

## WRITING FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: THE ROLE OF METACOGNITION IN COPING WITH CHALLENGES

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### INTRODUCTION

Metacognition can be defined as thinking about thinking or knowledge about knowledge. The role of metacognition in facilitating learning has received increasing attention in the field of language learning in the last two decades. Out of the four language skills, writing is considered the most difficult skill by many learners and it is also the skill many teachers are reluctant to teach as the results are often frustrating. Writing becomes more challenging when the learners have to write in a second language and especially when they have to write for academic purposes in a second language. As Schraw (2001) points out, metacognition is extremely useful for learners in managing their skills better and in determining their weaknesses as well. According to Anderson (2003), developing metacognitive awareness in learners may enable them to think about their writing processes and this may lead to the development of better writing skills.

The students who register for various degree programmes at the Open University of Sri Lanka are expected to follow the courses in the medium of English and write their assignments and sit their final examinations in English. The Department of Language Studies conducts courses in English for Academic Purposes to help these students. Research reveals that a high percentage of students who follow programmes in English and those who study English for academic purposes at the Open University and other universities in Sri Lanka show poor performance in Writing (Raheem & Ratwatte, 2001; Raheem & Wijetunge, 2009; Ratwatte, 2005). The present study was carried out with a view to address this problem.

This paper discusses the findings of a study which investigated the effectiveness of writing strategies (mainly metacognitive strategies) used by students who were studying English for Academic Purposes. These are part findings of a longitudinal intervention study which investigated the impact of strategy instruction on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students' writing strategy use and writing performance.

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed method true experimental research design. The sample consisted of 72 science undergraduates following the English course in 2007. The students were randomly selected and randomly assigned into an experimental group and a control group. The data were collected using questionnaires, stimulated recall sessions, learner diaries and writing tests. The experimental group was provided with a comprehensive writing strategy instruction programme designed by the researcher as part of their EAP course and the control group had the same number of teaching hours and followed the same course content except strategy instruction.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire data were analysed quantitatively while the stimulated recall protocols were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Since the focus of this paper is metacognition, only those findings relevant to metacognitive strategy use (Planning, Self-Monitoring, and Evaluation) will be discussed. A quantitative analysis of questionnaire data and stimulated recall data showed

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that Planning and Monitoring strategy use were moderate at the pre-test while Evaluation strategy use was low. A qualitative analysis of the Stimulated Recall protocols and their written texts showed that their use of strategies was not very effective at the pre-test. The experimental group showed higher increase in the mean value between the pre-test and the post-test than did the control group in Planning, Self-Monitoring, and Evaluation strategy use. At the pre-test, Planning, Self-Monitoring, and Evaluation strategy use showed no statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. At the post-test, there was a statistically significant difference in Planning strategy use between the experimental group and the control group ( $Z = 2.103, p = 0.035$ ). In the Self-Monitoring category, the difference between the experimental group and the control group approached significance at the post-test ( $Z = 1.899, p = 0.058$ ). The experimental group also showed significantly higher Evaluation strategy use than did the control group at the post-test ( $Z = 2.419, p = 0.016$ ). The higher mean value was for the experimental group.

A quantitative analysis of the Stimulated Recall protocol data showed that there was an increase in the total Planning strategy use between the pre-test and the post-test for the experimental group while there was a slight decrease for the control group. In the Monitoring category, a higher increase between the pre- and post-tests was seen for the experimental group than that for the control group. There was no difference in mean total Evaluation strategy use between the two groups.

A qualitative analysis of Stimulated Recall Protocols showed that the manner and the effectiveness of strategy use varied from one informant to the other and also between the pre-test and post-test. At the post-test, the experimental group students were found to be applying the strategies introduced to them during the strategy instruction programme. They showed the ability to select relevant strategies and use them more appropriately in order to solve their problems than they did at the pre-test. The findings of the present study showed that Writing Strategy Instruction was feasible with EAP students and it had a positive impact on their strategy use.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the feasibility of metacognitive writing strategy instruction and its effects on students' strategy use. The Writing Strategy Instruction Cycle was specifically designed for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students at undergraduate level. The findings showed that this instruction cycle was effective in training students not only to use writing strategies effectively and appropriately but also to become more independent and self-directed in their learning. However, more research in this area is necessary before generalizing the findings.

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## REPORTING RAPE IN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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### INTRODUCTION

To say that language is used to represent a particular reality is stating the obvious. However, what is often overlooked is its power and potential to create reality and position subjects in particular ways due to its discursive quality. Against the backdrop of increased literacy, including computer literacy, and the place given to English at present, this paper attempts to analyze the manner in which crimes against women are represented in English newspapers, using a contemporary theoretical framework and methodology which combined, would provide both a quantitative and qualitative perspective of how this important issue is discursively reported, and its implications. The aims of this study are two-fold. One is to investigate linguistic patterns and thereby the discursive construction of reality related to sexual violence against women in the English press, in order to raise awareness of the fact that language is not an innocent means of communication. The other is to create a framework which combines discourse analysis with corpus linguistics in order to contribute to the field of linguistic analysis of the media in Sri Lanka.

The theoretical perspective used is Critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach, while defining discourse not only as language as it is used in context, but also as a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge (Fairclough, 1995), attempts to draw connections between the use of language and the exercise of social power. Within the paradigm of CDA, reality is understood as constructed, shaped by various social forces. These realities however are naturalized in everyday discourse. Reality is frequently presented simply as 'the way things are' and not as the outcome of social practices that might be questioned or challenged. CDA can help to unpack the meanings of specific linguistic items in the texts, and to relate these meanings to broader socio-cultural processes. Early studies using the CDA framework were done by the Glasgow Media Group (1980) who pointed out that news reports had a consistent pattern of language use which portrayed workers and labour unions as being demanding, unreasonable and violent but managers and employers as being peaceful and reconciliatory. In the late nineties, researchers such as Ehrlich (1998) examined judicial proceedings in date – rape trials and investigated the grammatical resources that were used to construct certain sequences of events as consensual sex rather than as assault. Van Dijk (1987, 1991, 1996) has repeatedly examined the representation of race in mainstream sources including press reports, speeches made in European legislative assemblies school textbooks and scientific and corporate discourse. In a more relevant study, Clark (1998) investigated reporting of violence by the British "Sun" newspaper using naming analysis and transitivity analysis. She concludes that the *Sun* manipulates blame and achieves this linguistically, and in its reporting of crime, victims were cast according to their sexual availability or not, and their attackers were named as fiends or not. She attributes this to the *Sun*'s general interest in sex as a selling property. Since no study of this nature of this nature has been conducted in Sri Lanka, this paper attempts to fill this void.

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study is primarily Corpus Linguistics, (CL). CL is a currently popular computer-based method of analysis which analyses recurring patterns in large samples of linguistic data. It is the study of linguistic phenomena through large collections of machine-readable texts: **corpora**. An important part of CDA is to demonstrate the existence of consistent patterns in a text or set of related texts. Analysis has to be systematic and not just a matter of

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