

The Interplay of Text Genre and Comprehension-checking Behavior: Moroccan EFL University Students as a Case Study

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Abstract— It is true that textual processing entails the methodical usage of monitoring strategies intended to facilitate the attainment of an effective, adequate comprehension. Indeed, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, in their endeavor to generate efficient sense of any written discourse, are expected to employ a large corpus of strategic processes. Granted this, the current study depicts the typical influence of text genre (i.e., narrative, expository) on the use of the monitoring techniques among Moroccan EFL learners (n=113) at the pre-test and post-test levels. Two English department groups were targeted: Control group (n=50) and treatment group (n=63). In order to reach comprehensive findings, three research instruments such as reading tests, strategy instruction and reading comprehension texts (i.e., narrative, expository), were tapped. The outcomes showed that text genre does, to some extent, impact the frequent use of monitoring during the reading process. Lastly, the study concludes with some pertinent implications and suggested perspectives.

Index Terms— executive control, expository text, narrative text, monitoring, text analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly admitted that being strategic, independent readers is an important precondition to an academic success (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2011; Bharuthram, 2012; Kolić-Vehovec, et al., 2011). Indeed, the methodical use of effective strategies in the course of reading written texts can both facilitate the comprehension process for the learners in various ways and improve their reading capabilities to a greater extent. Thus, the lack of an appropriate understanding of the content of written materials can be attributable to the inefficient use of monitoring strategies. Most EFL learners do not seem to apply them efficiently for ensuring a thorough understanding. They only employ some strategic processes, often unconsciously, so as to make sense of the textual content in a general way. This engenders a certain type of inaccuracy and ineffectiveness in terms of comprehending the target message conveyed by the author/writer via his/her text. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the use of monitoring is a potentially promising means for attaining an accurate, comprehensive understanding of the written text (i.e., narrative, expository).

Actually, a large corpus of previous extended reading research conducted on the perceived interconnectedness between text genre (i.e., narrative, expository) and strategies, has been restricted to the exploration of the influence of text type on prediction (e.g., Afflerbach, 1990), inferencing (e.g.,

Baretta, et al., 2009), selective attention (e.g., Goelman, 1982), and recalling (e.g., Zabrocky & Ratner, 1992; Wolfe & Mienko, 2007). Further, while a grouping of reading research specialists (e.g., Best, et al., 2008) investigate the interplay of the variable of text type and decoding skills and background knowledge in the reading process, other researchers (e.g., Khansir & Mohammadi Fard, 2014) tackle the text genre impact on vocabulary acquisition techniques among learners. However, the effect of text type on comprehension monitoring has been addressed by very few researchers (e.g., Zabrocky & Ratner, 1992; Zabrocky & Moore, 1999). Hence, the current study intends to address this issue in a Moroccan EFL context in an attempt to depict the link relating between text typology (i.e., narrative, expository) and learners' strategic monitoring behavior.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Executive Control

Executive control refers to the process of performing a particular cognitive task in an organized, regulated and efficient way. Wang, et al. (1997) consider it to be "a student's capacity to plan, monitor, and, if necessary replan comprehension strategies in the service of understanding". Most important, executive control enables EFL learners to methodically apply a wide variety of strategies in the learning as well as the reading tasks. It is deemed a sophisticated kind of metacognitive control

which allows learners to undertake and approach different tasks with a certain amount of efficiency and accuracy.

For Rubin (1992), executive control consists of three major processes which are reflected in the setting of goals, the monitoring of performance or comprehension of any problems that arise, and the making of decisions as to appropriate subsequent action. In very simpler terms, executive control, as an effective way of organizing and controlling one's learning process, incorporates three primary strategies which can be referred to as planning, monitoring and evaluating. For instance, in the process of reading, learners are highly expected to formulate goals for their reading task, monitor the progress of comprehending the content and assess the effectiveness of their reading performance. These strategies form an essentially significant portion of the executive control since they assist learners to attain an overall interpretation of the text content.

B. Monitoring in Text Reading

Monitoring, as a „regulatory“ and executive strategy, refers to “one's awareness of comprehension and task performance while in the process of performing a specific task” (Nietfeld, et al., 2005: 9). It is, indeed, an essential metacognitive strategy which enables learners to be fully aware of the process of understanding. In other terms, monitoring, when undertaking a given reading task, gives learners the opportunity to ensure that the process of comprehension is effectively undertaken. For Nietfeld, et al. (2005), who basically underscore the critical significance of the monitoring strategy in dealing with different academic tasks, effective monitoring “aids students in keeping track of ongoing cognitive processes and using regulatory strategies to solve problems” (p.9).

According to Ley and Young (2001), monitoring has been associated with achievement (p.98). This reveals that the utilization of this „self-regulatory“ strategy in attempting to approach academic reading is a foundational prerequisite to achieving a successful comprehension. To put it succinctly, conducting a given reading task without monitoring the extent of the progress that is taking place will not assist learners to attain an efficient understanding. Within this framework, Puntambekar (1995) reflects the fact that younger and less skilled learners do not use many monitoring strategies. This amply evinces that the development of monitoring strategies, as noted by Puntambekar (1995), can be closely related to two major variables which are age and aptitude. That means that mature and skilled learners are able to effectively monitor their comprehension of diverse texts (i.e., narrative, expository), whereas younger and less skilled learners

cannot use the monitoring strategies as successfully as their counterparts (skilled learners).

In view of this, monitoring, as “a crucial component of metacognition” (Schmitt & Newby 1986: 30), significantly assists learners to tackle the reading texts of narrative and expository type with greater effectiveness and efficiency. Nonetheless, monitoring strategies, as confirmed by Brezin (1980), are frequently implemented by experienced learners. This explicitly stated fact reflects that this type of strategies cannot be used by „unskilled“ and „inexperienced“ learners more efficiently unless they are provided with adequate strategy training. Hence, an extensive use of the monitoring process by learners is associated with the attainment of an effective understanding of the content included in diverse textual input (i.e., narrative, expository).

Research Objectives & Research Questions

This exploratory study seeks to reveal the typical influence of text genre (i.e., narrative, expository) on the monitoring techniques among Moroccan EFL learners (n=113). It also aims at disclosing whether the variable of strategy training can impact English department university learners' monitoring behavior as pertains to text genre (i.e., narrative, expository). For bringing these objectives into a succinct, plain perspective, some research-based instruments such as reading comprehension texts (i.e., narrative, expository), strategy instruction and narrative and expository reading tests (i.e., pre-test, post-test) were put into action by the researcher for the assurance of quantitative and qualitative data. Hence, two prime research questions are formulated.

a- To what extent does text genre influence Moroccan EFL university learners' strategic monitoring?

b- To what extent can Moroccan EFL university learners' monitoring behaviour be impacted by reading strategy training whilst coping with text type (i.e., narrative, expository)?

Research Hypotheses

In light of the above-stated research questions, two prime research hypotheses have been formulated. They are brought forward as follows:

1. Moroccan EFL university students' strategic monitoring is not genre-specific.

2.Strategy training does not have a significant effect on EFL university learners’ monitoring behaviour with regard to text genre (i.e., narrative, expository).

III. METHOD

A. Participants

One hundred and thirteen Moroccan EFL university students, studying at the first-semester level at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V- Agdal in Rabat, participated in the current study. Two groups were addressed. The first group (n=63) was exposed to the instructional treatment and the second group (n=50) did not receive any strategy intervention. The targeted learners in the two EFL groups (i.e., control, experimental) are not repeaters and they have a comparable educational background. The prime impetus for selecting these two groups is to draw a parallel between the experimental and control groups with respect to comprehension-checking at the pre- and post-test levels.

B. Procedure

The current exploratory study adopts a pre-post-test design by assigning a pre-test and a post-test to the control and treatment groups. The two groups (control & experimental) were pre-tested on narrative and expository written discourse and given a „self-report questionnaire” at pre-testing. Afterwards, the control group (50) was instructed in reading comprehension without receiving any strategy intervention. As to the intervention group (63), it was instructed in strategic monitoring for a semester-long period (Fall Term/ 2012). The procedure was conducted through the assignment a wide series of narrative and expository written texts with a view to consolidating the treatment group’s reading strategic behavior and analysis/ synthesis skills. At the conclusion of the undertaken intervention, the controls as well as the treatment group were presented with narrative and expository post-tests. This was accompanied with a „self-report questionnaire” for gauging the learners’ strategic monitoring throughout the course of text processing (i.e., narrative, expository).

The data obtained through the „self-report questionnaire” were computed through the Excel software Program (version 2007) with a view to measuring the strategic monitoring behaviour among both groups (i.e., control, experimental) in coping with text genre (i.e., narrative, expository). This was effected at the pre-test and post-test levels for investigating whether EFL learners’ monitoring behaviour is „genre-sensitive”. The strategic monitoring

processes of the target learners were numerically counted. Further, illustrative figures reflecting the attained findings were used. In fact, the frequency of monitoring strategy use for both the narrative and the expository written texts included in the pre-test and post-test was tabulated with percentages.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1. The Interplay of Self-monitoring & Text Genre among EFL learners

Based on the findings reached, it is of paramount significance to state that the utilization of self-monitoring during the reading act among Moroccan EFL learners cannot be impacted by the text type variable. This is displayed in the two following figures.

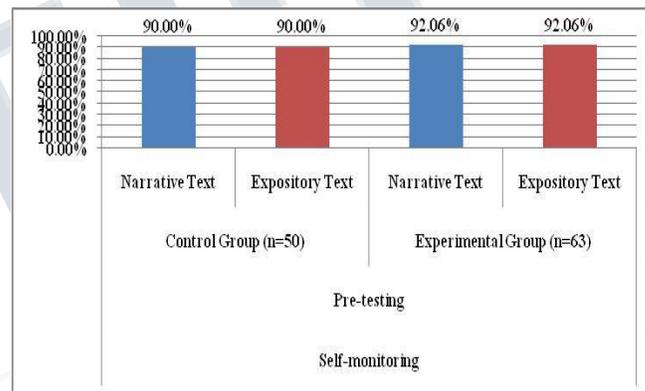


Figure 1. Self-monitoring use among EFL groups at pre-testing level

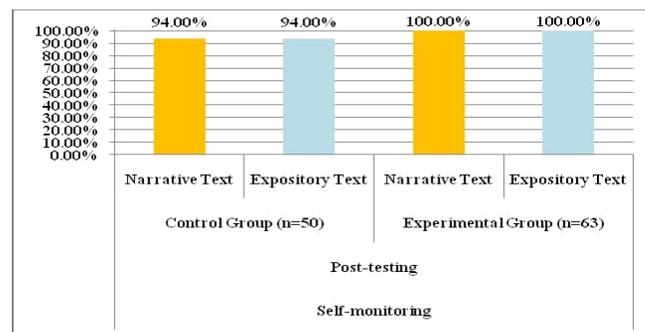


Figure 2. Self-monitoring use among EFL groups at post-testing level

As plausibly indicated in the two figures, self-monitoring was recruited with similar frequencies in reading narrative and expository texts among the control and experimental groups. For instance, the control subjects resorted to the strategy of monitoring during reading the narrative as well

as the expository texts with a frequent occurrence of 90% and 94% at the pre-test and post-test levels respectively. As to the treatment group, it depended on self-monitoring with percentage of 92.06% in tackling the narrative and expository texts at the pre-test. At post-testing, a heavy reliance of this comprehension-checking strategy was reflected among the treatment subjects. This shows that text genre does not have any marked impact on the sampled EFL students' self-monitoring in text reading.

4.2. The Interplay of Self-questioning & Text Genre

As was the case with self-monitoring, the strategy of self-questioning, as a basic monitoring move, does not appear to be genre-oriented. This is plainly illustrated in the ensuing figures.

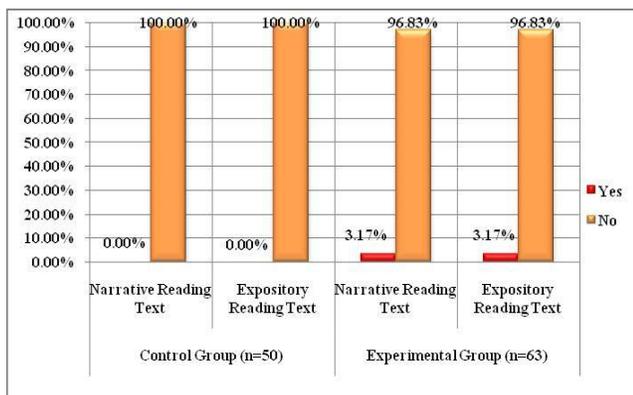


Figure 3. Usage of self-questioning among EFL groups at pre-testing level

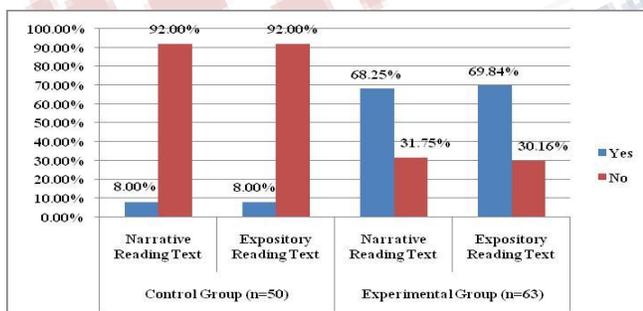


Figure 4. Usage of self-questioning among EFL groups at post-testing level

It is manifest that in engaging in the analysis of the narrative and expository texts, the EFL learners belonging to the control group did not use self-questioning for the sake of facilitating understanding. They only employed this strategy with a rate of 8% at post-testing in dealing with both texts (i.e., narrative, expository). On the other hand, at the pre-test, the experimental group had recourse

to self-questioning in synthesizing the narrative and expository textual input with a frequency of 3.17%. Yet, at the post-test, the experimental group's use of self-questioning increased with occurrences of 68.25% and 69.84% for the narrative and expository texts respectively. This, indeed, does not prove that self-questioning is genre-sensitive given the slight difference between the frequent uses of this strategy in coping with both text types (i.e., narrative, expository).

4.3. The Interplay of rereading & Text Genre among EFL learners

Text rereading is deemed a substantial element of the comprehension checking act for the sake of effective textual analysis. The frequent use of text rereading among EFL learners is showcased in Figures 5 & 6.

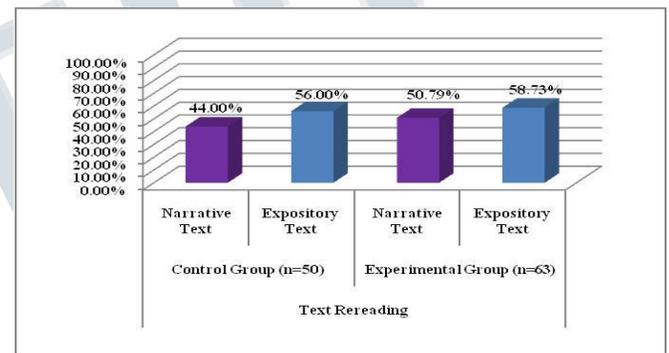


Figure 5. Reliance on of text-rereading among EFL groups at pre-testing

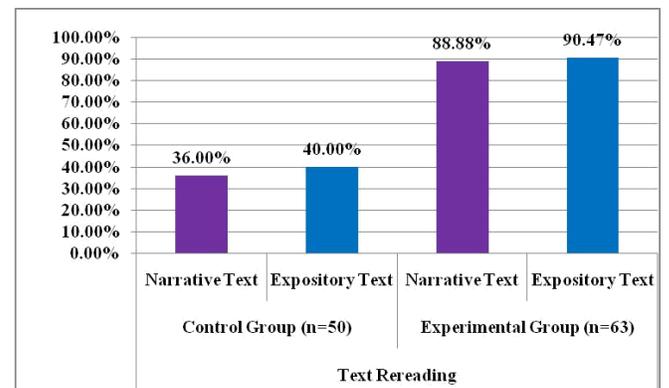


Figure 6. Reliance on of text-rereading among EFL groups at post-testing

As manifested in Figure 5, most EFL control group tended to reprocess the presented texts at the pre-test level with percentages of 44% and 56% for the narrative and expository written discourse respectively. Further, whereas 36% of the controls declared that they re-inspect

the narrative text, 40% of the same group reread the expository text at post-testing. Also, a great number of the experimental subjects did engage in reprocessing the target written texts. Respectively, 50.79% and 58.73% of this group managed to reread the assigned narrative and expository written discourse at pre-testing. Rereading the two texts of narrative and expository type at post-testing was performed by 88.88% and 90.47% of the participants belonging to the experiment group. Clearly, the dominant use of rereading is embodied in processing expository texts among both groups along the pre-post-test continuum.

It is of note that the use of some monitoring reading strategies (i.e., self-monitoring, self-questioning) were not subject to the impact of text type across the pre-post-test levels. However, the strategy of rereading is genre-dependent since it was used with high frequencies in coping with the expository texts across the pre- post-test stages. This indicates that the variable of genre impacts the usage of rereading. Further, the treatment group's exposure to the strategy training improved their rereading strategy use. Yet, the frequency of using this strategy remained heavily dependent on the agent of text genre (e.g., narrative, expository). In fact, considering that strategy intervention is a contributing constituent to the improvement of the learners' strategy use across diverse texts (e.g., narrative, expository), the text genre does impact only rereading. As to self-monitoring and self-questioning, they are not influenced by text type (i.e., narrative, expository). This is in accord with the postulate stated by some researchers (e.g., Zabrocky & Ratner, 1992; Zabrocky & Moore, 1999) that text type does not influence learners' monitoring act.

The fact of the matter is that whilst the execution of some monitoring tactics (i.e., self-monitoring, self-questioning) is not governed by the type of the text (i.e., narrative, expository) being processed among EFL learners, rereading remains subject to the text genre impact given the difficulty that typically characterizes expository texts. The latter entails the frequent use of rereading. This backs up the view of a grouping of educational researchers (e.g., Geva and Reyan, 1985; Best et al., 2008; Yoshida, 2012) that expository texts are more difficult to process and analyze than narrative texts.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study sought to gauge the text genre impact (i.e., narrative, expository) on English department learners' comprehension monitoring within the Moroccan context. It also evinces the extent to which strategy intervention can influence the targeted learners'

comprehension monitoring as concerns text typology (narrative & expository). These two postulates are deemed as a guiding signpost for conducting a comprehensive investigation.

Apparently, the cognitive engagement in text processing varies according to genre since the accessibility to textual input of expository type imposes more frequent use of rereading on EFL learners for the goal of attaining a certain kind of sufficiency in terms of comprehension. This is supported by many researchers (e.g., Best et al., 2008; Zhou & Siriyothin, 2011). Thus, the claim put in Hypothesis 1 that Moroccan EFL university students' strategic monitoring is not genre-specific is partly confirmed. Indeed, rereading, which is a constituent element in comprehension monitoring, is dependent on genre as opposed to self-monitoring and self-questioning which are remote from „genre-specificity“.

Though the use of self-monitoring and self-questioning was substantively enhanced among the experimental subjects at post-testing, they were made use of in interpreting the content of both types of texts by both EFL groups with roughly similar frequencies. This underlying principle places a tremendous stress on the absence of the genre impact on the EFL learners' monitoring behavior (self-monitoring & self-questioning). Yet, EFL learners' recourse to rereading is governed by genre (i.e., narrative, expository) since the characteristic features and the inherent content of the expository written text entail heavier dependency on rereading that enables an effective understanding. This is in accordance with the view stated in the second research hypothesis that strategy instruction does not have an impact on English department learners' monitoring behaviour with regard to text genre (i.e., narrative, expository).

The implications drawn from the study are as follows. It is clear that exposure to reading strategy instruction helps EFL learners enhance their awareness of comprehension monitoring moves used in each given text type (i.e., narrative, expository). Thus, learners can foster the potent capability of effectively tracking their grasp of the content of differing texts. Also, improving EFL learners' perception of „genre awareness“ can direct their monitoring processes towards the optimal way of tackling the given text (narrative & expository) in an efficient fashion. Overall, it is suggested that other Faculties of Letters & Humanities as well as faculties of Sciences be prospective case studies for confirmatory purposes. It is further recommended that a comparative investigation between EFL male learners and EFL female learners at the level of comprehension monitoring as to narrative and

expository texts be conducted for the sake of research findings expansion.

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