Exploring Relationships between Oral and Written Communication:
How speaking effects writing?

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Abstract

Many language specialists and theorists point out the close relationship between speaking and writing and how they develop concurrently and exert mutual influence. This paper confirms this relationship and presents the results of research in which I compared the writing skill improvement of a writing class and a debating class. In the debating class, speaking and writing were integrated throughout the preparation and a match, and in the writing class, activities were only focused on writing.

The research is done from two perspectives: how much writing skill was improved after one year in each class, and how expository writing should be taught. Statistical results show that debate, which requires lots of clarification and elaboration throughout the process, is effective for teaching writing and that low level writers in debating class improved their writing far more than high level writers did in one year.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many linguists (Bloomfield, 1933; Robins, 1967; Lyons, 1968; Salus, 1969) insist on the primacy of the spoken language. However, Vachek (1973) argues that neither speaking nor writing is primary and that they are “functionally complementary” systems. He states that speaking and writing develop concurrently and exert mutual influence. Rivers and Temperly (1978) also point out certain advantages of using writing in the foreign language classroom to build oral skills. They state that writing reinforces what has been practiced
In this paper I will discuss the importance and effectiveness of integrating speaking and writing for the purpose of writing skill development. How are most EFL writing classes taught in Japan? Some teachers may be trying translation, some may be emphasizing journal writing, and others may be trying essay writing. Whatever they try, usually their focus is just on writing. However, I would like to raise a question, “Is focusing only on writing an effective way to improve writing skill?” In my research I chose debating for a speaking activity in which writing and speaking are integrated. The result shows that students who debated a topic before writing about it improved their writing far more after one year than those who only concentrated on writing.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

2.1. Speaking and writing, close relationship

Kroll (1981) insists that practice in talking is a good practice for writing and a number of other language arts specialists (Rubin, 1975; Crammer, 1978; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, A., 1975) point to similarities between talking and writing, and emphasize the close relationship of oral and written language. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976) argue that written language is founded upon speech development and “… cultivation of speech is a primary task, for on it all else is built” (p.209). For this reason, beginning writers are likely to be aided by the opportunity to rehearse in speech their own ideas and to overhear the thoughts of others.

Tough (1977b) and Lundsteen (1976) explain this relationship from the children’s writing development point of view. They emphasize that usually a child will not write better than he talks and that children who can use oral language for a variety of communicative purposes will have a stronger basis on which to build written communication skills. Children learn to use oral language for complex purposes and problem solving. Then how can we apply this idea in teaching EFL (English as a foreign language) students’ writing development?

2.2. Expository Essay Writing

It is often said that essay writing, especially expository writing is difficult to teach. However, there should be some effective ways to teach writing. As we have seen so far, if speech provides a resource for writing, then the ability to use speech for a greater variety of
purposes should benefit writing development, too. Petty, Petty, & Becking (1976) mention that talking and writing are multidimensional processes and oral discussion prior to writing is often particularly important. Marcus (1977) also adds that the most essential factor in helping students make decisions about the content of writing is to let exploratory talk precede writing.

Jacobs (1982) discusses the writing development from a different point of view. She suggests that to build hierarchy in writing, personalized and embedded language is necessary in working through knowledge before disembedded, academic language can be successfully employed. She also says that the use of the first language to varying degrees assists learners in understanding the discussion topic clearly and deeply. The first language makes the topic more real and familiar to the learner, and the language provides a holding place for information that the learner can then attach to a newly introduced topic. Therefore, when it is stated that speaking precedes writing, the speaking should be done at first in the first language then switched to the second language. Therefore, both first and second languages are important to build hierarchy in writing in second language.

Williams (1979) mentions that many student paragraphs are comprehensible but difficult to read because thematic material is poorly arranged. In The Practical Stylist, a popular freshman rhetoric text, Baker (1977) recommends that students develop the middle section of their papers first. He says that they should present one argument of the opposition, then knock it down. Then they should present another argument and demolish it, and so on. Argumentative essays that employ this tactic obviously have much more dialog than narrative.

One more thing we should not overlook in expository writing is audience. The syntactic complexity of writing, as well as of speech, is influenced by the specific purposes and audiences of communication tasks (Rubin, 1980). Fluency is often enhanced with peer audiences (Kantor, 1978). In expository essay it is important to persuade readers, and readers' impressions about the arguments greatly depend upon logic and reasoning. Logical reasoning is essential because we can not count on the minds of others working the same way as our mind works. Putting this idea in mind, in the next chapter, I evaluated students' writing in the three categories: argumentation, organization, and communicative quality. (cf. 3.1. Study)
3. METHOD

The research discussed here was designed to address the question: Which kind of class was better in improving writing skill, a speaking and writing integrated class or a strictly writing focused class? The subjects were 58 debating class students and 55 writing class students. All were sophomore and English major in junior college.

3.1. Study

In the writing class, I thoroughly focused on essay writing. Students read essays in the textbook and newspaper articles, did exercises at the end of every lesson which were designed to help students learn new vocabulary and sentence patterns, and students were asked to write short essays at the end of the lesson. The topics studied in writing class were as follows:

Smoking in a public space should be banned.
Which is a better source to get today’s news from, TV or newspaper?
How do you teach foreigners to enjoy drinking Japanese sake?
Which is better, classical music or pops?
Which one would you choose for a trip, the USA or UK? Why?
Is it good to live together before marriage?
Can women be the leaders of our country?
Which is more important, family or company loyalty?
Should women quit their jobs after marriage?
Japan should abolish the death penalty.

On the other hand, in the debating class, students tried debating on three topics from the above list:

Which is more important, family loyalty or company loyalty?
Should women quit their jobs after getting married in Japan?
Japan should abolish the death penalty.

Since 58 students were divided into groups of 5 and four groups debated in one class period, it took about two months for everybody to have a chance to debate. On the other hand,
students in the writing class studied many lessons and wrote more essays during the semester than those of the debating class.

These different teaching methods were adhered to for a year in each respective class. The first writing assignment was given to both classes at the beginning of the school year before actual class started. They wrote the second assignment in the middle of the year and the third one after one year. The essays of the two different classes were compared to see how they improved in writing after one year. Although both classes had three assignments, I compared the first and the third one in order to see if clear differences emerged over time. At the beginning of the school year, students in both classes were asked to write short essays on "Which is more important, family loyalty or company loyalty," and at the end of the year, they wrote on the topic that Japan should abolish the death penalty. The title was given in the style of a proposition and students were asked to take either pro or con sides. Various kinds of reading materials were distributed for reading to both classes. The writing class students studied most of them in class together with a teacher, whereas the debating class students studied and discussed them by themselves and prepared for a debate based on those reading materials. Both classes were given the same reading materials on the topic to develop their ideas, and about the same number of hours were spent per person in class, although the debating class took two more class periods to finish all debating matches.

I read the students' essays several times and graded them on a scale of 1 being lowest and 9 being highest, and in three categories; argumentation, organization, and communicative quality (a perfect score in every area would add up to 27 points). This scale was introduced by the British Council as an analytic scale. Argumentation is to see if relevant arguments are presented in an interesting way, with main ideas prominently and clearly stated and arguments are effectively related to the writer's experience or views. Organization is to see if the writing displays a completely logical organizational structure which enables the message to be followed effortlessly. Communicative quality is to see if the writing displays an ability to communicate in a way which gives the reader full satisfaction.

3. 2. Results

SPSS, version 7.5J for Windows, was used for the all statistical procedures and tests. The scores of the three categories were added up and the total scores were compared to see if there was a significant differences between the two classes in the first and the third writings. Table 1 represents the summary of differences in writing skill of the two classes
between the first and the third essays.

Table 1. Comparison of writing skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debating class</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Argument 1</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization 1</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicative quality 1</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Writing class</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Argument 1</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>12.58</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization 1</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicative quality 1</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Debating class</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Argument 3</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>21.47</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization 3</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicative quality 3</td>
<td>7.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Writing class</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Argument 3</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>14.76</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization 3</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Communicative quality 3</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scores of the first essay and the T-test result (p=.614) show that their writing skills were almost the same at the time of the first essay. The results of the third essay, however, display that the mean score of the debating class became much higher than the one of the writing class and the difference is extremely significant (p<0.001). This indicates that debating was a very effective way to improve the students' writing skills.

The next question is how much improvements students in each class made in one year and whether they are significant enough or not. The paired comparison T-test was tried with the mean scores of the first and the third essays. The analysis indicates that in both classes statistical significance is observed in the improvements between the first and the third essays: the debating class (p<0.001) and the writing class (p=0.01). Although we can conclude that both classes made a significant improvement in writing skills after one year,
the mean scores and the p value imply that the students in the debating class show much more progress than those in the writing class.

So far, we have confirmed that there was an outstanding differences between two classes in Essay 3. Now we would like to look at three categories separately using the T-test, the Mann-Whitney-U, and the Kolmogrove-Smirnov Z, and find out how the two classes are statistically different in each category. Independent sample test was tried by comparing means of argument 1, organization 1, and communicative quality 1 in the first essay and argument 3, organization 3, and communicative quality 3 in the third essay.

Table 2. Differences in each category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paired differences</th>
<th>Pvalue</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>T-test</td>
<td>Mann-Whitney-U</td>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument 1</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument 3</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization 1</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization 3</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative quality 1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative quality 3</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All test results confirm that the difference in every category is significant (p<0.001) in Essay 3 and the debating class is superior to the writing class. This supports the result of the previous T-test. We learned before that there was not much differences in their writing skills in Essay 1 (cf. Table 1), however, Table 2 indicates that the writing class was better in organization skill (p=.044) in the first essay. It means that the debating class was even lower in some writing skill than the writing class in the beginning but they became far better after one year.

Lastly, let me check how individual students improved between the first essay and the third essay. Their correlation is tested by the Pearson correlation coefficient, Kendall’s tau-b, and the Spearman rank correlation coefficient. The dependent variable is the differentials between the first essay and the third essay and the independent variable is rank order scores of the first essay.
**Table 3. How individual student improved in one year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient of correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debating class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>-5.93**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s tau-b</td>
<td>-3.93**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spearman</td>
<td>-5.11**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**: p<0.01

The above figures indicate that the lower the skills students shows in Essay 1, the more improvement they display in Essay 3 and there is a negative linear relationship between the skills in the first and the third essay. The next two figures visualize the individual students' improvement clearly.

**Fig. 1. Writing class**

![Figure 1. Writing class](image-url)
**Fig. 2. Debating class**

![Graph showing the relationship between Essay 1 and Essay 3 scores.](image)

*The score of Essay 1*

It is very clear from these graphs that in both classes higher scoring students in the first essay had less improvements. It is especially serious in the writing class, because the higher scoring students' improvements show minus scores.

**4. Discussion**

In the present study, we can summarize that the writing skills of both classes were about the same (Table 1) in the beginning. However, after one year there was a significant difference in writing skills between the two classes. The writing class spent most of the time reading articles and writing essays on the topics (cf. 3.1. Study), translation practices and solving grammar problems. Their writing skills improved significantly ($p=0.01$) after one year, however, their progress is far smaller than that of the essay class (Table 1). On the contrary, the debating class spent most of the time preparing for the debate; reading related articles and materials for debate and discussing them. After one year their improvement in writing skills shows an outstanding progress ($p<0.001$). What is common about the progress in both classes is that those who were lower in writing skills in the first essay had very high scores in the third essay (Table 3 and Fig.1). However, one serious problem of the writing class is that higher scoring students in the first essay had lower scores in the third essay.

Now I need to discuss why these differences were observed. First of all, let me think
about the writing class. Why did lower skilled writers make such a big progress and higher skilled writers lower their scores? Main reason could be that they were used to translation exercises but not essay writing at the beginning of the year and could not write the first essay well. After writing many essays, lower skilled writers improved their writing skills to express their thinking and ideas, and had much better scores at the end of the year. Next we need to consider the higher scoring students who lowered their scores at the end of the year. This could be due to the topic of the essay. The first essay was about family, which is a popular topic for girl students, however, the topic of the third essay was about capital punishment, which was not a familiar topic and it was difficult for them to build ideas and organize them logically.

Let me think about the debating class, now. The lower skilled students needed to read articles thoroughly and discussed the topic deeply among group members to prepare for the debate match. Therefore they learned how to organize their ideas logically to persuade the opposing side in the process of preparation. Higher skilled students were skillful at writing in the beginning and there was not much possibility for them to improve more. To write a persuasive essay, we must guide our readers from one idea to another and arrange our ideas logically so that others can understand them and be convinced. This skill is not easy to acquire. Some more time to practice debating and writing might be necessary for skilled writers to reach the highest level of the writing skill. These could be reasons that they did not show much increase in scores.

Here we should not overlook the following points about the higher skilled writers. Many of the higher skilled writers in the writing class lowered their scores in the third essay, however, those of the debating class students did not. Some showed a progress and others maintained their original level. This could mean that the teaching method like my writing class is not effective especially for the prospective skilled writers to improve their writing skills more. As Rubin (1980) and Kantor (1978) insist, audiences and the specific purposes are essential to improve the expository, or syntactic complexity writing, and I think the debating fulfills these requirements.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The most significant finding in this research is that the degree to which low level writers in the debating class improved was surprisingly great. This is very encouraging for both the teacher and students who try debating. Many linguists emphasize the importance of
conversation and discussion to develop writing. Does just having pre-conversation for writing help students write good essays, then? When we converse, at least when we converse with friends, we need not be explicit because we share a great deal of knowledge with our hearers. I would like to consider this in the case of Japanese students.

I think most Japanese tend not to argue with others out of respect for harmonious relationships. Moreover, in the Japanese sense, to be sociable means not to look at things differently from others. Therefore, critical thinking ability is very difficult to develop. In this situation, it is rather impractical to expect Japanese students to develop their ideas through conversation. We need to have a more controlled activity than conversation to encourage students to discuss a topic deeply. Debating, however, requires students to prepare for cross examinations and rebuttals, therefore they discuss issues fully throughout the process.

Moffet (1968) states that the conversations which best prepare students for writing are full of requests for clarification and elaboration, therefore, teachers have to guide the discussion to ensure that such requests are made. I doubt very much if my students could have gotten the same improvement through conversation, and group discussion would not have been so different from just having conversation. The teacher has to guide students with a well-planned agenda so that they discuss what they should and clarify and elaborate the problems in an organized way. It seems that the efforts in preparing for the debate lead to bigger differences compared to students in writing classes. Considering Moffet’s comment and the results of my research, debate seems to be one of the best pre-speaking activities for the writing development. British educators have especially stressed the value of speaking and writing as tools for learning about one’s self and one’s world (Kantor, 1981). Debating seems to help students develop expository writing skills and serves an important function as a tool for the discovery of thought.

**REFERENCES**


Connor, U. Argumentative Patterns in Student Essays: “cross-cultural Differences.” *Writing Across*


