative about their variations. It could help students to pay attention to written situations where the non-standard features would be acceptable or tolerant of and settings where Standard English would be expected. Such understanding would eventually facilitate their learning of Standard English for academic purposes and practices of English in actual communication, thereby powering up themselves as native-like English speakers.

In view of the preliminary findings and their implications, this action research proposes that linguistic

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knowledge of HKE may be productive to students' learning and practices of academic writing. The characteristics of tenses and sentence structures, albeit often seen as mistakes, have their subtle roles in the curriculum. Compared to dwelling on such mistakes and the corrections using the grammar-translation method, teaching them why such mistakes will be easily made can be more efficacious and less demotivating. Penalizing learners on non-standard linguistic items is not always useful[63]. By contrast, it often creates an unpleasant classroom surrounding that can be devastating to second language learning[64]. While external intervention from non-linguists is unavoidable, learners' behaviors of "changing English should be respected instead of being criticized"[65]. Thus, college teachers may describe the HKE features when they enter discussions about the academic register or style. Even for college teachers themselves, understanding HKE from a linguistic viewpoint will help them cope with English varieties and their students' home language[66]. This research also advocates the co-existence of HKE and Standard English in English language teaching in tertiary education. While Standard English is preferred in most academic contexts, HKE is sometimes acceptable or even rhetorically effective in other informal settings. The dominant voices, which often despise HKE, are not necessarily the "reality". Rather than prescriptively rejecting the existence of HKE across all contexts, it appears more practical and realistic to raise students' awareness about when and where it is tolerated or not tolerated. One way to achieve this is to create a learning setting where the non-standard norms are acknowledged to some extent[67]. College teachers may share with students how linguists or ELF proponents perceive the role HKE in the globalized society, so as to build their competence in evaluating use of English in context. This should be the ultimate goal of teaching English as a second language if college teachers are really concerned about the interests of the next generation and the symbolic power they will possess after graduation.

The above propositions and suggestions are based on analyses and projections of self-reports from the qualitative experiment, rather than a quantitative assessment of students' learning experience or performance. There were two weeks between the HKE tutorial and the focus group sessions; rather than the tutorial alone, there might be external variables (e.g., self-reading) beyond the classroom setting that had impacted on Group B representatives' perceptions of HKE and academic writing as reported in the focus group. Additionally, due to the administrative constraint, only eight representatives (out of 100 participants) from the dataset were invited to the focus group. Further studies could determine the veracity and conditionality of the functional and/or pedagogical roles of HKE in teaching academic writing and speaking in university. A longitudinal text analysis of students' essays before and after a discussion about HKE would be particularly helpful in justifying the formal causal link, if any, between learning HKE and learning English academic writing. Researchers could also conduct similar research on the role of another aspect of HKE, namely the Hong Kong accented pronunciation, in academic speaking and presentation courses.

To summarize, this paper urges that an English academic writing course, where Standard English for academic purposes is taught, could reserve a space in which non-standard English plays an educational role. In the Digital Age, English has more or less become a lingua franca across the globe. People not only speak different accented Englishes face to face, but also write different Englishes on the Internet, where new words and new usage emerge easily. When negative transfer becomes so common, its label in folk theories may also become less negative than it used to be. Simultaneously, when there is more variation in language use because of the increasing diversity of speakers, students may find a gap between the English required in the classroom and the Englishes used in social interaction [68]. The dichotomy between correct use and incorrect use blurs. In such a situation, it may be no longer persuasive to simply emphasize the standard and decline the non-standard as teachers did half a century ago.

But still, normative evaluations of good and bad English remain in place among non-linguists and in the academic world. Learning English as a second language for academic purposes is not only about grammar or pronunciation, but also background of the L2 learners, especially the features of their shared L1. If language teaching also aims at helping students become global citizens who acknowledge diversities of language[69], the variety of the locals should not be totally excluded from the syllabus[70]. It is unhelpful to "keep imposing a single restricted pedagogical model to the students while they actually have options to choose from"[71]. There should be "a pedagogical value in incorporating the 'non-standard' into the curriculum as a variety to be discussed and contrasted"[72]. To encourage students to learn the standard and simultaneously appreciate the non-standard, once more, English teachers should create space for discussing the students' variety (or varieties) in the English classroom, to promote a positive, global view of English and help them take a healthy, open attitude to the varieties – including the standard ones.

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ARTICLE

The Bilingual Competence of Local Council Staffers in the Centre and Littoral Regions of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This work sets out to appraise the state of individual bilingualism in francophone local councils in Cameroon. The work checks the use of English by francophone local council workers and of French by their anglophone mates with the focus on the four communicative language skills, i.e., speaking, reading, writing and listening. The ethnographic approach to data collection was adopted, and self-rating through a questionnaire was the major tool used. The eight-item questionnaire was administered to 192 local council staffers. They were 177 (91.14% of 192) francophone workers selected out of a pool of over 500 workers in six local councils situated in two big francophone towns i.e., Douala and Yaounde on the one hand, and 15 (8.85% of 192) out of a total of 16 anglophone workers in these same localities. The analysis of the data collected revealed that very low percentages of francophone workers could perform the following tasks using English: discuss office issues with their bosses (10.16% of 177 subjects), read out a speech (8.47%), write a letter to their collaborators (4.51%), and listen to someone with understanding (20.33%). Conversely, a high proportion of anglophone workers were able to perform these same tasks using French i.e., discuss office issues with their bosses (73.33% of 15 subjects), read out a speech (20%), write a letter to a collaborator (33.33%), and listen to someone with understanding (80%). In short, 63.28% of 177 francophone workers reported having a low performance in receptive skills in English as opposed to 20% of 15 anglophone workers who said the same for French; similarly, 7.34% of 177 francophones claimed to have a good command of productive skills in English as opposed to 53.33% of 15 anglophones who claimed to have a command of French. The implications for the study are that official French-English bilingualism in Cameroon is a mere political wish which is not a reality on the field.

1. Introduction

When a country opts for two official languages, there is always a problem with the size of the users. Should one of these languages be given preferential treatment? Or, should both languages be used on equal basis so as to curb down linguistic assimilation, and facilitate social peace and harmony in the country? Since the independence of French Cameroon in 1960 and

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its Reunification with British Cameroon in 1961 to form a Federal Republic, a decision was taken by Government to establish English and French as the two official languages of the newly born Federal Republic of Cameroon. It was pledged that the two languages were to function on equal basis and that Government was to take appropriate measures to promote bilingualism in these two languages. These measures have been applied for over half a century and it is expected that they are bearing fruit today. The purpose of this work is to check whether local council workers are capable of rendering services at their places of work using both official languages. The following central question was set to guide the exercise: How bilingual are anglophone and francophone Cameroon local council workers? This is supplemented by four specific questions, i.e.: can Cameroonian local council workers discussed office issues with their bosses in French and English, the two official languages? Can they perform tasks like reading out a speech, writing letters and listening with understanding in these two official languages? The work is divided into four sections labelled background to the study (1), literature review (2), methodology (3), and data analysis and discussion (4). These are considered in turn.

Background to the Study

This section first defines the term bilingualism and examines a number of attributes that tend to go with it (1.1); then it considers the language situation in Cameroon (1.2), and the structure of Central and local Governments in the country (1.3).

1.1 Bilingualism and its Attributes

Several researchers like Bloomfield (1933)[5], Mackey (1970)[19], Haugen (1953)[11], Ayafor (2005)[1], and Baker (2006)[2], to name only these, have worked extensively on the issue of bilingualism. To all of them, it can be regarded as the alternate use of two languages. To Bloomfield (1933)[5] cited in Baker (2006)[2], it refers to the native-like control of two or more languages. To Haugen (1953)[11], individual bilingualism is attested when a speaker of one language is able to produce complete meaningful utterances in another language. According to Ayafor (2005)[1] bilingualism is the ability to speak more than one language with proficiency; it is also a side by side co-existence of two languages in a country or in a community. It can therefore be concluded that a bilingual person is someone who is capable of using two languages with varying degrees of competence. This issue of degree of competence has pushed Baker (2006)[2] and other researchers like Wei (2000)[22] to assign some attributes to bilingualism: active, passive, balanced, minimal, maximal. Active bilingualism refers to someone who speaks and writes in two languages well while passive bilingualism refers to someone who has receptive abilities of understanding and reading in their second language. A balanced bilingual, also referred to as equilingual, symmetrical or ambilingual, is said to use two languages with equal proficiency, even though Fishman (1971)[9] argues that rarely are there bilinguals or multilinguals with equal ability in their use of two or more languages. Maximal competence is when a bilingual has native-like control of two or more languages (Bloomfield 1933)[5] while minimal competence is when a bilingual has some control of his or her two languages. Other attributes, which are based on such factors as the age of the bilingual, the ability of the bilingual, the process of development of bilingualism, and the context of acquisition of bilingualism, to name only these, include the following: simultaneous, sequential, late, incipient, receptive, productive, ascendant, recessive, circumstantial, and elective. Simultaneous bilingualism is the acquisition of two languages at the same time and age; in sequential bilingualism, the individual acquires one language first, and then learn the other language later. As for late bilingualism, it occurs when an individual has learned and used a language from childhood and, later in life, he/she decides to learn another language. Incipient bilinguals can utter a few utterances in their other language, like a tourist who can successfully ask for the way to a given destination like a museum. Ascendant and recessive bilingualism are two extremes of a continuum; it occurs when someone is developing a second language at the expense of a language he or she had acquired previously. Elective bilingualism has to do with freely choosing to learn a language, usually in the school context while circumstantial bilingualism is the learning of a new language in order to survive, as it is usually the case with immigrants.

1.2 Language Situation in Cameroon

Cameroon is a multilingual country where several languages of various statuses co-exist peacefully. First close to 300 indigenous languages are spoken natively by the various tribes that constitute the country's 22 million inhabitants. These languages are listed in a number of works including the following: Dieu and Renaud (1983)[6], Kouega (2007)[16] and Lewis et al (2016)[18]. Next above these are some major lingua francas whose speakers span three or more of the ten regions of the country. These are: Pidgin English, Fulfulde, and Beti. Pidgin is actively used in the Southwest and Northwest region and the neighbouring Littoral and West regions, especially for business transactions. Fulfulde is spoken in the three northern regions of the country i.e., the Adamawa, Far-North and North regions. Beti is the name of a language

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group that includes major dialects like Bulu, Eton, Ewondo, and Fang, which are spoken from the Centre region through the South region of Cameroon up to the northern provinces of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. Speakers of these dialects share many cultural and linguistic features, though intelligibility decreases to some extent as one moves across this vast territory. Reigning above these languages are French and English, which are the joint official languages of Cameroon. French came into the country when Germany lost the First World War and its colonies in Africa had to be shared between the victors i.e. France and Britain. France took 4/5 of German Kamerun as it was called then, and Britain took 1/5. French Cameroon evolved as a League of Nations Trust Territory, then as a United Nations Mandated Territory, before becoming independent in 1960, with French being adopted as its official language. British Cameroons were two discontinuous strips of land, one strip being in the north and the other in the south. The two strips were attached to Nigeria, a large British colony. These two strips of land became League of Nations Trust Territories and then United Nations Mandated Territories. Under the pretext that these two strips of land could not evolve on their own, their citizens were asked to choose between joining the Nigerian Federation or joining Cameroon that became independent in 1960. A referendum was organised and Northern British Cameroons decided to join Nigeria while Southern British Cameroon whose official language was English, joined French Cameroon. In 1961, British Cameroon and French Cameroon formed a federation with French and English being the joint official languages of the new state. Today, the country is divided into 10 regions of which eight fall in the francophone zone and two in the former Anglophone territory.

In short, three classes of languages coexist in Cameroon i.e., close to 300 indigenous languages which are used for in-group communication, some three major lingua francas which are used for out-group communication, and two official languages i.e., English and French, which are used for Government transactions and as languages of instruction in all schools.

1.3 Structure of Central government and local councils in Cameroon

This section defines "central government" and "local councils" in Cameroon, outlines the types of councils in the country, and the duties of council officials and workers. Central government in Cameroon is headed by the President of the Republic who is assisted by ministers in charge of various departments. The country is divided into ten administrative units called "Regions". Each region is run by a Governor appointed by the President of the Republic. The administrative unit next below the region is known as "Division" (in French "Département") and is headed by a "Divisional Officer" in short D.O. (in French "Prefet"). The lowest administrative unit is the "Sub-division" (in French "arrondissement") which is headed by a "Sub-divisional officer", in short S.D.O (in French "Sous-prefet") (see Kouega 2006[15] for details).

Local councils, also known as local governments, are legal entities elected by the people to cater for their services. As Article 1 of Law No. 74/23 of December 5, 1974 stipulates a council is "a decentralized public community having public rights as well as administrative and financial autonomy. It manages local affairs under the protection of the State". Though local councils are run by officials elected by the people, they work under the supervisory authority of the Governors and the Divisional officers appointed by the President of the Republic.

In Cameroon, there are two main types of councils, i.e., city councils and sub-divisional councils. City councils are found in Regional headquarters and in large towns; they are headed by "government delegates" (in French "Délégués du Gouvernement") appointed by a decree of the President of the Republic. Sub-divisional councils are run by a team of elected councillors whose number depends on the population size of the councils' jurisdiction. When these councillors take up duty, they elect one of them as mayor of the council. The main legislative texts pertaining to local government in Cameroon are: Law No. 2004/017 on decentralization; Law No. 2004/018 on local councils; Law No. 2004/019 on regions (see http://www.clgf.org.uk for details)

What is relevant to this study is that some of the duties of the mayors and other council officials require that they are in contact with their population. These duties include: solemnising marriages, certifying birth and death certificates, assigning work to council staff, and leading the councils on public occasions such as official ceremonies, to name only these. The problem at issue is: Are these mayors and other council clerks capable of performing these duties in their other official language, which is French for Anglophones and English for francophones? In other words, how bilingual are the local councils and their staffers?

2. Literature Review

There are a number of works that focus on the assessment of bilingualism, including the following: Macnamara (1967)[20], Hamers and Blanc (1989)[10], and Stokes and Duncan (1989)[21]. These researchers have proposed various formal and informal ways of measuring bilingualism, but these proposals tend to compare bilinguals with monolinguals. To Hideyuki Taura

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(1996)[12], ideal bilingual measurements "should take into consideration such variables as affective variables, bilingual types (sequential, simultaneous, etc.), the age of exposure to languages, socio-economic and educational background, and level of intelligence." (p. 8). Examining these variables falls outside the scope of the present paper, which is limited to how the informants rate their performance in specific bilingual tasks.

In Cameroon, researchers who have attempted to evaluate individual bilingualism include: Biloa (1999)[4], Echu (2004)[7], Essomba (2013)[8], and Kouega (2005)[14]. These studies have in common the fact that they focus on the acquisition of English by francophones. Works on the acquisition of French by Anglophones are rare. Biloa (1999)[4] examined the teaching of French to anglophone students in the University of Yaounde I. His main objective was to assess the effectiveness of the daily French language taught to anglophone students of this institution. He collected data using participant observation and a questionnaire administered to anglophone students in this institution. The analysis revealed that "… the programme on the teaching of French to Anglophone students in this institution is pedagogically inadequate and not adapted". He concluded that the administration of the University of Yaounde I was unable and unwilling to effectively apply the policy of bilingualism as stipulated by the Constitution. The present work is related to that of Biloa in that both works focus on bilingualism in Cameroon. However, they differ in that Biloa's focus is pedagogy whereas the focus of this study is individual bilingual competence.

Echu (2004)[7] worked on the implementation of bilingualism in the educational system of Cameroon from the primary through the secondary to the tertiary level, his major objectives being to evaluate the immersion of francophone pupils in anglophone primary schools and to check the experience of bilingual training in the Government Bilingual High School in Buea. He collected data using a questionnaire and participant observation and the analysis revealed that on the whole, the policy of bilingualism in the domain of education needs special care from legislators of this country; there should be a well organised text of orientation which clearly defines the goals to be achieved.

Essomba (2013)[8] considered the level of individual bilingualism in Yaounde. His major objective was to check the bilingualism competence of some individuals living in Yaounde, the political capital of Cameroon. The materials he used were a questionnaire and a language test and his informants were some 240 pupils. These pupils were randomly chosen from three bilingual high schools in Yaounde, with the researcher making sure that each of the ten regions of the country was represented in his pool. The questionnaire revealed that these subjects made alternate use of English and French at varying degrees, and possessed each at least one language skill in these two languages. The language achievement test revealed that the subjects had a fair mastery of the grammar of both languages. Moreover, a significantly high number of participants came up with sensible translations from one language into the other. On the basis of these results, he concluded that both francophone and anglophone pupils living in Yaounde can be termed bilingual individuals. An inspection of this work shows that it does not follow the basic canons of research. For example, the informants came from three bilingual high schools in Yaounde. This gives the impression that in Yaounde, all high schools are bilingual, which is wrong. Actually bilingual high schools are rare in the city of Yaounde and usually the pupils admitted into these schools are screened. The bulk of secondary pupils attend French-medium schools were English is taught as a subject (see Kouega 2007[16] for details). In other words, the subjects chosen for this research do not represent high school goers in Yaounde, let alone in the rest of the country. Second, previous publications on this same issue were not reviewed. This work is however related to the present one as it attempts to assess individual bilingualism.

Kouega (2005)[14] examined the official syllabus for the teaching of English in francophone elementary grades in Cameroon and concluded that it is practically impossible for pupils to learn even the basics of English in a context where teachers are not trained when they are available. He suggested that English should start not at the primary level as is the case today, but at the secondary level instead. It should start with a clear objective: to teach English to francophone secondary pupils so that by the time they graduate, they are capable of sitting for the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC for short), which is the exit certificate for primary school pupils in English-medium schools in Cameroon. In other words, the syllabus for primary education in English-medium schools should be used for the teaching of the English subject in French-medium secondary schools. If this suggestion is taken into account, then before leaving secondary education, all pupils would have sat for the First School Leaving Certificate and many of them would surely have passed this examination. Presently, no francophone secondary pupils that have gone through French-medium schools can make it. The subjects of the present study i.e., local council workers, have all learnt English as a subject or French as a subject in secondary education in Cameroon.

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3. Methodology

The informants and the material of this study are outlined here. The informants were 192 local council workers of whom 177 were francophones and 15 anglophones. They were drawn from local councils located in the cities of Yaounde in the Centre region and of Douala in the Littoral region of Cameroon. In Douala, three local councils out of the six in the city were visited. These are: Douala I Council, Douala II Council and Douala III Council. In these three councils, a total of 90 subjects were contacted, of whom 48 returned their filled copies of the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 53.33%. In Yaounde, three local councils out of seven were visited, i.e., the Yaounde City Council, the Yaounde III Council, and the Yaounde IV Council. Some 200 subjects were contacted and 144 returned their copies, giving a return rate of 72%. The information provided in the questionnaire was used to work out the relevant sociolinguistic details on these informants, i.e., their gender, their level of education, and their second official language which is English for francophones and French for anglophones. Regarding gender, there were 100 males (52.08 of 192 informants) and 92 females (47.91%).

Concerning their level of education, they had all completed primary education; 126 had had secondary level education (65.62% of 192 informants) while 66 had done tertiary level education (34.38%). As for their second official language, they were asked an indirect question: what was your language of instruction in primary school? It is known that in Cameroon, francophone people generally attend French-medium primary schools while Anglophones attend English-medium primary schools. On the basis of the answer to this question which confirms information gathered during the administration of the questionnaire, it was found that of the 192 informants, 15 (i.e., 7.81%) were Anglophones while 177 (i.e., 92.18%) were francophones.

These informants were contacted at their place of work and were encouraged to fill in an eight-item questionnaire which was designed to elicit their ratings of their performance in a number of bilingual tasks.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis takes up the respondents' self-reported ability to read out a speech (reading), to listen to the radio/TV news with understanding (comprehension/listening), to discuss office matters with their bosses (speaking), and to write letters (writing). These are considered in turn.

The 177 francophone informants were asked if they could read out a speech written in English (Q1a). Reading aloud was targeted as it was not possible to assess all the sub-skills of reading. These informants were expected to choose one of these proposed answers: "Yes", "A little bit", "No", and "Others". The range of definite answers was limited to three, with a fourth slot provided for these informants to indicate other possible answers. These informants made the choices presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reading of a Speech Written in English by Francophone Workers

Q1a. Can you read out a speech written in English?						
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	11 (8.2%)	43 (32.08%)	80 (59.7%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	4 (9.3%)	9 (20.93%)	30 (69.76%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	15 (8.47%)	52 (29.37%)	110 (62.14%)	-	-	177 (100%)

In Table 1, 62.14% of 177 francophone local council workers reported that they could not read out a speech written in English; while only 8.47% claimed that they could do so. In-between these two extremes are 29.37% subjects who claimed that they can do so a little bit. It can therefore be concluded that the proportion of bilingual francophone workers who can read out a speech written in English is very low.

The 15 anglophone informants were asked the same question i.e., whether they could read out a speech written in French (Q1b) and they gave the answers in Table 2.

Table 2. Reading of a Speech Written in French by Anglophone Workers

Q1b. Can you read out a speech written in French?						
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	-	2 (40.4%)	3 (60%)	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	3 (20%)	6 (40.4%)	6 (40%)	-	-	15 (100%)

Table 2 shows that 40% of 15 anglophone local council workers said that they could not read out a speech written in French, while 20% of them claimed that they could do so. It means that the proportion of bilingual anglophone workers who can actually read out speeches written in both English and French is very low. These are likely those Anglophone workers who make personal efforts to communicate in French.

Q2a asked the francophone informants whether they could understand the radio/TV news broadcast in English, which was assumed to be a good comprehension exercise. Their answers are presented in Table 3.

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Table 3. Understanding of the Radio/TV News Broadcast in English by Francophone Workers

Q2a. Can you understand a radio/TV news broadcast in English?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	27 (20.74%)	8 (5.97%)	99 (73.88%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	9 (20.93%)	19 (44.18%)	15 (34.88%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	36 (20.33%)	27 (15.25%)	114 (64.4%)	-	-	177 (100%)

As Table 3 shows, 64.4% of 177 francophone workers reported that they could not listen with understanding to a radio/TV news broadcast in English while 15.25% claimed that they could do so a little bit. Only 20.33% of them disclosed that they could listen to the news with understanding, which is a very low proportion.

The anglophone informants were asked the same question and they made the claims in Table 4.

Table 4. Understanding of a Radio/TV News Broadcast in French by Anglophone Workers

Q2b. Can you understand a radio/TV news broadcast in French?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	-	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	-	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	12 (80%)	3 (20%)	-	-	-	15 (100%)

As shown in Table 4, 80% of 15 anglophone workers in the Centre and Littoral Regions claimed that they could fully understand a radio/TV news broadcast in French. It means that anglophone council workers in francophone Regions are highly bilingual. This may be probably due to the fact that they are living in French-dominated areas.

The 177 francophone informants were asked whether they could discuss office issues with their bosses in English (Q3a). It was assumed that if they were not able to discuss office issues, they would obviously not be able to discuss such issues as sports, costumes, or food. Their responses are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Discussing Office Issues with Bosses in English by Francophone Workers

Q3a. Can you discuss office issues with your boss in English?						
Answers/ Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	13 (9.7%)	34 (25.37%)	87 (64.92%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	5 (11.62%)	15 (34.88%)	23 (53.48%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	18 (10.16%)	49 (27.68%)	110 (62.14%)	-	-	177 (100%)

As Table 5 shows, some 62.14% of 177 informants said they could not discuss office issues with their bosses in English. Actually even those who said "a little bit" (27.68%) cannot interact with their bosses in English. In other words, only few workers (10.16% of 177) reported that they could successfully discuss office issues with their bosses in English.

The 15 anglophone informants were asked this same question and their responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Discussing Office Issues with Bosses of in French

Q3b. Can you discuss office issues with your boss in French?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	-	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	-	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	11 (73.33%)	4 (26.66%)	-	-	-	15 (100%)

Table 6 indicates that 73.33% of 15 Anglophone informants claimed that they could discuss office issues with their bosses in French while only some 26.66% claimed that they could only try a little bit.

Q4a asked the 177 francophone informants whether they could write a letter to their bosses in English. If one can write a formal or informal letter to one's boss, one can also write a shopping list or a short message on social media. The answers given are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7. Writing of Letters in English by Francophone Workers

Q4a. Can you write a letter to your boss in English?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	6 (4.47%)	31 (23.13%)	97 (72.38%)	-	-	134 (100%)
Littoral	2 (4.65%)	4 (9.3%)	37 (86.04%)	-	-	43 (100%)
Total	8 (4.51%)	35 (19.77%)	134 (75.7%)	-	-	177 (100%)

In Table 7, some 75.7% of 177 francophone local council workers declared that they could not write a letter in English whereas a very low proportion i.e., 4.51% of 177 subjects, affirmed that they could do so. Their 15 anglophone counterparts answered this same question as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Writing of letters in French by Anglophone workers

Q4b. Can you write a letter to your boss in French?						
Answers / Region	Yes	A little bit	No	Others		Total
Centre	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	-	-	10 (100%)
Littoral	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	-	-	5 (100%)
Total	5 (33.33%)	5 (33.33%)	5 (33.33%)	-	-	15 (100%)

In Table 8, some 33.33% of 15 anglophone local council workers in the two Regions indicated that they could not write a letter in French. Another 33.33%

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claimed that they could do so.

These findings can be brought together under the dichotomy receptive and productive skills. Reading and listening (Tables 1-4) are receptive skills while discussing and writing fall under productive skills (Tables 5-8). The overall performance of the informants in receptive skills is presented in Tables 9-10. It is obtained by adding up the figures for reading and listening and dividing the sum by the figure 2.

Table 9. Overall Performance of Francophone Informants in Receptive Skills

Skills of reading and listening					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	19 14.17%	25.5 19.02%	89.5 66.79%		134 100%
Littoral	6.5 15.12%	14 32.56%	22.5 52.33		43 100%
Total	25.5 14.41%	39.5 22.32%	112 63.28%		177 100%

Table 10. Overall Performance of Anglophone Informants in Receptive Skills

Skills of reading and listening					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	5.5 55%	3 30%	1.5 15%		10 100%
Littoral	2 40%	1.5 30%	1.5 30%		5 100%
Total	7.5 50%	4.5 30%	3 20%		15 100%

As Tables 9 and 10 show, 63.28% of 177 francophone council workers have a low performance in receptive skills as opposed to 20% for their anglophone counterparts. On the other hand, only 14.41% of 177 francophone workers reported having a high performance in receptive skills as opposed to 50% for their anglophone counterparts. It can therefore be stated that anglophone council staffers in the Centre and Littoral regions are more bilingual than their francophone counterparts. This high performance may be due to the fact that these anglophones reside and work in a francophone environment. If residing in a francophone milieu is actually a facilitating factor, then francophones working in councils in anglophone Cameroon would be bilingual. This hypothesis will be checked in a future study.

Tables 11-12 present the overall performance of the informants in productive skills.

Table 11. Overall Performance of Francophone Informants in Productive Skills

Skills of discussing and reading out a speech					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	9.5 7.09%	32.5 24.25%	92 68.66%		134 100%
Littoral	3.5 8.14%	9.5 22.09%	30 69.77%		43 100%
Total	13 7.34%	42 23.73%	122 68.93%		177 100%

Table 12. Overall Performance of Anglophone Informants in Productive Skills

Skills of discussing and reading out a speech ing					
Answers / Regions	Yes	A little bit	No	Others	Total
Centre	5 50	3.5 35	1.5 15		10 100%
Littoral	3 60%	1 20%	1 20%		5 100%
Total	8 53.33%	4.5 30%	2.5 16.67%		15 100%

As Tables 11-12 show, only 7.34% of 177 francophone informants claimed to have bilingual competence as opposed to 53.33% of 15 anglophone informants. On the basis of this finding, it can be put forward that bilingualism in Cameroon means that Anglophone workers must learn and use French while francophones may remain officially monolingual if they so wish. This imbalance seems to be one of the root causes of what has become known today as "the Anglophone problem in Cameroon" Konings and Nyamjoh (1997)[13], BAPEC (2017)[3], Kouega (2018)[17].

5. Conclusion

This work examined the self-reported French-English bilinguality of local council staffers in Cameroon, using the ethnographic data collection method. There were 177 francophone workers whose competence in English was checked and 15 anglophone workers whose competence in French was assessed. A questionnaire was devised, with the focus on the communicative skills of reading and listening on the one hand, and speaking and writing on the other. Some 192 copies were returned and the analysis revealed a number of interesting facts. First, some 10.16% of 177 francophone informants could discuss office issues with their bosses in English while 73.33% of 15 anglophone subjects could do the same using French. Second, 8.47% francophones could read out a speech in English as opposed to 20% of 15 anglophones who could do the same in French. Third 4.51% of francophones could write a letter to their collaborators in English as opposed to 33.33% of anglophones who could do the same. Fourth, 20.33% of francophones could listen to the news with understanding as opposed to 80% of 15 anglophones who could do the same. In short, anglophone informants who claimed to have a good control of receptive skills in French (53.33%) and of productive skills in French (53.33%) were found to be proportionately more numerous than francophones who claimed to have control of receptive skills in English (14.41%) and of productive skills in English (7.34%). It may be argued that the imbalance observed in the findings of this study is due to work environment, as the data were collected in a francophone area. If work environment is a major

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factor in the performance of anglophones, then a similar study conducted on the English of francophones working in an anglophone setting will show a higher proportion of francophones having a command of English. This will be the subject of a future study. The implications of this study are that successive governments in Cameroon have been overlooking researchers' findings on the implementation of the official French-English bilingualism policy. As a result, anglophones have over the years been pondering over the observation that bilingualism in Cameroon means that anglophones should learn French and francophones should speak French.

Questionnaire (English Version)

Dear Respondent,

I am conducting a research exercise and would be grateful if you could spare a minute to answer the questions below. I have chosen you because I know that you can provide accurate answers to these questions. In some cases, you will simply tick the correct answer.

You are advised to read through all the questions first before answering them.

I. Identification of the informant

1. Gender: Male _____ Female _____

2. In what language did you do your primary education?

A) English _____ B) French _____

C) Others _____

3. Did you do secondary education?

Yes _____ No _____

4. Did you do tertiary education (in any university or institution)?

Yes _____ No _____

II. Evaluation of individual bilingualism

5. Can you discuss office issues with your boss or colleague using your second official language?

A) Yes _____ B) A little bit _____

C) No _____ D) Others _____

6. Can you read out a speech using your second official language?

A) Yes _____ B) A little bit _____

C) No _____ D) Others _____

7. Can you write a letter to someone using your second official language?

A) Yes _____ B) A little bit _____

C) No _____ D) Others _____

8. Can you listen with understanding a radio/television news in your second official language?

A) Yes _____ B) A little bit _____

C) No _____ D) Others _____

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Author Guidelines

This document provides some guidelines to authors for submission in order to work towards a seamless submission process. While complete adherence to the following guidelines is not enforced, authors should note that following through with the guidelines will be helpful in expediting the copyediting and proofreading processes, and allow for improved readability during the review process.

Ⅰ. Format

- Program: Microsoft Word (preferred)
- Font: Times New Roman
- Size: 12
- Style: Normal
- Paragraph: Justified
- Required Documents

Ⅱ. Cover Letter

All articles should include a cover letter as a separate document.

The cover letter should include:

- Names and affiliation of author(s)

The corresponding author should be identified.

Eg. Department, University, Province/City/State, Postal Code, Country

- A brief description of the novelty and importance of the findings detailed in the paper

Declaration

v Conflict of Interest

Examples of conflicts of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Research grants
- Honoria
- Employment or consultation
- Project sponsors
- Author's position on advisory boards or board of directors/management relationships
- Multiple affiliation
- Other financial relationships/support
- Informed Consent

This section confirms that written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study.

- Ethical Approval

Eg. The paper received the ethical approval of XXX Ethics Committee.

- Trial Registration

Eg. Name of Trial Registry: Trial Registration Number

- Contributorship

The role(s) that each author undertook should be reflected in this section. This section affirms that each credited author has had a significant contribution to the article.

1. Main Manuscript

2. Reference List

3. Supplementary Data/Information

Supplementary figures, small tables, text etc.

As supplementary data/information is not copyedited/proofread, kindly ensure that the section is free from errors, and is presented clearly.

Ⅲ. Abstract

A general introduction to the research topic of the paper should be provided, along with a brief summary of its main results and implications. Kindly ensure the abstract is self-contained and remains readable to a wider audience. The abstract should also be kept to a maximum of 200 words.

Authors should also include 5-8 keywords after the abstract, separated by a semi-colon, avoiding the words already used in the title of the article.

Abstract and keywords should be reflected as font size 14.

Ⅳ. Title

The title should not exceed 50 words. Authors are encouraged to keep their titles succinct and relevant.

Titles should be reflected as font size 26, and in bold type.

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Section headings, sub-headings, and sub-subheadings should be differentiated by font size.

Section Headings: Font size 22, bold type

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Sub-Subheadings: Font size 14, bold type

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The introduction should highlight the significance of the research conducted, in particular, in relation to current state of research in the field. A clear research objective should be conveyed within a single sentence.

Ⅵ. Methodology/Methods

In this section, the methods used to obtain the results in the paper should be clearly elucidated. This allows readers to be able to replicate the study in the future. Authors should ensure that any references made to other research or experiments should be clearly cited.

Ⅶ. Results

In this section, the results of experiments conducted should be detailed. The results should not be discussed at length in

this section. Alternatively, Results and Discussion can also be combined to a single section.

Ⅷ. Discussion

In this section, the results of the experiments conducted can be discussed in detail. Authors should discuss the direct and indirect implications of their findings, and also discuss if the results obtain reflect the current state of research in the field. Applications for the research should be discussed in this section. Suggestions for future research can also be discussed in this section.

Ⅸ. Conclusion

This section offers closure for the paper. An effective conclusion will need to sum up the principal findings of the papers, and its implications for further research.

Ⅹ. References

References should be included as a separate page from the main manuscript. For parts of the manuscript that have referenced a particular source, a superscript (ie. [x]) should be included next to the referenced text.

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Ⅺ. Glossary of Publication Type

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Ⅻ. Others

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