IS SUMMARIZING DIFFICULT FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS?: RESPONSES FROM NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

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This study examines how native and non-native English speakers summarize expository texts. It investigates if there is any difference in quality between the summaries of the two groups; namely native speakers of English, who acquire the language in early childhood and have their education (from kindergarten/grade1 to high school) in English, and non-native speakers, who acquire the language in an ESL/EFL context. This study also observes the problems students encountered during summarization.

Keywords: Non-native English speaker, native speaker, expository texts

Different factors might affect students' performance in summary writing such as text complexity, length, text type, type of summary and presence of the text during the summarization task. Researchers claim that the text type of the original material seems to affect students' ability to summarize. Marshals (1984), Meyer and Freedle (1984), Hidi and Baired (1985) cited in Hidi and Anderson (1986), affirm that schemata in summarizing text is inevitable. The background knowledge students have about narrative texts makes the expository text difficult for them.

As Martin (1999) maintained, the students are not usually exposed to expository text until later grades. Furthermore, summarization for academic classes in high grades and in the universities usually involves expository rather than narrative text. As few studies have served to investigate the difficulties of the summary writing process and the implications of an applicable strategy for summarizing expository text in L2, this study, therefore, may call on researchers and teachers to focus more in this area.

The Summary Writing Process

Summarization involves additional and deliberate processing strategies than what are required in comprehension (Brown & Day, 1983; Brown, Day, & Jones, 1983; Winograd, 1983). Hidi and Anderson (1986) analyzed the operational procedures used to summarize and suggested four requirements for writing a summary: 1.comprehension; 2. evaluation; 3. condensation; 4. frequent transformation of ideas.

The Kintsch and van Dijk (1978) summary model suggests three basic processes to Summarizing: 1. deletion (omission of irrelevant information); 2. generalization (ideas are combined to produce superordinate propositions); and 3. construction (integration of details into topic sentences).

Brown and Day (1983) using the Kintsch and van Dijk summarization model developed six rules of summary writing, which are identified as follows: 1. deletion of trivial material; 2. deletion of redundant material; 3. substitution of a superordinate term for a list of items or actions (e g. using pets for cats, dogs, goldfish and parrots); 4. substitution of superordinate action for a list of a subcomponents of that action (e.g. "John went to London" for "John left the house", "John went to the train station", "John bought a ticket"); 5. selection of topic sentence (if available); 6. invention of topic sentence (if necessary).

The summarization rules proposed by Hare and Borchard (1984) as cited in Hahn and Garner (1985) are similar to Brown and Day's (1983) rules, but the language used to describe these processes is simple and more child-oriented. The rules are: 1. includes no unnecessary details; 2.collapse lists; 3. use topic sentences; 4. integrate information; 5. "polish" the summary.

Finally, Johnson (1983) in his study described six processes that occur during summary writing (cited in Hidi & Anderson, 1986). The first four processes are identified as pre-requisite for

summarization and the last two processes are seen as central to the summarization process. They are: 1. comprehending individual proposition 2. establishing connection between them; 3. identifying the structure of the text; 4. remembering the content; 5. selecting the information for inclusion in the summary; 6. formulating a concise and coherent verbal representation (oral summary).

Three common features run through these five models. Firstly, the selection process in which information is consciously evaluated and decisions are made on ideas which should be deleted and included in the summaries. Secondly, the condensation/reduction process where the summary is condensed by substituting general ideas (superordinates) for lower level and more detailed ones (Anderson & Hidi, 1988/1989). And the third one is the recognition that the concise and accurate representation of the main ideas requires more complex integration, combination and transformation of the original text.

Statement of Problem

Summary writing was tested for the first time in the SPM English Language examination (1322) in 1995 in Malaysia. With the revision of the SPM English Language examination formats, the focus had shifted from testing communicative competence to testing writing skills. (Report of the Committee for the Planning and Coordinating of English Programmes in Schools, 1992 cited in Khatijah Mohd Tahir, 1998). According to the educational system in Iran, Sudan, Indonesia, Turkmenistan, and other EFL countries, the students will be familiar with summarization in secondary schools. In fact, summarization is utilized more in academic writing than in practical application in society. Furthermore, the schools focus more on the grammar rather than communicative approaches. (Geranpayeh, 1993; Heshmati, 2003, Sinaee, 2001)

Egyptian and South African students as native speakers in this study start their elementary schools with English language. They become familiar with summary writing from the secondary schools in different subjects. Moreover, one of the basic elements in the examination is summary writing with word limit. The information is obtained from the students' survey from NES countries.

Objectives and Research Questions

This study attempts to investigate the differences in summarization of expository text between native and non-native speakers of English. The following research questions are considered in this study:

1. Is there any difference in quality between the native and non-native English speakers' summaries of the expository texts?
2. What are the general rules which both native and non-native English speakers apply when summarizing expository texts?
3. What are the problems encountered by the native and non-native students when writing the summary of expository texts?

Methodology

The selected students were 70 engineering undergraduates comprising freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors. There were 35 native speakers comprising Egyptians and South Africans. The non-native English speakers comprised 35 students of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) The text used in this study is expository text. This was because most of the texts that students read for academic purposes are expository in nature. Research has shown that most learning from reading, both in and out of school, depends on the ability to read and understand expository text (Ambruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987).

Engineering students were selected in this study because most of the texts in engineering might be expository text and the students face difficulties in summarizing expository texts. This is supported by Taylor and Beach (1984) who point out that difficulty with summarizing expository text is experienced by students even in high school and university (cited in Pincus, Geller, & Stover, 1984). Eleven raters with master degrees in TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) were

selected randomly to grade the summarizations. A questionnaire was distributed among students after they had summarized the passage, since the number of students did not allow the researcher to interview all the students. The questionnaire was distributed among teachers who marked the summaries. The reason for using the questionnaire rather than the interview was inaccessibility for interview. The interview was conducted with 12 of native and 13 of the non-native English students.

A pilot study of summary writing text was carried out with six undergraduate students from Iran, Malaysia and South Africa. The expository text was piloted with the group in the university library .The students were not asked to write the summary in the time limit because length of time was one of the comparative criteria between native and non-native students in this study. During the piloting of the summarizing, the approximate time for summarizing the passage was found to be thirty minutes.

The analysis of data was performed on four sets of data, namely: (1) scores from the written summaries of both texts; (2) undergraduates' questionnaire; (3) post task interview; and (4) teachers' questionnaire. Three of the criteria in this study were considered according to the SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education) examination scheme. The panelists evaluated the summaries independently according to the SPM examination mark scheme. The scripts were evaluated according to the following criteria: content, paraphrase, use of English, level of the summary, operation of the summary and length of the summary.

Four English teachers who comprised two native and two non-native speakers of English chose the main points of the passage. Then, the teachers met to select the final content points of the passage. The passage had six main points, with one mark allocated for each. In fact, the summaries were scored up to 10 marks of which the main points were 6 and the other 4 points were marked according to the teachers' recognition of other main points of the passage. Content points with spelling and structural errors were still awarded marks as long as the meaning was clear. Errors in summaries were assessed in the Use of English criterion. In this criterion the summaries were assessed to determine students' ability to put ideas in their own words and avoid using excessive lifting of phrase and copying of the text. Each summary was graded up to 10 marks based on the mark levels assigned for each of the five categories. For this criterion the summaries were assessed on the relative absence of grammatical and structural errors that could cause confusion. The scripts were graded up to a maximum of 10 marks. The marks of each summary were determined based on which mark level the summaries fell into (Appendix 7). The final mark for each of the summary scripts was expressed as: Content 10, Paraphrase 10 and Use of English 10 giving a total score of 30 points.

The mean scores of each of the criterion and the mean scores of the total scores of 75 summaries in two groups of native and non-native English students were subjected to t-tests to ascertain if there was any significant difference in quality between the summary of native and non-native English undergraduates in expository text.

Results

Quality of Summaries of the Expository Texts between the Native and Non-Native English Speakers

The first set of data in the first group, the mean of the total scores of the seventy summaries of native and non-native English students were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 1. The mean score for the native English speakers in expository text was 18.3 while the non-native English speaker's was 14.4, the t-test was 6.7 and the level of significance was.000. The findings from this set of analysis revealed that there were significant differences ($p<0.05$) in quality between the summaries of native and non-native English speakers. The results, therefore, show that there is a significant relationship between the students who summarise the expository text and the quality of summaries produced.

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Table 1
Total Scores of Summaries for Native and Non-native Speakers

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-scores	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	18.3	2.6			
				6.7	68	.000
Non-native	35	14.4	2.2			

The next set of analyses examined the content point criterion as presented in Table 2. A *t*-test was also performed on the students' scores. These analyses revealed that there is a significant difference ($p<0.05$) between the native and non-native speakers in content in the summarizing of expository text.

Table 2
Content Point Criterion

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-scores	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	5.6	1.2			
				3.9	68	.000
Non-native	35	4.6	1.0			

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of the data for the paraphrase criterion. These analyses revealed that there is a significant difference ($p< 0.05$) between native and non-native speakers in paraphrase criterion.

Table 3
Paraphrase Criterion

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-scores	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	6.2	1.2			
				5.5	68	.000
Non-native	35	4.8	1.0			

The final set of analysis in Table 4 revealed that the scores did differ significantly ($p<0.05$) from one another between native and non-native English speakers.

Table 4
Use of Language Criterion

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-scores	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	6.4	1.0			
				5.9	68	.000
Non-native	35	4.9	.98			

From the analysis of the sets of data such as content point, paraphrase and use of language, the results show that there were significant differences ($p<0.05$) between native and non-native English speakers in expository text on each of the criteria. In examining the mean scores of the individual criteria of the native and non-native English undergraduates in expository text, a difference of 1.50 was noted for the use of language criterion compared to 1.40 for paraphrase and 1 for the content point. This reveals that there is significant difference between native and non-native English speakers. Moreover the native speakers performed better in expository text compared to non-native speakers of English. Cumming (1989) and Cumming, Rebuffot, and Ledwell (1989) reported that students with higher English proficiency received higher scores for their summaries and that experienced L1 writers were found to have attended more efficiently to the overall gist of the source text.

The nominal data in this criterion were analyzed according to Pearson Chi-square. Table 5 shows the detailed analyses of level of the summary. According to both statistics tests there is no significant difference ($p <0.05$) between native and non-native English speakers in quality of summarization of expository text. Hence, the native speakers (51%) performed better than the non-native speakers (49%), although there was only a slight difference between them. According to the quality of the level of the summary, the native and non-native speakers have the same performance at paragraph level. Moreover, the native speakers have the higher percentage than the non-native speakers at the global level. In contrast, the native speakers performed better than non-native speakers. Therefore, the conclusion of this study did not support Kozminskey's investigation. The investigation by Kozminsky and Graetz (1986) found that L2 speakers focused more on the word level than did first language speakers. Table10 shows the analysis of Pearson Chi-square. According to the table, there is significant difference ($p<0.05$) between native and non-native English speakers in operation of the summary. The percentage of the native speakers (52) is higher than the non-native speakers (47%) although there is only a slight difference between them.

Table 5
Level of the Summary

Group	N	Percentage	Chi-Square	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	51			
			1.16	2	.558
Non-native	35	49			

In fact the native speakers summarize more copy operation than the non-native speakers. Hence, the non-native speakers summarized the text with more abstraction than the native speakers. This supports Kozminskey's investigation that the summaries of non-native students contained more abstraction operations when compared to native speakers' summaries which contained more copy operations. On the other hand, Campbell (1990) compared various textual features including copying, paraphrasing, summarizing, citing, and explaining the original text in the summary writing of less and high proficient non-native speaker students and their L1 counterparts. Results show that less-proficient non-native students copied the most and achieved the lowest holistic scores compared with their more proficient ESL and L1 peers.

Table 6

Operation of the Summary

Group	N	Percentage	Chi-Square	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	52			
			1.06	1	.303
Non-native	35	47			

Table7 shows the analyses of Pearson Chi-square. According to the table, there is significant difference ($p<0.05$) between native and non-native English speakers in the length of the summary in expository text although there was only a slight difference between them. In contrast, the percentage of performance of native speakers (48%) in length of the summary was lower than the non-native speakers (52%). In the detailed analysis of this criterion, it was found that the native speakers wrote longer summaries and without enough content points than the non-native speakers, while the non-native speakers applied more content points in their shorter summaries. Although the native speakers performed better than non-native speakers in length of the summary based on statistical tests, the non-native speakers can condense the text better than the native English speakers.

Table 7

Length of the Summary

Group	N	Percentage	Chi-Square	df	Level of Significance
Native	35	48			
			4.50	3	.212
Non-native	35	52			

From the analysis of the sets of data such as level of the summary, operation and length of the summary, the results show that there were significant differences ($p<0.05$) between native and non-native English speakers in expository text.

General Rules Which both Native and Non-Native English Speakers Apply in the Summary of Expository Texts

As explained in the review of literature, five models for summary process (Hidi & Anderson, 1986); Kintsch & Van Dijk, 1978; Brown & Day, 1983; Garner, 1985; Johnson, 1983) were focused on in this study. Although their main processes were the same, there are some differences between the stages. As Kintsch and Van Dijk and Brown and Day offered the same rules, the researcher applied four models for data analysis. To answer this question, the researcher analyzed the students' questionnaire which was based on four models of the summary process. The native English speakers (44%) applied the rules of Garner (1985) who introduced the following process: 1. include no unnecessary details; 2. collapse lists; 3. use topic sentences; 4. integrate information; and 5. "polish" the summary. Although Garner's rules were similar to that of Brown and Day, the students' questionnaires followed Garner's process. On the other hand, the non-native speakers (48%) applied Johnson's processes (1983) which are: 1. comprehending individual proposition; 2. establishing connection between them; 3. identifying the structure of the text; and 4. remembering the content. The proportion of applying other models were not take into account because the researcher focused on the major difference in usage of rules between native and non-native English speakers. On the other hand, other researchers showed that the native speakers developed their summary skills by learning first to

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delete trivial and redundant information, before combining or integrating information, and finally inventing topic sentences to express the gist of the source text (Brown & Day, 1983; Brown et al., 1981; Garner, 1985; Garner et al., 1985; Kennedy, 1985; Taylor, 1986; Winograd, 1983).

Problems Encountered by the Native and Non-Native Students When They Wrote the Summary of Expository Texts

The data from all sources showed that both native and non-native English speakers performed better in content points than in paraphrasing and use of English. Moreover, the data revealed three principal problems in the summarization process between native and non-native speakers. They were identifying the main points, condensing and paraphrasing. The native speakers had less difficulty in selecting the main points compared to non-native English speakers and the reason might be the weakness of the non-native speakers' comprehension of the text and lack of language proficiency. The results showed that most of the non-native speakers have problems in English proficiency. From the analyses of teachers' questionnaires, it can be concluded that if the students identify the topic sentences, they might not have a major problem in identifying the main ideas; other teachers have pointed out that teaching students specific strategies, such as different reading techniques (scanning and skimming), can improve their skills in identifying the main points.

The second and third problems identified by the students were condensation and paraphrasing. These problems were encountered by both native and non-native English speakers. In fact the native speakers summarize more copy operation than the non-native speakers. According to the results, the non-native speakers summarized the text with more abstraction than the native speakers. This supports Kozminskey's investigation that L2 summaries contained more abstraction operations when compared to L1 summaries which contained more copy operations.

Discussion

Proper training of summarization in the condensation and paragraph criteria will provide native and non-native students with better skills at tackling summarization successfully, especially in college and university examinations in which most of the texts are expository. The findings of this study indicate that both native and non-native students need to be trained in the structure of expository text to point out the differences between expository and other texts. These differences are important because different reading strategies and techniques are required to summarize each type of text. Moreover, the teachers need to be trained in summarization skills especially in condensation and paraphrasing. It is suggested that the students have a specific program for summarization in their secondary schools to improve different summarization skills such as condensation, selection of main points and paraphrasing.

It is also suggested that the study should be continued with a more homogenous group from one country for each of native and non-native speakers with a larger sample. Another area for further study would be applying other text types between native and non-native speakers, for example, narrative, argumentative, persuasive, and discursive text structure to see if native and non-native English students had problems in summarizing any of them, the process which natives and non-natives followed and where the process was breaking down. Students' awareness of text structure in summary writing can be investigated for further study, as this is one of the important aspects in summarizing .This awareness can help students to recognize the structure of the text and summarize it based on processes required for different structures.

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