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SPEAKING (NNES) STUDENTS' FACEBOOK STATUS UPDATES
AND THEIR SHORT NARRATIVE COMPOSITION

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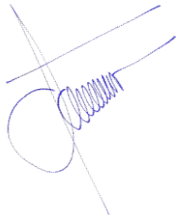
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**THE LENGTH AND FREQUENCY OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING (NNES)
STUDENTS' STATUS UPDATES ON FACEBOOK AND THEIR SHORT NARRATIVE
COMPOSITION**

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The Length and Frequency of Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) Students' Status Updates on Facebook and Their Short Narrative Composition

Abstract

The objective of this study was to find out the association between the length and the frequency of Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) students' Facebook status updates and their ability to write a short narrative composition. Five non-native English speaking graduate students at an American university participated in this study. The data were collected by monitoring subjects' status updates on Facebook for a month and then followed by a timed writing task test in which they were required to write a 200-300 words narrative text about a daily topic. The results revealed that there was no correlation at all between the variables, leaving all the hypotheses unconfirmed. The results were discussed both from the view on participants' homogeneity and discourse analysis perspective.

Keywords: Facebook, NNES, Composition

INTRODUCTION

The availability of Web 2.0 technologies (e.g. blogs, social networking sites, etc.) brings in greater opportunity for learning that could be selected based on learners' preference and needs. These tools can be utilized to enhance learning. It may help learners build personal and community identity, which in return enrich their learning experience. It is predicted that writing classroom in the future will include the role of social media (Kaufer, et al., 2011).

Social media or social networking, which is popular among teenagers and young adults, could be advantageous. This kind of online world introduces a new habit of reading and writing in various forms to youths. It brings students, who sometimes are reluctant to write in a classroom, to a new environment where they can write actively and creatively (Hansford & Adlington, 2008). Besides helping those silent students who rarely speak up in the classroom, the use of social media in class may also be effective for back-channeling, keeping students use the internet and social media for positive, educational purposes instead of letting them use those only for shopping or leisure activities (Gabriel, 2011, May 11). Blog, for example, has been known as an effective medium of writing instruction that promotes knowledge sharing, develops the feeling of

authorship, positively affects writing fluency, and fosters critical thinking and group works (Lee, 2010; Arslan & Sahin-Kizil, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012).

Facebook, as one of the most popular social networking websites, has also become a subject of discussion regarding the controversy of its use for educational purposes. Some people concern about privacy issues and some simply consider Facebook not educationally appropriate (Munoz & Towner, 2009). Aside from these growing negative views, some experts still see Facebook as a prospective pedagogical tool because it may improve motivation and build a positive learning atmosphere (Mazer, Murph & Simond, 2007). Also, Facebook might be unique in a way that it emphasizes popular culture, in which most young people may have an interest (Maranto & Burton, 2010). Facebook is free and easy to access and it is also easy to incorporate Facebook into a teaching and learning process, which is starting to be widely known as Faceteaching (Beck & Shell, 2011). Due to its popularity among youths and students and its possible positive impacts, it is necessary to investigate the association between Facebook use and students' learning, especially in writing.

RATIONALE

As it is widely known, Facebook offers its users a feature called status, which people can use to express whatever they have in mind. This feature sometimes becomes a medium for Facebook users to share, in written form, a short fragment of what they have experienced in a certain time. It is not surprising, then, if sometimes we find Facebook is just like a mini bookstore feeding us with various short, fragmented narratives of others. Therefore, active Facebook users may also be active short narrative writers and it is safe to assume that the more frequent users update their status, the more they write and the more experienced they become. We may further hypothesize that these experienced writers can produce a good short narrative text.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

DeKeyser (2007), in his skill acquisition theory, argues that language is a skill that can be acquired through practice. Starting with knowing rules and facts about language (declarative state), a language learner may improve his way to an automation state, where he acquires procedural knowledge through practices.

Writing is a skill. It is a complex skill requiring the mastery of vocabulary, grammar rules, punctuations, etc. Due to its complexity, writing is sometimes considered a difficult skill to acquire. However, despite the difficulty, a second language learner may still write well because, as proposed by DeKeyser's (2007) skill acquisition theory, a skill could be mastered through practice.

Students who update their status on Facebook regularly, thus, could be considered unknowingly practicing their writing skills, especially if they do that in the second language they learned. Therefore, it might be reasonable to argue that the more frequent students update their Facebook status in English, the more chance they have to improve their English writing skills.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

So far, most of the research on Facebook focuses on issues like privacy, security, etc. There is not much research investigating the use of Facebook for teaching and learning. Reid (2011) observed the writings of tutors and students in a closed-group made for a university class and analyzed them using Jank's critical literacy model to find out how the use of this Facebook group affected issues like power, access, diversity, and design. She found that the use of closed-group promotes awareness among students about the importance of academic networking. It also distributes power from the instructor to all students, so everyone in the group became actively involved in the discussion and learning process. However, it should also be noted that students, in many cases, communicate by using non-standard writing (shortening words by deleting some vowels, no capital letters, etc.)

In an experiment on integrating Facebook and peer assessment with blended learning, Shih (2011) found that Facebook integration can be interesting and effective for college-level English writing classes. From the interview conducted in this study, twenty-three freshmen majoring in English in a Taiwanese university found that Facebook significantly enhanced their interest and motivation.

DePew (2011) conducted a qualitative study on three non-native English students at an American university and the writing strategies they used to compose on Facebook. The findings indicated that even though the participants exhibited, sometimes for deliberate reasons, non-standard writing conventions in their writings, they actually "have the potential to respond to communicative situations in rhetorically complex ways."

In another study, Dixon (2013) investigated both non-native English speakers (NNS) and native English speakers (NS) who studied at an American community college and their engagement with Facebook as well as their writing efficacy. The findings revealed that there was no significant correlation between the amount of time spent on Facebook per day and writing success for both NNS and NS. There was also no direct result that showed engagement with Facebook would be advantageous to the participants' writing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research addressed the following questions:

1. Do students who frequently write status updates on Facebook in non-standard or standard writing also write the same way when they write a personal narrative?
2. Do students who frequently write short status updates have difficulties in expanding their paragraphs when they write a personal narrative?

It is logical to presume that the more often students update their status in non-standard writing conventions, the more familiar they are with it, and the bigger the tendency for them to write the same way when they write a short narrative. On the other hand, the more often students update their status in a standard writing convention, the more familiar they are with it, and the bigger the chance for them to write the same way when they write a personal narrative.

Moreover, the more often students write short status updates, the more they are familiar with it, and the bigger the tendency for them to write that way when they write a personal narrative. On the other hand, the more often students write long status updates, the more they are familiar with it, and the bigger the tendency for them to write that way when they write a personal narrative.

Further, in this study, the following operational definitions were applied:

- Students/ participants: non-native English speakers who are currently enrolled as students at an American university.
- Status updates: Status updates written in English and posted on participants' timelines during the period of observation. Status updates written in participants' L1 were not counted.
- Frequent status updates: Updating status for at least 14 days in a month with at least one update a day. Updates made less than this number were not considered frequent.

- Long status updates: Status updates that contain at least 50 characters. Updates that did not meet this criterion were considered short updates.
- Personal narrative: writing a short 200-300 words narrative composition.
- Standard writing: writing that shows a clear meaning of the writer's idea and also reflects a good writer's attention on grammar and punctuation as it is generally required for any kind of academic writing.

METHODS

This study investigated the association between the frequency in writing Facebook status updates as well as the length of those status updates and writing a personal narrative text. Participants were recruited voluntarily and they were informed, at the beginning of the recruitment process, that their status updates would be monitored. Participants' status updates were monitored for a month. At the end of this phase, the participants were given a link to a writing task that required them to write a 200-300 words narrative text. These short compositions were then graded.

Participants' status updates were categorized into two groups based on length and frequency. These data were then compared with their grade on the writing task to see if there was a pattern between those variables.

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

The participants for this study were initially six international students. One participant, however, had to be drawn out because of failure to complete the writing task, leaving only five participants whose data could be used. Of these five students, one was the native speaker of Hausa and Zarma, one was the native speaker of Spanish, another one was Vietnamese, and the remaining two were Chinese native speakers. All of them were graduate students at an American university. They reported that they had been learning English for an extended period, ranging from 10 years to 25 years. When asked to rate their own English proficiency in general, one participant considered himself to have superior English ability while the remaining four were in the advanced level.

INSTRUMENTS AND TREATMENTS

The instruments in this study were Facebook, a writing task, and a questionnaire used to collect the participants' demographic data. The writing task was limited only to 30 minutes and 200 to

300 characters. This was made like this because, in a real situation, most people would probably not spend hours editing and revising before posting what they have written for their updates. The characters' limit was also applied because in real life it is rare to find someone who updates his status in an enormous number of characters. The narrative was also chosen because this is the genre that would best reflect most status updates on Facebook, which are mostly about personal stories or experiences.

DATA COLLECTION

The participants' status updates were monitored in a period of a month and their updates were recorded. These were then grouped by their frequency and numbers of characters and categorized as frequent/ infrequent and long/ short.

The writing task, which was initially planned to be given in a face-to-face meeting, was eventually given online due to the inability to gather all the participants at the same time. The participants were given a link to a website where they could do the task.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The data about the frequency and length of the participants' status updates were taken from their Facebook account. These updates were then categorized based on their length and frequency. In the second part of the research, the participants were asked to complete an online writing task. These writings were then graded using the Foundations Written Communication Scoring Rubric developed by the University of Hawaii at Manoa (2008). The data were then compared side by side to find out if there was a pattern indicating a correlation between them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were very different from what I expected. Most of the participants rarely made status updates on Facebook. Three of them were practically never made any during the period of observation. One made two updates and the other one updated his status only once. The same thing applies to the updates' length. The average number of characters from Subject 1 was 47 characters, while the other one was 17 characters. The writing task, on the other hand, showed a completely different picture. Overall, the participants did very well in writing a short narrative text. The following tables summarize all the results.

Table 1. *The Participants' Composition Score*

Participant	Score Elements				Total score
	Content	Organization	Language	Mechanics	
Subject 1	4	4	4	4	16
Subject 2	4	4	4	3	15
Subject 3	4	4	4	3	15
Subject 4	4	4	4	4	16
Subject 5	4	3	4	3	14

Table 2. *The Participants' Updates Frequency, Length, and Total Composition Score*

Participant	Number of Updates in a Month	Average Characters per Update	Total Composition Score
Subject 1	2	47	16
Subject 2	0	0	15
Subject 3	0	0	15
Subject 4	0	0	16
Subject 5	1	17	14

Based on these data, it is clear to see that there is no association between the frequency and length of Facebook status updates and the participants' composition score. No statistical calculation was necessary to make this conclusion. Therefore, all the research questions were answered clearly.

One possible reason why all the participants performed very well on the narrative writing task was that all the participants were advanced level English learners and all were graduate students of English. With 10 to 25 years of learning English, they may not find it very difficult to write a short narrative composition.

Another noteworthy possible reason why the participants rarely made status updates on their Facebook is that they were busy with their academic responsibilities as they were all graduate students. Studying at a graduate school is demanding and one might be very busy, occupied with academic tasks, deadlines, etc.

Writing on social media often involves the writer's intention to share the writing with some audience. On the other hand, writing to complete a task is a completely different issue. When writing to complete a task, one usually writes for evaluative purposes. Both of these are different discourses and may require different ways of writing. Therefore, Reid (2009) argues that it may

not be appropriate to compare these two. In his argument opposing the view that hypothesizes the probability of writing on social media affects academic writing, Reid (2009) asked back another intriguing question to show his strong opposing stance:

“Why ask whether writing on the Internet makes you a better academic writer? Why not ask whether academic writing makes you a better user of social media?”

Reid (2009) further summed his view about this issue by asserting that a higher frequency of writing in different genres would lead learners to a better mastery of those genres. Therefore, based on this reasoning, it is nearly impossible for people to find a way to see if a mastery in writing for one genre affects the mastery in mastering another genre.

Thus, the findings from this study corroborated Dixon's (2013) study that found no effect of Facebook engagement in students writing. They also corroborated DePew's (2011) results that found non-native English speaking students could perform well in writing aside from their use of some non-standard writing conventions on social media.

LIMITATIONS

Perhaps the most obvious limitations of this study are the short time and the small number of participants. Further study should involve more participants and long-term monitoring of participants' engagement on Facebook, which may also include their comments written on it in English.

Another possible limitation is the participants in this study were homogenous. They were all advanced students with a high number of years of learning English. The result may give a better picture if the participant were taken from various levels of proficiency. This way, the result would reflect the real population of students in general that comprises not only advanced level students but also the ones from the intermediate or beginner level. Future studies, then, should address this issue to gain better results.

Finally, another limitation that cannot be dealt with without violating privacy is the possibility that the participants restricted public access to see their status updates. In that case, it was not surprising if in this study most of the participants' status updates were not visible.

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