

THE IMPACT OF REVISION STRATEGIES ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are (1) to describe the most frequently employed revision strategies used by university students in their research proposals, and (2) to describe the problems they face in revising their research proposals. This considers the revision strategies as part of the research proposals writing by examining how a focus on deletion, substitution, addition and reordering affects the revising processes of written products.

The method used in this study was a qualitative research fundamentally involved an in-depth interpretation of data. Four university students at PBI UST academic year of 2015/2016 involved in this study used different revision strategies: (a) revising by deletion, (b) revising by substitution, (c) revising by addition and (d) revising by reordering. An open ended interview technique was used to get information on problems the participants faced during writing and revising their research proposals. The processes of data analysis technique were (1) establish units of analysis of revision strategies, indicating how these units are similar to and different from each other, (2) match the responses given in interviews to written documents, (3) create a domain analysis, and (4) establish relationships and linkages between the domains (Manion & Morrison, 2000).

The findings show that participants revised their research proposals by using a deletion strategy through which they focus on removing certain parts of the proposals being produced. Another revision strategy is substitution in which participants organize replacements of inappropriate parts of the proposals. The revision strategy called addition is used to refer to certain missing parts of proposals. The simultaneous use of reordering is also of paramount importance to mark the revised source materials in the writing activities. Emergent revision strategies were coined by participants namely revision by consultation, revision by rereading and reanalyzing, and revision by reviewing. Participants faced grammatical errors (grammatical difficulties), lack of vocabulary, incorrect use of dictions and sentences (a word-level and a sentence-level of difficulties) in the process of writing their research proposals.

Keywords: revision strategies, deletion, substitution, addition, reordering

INTRODUCTION

Writing for the university level has always been a difficult area for foreign language students. It is worth stressing that they have troubles when generating ideas and organizing them into acceptable writing. Evidently, to affirm the need for writing

should be followed by the revision strategies focused on adding specific vocabulary, elaborating with showing, combining ideas and sentences. The dynamic act of revising proves exploratory in that it fosters students to deal with in-depth elaborations of ideas, structure or organization, emphasis,

development, style, mechanics and spelling (Bloom, 2011).

The true ignorance over these basic activities leads to writing difficulties, and the writing ability evolving into an interdisciplinary field of academic study with its own disciplinary infrastructure (Matsuda et al., 2003) cannot be fully developed. Products of writing fail to make changes in the analysis accuracy. Misleading accommodation of audience is unavoidable, and incorrect structure or organization of ideas worsens the writers' emphasis on developing acceptable writing standards. As revising is the essence of writing (Bloom, 2011), it is hoped that writing acceptability, accuracy, clarity and content coverage are set to determine the completion of certain writing stages ranging from prewriting, drafting, revising and editing.

In what follows, writing has established links with four kinds of revision operations namely revising by *deletion*, revising by *substitution*, revising by *addition* and revising by *reordering*. These basic revising activities provide four levels of changes in the form of word, phrase, sentence, and theme (the extended statement of one idea) considered important to see what role of revision is played in writing processes (Sommers, 1990).

Although students' works contain invaluable insights, and a comprehensive review of major issues and the relevant findings, consistent efforts to revise them aim to pursue a relatively comprehensive and systematic overview of the writing processes. It can help identify what issues have been discussed, what questions have been posed, what solutions have been devised, and what consequences have come of those solutions and why they are to take into account considerably.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Revision Strategies

The theories at the heart of this project begin with revision strategies commonly called writing processes to make changes in

focus, accommodation of audience, structure or organization, emphasis, development, style, mechanics and spelling in order to bring the written work closer to one's ideal. For most writers, revision strategies become the essence of writing (Bloom, 2011). Thus, revision is understood as a separate stage at the end of the process – a stage that comes after the completion of a first or second draft and one that is temporally distinct from the prewriting and writing stages of the process (Rohman and Wlecke, 1975) in Sommers (1990).

In addition, revision is a way of seeing and then reseeing our words, training our eyes and ears to what good writing sounds like, and learning and practicing strategies that will make a difference in our writing (Heard, 2002). In what follows, revising means reorganizing, style, adjusting to readers, refining ideas (Hyland, 2003). Most feedback-linked revisions seem to result in text improvements (Ferris, 1997) in Hyland (2003). Sommers (1990) identifies four kinds of revision operations namely revising by deletion, revising by substitution, revising by addition and revising by reordering. In addition, four levels of changes in terms of word, phrase, sentence, and theme (the extended statement of one idea) are important to see what role of revision played in writing processes.

Among the various research proposals made to define and study writing revision strategies, the one made by Flower, Hayes, Schriver, Stratman, and Carey (1986) is undeniably the most precise. These authors give a more complex description of the «reviewing» process, previously thought to be composed of only two sub-processes called evaluate and revise (Flower & Hayes, 1981), by breaking down the process into four components and by further specifying the kind of knowledge the revision activity involves and generates. They grant a more important role to the reviser's selection of what knowledge to apply and what strategic choices to make as he/she a) defines the task,

b) evaluates the text and defines the encountered problem, c) selects a strategy involving either going back to the preceding processes or going on to modify the text, and d) modifies the text either by revising it or rewriting it.

From a functional standpoint, the above sub-processes of revision are organized hierarchically. Each of the four steps required to make a correction is necessarily subordinate to the preceding one. The reviser can nevertheless decide not to go on to the next step, and restart the sequence at any one of the higher-order sub-processes. This process-sequencing flexibility accounts for the functional variants so fully described by Flower et al. (1986).

In order to revise, writers must have, and if not build, a representation of what they consider to be involved in evaluating and improving a text. They must plan what they are going to do by specifying:

- The goals to be reached (for instance, revise to make the text clearer).
- The characteristics of the text to be examined (for instance, revise the local or global aspects of the text).
- The means that can be used to reach the defined goals (for instance, correct the text several times in succession).

Flower et al. (1986) attribute a clearly meta-cognitive role to the notion of task definition.

Indeed, this definition serves as the control manager for the sequencing of complex sub-processes by setting the goals, constraints, and criteria required to guide the entire revising activity. These authors make an inventory of the various definitions of the task that revisers of differing degrees of expertise can verbalize, and thus ascertain that experts have more meta-knowledge, and knowledge likely to promote the setting of objectives like check for correct meaning, text length, and text type, or check the number, density, and complexity of the problems and

errors in the to-be improved text, etc. The scope of an experts' processing unit is the entire text, whereas that of novices is the sentence at this point.

Writing competence

Definitions of writing competence may focus on particular features of writing. Smith et al. (1980) define writing competence as an ability to deal with structural or grammatical elements. In other views, acceptable mechanics are a minimum, but emphasis is given, in addition, to the quality of thought or to the logic and clarity of communication.

Krashen (1982, 2003a) adds that writing competence, broadly defined, refers to knowledge of the language of writing, the grammar, vocabulary, and discourse style writers use. Biber (1986) points out that writing competence is related to abilities to apply different writing styles that have different linguistic characteristics, but there is also considerable overlap among styles. Narrative style has, for example, some, but not all of the characteristics of formal, expository writing.

There is no evidence that writing contributes to writing competence; those who write more do not write better and increasing writing does not result in better writing (Krashen, 1984, 1994). Writing, however, makes a different kind of contribution. Writing can make you smarter. When we write something down on the page, we make a representation of our thoughts, of our "cognitive structures." Once on the page, the brain finds it irresistible to come up with a better version of our cognitive structures. Improving our cognitive structures is real learning (using "learning" in the general sense, not as contrasted with "acquisition"). Writing is not the only way of doing this, of course, but it is a very effective way.

The insight that writing makes you smarter is shared by many observers. Elbow (1975), for example, concluded that meaning is not what you start out with in writing, but what you end up with. Boice (1994) noted

that inspiration is the result of writing, not the cause. In addition, there is empirical evidence supporting this assertion, experiments showing that writing can aid in thinking and problem-solving (Krashen, 2003) as well as positive correlations between eminence and amount written among professional writers and thinkers (Simonton, 1984).

Productive writers engage in "regular daily writing" rather than "binge writing"; instead of waiting until they have large blocks of free time, they write a modest amount each day, a strategy demonstrated to produce more writing as well as more new ideas (Boice, 1994). Also, good writers understand the importance of short breaks that encourage "incubation," new ideas and solutions to problems that emerge when writers leave their writing and give their minds a rest (Krashen, 2001).

OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The objectives of this study are:

1. To describe the most frequently employed revision strategies used by university students in their research proposals.
2. To describe the problems they face in revising their research proposals.

This study is important for students to develop their revision strategies along with the problems in the process of writing their research proposals consisting of revising by *deletion*, revising by *substitution*, revising by *addition* and revising by *reordering*. These basic revising activities provide four levels of changes in the form of word, phrase, sentence, and theme (the extended statement of one idea) considered important to see what role of revision is played in writing processes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

Researchers selected four students out of ten who were writing their research proposal at Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa Yogyakarta Academic Year of 2015/2016.

The selection of the participants was done after reviewing their research proposals. All four students' research proposals were selected using purposive sampling that sufficiently provided maximum insight and understanding and relevant information about the topics (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002).

Data Collection Technique

This study employed a qualitative research along with *documents* and *interviews* as the data collection methods. Qualitative researchers used written documents to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study. Interview is also one of the most widely used methods for obtaining qualitative data. Interviews are used to gather data on subjects' opinions, beliefs, and feelings about the situation in their own words (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002).

Data Analysis Technique

The first thing to do in analyzing data involves reducing and organizing through a process called documents and interviews *coding* (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Huberman & Miles, 1994). This involves organizing, accounting for, and explaining the data; in short, making sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Manion & Morrison, 2000).

For the sake of clarity, the processes of data analysis technique can be portrayed in a sequence of the following steps:

Step 1: Establish units of analysis of the data, indicating how these units are similar to and

different from each other

Step 2: Match the responses given in interviews to written documents

Step 3: Create a domain analysis

Step 4: Establish relationships and linkages between the domains (Manion & Morrison, 2000).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Revision Strategies

The research findings are organized into four major sections. The first section examines how participants revised their research proposals using a *deletion* strategy through which they focus on removing certain parts of the proposals being produced. The second section discusses issues of *substitution* – how participants organize replacements of inappropriate parts of the proposals specifically for the ways this strategy supports the processing of information across the proposals. In the third section, the researchers consider the role of *addition* to certain missing parts of proposals to mark the revised source materials in the writing activities of the participants and the ways it was used to support thinking activities, and restructuring of information.

A final section then discusses the simultaneous use of *reordering* of certain parts in the proposals that need revised versions of the same document and the ways in which the participants deliberately developed the respective characteristics of *reordering* strategy. These basic revising activities lead to four levels of changes in the form of word, phrase, sentence, and theme (the extended statement of one idea) considered important to see what role of revision is played in writing processes (Sommers, 1990).

Although most of the paragraphs were short and not sufficiently developed, the research proposals writing showed that the major focus was on generating as many ideas as possible. One reason is that the production of a relatively long paper was realistic, but its quality should be improved. For example, longer sentences did not contain linking verbs or phrases (e.g. and, moreover, in fact, although, due to, because, because of, etc.), a list of items, most of which are qualified (i.e. by enumerating the characteristics), and one or more semicolon or colon, or commas. This is typical of a writer who does not want to waste time organizing thoughts in a way that will be clearer to the readers.

Other major characteristics are that the research proposals reflect a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar and content. Therefore, the researchers started to analyze the revisions by reading the original version of the paragraph and compared it with the revised version written previously. The focus of analysis was revision strategies, word order, breaking up long sentences, structuring paragraphs and sentences, accuracy and clarity, removing redundancy, avoiding ambiguity and vagueness.

In sum, proposal writers were not skillful in handling grammatical errors in their writing. In terms of mechanics, they failed to catch spelling errors. For instance, they failed to notice that they had written “form” instead of “from”. They should work on grammar, but the biggest concern was the content as well. Their major effort was made to improve the existing paragraphs by rephrasing sentences or by providing some additional explanations including the improvement in terms of clarity and coherence, if not in grammatical accuracy.

The first participant repeated the same point indicating that she was not fully in control of the materials. It gives the impression that she expanded and explained the language by specifying similar terms resulting in repetition and redundancy, as described below.

Original Version (OV) of Paragraph 1

English is a very important in our daily life. It is a communication tool for people can use it to communicate to each other, obtain certain information or express their idea or feeling. One of the languages used to communicate in this world is English.

As indicated by *Paragraph 1*, the same point is repeated considerably. The phrases *a communication tool*, *to communicate* and the word *English* are used unnecessarily. Though a research proposal attempts to be precise, formal, impersonal and objective, this does not mean that pronouns *our* and *their* are never used, but in general, the focus is on

presenting information as clearly and accurately as possible. By using the revision strategy called *revising by deletion*, the article *a*, the pronouns *our*, *it* and *their*, prepositions *for*, *in* and *to*, the adverb *daily*, the demonstrative pronoun *this*, the nouns *world*, *life*, *communication* and *English*, the adjective *certain*, the verb *is*, *obtain*, *communicate*, coordinating conjunction *and*, *or*, modal auxiliary *can*, and the verb *use* should be removed from the paragraph.

Revised Version (RV) of Paragraph 1

English is very important in the world. It is a tool for people to communicate with each other in delivering information and expressing ideas or feelings. Thus, English is one of the languages used in the global communication.

The revision strategy used in *Paragraph 1* is revising by *deletion* and revising by *substitution* resulting in the clarity and accuracy of the words usage. More importantly, the number of words used decreases from 45 words (original paragraph) to 38 words (revised one). The detailed revision strategies can be seen in the following table.

Table 1: Revision Strategies of Participant 1

No	Strategies	Number of Occurrences	Levels of Changes
1	Deletion	<i>a, our, it, their, for, in, to, world, communication, English, is, communicate, and, or, can, use, obtain, certain, life, daily</i> (20)	Word
2	Substitution	<i>thus, the, global, communication, for, with</i> (6)	Word
3	Addition	<i>ideas, feelings, in, delivering, expressing, the world</i> (6)	Word, phrase
4	Reordering	One of the languages used to communicate in this world is English. (<i>English is one of the languages used in the global communication.</i>) (1)	Sentence

The second participant wrote the original version (ov) of a paragraph in a way that was not fully appropriate because of repetition and redundancy of phrases, and misplaced word orders. The phrase *curriculum 2013* appears four times giving rise to the repetition and redundancy of

words. The use of a phrase *some schools* is imprecise because the determiner *some* refers to places that are unknown or not identified specifically. Moreover, the basic word order in the phrase *curriculum 2013* is incorrect, so the correct word order should be the *2013 curriculum*, as illustrated in the following paragraph.

Original Version (OV) of Paragraph 2

In the academic year of 2015/2016, some schools use curriculum 2013 to change school-based curriculum (KTSP). Curriculum 2013 is the newest curriculum of national education in Indonesia. SMA N 2 Bantul also applied 2013 curriculum to be a school learning guideline. Curriculum 2013 focuses on student' building character, where students are required to be more active and creative in learning; it makes the students become more independent in the study without following the teachers' instruction frequently.

Paragraph 2 shows that the repetition of disordered phrase *curriculum 2013* and the words *learning* and *study* affects the repeated meaning. If the participant makes mistakes in every other word, for example, the misplaced phrase *building character*, there is likely to be serious confusion about meaning, so that it is hard to understand the paragraph fairly. As the meaning component in writing causes difficulty and confusion, the researchers provide the revised version (rv) of the paragraph's original version (ov) as follows.

Revised Version (RV) of Paragraph 2

The 2013 curriculum is used to replace the school-based curriculum (KTSP). In the the academic year 2015/2016, SMA N 2 Bantul applied the 2013 curriculum to be a school learning guideline that focuses on students' character building. In this way, students are required to be active and creative in learning, so they become more independent without following the teachers' instructions frequently.

The revision strategy used in *Paragraph 2* is revising by *deletion* and revising by *substitution* and revising by *reordering* resulting in the clarity and accuracy of word meanings. As a result, breaking up a long sentence is unavoidable because the shorter the sentence, the greater the chance it will be understood.

The phrase *some schools* is deleted because the use of determiner *some* refers to unknown or unidentified places. The words *also, where, more, it, makes, the, students, study,* and *in* are removed as well because they are unnecessary. The words *that, so,* and *they* are substitutions that make the meaning clearer. The phrase *curriculum 2013* is reordered correctly, so it becomes the *2013 curriculum*. The adverbial phrase *in the academic year 2015/2016* is also technically reordered. More importantly, the number of words used decreases from 76 words (original paragraph) to 60 words (revised one). The detailed revision strategies can be seen in the following table.

Table 2: Revision Strategies of Participant 2

No	Strategies	Number of Occurrences	Levels of Changes
1	Deletion	<i>some schools, also, where, more, it, makes, the, students, in the study</i> (9)	Phrase, word
2	Substitution	<i>that, so, they</i> (3)	Word
3	Addition		
4	Reordering	In the academic year of 2015/2016, some schools use curriculum 2013 to change school-based curriculum (KTSP). (In the the academic year 2015/2016, SMA N 2 Bantul applied the 2013 curriculum to be a school learning guideline that focuses on students' character building.) Curriculum 2013 (The 2013 curriculum) (2)	Sentence, phrase

Students' Problems in Applying Revision Strategies

Interview results show discrete problems that concern on how grammatical errors (grammatical difficulties), lack of vocabulary, incorrect use of dictions and sentences (a word-level and a sentence-level of difficulties) influence the implementation of revision strategies. The message behind sentences specifically constructed to be part

of "a process-sequencing flexibility" (Flower et al., 1986) cannot be delivered to the audiences as clearly as possible. As a result, modes of misleading messages or losses of the content specificities and less-directed forms of revision strategies emerge in the thesis proposal writing.

The first domain is grammatical errors that become a main source of communication associated with how a measure of background knowledge of grammatical competence comes into play considerably. This means that every grammatical error participants made during writing their research proposals provides direct evidence about content knowledge primarily focusing on an in-depth comprehension and a mastery of topics under discussion.

The second domain on which the proposal features may vary is that, as one of the assessment components of the proposal writing, a lack of vocabulary mastery is closely related to a number of incorrect words used to mark a less elaborate writing activity while exploring a variety of incorrect words choices as required. In fact, vocabulary advancement has a strong impact on the participants' ability to construct sentences correctly as a process of learning to use words correctly but accurately. In short, vocabulary-related problems have long echoed a mainstream of writing mistakes that, on a regular basis of learning, resulting in a less-explorative writing and a distinctive feature of low-level competence. This can be seen as a phenomenon in the context of EFL writing, whereas it highlights a less recursive writing activity in an extremely inappropriate way. A key role of research proposal writers is to carry out more writing practices by prompting a so-called vocabulary-rich approach, or by providing media of technology through which knowledge transformations of writing are elaborated further.

To a certain extent, incorrect use of dictions essentially indicates participants' low competence with respect to how less-effective vocabulary prompts might lead to a blurred

transfer of vocabulary knowledge. To this point, rearrangement of words can generally be viewed from two perspectives. First, the process by which participants put words in correctly generated orders is referred to as a word-level arrangement that mainly tends to influence the word meanings. Second, a word-level rearrangement is easily identifiable in a way that participants make sense of their writing by consulting dictionaries to spot contexts of word uses and meanings alike, asking their friends and thesis advisors to find out another solution to problems in a given situation.

The negotiation of meaning in constructing correct sentences provides opportunities for participants to track how grammatical errors build and sustain writing competence. The revision strategies are not novel for participants to generate assumptions. In some contexts, certain parts in a research proposal are deleted because they are incorrect and unneeded. In this basic principle lies a conviction that writing brings together words, phrases and sentences, along with different meanings. Whenever they are out of contexts, substitution as one of the revision strategies is introduced to anticipate biased meanings and, most of all, an addition to missing parts of a thesis proposal effectively works as it is partially subject to necessary changes. Some other emergent revision strategies were coined by participants namely *revision by consultation* (by Participant A), *revision by rereading and reanalyzing*, *revision by reviewing* (Participant C). These revision strategies require experts' judgments, patience, technical skills and critical thinking.

Likewise, reordering strategy integrates theoretical and practical domains of revising. Reordering, broadly defined, refers to a simultaneous change of order in which something is arranged (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010). Although it is uncommon to view a research result merely from representative participants, reordering has dominantly been used in certain parts of

the thesis proposals, as a focus to deliberately rearrange components closely connected to revisions issues of words, phrases, and sentences.

FUTURE PLANNING STAGES

1. Review the research proposal parts that bring benefits to rewriting stages in order to design a final version ready to be published in the *International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies* (IJ-ELTS).
2. Continue analyzing the major focus of revision strategies to get more points of interpretations.
3. Map out a dual linkage between revision strategies and problems faced by the thesis proposal writers, so the researchers need more time to plan and do this part of the research project.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The revision strategies used by thesis proposal writers have pointed out that less skilled writers tend to be prematurely distracted by concerns about grammar and mechanics. Therefore, it has been believed that having less skilled the research proposal writers focus on grammatical correctness during revision would only intensify their preoccupation with correctness and make them less attentive to important aspects of writing and neglect more global problems in content and rhetoric. The composition researchers have also begun to take this approach, taking the position that the main focus on any writing class should be on developing fluency, rather than accuracy, and that in the meantime, grammar will take care of itself.

The research results show that the notion focusing on correctness would negatively affect participants' writing and revising processes. The researchers' direction to focus on formal correctness does not have any influence on their revision processes. The written products, as well as the revising

processes of the different instruction circumstances—one that does not specify areas to focus on, and the other that do—show no remarkable differences. In that case, participants choose to do what they consider the most needed in revision, and for all of them, despite task-instruction differences, it means attending to vocabulary and the content.

As evidenced, interview results examine problems concerning how grammatical errors influence the level of communication in expressing ideas. To implement revision strategies fully, one aspect called lack of vocabulary is worth considering as it proves to be essential in using words and phrases correctly. Most of the thesis proposal writers focus on correct use of dictions in sentences that relate to specific meanings in context. It means that a meaning-based revision is more important than that of a form-based one. In the former, grammatical errors are judged critically to know the semantic aspect of revisions focusing on the accuracy and clarity of meanings. In the latter, revision strategies related to the structures of sentences directly pave the way to exploring language components rather than the content knowledge.

There are three suggestions that might be addressed in this section. First, other researchers interested in studying revision strategies are required to put more emphasis on other texts outside the academic field of thesis proposal papers. Second, university students should be aware of doing a research on revision strategies with respect to seminar papers. Third, other researchers can use the mixed methods in combining participants' perspectives and perceptions in order to elicit more reliable research results.

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