Desire to Write Poetry: Gender Differences in Bangladeshi Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure Bangladeshi undergraduate male and female students' willingness to write poetry in English. Fifty (N=50) Bangladeshi undergraduate students at a private university of Bangladesh completed an online survey. Out of 50 students, 31 students were male and 19 students were female. During the survey, participants were asked to mention about their experiences and willingness to write poetry in English. The university is located at Dhaka which is the capital of Bangladesh. Statistical measured revealed significant difference between males and females in their desire to write poetry in English. This study has shown that male undergraduate students have higher desire to write poetry in English than female undergraduate students in Bangladesh. However, this result may not be generalized due to small sample.

Key words: Writing poetry, gender differences, Bangladeshi undergraduate students

Introduction

English is taught from grade one to twelve as a compulsory subject in Bangladesh, though English language teaching in Bangladesh has been changing in recent years. The Ministry

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of Education of Bangladesh has introduced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) from grade six to grade twelve for teaching English with the goal of improving learners' communicative competence. However, many English teachers of Bangladesh still use the traditional Grammar-Translation Method and mainly those teachers are reluctant to teach poetry writing in their classes (Roy, 2016a). Thus, students in Bangladesh do not develop the competency to write poems in English. This study tries to investigate the desire to write poetry by Bangladeshi undergraduate students based on their gender. However, research in large scale is required to claim generable result in the context of Bangladesh.

Review of Literature

Many English teachers think that it is difficult to teach how to write poetry particularly in an L2 writing class (Hanauer, 2012). However, teaching how to write poetry in English in a L2 writing class can be effective and useful in a multilevel class even in a multicultural group (Hanauer, 2003, 2014; Hawkins & Certo, 2014; Mittal, 2016). It is already argued that second language learners can express their feelings, emotions, and experiences through poetry beautifully (Hanauer, 2015). Iida (2012a) has claimed that teaching how to write poetry increases L2 students' writing skills. However, Hanuer and Liao (2016) have touched upon the fact that some L2 students possess negative attitude towards poetry writing. Melin (2010) has stated that language and culture are important factors while teaching poetry writing. An analogous remark is made by Iida (2012b) that L2 students' attitude vary from one another depending on several factors. These indicate that L2 students' linguistic, educational and cultural background have impact on their willingness to write poetry. It can be logically inferred that L2 students who have had more exposure to poetry might have more desire to write poetry. However, more empirical

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studies are needed to identify what factors influence L2 students' desire to write poetry. Therefore, measuring the correlation between L2 students' linguistic, educational, cultural background and their desire to write poetry bears a great significance.

This study aimed to investigate the impact of linguistic, educational, and cultural background on L2 students' desire to write poetry. The outcomes of this study will be used to develop teachers' awareness about the students' background for giving better instructions for teaching poetry writing. The study was initially directed by the question: "In what way do L2 students' linguistic, educational, and cultural background influence their desire to write poetry?" However, for this report, only the issue of gender is focused.

Methodology

Research Question and Hypotheses:

In what way L2 students' gender influence their desire to write poetry?

1. Significant difference will appear between male and female undergraduate students.

    Null: No difference will appear between male and female undergraduate students.

Instrument

The survey included items modelled after Johnson's (2011) instrument. After validation of the instrument for content and construct validity, the resulting instrument included 29 items of which there were multiple choice questions, a 5 point Likert Scale and few demographic questions. The multiple-choice questions were used to know about students' frequency of reading and writing poetry in L1 and in L2, and their years of having poetry instruction in their previous education. The Likert Scale was used to measure their perception of importance of poetry and their willingness to write poetry in L1 and L2. In general, I included questions about

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students' linguistic background, educational background, cultural background experiences, and their willingness to write poetry in L1 and L2. The main six dependent variables were formulated in statements: 1. I am confident that I can write poetry in my first language (mother tongue); 2. I am confident that I can write poetry in my second language (foreign language); 3. I am interested in writing poetry in my first language (mother tongue); 4. I am interested in writing poetry in my second language (foreign language); 5. I would like to learn to write poetry in my first language; 6. I would like to learn to write poetry in my second language (foreign language). The Likert Scale was set from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The survey was workshopped with five of my PhD classmates as well as with the experts. The reliability of the internal consistency of the statements was evaluated through SPSS program and it was found to be (.088) alpha Cronbach, which indicated that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

Participants

Fifty (N=50) participants completed this online survey. All the participants are current undergraduate students of a private university in Bangladesh. Everyone's first language is "Bangla" which is the national language of Bangladesh and everyone's second language is English. Each of the participants has already completed twelve years' education prior to coming to study in the university. Out of 50 participants, 31 participants were male and 19 participants were female.
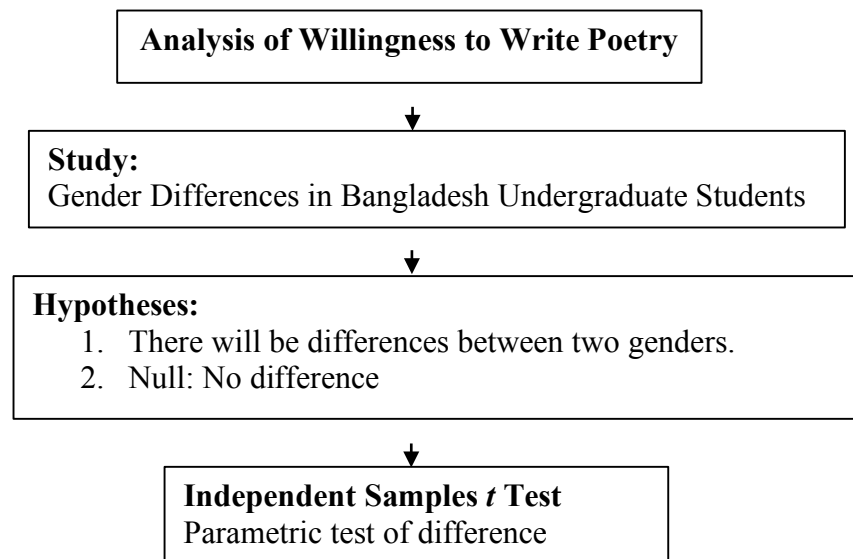
Data Collection Procedure

I contacted the Vice Chancellor of a private university of Bangladesh requesting him to allow me to have the undergraduate students of the institution as my research subjects. Upon receiving his site approval, I filled out the IRB protocol and got the IRB approval. After getting IRB approval, I sent the anonymous link of my Qualtrics survey to him along with the invitation

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email for the students and he disseminated the online survey to all the undergraduate students of the institution.

Data Analysis

The first step I did in analyzing the obtained data was conducting a descriptive analysis of the key 11 variables to obtain an overview of the normality of data distribution. After finding that all data were normally distributed, I conducted an Independent Samples t Test to find out the influence of gender on the willingness to write poetry.

Analysis of Willingness to Write Poetry

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Study:
Gender Differences in Bangladesh Undergraduate Students

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Hypotheses:
1. There will be differences between two genders.
2. Null: No difference

↓

Independent Samples t Test
Parametric test of difference

Results

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and skewness of eleven key variables. The desire to write poetry in L1 and L2 vary in means and SDs given differences in scale, but all are approximately normally distributed. The confidence to write poetry in L1 and L2 have the same means which is 2.58 on 1-5 rating scales. Desire to write poetry in L2 has higher means (M=2.79) than desire to write poetry in L1 (M=2.57) indicating an interesting fact that students have higher level of desire to write poetry in L2 than in L.

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Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and skewness for Key Variables

Variables	M	SD	Skewness
Years of poetry instruction	3.53	1.89	.27
Frequency of reading poetry in L1	4.77	1.76	-.78
Frequency of reading poetry in L2	2.85	1.19	.23
Frequency of writing poetry in L1	2.21	1.26	.66
Frequency of writing poetry in L2	2.08	1.74	.66
Confidence in writing poetry in L1	2.58	1.15	.49
Confidence in writing poetry in L2	2.58	1.21	.32
Desire to write poetry in L1	2.57	1.06	.36
Desire to write poetry in L2	2.79	1.33	.24
Interest to learn to write poetry in L1	2.42	1.02	.62
Interest to learn to write poetry in L2	2.36	1.09	.88

Table 1

Table 2 shows that males were different from females on "Confidence in writing poetry in L2" (p=.009), which was statistically significant. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average confidence level in writing poetry in L2 for female students (M=1.95) is significantly lower than the level of confidence (M=2.81) for males. The difference between the means is 0.86 on a 5-point Likert Scale.

Again, Table 2 shows that males were different from females on "Interested to write poetry in L2" (p=.012), which was statistically significant. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average interest to write poetry in L2 for female students (M=2.11) is significantly lower than the average interest (M=3.03) for males. The difference between the means is 0.92 on 5-point Likert Scale.

Furthermore, Table 2 shows that males were different from females on "Interested to learn to write poetry in L2" (p=.025), which was statistically significant. Inspection of the two group means indicates that the average interest to learn to write poetry in L2 for female students (M=1.89) is significantly lower than the average interest (M=2.58) for males. The difference between the means is 0.69 on 5-point Likert Scale.

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Table 2
Comparison of Male and Female Undergraduate Students on the confidence, and desire to write poetry (n= 31 males and 19 females)

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Confidence write poetry L2					
Males	2.81	1.16	2.70	48	.009
Females	1.95	0.91			
Desire write poetry L2					
Males	3.03	1.27	2.62	48	.012
Females	2.11	1.10			
Interest learn write poetry L2					
Males	2.58	1.08	2.32	48	.025
Females	1.89	0.87			

Table 2

Discussion

The result of this study confirms the remark of Iida (2012b) that L2 students' attitude towards poetry vary from one another depending on several factors. In general, students in Bangladesh need to improve their writing skills in English (Roy, 2016b). Therefore, teaching how to write poetry can play an effective role in developing students' writing skills (Mittal 2016). However, first, English teachers should be trained to appreciate the beauty of second language poetry writing (Hanauer 2011).

For the Context of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a developing country where English is second language. Based on the result of this study, it can be said that male undergraduate students in Bangladesh have higher level of confidence, desire and interest to learn to write poetry in English. The reasons may be attributed to the fact that in Bangladesh male students get more opportunities of learning English than female students in the existing socio-economic set up. In general, the desire to write poetry is not considerably high among the students of Bangladesh. This may be relevant to mention that the testing system of Bangladesh is not conducive to learning how to write poetry. Because, the

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testing system indirectly compels the students to memorize some selected essays and produce those in the examinations. Many students in Bangladesh are afraid of writing in English and many English teachers are not trained to how to teach writing in a systematic and appropriate way. Most of the teachers of Bangladesh view writing as a product and not as a process (Roy 2016b). Lack of teachers' training cab be attributed for this sort of attitudes of the teachers in Bangladesh (Roy, 2016b). Therefore, English teachers of Bangladesh need proper training so that they can teach how to write poetry in the class.

Conclusion

According to Hanauer (2011), "The L2 writing classroom is a unique opportunity to facilitate a process of self-discovery at a time in which students are situated in the uncertainty of culture and language" (p. 22). English teachers in Bangladesh are not familiar with the pedagogy of creative writing by using poetry. Even, many English teachers do not teach the poems which are included in the English text books from grade six to twelve (Roy, 2016a). If the English teachers of Bangladesh are given effective training on how to teach poetry, it can be expected that there will be significant changes in students' level of desire to write poetry in English.

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