



# Composing in Persian as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language: A Study of Narrative Writing Applied Linguistics

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**ABSTRACT:** Although numerous studies have been conducted to investigate second language composing processes; little research has been dedicated to investigate potential relationships between second- and foreign-language composing behaviors. This article is done to shed some light into these relationship(s)-specifically between composing in Persian as a second language and composing in English as a foreign language. The research questions posited were: Are good writers in Persian also good writers in English? And what role does learners' English proficiency play in their composing in English? Eighteen Iranian Arab high-school students were asked to write two narrative stories based on two series of pictures, one in Persian and the other in English. The participants' English and Persian compositions were analyzed both quantitatively (the number of sentences, words, and idea units) and qualitatively (holistic scoring). It was found that a high degree of correlation exists only between the compositions of the participants with a comparatively higher level of proficiency. This finding indicated that there should be a threshold English proficiency level: the students above this level composed similarly in Persian and English, whereas some of the students below the level had considerably more problems in composing in English and Persian.

**Key word:** Second Language, Narrative Writing, Linguistics

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## INTRODUCTION

"Writing is a basic communication skill and a unique asset in the process of learning a second language"(Chastain, 1988). Being able to write fluently is important in many contexts when writers have an idea that they want to write down before they forget it. This issue becomes more serious when the written text is to be evaluated by an instructor; that is, in an educational atmosphere where being less fluent than one's peers can be a serious barrier to educational achievement.

Cohen and Robinsons believe that most students have received minimal or no instruction in learning how to write not only in their second language but also in their native language. Cohen and Robinson have asserted that students instead receive feed-back which, they believe, is incomprehensible and thus unhelpful. However due to the plethora of exposure to the native language, either in text books or daily life, those who compose in their native language find this a process a possible one to handle. It is said possible because as Chastain (1988) has pinpointed, most students are not in the habit of writing even in their native language.

Writing in a second language, however, doesn't enjoy this big amount of support. Second language writers need to have reached a specific level of fluency by the time they are writing. Otherwise, they will find writing a very effortful process which may require conscious attention to retrieve words and spelling;

leaving little working memory free to attend to higher-level concerns such as generating detailed content and organizing the discourse (Chenoeth & Hayes; 2001). But when it gets to foreign language learners, the problem of writing becomes even more severe. To be able to produce a written text, foreign language writers have to rely heavily on a limited number of sources: their text books and their teachers' instruction. Due to a paucity of exposure to the target language, their experience with the language will be so narrow that they will continue to face the same difficulty the beginning second-language learners used to face while composing a text in a second language. Chenoeth and Hayes (2001) have found that increased experience with a language is associated with increased fluency in writing that language. Their finding brings into focus the problem foreign language learners face when writing in that foreign language. However, as a result of some factors, such as motivation, foreign language learners may strive to reach second-language learners' level of proficiency. That is, to increase their experience with the foreign language through different ways, such as reading, watching movies in the foreign language, or listening to tapes or CDs in that language. As a result of this, they may become able to compose more fluently in the foreign language. The question here is whether there is any correlation between a person's ability to compose in a second language and their ability to

compose in a foreign language. That is, are good writers in a second language also good at composing in a foreign language?

Second language writing researchers have undertaken several process-oriented studies. Most of these studies, however, dealt with between-subjects comparisons (Zamel, 1982; Raimes, 1987); that is, they examined the composing processes of second-language writers in comparison with the composing behaviors in the first-language studies. Only a limited number of second-language studies have attempted to investigate within-subjects comparisons between first and second-language composing processes of the same writers.

Edelsky (1982) for instance, investigated bilingual children's composing processes in first- (Spanish) and second-language (English) composing and found some evidence of transfer of both explicit and implicit knowledge about first-language writing into second-language writing. More specifically, Jones and Tetroe focused on planning strategies, and Gaskill (1986) focused on revising strategies of college student writers composing in a first (Spanish) and a second language (English), finding that regardless of the language used, the same strategies were operating in both the planning and revising processes. Cumming (1989) also undertook a study with Francophone college students as subjects to investigate how first-language writing expertise and second-language proficiency are related. His finding was that writing expertise was the major factor which affected the writer's second-language composing process, with a second-language proficiency acting as an additive factor. Thus, those previous studies all stress basic similarities between first and second-language composing process (Kamimura, 1996)

Kamimura (1996) argues that some qualifications are needed, first, in the choice of the participants' first language. That is, in the studies cited above, the participants' first language was Spanish or French which belong to the same language family as the participants' second language, namely, English. These languages use the same orthography. His second argument is that the participants in the previous studies were all learning English as a second language, as opposed to English as a foreign language. He believes that the participants would have manifested differences in the composing process of the two languages if they had learned English and a foreign, rather than second, language setting.

To fill this gap, Kamimura (1996) conducted his study, with a within subject design, to investigate the interrelationship between Japanese writers' composing in Japanese as a first language and English as a foreign language. He found a correlation between

the students' Japanese and English compositions. The correlation coefficient was high for students with high English proficiency.

Although the above mentioned studies have answered a lot of questions, there still exist more unanswered questions in this regard. The question of whether there is any correlation between composing in a second language and composing in foreign language seems not to be answered yet. Therefore this study is conducted to provide an answer to this question.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were chosen from two second-grade high-school classes. At the outset of the study 20 students participated. However, two of the students were absent for the second data-collecting session, and thus, 18 students remained at the end. They are all native speakers of Arabic whose second language is Persian and are learning English as a foreign language.

### **Data Collection**

Determining English proficiency

Since the researcher is the participants' English teacher, the participants' English proficiency was determined on the basis of their performance in the class.

### **Writing sessions**

The students participated in two writing sessions for picture description tasks. In these sessions, each student was given a series of pictures as writing prompt and told to write a narrative story based on the pictures.

Two different series of pictures (Series A and Series B) were prepared as the writing prompts (see Appendixes A and B). In Session 1, the students in Class 1 were given Series A and told to write a story in Persian in 20 minutes, while those in Class 2 were given Series B and told to compose in English in 40 minutes. A week later, Session 2 was conducted, and the series of pictures and languages to be used were switched between the two classes, i.e., the students in Class 1 were given Series B and told to write in English, while those in Class 2 were given Series A and told to write in Persian. Introductions were the same for all tasks: "Look at a series of pictures carefully and write a story". To avoid confusion, the protagonist's name was fixed as "Jack" for Series A and "Bill" for Series B. The compositions written by Class 1 and Class 2 were mixed and classified into two groups: Persian and English compositions.

**Data analysis**

**1. Quantitative analysis**

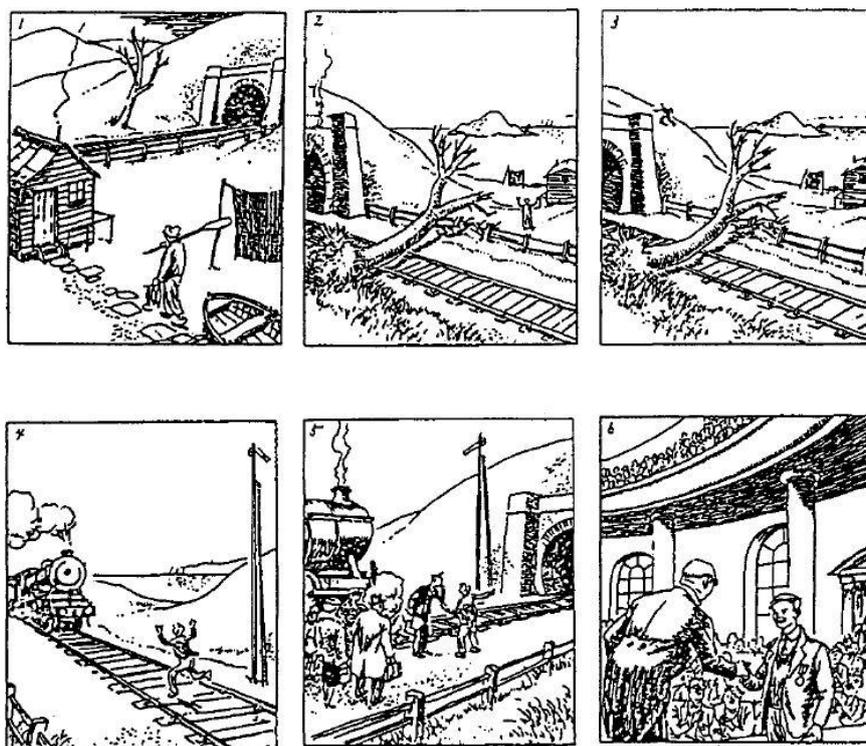
The students' English and Persian compositions were quantitatively analyzed according to the following four measures of analysis: (1) the number of sentences, (2) the number of words, (3) the number of idea units, and (4) quality rating

A careful consideration was given to identify idea units (semantic units that the participants are to include in their spoken or written production). The

researcher, who is an Iranian instructor of English, analyzed all of the students' Persian compositions and determined a total of 50 idea units for the Persian narrative writing (Appendix C). A total of 52 idea units were determined for the English narrative writing, of course these idea units and the series of pictures were adapted from the work by Kamimura (1996), (Appendix D). Appendix E demonstrates how the composition was actually analyzed into different idea units.



**Figure 1.** Series A (Writing Prompt Used for Persian Composition) From C. West, Listen Here (Georgian Press, 1999), p. 40.



Series B (Writing Prompt Used for Persian Composition)

**Figure 2.** From L. A. Hill, Picture Composition Book (London: Longman, 1960), pp. 22-23.

**Idea Units for Persian Compositions**

1. (dær jek ru: ze tabesta: ni: ) On a Summer day
2. (dʒæk væ xa: nva: de væ du: sta: næf ) Jack and his family and friends
3. (tæsmi: m gereftænd) decided
4. (bæra: je tæfri: h) for pleasure
5. (be sæfæri: dærja: ji: berævænd) to go on a voyage
6. (tæma: me væsa: jele murede neja: zef a: n ra: a: ma: de kærdænd) they prepared all the equipments
7. (sæva: re kærædzji: f udænd) got on board of a yacht
8. (bædæz i: nke æz sa: hel du: r f udænd) After they were off the coast
9. (hæma: ntur ke ba: hæm hærf mi: zædænd) as they were talking
10. (væ æz a: fta: b væ dærja: lezæt mi: burdænd) and enjoying the sea and the sun
11. ( na: gæha: n kærædzji: ?a: nha: be dʒesme buzurgi: bærxurd kærd) suddenly their yacht collided with a big body
12. (væ f uru: be ?i: nsu: væ ?a: nsu: ræftæn kærd) and started moving athwart
13. (?a: nha: xeili: væhf æt zæde bu: dænd) they were so horrified
14. (væli: nemi: da: nestænd ba: jæd tf e ka: ri: ændʒa: m dæhænd) but didn't know what to do
15. (a: n dʒesme æzi: m hæmtf ena: n dærja: ra: na: ?a: ra: m mi: kærd) that giant body ruffled the sea
16. (ta ?i: nke særændʒa: m) until finally
18. (ba: hærekæte f ædi: di: kærædzji: e ?a: nha: ra: va: zegu: n kærd) with a strong stroke it capsized their yacht
18. (?æz ?a: n læhze mtevædzeh f udænd) that moment they noticed
19. (ke ?a: n dʒesme æzi: m) that that giant body
20. (næhænge ghu: l peikæri: bu: d) was a gigantic whale
21. (xuf bæxta: ne) luckily
22. (hæmeje ?a: nha: dʒeli: gheje nedʒa: t be tæen da: f tænd) all of them were wearing life jackets
23. (væ væghti: be sæthe dærja: resi: dænd) and when they surfaced
24. (tæva: nestænd be su: je gha: jegh f ena: kunænd) they managed to swim back to their yacht
25. (æma: nætæva: nestænd ?a: n ra: bærgærda: nænd) but they couldn't turn it right
26. (du næfær æz ?a: nha: bæer puf te gha: jegh sæva: r f udænd) two of them climbed on top of the yacht
27. (du næfære di: gær hæm dær dærja: f ena: vær ma: ndænd) two of them were floating in the sea
28. (hær tf e dær dærja: nega: h mi: kærdænd) they looked everywhere in the sea
29. (ta: f a: jæd færja: d resi: bebi: nænd) in hope of a savior
30. (kæsi: ra: nædi: dænd) but they didn't see anybody
31. (xeili: tærsi: de bu: dænd) they were really horrified
32. (kæm kæm da: f tænd na: ?umi: d mi: f udænd) little by little they began to think it was the end
33. (ke na: gæha: n) when suddenly
35. (?æz du: r) miles away
35. (dʒæk jek kef ti: ra: di: d) Jack saw a ship
36. (di: gæra: n ra: ni: z mtevædzeh ?i: n ma: sæleh kærd) he draw the others' attention to that
37. (hæmægi: f uru: be da: du færya: d kærdænd) and all of them began to shout
38. (belæxære ?æfra: de dæru: no kef ti: ?a: nha: ra: di: dænd) and finally the people on board saw them
39. (be ka: pi: ta: n xæbær da: dænd) and told the captain of the ship about that
40. (væ ?u: mæsi: re kef ti: ra: tæghji: r da: d) the captain turned the ship off its normal course
41. ( dʒæk væ sa: jeri: n hæmtf ena: n da: du færja: d mi: kærdænd) Jack and the others were still shouting
42. (væ ku: mæk mi: xa: stænd) calling for help
43. (ta: ?i: nke belæxære kef ti: resi: d) until at last the ship arrived
44. (væ a: nha: ra: nedʒa: t da: d) and saved them
45. (væghti: be sa: hel ræsi: dænd) when they got to the coast
46. ( xæbærnega: ra: ni: ke ?æz ma: dʒera: ba: xæbær f ude bu: dænd) the news reporters who had heard of the news

47. (ba: dʒæk væ ma: dæræf msa: hebe kærdænd) had an interview with Jack and his mother
48. (xæbærnega: ra: n dær murede læhæza: te sæxti: k dʒæk væ digær du:sta: næf dær dærja: guzæra: ndænd pursi: dænd) the news reporters asked about the hardship Jack and his friends had been through
49. (dʒæk væ ma: dæræf hæm dær zemne pa: sux be ssa: la: t) while answering their questions, Jack and his mother
50. (?æz ka: pi: ta: no kef ti: tæf ækur kærdænd) thanked the captain

**Idea Units for English Composition**

1. Once upon a time
2. there was a man
3. called Bill
4. He was a fisherman
5. He lived in a small hut
6. by the railway track
7. There was a big tree
8. near the railway tunnel
9. One day
10. when he came home
11. from fishing
12. He discovered the big tree
13. which had fallen down
14. across the railroad tracks
15. because of a storm
16. in front of the tunnel
17. He was surprised
18. He thought a dangerous accident would happen
19. if a train came out of the tunnel
20. and ran into the tree
21. He decided to stop the train,
22. and he ran
23. up the hill
24. above the tunnel
25. as fast as he could
26. and ran down
27. to the other end of the tunnel.
28. Just then the train approached
29. Bill ran on the railway tracks
30. toward the train.
31. waving his hands.
32. and shouting "Stop".
33. Noticing Bill,
34. the engineer stopped the train.
35. The engineer got out
36. with some passengers.
37. They approached Bill.
38. Bill explained to them
39. why he had tried to stop the train.
40. Thanks to Bill,
41. all the passengers were safe.
42. The news spread through the town.
43. Three days later,
44. Bill was invited to a ceremony
45. held in the city hall.
46. Bill was applauded
47. by all the citizens in the city,
48. and given a medal
49. by the mayor
50. for his brave act.
51. Bill smiled happily.
52. He became a hero in the town.

**Sample Idea Unit Analysis (English Composition)**

[Many years ago] [there was a fisherman] [whose name's Bill]. [One day] [he was in the seaside]. [When he returned to his hut] [he saw a big tree] [that fell on the railway] [and a train was coming from a tunnel]. [Bill very afraid]. ["I must do things for this people"] [he said to himself]. [So he run along the railway] [and showed the people] [that they should stop]. [The people saw Bill] [and the train stopped]. [Therefore the mayor thanked him] [and gave him a medal.]

[Nowadays] [Bill is in our minds] [and we won't forget him]. [And should learn than him] [that help people].  
 Note [ ] indicates a boundary of an idea unit.

**2. Qualitative analysis**

For a qualitative analysis, the students' English and Persian compositions were rated holistically by two raters independently-the researcher who is the participants' English teacher and an experienced instructor of English. The rating was done on a five-point scale (A-F). Inter-rater reliability was  $r = 0.75$  for the English compositions and  $r = 0.80$  for the Persian compositions.

**3. Statistical Analysis**

To examine the inter-relationships between the students' Persian and English writing, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated between the Persian and English compositions for each measure of analysis. The statistical analyses were first attempted for all the students in the study to observe the general tendency. Following that, to investigate the role of English proficiency in composing in English, the statistical

analyses were conducted for the top five students on the basis of their teacher's overall evaluation of them during the term. In this study, the probability level was set at  $p < .05$  and the value at or beyond this level was considered as a statistically significant difference.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for the Persian and English compositions written by all the students in the study.

Statistically significant correlation coefficient was found between the students' writing in Persian and English in terms of sentences ( $r = .61, p < .05$ ). No statistically significant correlation coefficients were found for the number of words ( $r = .28, p < .05$ ), the number of idea units ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ), nor for the quality ratings ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ).

However when the data of the students with comparatively higher English proficiency were computed for statistical analyses, a different set of results emerged. Table 2 shows the the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for those students.

**Table 1.** Results of Correlation Analyses for the Number of Sentences, the Number of Words, and Holistic Ratings between English and Persian Compositions Written by All the Students

		Persian			
		Sentences	words	Idea Units	Ratings
English	Sentences	0.61*			
	Words		0.28*		
	Idea Units			0.24*	
	Quality Ratings				0.32**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 2.** Results of Correlation Analyses for the Number of Sentences, the Number of Words, and Holistic Ratings between English and Persian compositions by the Students with Relatively Higher English Proficiency

		Persian			
		Sentences	words	Idea Units	Ratings
English	Sentences	0.94*			
	Words		0.89*		
	Idea Units			5.91*	
	Quality Ratings				0.96**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

In comparison with the results for all the students, the analyses of the high-proficiency students' data revealed higher correlation coefficients in terms of all the analytical measures, and those correlation coefficients were all at the significant level: for the number of sentences ( $r = .94, p < .05$ ), the number of words ( $r = .89, p < .05$ ), the number of idea units ( $r = .91, p < .05$ ), and the holistic quality ratings ( $r = .96, p < .01$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

**General Tendency**

The results of the analyses suggest that the students' Persian and English compositions were in

some cases correlated. That is in general those who tended to include a big number of sentences in their English compositions tended to do the same in their Persian compositions. However the number of sentences doesn't guarantee the number of words, since it is possible to include a series of short sentences. The same is true about the idea units; that is the shorter the sentences and the less the words included in them, the less the idea units that are possible to appear in the text written by the students.

**The Role of English Proficiency**

The general tendency proved that there exists no significant correlation coefficient between composing in English and composing in Persian (except for the

number of sentences). However the results for the students with the highest English proficiency in this group of English learners revealed the higher correlation coefficient for all the measures of analysis. This implies that there can be a threshold English proficiency level at which composing in English becomes similar to that in Persian. This finding is in line with Kamimura's (1996) findings. In his case, he proved that there is a high correlation coefficient for all measures of analysis for the high group.

The other conclusion that one may draw is that the members of the higher group are able to employ the same techniques they use in a second language writing in composing in a foreign language. The ones who were successful in writing in a second language, in this case Persian, proved to be also successful in composing in a foreign language.

### Sample Compositions

Since the numbers per sé cannot depict the difference in writing behavior between the students of high and low proficiency, it seems necessary to examine some of the compositions written by the two groups. In the following section, sample English and Persian compositions will be shown, and some characteristic differences between the writing behaviors of the high- and low-proficiency groups will be explained.

Sample 1: Persian Composition by Participant 1 (Representative of the Students with High English Proficiency)

Persian transcription: sæla: m. Esmə mæn jæke væ 23 sa: l sen da: ræm

Hi, my name is Jack and I am 32 years old.

Persian transcription: mi: xa: hæm xa: terei bæra: jeta: n begu: jæm ke be 20 sa: le pi: f mærbu: t mi: f ævæd jæni: mæghei k 12 sa: læm bu: d

I want to tell a memory which belongs to 20 years ago, that is when I was 12 years old.

Persian transcription: be ja: d da: ræm ru: zi: æz ru: zha: je a: fta: bije ta: besta: n mæn væ ma: dæræm væ bæghi: je fa: mi: l bæra: je xuf guzæra: ni: be dʒæzi: re ræfte bu: di: m

I remember on one of those sunny summer days, my mother and the rest of our relatives and I went to the island for pleasure.

Persian transcription: hæma: ntur ke dær ha: le gæp zædæn bu: di: m væ ʔugha: te xuf i: ra: mi: guzæra: ndi: m na: gæha: n ehsa: s kærdi: m ke dʒesme sængi: ni: ma: ra: be ba: la: mi: kæf a: næd væ gha: jeghe ma: ra: va: zegu: n mi: kunnæd ke na: gaha: n næhænge æzi: muldʒuseʔi: sær æz a: b bi: ru: n a: værd væ ma: ra: dær dærja: ghærgh kærd

While we were chatting and having a great time suddenly we felt that a heavy body was dragging us up

and capsizing our boat suddenly a gigantic whale came out of water and drowned us in the sea.

Persian transcription: mæn fæghæt seda: je ma: dæræm ra: æz puʃ te sær mi: f æni: dæm ke mæra: seda: mi: kærd væ mi: guft: dʒæk beja: pi: f e mæn

I could only hear my mother's voice that was calling me from behind and saying: "Jack come here".

Persian transcription: xula: se mæn væ ma: dæræm ta: va: nesti: m nedʒa: t pei da: kuni: m væli: æz bæghi: je je du: sta: n xæbæri: næbu: d

Anyway, my mother and I survived but we didn't know anything about the rest of our friends.

Persian transcription: dæghi: gh ja: dæm næmi: ja: d ke tʃ e etefa: ghi: ʔufta: d væli: ʔi: n ra: mi: da: næm ke mæn væ ma: dæræm da: khele dærja: dunba: le bæghi: je mi: gæf ti: m væ belʔækhære tæva: nesti: m dʒa: ne a: nha: ra: nedʒa: t dæhi: m

I don't remember exactly what happened but I know that my mother and I were looking for them in the sea and finally we could save them.

Persian transcription: muntæzer ma: ndi: m ta: f a: jæd guru: he nedʒa: t beja: jænd væ ma: ra: nedʒa: t dæhænd

We waited for the coast guard to come and save us.

Persian transcription: kæmkæm da: f ti: m naʔ: umi: d mi: f udi: m væ mærg ra æz næzdi: k mi: di: di: m ta: ʔi: nke bæd æz hudu: de 10 sa: ʔæt keʃ ti: je nedʒa: t ra: ʔæz du: r di: di: m væ tæva: nesti: m nedʒa: t pei da: kuni: m

Little by little we were getting disappointed and seeing ourselves near to death that we saw the distant coast guard and we could survive.

Persian transcription: dær kul va: ghʔeje xeili: tæli: bu: d væli: ha: desje f i: ri: ni: ke bæd æz ʔa: n va: ghʔeh etefa: gh ʔufta: d i: n bu: d ke guru: hi: æz ʔæva: mel seda: væ si: ma: be mænzele ma: a: mædænd væ bæra: je musa: hæbe ma: ra: dæʔvæt kærdænd

All in all it was a terrible event but the pleasant event that happened after that was that a group of the TV staff came to our house and invited us for an interview.

Persian transcription: ja: dæm mi: ja: d ke musa: hebeje xeili: dʒa: lebi: bu: d væ mæn ni: z besja: r xuf ha: l bu: dæm ke dær sene nudʒæva: ni: be i: n f uhræt dæst ja: ftæm

I remember that it was a very interesting interview and I was very happy that I could reach that fame at my teens.

Persian transcription: ha: l mæn nevi: sænde hæstæm væ keta: bha: je zeja: di: be bætf eha: ærre kærdæm væ i: n ha: dese ra: ni: z tæhte ʔunva: ne -

buzurgmærde ku: tʃæk - bæra: je bætf eha:  
nevf tæm

I'm a writer now and I have offered the kids many books and I wrote a book called "The little big man" about that event.

**Sample 1:** contains 12 sentences, 278 words, and almost all of the idea units, and these are all relatively large numbers in the total Persian compositions written in this study. For quality this sample is rated high, given A+ as a holistic score.

In Sample 1, Participant 1 uses a clear narrative structure based on story grammar with such components as 'setting', 'initiation event', 'problem', 'attempt', 'consequence', and 'resolution' (Raimes, 1987; Thorndyke, 1977). She begins her story with the 'setting' in which she identifies herself with the protagonist and reflects on some event that happened to her 20 years ago (sælam, esme mæn jæke væ 23 sɑ: l sen da: ræm...): [Hi, my name is Jack and I am 23 years old...], this way she is able to transfer the feeling to the reader and convince him/her that the narrative is a reconstruction of a real event that happened to her 20 years ago. Then she presents the 'initiating event', when Jack and his mother and friends decide to go on a voyage (be ja: d da: ræm ru: zi: æz ru: zha: je a: fta: bije ta: besta: n mæn væ ma: dæræm væ bæghi: je fa: mi: l bæra: je xuf guzæra: ni: be dʒæzi: re ræfte bu: di: m): [I remember on one of those sunny summer days, my mother and the rest of our relatives...], and then the 'problem' that suddenly something capsized their boat (na: gæha: n ehsa: s kærði: m ke dʒesme sængi: ni: ma: ra: be ba: la: mi: kæf a: næd væ gha: jeghe ma: ra: va: zegu: n mi: kʊnæd ke na: gaha: n næhænge æzi: mʊldʒuseʔi: sær æz a: b bi: ru: n a: værd væ ma: ra: dær dærja: ghærgh kærð): [suddenly we felt that a heavy body was dragging us up and capsizing our boat suddenly a gigantic whale came out of water and...]. Following that, she offers the 'attempt', in which Jack and his mother, after surviving, tried to save the rest (dæghi: gh ja: dæm næmi: ja: d ke tʃe etefa: ghi: ʔufta: d væli: ʔi: n ra: mi: da: næm ke mæn væ ma: dæræm da: khele dærja: dʊnbɑ: le bæghi: je mi: gæf ti: m væ belʔækhære tæva: nesti: m dʒa: ne a: nha: ra: nedʒa: t dæhi: m): [I don't remember exactly what happened but I know that my mother and I were looking for them in the sea and finally we could save them.] and the 'consequence', where he was able to find the rest and to be saved by the coast guard and to give an interview (kæmkæm da: f ti: m naʔ: ʊmi: d mi: f ʊdi: m væ mærg ra æz næzdi: k mi: di: di: m ta: ʔi: nke bæd æz hʊdu: de 10 sɑ: ʔæt kef ti: je nejɑ: t ra: ʔæz du: r di: di: m væ tæva: nesti: m nedʒa: t pei da: kuni: m): [Little by little we were getting disappointed and seeing

ourselves near to death that we saw the distant coast guard and we could survive]. Finally she ends the story with a 'resolution', saying, (ja: dæm mi: ja: d ke musa: hebeje xei li: dʒa: lebi: bu: d væ mæn ni: z besja: r xuf ha: l bu: dæm ke dær sene nʊdʒæva: ni: be i: n f ʊhræt dæst ja: fæm): [I remember that it was a very interesting interview and I was very happy that I could reach that fame at my teens.]. The she returns to the present and reflects on her recent activities, which seem to be the consequence of that event. She even has chosen a title for her story.

Another characteristic of Sample 1 is that Participant 1 pays attention to the readers and creates a story which is easy for them to understand. She sounded more persuading since she has identified herself with the protagonist. This way it seems easier for the reader to sympathize with the protagonist. She includes so many pieces of information which are not included explicitly in the pictures, yet to understand the whole story, the reader needs them. As an example, she mentions the way they survived before the coast guard saved them. She also tried to present Jack's mother's attempts to save him. The interesting thing she employed beautifully in her story is the shift in time; at the present Jack is remembering an event belonging to 20 years ago, and finally returning to the present and giving an account of Jack's current status.

**Sample 2:** English Composition by Participant 1 (representative of the students with high English proficiency)

Many years ago there was a fisherman whose name's Bill. One day he was in the seaside. When he returned to his hut he saw a big tree that fell on the railway and a train was coming from a tunnel. Bill very afraid. "I must do things for this people" he said to himself. So he run along the railway and showed the people that they should stop. The people saw Bill and the train stopped. Therefore the mayor thanked him and gave him a medal.

Nowadays Bill is in our minds and we won't forget him. And should learn than him that help people.

Sample 2 includes 9 sentences, 108 words, and 46% of the total idea units which is acceptable for a student in an elementary level. Those numbers weren't the largest of all the English compositions collected in the study. The reason why this composition was chosen was that it was the most accurate one structurally. This sample is a composition of high quality, in comparison to the rest of English compositions, with a holistic score of A.

As in Sample 1, in Sample 2, Participant 1 writes the story according to the rules of story grammar to make the story as a complete whole: 'setting' ("Many years ago there was a fisherman whose name's Bill"), 'initiating event' ("One day he was in the seaside.

When he returned to his hut he saw a big tree that fell on the railway and a train was coming from a tunnel"), 'problem' ("Bill very afraid. "I must do things for this people" he said to himself"), 'attempt' ("So he run along the railway and showed the people that they should stop..."), 'consequence' ("The people saw Bill and the train stopped"), and 'resolution' ("Therefore the mayor thanked him and gave him a medal"). Participant 1 has even drawn the morale of this narrative ("Nowadays Bill is in our minds and we won't forget him. And should learn than him that help people").

As in Sample 1, Participant 1 includes the information which the pictures do not provide. She offers Bill's internal statement and makes it clear why Bill ran along the railway: "I must do things for this people" he said to himself. So he ran along the railway and showed the people that they should stop." Or she said "Bill was very afraid" the information which is not shown by pictures.

As these two samples show, Participant 1 manifests similar writing behaviors both in English and Persian composing. This student had high English proficiency (in comparison to the rest of the participants), and because of this she was able to utilize sophisticated writing strategies in composing in English almost as freely as she was in composing in Persian.

(2) Compositions by a student with Low English Proficiency

Sample 3 is the Persian composition written by Participant 2, who represents the group of Low English Proficiency, as had been determined by her English teacher.

**Sample 3:** Persian Composition by Participant 2 (Representative of the Students with Low English Proficiency)

Persian transcription: ?i: n a: ghɑ: ju: n sɑ:vɑ: re kef ti: hɑ:stænd jɑ: f a: jæd bæra: je xuf guzæra: ni: dær kef ti: sɑ:vɑ: r f ʊdænd

These gentlemen are on board of a ship or they may be on board for pleasure.

Persian transcription: vɑ: a: ghɑ: ji: ke kʊlɑ: h vɑ: eɪ næk pʊf i: de servætæf rɑ: be rʊkhe ?i: n du: stɑ: næf mi: kef i: d

And the gentleman wearing a hat and glasses is bragging about his wealth.

Persian transcription: ke tu: je rɑ: h tʃ ænd næfær rɑ: ke dær hɑ: le ghærgh f ʊdænæn vɑ: kʊmæk mi: xɑ: stænd vɑ: hær jek xʊdæf rɑ: be dʒæzi: reher ke næzdi: ke ?ɑ: nhɑ: hɑ:stænd bɑ: kʊmæke du: stɑ: nef a: n mi: kef u: næn

In the way some guys who were drowning and asking for help and each one of them dragging with the help of his friends to an island nearby

Persian transcription: ke jehʊji: jek kef ti: rɑ: mi: bi: nænd vɑ: bɑ: dæst ef a: re kærðæn be kef ti: ?u: n a: ghɑ: ju: n nærdebu: ne kʊmæk rɑ: bæraje ?ɑ: nhɑ: mi: ?ændɑ: zænd tɑ: ?i: nke jeki: jeki: sɑ:vɑ: re kef ti: mi: f ævænd

Suddenly they see a ship and by waving their hands to the ship, those gentlemen dropped the rescue ladder to them so that they get into the ship one by one.

Persian transcription: vɑ: dær ?ɑ: xær bæd ?æz resi: dæn be mæghsædha: ye murede næzæref a: n i: n xæbære zende mɑ: ndænef a: n vɑ: kʊmæk kærðæne ?ɑ: nhɑ: rɑ: be?ʊnvɑ: ne musahæbe dær telvi: zyu: n pæxf mi: kʊnænd vɑ: tæf ækure dʒɑ: nɑ: ne rɑ: ?æz ?ɑ: n tʃ æhɑ: r næfær mi: kʊnænd

And at last after getting to their destinations they broadcast the news of their survival and their help in an interview and thank those four guys sincerely.

Participant 2's Persian composition is poorly-written and rated low with a score of F. It is written with an unclear narrative structure.

Participant 2's Persian composition is not well-written and rated low with a score of F. The writer of this composition has not yet reached a high level of proficiency in Persian. This claim is made on the basis of the structural problems which are observed in this sample. The idea units expressed in this narrative are very limited and go beyond what is shown by the pictures. In fact there are also some misunderstandings on the part of Participant 2.

On a par with her poor composition in Persian, participant 2's English composition is also poorly written.

**Sample 4:** English Composition by Participant 2 (Representative of the Students with Low English Proficiency)

His name is Bill. And his working fisherman. One day one tree near hut Bill fall. That means fall front train and Bill trying to people in train helping and can they stop and at last take a medal from mayor.

Sample 4 is poor in syntax and content. It is short, written with only 4 sentences and 40 words. It includes only 23 % of the total idea units. The holistic score given to this sample was low, i.e., F.

This sample doesn't even present the framework of the story, the framework which is shown explicitly by the pictures. It does not offer any details. It does not follow the rules of story grammar (setting, initiating event ...). Participant 2's composing abilities both in her second and foreign language seem to be interrelated. Her weakness in composing in a second language may be due to her lack of being exposed to sources of the second language and her unfamiliarity

with narratives in general. Due to this, she showed an even more weakness in composing in a foreign language.

### **Conclusion**

The present study was conducted to examine whether Arab high-school students' second-language (Persian) and foreign-language (English) composing behaviors are inter-related, and if so, how they are related.

It was found that Arab high-school students with higher English proficiency composed their English narratives in a similar way to their narratives in their second language, both qualitatively and quantitatively. That is, the students who tended to write high-rated compositions with a large number of words and idea units in Persian also tended to do so in English. However not all the participants behaved in this fashion; that is the general findings didn't offer a significant set of correlation coefficients between the participants' writing in Persian and English compositions.

This study posits further research questions. First, the present study dealt with only one mode of writing, narration, and therefore, we need to examine whether the same pattern of correlations between second and foreign language will be found when other modes of discourse are used, such as exposition or argumentation.

Second we need to take a close look at the students' previous literacy experiences in their second language. Through questionnaires and interviews, we could examine what kinds and how much of second language writing activities the students have been engaged in before, in and out of school. Another way to get more information about the participants' background knowledge of their second language writing could be through asking their second language instructor about the nature of their writing course.

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