

## Aspects of English Writing in a CCDL Course

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### Abstract

This presentation examines the nature of English writing conducted in a cross-cultural distance learning (CCDL) course. While all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) are dealt with in cross-cultural distance English language learning, a heavy focus is placed on fluency at the expense of accuracy. Grammar is not at the forefront nor is it emphasized in any way. In this light, this presentation attempts to bring grammar to the forefront and argue that learners should take charge of enhancing grammatical accuracy. Aspects of English writing in a joint CCDL course among Waseda University, Tamkang University, and Korea University are examined. Although the main framework of the course is unified across the universities, details regarding course components and evaluation differ. First, how and in what ways English writing is manifested and evaluated in the course by the three universities is examined. Next, a sampling of student writings is analyzed for grammatical errors to determine what types of errors are made. In order to explore how learning autonomy can be enhanced in terms of grammatical accuracy, a survey on perceptions of grammatical accuracy is administered. Preliminary results show that the three universities differ in their approach to promoting grammatical accuracy in students' writings. Fluency is far more promoted than accuracy. In addition, while mechanics are touched upon in evaluation of writing grammatical structure is not. Students seem to perceive the need to improve accuracy but think of the CCDL course as a means to promote fluency. Lastly, implications and pedagogical interventions that can be taken to promote learning autonomy in improving accuracy in particular writing through CCDL are discussed.

### Keywords

English, writing, CCDL, EFL

### Introduction

Writing in a foreign language is not an easy feat. Writing is deemed a productive skill like speaking as opposed to the productive language skills of listening and reading. As the words "product" or "produce" implies, writing is an output of language and thus involves an array of sub-skills. In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, exposure to and opportunities for interaction in the target language are often lacking. This leads learners to be more proficient in receptive than productive skills.

### 1 CCDL<sup>1</sup>

The Korea University-Waseda University Cross-cultural Distance Learning Program (KWCCDLP) can be traced back to 1999. At present, Korea University (KU) runs three credit courses, and two non-credit courses per year in the KWCCLP. Waseda University (WU) runs 17 two-credit half-year courses. The format of the CCDL courses has evolved over the years. While the basic format of combining chat with video conferences remains, other aspects have changed. In 1999, chat was limited to written chat whereas from 2008, the courses began to incorporate oral chat. Also a multi-national course which included a third university, in the KWCCDLP case, Tamkang University (TU), Taiwan was initiated.

### 2 The Present Study

The present study examines the nature of English writing and the perceptions of learners enrolled in a joint CCDL course in the spring

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<sup>1</sup> As the contents of this section are factual, descriptive, and not subject to change, parts have been reproduced in their entirety from Owada and Lee (2015).

semester of 2016. In the course, students utilize all four language skills with an emphasis on speaking. Writing activities include writing and posting a reflection on topics dealt with in the course and responding and replying to other students on the BBS of a jointly used learning management system. Grammar is not directly assessed in any way or form in activities or assignments. The data analyzed here come from the reflections and a grammar survey. Due to space and time limitations, partial results from the survey on grammar are presented while other aspects mentioned in the abstract will be dealt with in the presentation.

A survey on perceptions of grammar and grammar instruction was administered to 16 students at KU and 7 students at WU. The survey (5-point Likert scale) included questions about whether respondents received grammar instruction at different levels and questions about their perceptions towards grammar, grammar use, and grammar learning.

(1) Sample question

Learning a foreign language means learning its grammar.

The results of the survey were tallied and are briefly discussed here.

### 3 Preliminary Results

Preliminary results of the grammar survey from the KU respondents are presented here for illustrative purposes.<sup>2</sup> The majority of KU students responded that grammar instruction was prominent at lower school levels but at the tertiary level grammar was seldom taught.

Table 1: Grammar instruction

	<i>Often</i>	<i>Seldom</i>
Primary	50% (8/16)	50% (8/16)
Middle	94%(15/16)	6% (1/16)
High	75% (12/16)	25% (4/16)
Univ.	6% (1/16)	94% (15/16)

The following are some examples of the statements given on the survey.

(2) Grammar is essential to learning a foreign language.

Agree: 88% (14/16) Disagree: 12% (2/16)

<sup>2</sup> Please note that at the time of the publication of the conference proceedings the research was incomplete.

(3) Grammar is more important than fluency.  
Agree: 6% (1/16) Disagree: 94% (15/16)

(4) I don't care about grammar.  
Agree: 12% (2/16) Disagree: 88% (14/16)

(5) I'll study more grammar in the future.  
Agree: 38% (6/16) Disagree: 62% (10/16)

As can be seen in the examples, the respondents do not place importance on grammar instruction although they perceive grammar to be essential to foreign language learning. In addition, respondents also perceive fluency to be more important than accuracy in language use. As for learning more grammar in the future, responses show that there is little desire or motivation to do so. This may be because at the tertiary level and beyond grammar instruction is not readily available and is subject to self-study.

### 4 Conclusion

The present study attempts to shed light on the nature of writing and the role of grammatical accuracy in a CCDL course. While writing is an important skill, in CCDL classes the writing activities focus more on fluency rather than accuracy. Grammatical errors in the writing activities show that learners need to focus on grammar more. In addition, responses to the grammar survey indicate that the learners themselves do not consider grammar as being important. While it is clear that grammar needs to be brought to the forefront, how to do so in a CCDL context needs to be pondered upon.

### References

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