

**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF NL IN L2 WRITING: EVIDENCE FROM  
ARABIC LEARNERS OF ENGLISH**

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## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
An overview of the approaches to the role of the NL in L2 Writing.....	8
American English rhetoric .....	11
Purpose of the study .....	15
<b>The Study</b> .....	18
Subjects .....	18
Instrumentation .....	19
1) Writing assignent .....	19
2) Questionnaire .....	23
Data analysis procedures .....	23
Methodology for scoring essays .....	23
Data analysis .....	28
1) The NL group .....	28
2) The TL group .....	34
3) The Learner group .....	39
The correlation between the students' writing in Arabic and English .....	53
What cohesive devices characterize the Learners' compostions? .....	58
Discussion .....	61
Interview data .....	65
Writing performance and reading/writing habits .....	65
Recommendations for further research .....	69

## Abstract

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The academic writing of many foreign students sometimes deviates from the prevalent American rhetorical pattern, characterized as it is by linearity in text development; this deviation has often been blamed on the negative transfer of different rhetorical patterns characteristic of these speakers of other languages. The present study used evidence from the writings of Arab and American students to investigate the extent to which students' writing reflects the rhetorical conventions of their native languages, as well as the extent to which writing skills in L1 constitute a good resource for the ability to produce an acceptable piece of writing in the target language. Based on the compositions of three groups of students (five American students; five Arab students with no background in ESL; and 27 Arab students with a good background in ESL), it has been found that the students in all three groups vary in their ability to organize text materials chronologically. As to the third group (the learner group), there was a positive relationship between the students' ability to organize text materials chronologically in their native language, Arabic, and their ability to do so in the target language, English, suggesting that L1 writing skills can be very helpful (and do not necessarily constitute an obstacle) to the learner's ability to produce a high quality piece of writing in L2. Finally, an interview was conducted with a number of students from the third group (the learner group) in order to account for their writing performance. The results of the interview indicate that reading/writing habits constitute an

important factor in students' ability to produce a high quality piece of writing in both L1 and L2.

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## Introduction

Over recent decades, there have been several studies in contrastive rhetoric which have attempted to investigate the writing performance of Arabic-speaking students in order to account for the difficulties facing such students in English composition. A number of such studies have perpetuated the views that Arabic is characterized by overemphasis, exaggeration and overassertion (Shouby, 1951), and that Arabic text organization is circular and non-cumulative (Allen, 1970), and that Arabic writing style is characterized by complex parallel constructions (Kaplan, 1966; Ostler, 1988).

While this research effort is not intended to investigate the validity of all those claims, it makes use of evidence from the writing of Arabic-speaking students both in Arabic and English to investigate the extent to which such students are skilled writers in their native language, and whether their writing skills in Arabic constitute a good resource for their ability to produce an acceptable piece of writing in English. This may provide some evidence as to the validity of the assumption made by several contrastive rhetoric studies that the academic writing of Arab students reflects the rhetorical conventions of Arabic, and that the deviation of such students from the rhetorical conventions of English is caused by negative transfer from Arabic.

The present study also investigates the extent to which the writing of American students conforms to the linear organizational pattern in order to see whether the deviation from such organizational pattern is a developmental problem of inexperienced writers in general (Mohan and Lo, 1985), or whether it is to be blamed especially on the transfer of rhetorical conventions typical of other languages ( Kaplan, 1966/1987).

### **An overview of approaches to the role of the NL in L2 Writing.**

Since the publication of Kaplan's "doodles article" (1966), which laid the basis for the development of contrastive rhetoric, there have been various approaches to the teaching of second language writing, and various views of the role of L1 in L2 writing. The debate over the issue of writing instruction, described by Raimes (1991) as "a journey into the woods", has been dominated by two competitive views with respect to the relationship between L1 and L2 writing skills. One view, advocated by Kaplan in 1966 (though, as we shall see, Kaplan himself softened his position in his 1987 paper ), maintains that L1 has a negative effect on L2 writing, while the other view, advocated by a number of scholars, such as Cummins (1981), Mohan and Lo (1985), maintains that L1 could be an important resource rather than an obstacle to L2 writing proficiency. Following is a brief overview of these two views.

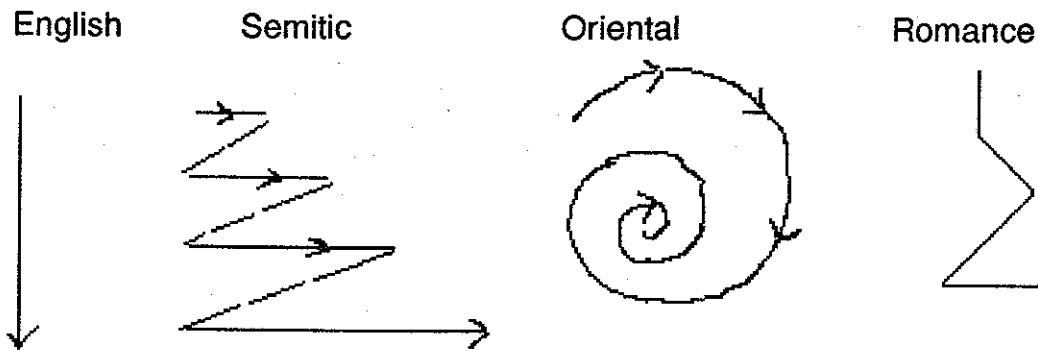
Dissatisfied with the tradition of contrastive analysis, which focussed only on language transfer at the sentence level, (phonology, morphology, and syntax), Kaplan (1966) argued that negative transfer in second language learning also occurs at the discourse level. The philosophy underlying Kaplan's hypothesis of negative transfer at the discourse level is:

"Logic which is the basis of rhetoric, is evolved out of a culture; is not universal. Rhetoric thus, is not universal either, but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture. It is affected by canons of taste within a given culture at a given time" (Kaplan, 1



-20)

Kaplan's hypothesis of rhetorical differences between different cultures is best illustrated in his famous diagrams of thought patterns:



Based on a study comparing writing samples in English from speakers of Arabic, Romance, and Oriental languages, Kaplan developed diagrams showing that English speakers think in a straight line, while Asians speakers think in circles, Europeans in zigzags, and speakers of Semitic languages in parallelism. In view of this hypothesis, Kaplan concluded that a student can be considered a skilled writer in his/her native language but not necessarily in the target language because "the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader" (Kaplan, 1966).

According to Connor (1987), this contrastive rhetoric hypothesis has

implications for classroom teaching and material development. Since writing habits developed in L1 cause negative interference and do not help in the learning of rhetorical conventions of a target language, students in a second language composition class need special emphasis on the rhetorical conventions of the target language in order to be able to produce "acceptable" written products.

Many researchers and teachers of English composition have found a refuge in Kaplan's hypothesis of the difference between cultural thought patterns to argue that the transfer of writing habits typical of the rhetorical conventions of other languages is the main reason (if not the only reason) why many foreign students usually fail to produce written products that conform to English rhetorical conventions.

Intrigued by Kaplan's hypothesis of contrastive rhetoric, and his methodology which examines the English writing of non-native English-speaking students, such composition researchers have undertaken studies in support of this hypothesis. The purpose of such studies is to explore modes of rhetorical development exhibited by non-native English speaking students and identify systematic rhetorical differences between the writing of these students and that of native speakers. The studies undertaken by Bartelt (1983) with young Apache and Navaho speakers; Connor and McCagg (1983) with Japanese and Spanish speakers; Harder and Kutz-Harder(1982) with Japanese students; and Ostler (1981; 1988) with Arabic, English, Japanese, and Spanish students, are only a few examples of

the many attempts to test the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis. But some scholars raise questions about this hypothesis.

A study on Arabic rhetoric, which presents challenges to the assumptions made by contrastive rhetoric proponents about the so-called parallelism in Arabic writing, was conducted by Sa'Adeddin (1989). Sa'Adeddin argues that the key to understanding negative Arabic-English interference is the distinction between the aural mode of text development (which characterizes the rhetorical style of some modern Arabic writers) vs. the visual mode of text development (which characterizes the English writing style in general). Sa'Adeddin, however, provides writing samples by some modern and ancient Arabic writers, showing that the visual (and linear) mode of text development is also common in Arabic literature, thus challenging views that Arabic text organization is circular and non-cumulative (Allen, 1970), and that Arabic writing style is characterized by parallelism (Kaplan, 1966/1987; Ostler, 1988).

### **American English rhetoric**

In order to understand what is meant by the English rhetorical style from which non-native English speaking students tend to deviate, thereby giving birth to the controversy between the proponents of contrastive and anticontrastive rhetoric, it suffices to quote Kaplan (1966) and Irmsher (1979), respectively.

"The thought pattern which speakers and readers of English appear to expect as an integral part of their communication is a sequence that is dominantly linear in its development".  
( Kaplan, 1966 ).

"In western culture, our concept of order is closely tied to qualities of linearity and symmetry. In terms of writing, what most of us recognize as logical is a one-directional sequence of thought with parts connected link by link to form continued successive discourse".  
(Irmsher, 1979: 45 - 56).

It should be added, however, that while a typical English paragraph is usually linear in its development, with "the flow of ideas [occurring] in a straight line from the opening sentence to the last sentence" (Kaplan, 1966), some researchers (e.g. Braddock, 1974; Pandharapande, 1984; Leki, 1991) maintain that it is not the only mode of text development adopted by professional native-speaker English writers. For instance, it has been argued that "there are numerous variations apparent in a normal English text" ( Leki, 1991).

In opposition to Kaplan's hypothesis of contrastive rhetoric, some scholars have taken a completely different approach to the relationship between L1 and L2 writing, arguing that there is a strong positive correlation between writing skills in one's native language and those in the target language. Such anticontrastive position was taken by Cummins (1981), and supported by Mohan and Lo (1985), among others. Cummins

claimed that first language development has a crucial role "in promoting educational success for language minority students". Cummins' hypothesis, known as the "interdependence hypothesis", maintains that some language skills, once developed in one language, transfer naturally to other languages. For example, the development of certain literacy skills in L1 contributes substantially to the development of writing skills in L2. This is so because some language skills, such as the ability to use language in decontextualized situations, transcend language differences, and appear to be learnable in any language. Cummins (1981) stated:

To the extent that instruction in Lx [i.e., Language x] is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly. (Cummins, 1981: p.29).

The claim being made here is that language learners can develop a common underlying linguistic proficiency, allowing them to utilize various language skills, and to transfer such skills across languages. Thus, contrary to Kaplan's hypothesis of negative transfer at the rhetorical level, Cummins's interdependence hypothesis implies that writing proficiency developed in L1 facilitates rather than hinders the development of writing proficiency in L2.

Support for Cummins' interdependence hypothesis comes from several studies, such as the one undertaken by Al-Rufai (1976) on a large population

(574) of Arab students. Al-Rufai's main finding is that the reading skills of these Arab students were similar in both Arabic and English, and that improved reading skills in the target language, English, led to improved reading skills in the NL, Arabic, supporting the hypothesis of transfer of language skills advocated by Cummins.

Further support for Cummins's interdependence hypothesis comes from Mohan and Lo (1985). Mohan and Lo suggest that the problems of Chinese students writing in English are developmental, and do not result from the influence of Chinese rhetorical patterns but are the usual difficulties of inexperienced writers. These claims seem to present serious challenges to the proponents of contrastive rhetoric, many of whom have based their inferences about the rhetorical differences of other languages on the TL writings of students who might be inexperienced in their native language writing in the first place.

As a result of substantial criticism of the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis, Kaplan (1987), in a revisit to his "doodles article", admits "having made the case too strong". He nevertheless insists that "there is some validity to the notion [that the rhetorical structure of languages differs] ". According to Kaplan, while all rhetorical forms are possible in all languages, each language has certain rhetorical preferences that occur with higher frequency than other rhetorical forms.

Though research to support this new position is not conclusive, it is

clear that such a position is more reconciliatory with the views of other scholars on the relationship between L1 and L2 writing skills than the one advocated in 1966.

### **Purpose of the study**

Following Cummins et al, this study will investigate whether the prevalent view of negative transfer at the rhetorical level is incomplete. Although it has contributed a great deal to our understanding of the writing problems of second language learners, the transfer of rhetoric view may not satisfactorily provide a complete account for the failure of many foreign students composing in English. In this research, we will examine the attempts of Arabic-speaking students to produce an acceptable piece of writing in English that meets the expectations of an English-speaking discourse community. If it is indeed the case that the deviation of many students' compositions from English writing conventions is the result of negative transfer from their native language, one would expect all (or at least most) Arabic-speaking students to exhibit a similar pattern of text development in both Arabic and English which does not conform to the expectation of an English discourse community.

This study is based on the assumption that the straight line pattern, though it may not fully account for all English writing practices, is the common pattern expected by English discourse communities. Nevertheless,

the writing performances of the English-speaking writers in this study will be tested to see if such writers really follow the straight rhetorical pattern.

Another purpose of this study is to find out to what extent there can be a correspondence between one's writing skills in L1 and writing performance in L2. In other words, we would like to find out to what extent the possession of writing skills in the native language positively correlates with one's writing performance in the target language, and to what extent the absence of writing skills in one's native language negatively correlates with one's writing performance in the target language.

It is not within the scope of the current research, however, to comprehensively examine all the writing skills of our student population, (such as grammar, vocabulary, content, and mechanics), a task which needs more detailed research. Instead, this research effort will focus on one aspect of those writing skills, namely the organizational patterns exhibited by students when describing a process in two languages, Arabic and English.

The reason for choosing to examine the patterns of organization instead of other writing skills is my feeling (I am sure many composition teachers have the same feeling) that Arabic-speaking students composing in English oftentimes fail to produce "acceptable" pieces of writing mainly as a result of "lack of organization" or "lack of coherence", leading to deviation from the linear organizational pattern typical of American academic writing. A



frustrating result of not being able to follow this organizational pattern typical of English writing conventions is usually poor grades received by these students.

It is not being claimed here that such deviation from the organizational pattern typical of American academic writing is the only reason for the poor performance of many Arabic-speaking students, nor is it being claimed that treating this area in the writing skills of these students will automatically result in resolving the writing difficulties of such students. I do think, nonetheless, that a good understanding of the problem of text organization, from which the compositions of many students suffer, will result in the provision of good treatment for such a problem, thereby enhancing the students' ability to produce better quality writing.

In short, this study will attempt to address the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent do NSs of Arabic fail to evidence a linear (chronological) order in writing in Arabic?
- 2) To what extent do NSs of English evidence a linear (chronological) order in writing in English?
- 3) Does the organization of learners' English writing deviate from that of NSs of TL?
- 4) Do learners use the same organization when writing in NL and TL?
- 5) How does the use of sequential connectors in the learners' NL and TL

compositions relate to their success in using a linear (chronological) organization?

## THE STUDY

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### Subjects

Our subjects in this study consisted of three groups of students. Two of these groups consisted of Arabic-speaking students, while the other group consisted of five American students. The first group (the learner group) consisted of 27 Arabic students with at least three years of instruction in English, and from three to ten years of study in the United States. It was assumed that this instruction would ensure that the performance of these students would not be influenced by poor knowledge of English. In this group, 21 students (77%) are science majors, while the rest are in humanities and social sciences. This group was asked to write on the same topic in both native language (NL) and target language (TL).

The second group, the NL group, consisted of five university students at the beginning level of ESL with little or no instruction in English composition. The performance of this group in writing in Arabic only was used to test the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis that Arabic-speaking students are already skilled in writing in their native language, which is why they deviate from rhetorical conventions of English. It was expected that the NL writing performance of this group (which is not influenced by

their study of the TL) would reflect the kind of school writing instruction they received in the Arab world because they had had no prior contact with English writing.

The third group (the TL group) were NSs of English writing on the same topic in English. They provided baseline data: evidence as to whether American students' writing actually conforms to American readers' expectations of linearity as described by Kaplan and Irmsher.

### **Instrumentation**

Our data is based on two tasks which were given to the students who participated in the study: a writing assignment and an interview. Following is a description of these tasks.

#### **1) THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

Research findings have demonstrated that the task, whether in an oral or writing assignment, has an important role in determining the final outcome of the student's performance. Brown and Yule (1983) suggested guidelines to be considered by the teacher when assessing the spoken language production of the student. Although such guidelines were developed to assess spoken language, these can also be useful when assessing written language production.

consists of (including the American students who were Muslims) were allowed to take part in the study. The writing task follows:

A non-Muslim friend of yours would like to know what the Friday prayer (Salatu -l- Jumua) consists of. Please give him/her a thorough description of the whole process of this weekly gathering of Muslims.

In addition to the familiarity of the students with the topic, the task clearly specifies to the students as a targeted audience "a non-Muslim friend of yours", which means that the reader they should keep in mind is one who is not familiar with the topic at all. The purpose of this is to alert the students to the fact that they should be responsible writers, i.e. writers who do not rely on the reader's cooperation to get their intended message across. Moreover, the type of task we developed required the students to provide a "thorough description of the whole process" being described. The purpose was to elicit from the students as many details as possible which could clearly reflect the mode of text development they tended to exhibit when describing a process.

The same task was given in English to the TL group, in Arabic to the NL group, in Arabic and English to the Learner group, but the latter were asked to write in English first in order to minimize the possibility of translating from their native language into the target language during the composing process. As we shall see, there is strong evidence that most of the Learner group did not resort to translation while composing in both languages.

As should be clear by now, the task required the students to describe a process, consisting of several steps performed in a sequential order. The steps of the process for which the students were held accountable were only those steps which turned out to be mentioned in all the highest rated essays as well as in most other essays, as we had found out from a preliminary evaluation by an English composition teacher. The evaluation of this teacher, who used the principle of linear organization as a criterion for successful organization, was used only to decide which steps were considered by the students to be absolutely required in the description of the process. As shown below, five steps of the process turned out to be mentioned by all the highest rated essays as well as by most other essays:

- 1- A designated person makes Adhan = "call for prayer"
- 2- Sermon ( Part 1)
- 3- Break
- 4- Sermon (Part 2)
- 5- The prayer.

These are the major steps of the Friday prayer stated in a chronological order as they are actually performed. The fact that some students decided to produce detailed descriptions of some steps related to Friday prayer (e.g. preparations for Friday prayer), were not provided for in the basic scoring matrix illustrated above. However, students were not penalized for giving other steps directly related to the process being described, even if such steps were not provided for in the basic scoring matrix (cf. Brown and Yule,

1983, for further discussion on scoring procedures).

## 2) STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire was constructed to find out about factors that might account for the students' writing performance both in their native language and in English. Based on previous research findings (Krashen, 1984) which established a positive relationship between writing ability on the one hand, and reading/writing frequency, a number of students who participated in the study (and who consented to be interviewed) were asked how frequently they practice self-motivated reading/writing. Then an attempt was made to find out what relationship there was between the scores they received on their writing performance on the one hand, and their reading/writing frequency on the other hand. The results of this questionnaire are given at the end of the study.

## DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

### 1) Methodology For Scoring Essays

For the purpose of this study, the criterion for "good" organization is defined as the ability to show a chronological development of the five different required steps of the process, supported by details that are relevant to the task (i.e. details that contribute to the understanding of the

process being described and do not disturb the flow of ideas). A chronological text development is required because describing a process, such as the description of the Friday prayer, falls into a natural order of organization requiring the writer to tell things in a time sequence, (i.e. to arrange the material chronologically). According to Donald (1991), the description of a process requires three things:

- 1- The process is analysed according to a logical sequence (first this, second this, next this);
- 2- The process evolves in a series of steps or stages;
- 3- The process has a particular purpose or end product.

Poor organization, on the other hand, is defined to mean the failure to state all or part of the different steps of the process in a natural (i.e. chronological) order. This means that any person who exhibits repetition of the steps, or fails to mention the steps in the order shown above, or puts irrelevant details that do not contribute to the understanding of the process, and/or disturb the flow of ideas, will be considered to have failed (whether to a small or large extent, based on an evaluation scale) in showing a sequential development in the description of the process.

In light of the above description of the principles underlying the evaluation of the students' performances, four separate criteria can be illustrated below. They were used by the two raters who carried out the evaluation, with emphasis given to the criteria as they are ordered below:



- 1) mentioning the five steps of the process.
- 2) following a chronological order when describing those steps (i.e. easy to follow order).
- 3) Not repeating the steps
- 4) putting in only relevant details (i.e., details that contribute to clear understanding of the process being described and do not disrupt the flow of ideas).

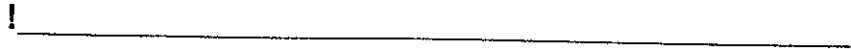
In addition to the above criteria, the evaluators carried out their evaluation based on the scale illustrated below. The scale ranges from 1 to 5. (1 being the lowest score, 5 the highest). To facilitate the evaluation procedure for the raters, the criteria for the highest rated essays as well as the criteria for the lowest rated essays were provided along with the grading scale, as illustrated below:

lowest score

highest score

1.0

5.0



- 1) - All ( or most) steps of the process not mentioned.
- 2) - Repetition of the steps.
- 3)- Hard to follow order.
- 4) - Lots of irrelevant details.

- 1) Mentioning all steps of the process.
- 2)- No repetition.
- 3)- Chronological (i.e. easy to follow) order.
- 4) - All details relevant to the task

Finally, and as part of the raters' training on how to use the pre-specified criteria and procedures for evaluation, two sample essays' were provided for the two raters, illustrating what constitutes "good" as well as "poor" writing. It was hoped that such steps taken before the essays' evaluation would enhance the reliability\* of the raters' evaluation and limit

\* To enhance the reliability of the evaluation results, the rating of the essays was conducted twice, using two bilingual raters each time. The results of the first evaluation yielded lack of consistency between the two raters' scores. However, the second evaluation carried out by two different bilingual raters yielded better results with significantly higher interrater reliability (as we shall see later on). Such increase in the interrater reliability seems to be the result of (1) modification in the scoring rules ( the criteria used for evaluation were ranked according to importance) as illustrated above, and (2) better training for the two raters on how to use the scoring rules in the evaluation.

## 2) Data analysis

### 1) The NL group

Research Q1: To what extent do NSs of Arabic fail to evidence a linear (chronological) order in writing in Arabic?

In order to test Kaplan's assertion that the foreign student follows nonlinear NL rhetorical conventions in his/her native language, we will start by examining texts written by the NL group – the group of Arabic .

speakers who wrote only in Arabic and who were not trained in English composition. Thus, they have not been trained in "English linear organization" which could influence their Arabic rhetorical conventions

Based on the raters' evaluations, we found that three of the five students exhibited a chronological sequencing of the different steps of the process, whereas the two others, while mentioning all the steps of the process, nonetheless exhibited at least one of the following features:

- mixing up the various steps of the process.
- Including many irrelevant details.

The following table illustrates the scores received by the students who wrote only in Arabic:

Table 1  
Scores assigned to NL group Arabic essays

Case #	Evaluator A	Evaluator B	Average
1.	4.8	5.0	4.9
2.	4.0	4.0	4.0
3.	3.8	4.0	3.9
4.	2.5	3.5	3.0
5.	2.2	3.0	2.6

Mean = 3.68

Range = 2.6 - 4.9

This table illustrates the difference between the students' performance based on the scores ranging from an average high (4.9) to an average low of (2.6), and a mean of 3.68. The students in this group vary quite a bit in their ability to exhibit linear text development. In order to illustrate the variation in the writing performances of these Arabic-speaking students in their native language, let us examine some essays they wrote.

Three of the Arabic essays illustrate the presence of linear organization and two do not. First we examine one of the essays that scored low\* on linear organization, and then compare it with one of the essays that scored high. The literal translation of the Arabic text was conducted by the author of this paper. In the first translation that follows, the student failed to show a linear mode of text development.

(Essay # 4. Ave. rating: 3.0)

Friday prayer is one of the prescribed prayers on muslims. It is different from other prayers in that it has to be performed in a group, and there is a specific number of people that should be present to perform it. The time for friday prayer starts with the beginning of noon prayer. The prayer is performed according to some steps or rituals.	Topic statement Requirements of Friday prayer
1- Athan: is similar to Athan for other prayers and consists of (...)	1. Athan
2- The speeches: The speaker steps to the Minber (consisting of a high place where he can deliver his speeches interrupted by a short sit where he relaxes. He starts by praising God and praying on his messenger, and then chooses any topic that concerns muslims. Then he makes supplication for them, enjoining right and forbidding evil. He finishes by supplication.	2. Sermon (P. 1) 3. break 4. Sermon (P. 2)
3. Performing prayer: The speaker leaves the minber and the call for prayer is made, which is similar to the first call, except that the muathan adds" prayer is going to start".	5. prayer
4. Imam asks the prayers to straighten their lines and close the gaps.	
5. Reading loudly the opening chapter and some verses from the Qura'n. Then the bowing.	Describing prayer
- <u>Prostration</u> twice, and then standing up and reading the opening chapter and some verses one more time, and then bowing. Two prostrations, <u>tashahid</u> and then <u>Taslim</u> . thus, the basics of friday prayer are not different from that of other prayers.	
6-There is no afternoon prayer on that day, because the friday prayer replaces it.	F. pr. replaces afternoon pr.
7- Women, travelers, sick people are not required to perform that prayer.	People exempt from f. prayer
8- No business or any other activities are allowed during that prayer.	No business during f. pr.

9- It is recommended to take a shower for friday prayer and dress up, and put some perfumes.

Preparation  
for f. prayer

In the first part of her paper, the student seems to have followed a chronological order as can be seen from the fact that she mentioned all the steps of the process in a chronological order. Starting from step (6), however, the writer introduced details which the reader expects to be mentioned at the beginning of the essay and not at the end. For instance, the last paragraph talks about special preparation for Friday prayer. Clearly, this should be mentioned at the very beginning of the process description. By failing to do so, the writer failed to exhibit a linear development of her text, which is the natural order that can allow the reader to recreate the whole process in his/her mind.

Unlike the above essay, the following essay shows a straight linear mode of text development:

(Ave. rating: 4.9)

Islam is known by some specific fundamentals among which is prayer which this religion is based on. While prayers are performed daily, friday prayer is performed weekly. So what is friday prayer, and what are its bases, and its importance in the religion of Islam?

Topic statement

As its name name implies, friday prayer is performed on the part of muslims each friday at noon. By performing it, noon prayer is not required

any more while the other prayers ( morning, afternoon, sunset and Isha prayers) remain the same.

Friday prayer is attended by a specific number of mature prayers whole number should be (as far as I know) no less than eleven, led by an imam who meets special conditions. The prayer should not necessarily be performed in a mosque, because once the number of people is sufficient, the prayer can be performed.	Number of people required to perform f. prayer Place of F. prayer
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As in other prayers, Friday prayer is preceded by an Athan (call for prayer). Friday prayer consists of two sermons dealing with muslims affairs and their current problems. The two sermons are interrupted by the imam in the middle with a short sit. Then, he ends them with supplication. It is not allowed for the prayer to speak during the sermon. Instead, he should listen quietly because " whoever speaks, as if he did not pray at all", as narrated on the prophet peace be upon him...	1. Athnan 2. Sermon: 1st part. 3. break 4. 2nd part of sermon
--	--

While noon prayer consists of four rak'a, friday prayer consists of only two.	5. Prayer
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Clearly, this student has followed a chronological order in her Arabic writing as can be seen from the fact that she starts by mentioning the importance of Friday prayer in Islam, and then moves on to the day and time when it is performed, the required number of Muslims for its performance, and the place where it can be performed. After that, she mentions Athan which precedes the two speeches (i.e., first and second parts of the sermon), and states how many parts the speech consists of, what it usually addresses, and how the attendants should listen carefully while the imam

is speaking. In the last part, she mentions the prayer itself which consists of two rak'a.

## 2) The TL group

Research Q 2 : To what extent do the NSs of English evidence a linear organization in writing in English?

Now, let us turn to the essays written in English by the American students to see whether the patterns of organization they exhibited conform to the criteria we set above, (whether their writing actually conforms to American readers' expectations) and whether they too vary in their preferred rhetorical styles.

The following scores assigned by the two raters to the compositions of the American students reflect the degree of success, as well as the degree of failure, of these students in showing a straight linear development of their ideas.



Table 2  
Scores assigned to American TL students

Case #	Evaluator A	Evaluator B	Average
1.	4.8	5.0	4.90
2.	4.7	5.0	4.85
3.	4.5	4.0	4.25
4.	2.7	3.0	2.85
5.	2.4	2.0	2.20

Mean = 3.80

Range = 2.20 - 4.90

The mean and range of the American TL group is similar to that of the Arabic TL group. Note that the American TL writers vary even more than the Arabic NL group in the degree to which they use a linear text organization, as illustrated by their scores ranging from 4.9 to 2.2. In order to illustrate this variation, let us examine two types of essays: a well organized essay and a poorly organized one.

The following essay by an American student writer serves to demonstrate the linear mode of text development "which speakers and readers of English appear to expect as an integral part of their communication" (Kaplan, 1966).

Comp. #1 (average rating: 4.90)

Friday is the day on which Muslims are required to gather for congregational worship, and they come together in mosques for that purpose. Here in the United States, storefronts, converted churches, and even rooms at universities and community centers serve as mosques, well as buildings erected exclusively for that use.

Topic statement

Place where friday prayer is performed

Shortly after noon, worshippers begin to trickle into the mosque. They go to the faucets and wash their hands, faces, and feet, and they remove their shoes before entering the prayer area. Sometimes an early arrival burns incense to perfume the mosque. Worshippers talk quiet, read Quar'an, or spend the time in meditation and prayer.

Time of worship

Wudhu (ablution)

Before friday prayer

As the time for the Friday prayer draws near, one of the men rises and calls the congregation to worship. The imam, or man who will lead the prayer, stands and introduces his sermon with a traditional formula of supplications. He then launches into a sermon, enjoining right conduct and piety on the congregation, and reminding them of Islamic principles.

1. Athan (Call to prayer)

2. Sermon:  
( First part )

Latecomers straggle in one at a time, but there is no conversation, as speech is forbidden during the sermon. Children play quietly among the congregants, who sit on the floor, intent on the imam 's speech. Presently the imam instructs the worshippers to pray for forgiveness, and he sits down and does the same. There is a brief pause before the imam stands up to complete his sermon. He switches to a different topic of current interest to the community, exhorting them to the appropriate action necessary to deal with the problem. The sermon ends with another traditional set of formulaic prayers.

General mood during the sermon

3. Pause

4. Sermon:  
second part

A murmur arises as the congregation stands, assembling for the actual prayer. Rows are quickly formed, in which the worshippers stand shoulder to shoulder, facing Mecca. It is not uncommon to find an African man standing next to a man from India, while a Malaysian woman prays next to a European-American woman from the American Midwest.	5. Prayer Description of worshippers
The imam raises his hands to his ears and intones, "God is Most Great" in Arabic, and the congregation follows suit. A melodic recitation of the Quaranic scripture begins, followed by bowing and prostrations that the congregation makes as one body. The prayer is concluded with the salutation, "Peace and the mercy of God be with you", and the crowd slowly disperses, as some stay to socialize or make additional prayers.	Description of the prayer End of friday prayer
One week later, the whole sequence of events will be repeated.	

In this essay, the student starts with an opening statement announcing the topic she is going to write about: "Friday is the day on which Muslims are required to gather for a congregational worship". Then she mentions the place where this congregational worship can take place. In the second paragraph, she talks about the time of the worship before describing the special preparation of Muslims for this worship. The third paragraph is devoted to the description of the sermon as well as the general mood of the worshippers as they listen to the Imam delivering the first part of this sermon, and then moves on to describe the second part of that sermon. In the next paragraph, the student smoothly moves on to the description of the Muslims as they get ready to perform the prayer, giving us a clear picture about the type of people who gather for this prayer, and then moving to a

detailed description of the prayer itself.

Needless to say, this student has demonstrated a clear and chronological development of the text. This linear text development, however, was not exhibited by all the American students. One American student clearly violated the straight linear progression as can be seen from the following essay:

(Ave. rating: 2.2)

The Juma'a congregational prayer consists of prayer and a lecture called the <u>Khoutba</u> . One prays four raka'a and then the Khoutba is presented on any islamic topic. Usually something innovating. Then athan is called, the call to prayer and everyone enters. After the congregation stands and forms even rows for prayers. The imam recites verses from the holy Quran. This prayer is two <u>ruku</u> . Usually, it 's inevitable that a few babies scream during this time. <u>Thekir</u> is said, praising Allah with three different names 33 times. One then makes <u>du'a</u> , a form of supplication. Some chose to make two more additional ruku, called <u>sunnah</u> . Lastly, some relevant announcements are made and the congregation disperses. Some people stay after and speak, some go back to their daily activities.	Defining F. prayer 1. prayer 4. Sermon 1. Athan 5. Prayer After prayer The importance friday prayer
Juma'a prayer is a time for the whole community to come together.	

Although all the details included in this short essay are relevant to the topic, such details are not presented in such a way that the reader can clearly understand how the process being described is performed. In other

words, the steps of the process are not presented in a chronological order as they are actually performed (for instance Athan is stated after Khoutba, although chronologically, Koutba occurs before Athan). Also, step # 2 of the process: wudhu is omitted. For these reasons, this writer failed to meet the criteria of linear text organization we set earlier.

### 3. The Learner group

RQ3 : Does the organization of the learners' English writing deviate from that of NSs of English?

RQ4 : Do the learners use the same organization when writing in NL and TL?

Let us now examine the written products of the Arabic-speaking students to see to what extent their writings in Arabic as well as in English conform to the principles of linearity in text development, and whether such students use the same organization when writing in NL and TL. A related question (Research Q5 ) is, what linguistic features characterize the learners' compositions in English and Arabic? Table 3 and 4 below, which illustrate the scores assigned to the Arabic-speaking students in both languages by the two raters, may help to answer some of the above questions. (Note that the subject number is the same on table 3 and 4).

Table 3

Scores received by the Learner group: English essays

Subject #	Evaluator A	Evaluator B	Average
1	4.8	4.5	4.65
2	4.2	4.5	4.35
3	4.0	4.5	4.25
4	4.0	4.4	4.20
5	3.8	4.5	4.15
6	3.8	4.5	4.15
7	4.2	4.0	4.10
8	3.8	4.0	3.90
9	3.6	4.0	3.80
10	3.6	4.0	3.80
11	3.5	4.0	3.75
12	3.2	3.5	3.35
13	3.0	3.5	3.25
14	3.4	3.0	3.20
15	3.0	3.0	3.00
16	2.8	3.0	2.90
17	2.5	2.5	2.50
18	2.4	2.5	2.45
19	2.5	2.2	2.35
20	2.0	2.5	2.25
21	2.5	2.0	2.25
22	2.4	2.0	2.20

23	!	2.2	!	2.0	!	2.10	!
24	!	2.0	!	1.8	!	1.90	!
25	!	1.6	!	2.0	!	1.80	!
26	!	1.8	!	1.4	!	1.60	!
27	!	1.4	!	1.5	!	1.45	!

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Mean = 3.10

Range = 1.45 - 4.65

RQ3: Does the organization of learners' English writing deviate from that of NSs of English?

Based on the above scores assigned to the learner group writing in English, it is interesting to note that there is a large variance in the degree to which the students in this group use a linear mode of text development, as indicated by the lowest and highest average scores (1.45 - 4.65). Comparing this range of scores with that of the TL group (2.2 - 4.9), we notice that 22 learners scored within the TL range, while seven others scored lower. In general, the variation in the learner group is larger than the variation in the TL group, and this might be attributed to the difference in the sample size of the two groups. Despite this surface difference between the writing performance of the two groups, however, our statistical analysis\* show that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups as illustrated by  $p > .05$ .

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\*The analysis of the level of significance between the two groups' scores was done by using a T-test.

Now let us turn to the writing performance of the learner group in Arabic, and examine the degree of success in showing a linear mode of text development. First let's look at their scores:

Table 4  
Scores received by the Learner group: Arabic essays

Subject #	!	Evaluator A	!	Evaluator B	!	Average	!
1	!	4.5	!	5.0	!	4.75	!
2	!	4.8	!	5.0	!	4.90	!
3	!	3.4	!	4.0	!	3.70	!
4	!	4.5	!	5.0	!	4.75	!
5	!	4.0	!	5.0	!	4.50	!
6	!	4.4	!	4.0	!	4.20	!
7	!	3.8	!	3.5	!	3.65	!
8	!	3.0	!	3.5	!	3.25	!
9	!	4.4	!	4.5	!	4.45	!
10	!	3.8	!	4.25	!	4.00	!
11	!	3.0	!	4.0	!	3.50	!
12	!	4.0	!	4.5	!	4.25	!
13	!	2.4	!	3.0	!	2.75	!
14	!	3.4	!	3.0	!	3.20	!
15	!	3.0	!	3.0	!	3.00	!



16	!	3.0	!	2.5	!	2.75	!
17	!	1.5	!	1.5	!	1.50	!
18	!	2.2	!	2.5	!	2.35	!
19	!	1.8	!	2.5	!	2.15	!
20	!	3.0	!	3.5	!	3.25	!
21	!	2.4	!	3.0	!	2.70	!
22	!	2.5	!	2.5	!	2.50	!
23	!	2.5	!	1.5	!	2.00	!
24	!	2.0	!	2.0	!	2.00	!
25	!	1.0	!	1.0	!	1.00	!
26	!	2.0	!	2.0	!	2.00	!
27	!	1.4	!	2.0	!	1.70	!

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Mean = 3.12

Range = 1.00 - 4.75

Based on the above scores assigned to the learner group writing in Arabic, it is interesting to note that there is a large variance in the degree to which the students in this group use a linear mode of text development, as indicated by the lowest and highest average scores (1.00 to 4.75). Thus, the students in the Learner group seem to vary a lot in their writing performance both in their native and foreign languages (1.00 - 4.75 in Arabic, and 1.45 - 4.65 in English)

RQ4 : Do the learners use the same organization when writing in NL and TL?

In order to examine the relationships between the writing performances of the learner group in Arabic L1 and English L2, and find out about the degree of correlation between the writing performances in both languages, further statistical analyses were needed. However, before giving the results of these analyses, let us examine the characteristics of the essays themselves in order to see the different types of writing performances exhibited by the learner group.

In order to examine the English texts of those students who succeeded in showing a sequential progression in their description of the process as well as the texts of those who failed to do so, we divided the students' essays in four groups (based on the scores assigned by the two raters), each group comprising 8 essays. Then we examined the characteristics of the highest rated essays as well as the characteristics of the lowest rated essays. As far as the eight highest rated essays are concerned, the following features were exhibited:

- Stating all the major steps involved in the process of Friday prayer.
- Stating the steps in a chronological order (i.e. in an easy-to-follow order).
- Avoiding repetition of any step mentioned before.
- Putting relevant details in the description of the different steps of the process (details that contribute to the understanding of the process being described).
- Awareness of the audience: Defining and explaining each step for the

reader (when needed).

As to the eight lowest essays, their failure in showing a coherent, sequential development of the text is attributed to the absence of some or all of the following characteristics, based on the criteria we set above:

- No chronological (i.e. easy-to-follow) order in stating the various steps of the process.
- Repetition of already mentioned steps of the process.
- Irrelevant/confusing details at the expense of the description of the process itself.
- No awareness of the targeted audience.

To illustrate these two types of writing performance, let us take two sample compositions from each group and examine the features that contribute to their coherence, or absence of coherence. The first two compositions (written in English) belong to the first group of students who exhibited a straight linear progression in their description of the process.

(Comp. #1 Ave. rating: 4.65)

Friday is the gathering day for Muslims, the same way Sunday for Christians and Saturday for Jews. This gathering takes place at noon and the time varies according to the seasons because the day in Summer is shorter than the day in Winter. When the time is due, a person called (Mu'then) starts the (Athan) which is the Muslim form for calling people to prayer, the words of this Athan are as follows:

Topic statement

1. Athan

- + Allah Akbar (i.e. God is great, ...) repeated 4 times; Explaining
- + Ashhadu An La Elaha Ella Allah (i.e. I bear witness that there is no god except Allah)repeated 2 times; Athan
- + Ash hadu Anna Muhamadan Rasoulu Allah (i.e. I bear witness that Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah), repeated twice;
- + Haya 'ala asslah ( i.e. Come to the prayer), repeated twice;
- + Haya 'ala falah (i.e. Come to the success), repeated twice;
- + Allahu Akbar (i.e. God is great), repeated twice;
- + La Elaha illa Allah (i.e. There is no god except Allah)

Then the Imam ( the person giving the sermon and leading the prayer) will stand up and start his sermon by praising Allah and invoking his mercy on the believers till the day of judgement. Then start a topic of his own choice and link it to the Quran (the book of the Muslims) and Sunneh (the tradition of the Prophet Muhammed p.b.u.h.). After that he concludes the first part of his Khutbah (Sermon), the sermon then he asks the Muslims to make supplications for themselves and the others and sits down for a while, the stands up and starts the second part of the Khutba.

- 2. Sermon:  
(Part 1)  
Explaining
- 3. Break
- 4. Sermon  
(part 2)

The second part also starts by praising Allah and his Messenger, and continues the subject towards the end the Imam concludes by making supplications loudly and the Muslims say Amin. Then he asks for the prayer to start and the person who made the Athen will repeat the same call (almost) and people would stand up and follow the Imam in his prayer. This prayer is called Salaat and consists of two units, each of them is called Rak'a. In each Rak'a the Imam reads Chapter1 of the Qura'n and any other chapter (or part of it) of his own choice. He repeats that in both Rak'as, and concludes by turning his head to the right and to the left and in each direction says: "Assalamu alaykum", meaning peace on you.

- Second call  
to prayer
- 5. Prayer  
Explaining  
prayer  
End of pr.

In (Comp. #1), the student starts his controlling idea by using analogy, which is rather an effective strategy in order to define the religious

significance of the Friday prayer for the reader who might have no idea about this religious practice in Islam. Then, the student mentions the time of the prayer and moves on to the next step which is Athan, or calling to prayer, and explains what Athan consists of. Then he moves on to the sermon given by the Imam, and explains what it usually addresses, and how it is divided into two parts. After the sermon, he mentions the next step which is prayer, and demonstrates what the prayer consists of. It is interesting to note that this student has also shown good use of paragraphs, each dealing with one step. In addition, this student makes good use of cohesive devices (i.e. sequential connectors), such as then, before, after, the second part, etc..., to signal the sequential relationship of the different steps of the Friday prayer.

To further illustrate how a coherent, sequential organization in the description of the process was exhibited by the first group of students in writing in English, another sample of this kind of writing follows:

(Comp.#7, Ave. rating: 4.10 )

The Friday Congregation is like all the other daily prayers an occasion in which all muslims gather in order to worship God and show their obedience to him. However there's a certain difference between the Friday congregation and the other daily prayers, in that this prayer is a more unifying one. In fact during the other other days the Muslim has a certain time duration in which he can perform his prayer even alone. Moreover during the Friday congregation he has to perform his prayer with his fellow Muslims and has to listen to the "Imam". When hearing the "call" or "Athen" the Muslim has to give up any other occupation

Topic statement  
The importance  
of f. prayer  
1. Athan

and has to prepare for his prayer, he then goes to the mosque where he meets great numbers of Muslims. This prayer is in reality an occasion for the Muslims to meet, in a unifying place in order to strengthen their feeling of togetherness and their love to each other.

After the call, and gathering there is a request for them to be quiet because the "Imam", the spiritual leader, is going to begin preaching.

During his preaching the Imam speaks of what a Muslim should, or should not do, he teaches Islamic laws that organize social relationships, economic boundaries and political awareness. He then sits for a while and then goes back to his preaching.	2. Sermon: (1st part)
After he has finished, he addresses prayers to God to help man, thanks for what he provides him with. The last step of the gathering is to do the non-verbal prayer which is composed of two units. Each unit is consisted of three major steps: The first being the standing up and oral reading of some Koranic verses, then comes the "Assufud" which is the bending and putting of one's hands on one's knees, and saying three times of a phrase in which the Muslim confesses his devotion to God and the latter's greatness. The final step is "Arruku", represented in the bowing to God and saying of the same phrase as during the second step.	3. Break + 4. Sermon: (2nd part) 5. Prayer Description of the pr.
After the prayer is up every Muslim goes back to his job until the afternoon prayer.	End of the prayer

This student has demonstrated clarity in the description of the process by stating the steps in a chronological, easy-to-follow order. Moreover, many details are used in the student's essay that are relevant to the task, thereby making it easier for a non-Muslim reader not only to visualize how the different steps of the process are performed, but also what these steps actually are.

In contrast to the above compositions, characterized as they are by a chronological order, precision and clarity in the description of the process, let us look at the following English (L2) essays, and examine the features that contributed to their poor organization, based on exactly the same standards previously stated. (Grammatical errors are disregarded here).

(Comp. #22 Ave. rating 2.20 )

Friday is the best of the days of the week in which Adam was created. The master Topic statement  
of the days is Friday. It is the greatest in the account of Allah. It is better than the  
day of Fiter and the day of Sacrifice.

-It would be better for those who attend the congregation of Friday to be in the Preparation  
best appearance of dressing and cleanliness. for f. prayer

- Friday congregation is a must on Muslims, who are free (well-minded, mentally able), mature, physically capable. As far as those ones who are not People exempt  
obliged to attend Friday congregation would include : women, boy, sick people , from f. prayer  
traveler and those who have an excuse such as (environmental) rain, mud, cold etc..

- Friday congregation consists of two (rak'ahs) and its time is noon. It must be 5. Prayer: its  
performed in a group that consists of at least two people. It could be performed in conditions  
any place and could be performed in more than one place.

- friday congregation must have ( khutbah) speech that startes with praising Allah 2. Sermon  
( saying Shahadahs) and bear witness that there is no god but Allah and Mohammad is  
his messenger.

The speech consists of two parts. kateeb sits for a while after the first part. Sermon: 1st  
Then stands up and completes the second part. part 3. break

- The time of speech should be shorter than time of Friday prayer itself. 4. Sermon.

- The speech contains reminding of principles of belief (Iman) in Allah, angels, Content of  
book, messengers ... friday speech

"...The call for prayer is given, which is called Athan, a word meaning permission, whereby the permission is given to every Muslim at that time to leave everything and go to the Friday prayer. When hearing the call, the Muslim goes to the Mosque where he meets his brothers and talks with them slowly in order not to disturb others.

Meaning of  
athan.  
Going to the  
mosque

When the Imam, a person knowledgeable in Islamic literature and laws, starts, every muslim should listen carefully to what he is saying.

Listening to  
the imam

The role of the Imam consists of teaching Muslims about the Islamic code of behavior and the Islamic laws, and in general, he can speak about any subject that concerns Muslims..."

The role of  
the imam

Although these two paragraphs focus on the specific steps of the process, namely Athan and speeches, the first text written in English gives more details about the importance of the Friday prayer, while at the same time it gives fewer details about the imam who delivers the sermon. In addition to the difference in content, there is a clear difference between these two texts at the level of syntactic structures and lexical choice, indicating that the student composing in Arabic and English did not resort to translation to express her ideas.

Let us now take a look at another case where the student fails to exhibit a chronological organization in both languages; the failure in each case is not the same. The first extract is from the English text (notice the repetition of the same step at the end of the paragraph ).



description of the various steps of the process.

In order to demonstrate the relationship between the frequency of occurrence of sequential connectors (SCs) on the one hand, and the ability to demonstrate a straight linear progression in the description of the process on the other hand, we took the seven highest rated essays and the seven lowest rated essays and compared the frequency of occurrence of SCs in both groups. Among the highest rated essays, five essays turned out to be written by the same subject in Arabic and English. Similarly, among the lowest rated essays, four turned out to be written by the same writer in Arabic and English. The following table illustrates the difference in the use of SCs:

Table 4  
Average use of SCs per student

<u>Essay type</u>	<u>in Arabic</u>	<u>in English</u>
(7) highest rated essays	47 SCs ( Ave. 6.7/st )	50 SCs ( Ave. 7.0/st )
# of words*:	2 SCs /100 Ws	1.7 SCs /100 Ws
-----		
(7) lowest rated essays	11 SCs (Ave. 1.5/st )	19 SCs (Ave. 2.5/st )
# of words:	0.5 SCs /100 Ws	0.7 SCs /100 Ws

st = student

ws = words

in their use of some linguistic forms especially sequential connectors, whereas those students from the same group who failed to use a linear mode of text development used fewer sequential connectors to signal the sequence of events in the process. This fact has implications for the teaching of composition in that the mastery of some writing genres can be enhanced by the mastery of some linguistic forms.

In view of the above discussion, one may ask: what factors other than negative transfer may account for the students' variation in their attempts to produce a high quality piece of writing wether in L1 or in L2? The following interview data will shed light on what may have caused variation in NL and TL writing skills.

Though based on a limited number of subjects, the results of this study reveal some important facts about the writing abilities of these native Arabic students in Arabic and English. Teachers who complain about the poor performance of many Arabic-speaking students in English composition need to realize that the performance of many of them in Arabic compositions is no better when judged by the standards of what constitutes good writing in Arabic. While this study does not strongly argue against the view of negative transfer at the rhetorical level, it does argue that what often seems to be transferred in the written products of many Arabic-speaking students is not so much a particular writing pattern peculiar to Arabic, as it is the absence of writing skills, which Cummins (cf. Cummins, 1981) might characterize as cognitive, academic language proficiency (CALP) in both NL and TL.

As it turns out, a number of Arabic-speaking students seem to possess skills of linear text development which they employ properly in both Arabic and English, whereas some others don't seem to possess this organizational skill which makes them liable to deviation from the rhetorical expectations of both NL and TL discourse communities. We hypothesize that this is the result of the lack of instruction, and/or experience in this area rather than the result of transfer of a particular rhetorical pattern prevalent in Arabic writing traditions. Thus, the failure of some Arabic-speaking students to produce an acceptable piece of writing is analogous to the failure of some English-speaking students in that the cause of such failure seems to be the

lack of skills and experience in L1 writing.

We also argued that rhetorical differences between Arabic and English may exist and could be responsible for the deviation of Arabic writers from English rhetorical conventions. In order to find out about the nature of such deviation, however, it is important to investigate original texts written by professional Arab writers for native speakers and to contrast these with comparable texts in English.

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