

Grammar and Written Discourse Competence of BA English Students



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ABSTRACT: This paper aimed to ascertain the level of grammar and written discourse competence of BA English students. Likewise, it sought to determine significant differences in the level of grammar and written discourse competence of students when they were grouped according to sex and school of origin. Moreover, it purposed to discover the relationship between grammar competence and written discourse competence. The respondents were all 77 First Year BA English students of a state college in Negros Occidental. Employing descriptive-comparative and correlational research designs, a standardized test questionnaire was used to gather data about grammar competence, and a standardized rubric to assess written discourse competence. Mean, standard deviation, t-test and Pearson r were used to gather data. The findings reveal that the level of grammar competence of the respondents when taken as a whole was average while their level of written discourse competence was high. The male respondents and those who came from private schools had high-level grammar competence while the female respondents and those who came from public schools had average-level grammar competence. The male respondents and those who came from public schools had average-level written discourse competence. The female respondents and those who came from private schools had high-level written discourse competence. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the level of grammar and written discourse competence of the respondents when they were grouped according to the profile variables, and there was a low positive relationship between their level of grammar competence and level of written discourse competence.

KEYWORDS: Grammar, Grammar Competence, Discourse Competence, Written Discourse Competence, BA English students

[1] INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is hailed as the 2nd country (among 15 countries) with high English proficiency level. However, the standard of English in the country has dwindled since many jobs in different industries have not yet been filled and since for every 100 applicants, only 8-10 persons are hired in the information technology business process outsourcing according to the IT Business Process Association of the Philippines (Cabigon, 2015). Indeed, every college graduate must have high English proficiency level to be employed.

Although the Philippines ranked second in spoken English proficiency, it ranked second to the last in written English proficiency as evident in the Versant Test results conducted between January and December 2015 (Cerera, 2017). This implies that the primacy of acquiring English as a second language in speaking and writing cannot be negated, and that a learner must strive to be proficient in spoken and written English.

This study was conducted to prompt teachers of English to intensify their efforts toward helping students become competent in English grammar for them to also become adept at writing in English and to make AB English students cognizant of the fact that English proficiency can help them land good jobs. Likewise, this study was carried out to let the readers know that though a number of studies on level of grammatical competence and on level of written discourse competence have been conducted, there is still a dearth of data that may prove the significant relationship between grammatical competence and writing ability.

[2] FRAMEWORK

This study hinged on Transformational Generative Theory and Communicative Competence Theory.

According to Ambrose (1978) as cited in Alduais (2015), Transformational Generative Theory refers to a grammar that gives details of a language and that creates rules which makes possible the delivery of that language. Tomori (1997) as cited in Adetuyi and Fidelis (2015) held that transformational generative grammar completely describes and aims to direct anyone in the use of a language. To Chomsky (1965), transformational generative grammar endeavors to delineate a speaker's knowledge (Barman, 2012). Dell Hymes (1972) describes communicative competence as the ability to use a language that is suitable to any situation (Kurcz, 2004) and not just to know how to form grammatically correct sentences (Karvin, 2015). Moreover, Hymes explains that socio-linguistic differences can affect one's understanding of a message even if it is grammatically correct and even if the speaker's

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intention to convey it is clear. Canale and Swain (1980) hold that communicative competence is brought about by knowing how grammar is used in communication (grammatical competence) and by understanding, forming, and keeping social relations (sociological competence) (Karvin, 2015).

The connection between grammar and writing cannot be nullified. To write a good composition, one should not only know the rules of the grammar of a language that are responsible for forming coherent and cohesive texts but should also be conscious about how to use the language in any social context. Therefore, written discourse competence is corollary to grammatical competence and communicative competence. The Transformational Generative Theory and the Communicative Competence Theory will, by some means, show that following the rules of the grammar of a language can enable one to create well-written texts.

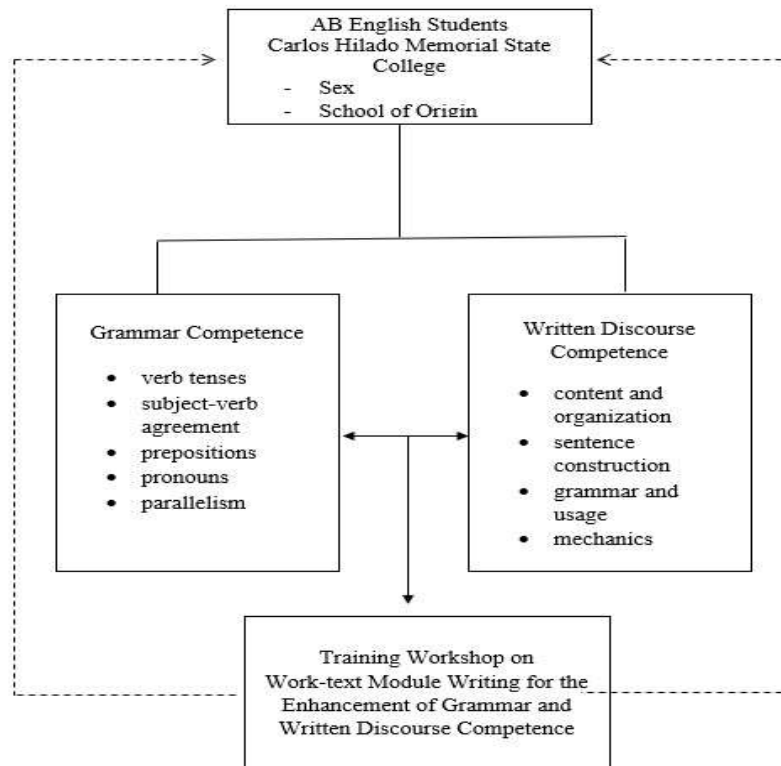


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

[3] METHODS

This study employed descriptive-comparative research design to determine levels of and significant differences in grammar competence and written discourse competence. In addition, correlational research design was used to find out whether there was a significant relationship between grammar competence and written discourse competence.

The respondents of the study were all the 77 First Year AB English students of Carlos Hilado Memorial State College – Talisay campus enrolled during the School Year 2018-2019. Of the 77 respondents, 19 were male and 58 were female. As to school of origin, 33 came from private schools and 44 from public schools.

To gather data about grammar competence, a standardized test questionnaire was used. To assess written discourse competence, a standardized rubric was used.

Before the conduct of this study, the researcher wrote a letter to the President of the college to seek his permission, asked for the consent of the Dean of the College of Arts to administer the questionnaire to the respondents, asked for the approval of the respondents to administer the questionnaire, administered the questionnaire to the respondents, and gathered the accomplished facsimiles of the questionnaire for analysis.

As to descriptive statistics, mean was used to determine the level of grammatical competence and level of written discourse competence of First Year AB English students of Carlos Hilado Memorial State College when taken as a whole and when they were grouped according to sex and school of origin.

As to inferential statistics, t-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in the level of grammatical competence and in the level of written discourse competence of First Year AB English students of Carlos Hilado Memorial State College when taken as a whole and when they were grouped according to sex and high school of origin and Pearson r to determine whether there was a significant relationship in their level of grammatical competence and level of written discourse competence.

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[4] RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Grammar Competence

The level of grammar competence of the respondents when taken as a whole ($M = 23.70$, $SD = 3.63$) was average. The male respondents ($M = 24.16$, $SD = 3.58$) obtained a higher mean, which is interpreted as high-level grammar competence while the female respondents ($M = 23.55$, $SD = 3.67$) had only average-level grammar competence. Moreover, the respondents who came from private schools ($M = 24.03$, $SD = 3.87$) obtained a higher mean, which is interpreted as high-level grammar competence while the respondents who came from public schools ($M = 23.45$, $SD = 3.47$) had only average-level of grammar competence.

Table 1. Level of Grammar Competence

Sex		N	M	SD	Interpretation
Male		19	24.16	3.58	High level
Female		58	23.55	3.67	Average level
School of Origin					
Private		33	24.03	3.87	High level
Public		44	23.45	3.47	Average level
Whole		77	23.70	3.63	Average level

Note: Mean Scale; 0.00-7.99 Very Low, 16.00-23.99 Average, 24.00-31.99 High, and 32.00-40.00 Very High

The findings imply that the First Year AB English students just applied their basic knowledge of English grammar rules and that the male respondents and those who came from private schools knew more about the English grammar rules than their counterparts. In particular, all the respondents had basic knowledge of the rules for verb tense consistency, subject-verb agreement, use of prepositions and pronouns, and making sentence elements parallel, so they were able to successfully pass the grammar test. Consequently, they could understand simple questions that required them to observe grammar rules. It must be noted that the male respondents and those who came from private schools could answer complex questions about verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, parallelism, and pronouns more than the female respondents and those who came from public schools.

The findings of this study are in consonance with the studies of Acaling et al. (2019) and Compe (2017), which discovered that the respondents had high-level grammar competence. On the contrary, Cuellar (2013) and Leyaley (2016) revealed that the respondents had low-level grammar competence while the studies of Alvarez (2017), Lumabao (2017), and Magpayo (2014) found out that the level of grammar competence of the respondents was average.

Written Discourse Competence

The level of written discourse competence of the respondents when taken as a whole ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.98$) was high. The male respondents ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.01$) obtained a lower mean, which is interpreted as average-level written discourse competence while the female respondents ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.98$) had high-level written discourse competence. Furthermore, the respondents who came from private schools ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.03$) had high-level written discourse competence while the respondents who came from public schools ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.93$) had average-level written discourse competence.

Table 2. Level of Written Discourse Competence

Sex	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Male	19	2.37	1.01	Average level
Female	58	2.47	0.98	High level
School of Origin				
Private	33	2.61	1.03	High level
Public	44	2.32	0.93	Average level
Whole	77	2.44	0.98	High level

Note: Mean Scale; 0.00-0.79 Very low, 0.80-1.59 Low, 1.60-2.39 Average, 2.40-3.19 High, 3.20-4.00 Very high

The findings imply that the First Year AB English students were very much aware of the importance of following the English grammar rules in writing English texts. However, the female respondents and those who came from private schools were more serious about applying the English grammar rules than their counterparts. Generally speaking, all the respondents clearly understood that observing conventions for content and organization, sentence construction, grammar and usage, and mechanics can contribute to well-written texts. In particular, the female respondents and those who came from private schools could create and organize

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creative and original ideas, develop varied, rich, and well-organized sentences, use different parts of speech correctly, observe punctuation and capitalization rules properly, and spell words accurately.

The findings of this study are in congruence with those of Cabansag (2013) and Petalen (2014), which found out that the level of written discourse competence of students was high. Contrarily, Megaib's (2014) study is not in congruence with the findings of this study. She found out that Indonesian senior high school students had difficulty in using verb tenses, articles, singular and plural nouns, and in observing rules in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Consequently, the students were not able to write well-written English compositions. In addition, Compe (2017) stated that students at Surigao Del Sur State University did have a low written discourse competence.

Difference in the Level of Grammar Competence

There was no significant difference in the level of grammar competence of the respondents when they were grouped according to sex [$t(75) = 0.629, p = 0.531$] and school of origin [$t(75) = 0.686, p = 0.495$] at 0.05 level of significance. This finding implies that sex and school of origin did not influence the respondents' level of grammar competence. Being male or female and coming from either a public school or private school did not affect the level of the students' ability to use verb tenses, prepositions, and pronouns, to make subjects agree with verbs, and to make sentence elements parallel.

The study of Acaling et al. (2019) and Leyaley (2016) revealed that there was a significant difference in the level of grammar competence of the respondents when they were grouped according to sex and school of origin. On the contrary, the study of Tuan (2017) found out that sex influenced the level of grammar competence of the respondents. With regard to school of origin, Leyaley (2016) held that the level of grammar competence of students from private schools was higher than that of those who came from public schools.

Difference in the Level of Written Discourse Competence

There was no significant difference in the level of written discourse competence of the respondents when they were grouped according to sex [$t(75) = 0.373, p = 0.710$] and school of origin [$t(75) = 1.281, p = 0.204$] at 0.05 level of significance. This finding implies that sex and school of origin did not affect the level of written discourse competence of the First Year AB English. Being male or female and coming from either a public school or private school did not affect the students' ability to create and organize creative and original ideas, develop varied, rich, and well-organized sentences, use different parts of speech correctly, observe punctuation and capitalization rules properly, and spell words accurately.

In the studies of Tuan (2017), Compe (2017), and Cabansag (2013), it was revealed that sex did not influence the level of written discourse competence of the respondents.

Relationship between Grammar Competence and Written Discourse Competence

There was a low positive relationship between the students' level of grammar competence and level of written discourse competence [$r(77) = 0.415, p = 0.000$] at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3. Relationship between Grammar Competence and Written Discourse Competence

Relationship	N	r - value	p-value
Grammar * Written Discourse	77	0.415**	0.000

Note: $p < 0.05$, there was significant relationship

The finding implies that the First Year AB students' knowledge of the English grammar rules did not actually affect their ability to write good English texts to a great extent. The students' basic knowledge of grammar could have helped them write well-written texts but only to a low extent. Particularly, their knowledge of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, parallelism, and pronouns could not really have guaranteed well-written texts.

This finding agrees with Mulyaningsih, Rais and Sulistyawati's (2013), which revealed that grammar competence contributes to writing competence.

The level of grammar competence of first year Bachelor of Arts students especially along verb tense, subject-verb agreement, pronouns, prepositions, and parallelism was just average. It can be averred that their grammatical competence is due to the fact that they are non-native speakers of the English language. However, it can be posited that they did not take to heart the learning of grammar rules since elementary school. Transformation generative grammar is all about observing the grammar rules of a language to construct well-written sentences. Though low,

Although the students were afforded ample time and vast opportunities to learn the rules of English grammar and to use them in communicative activities both in and outside of mainstream classroom, they could not have taken writing in English seriously. Transformational generative grammar accounts for the construction of grammatical sentences while communicative competence considers knowing how and when to use grammar rules. Relatively, the students were equipped with information about English grammar rules, but they could not have very well known how and when exactly to apply those rules in constructing sentences.

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Therefore, the findings do not establish congruence with the claims of transformational generative grammar and communicative competence.

[5] CONCLUSION

The noteworthiness of grammar competence and written discourse competence cannot be highly stated. The students possessed grammar competence, albeit average. Their ability to answer only simple questions pertaining to grammar may help them understand spoken and written English. The male students and those who came from private schools were well-equipped with grammar skills, so they could answer complex questions about grammar.

All the students could write well-written paragraphs, but the female students and those who came from private schools could construct grammatical sentences more than their counterparts.

Sex and school of origin did not influence the student interns' level of grammar competence and level of written discourse competence.

Only a positive relationship existed between the respondents' level of grammar competence and level of written discourse competence since knowledge of the English grammar rules does not guarantee writing well-written English paragraphs.

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