Roles of Metalinguistic Awareness and Academic Extensive Reading in the Development of EFL/ESL Academic Writing Skills

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper argues that the development of academic writing proficiency may require both explicit metalinguistic awareness (MA) and extensive reading (ER) of academic texts. Specifically, it argues that: (a) there may be a connection between explicit MA and the development of writing skills; (b) there is a connection between ER and the development of writing skills, but academic ER may be required for development of academic writing skills; (c) there may be a connection between explicit MA and the development of reading skills, which may be exploited for the development of academic ER skills, which in turn supports the development of academic writing skills.

Introduction

(Frodesen, 2001) has observed in the United States that resident ESL learners may write more fluently but too informally when writing academically, and that international EFL learners may write with more complicated syntax, but awkwardly and unnaturally. The difference between these sets of learners, she suggests, lies in the fact that the ESL students tend to develop much of their metalinguistic awareness (MA) 'by ear', or intuitively, and EFL learners tend to have acquired their MA through explicit grammar instruction. And neither case is optimal, for it would seem that both extensive exposure to the target language as well as some degree of explicit MA are required for the development of sophisticated academic writing skills. In this paper, I conduct a review of the literature on the roles of explicit MA and extensive reading ER in the development of academic writing ability, specifically with a view to exploring the relationship between metalinguistic awareness and academic literacy (reading and writing) in the tertiary academic setting. This paper argues that the development of academic writing proficiency may require both explicit MA and ER of academic texts, specifically, that: (a) there may a connection between explicit MA and the development of writing skills; (b) there is a connection between ER and the development of writing skills, but academic ER may be required for development of academic writing skills; and (c) there may be a connection between explicit MA and the development of reading skills, which in turn supports the development of the academic ER skills. That is, both, the development of MA and ER of academic text are strategies that may be employed for academic writing skills development.

Defining Metalinguistic Awareness (MA)

In broadest terms, MA is knowledge or awareness about language. However, as Fontich and Camps (2013) explains, the concept of metalinguistic awareness is multifaceted.

2.1 Diversity of perspectives
Firstly, the term may be considered from a variety of perspectives, for example, metalinguistic *awareness* (MA), metalinguistic *activity,* metalinguistic *function,* metalinguistic *faculty,* metalinguistic *capacity,* metalinguistic *representation,* metalinguistic *reflection,* metalinguistic *analysis,* and metalinguistic *control.* Moreover, metalinguistic activity may be viewed from the perspective of two separate disciplines. Within the linguistic discipline, metalinguistic activity may be viewed as 'language about language', but within the psycholinguistic discipline, it may be referred to as 'language cognition', two separate constructs.

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2.2 Implicit vs. explicit MA

Implicit MA is knowledge about language that is intuitive and cannot be explained by the user of the MA. Explicit MA is knowledge about language that can be explained either in everyday language or using specific metalinguistic terminology. The link between implicit MA and explicit MA is likely to be nonlinear. Karmiloff-Smith (1986, cited in Fontich & Camps (2013), in one of the most important models in psycholinguistics, The Representational-Redescription Model, proposed that movement from implicit to explicit MA occurs non-linearly and bidirectionally through the processes of redescription and reformulation, rather than linearly and uni-directionally from implicit MA to explicit MA. The theoretical representations about language that are held in our minds either implicitly or explicitly are tested and modified, redescribed and reformulated, based on sensitization to increasing amounts of language exposure and data. Fontich and Camps (2013), therefore, argue that the pursuit of explicit metalinguistic knowledge should involve a dialectic process, involving interplay of theory and observable language phenomena, in a process that shadows the discovery of new scientific knowledge, based on the scientific method.

2.3 Implicit vs. explicit metalinguistic activity

Knowledge about language may also be considered in terms of implicit vs. explicit metalinguistic *activity* as opposed to MA. Implicit metalinguistic activity is the activity of the mind to apply implicit MA unconsciously, allowing the user to monitor language use without being consciously aware of doing so. (Jakobson, 1960, cited in Fontich and Camps, 2013). While implicit metalinguistic activity is unconscious application of MA, explicit metalinguistic activity is the conscious, deliberate application of MA, and there are postulated to be three levels.

2.4 Three levels of explicit metalinguistic activity

Camps et al. (2000) distinguishes three levels of this explicit or conscious metalinguistic activity: (i) activity which is non-verbal, (ii) activity verbalized using everyday language, and (iii) activity verbalized using specific metalanguage. The first level, that of non-verbal metalinguistic activity, is conscious metalinguistic activity that occurs without any accompanying language use, e.g. during spontaneous manipulation of language elements or attention to form, such as, reformulations. Non-verbal metalinguistic activity mainly utilizes both implicit MA. The second level of metalinguistic activity is manifested through the use of everyday language, what Rey-Debove (1978) calls "natural metalanguage," (Rey-Debove, 1978, cited in Fontich & Camps, 2013: 5). This level requires at least a low degree of explicit MA. The third level of metalinguistic activity, that which is verbalized metalinguistic activity using specific metalanguage terminology, requires a higher degree of explicit MA. Activity of the third level arises out of a need to think more systematically and efficiently about the language elements being manipulated and to discuss them more efficiently, for example, in peer-review or collaborative writing.

2.5 Three types of explicit MA

Hence, three types of MA may be distinguished: (i) implicit MA, (ii) low explicit MA, and (iii) high explicit MA. Implicit MA is implicit or unconscious grammatical awareness that has been acquired through abundant exposure to the target language. Although this MA may be consciously used, it cannot be explained by the user in reference to the grammatical system or phenomena. Implicit MA should not to be confused with implicit metalinguistic activity, which involves the unconscious application of implicit MA, application that the language user is not consciously aware of carrying out. Implicit MA may be use carry out both implicit metalinguistic activity, and the first level of Camps et al.'s (2000) explicit metalinguistic activity, the level of non-verbal metalinguistic activity.

Low explicit MA is characterized by lower degrees of explicit awareness of the grammar phenomena. The language user is able to explain metalinguistic choices with reference to the grammatical system using everyday language, or, what Rey-Debove (1978, cited in Fontich & Camps, 2013: 5) called, "natural metalanguage." It is used to carry out the second of Camps et al.'s (2000) levels of metalinguistic activity, as noted above.

Finally, high explicit MA is characterized by higher degrees of awareness of the grammar phenomena, usually with the use of specific metalanguage. It is used at the third and highest level of metalinguistic activity, where there is a need to consider and discuss language usage more systematically and efficiently.

2.6 Three components of MA relating to reading

Finally, MA has also been studied for its effect on the acquisition of reading skills. In this connection, it has been characterized as comprising three components, i.e. awareness of: metasyntax, metamorphology and metasemantics. Metasyntax is knowledge that is utilized to judge syntactic correctness. In a review of literature involving young L1 learners, Roth et al. (1996) found that metasyntax may have highest influence on reading ability in older children. Metamorphology is knowledge utilized to judge morphological correctness. Its use is often examined in conjunction with

that of metasyntax. Metasemantics is knowledge utilized to determine the meanings of figurative, idiomatic or ambiguous expressions.

Thus the concept of MA is far from being a simple one. However, a detailed understanding of MA is necessary for the discussion of the role of MA in the development of reading and writing skills.

3. MA and Academic Writing Skills

The problem of L2 academic writing as observed by Frodesen (2001) among resident ESL and international EFL learners, related in the *Introduction* section of this paper, may be explained in terms of Fontich and Camps' (2013) three levels of explicit MA. The resident ESL students, with their intuitive but imprecise grasp of sentential grammar may be said to have developed a higher degree of implicit MA compared with their international counterparts, but a lower degree of explicit MA. International EFL students, on the other hand, have developed a higher degree of explicit MA but a lower degree of implicit MA. This suggests that the raising of both, L2 learners' explicit MA through explicit grammar instruction, and their implicit MA through extensive language exposure, most notably in the form of ER, is necessary to develop academic writing skills. This section will discuss the role of MA, and the next section will discuss the role of ER, in the development of writing skills.

Although research on MA and L2 writing is lacking, there has been increasing interest in the study of the role of MA in the development of mother tongue (L1) writing skills, namely, on the question of whether explicit grammar instruction can lead to better L1 writing skills (Andrews et al., 2004, 2006; Camps et al., 2000; Carter, 1990; Fontich & Camps, 2013; Gutierrez, 2008; Hudson, 2001; Myhill et al., 2012; see Cots, 2008 for a good overview of the history). This renewed interest goes against what has been the prevailing trend in the U.S. since the mid-20th century, which has been to downplay the role of grammar instruction in literacy development, an issue that has been hotly debated since the release of Braddock et al.'s report in 1963.

Fontich & Camps (2013:9) rightly point out, however, that "writing, and especially revising what one writes, always implies some sort of conscious metalinguistic activity." Moreover, different operations and aspects of the revision process require different levels of metalinguistic activity and types of MA (Bartlett 1982; Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987; cited in Fontich & Camps, 2013): First, there needs to be the ability to perceive that a linguistic problem in the text exists. This process may rely heavily on implicit MA. Second, once a problem is perceived, more conscious metalinguistic activity is required to diagnose the problem, to figure out why the problem exists. This process requires at least a low degree of explicit MA. Finally, the correction of the problem requires metalinguistic activity at its most conspicuous level and requires a higher degree of explicit MA, especially in academic writing.

What this suggests is that implicit MA in itself may be insufficient in itself to equip L2 learners to write well grammatically for academic purpose. Good writers rely heavily on a recursive process involving planning, writing and revising (Flower and Hayes, 1980). That is, revision is critical to the process of transforming ideas to well-polished final written products (Zamel, 1982). Therefore, if explicit MA is required during revision for the diagnosis and correction of linguistic problems in the text (Bartlett 1982; Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987; cited in Fontich & Camps, 2013), then implicit MA alone is inadequate during the revision stage, but a degree of explicit MA is also needed, especially in advanced L2 writing.

Camps et al. (2000: 104) considers the educational environment to be ideal for the development of MA, especially that which relates to oral and written competence in "genres related to academic subjects and formal situations." They also consider collaborative work as a powerful means to enhance MA and metalinguistic activity in this setting. Saleem (2010) also reports on the benefits of collaborative work in the form of peer-review, and teacher-feedback may be viewed as another form of collaborative work. Effective discussion about MA during collaborative work requires that the participants share a common understanding of metalinguistic concepts and terminology. Hence, the development of explicit MA may support the peer-review process, as well, and enable learners to maximize the learning opportunities offered in teacher-feedback.

3.1 The Language Threshold Hypothesis and writing

Further support for the role of MA in writing comes from the Language Threshold Hypothesis. There is already strong evidence supporting the language threshold hypothesis in L2 reading. Grabe (2003) cites numerous studies that have shown that L2 reading is much more dependent on L2 language proficiency and knowledge rather than L1 literacy skills.

Therefore, although L2 readers may have strong reading skills in L1, L2 learners need a minimum threshold of language proficiency and knowledge to read well in L2. Grabe (2001) cites evidence that the Language Threshold Hypothesis may also apply to L2 writing abilities. That is, writing ability may be more dependent on L2 language knowledge and proficiency than L1 writing ability (Johns and Mayes, 1990; Sasaki and Hirose, 1996; cited in Grabe, 2001). Grabe points out that L2 knowledge here does not refer to specific structures or vocabulary, but that the threshold is variable. In other words, the threshold may involve, also, varying degrees of implicit and explicit MA. If the Language Threshold Hypothesis holds for writing, then it implies that a minimum threshold for implicit and explicit MA is also needed for writing. While explicit MA development requires explicit instruction in MA, implicit MA development requires language exposure, especially in the form of ER.

4. ER and Academic Writing Skills

4.1 The reading-writing connection: The Extensive Reading Hypothesis
One of the theories supporting the existence of a reading-writing connection is The Extensive Reading Hypothesis, which simply states that ER leads to better writing skills (Grabe, 2003). It was first proposed by Krashen (1984) and then reiterated by Krashen (1993). Subsequently, it has been further supported by empirical research (Elley, 1991, 1996; Flahive & Bailey, 1993; cited in Grabe, 2003) Shaffer (2012) also cites extensive empirical evidence to support this hypothesis. What the Extensive Reading Hypothesis implies is that the comprehensive input the L2 learner receives from ER leads to implicit MA development, which, according to the Language Threshold Hypothesis, leads to writing skills development.

4.2 Non-academic ER
Extensive reading (ER) has been called by a variety of different names: *pleasure reading, free voluntary reading, self-selected reading, sustained silent reading,* and *graded reading;* but its essential characteristic is best summed up Day and Bamford (1998: 6): "An extensive reading approach aims to get students reading in the second language and liking it." The primary goal of ER is to make L2 reading enjoyable for learners, in the hopes that a good L2 reading habit may result and learners may voluntarily give themselves to extended or copious amounts of reading. More specifically, Day and Bamford (1998: 7) described ER as bearing the following characteristics:
A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available
The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding
Teachers orient students to the goals of the program, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the program.
Students select what they want to read
Reading is its own reward.
Students read as much as possible
The teacher is a role model of a reader for students
Reading is individual and silent
Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower
Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students
ER, therefore, is by and large copious amounts of reading that learners would choose to do voluntarily, because they enjoy reading in the foreign language, and they have developed a strong habit of reading in the foreign language. Typically, this type of reading involves non-academic texts.

4.3 Limitations of non-academic ER
However, Grabe (2003) points out that there are a number of limitations that make it difficult to establish the importance of ER in academic contexts, particularly at the tertiary setting, the chief one being time and resources: Extensive reading requires a significant commitment of time on the part of the learners to notice language gains (Waring, 2009). To illustrate in regards to vocabulary development: in order to encounter unknown vocabulary such as *stumble,* the 2000th most common word, once, one must read 23,103 words (Waring, 2009: 96). Encountering more sophisticated unknown vocabulary, e.g. *satellite,* once, may require reading in excess of 100,000 words. Then, assuming that the right conditions for incidental vocabulary learning are present—e.g. 1 unknown word per 40-50 known words (Waring, 2009: 84), and the new word is noticed each time it is encountered—and assuming also the most conservative estimate of 5 encounters of a new word for incidental vocabulary learning to take place, then, words like *stumble* and *satellite* would require the reading of 115,625 and 660,714 words, respectively, in order to be learned from ER alone (Waring, 2009: 96). The figures are substantially greater for the learning of language structures, Waring (2009) points out.

In addition, Grabe points to the need of EAP instruction to better reflect authentic reading and writing tasks that L2 learners must face at university. One of the characteristics of authentic academic writing is that writing quality must be judged in terms of the element of critical thinking. The primacy of high-quality thinking in academic and scholarly writing is what sets this type of writing apart from other types of writing. The Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology of Washington State University (2006) recommends the rubric in Table 1 to assess students' writing, and it can be seen here that language use and organization together constitutes just one of the seven criteria of good academic writing. Although non-academic ER can lead to certain gains in writing, provided an appropriate time investment for an adequate amount of ER has been made, it remains unclear whether the type of writing for which these gains have been reported actually reflect authentic university-level writing tasks. In other words, how much of the writing gains associated with ER reflect criteria for good academic writing like those in Table 1?

Criteria for the Assessment of Students' Writing at University
Identifies , summarizes the problem, question or issue
Identifies and considers the influence of context and assumptions
Develops, presents, and communicates own perspectives, hypothesis or position
Presents, assesses, and analyzes appropriate supporting data/evidence
Integrates issue using other perspectives and positions
Identifies and assesses conclusions, implications, and consequences
Communicates effectively

Table 1. Criteria for the Assessment of Students' Writing
(Washington State University, 2006, cited in Saleem, 2010: 68)

4.4 Effect of non-academic ER vs. academic reading on academic writing
One study that sheds some light on this question is Crowhurst (1991), which found that reading and studying persuasive texts led to gains in persuasive writing, while reading novels and writing books reports did not lead to gains in persuasive writing. The study participants were L1 6th graders assigned to four groups: writing, reading, control, and single-lesson. The writing group was given instruction on the persuasive writing model on the first day of the intervention period, and then wrote five essays to practice the model, receiving instruction on persuasive writing. The reading group was given the same instruction on the persuasive writing model on the first day, and then read and studied persuasive texts only, receiving instruction on the analysis of persuasive texts. The control group read only novels and wrote general book reports about the novels that they read. The single-lesson group received the same intervention as the control group, except on the last day before the post-test, at which time they received the same instruction on the persuasive writing model as the first two groups. Significant writing improvement between the pre-test and post-test in writing and reading groups was seen, but in not the control and single-lesson groups. This study, while lending support to the reading-writing connection, offers some evidence that ER in itself may not enough to develop academic writing ability. Rather, ER of academic texts is what is required. Crowhurst (1991) provides further evidence to support, even in regard to academic literacy. Academic reading, authentic to the kinds of writing L2 learners must produce, can lead to improvement in academic writing. That is, in regards to the Extensive Reading Hypothesis and academic writing ability, what is needed is ER of academic text.

Academic Reading and Day and Bamford's (1998) Criteria for ER		
Criteria	Does not meet criterion (✗)	Comment
A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available		A range of materials may be available in academic reading, also.
The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding	✗	Academic reading may seldom be perceived as 'pleasurable', and seldom relate to general understanding.
Teachers orient students to the goals of the program, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the program.		Teachers may do this in the teaching of academic Reading, also.
Students select what they want to read	✗	Reading is usually determined by course requirements.
Reading is its own reward.	✗	Reading is usually not carried out for its own sake.
Students read as much as possible	✗	Especially in EFL context, students may read translated versions of academic texts.
The teacher is a role model of a reader for students	✗	Language teachers are less likely to model enthusiasm for academic reading.
Reading is individual and silent.		Academic reading is also individual and silent.
Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.	✗	Reading speed may often be prohibitively slow.
Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students.	✗	Academic texts at the university level require a higher linguistic competence than most L2 learners have acquired.

Table 2. Ways in which academic reading can fail to meet Day and Bamford's (1998) criteria for ER

4.5 The Language Threshold Hypothesis and academic reading
One of the main problems of academic reading may be explained in terms of The Language Threshold Hypothesis. The problem of academic reading is that the language threshold is much higher for academic text, especially at the tertiary educational level, than most L2 learners will have attained, especially in EFL contexts. In order to achieve reading fluency of academic texts, L2 learners need to overcome the language threshold barrier of sophisticated academic vocabulary and syntax.

As a result, academic reading can fail to meet most of the criteria for ER like those of Day and Bamford's (1998) (Table 2): (i) Academic reading may seldom be perceived as 'pleasurable' and seldom relate to general understanding. (ii) Students do not normally select what they want to read; rather reading is usually determined by course requirements. (iii) Reading is usually not carried out for its own sake. (iv) Especially in the EFL context, students tend not to read academically in L2 as much as possible, but may read translated L1 versions of academic texts, instead. (v) Language teachers are less likely to be academic reading enthusiasts. (vi) Rather than faster, reading speed may often be prohibitively slow. (vii) Academic texts at the university level require a higher linguistic competence than most L2 learners have acquired.

What is needed, therefore, is a means of lowering the language threshold of academic reading for L2 learners. With a lowering of the language threshold, academic reading may be brought to conform better to criteria for ER like those of Day and Bamford's (1998): (i) Academic reading may become more 'pleasurable' in the sense of more fruitful and satisfying. (ii) Students may be more encouraged to seek out academic reading of their own choosing relating to the subjects that

they study. (iii) Students may resort less to translated L1 versions of academic texts. (iv) Reading speed may be increased. (v) L2 learners may be able to approach the language threshold of academic texts more successfully.

One means of lowering the language threshold for academic texts is the teaching of academic reading strategies. There are a number of reading strategies that could be taught, and the reader is referred to works like Nuttall (1996) for a full discussion of reading strategies, which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, there is one that does fall within the purview of this paper, and it concerns one of the components of explicit MA related to reading: metasyntax.

5. MA and Academic Reading Skills

It was noted earlier that the three components of MA relating to reading have been studied: metasyntax, metamorphology and metasemantics. Of these, Roth et al. (1996), in their review of the literature, found that metasyntax may have the highest influence on the reading ability of older children. They examined studies that assessed metasemantics, metasyntax and metamorphology in relation to reading comprehension among children in kindergarten through the third grade, and found that "although phonemic awareness retained its prominence as a predictor of early reading skills, metasyntactic ability often accounted for significant variance" (Roth et al., 1996: 257). This variance was noticed among the older children, in particular, (Weaver, 1979, cited in Roth et al., 1996: 271). This finding suggests that higher cognitive development is required in L2 readers before metasyntactic ability can begin to play a more prominent role. It is possible to theorize, therefore, that higher degrees of MA of metasyntax may also have a good influence on adult L2 learners, who have the cognitive capability to understand metasyntactic concepts fully.

One application of metasyntactic MA in reading involves simplification of long and complex sentences through sentence parsing to their most germane parts of speech: the subject and verb of the independent clause. Analysis of this type can enable L2 learners to grasp the main idea of a complicated sentence fairly quickly and be able to move on to the next at a reasonable pace.

Instruction of this type, along with other instruction in other academic reading strategies targeted specifically at lowering the language threshold for academic texts may help to bring academic reading to conform more to criteria for ER like Day and Bamford's (1998). Once academic reading has been facilitated, and learners begin to engage in academic ER, the reading-writing connection may be relied upon for the increased amounts of academic reading in English to benefit academic writing in English.

6. Conclusion

In summary, therefore, the development of academic writing proficiency requires both explicit MA and ER of academic texts. Instruction in explicit MA may benefit L2 writers, especially in the self-revision and peer-revision processes, as well as facilitate discussions of language use problems between the teacher and students. Evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that ER leads to better writing, but ER of non-academic texts may be of limited benefit to L2 academic writers (Crowhurst, 1991). Since ER of academic texts is often not feasible owing to the difficulty of academic texts, instruction in academic reading strategies could be targeted at lowering the language threshold requirement for L2 readers. One of the means by which to do so is offering instruction in explicit MA to enable them to simplifying long and complex sentences to facilitate reading. By lowering the language threshold for academic texts, academic reading could be brought to bear more of the characteristics of non-academic ER, such as those described by Day and Bamford (1998). Development of an academic ER habit, in turn, would support the development of academic writing skills.

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