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Title

Self and Peer Revisions in Students' Narrative Paragraph Writing

Author

Barli Bram

Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Bio-Profile:

Barli Bram teaches English at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He completed his MEd at Boston University and earned his PhD in linguistics from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He has a profound interest in writing, grammar, syntax, semantics and morphology. He can be reached at barli@usd.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the two phases, namely drafting and revision stages, in students' narrative or story-telling paragraph writing to reveal whether or not the writing products have a better quality, particularly from the grammatical point of view. Through self-revision and peer revision, every student was required to improve her or his draft and eliminate or reduce mistakes listed in the so-called minimum requirements when drafting and revising a narrative paragraph. Data were collected from Paragraph Writing, one of the compulsory courses conducted by the English Language Education Study Programme of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The participants were course takers of Paragraph Writing, who consisted of 23 students belonging to batch 2015 (the second semester students), who took the course Basic Writing in the first semester. The data, narrative paragraphs which had been revised through two phases, were scored and analyzed using the minimum requirements consisting of seven (grammatical) points. Results showed that students undergoing self and peer revisions improved their narrative paragraph writing.

Keywords: *drafting, narrative paragraph, self-revision, peer revision, writing*

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by Bram Barli

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Introduction

Improving narrative paragraph writing remains a challenging task for learners of the English language, including facing grammatical issues, such as finite verbs and agreement or concord. Self-revision and peer-revision, which are also called self-correction/feedback and peer correction/feedback, play a significant role in bettering a narration. McGroarty and Zhu (1997, p. 2) conclude that “Peer revision, in which students work in pairs or small groups to provide feedback on one another’s writing, has become a widely used teaching method in first (L1), second (L2), and foreign language writing instruction”. This study aims to discover whether or not students improve their narrative or story-telling paragraph writing after going through self-revision and peer revision, particularly in terms of language accuracy.

Previous studies

Various studies focusing on revision in writing have been conducted. In their research, Villamil and De Guerrero (1998, p. 491) say “The benefits of using peer feedback as an aid to revision in writing in first (L1) and second (L2) language classrooms have been amply discussed in the literature”. Nevertheless, researchers continue looking for answers because “there are still questions about the learners' capacity to help each other in solving linguistic problems...” Regarding students’ capabilities in giving corrections, Chandrasegaran (1986) conducted “an exploratory study of the revision and self correction capabilities of a group of university students for whom English is a second language (sic).” In Yang’s (2010) study, which took place from 15 September 2008 till 9 January 2009, there were 95 undergraduate students who “were encouraged to construct and reconstruct their texts, which were revised by themselves and peers in and after class”. Based on their research, Kaufman and Schunn (2011, p. 388) state that “Much research has demonstrated the positive benefits of peer assessment for both the assessor and student who is receiving the assessment”.

Further, Diab’s (2010) study results showed that the students who went through “peer-editing reduced their rule-based language errors in revised drafts more than those who self-edited their essays”. Villamil and De Guerrero (1998) examined “the impact of peer revision on writers' final drafts in two rhetorical modes, narration and persuasion, among 14 Spanish speaking ESL college students”. In their study, Villamil and De Guerrero (1998) posed two questions, namely how revisions made in peer sessions were “incorporated by writers in their final versions” and how trouble sources were revised based on “different language aspects (content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics)”. In conclusion, “These revisions

suggest a pattern of behavior conducive to self-regulation among writers” (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1998; cf Liu, 2013, p. 51).

Data

Data, consisting of 23 narrative paragraphs written by 23 students, were collected from the Paragraph Writing course. The course, which is a compulsory subject consisting of two credits, was designed to give students opportunities to practise their writing skills to produce a good paragraph. During the course, students will be introduced to the concept of a good paragraph which covers the topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. The course focuses on descriptive, narrative and argumentative paragraphs (but for the current study, the writer covers narrative paragraphs only, considering that the main concern is to encourage students to tell or narrate stories in grammatically and semantically correct English. This course is offered to semester two students of the English Language Education Study Programme of Sanata Dharma University. The grading policy is as follows: three assignments or tasks (20%), attendance and participation (10%), two progress tests (40%) and the final exam (30%). The distribution of the grades is as follows: A (80-100), B (70-79), C (60-69), D (50-59) and E (0-49). The course Paragraph Writing, consisting of a total of 16 meetings, started on 11 February 2016 and ended on 27 May 2016.

Minimum requirements

“When you write (and speak) English, you must check to make sure that you do not make any of the grammar mistakes listed. Freedom from these mistakes is the lowest possible standard which will be accepted” (By courtesy of the English Language Education Study Programme of Sanata Dharma University. These MR's are (re)adapted from a handout entitled *An English Language Course for First Year Students of English at the IKIP* by RL Fountain (nd).). There are seven points listed in the Minimum Requirements, namely 1. concord/agreement, 2. finite verbs, 3. tenses, 4. verb groups, 5. articles/determiners, 6. punctuation and 7. spelling. How important is grammar learning-teaching in the context of writing in English? Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012, p. 196) state that “the teaching of grammatical features like tenses and linguistic elements, including capitalization, commas and other punctuation” can assist learners to write better.

Results

Based on the analysis of the 23 narrative paragraphs, the current researcher discovered that as a whole the narrations read better and contained fewer grammatical mistakes after the students did self-revision and peer revision, with the scores ranging from 71 up to 88 (three B's and 20 A's). The distribution is as follows: 71 (1 student), 72 (1), 77 (1), 80 (5), 81 (2), 82 (5), 83 (4), 86 (2) and 88 (2), and the range of the grades is as follows: A (80-100), B (70-79), C (60-69), D (50-59) and E (0-49). Below are an example of a draft and of a finalized narrative paragraph (after self and peer revisions).

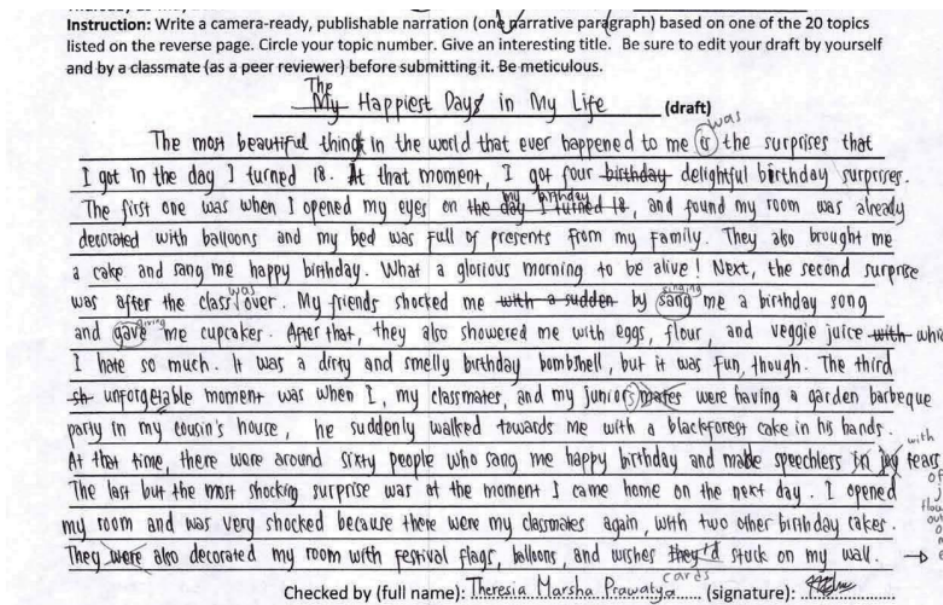


Figure 1. Drafting, self-revision and peer revision

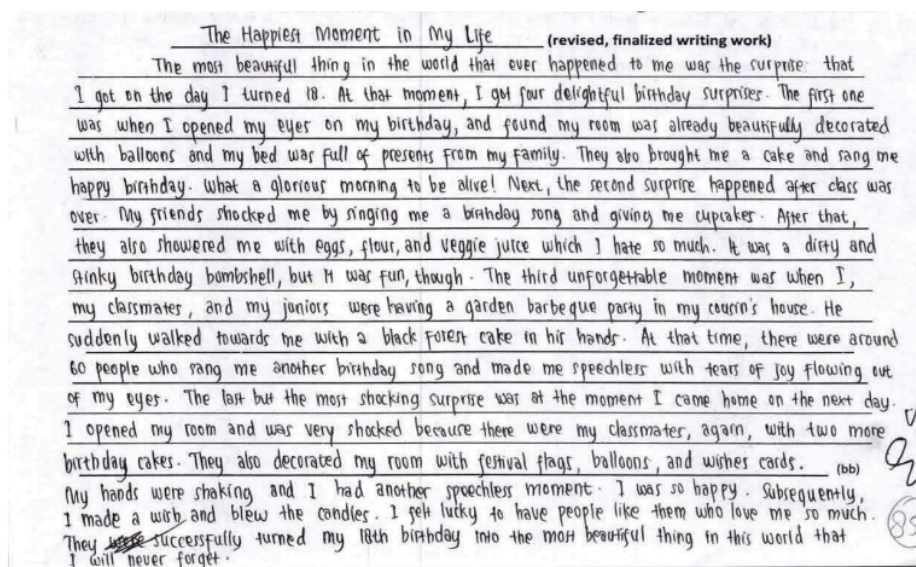


Figure 2. Finalized version

In the instruction, the students were asked to write a camera-ready narrative paragraph based on one of the 20 topics given. Each student should ensure to do self-revision and peer revision. It was an open book/resource test. Time allotment was maximum 75 minutes.

Conclusions

Paragraph Writing students who did self-revision and peer revision wrote better narrative paragraphs by eliminating or reducing mistakes listed in Minimum Requirements, such as finite verbs and determiners. The results showed that there exists “a positive relationship between grammar and writing” (Jones, Myhill & Bailey, 2013, p. 1258; cf Duc, 2016, p. 16). Students with few grammatical/linguistic mistakes can improve their narrative paragraphs and deserve better scores.

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