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How the teacher makes a sense of teaching: Focus on deliberate practices

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Abstract

This study focuses on written practices the teacher uses in order to strength students skills in writing. I argue that deliberate outside written classroom practices can help students to acquire certain norms when teachers' follow up well- organized procedures. Johann Van Der Walta (1988) stresses the importance of formal instructions by saying that "It is concluded that instruction in the form of consciousness-raising is compatible with what is known about language", (P.101). This means that the students need to understand how to learn all language skills at the same time. The study will answer the question; what kind of norms the students learn through the teacher's feedback and outside classroom activities. The methods of writing in Arabic are unlike English. In that, there are not specific steps to fellow at the beginners' level of learning Arabic. Therefore, this study might come up with some theories and approaches to develop students writing in Arabic.

Keywords: teaching, deliberate practices

1. Introduction

Writing in a second language requires follow up and efforts. Students need to learn how to write structural patterns and learn how to connect sentences. This cannot happen randomly but through continuous deliberate practices. What I mean by deliberate practices in this study, is giving students a specific exercise to work each week. The teacher role in this case, is to follow students' development through giving them direct or indirect formal instructions.

There are not enough researches on Arabic writing, there are some studies that examined learning strategies and written processes. For example, Khaldieh (2000) discussed proficient and less proficient learning Arabic. In his studies, he discussed mostly how to approach the grammatical concepts.

Johann Van Der Walta (1988) believes that the teacher should use an organized plan for formal instruction. In this respect, Ellis (1986) argues that formal instructions can create mastery of second language forms when the teacher focuses on certain forms and ignore others L2 forms.

In this study, I disagree with Ellis and I argue that deliberate outside written practices can help students to acquire certain norms through teacher's follow up procedures. Johann Van Der (2012)

stresses the important of formal instructions by saying that “It is concluded that instruction in the form of consciousness-raising is compatible with what is known about language”, (P.101). Finally, my research will try to explore the types of norms the students learn through the teacher feedback before staring their written assignment outside the classroom.

2. Main Questions

- 1- What is needed to develop a model in writing Arabic composition?
- 2- What usually the teachers do to assist students writing?
- 3- What are the steps that the students fellow when writing a composition in Arabic?

3. Types of Writing

Developing a model in writing requires identifying stages of writing development and ways of writing compositions in Arabic. Paulston (1972) examined the role of writing in a foreign language teaching. In his papers, he discussed basic concepts in teaching compositions and talked about the techniques that are required in writing compositions. He identified procedures related to free composition vs. controlled composition. He believes that controlled composition is governed by drills while, free compositions are related to whatever the student writes or comes in his/her head.

It is believed that controlled compositions can direct students thinking towards a certain aspect of language and help teacher to focus on the subject. While free writing will not improve writing skills. Paulston states that “a controlled composition consists of a written model of some type with directions for conversions or specific language manipulations in rewiring the model” (p.39).

There are several advantages in using controlled compositions and these include using correct practices, covering teaching points, and following clear ideas (Owns, 1969). Paulston identifies five types of controlled compositions and these are related to substitutions frames, models with directions, written or oral models, direction exercises, and exercises with semi controlled.

Accordingly, Maryruth (1971) found that in using semi controlled compositions it is important to restructure the topic in order to exercises control over writing and this can help in maintaining freeness in the companion.

4. Procedures

The researcher selected writing samples from two female students who studied elementary Arabic 101 last semester and are taking upper elementary Arabic 102 this semester in a selective college. The researcher translated the selected texts from Arabic into English. The selection was based on the time that these writings were assigned to trace students’ development. Students were given a composition to write every week outside the class.

The researcher focused on the teacher type of instruction that was delivered before the writing assignments. Then, the researcher compared students’ development and teacher’s methodology that were used during the writing processes. The researcher used bold letters to highlight students’ mistakes.

5. Teacher Directions

The teacher asked the students to write a composition about “their hobbies”. The students should write the composition at home and bring it the next day. The teacher taught the students some words related to hobbies they like and also explained the use of the past tense.

After giving the students the assignment, the teacher sent the student an email and told the students to write a full page and use the words they learned about hobbies in class. This assignment was given to students after three months of learning Arabic.

6. Translation of Student 1 first Writing 11/16/2012

I was in many **math** I knew a lot of hobbies in my childhood too. I like math and my hobbies today. The sport usually for me basketball because I am tall and it was good. I wanted sometime swimming. My dad says my daughter is **good** in swimming because her aunt was Olympics. In high school two years ago, I liked basketball too because I am tall, and photography. I **like** this because I was in Jerusalem two years ago, and **this** region has many nice pictures, in my childhood and today, reading.

7. Analyzing student 1 first Writing

The student made a mistake when used the word “Math”. The student wanted to say the word “sport”. The words “math” and “sport” have somehow similar pronunciations in Arabic “Riatha” means “sport” and the word “ Riathiat” means “math”. The student made another pronunciation mistake in Arabic and used a different letter instead of “H” with word “like”, in Arabic. The student did not use dotes with the word “ this”. In addition in the sentence “ good in swimming” instead of using the word “good” to refer to feminine , the students used the word “ good” to refer to masculine.

It seems to me that the student followed teacher’s directions that were sent through the email. The student used all the vocabularies learned in class and from the book. Besides, it appeared that she has learned how to use the past tense in Arabic though she made some mistakes in spelling. Finally, the student wrote a full page.

8. Translation of Student 2 first writing 11/16/2012

I have many hobbies. I play sport a lot. I do not play basketball but I am tall. I like play volleyball because I was the best in the high school. I like swimming in summer because the weather hot, better in the evening. In winter, my girlfriends like skiing because the weather cold, my friend Mary likes dancing, and she teaches I. According to reading, literature is best class. But I like Arabic too. I play the flute and music hard. I do not know how much the ticket to cinema costs. I go to movie to watch “Flight” because I like Denzel Washington. Painting difficult but it is beautiful, I like not to eat after sport, when I do not study, I play sport.

9. Analyzing of student 2 First Writing

Student two used all the words she learned about her hobbies. She was able to link all the sentences. Some sentences seemed to be redundant because the student introduced her friend, and then talked about her hobbies again. Her writing at this level was good because she followed all the teacher directions and used different logical connectors like “where “at the end.

The student used all the verbs correctly when she formed the sentences, and there was not any spelling mistakes in her writing, there were some grammatical mistakes for example “teaches I”, and this because the teacher did not introduce the grammatical rule yet.

10. Teacher Directions

In the second semester of Arabic, the teacher asked the students several questions in class related to the way they write their compositions. For example; what is the first thing you do when you write your composition? And what do kind of references you use?

A student said, we “think of English”, the teacher said “wrong”, another student said “we use the vocabulary that we learned, and we use the book”. It seemed to me from the students answers that they did not follow any approach in writing their assignments and they just form a story and write it.

In any language, the writing process happens gradually and it needs a lot of directions and a systematic organization. The teacher told the students that when they write next time, they need to come up with several sentences on a paper and link them together.

This was a direct control from the part of the teacher by asking them to think and write several sentences before writing their assignment. The assignment was writing a composition outside the class about the subject “My Vacation”.

11. Translation of student 1 Second Writing 1/15/2013

In my vacation, many things happened. I returned to my house and visited dad and mom. I visited my sweetheart too because he joined his university. After Christmas we, my dad, my mom, and me we traveled to DC because my grandmother and my grandfather live in this city. In house of my grandfather, I slept late because I like sleeping a lot after a difficult semester. In the city of my grandfather like walking because the weather is nice. After visiting my grandfather, my family returned home.

12. Analyzing Student 1 Second Writing

It seems to me that the student followed the teacher’s instructions. Her ideas were more focused and her sentences were not redundant. The student made spelling mistakes in writing the verbs “returned, visited, and travelled” in the past. The student used more cause and result sentences. She used less vocabulary to describe one idea and develop her story.

13. Translation of Student 2 Second Writing 1/15/2013

I went to my house after my exams in college. I slept a lot because I was tired. I visited my friends and we exchanged presents after Christmas. After Christmas, I traveled with my dad and my mom To Latin America. We walked on the water in the morning, and we liked swimming in the swimming pool in evening. I ate a lot fruit. Also I read books and listened to music, we returned in Friday. Then on Saturday, my mom and I woke up in the morning and returned to college very far from my house. I liked the story of my friends, I do not like work but I like my classes.

14. Analyzing Student 2 Second Writing

It seems that the student followed the teacher’s instructions. Her ideas were more focused and her sentences were not redundant. The second student did not make any mistakes in writing the verbs “returned, visited, and travelled” in the past. The student used more cause and result sentences as

the first student. She was able to talk about her good experience in Latin America and develop her story.

15. Discussions of the Teacher's Role

In the first assignment "My hobbies" which was given in the first semester of Arabic 101. The teacher used indirect control by sending the students an email and telling them what to do. The students followed teacher's instructions and the indirect control was obvious. The students wrote a full page and used the vocabulary they learned in class and in the book. In addition, they used simple structured sentences with the past tense.

I believe it is important to follow a certain approach in writing a composition in Arabic. As I stated earlier, Arabic composition's layout differs from American way of writing a composition. The students at this stage of learning have limited vocabulary and grammar, and there is not a specific method of writing in Arabic that the teacher can follow when teaching all language skills at the same time. Therefore, following certain steps can help students to proceed to the next level of writing.

In the second assignment "My vacation", which was given in the second semester of Arabic 102, the teacher asked the students several questions in class. The teacher exercised a direct control and gave students some tips on writing their compositions like they have to write several sentences and link them together.

I think asking students questions about their writing methods made the students think that they did not follow any system in writing. Teacher's instruction helped the students a lot in that, they did not write redundant sentences, they used less vocabulary, and the students' sentence structures were developed. The students used more cause and result sentences.

It appears from the students writings that they follow teacher's instruction, they used complex sentence structures and less vocabulary. They wrote some main sentences and they connected them together through using logical connectors, like where, and, and then.

16. Comparing students writing assignments

Both students followed all the directions that were given to them by the teacher. The assignment "My hobbies" appeared less systematic due to many reasons and these were related to the fact that it was the students first semester of learning Arabic and they have very limited vocabulary and grammar concepts.

In the second assignment, "My vacation", both students follow teacher's directions. Their writings were more advanced. They students followed a systematic approach in writing because there was a direct intervention from the teacher's part and that was clearly shown when the teacher asked the students several questions and told them to write several related sentences and connected them together.

17. Conclusions

This study aimed at answering questions related to developing a model in writing Arabic composition, how the teachers assist students at their early stages of writing in a foreign language, and the steps the students follow in their writings.

In answer to how the teacher assists students when writing compositions, the results of the teacher's instruction analysis related to writing a composition outside the class show that there

was two types of control the teacher used in delivering instruction, these was indirect control through emailing the students some instructions to follow, and a face to face interaction with the students when the teacher asked students several questions related to the way they write compositions, and gave them a direction to follow which was writing several sentences and connect them together.

As Owns (1969) states that in control writing, the teacher can help students to get involved in correct practices. Through control writing, the teacher can cover the teaching points, and can help students to explain their ideas clearly in writing.

Is it possible to develop a model of writing in Arabic at early stages of writing and learning the language? I would say “yes”, it is possible. In this study; the teacher followed a simple approach to help the students to write. The teacher gave fewer instructions and built up upon the previous instructions that the teacher gave because the teacher exercised two types of control indirect and direct control. I believe the teacher’s approach was helpful to the students because it helped them to proceed to the next level of writing. It seemed to me they students gained more confidence in writing.

Therefore, I would suggest the model of writing in a foreign language can be built through steps and these can involve two types of control from the teacher’s side in addition to using simple instructions to guide the students in their writing.

Arabic 101, and 102 are not writing courses, and the teacher has just a few minutes in class to give directions. I think this simple model in writing can be useful to most language teachers who teach all the skills at the same time in class.

As for the steps the students followed in their writing, it appears from the analyses of students writings in both selected assignments that the students have followed teacher’s instructions and they used what they have learned in class such as; grammatical rules and new vocabulary in their writing assignments.

Finally, I believe that the students acquired some norms through teacher’s directions. These norms involved following a certain system in writing and building ideas through using several sentences.

I would recommend at the end, a new study that uses more students writing samples, and involve more teachers, to examine if the teachers follow the same steps in writing. In addition, the researcher can compare between two languages and same level of students when conducting a new study.

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