Syntactic and Lexical Variation in Rhetorical Tasks of Low–intermediate EFL College Students

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In EFL writing classrooms in Korea, writing was often limited to controlled sentence-level writing or an expansion of grammar practice, narrowly focusing on discrete units of language. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors which influenced the overall quality of writing in three rhetorical types and the intricate relationships among these factors. The subjects were low-intermediate level Korean college students. The results of quantitative data indicated that the levels of the students' performance varied on the rhetorical type of writing task and the qualitative data presented a more thorough picture of the students' writing complementing to the quantitative data. This study shows that the intricate relationship of vocabulary to grammar and quality writing is another area which needs more careful attentions. This study suggests that EFL writers need a minimum level of vocabulary and background knowledge related to a certain topic which affected content and grammar, and finally the overall quality of writing. It is also evident that students' emotional status also affected the quality of writing, and EFL student writers, especially low-intermediate writers, need to gain experience in reading and writing with different rhetoric and genres.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is frequently a fairly challenging task not only to non-native speakers but also to native speakers of any language, which demands a coordinating skill of a variety of different aspects contributing to the overall quality of writing, such as text structure, vocabulary (lexicons), content, syntactic structure, paragraph structure, and mechanics. In addition to linguistic knowledge, discourse knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge are also required for "good writing." An expert writer is no other than a person who has mastery of discrete units of language and writing skills and beyond that, can coordinate these skills for the most effective communication with his/her audience.

Until recently, however, in EFL writing classrooms in Korea writing was often limited to controlled sentence-level writing or an expansion of grammar practice, narrowly focusing on discrete units of language. In this situation, everything else but syntactic structure (grammar) is ignored, particularly in low and low-intermediate EFL writing classrooms. As in spoken language, there has been a long-term controversial debate over accuracy and fluency in writing. In the debate, writing is often split between accuracy of language use and fluency of ideas and creativity. Whereas at the basis of accuracy was correctness of syntactic structure, fluency is frequently demonstrated by lexical variables, content, discourse knowledge, text structure, and background knowledge. Although accuracy and fluency often collide and do not seem to be compatible with each other, they, in fact, are constantly influencing and interacting with each other. Therefore, it may be difficult to view fluency separate from accuracy or vice versa.

In terms of writing fluency, a considerable amount of studies emphasized the importance of lexical variables in EFL writing (Ransdell & Barbier, 2002; Weigle, 2002). These studies quantitatively or qualitatively demonstrated the effect of lexical variables, such as the total number of words, lexical density, and appropriateness of vocabulary use in context, on overall quality of writing. It is evident that students of different language proficiency levels use different writing strategies, among which lexical variables have gained more attentions from scholars (Campbell, 1997; Engber, 1995; Grobe, 1981). In other words, according to prior research, lexical variables were stronger indications of writing quality until students reached a "vocabulary threshold" (Campbell, 1997). This signified that lexical variables had more weight in the writing of low and low-intermediate EFL writers. Although this is a promising area which can greatly help EFL student writing, not much is known in the Korean context. Additionally, discourse knowledge and background knowledge pertaining to the topic are crucial keys to successful EFL writing. It is already widely known that different languages have different rhetoric preferences (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1999; Quellmalz et. al, 1982). Subsequently, topics and task types, as they are closely related to rhetorical modes or discourse modes of writing, can be factors which influence the overall quality of writing. Yet, there has not been much research conducted in this regard.

On the one hand, research into EFL writing is concerned with the writing process by examining these aspects and relationships between/among aspects discussed above m and to the overall quality of writing. On the other hand, research also focuses on the writing product; that is, assessing writing. The present study, by assessing 96 writing samples of Korean college students and analyzing them, intends to define factors which influence the overall quality of writing and the intricate relationships among these factors. This study particularly compared factors of writing across three different rhetorical types of writing task, descriptive, argumentative, and narrative, to investigate whether the students

performed differently depending on the different rhetorical task types. It addresses the following questions:

1) Which factors or aspects most influence the overall quality of writing?
2) Did the students perform differently depending on different rhetorical types of writing tasks?
3) What are the relationships among individual aspects and between these aspects and overall quality of writing?
4) What are the relationships between lexical variables and writing quality?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Rhetorical Tasks in EFL Writing: Academic Argument vs Personal Narrative

The rhetorical task refers to one of the traditional discourse modes of narration, description, exposition, and argument/persuasion (Hale, et. al, 1996). According to Kobayashi (1999), L2 writers have difficulty creating coherent text and this has been attributed to culturally different rhetorical organizational patterns and notions such as unity, specific support, and responsibility of readers and writers. Therefore, it tends to be problematic for L2 writers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to acquire English discourse features.

Hinds (1975) found that discourse construction may not be separable from lexical and syntactic features that support the discourse purpose. In L2 writing, ESL writers create writing according to their L1 writing tradition; for example, Korean writers use text flow which is structured along the lines of fixed sequence rather than the relevance of ideas to the text's purpose. Further, he found that many Asian writers have common features in rhetorical traditions: the purpose of discourse is delayed until the end of writing. In other words, it is inductive rather than deductive as is common in Anglo-American style.

Academic argument requires persuasive and analytic prose; the writer must define a problem, develop a thesis, use evidence to support thesis, create orderly paragraphs and use well-reasoned prose. Hasseler and Bean (1999) claimed that argumentative assignments to L2 writers will not automatically generate thinking that instructors desire because L2 writers have different modes of thinking. Topics in argumentative writing require somewhat more cognitive complexity than the more straightforward and personal topics and, consequently, these topics have more cognitive demands than other types of rhetoric tasks.

On the other hand, since personal writing such as narrative writing and descriptive writing emphasizes the voices of the writer, the L2 writer can be free from clarity of

thesis-based argument. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) distinguished two types of writing; knowledge telling and knowledge transforming, and states that writing about personal experiences or opinions produces the easiest form of writing. For instance, writing assignments such as my first day in the U.S and my happiest day do not require writers to work beyond their knowledge and experience and the writer only need write down their memories and opinions. According to Peterson (1997), this type of writing values intimacy, richness of detail and individual voices and experiences. More importantly, it makes the writer have authority over the content of their writing. Narrative writing and descriptive writing facilitates student expression of their own voice through which L2 writers can gain more confidence in descriptive or narrative writing than argumentative writing.

Studies demonstrate that argumentative essays are syntactically more complex than narrative or descriptive essays. According to Hoetker and Brosell (1989), the details of the wording of a topic have a close relationship with student writing performance because the language of the topic can influence L2 writers' interpretation of the task and their anxiety level. Nold and Freeman (1977) state that topics requiring different cognitive and experiential demand have different types of writing tasks. The research found that systematic differences between personal opinion argument and critical argument exist, in that personal opinion argument is lengthier while critical arguments are syntactically more complex.

2. Lexical Density, the Length of Essay

Research on lexical richness and lexical errors in the writing of EFL learners shows the role of vocabulary in L2 writing, particularly for less-skilled writers. Engber's research (1995) on the relationship between language proficiency, lexical proficiency, and reader judgments of their essays reveals that language proficiency, especially vocabulary, became an issue for less-skilled L2 writers at the beginner or intermediate level. Raimes (1985) also supports the research above; for less-skilled writers, who were concerned with putting ideas on paper, the major barrier to their English writing is a lack of vocabulary. Furthermore, Spack (1988) also claimed that a rich lexical knowledge and background in English is of primary concern for even the advanced L2 writer when creating and organizing their own ideas in writing.

Grobe (1981) pointed out that scoring measures are syntactic maturity, mechanics of writing, and vocabulary and if the vocabulary component is not included, essay length was a powerful indicator of overall essay score. It was evident in the research that vocabulary diversity is closely connected to the teachers' perception of good writing. Engber (1995) stated that the intermediate L2 writer uses strategies of lexical variation to express content, whereas advanced L2 writers rely more on accuracy. Intermediate writers take effort to add his or her stock of lexical items to their work, and this results in higher lexical variation

related to higher quality writing.

Often, fluency is demonstrated by overall length of essay. Of course, length of essay does not necessarily ensure quality writing and an underdeveloped essay may be a collection of lengthy but empty sentences (or even nonsense words), while a specific and effective piece of writing may be relatively short (Hillocks, 1986). However, essay length is often indicative of development within paragraphs, structural completeness, and fluency. Indeed, in several studies with native and nonnative speaker writers, length of essay has correlated highly with quality writing (Reid, 1993; Carlson et al., 1985).

III. METHOD

1. Participants

The subjects in this study were juniors at a local college in Korea, and enrolled in Intermediate English Writing class during Fall, 2006. Even though they majored in English, the evaluations conducted in the previous year indicated that their overall English proficiency was low-intermediate. The total number of the students who participated in this study was 32 (11 male and 21 female students). The students were randomly split into two classes and taught by two instructors, since the course required that only a small number of students be enrolled.

2. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

1) Students' Writing Sample

To diagnose the students' writing proficiency in English, the instructors asked them to write three essays in English in the first three consecutive classes. Since different teaching styles and instructions of the instructors could affect the students' products, all the essays were written and collected before the actual class began.

The topics were selected from three rhetorical tasks: descriptive, argumentative, and narrative. Only the topics were given to the students (Table 1) without detailed prompts or instruction. The students wrote each essay in class for 40 minutes and were allowed to utilize Korean-English dictionaries to let the students express their ideas on the topics better without being limited by vocabulary during writing. Ninety six essays in total, covering the three rhetorical tasks, were collected.

TABLE 1
Topics of Students' Writing

Rhetorical tasks	Topic
Descriptive	Describe where you live now (e.g. house, apartment).
Argumentative	Write your opinion about the depletion of natural resources.
Narrative	Write about the most memorable event in your life.

2) Data Analysis

To identify the factors to influence the overall quality of writing and the complex relationships among the aspects, one-way ANOVA and correlation coefficient were conducted using SPSS package version 10.0 and Microsoft Excel. After getting results of the quantitative analysis, to verify the quantitative results, qualitative data were collected using survey. Total 18 students answered the survey questions that asked what types of writing was the most difficult and why, and if the argumentative writing was the most difficult among the different rhetoric tasks, whether the difficulty came from lack of vocabulary or from other reasons, and asked another question whether, in case of argumentative writing, it would be easier for them to write the same content in their L1 which is Korean.

IV. RESULTS

1. Scoring Procedure

One of the important elements in writing assessment is the nature and type of the rating scale. An analytic scale, rather than holistic, was used in this study as it was considered to be a more sufficient indication regarding reliability and validity (Reid, 1993; Weigle, 2002). In addition, it provides more detailed information about each writing sample. In an analytic scale, discrete scores are given to different aspects of each writing sample, such as mechanics, vocabulary, content, register, cohesion, interaction, and organization. This research employed the Jacobs et al. scale (1981), one of the most widely used analytic scales in ESL. The Jacobs et al. scale rates scripts on five aspects; mechanics, language use, vocabulary, organization, and content. The five aspects are differentially weighted according to their significance in writing (Table 2). Since it is not a simple task to assess students 'writing using an analytic scale even for experienced raters, the raters, who are the instructors of the writing classes as well as researchers in this study, double-checked the scripts after they carefully scored them.

To establish inter-rater reliability (the tendency of different raters to give the same score to the same student writing sample) an inter-rater reliability test on 35% of the data was carried out

based on Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The results indicated that there was a strong correlation (high agreement between the raters) (correlation coefficient = 0.81).

TABLE 2
Jacobs et al.'s (1981) Scoring Profile

	Score	Criteria
CONTENT	30-27	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: knowledgeable, thorough development of thesis, relevant to assigned topic
	26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE: some knowledge of subject, adequate range, limited development of thesis, mostly relevant to topic but lacks detail
	21-17	FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge of subject, little substance, inadequate development of topic
	16-13	VERY POOR: does not show knowledge of subject, non-substantive, not pertinent, or not enough to evaluate
ORGANIZATION	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression, ideas clearly stated/supported, succinct, well-organized, logical sequencing,
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: somewhat choppy, loosely organized but main ideas stand out, limited support, logical but incomplete sequencing
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: non-fluent, ideas confused or disconnected, lacks logical sequencing and development
	9-7	VERY POOR: does not communicate, no organization, or not enough to evaluate
VOCABUALRY	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: sophisticated range, effective word/idiom choice and usage, word form mastery, appropriate register
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range, occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: limited range, frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage, meaning confused or obscured
	9-7	VERY POOR: essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form, or not enough to evaluate
LANGUAGE USE	25-22	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: effective complex constructions, few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions
	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE: effective but simple constructions, minor problems in complex constructions, several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns but meaning seldom obscured
	17-11	FAIR TO POOR: major problems in simple/complex constructions, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions, meaning confused or obscured
	10-5	VERY POOR: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules, dominated by errors, does not communicate, or not enough to evaluate
MECHANICS	5	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: demonstrates mastery of conventions, few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing
	4	GOOD TO AVERAGE: occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing
	3	FAIR TO POOR: frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, meaning confused or obscured
	2	VERY POOR: no mastery of conventions, dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, or not enough to evaluate

2. Statistical Analysis and ANOVA

1) Descriptive Statistics

The result of descriptive statistics showed that there were considerably significant discrepancies among scores across rhetorical tasks. As the following table (Table 3) shows, the students performed best in descriptive writing (*means*=78.97), and then in narrative writing (*means*=74.38) followed by argumentative writing (*means*=68.22).

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics of Three Rhetorical Tasks: Holistic

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Descriptive	32	78.97	10.597	1.873	75.15	82.79	58	94
Argumentative	32	68.22	13.129	2.321	63.49	72.95	44	89
Narrative	32	74.38	11.155	1.972	70.35	78.40	47	91
Total	96	73.85	12.373	1.263	71.35	76.36	44	94

To test if the discrepancies among the means were statistically significant, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The null hypothesis, "the means of each rhetorical task are equal," was tested. Results of the ANOVA reject the null hypothesis (F=6.827, p< .002), which indicates that the difference of the mean for each rhetorical task is statistically significant (Table 4).

TABLE 4
ANOVA of Three Rhetorical Tasks

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Rhetorical tasks	1862.021	2	931.010	6.827	.002
Error	12681.938	93	136.365		
Total	14543.958	95			

Table 5 indicates there were also large differences in total word counts. The students produced more words in narrative and descriptive writing tasks than argumentative tasks; however, in the word count per sentence, the argumentative writing tasks exceeded the other two. It was also interesting to note that the argumentative writing tasks were scored lower than the other two across all five aspects, as summarized in table 5. Also, Figure 1 graphically presents the scores for each aspect of the three rhetorical types of tasks. The narrative writing tasks outscored the argumentative writing tasks, and the descriptive

writing tasks outscored the narrative writing tasks in every measure conducted in this study.

Since vocabulary was one of the significant areas determining the quality of writing, in addition to scoring the appropriateness and level of vocabulary used in the students' writing samples, lexical density was also calculated. As stated earlier, lexical density is measured by dividing the total number of words in the essay by the total number of lexical items (content words). The argumentative writing tasks had the highest lexical density (*means*=66.6) and the descriptive writing tasks had the lowest lexical density (*means*=54.8).

TABLE 5
Descriptive Statistics of Each Task: Analytic

	Total word count	WC per sentence	Lexical density	Mechanics	Grammar	Vocabulary	Organization	Content
Descriptive	142.1	9.1	54.8	4.2	18.5	16.0	16.3	24.0
Argumentative	89.2	9.6	66.6	3.7	16.3	14.4	13.9	20.3
Narrative	146.6	9.0	59.5	4.0	17.7	15.3	15.3	22.8

FIGURE 1
Scores of Three Rhetorical Tasks
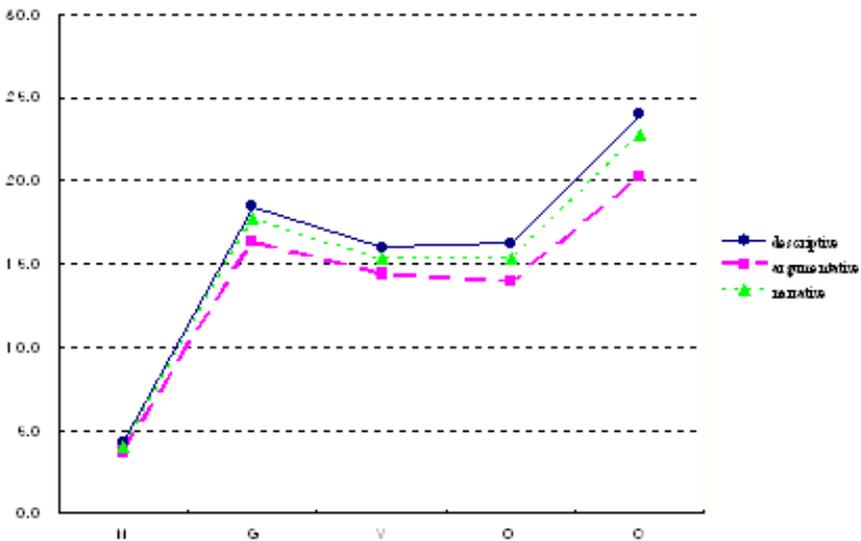
2) Correlations among Factors

To identify the factors which influenced the quality of writing (total score), several factors were measured and compared using Pearson's coefficient correlation. First, the relationship between the total word counts and the total score was tested and the result turned out that they had a significant correlation ($F= .652$). This result indicated that the more words the sample essay contained, the higher the score it earned. This applied for all three rhetorical writing tasks (descriptive: $F= .566$, argumentative: $F= .753$, narrative: $F= .539$). However, lexical density had a negative correlation with the score ($F=- .527$). The argumentative writing task had the most negative correlation with the score ($F= -.610$), followed by narrative ($F= -.402$) and descriptive ($F= -.527$). While lexical density did not have a strong correlation with the word counts ($F= .120$), it had a significant negative correlation with vocabulary ($F= -.462$) or language use ($F= -.342$).

TABLE 6
Correlation between Word Counts and Total Quality of Writing

		words	Total Quality of Writing
Words	Pearson Correlation	1	.652**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	96	96
Total	Pearson Correlation	.652**	1
	Sig. (2tailed)	.000	
	N	96	96

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

TABLE 7
Correlation between Lexical Density and Quality of Writing

		lexical density	Total Quality of Writing
Lexical density	Pearson Correlation	1	.-.527**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	96	96
Total	Pearson Correlation	-.527**	1
	Sig. (2tailed)	.000	
	N	96	96

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

As it was speculated that the negative correlation between lexical density and the scores was ascribed to a high frequency of grammatical errors, such as missing function words, the correlation between lexical density and grammar was also measured. The result, again, showed that lexical density was negatively correlated to grammar ($p= -.342$).

TABLE 8
Correlation between Lexical Density and Grammar

		lexical density	grammar
Lexical density	Pearson Correlation	1	.-.342**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	96	96
Grammar	Pearson Correlation	-.342**	1
	Sig. (2tailed)	.001	
	N	96	96

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Next, multiple regression was also conducted to discover which aspect influenced the total score most. Among the five aspects, content (*coefficient*= .348) and grammar (*coefficient*= .327) turned out to be the most influential to the total score. Surprisingly, vocabulary did not contribute much to the total score. This order applied for all three rhetorical tasks with slight differences in each coefficient.

TABLE 9
Regression: The Influence of Each Aspect on the Overall Quality

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-4.OE-015	.000		.	.
	mechanics	1.000	.000	.050	.	.
	grammar	1.000	.000	.327	.	.
	vocabulary	1.000	.000	.181	.	.
	organization	1.000	.000	.235	.	.
	content	1.000	.000	.348	.	.

V. DISCUSSION

1. Vocabulary and EFL Writing

As many scholars (Carlson, 1985; Reid, 1993) define total number of words used in student writing as a significant indicator of writing fluency, total number of words used in each writing task was taken into account in this study. As shown in the descriptive statistics, there was a great difference among the three types of tasks; that is, the narrative writing task contained the largest number of words (*means* =146.6 words), followed by descriptive writing task came (*means*= 142.1 words) and the argumentative writing task marked the lowest (*means*= 89.2). ANOVA also demonstrated that the correlation of the total number of words and the score was significantly high (*p*= .652). This result confirmed that total

number of words was indicative of overall quality of writing.

Word count per sentence and lexical density in each task, however, presented a different picture. In both categories, the argumentative writing task marked the highest (*means*= 9.6 and means= 66.6 respectively). Whereas the descriptive writing task was scored a little higher (*means*= 9.1) than the narrative writing tasks (*means*= 9.0) in word count per sentence, the narrative writing task marked a higher score (*means*= 59.5) than the descriptive writing task (*means*= 54.8) in lexical density. Engber (1995) and Reid (1993) also pointed out, word count per sentence (or average sentence length) and lexical density were often powerful indicators of overall quality of writing; yet, the result of this study did not support the result of the previous studies.

First, the statistical result of this study did not match those of prior research. In the present study, vocabulary in the scoring scale encompassed the sophisticated range and appropriate usage in the context during assessing the students' writing. Contrary to the case of the total number of words, the argumentative writing task was scored lowest (*means*= 14.4) in vocabulary. The descriptive writing task marked the highest (*means*= 16.0) and the narrative writing task was next (*means*= 14.4). Therefore, high word count per sentence did not relate to the overall quality of vocabulary or the total score of writing. Next, unlike many previous studies, the present study discovered a strong negative correlation between lexical density and the total scores (*coefficient*= -.527). It was suspected that the students' mere listing content words without proper function words resulted in high lexical density but low total scores, thus, as a result, the correlation between lexical density and grammar was examined. Not surprisingly, these two categories had a negative correlation (*coefficient*= -.342).

The result of the qualitative data, the questionnaires, of this study was also resonant with that of the quantitative data. The students reported that their lack of vocabulary hindered their writing most. The students answered that the descriptive writing was the easiest task of all, because the vocabulary was comparatively easy for them. They further explained that the words for the descriptive writing task were visible, concrete, and simple words from their everyday lives. Even when they did not translate the Korean words that they wanted to use, they could easily find in the dictionary (e.g. ceiling, chest, and drawer). On the other hand, the vocabulary for the argumentative writing task was more abstract, often invisible, scientific, and not ordinary ones (e.g. alternative energy, depletion, and velocity). Although they were allowed to use Korean-English dictionaries, they could not select appropriate words for the context from the dictionary. They also said that lack of background knowledge was another barrier to using sophisticated and appropriate words for the topic.

Both quantitative and qualitative results of this study pointed to the same conclusion; On the one hand, word counts can be one measure of writing fluency in EFL writing, as

proved in prior research. On the other hand, lexical density and average sentence length may be indicative of overall writing quality in the case of advanced ESL/EFL students; however, this is not applicable for low-intermediate students. Contrarily, both lexical density and word count per sentence had negative correlations to the quality of writing. In addition, the students' anxiety level and self-awareness of incompetence also affected the outcomes of writing. That is, the more difficult the task felt, the lower the score was in vocabulary and total scores. This will be further explained in the following section.

2. Student Writing Proficiency in Different Rhetorical Tasks

As shown in the data analysis in each aspect of the scoring scale and the total score, the students were given the best score in the descriptive wring task, followed by the narrative and argumentative writing task. This result was also congruent with the follow-up questionnaires. Of 18 students who answered in the questionnaire, thirteen students remarked that the argumentative writing task was the most difficult, while fourteen students answered that the descriptive writing task was the easiest. For the reason that the argumentative writing task was the most difficult, most students listed "lack of background knowledge" and "lack of vocabulary." The descriptive statistics of the scores of content in each writing task also exhibited that there existed significant differences among three writing tasks. Like in other aspects, the argumentative writing task marked the lowest score in content. Thus, the students' feelings of difficulty level during the three writing tasks were consistent with the score of content in each writing task.

Even though natural deletion was not something new to the students and almost half of the students answered that they would have done much better if the task had been a writing task in Korean, they still felt that the topic was difficult to them. One speculation for this feeling of difficulty (and the actual low score) is that the topic for argumentative writing task was "comparatively" difficult than the other two. The students reported that they did not struggle with the topic for the narrative writing since their house was very familiar and visible to them. Another possible reason is the result of lack of vocabulary. The students marked better scores in vocabulary in the descriptive and narrative writing tasks and also in the questionnaires, they pointed to their lack of vocabulary particularly for the argumentative writing task. Although the students were allowed to use dictionaries during the tasks, the levels of familiarity of vocabulary for each writing task differed among the tasks.

It was interesting that the students did not mention grammar much for the difficulty in writing tasks in questionnaires. As the multiple regression (Table 9) showed, grammar was the second- significant aspect to determine the total scores of the writing tasks and the scores of grammar in each task significantly differed (again, the argumentative writing task

marked the lowest score); yet, the students did not ascribe the reason for the difficulty to grammar.

Bridgeman and Carlson's study (1983) discovered that students produced simpler, shorter sentence structures in narrative writing tasks than in expository writing tasks. However, in general, prior studies did not reach a consensus on differences in syntactic variables across rhetorical tasks (and there has not been much research conducted on the relationship between grammar and the types of rhetorical tasks). Although the present study discovered that the scores of each task in grammar quantitatively differed, but it did not prove the qualitative relationship between types of rhetorical task and grammar. It is presumed that several different reasons complicatedly influenced the scores, such as the time constraints imposed to the students, their feelings of difficulty level during the argumentative writing task, lack of vocabulary, limited sentence structure strategies, and resources. Even though the students' grammatical competence remained the same across the tasks, these factors might have aggravated their performances in grammar during the argumentative writing task. Consequently, these factors complicatedly interacted with one another and affected the overall score of each writing task.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors which influenced the overall quality of writing differing in three rhetorical types of writing tasks. Although there has been research on effects of rhetorical types of writing tasks and discourse modes in ESL writing, it still has much to be done both in its amount and scope. Furthermore, considering different cultures have different rhetorical devices and discourse modes in their languages, there should be more research on the effect of rhetorical types on EFL writing in a Korean context. It should be also taken into account that different language proficiency levels react differently to different rhetorical types.

The contribution of the present study is to provide an insight into how low-intermediate Korean students performed differently depending on the rhetorical type of writing task. The results of descriptive statistics, coefficient correlation analyses, ANOVA, and multiple regressions indicated that the levels of the students' performance varied on the rhetorical type of writing task. The qualitative data of this study presented a more thorough picture of the students' writing complementing to the quantitative data. This study suggested that EFL writers needed a minimum level of vocabulary and background knowledge related to a certain topic, which, in turn, affected content and grammar, and finally the overall quality of writing.

This study, however, did not investigate qualitative differences in vocabulary and syntax

derived from different rhetorical types of writing tasks, which would be a valuable insight into Korean students' EFL writing. As lexical variation and sophistication is a productive strategy for expressing content to low- and low-intermediate EFL students (Engber, 1995), further research is necessary. Also as briefly mentioned in this study, the intricate relationship of vocabulary to grammar and quality writing is another area which needs more careful attentions.

In practice, EFL writing teachers often assume that a good writer exclusively focus on discrete linguistic skills without understanding of the complex nature of writing. However, the implication of this study is that writing is a complicated process, which is more than just lexicons or syntax. It is also more than a cognitive process; while the students were writing, their emotional status (e.g. anxiety and worry) also affected the quality of writing. Moreover, in addition to linguistic knowledge, it requires student background knowledge. It is evident that EFL student writers, especially low-intermediate writers, need to gain experience in reading and writing with different rhetoric and genres. All these factors interact with one another and determine the overall quality of writing. Keeping this in mind, EFL writing teachers analytically diagnose student writing to define the area in trouble and help them maximize their knowledge and improve their writing.

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