

SOME PROBLEMS OF TEACHING WRITING IN B1 LEVEL

Abdulazizova Sevara Ganiyevna
Andizhan State University, Uzbekistan

Yuldasheva Oyista Taxirovna
(Pedagogical institute) Andizhan State University, Uzbekistan
zaminmedia165@gmail.com

ANNOTATION

Writing, like all other aspects of language, is communicative. We should think about what we write in real life. We write e-mails, lists, notes, covering letters, reports, curriculums, assignments and essays. This article is devoted to some problems in teaching writing tasks which have a communicative purpose and a target audience.

INTRODUCTION

Within the communicative framework of language teaching, the skill of writing enjoys special status—it is through writing that a person can communicate a variety of messages to a close or distant, known or unknown reader or readers. Such communication is extremely important in the modern world, whether the interaction takes the form of traditional paper-and-pencil writing or the most advanced electronic mail.

Writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learner's course of study, and this work will attempt to deal the early stages of EFL writing.

The view of writing as an act of communication suggests an interactive process which takes place between the writer and the reader via the text. Such an approach places value on the goal of writing as well as on the perceived reader audience. Even if we are concerned with writing at the beginning level, these two aspects of the act of writing are vital importance; in setting writing tasks the teacher should encourage students to define, for themselves, the message they want to send and the audience who will receive it.

The writing process, in comparison to spoken interaction, imposes greater demands on the text, since written interaction lacks immediate feedback as a guide. The writer has to anticipate the reader's reactions and produce a text which will adhere to Grice's cooperative principle. According to this principle, the writer is obligated (by mutual cooperation) to try to write a clear, relevant, truthful, informative, interesting, and memorable text. The reader, on the other hand, will interpret the text with due regard to the writer's presumed intention if the necessary clues are available in the text.

Linguistic accuracy, clarity of presentation, organization of ideas are all crucial in the efficacy of the communicative act, since they supply the clues for interpretation. Accordingly, while the global perspective of content organization needs to be focused on and given appropriate attention, it is also most important to present a product which does not suffer from illegible writing. Writing is, in a very sense, a mirror image of reading. Both are interactive. Readers decode what writers encode. The reader brings prior knowledge to the comprehension of a text; the writer draws upon similar knowledge in composing a text.

There are lots of reasons, as there are lots of ways to make the writing we do with learners more communicative. By its nature, writing is often a solo activity, done silently, involving physical effort and taking a lot of time. This may not make it attractive to learners or teachers as a classroom activity. In addition to this, writing is difficult, even in Level B1. There are linguistic, psychological and cognitive problems involved, making teaching it and learning it a considerable challenge. It is also important to remember that many people never write anything of any length in their daily lives, or anything using paper and a pen, or without using a spellchecker. But this is often what we ask them to do in English.

Responding appropriately to writing that learners give us is time-consuming and taxing, whether we are addressing errors or the content. We often have to work as hard as our learners have done. Our response is also often dictated by our concern with sub-skills and so correction is often at this level rather than at that of communicative competence.

In addition, it is important to recognize that learners are equally concerned about correctness in writing at a sub-level, in areas such as spelling and punctuation. This is especially true when compared to speaking. This inhibits communication.

The kinds of tasks we set learners may not be motivating, relevant or indeed very communicative. Writing is rarely incorporated into a lesson, ending up relegated to homework - which reduces the possibilities to be communicative. We need to give learners tasks that are intellectually satisfying, especially when writing. Adult learners become aware of their limitations very quickly when they try to express complex ideas on paper. As a final note coursebooks don't necessarily always help us develop writing. We need materials that provide relevant, real and communicative practice.

We need to make a distinction between writing to learn (other things, like structures, spelling and vocabulary) and learning to write. If we understand this distinction and make sure our learners do too then the communicative purpose of writing will be clearer.

We need to work hard on developing ways of responding to the content of what our learners write - the message - and not just the level of language. If we can do this effectively, then our learners will make more effort to communicate when they write for us. This can support an emphasis on the importance of writing for a real audience, but we do also need to find real audiences for learner writing. This could include ourselves if we can respond as readers, other learners and groups, and public forums such as blogs, websites and letter pages.

We need to find ways to integrate writing with other skills and activities, giving it more relevance and importance - and also making it more interesting. We need to use meaningful, realistic and relevant writing tasks, based on our learners' needs and interests. We may need to design individual tasks based on what individual learners need to write. In addition we should talk about writing with our learners, how we write well, why we write and for who, and what makes it difficult. Learner training like this can provide valuable support and motivation. Finally, we need to evaluate the impact on our learners' written English when most of our focus on writing is as homework.

Three level of writing activity are presented in this stage.

At the first level teacher presents parts of an essay or article as guidelines for further development. In this way, students are not only given a topic, but also some information and details contained in the piece.

At the second level, the teacher gives the class a definite theme to write on. It is up to the students to develop information on this topic in their group sessions.

At the third level, students must select and develop their own topics in group sessions. At this level each group may very well generate a different topic.

The most important factor in writing exercises is that students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of lasting value. Encouraging student participation in the exercise, while at the same time refining and expanding writing skills, requires a certain pragmatic approach.

The teacher should be clear on what skills he/she is trying to develop. Next, the teacher needs to decide on which means (or type of exercise) can facilitate learning of the target area. Once the target skill areas and means of implementation are defined, the teacher can then proceed to focus on what topic can be employed to ensure student participation. By pragmatically combining these objectives, the teacher can expect both enthusiasm and effective learning.

Development of writing skill - gradual process.

WRITING SUBSKILLS – OF TWO TYPES

1. Lower order subskills: first one of these to master: copying. Then dictation, and ‘writing-down’ or ‘writing-in-the-language’ exercises – whereby students manipulate simple sentence structures. Aim: consolidating students’ spelling habits in the target language, (copying, dictation), and ‘Writing-down’ exercises help students retain and recycle newly learnt language items. We call these writing as a means activities, as the primary aim is to develop other aspects of language through writing.
2. Higher-order subskills: teaching of writing normally means ‘free writing’; when learners write a letter, composition or essay, write for developing writing skills. In this case we talk about writing as an end, as we focus on writing for writing’s sake. The stage of free writing is usually reached through the intermediary steps of ‘guided writing’, where students are given, for example, a skeleton letter that they have to fill in or they can rely on prompts which help them generate ideas and/or organize their thoughts.

Ideally, students should be given ample initial guidance and this guidance should diminish over time.

Writing is a communication process → → writer needs to recognize the other side, the reader. Successful communication in writing pre-supposes a readership awareness, reflected in several aspects of the choices writers make. → → Writing style should involve sensitivity to readers and their knowledge, beliefs and expectations.

Similarly to the other skills, writing as a kind of communication is purposive. We write because we want to inform our audience about an occurrence or our views on a given topic, etc. It is important that students should have a clear purpose before they get down to the task of actual writing.

Another major issue is the selection of relevant information. Amount and kind of information the writer includes depend on context. Accordingly, the writer must provide the reader with context as a guide to the correct interpretation. Hungarian students seem to have problems with this aspect of writing. This may be due to the fact that they are not experienced writers. As we saw in relation to listening, also reading and speaking, significant difference between spoken and written language, each having an identifiable code of its own.

A learner's success in learning to write depends in part on his or her mastery of the code's resources. Extensive reading within a subject area may provide a beginning writer with primary models from which writing skills can be inferred. Exposure to and analysis of genres helps students cope with the task - they are exposed to a few typical models of the genre before producing a piece of writing of their own. This is especially true in the case of formal letters, whose language is highly formulaic and idiomatic. Cognitive Writing involves general problem-solving mental activities besides linguistic skills.

The problems we encounter and the way we solve them - more or less different because of the idiosyncratic features of our individual cognitive systems. Writing - simultaneous handling of several separate subprocesses - developing content, coherence, readership awareness, and linguistic choices → → short-term memory is put under particular strain. One way our limited capacities can cope with the processing demands → → develop regularized/routinized subprocesses such as standard phrasing and methods of organization. Put it simply: practice a lot.

Communicative competence in writing 'communication displaced in time' - readers cannot ask for immediate clarifications. → → clarity - a major strength of good writers, to make our meaning as clear as possible is a major concern for teaching writing.

Clarity - partly dependent on relevance of information to be given. Inefficient writers often have problems with it; tend to include a lot of irrelevant elements while omitting some relevant ones, which disrupts internal coherence. Internal coherence in composition makes it easier for readers to follow our train of thought and clearly decode our intended message.

Coherence - enhanced by discourse markers of cohesion, cohesive devices, students should also have practice in their use. Gap-fill exercises are suitable for this purpose, but it is also useful if such features of some good pieces of writing are analyzed in class. As we remember, most oral communication is spontaneous - errors, false beginnings, hesitations are tolerated as long as they do not disturb comprehensibility or disrupt sense.

In writing, however, such inaccuracies not acceptable. linguistic accuracy and social appropriacy are even more important in writing than in speaking. Linguistic accuracy - usually worked on separately from 'free writing' activities, but useful to help students develop in self-correction. Before given any peer/teacher feedback on their pieces of writing, students should be encouraged to first spot inaccuracies themselves. Besides linguistic accuracy, the rules of social appropriacy must be observed.

In conclusion we can say that problems and inaccuracies should only be indicated and students try to correct themselves. Still, they should also be allowed to rely on peers' and/or teacher's help on how to improve the necessary aspects if they feel they are not competent enough to cope.

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