

L2 Japanese Writing Development Through Repeating a Weekly “15-Minute Writing Task”

第二言語としての日本語ライティング能力の発達 一週一度の「15分ライティングタスク」を通して

The current study partially replicates Nitta and Baba’s (2014) study, adding additional linguistic measurements (i.e., grammatical accuracy), to further understand L2 writing development. Nitta and Baba’s longitudinal study found that EFL learners significantly increased their syntactic complexity, but not fluency, through a repeated timed writing task. Nitta and Baba’s investigation endorsed the effectiveness of task repetition to facilitate L2 writing development; nevertheless, no longitudinal studies to date have investigated the effects of task repetition specifically on L2 writing skills in Japanese.

Thus, a weekly “15-Minute Writing Task” was used to find out whether Japanese-as-a-foreign-language (JFL) learners significantly improved their syntactic complexity, grammatical accuracy, and fluency in L2 writing performance over one academic semester (16 weeks). The writing task topics were considered in terms of the Cognition Hypothesis (Robinson, 2001), which states that different cognitive demands of tasks will lead to different L2 output. Regarding this point, the current study explored whether there were any significant differences between two task types: descriptive and argumentative essays. Specifically, 29 intermediate-level JFL learners at an American university were required to write seven descriptive and seven argumentative essays during the study period. For the pre/posttest analysis, the first and the last essays ($n=116$) were used.

Regarding the descriptive essays, despite improvements in syntactic complexity and fluency, no significant findings were identified for accuracy. In contrast, for the argumentative essays, the findings revealed that the learners demonstrated significant positive development of overall complexity, complexity by subordination, accuracy, and fluency. Furthermore, comparisons of the effect sizes (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014) provided sufficient evidence to say that there are unique developmental differences in L2 writing, depending on the essay types.

This study shows the importance of considering the complexity of writing tasks in order to assess L2 writing development appropriately. Therefore, based on the empirical findings, the pedagogical implications will be discussed. The learners’ composition samples and the writing task topics used in this study will be shown to illustrate the pedagogical implications.