The trade-off relationship between English writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency: A case study on GEPT High-Intermediate Writing Tests

林銘輝
淡江大學英文學系

Abstract

The Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM) (Skehan & Foster, 1997, 2001) is believed to have an impact on the memory processing system, leading to a trade-off model between the levels of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) in writing output by EFL learners. Among the various factors, time may be one critical variable consuming EFL writers' LACM, but the current literature on the possible influence of LACM on the CAF relationship demonstrated in timed writing is rather limited; this is particularly the case in the context of Taiwan. What has not been properly investigated here includes the investigation of possible CAF interaction caused by Taiwanese EFL writers' proficiency levels. Studying this is also important given how the development of student writers' skills change over the course of learning, that is, being able to write with more complexity, more accurately, or more fluently when they are more skilful in writing than when they are not. To shed light on these aspects, the researcher of this study investigated 150 timed writing samples created by EFL test-takers who participated in the General English Proficiency Test High Intermediate. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The research results indicate a possible trade-off relationship between complexity and fluency/accuracy, irrespective of the overall writing proficiency of the GEPT test-takers. To be specific, the higher the complexity of the writing samples, the lower their fluency and accuracy; the higher the fluency of the samples, the higher their accuracy. However, such trade-off relationship is not significantly correlated with the test-takers' writing scores. The paper concludes by offering implications and by identifying possible avenues for further studies.

Keywords: the Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM), EFL writing