

UNDERSTANDING SOME ASPECTS OF DISCOURSE ACQUISITION IN NNs SETTING

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Abstract

What happens in EFL learners' black box? This research is a quest for process-product in of learners' classroom acquisition in non native setting (NNs). The question to quest is what discourse do these learners acquire? To what extent students continuously improve when they learn english during the semester as shown in their writing. To what extent do the discourses are reflecting their English Communicative competence. The subjects covers learners of 2nd semester at English Department attending writing –I (2 credits). They have 16 sessions but the with diary as their extrawork activities to support their learnings. The interpretive analysis shows tentative trend that NNs learners, english communicative competence. Learning english in Nonnative (NNs) setting is tough matter. Thousands of english learners in Pematangsiantar Indonesia, and other places as well are striving to achieve more or less some good english. Every year these learners explore the routes, search what other says, and follow what teachers suggest. Every NNs learner hopes to get the right track. The following is a longitudinal survey of how NNs english grow through semesters. The learners are 2nd semester students in writing I, backgriunded in rural or remote schools entering english department. They start with a strong motive to study english but with very limited prior knowledge after grade 12. The study focus on student's writing.

Keywords: Acquisition, Competence, Discourse, Learning, Writing

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning English in Nonnative (NNs) setting is a tough matter. Thousands of English learners in Pematangsiantar Indonesia, and other places as well are striving to achieve more or less some good English. Every year these learners explore the routes, search what other says, and follow what teachers suggest. Every NNs learner hopes to get the right track. The following is a longitudinal survey of how NNs English grow through semesters. The learners are 2nd semester students in writing-I, backgrounded in rural or remote schools entering English department. They start with a strong motive to study English but with very limited prior knowledge after grade-12. The study focus on student's writing.

1.1 Problem

This research observes to what extent students continuously improve when they learn English during the semester as shown in their writing.

2. SOME NOTIONS ON THE NATURE OF WRITING COMPETENCIES

For quite a long millennia, the debate on how a foreign language is acquired has never ended. For some era, ELT teachers admire philosophers from Socrates' time upon their prior excellence in literacy and literature, and the development of romanticism. Scientifically, they put claim upon them as traditional. Since the Saussurian era, ELT teachers overview various paradigm from structural to transformational, and later functional to communicative paradigm. The development is so sound scientifically but the acquisition of English as a second or foreign language remains subject to ELT classroom. Consequently, *for millennia, English communicative quality has been the secret and the mystery of successful learners.*

SPEECH (Plato)

- Generic constituents
 - Purpose
 - Form
 - Topic sentence
 - Content
 - Concluding sentence
 - genre
- Proxegora → eloquence
- Inergia → vividness

Experts for centuries agrees that English communicative quality is the ideal model of global literacy where the learners acquires near native standards and gain the privileges to the construct, the structure and the paradigm of the modern mind, the civilized community. The academe has wisdom. Their saying is the truth. As Ions Plato says, ‘Of the many excellences which I perceive in the order of our State, there is none which upon reflection phases me better than the rule about poetry’. But how does the learner get there to the English communicative quality as they dream? Again experts strive, struggles and try out experiments to find its realistic acquisition path. This leads to two ends of a paradox that switch the acquisition pendulum, the paths of successful learners they strive to articulate and the strive to quest for enlightenment to expose what is given in native language acquisition settings and what is processible in classroom or other settings. Hence, they may sum up to articulate the acquisition path those successful learners, and the most direct routes to the English communicative qualities.

ELT teachers in classroom remains to acknowledge the challenges. The learners assume that their ELT teachers are accountable ideals to bring them to mouse *the secret and the mystery of successful English learners* for they show and perform that they have a command of the language in the classroom. The challenge remains to the ELT teachers upon *the secret and the mystery of successful English acquisition*. Some day will regret that their teachers have failed upon them. All over else where every teacher reflects this as matter. In short, in all learning enterprises, the learner’s success is the focus. And so is doing in successful discourse in writing.

2.1 Teaching Writing I Competencies at English Department

Teaching writing in general is a complex phenomenon. The world education defines writing as one of the primary basic. In academic reality and learners’ acquisition, writing competencies and teaching writing are some of the most tough matters. Among the three basics, reading, writing and arithmetic, writing is the most difficult to acquire, and to be mature with. Even experienced teachers, my undergraduate instructor years ago, did say, I cannot teach you writing just like your mom cannot teach you language. You do it yourself”. So what?

Writing instruction (Sylva in Khrol, 1990:12) to be accountable need to base on sound principles, such as the notion of the writing, the professional demand to instructor, and the assessment (Khrol, 1988). With respect to the construct of writing, approaches to writing can be seen as controlled composition, rhetoric and process. Writing as a controlled composition assumes that the learners are developed step-by-step in their linguistic controls to write a well-developed text. The learners are delivered graded writing instructions from controlling linguistic elements such as tenses, syntax and vocabulary, and step by step move to expressive writing.

In this way, controlled composition approach does not accommodate the creative aspects of writing and that writing teachers resort to writing models in L1 writing, rethoric—or the rhetoric model. The central concern in writing then is the logical construction and arrangements of discourse forms such as topic sentence, paragraph development and organization.

Taylor (1981) claims that writing is not plan-outline-write process that many believe it to be (Taylor in Sylva, p15). They criticize that rethoric approach puts writing problem as a matter of arrangements and organization. Furthermore, they assume that writing is a composing process and composing means expressing ideas, conveying meaning. Composing means thinking. In this way, the composing process is seen as a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discovers and formulates their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning (Zamel in Silva, p 15).

In a process approach, writing assumes a number of factors such as context, writer, text, and reader as the basis to develop the writing (Silva, p.18 in Khrol, 1990). Furthermore, the basic elements of the writer covers personal knowledge, attitudes, characteristics, cultural orientation, language proficiency, motivation and the process of writing as well. The aspect of reader deals with the primary audience and the way they read. The aspect of text constitutes genre, aims, moods, discourse, styles, and linguistic entities. The context covers the aspect of background reality, the setting of the text and its target reader. In short, a writer situates herself in her orientation to do writing in a given discourse community. This assumption holds for a process approach in writing (Silva, 1990 18).

The process approach in particular perceives writing as an active creative process of communication. In this way, the writer develops the nature of the writer as text-builder in a discourse community, develop concern with the reader audience, and do communicate in text as accepted text, style, genre and codes in the community discourse.

A diary is one's life. It is the way s/he looks at and over the world. S/he has life experiences and them put them in a text. So, as feasible in the diary samples, students express what life is in terms of their known view.

Students learn English. At most they are good at grammar. The ALIGU test does show how well the participants grammar is for in the average they are in average above 70 scores. But when they are asked to write, they have some difficulties to express in one, two or more paragraphs. The students learn English as a foreign language, and after 12 years studying from grade-1 to grade-12, the language is still "foreign" to them, the meaning of English means knowing grammar. Well, knowing grammar is good, whatsoever.

The point is that in this millennium-3 (M3), the information era, they need English. Why, information is wheresoever, and they make use if they know communicative English. They need English for self-fulfilment of functional tasks such as readings for their academic needs and demands, getting e-net information, browsing websites and choosing various communicative affairs they functionally need, or even practical tags such as knowing school scholarship, getting free softwares, adapting W-XP to current mode, standard or Vista window, and the like. But **with the good grammar knowledge**, they are still as others grabbing notoriously the functional information they need, and always less effective and efficient.

From functional perspective, students mostly strive English in the domain of logical metafunction language and their teacher and classroom experiences are offering. Language is developed in three stages, the basic functions such as regulatory, directive, expressive and the like to transional function mathetic and pragmatic and then the 3rd stage ideational, interpersonal and textual. The classroom and the teacher right from the beginning exercise only the logical function, rarely the experiential function, let alone interpersonal and textual ones. Of course the 12 years schooling with the logical function will exert good grammar as the test reveals. This is the school choice, although the curriculum has been echoing since 1968, to be **a communicative learner, a communicative learner in English**. In short, they need an English functional literacy for their own sake, and in their own terms, a communicative learner.

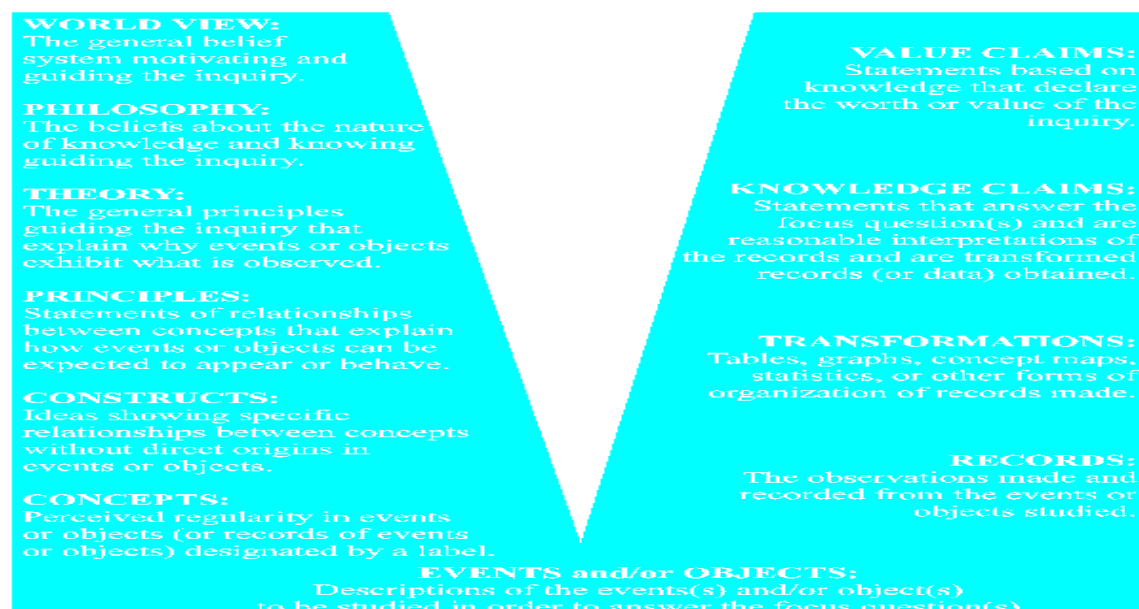
To be communicative, students strive English acquisition for communicative competence. They need instructional experiences to exercise and practice **the total language metafunctions, ideational function, interpersonal and textual function altogether**, not just logical function as they undergo in the previous schooling. They need discourse practice such as language characterization through praxis in thematic structure, genre, rhetorical properties, communicative codes, in various domains of job and vocational communities of M3, and in the end **reach the communicative quality**.

2.2 Communicative Quality in Writing

Writing in any form is a discourse. To write constitute a multilayered set of processes. How can we explain it then? In Myles (2007), there are two factors that affect students's text in writing. For Myles, writing involves composing and transforming information into new text. It is viewed as a continuum activities that range from the more formal aspects of writing down one the one end, to the more complex act of composing on the other end. It is to say that formulating ideas can be difficult because it involves Transforming information which is much more complex than writing as telling. In all this process, social and cogtitive factors affect language learning and writing. The social factors are discussed by Gardners (1985), the socio educational model that mentions four social factors affecting language acquisition, namely, (1) the social and cultural milieus, (2) the individual learner differences, (3) the setting, and (4) the learning outcomes.

The cognitive factors, discussed by Anderson (1985) in model of language production in three stages, as follows (1) construction, (2) transformation and (3) execution. The construction stage is the process in which the writer plans what he/she is going to write by brainstorming, using a mind-map, or outlining. The transformation stage is the process where the writer produces meanings into the form of the message with composing and revising. The execution stage is the writing act of the text. This stage-process hold altogether in structuring information in the text. This is the process where the writer uses various types of knowledge, such as discourse knowledge, understanding of audience, sociolinguistic rules, organization at both sentence and text levels, all of

which function to produce effective communication of meaning and ultimately the quality of the writing (Scardamalia & Breitter, 1987 in Myles, 2007). For instance, coherence problems may be due to not knowing how to organize text, or not knowing how to store the relevant information.



Due to this complex process of writing learner often finds it difficult to develop all aspects of the stage simultaneously. As a result, the learners operate different strategies in each stage, namely, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social affective strategies (Omeley & Chamot, 1990 in Myles, 2007). Metacognitive strategies function in planning, and monitoring text writing. Cognitive strategies function to transfer information into linguistic information entities and rhetoric entities. Social-affective strategies by the concern of cooperating teachers and peers function to help improve the writing text.

Diary is a simple activity, just write. It is at the student reach and at teacher's outreach. But it offers total metalanguage functions altogether to articulate a self in and into the world in terms of student's choice. The learner explores and express the exploration, an access to real communicative competence. From metacognitive perspective, writing covers a set of competencies the rational logic as well as the epistemological competencies, from facts to principle, from a simple object to a notion of value.

By nature, a diary is one's life. It is the way s/he looks at and over the world. S/he has life experiences and them put them in a text. So, as feasible in the diary samples, students express what life is in terms of their known view. Students learn English. At most they are good at grammar. The ALIGU test at English Department from years to years does show how well the learner's grammar is for in the average they are in average above 70 scores. But when they are asked to write, they have some difficulties to express in one, two or more paragraphs. The students learn English as a foreign language, and after 12 years studying from grade-1 to grade-12, the language is still "foreign" to them, the meaning of English means knowing grammar. Well, knowing grammar is good, whatsoever.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This research is one year longitudinal study in a qualitative approach. The subjects covers learners of 2nd and 3rd semesters at English department attending writing-I (2 credits), and writing II. They have diaries as one of the ongoing assignment, then their diaries in both semesters are used. They have 16 sessions in writing with diary as their extrawork activities to support their learnings. Some of the learners' diaries are used in its following semester to observe to possible informations on competency improvement in the learners. The following are some data examples of what students write. They write in diaries. Then they write, they express themselves.

3.1 General Aspects

<1> Diary-1 Subject-1

The night is beautiful. The night is cold but I don't lazy to write my diary. Even though cold, I always spirit to do my activities. In this day, I'm very happy. I go to campus at 10' o'clock. After finish to study that, I go to Horas market to buy the need of my shop. Because in my house I sell any tea and cigarettes,

etc. Every wednesda7y I shopping to horas market. Back from the market, I must go to field and work in there ... 1/3/2011

This diary is the first day first year at English Department. The learner has not got systematic training to her English through various subjects, and is just beginning to write. In the first place, despite its various grammatical errors, it shows that the student has a motive and a notion to write, how to express herself. This challenges the instructor whether to improve grammar first or to let the expressive quality process grows more in the learners. In short the students' commands on grammar is very limited.

<2> *Diary-2 Subject-1*

Hallo my diary? In this day, in morning, I pray to my Father. After that I take a bath, and go to Campus. In this day I have only one lesson. I don't tired. I go to Ramayana to buy a cloth. I'm very happy because I meet my friend. I surprised because I look my friend has a child. She don't talk to me, but I go to her, and I ask her, "do you married?" She is ashamed, but she says, 'yes, I do. I'm married, not yet graduate SMA. ' But I say to her, ' you don't believe for yourself, don't ashamed. You must tunjukin you are as a woman and as a wife. I like to look her because she has child and I think she is very like and nice. Then I go to my house.

30/3/2011

This diary is written after one month studying writing at English Department. The learner began systematic training to her English through various subjects, and is just beginning to write. The student has a little improvement at least in plotting her diary. She is more expressive either.

<3> *S1-3 Diary-3 Subject-1*

Today is Thursday. I must study in campus from morning until afternoon. In campus, I get many assignment. The lecture of speaking, say to us, to make a speech. He says we must go to front of the class one by one and at the afternoon the lecture give assignment again. We must make paper and must can responsible the topic. But we do with homework. Back from campus is the rain is came, and I call my friend to pick up me. But he wasn't, and I must back to house with bus, and I'm forgot to bring my umbrella. I'm very disappointed to my friend decision I don't know why he can't to meet me? I'm disappointed but I think he has a job and he don't leave it and arrive in house n I'm sick and I pray to God. In order, I healthy and can study.

24, 5, 2011

The is doing improvement in grammar but not at functional control yet. She is got in plotting her diary, and more expressive. In one aspect, the learner wants to express her ideas to events she is concerned. But still with some limited capacity.

<4> *Student-1 data-4*

Sounds of my alarm make me wake up. But I 'm very lazy and I sleep again. But I think I must wake up to do my job. Then I wake up even though I am lazy. Then I cook our breakfast. Because I don't go to campus today, my Aunt invite me to follow her go to bank. Arrive in bank, I m very sleepy, and people of the sit in my beside is very funny to look at me because

He looks me sleep and I'm very ashamed etc.

3, 7, 2011

This diary is written at the end of the semester. The learner has got some systematic training to her English through various subjects. The learner has some improvement at least in plotting her diary. She is more expressive either.

The learner's diary is the the data. They are analyzed in interpretive approach common to qualitative linguistic and discourse analysis. It reveals two aspects of students' discourse, the general goodness and the specific characteristics.

3.2 Some observations on student's opening style

Subject-1

Opening-1: The night is beautiful. The night is cold but I don't lazy to write my diary. Even though cold, I always spirit to do my activities. 21/3/2010

Opening-2: Hallo my diary? In this day, in morning, I pray to my Father.After that I take a bath, 30/3/2007

Opening-3: Today is Thursday. I must... 24, 5, 2010

Opening-4: Sounds of my alarm make me wake up.....3, 7, 202010

This opening shows a substantive change of opening from diary1 to diary-4. The learners plot the challenges of the meaning she is to express and put a solution to it despite it is grammatically not perfect.

Subject2

Opening-1: I fed up with Mariana. Her strange attitude is came. I almost closed ears today and run away from me.

Opening-2: God, I hope you stays in my life. please make me be useful person for my family, college and nation.

Opening-3: good afternoon, my Lord...Thanks Father. you have came true my wish today.

This opening introduces direct interest and self interest mostly self reflection.

Subject-3

Opening-1: Be a good moment for can picked up my youngest sister again at kindergarten. what a funny to see them, singing, playing and learning. I became remembered my childhood, or most beautiful moment.

Opening 2: Every body are ever doing the solution every day. If they have problem and they shall discussion with the cooperate together.

This opening shows a recount for the text.

Opening a writing form is not easy. When one writes, opening is always a tough affair, to repeat the same opening or to avoid redundancy. Opening in this student's diary has a variety but not in other diaries. This is important for instructure in teaching writing genre and discourse. The learners' openings offer some hints. Some learners resort to their writing habits as in Subject-2 and others are more following and dealing with the meaning challenges and solution to it as shown by learner-1, learner-3. If the learners realize the discourse meaning they are challenged to express, they may express the essence of opening the discourse.

3.3 Notes on Paragraph Genre

The night is beautiful. The night is cold but I don't lazy to write my diary. Even though cold, I always spirit to do my activities. In this day, I'm very happy. I go to campus at 10' o'clock. After finish to study that, I go to Horas market to buy the need of my shop. Because in my house I sell any tea and cigarettes, etc. Every wednesda7y I shopping to horas market. Back from the market, I must go to field and work in there ... 1/3/2011

From genre point of view, we may put some interpretive points. First the learners puts topics on a single paragraph

The night is beautiful. The night is cold but I don't lazy to write my diary. → TOPIC-1: the night

Even though cold, I always spirit to do my activities. In this day, I'm very happy. I go to campus at 10' o'clock. → topic-2: Campus....

After finish to study that, I go to Horas market to buy the need of my shop. Because in my house I sell any tea and cigarettes, etc. Every wednesda7y I shopping to horas market. Back from the market, I must go to field and work in there ...→topic-3: go to market

By rhetoric, it is true that this paragraph merits poor and little rhetoric quality. They express vividness anyway to certain limit although it is not in instructor's criteria. But it is interesting. This last notion reveals that the paragraph contains topics, representing objects. It also contain ideas, and even sequence of events. From the learner's point of view, it shows the whole things together comprises a metacognitive structure but in learner's term.

3.4 Interpretations

3.4.1 What students learn

| | Data | What is learned | |
|------|---|--|------------------|
| | | Goodness | Comments |
| S1.1 | The night is beautiful. The night is cold but I don't lazy to write my diary. Even though cold, I always spirit to do my activities. In this day, I'm very happy. I go to campus at 10' o'clock. After finish to study that, I go to Horas market to buy the need of my shop. Because in my house I sell any tea and cigarettes, etc. Every wednesday I shopping to horas market. Back from the market, I must go to field and work in there 21/3/2011 | Expressive The NNS learners are motivated to express And thy did in their own terms | In the beginning |

| | | | |
|------|---|---|--|
| S1.2 | Hallo my diary? In this day, in morning, I pray to my Father. After that I take a bath, and go to Campus. In this day I have only one lesson. I don't tired. I go to Ramayana to buy a cloth. I'm very happy because I meet my friend. I surprised because I look my friend has a child. She don't talk to me, but I go to her, and I ask her, "do you married?" She is ashamed, but she says, 'yes, I do. I'm married, not yet graduate SMA. ' But I say to her, ' you don't believe for yourself, don't ashamed. You must to show you are as a woman and as a wife. I like to look her because she has child and I think she is very like and nice. Then I go to my house. 30/3/2011 | Meanwhile after 30 days of free self-expressings learners are getting to control interlanguage meanings but less on forms | Amonth after |
| | S1-3 Today is Thursday. I must... Today is Thursday. I must study in campus from morning until afternoon. In campus, I get many assignment. The lecture of speaking, say to us, to make a speech. He says we must go to front of the class one by one and at the afternoon the lecture give assignment again. We must make paper and must can responsible the topic. But we do with homework. Back from campus is the rain is came, and I call my friends to pick up me. But he wasn't, and I must back to house with bus, and I'm forgot to bring my umbrella. I'm very disappointed to my friend decision I don't know why he can't to meet me? I'm disappointed but I think he has a job and he don't leave it and arrive in house n I'm sick and I pray to God. In order, I healthy and can study. 24, 5, 2011 | After a continuous two months regular writing, they are beginning to use monitor in controlling forms | The stepping stones to Acquisition-Path |
| | Sounds of my alarm make me wake up. But I 'm very lazy and I sleep again. But I think I must wake up to do my job. Then I wake up even though I am lazy. Then I cook our breakfast. Because I don't go to campus today, my Aunt invite me to follow her go to bank. Arrive in bank, I m very sleepy, and people of the sit in my beside is very funny to look at me because He looks me sleep and I'm very ashamed etc. 3, 7, 2011 | Learners are beginning to gain her interlanguage style and more gain on form controls | More self-monitored articulation of English use. |

This data shows that there is a tendency at university level, although more students are gaining more scores, still few communicate pragmatically congruent. Here it is not clear that if learners do not use English or at least do not practice, there is either no increase development or attrition.

3.5 Some Findings

| | Data | What is learned | |
|------|--|---|------------------|
| | | Goodness | Comments |
| S1.1 | The night is beautiful. The night is cold but I don't lazy to write my diary. Even though cold, I always spirit to do my activities. In this day, I'm very happy. I go to campus at 10' o'clock. After finish to study that, I go to Horas market to buy the need of my shop. Because in my house I sell any tea and cigarettes, etc. Every wednesday I shopping to horas market. Back from the market, I must go to field and work in there ... 21/3/2010 | Expressive The NNS learners are motivated to express And thy did in their own terms | In the beginning |

| | | | |
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| S1.2 | Hallo my diary? In this day, in morning, I pray to my Father. After that I take a bath, and go to Campus. In this day I have only one lesson. I don't tired. I go to Ramayana to buy a cloth. I'm very happy because I meet my friend. I surprised because I look my friend has a child. She don't talk to me, but I go to her, and I ask her, "do you married?" She is ashamed, but she says, 'yes, I do. I'm married, not yet graduate SMA. ' But I say to her, ' you don't believe for yourself, don't ashamed. You must tunjukan you are as a woman and as a wife. I like bto look her because she has child and I think she is very like and nice. Then I go to my house. 30/3/2010 | Meanwhile after 30 days of free self-expressings learners are getting to control interlanguage meanings but less on forms | Amonth after |
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| | Sounds of my alarm make me wake up. But I 'm very lazy and I sleep again. But I think I must wake up to do my job. Then I wake up even though I am lazy. Then I cook our breakfast. Because I don't go to campus today, my Aunt invite me to follow her go to bank. Arrive in bank, I m very sleepy, and people of the sit in my beside is very funny to look at me because He looks me sleep and I'm very ashamed etc. 3, 7, 2010. | Learners are beginning to gain her interlanguage style and more gain on form controls | More self-monitored articulation of English use. |

What can be derived from the data is as follows. In the beginning the leraenrs do free writing with respect to their linguistic and logical resources at their command. Consequently, they are expressing in their source language meaning and styles rather than in the target lamnguage they learn. But the more they experience learnings in writing, and in other subjects as well at the English Department, the more they control not only the linguistic aspects of the language, but also the discourse aspects. The more they have access to do the writing, the more monitoring grwoing in themselves following natural order in Krashen's term but at discourse level. Meanwhile, students prefer to express more meaning in exprressing than putting or striving to use the English (you must tunjukan.....). Language mastery at discourse level tend to explain that a leaner masters all components and aspects of language altogether unitary in nature rather than discrete. In this term, discourse contains a number of metqcognitive aspects such as object, idea, principle, and the like. It means that English communicative competence by nature is a unitary construct although they can be explained dimension by dimension. What this study explain is as follows. This reveals that there is a tendency of acquisition-path from **not controlling discourse to staccato controlling..... to fluency.... and accuracy and in the end.... naturalness.** We extrapolate in the following table.

3.6 Discourse Acquisition

| Categories of learnings | Discourse acquisition | Interpretation on level of acquisition |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Master discourse, genre, essay and other literacy form | Expert in writing discourse | Gain naturalness in discourse writing |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Acquire more self-resources, semantic resources, and other resources | Exercise monitor writing for a given communication on comprehensive and logical basis | Accuracy writing at discourse form and genre |
| Growing with more self-resources and semantic resources | Begin to monitor writing for a given communication | Fl writingency |
| Getting more exposure | Begin to control self-resources and semantic into writing discourse | Staccato-level |
| Beginning level | Tendency to transfer self-resources and semantic into writing discourse with less or no control or monitor | Silence-level |

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