

Upper-Intermediate-Level ESL Students' Summarizing in English

OKSANA VOROBEL
DEOKSOON KIM

University of South Florida

This qualitative instrumental case study explores various factors that might influence upper-intermediate-level English as a second language (ESL) students' summarizing from a socio-cultural perspective. The study was conducted in a formal classroom setting, during a reading and writing class in the English Language Institute at a university in the southeastern United States. Seven international ESL students provided information through questionnaires and interviews. Additional data were gathered through classroom observation. The findings of the study provide evidence that such personal factors as culturally influenced thinking patterns, content knowledge, motivation and attitude, and native language and second language literacy skills, as well as textual factors, writing style, vocabulary, and grammar, have an effect on ESL students' summarizing.

doi: 10.5054/tj.2011.259958

Summarizing is an essential component of education (Seidlhofer, 1995). It is a complex task involving a number of skills that are necessary in academic reading and writing. Students need to comprehend, select, infer, recall, integrate, paraphrase, evaluate, and write concisely and coherently. Learning how to summarize helps English as a second language (ESL) students determine the main idea of a reading, prepares them to integrate information into their writing, and enhances their critical thinking (Mateos, Martin, Villalon, & Luna, 2007).

Due to its importance, summarizing has received some researchers' attention, generally in the area of reading in the first

language (L1; Kazantseva, 2010). In the area of second language (L2) and foreign language acquisition, most studies have investigated separate skills such as paraphrasing (Keck, 2006), focused on the influence of one factor such as lexical proficiency (Baba, 2009), and researched summary writing process (Yang & Shi, 2003). However, none of the studies, to our knowledge, have explored factors that may influence summarizing. Thus, there is a need for a holistic explorative qualitative study to fill this gap in the research literature.

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing belongs to the list of strategies that students use extensively in their classes (Keene, 2007). The skillful use and application of appropriate strategies, including summarizing while reading and writing, often determines students' achievements (Oxford, 2003). Therefore, reading strategies should be taught in ESL classes (Fitzgerald, 1995).

Most of the early studies on summarizing were done in the field of L1 reading (Kazantseva, 2010). Johnson (cited in Hare, 1992) states that summarizing reveals the microstructure of the text, which has raised a discussion among researchers as to when summarizing happens: during or after reading. If it occurs during reading, then it is a reading task (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2002). In contrast, if it happens after reading, it is a writing activity (Hare, 1992). The perspective that we support in this study is that summarizing is a hybrid of reading and writing (Mateos et al., 2007). In addition, we view summarizing as a set of cognitive processes that are mediated and first regulated by others and then progress into self-regulation through interaction (Ellis, 2008). This leads us to investigate summarizing in the classroom context.

The complex nature of summarizing has inspired many researchers to look at separate skills that constitute this task. For example, many researchers have focused on paraphrasing and failure to do it, which may result in plagiarism (Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004; Keck, 2006). Friend (2001), on the other hand, investigated the importance of explicit training in summary writing. Finally, Kirkland and Saunders (1991) suggest that a student must be familiar with the academic conventions, the

discourse community, the expectations of a teacher, and the implicit and explicit purpose of the task. We see our study as a crucial link that will fill the gap in the research literature on summarizing and provide teachers and researchers with more information on what may hinder or help ESL students in summarizing in L2.

FACTORS THAT MIGHT AFFECT SUMMARIZING

While summarizing, students may be challenged by the complexity of the task as well as other factors. In order to provide a complete overview of research on such factors, we combine our review of studies on summarizing in L2 with studies in L1 because of the dearth of the former. In addition, we use Hare's (1992) classification of the factors involved in summarizing and supplement it with other researchers' findings (e.g., Baba, 2009; Keck, 2006). According to this classification, all variables may be divided into three categories: person, text, and task variables. Person variables include views of the task, skill levels, and level of content knowledge; text variables include length, genre, and complexity; task variables include access, purpose, and length restrictions. Because our study is qualitative, we use the term *factors* instead of Hare's term *variables*. In this article, we focus on person and text factors, excluding length, because task factors are seamlessly embedded into such a discussion.

PERSON FACTORS

Views of the Task

According to Hare (1992), ESL students may perceive summarizing in different ways than expected and could often benefit from guidance. For example, they may be unaware of the need to paraphrase while summarizing. Depending on how they perceive the task through the context of their previous writing experiences, university ESL students will either struggle while summarizing or cope with the assignment confidently (Yang & Shi, 2003). In a review of the research on task vision, Hare showed that students who were native speakers had different attitudes toward the task according to its requirements and length.

Skill Levels

Skills such as finding main and supporting ideas, inferring, analyzing, synthesizing, paraphrasing, and evaluating are essential components of summarizing (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991). The difference between successful and unsuccessful students in terms of summarizing lies in the ability to find important information and distill it (Keene, 2007). In Kirkland and Saunders's study, the ability to find important information was significantly related to the ability to comprehend the reading. Relatedly, they emphasize the importance of reading and writing skills training for L2 students.

Level of Content Knowledge

Level of content knowledge may also affect summarizing in L2 (Hare, 1992). Afflerbach (1990) investigated the effect of prior knowledge on students' main-idea construction strategies. Texts used in the study did not have an explicitly stated main idea. As a result, students who had some prior knowledge of the content of the text constructed the main idea automatically. In contrast, those who lacked content knowledge used draft-and-revision and topic-comment strategies. Hence, this person factor may have an influence on ESL students' summarizing.

TEXT FACTORS

Genre

Native-English-speaking students are usually familiar with various genres required at the university level, such as reaction papers, literature review papers, proposals, and so on. In contrast, international students may come to the United States with limited knowledge about genres in an L2 academic community (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005), which introduces another concern and difficulty that ESL students may face while summarizing. Ferris and Hedgcock emphasize that teachers should familiarize ESL students with academic genre conventions such as structural organization, lexical choice, and stylistic features to help them become members of the academic community.

Complexity of the Text

Complexity of the text consists of vocabulary, sentence structure, abstractness, familiarity of ideas, and the quality of organization (Hidi & Anderson, 1986). Language proficiency, vocabulary, and sentence structure in particular were found to have a major influence on L2 summarizing (Baba, 2009; Keck, 2006). Kirkland and Saunders (1991) modified this list, adding complexity of concepts and number or kind of interrelationships. In their view, these components of complexity of text cause enormous cognitive load and can result in ESL students' failure to summarize well.

Hence, summarizing can be defined as a compound process involving a set of skills that may be influenced by person, text, and task factors (Hare, 1992). The research findings just reviewed provide the foundation for our exploratory qualitative case study of students' perceptions and the factors that influence ESL students' summarizing from a sociocultural perspective. From such a perspective, context is an inseparable part of any activity with language as a meditational tool (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Thus, it is vitally important to study the process of L2 summarizing through the lens of sociocultural theory—exploring contextual factors that either help ESL students summarize or become obstacles for them.

Our professional interests became piqued on this topic as we have observed how ESL students are challenged by writing summaries in an academic L2 setting. Despite the practical need to teach summarizing, to our knowledge no research studies have explored factors that specifically influence upper-intermediate-level ESL students' summarizing from a sociocultural perspective. This study focuses on various factors that may influence summarizing in positive as well as negative ways. Our qualitative inquiry is undergirded by the following research question: What are upper-intermediate-level ESL students' perspectives on the factors that influence summarizing?

METHOD

We conducted the study in fall 2008. One of the coresearchers was an instructor and observer of this course for that semester (September–December 2008). The awareness of our positionality (Moser, 2008) as English language learners (ELLs) in the past helped

us make a clear connection between our own experiences of L2 writing and those of the participants.

After considering the setting, the sampling of the participants, and the study goals, the design of our study developed into a holistic within-site instrumental case study with embedded units (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2007). We had multiple participants, and the case was bounded by time and context. Moreover, we had a specific focus to explore: factors that can influence upper-intermediate-level ESL students' summarizing. This determined the instrumental essence of the case study.

SETTING

We conducted the study in the English Language Institute (ELI), an intensive program with five levels of ESL (from beginning to advanced), at one of the largest urban universities in the southeastern United States. ELI students focus on their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English. They also develop learning strategies, oral presentation skills, library research, basic computer skills, and knowledge of academic culture. There are typically 15 students in a class. They generally do not share an L1, and the ELI has no age requirement. Generally speaking, each class has students of different ages and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Academic Preparation 4 is a mandatory core content-based academic reading and writing class. Students assigned to Level 4 through the Computer Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System (COMPASS) are not generally ready to read authentic academic texts. They still experience difficulty with the language and rhetorical styles of the literature and need practice with different academic genres and research and presentation skills. Our Academic Preparation classes take place three times per week for a total of 5 hours weekly. Due to the nature of the course, it requires many reading and writing projects.

PARTICIPANTS

Seven of the 15 students in the fall 2008 class became participants in our study. Our criteria for purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) were students' submission of the course assignments, attendance, and age (starting from 17 years old). The seven participants who

met these requirements were Mei Mei, Yusuf, Elsa, Keiko, Robin, Sam, and Jameela. (All names used are pseudonyms.)

Mei Mei, a 20-year-old from China, was in her second semester in the ELI and had completed 4 months of classes prior to this study. She had 7 years of experience learning English and some experience in summarizing both in L1 and L2. In general, she understood the basic concept of summarizing but lacked the skill of finding main and supporting ideas to make her summaries complete. Because she had come to the United States recently, she often brought up cultural matters in discussions. Mei Mei was open to the reading topics as well as to sharing her experience and progress in our class during the interview.

Yusuf, a 25-year-old from Libya, had been studying English as both a foreign and second language for 7 years and had already spent 2 months in the ELI. His total time of immersion in the United States was 6 months. He considered himself bilingual—speaking both Arabic and the Amazigh language as native. Yusuf showed extraordinary persistence in his writing and reading throughout the course, and those skills developed substantially during the semester. He stated that he had no experience with writing summaries in either L1. However, he showed some knowledge of what summarizing is, which could be explained by his learning in the ELI during the previous semester.

Keiko was a 42-year-old from Japan, whose L1 was Japanese. Like Mei Mei and Yusuf, she had been studying English for 7 years. After coming to the United States, she had been studying in our program for 6 months. She considered herself a good writer who needed to develop her critical thinking skills. Being a hardworking and active student, Keiko had some experience with summarizing in her L1. She stated that she used to summarize a book or an interesting story to others in an oral form to share its information.

Robin was a 17-year-old from Venezuela with Spanish as her L1. She had been in the ELI and the United States for 2 months, and she had studied English for 10 years in Venezuela. Robin said that she had experience with summarizing and knew its purpose. She also reported that she had used summarizing as a strategy when she read and wrote assignments at school.

Sam was a 17-year-old from Colombia. He had spent 10 months in the ELI. He claimed that in his L1, Spanish, he was a good writer. He had some experience with summarizing because he was a continuing student in the program and, before our class, had already taken another class and learned how to summarize and how to use this strategy.

Jameela was a 20-year-old from Saudi Arabia with Arabic as her L1. She stated that she had already been studying English for 14 years. Though she had lived in the United States for a little more than 5 years, she was new to the ELI, having spent only 2 months in the program. Intending to be an undergraduate student in a U.S. university, she aimed to be fluent in academic English reading and writing. Jameela said that summarizing was new for her, and she had no experience with it in her L1.

Elsa was a 23-year-old from France. She considered herself bilingual, fluent in both Turkish and French because she had been born in France to a Turkish family. She had studied English for 5 years in France. Her total time of immersion in the United States was 9 months. Elsa was a continuing student, having spent 8 months in the ELI. She was a hardworking, diligent, and enthusiastic student with a positive personality. She had experience summarizing in French.

We consider these participants to be typical cases of upper-intermediate-level ESL students who come to the United States with a specific goal: to become part of a U.S. academic community. Meanwhile, we acknowledge their hard work and motivation in our course.

DATA COLLECTION

We collected data through interviews, observations, and questionnaires during one semester (September–December 2008). For the interviews, we prepared a semistructured protocol, a format that allows for modification of questions, emergent clarifications, and other alterations for better understanding of the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). According to Perry (2005), interviews are special because of an interpersonal connection between the interviewer and interviewee. Individual interviews were of great benefit for this

study because they provided rich data and helped answer the research question.

We conducted the interviews at the end of the semester. At that time, students were able to assess their summarizing and the influence of different factors on it. To conduct the interviews, we explained to the students that their views, experiences, and opinions were valuable and could benefit other students and teachers in the future. The interview questions were open-ended and covered such topics as the essence of summarizing, the difference between summarizing in the participants' native language and English, and factors that may influence participants' summarizing in English. At the end of the interview, the participants had the opportunity to discuss any issues related to summarizing that the teacher had not asked about. We conducted teacher–student conferences in the same classroom where students usually gathered for the Academic Preparation 4 course. Of particular note was the collaborative atmosphere that we encountered during the individual teacher–student conferences. A positive atmosphere, mutual respect, and collaboration are foundations of effective learning and teaching (Bachmann & Barth, 2007).

Another source of data was long-term observations throughout the semester. According to Merriam (1998), observations may enhance researchers' understanding and provide more knowledge about the matter under study. We observed and took field notes about the physical setting, the participants, and their conversations during class. Our observational protocol included descriptive as well as reflective notes (Creswell, 2007). Detailed notes about the setting and participants provided a framework for the core of our investigation—information that participants shared during discussions and interviews. Their statements and questions in class complemented the data from interviews. Therefore, we triangulated data collection to increase the credibility of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In addition, at the beginning of the semester, each participant filled out a questionnaire, mainly to provide demographic data. It included questions about the participant's age, gender, nationality, and home country. In addition, we collected data on topics such as each student's experience with learning English, immersion into the

L2 culture, prior knowledge, and any experience with summarizing.

DATA ANALYSIS

Based on a naturalistic inquiry mode (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we organized all the collected data. We perused our observation notes and transcribed the interviews verbatim. Then we color-coded the data and identified emerging themes (Creswell, 2007). While coding, we applied a direct interpretation method (Creswell, 2007). We interpreted every instance in the data that was related to our research question. We experienced writing the case study report as a “flexible and evolving narrative process” (Clandinin & Connelly, quoted in Creswell, 2007, p. 184). Having verisimilitude (Creswell, 2007) as a goal of our report, we included detailed descriptions of the case, the focus of the study, and all of the stages of conducting the study. One of the important stages in analyzing data and writing the report of a qualitative study is the reflexivity that the qualitative researcher reveals (Janesick, 2000).

Having been ESL learners in the past and having different L1s provided us with an excellent opportunity to triangulate our interpretation of data and enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). While interpreting the data, we compared the information with our experiences as former ESL learners and ESL instructors. We as researchers were the instruments of data analysis in the study, which is also one of the characteristics of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007).

As noted, we realize that each language institution has its own contextual factors. However, our study may enlighten this area in ESL research by providing thorough descriptions and emic voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, when designing the study, we were concerned with its broad goal: to explore all the possible factors that may influence participants’ summarizing. Further exploration of the topic is necessary in the future. However, we hope that our description of the cases and procedures in the study, our own reflexivity, and close collaboration with participants have enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS

Having gone through the previously described stages, we identified the following factors that influenced participants' summarizing: culturally influenced thinking patterns, content knowledge, motivation and attitude, and L1 and L2 literacy skills (person factors); and vocabulary, grammar, and writing style (text factors).

Culturally Influenced Thinking Patterns

One of the contextual factors of the ELI students' community is its multicultural nature. The students come from all over the world; immerse themselves into U.S. culture; and share their experiences, values, and cultural backgrounds with each other. One of the themes we found is that culturally influenced thinking patterns have an impact on students' summarizing. We define *cultural thinking patterns* as the ways ESL students interpret information from readings, as influenced by their cultural, educational, and other backgrounds.

One of the questions in the interview dealt with the difficulty of finding the main idea in the article before and after our classes in Academic Preparation 4. Mei Mei, a continuing student in the ELI, explained:

Yeah. Sometimes maybe like the Eastern people and Western people, they think different. So when I read the article, maybe the author want to tell me this point but in my mind I don't understand it. Maybe I will think about it the other way.

Mei Mei explicitly mentioned the impact of culturally influenced thinking patterns on summarizing during interviews, and other students reported the same concerns during our observed classes. Often they were confused between main ideas and supporting ideas due to the different rhetorical patterns between L1 and L2, such as induction, specification, and explanation (Uysal, 2008). They did not feel that they fully understood the ideas, and they often thought they had understood an article only to realize the opposite in class discussion.

Content Knowledge

Students also reported that content knowledge had an effect on their L2 summarizing. As an example, one of the topics discussed in

the class was poetry and its analysis. Writing a short summary of a long poem was a challenging part of poetry analysis for most students. Yusuf shared his thoughts on the importance of content knowledge and its influence on summarizing:

[Summarizing] depends about understanding of the subject itself. Because in some kind of poetry, if you cannot understand it, you cannot summarize it properly. And that's why what happened for me at the beginning I could not understand the subject, so I cannot summarize it properly because sometimes I used to miss the important points and I was writing about something else extra, that's why. If I understood the subject, maybe I will go for the poetry. . . . If I could not understand even the subject, I cannot use the proper words for summarizing.

Elsa, also a continuing ELI student, expressed a similar opinion, supporting Yusuf's statement about the influence of content knowledge on the ability and quality of students' summarizing. She said, "I think it [the result of summarizing] depends on the content of the essay. If I understand the essay about the poetry analysis, I think I can summarize it." According to Elsa, content knowledge determines the comprehension of the article. Therefore, students with limited knowledge on the topic or genre assigned for the summary may have difficulty beginning to write the summary.

Motivation and Attitude

Another theme that emerged from the collected data is students' motivation and attitude toward the topic assigned for summarizing. Four participants acknowledged that their interest in a topic could influence their summarizing. Mei Mei said that her interest in the topic determined her ability to find the main idea of the article. She also stated that it would be easier for her to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word from the context if she had motivation and interest in the topic of a reading:

I don't know. For me it's the easy because I like it. It depends on the article. Maybe it is short, but it's difficult because you don't understand the poetry, but if you are interested in the one you can understand more about that one and you easy to write it.

Mei Mei explained that it is not the length of the article that influences her summarizing, but her interest and motivation.

L1 Literacy Skills

Most participants had some L1 experience with summarizing and mentioned that it facilitated their summarizing in English because they had already learned how to do it. For instance, Jameela told us, “It’s the same, the same process. Just different languages.” Mei Mei expressed a similar view:

It helped because when the teacher teach us to summarize, they will give us a lot of the paragraph. You need to read a paragraph and understand the paragraph and catch the main idea. So when I read the other essay, it will be more easier to catch the main idea because I practiced that before.

Both Jameela and Mei Mei thought that their previous experience with summarizing and skills learned in the L1 had a positive influence on their summarizing in English. It was easier for them to understand the expectations and the nature of the task; having practiced it before was beneficial.

L2 Literacy Skills

One of the goals of Academic Preparation 4 is students’ development of literacy skills in English, such as paraphrasing, finding the main idea in a text, and so on. During classes, participants mentioned that they had difficulty with “making it shorter” and “trying to choose the main idea.” Robin shared her experience with summarizing:

No, it’s not hard. The thing is that when I am summarizing . . . it’s very difficult to make it shorter. I always want to include everything in. If I think that I have to do it shorter, then I take out some main points. So I don’t know how to do it. I mean, I know, but it’s really hard for me. I always write, like, really long things.

In addition, Sam expressed concern that he would omit some important point and information when summarizing:

Because you think all of the things are important, even the details. . . . Oh, this detail is very important, or this idea is really

important. So it's really hard choice, try to choose the main idea. . . . I told it's easy if you have to study . . . but if I try to summarize I feel like afraid because I think I'm gonna miss something important there.

The participants mentioned that they wanted to include all the information, not being able to differentiate between details and main and supporting points. They often described concerns and anxiety because of this difficulty. Those who had extensive experience and practice in summarizing in their L1 spoke about its positive influence on summarizing in L2. However, they pointed out that paraphrasing was difficult for them because of the lack of relevant experience with this skill. Thus, L1 and L2 literacy skills can have both positive and negative influence on students' summarizing.

Vocabulary and Grammar

Two of the influencing factors that Yusuf and Mei Mei acknowledged were vocabulary and grammar used in a reading. In their opinion, many unfamiliar words and complicated sentence structures could cloud a text's meaning. Yusuf told us, "So usually I cannot focus on the subject exactly because of the lack of the vocabulary and something else." Mei Mei also expressed concern about both the grammar and vocabulary of articles assigned for summarizing:

Sometimes just the article is a little bit difficult to understand. Maybe the new words, maybe the article, not only just the new words, and they have different grammar and sometimes I cannot understand grammar; the sentence is complicated.

Keiko also said that many unfamiliar words in a text made summarizing difficult:

You know I like the gender topic, but I could not understand easily "Uncle Sam and Aunt Samantha." So if the author use the very difficult words or sentences . . . then I feel that it's so difficult because I made the mistake before.

These examples from the participants demonstrate that unfamiliar words, complicated sentence structures, and grammar influenced comprehension of the assigned reading, confused the

participants, and revealed difficulties that participants had experienced with summarizing. According to Mei Mei, these factors were even more influential than her interest and motivation.

Writing Style

Writing style appears to be another factor that influenced participants' writing of summaries. According to Hinds (1987), Kaplan (1966), and Díaz-Rico and Weed (2002), there is a difference in expression of thoughts and ideas in writing, depending on the author's L1. For example, Asian authors do not state the thesis and the main idea at the beginning of an article (Hinds, 1987); they prepare readers for it by providing context and details and only later offer the main idea. In contrast, U.S. writers tend to be direct and straightforward in writing; they do not want readers to guess what they mean, so they provide their thesis or main idea of an article at the beginning, including an overview of supporting ideas.

In our study, Elsa reported that unfamiliar writing styles could constitute an obstacle for summarizing:

I try to write simply, and sometimes the sentence was . . . they were very hard for me too. And to summarize them was hard. Or also, for example, when he [author] was talking about just his experience [in the reading]. It was also hard what we need to write, what we need to summarize, what we need to don't summarize, what is important, what I can put in my summary and what I can't.

Elsa said that she always tried to write simply. However, the texts she had read for the class contained sentences consisting of writing styles very different from her L1. It was not the way she expressed her ideas in writing. This difference caused difficulties for her writing summaries.

DISCUSSION

Person Factors

Culturally Influenced Thinking Pattern

Previous studies on thinking patterns dependent on culture focus mostly on writing or expressing thoughts orally. For example,

Kobayashi and Rinnert (1996) emphasize the need to pay attention to differences in cultural rhetorical patterns and readers' background on composition evaluation in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. In addition, Chan and Yan (2007) discuss differences in thinking between East Asians and Westerners. Though such studies attract readers' attention to the possible influence of culturally influenced thinking patterns on ESL and EFL students' writing, our study breaks new ground for further research on the influence of culturally influenced thinking patterns on ESL readers' comprehension while summarizing in the L2.

Mei Mei thought she had understood the assigned reading; however, she later learned that she had understood it in a different way than her instructor. Thus, we suggest that students' background and culturally influenced thinking patterns affect their understanding of the reading. In addition, longitudinal immersion in L2 culture apparently does not eliminate the influence of this factor. In our study, there were continuing students and new students in the ELI. They all experienced difficulty summarizing an article even after doing prereading and prewriting tasks.

Content Knowledge and Motivation

If students have prior knowledge of the content, they may use prewriting strategies to activate this knowledge. Doing so may enhance their comprehension of the text while reading it and help them summarize it in writing. This shows that the summarizing process includes both reading and writing. Additionally, Kim (2009) points out the importance and impact of prior knowledge on L2 literacy acquisition.

Furthermore, our findings reveal an interrelationship between topic selection, students' motivation, and their future major. Upon entering ESL academic programs in the United States, students set a goal to improve their English skills enough to be accepted into a U.S. university. Therefore, students in one class usually not only represent various cultural backgrounds, but also present multifaceted educational and professional interests. Though this may enrich discussions in the class, it may also cause difficulties for ESL teachers in selecting readings for their students. According to Yusuf, Elsa, and Keiko, content knowledge and motivation

determined their success in summarizing a text. They considered it important to have exposure to readings and language related to their areas of future study. If students have some grounding in a topic and genre, they are probably interested in it or had some past interest in it. Thus, topic selection and motivation seem interdependent.

Relationship Between L1 and L2 Literacy Skills

We chose to differentiate between L1 and L2 literacy skills because of the social dimension wrapped up in literacy that influences ESL learners' literate behavior (Eskey, 1993). By L1 literacy skills, we mean abilities and practices of making meaning of any sign in L1. In turn, the use of L2 as a mediational tool of interaction influences activities in general and summarizing in particular. Nevertheless, it is clear that L1 literacy skills are involved while practicing L2 reading and writing. Participants who had L1 experience with summarizing considered it beneficial and helpful for L2 summarizing. This finding provides evidence of transfer of L1 literacy skills into the L2 context. As Grabe (2003) points out, it is already known that L1 literacy skills can transfer to L2; however, there is still a need for research on what skills are readily transferred and under what conditions. Our study provides further insight into the matter and supports Grabe's research on the transfer of L1 skills to L2, placing summarizing into that list of skills.

The findings show that participants who were not experienced with summarizing in their L1 had difficulty finding main and supporting ideas and were concerned with eliminating details. This finding aligns with Hare's (1992) classification that skill levels are a factor that might influence summarizing. In addition, it supports Keene's (2007) statements that the extent and quality of skills application may determine success in a reading or writing task. Thus, extensive practice and application of skills that constitute summarizing can help ESL students make tremendous progress in their academic studying.

Finally, the factors of L1 and L2 literacy skills reveal the importance of studying the skills that comprise summarizing in their interrelation, taking into account their intertwined nature and interdependency. Our study does not try to undermine the findings

of previous studies, but attempts to fill the gap in the research and help teachers facilitate ESL students' summarizing. It is crucial because the skills necessary for summarizing are used for other purposes and tasks; for example, ESL students may need to paraphrase in order to incorporate ideas from a source into their writing.

Text Factors

Writing Style

Writing style is another factor that can influence ESL students' summarizing. Though it is closely connected to the factor of culturally influenced thinking patterns, we choose to differentiate it and associate culturally influenced thinking patterns with the students' interpretation of the message that authors convey in their writings. In contrast, by writing style we mean the conventional way of rendering information in a particular country—in our case, the United States. Both writing style and culturally influenced thinking patterns are new factors that Hare (1992) did not include in the overview of existing literature on the topic of summarizing. The difference in participants' L1 and L2 writing styles seems to create difficulties for students organizing information while writing an essay. In addition, students' L1 writing style may limit them from making their summaries logical and comprehensive to the audience, which may lead to misinterpretation of the summary and failure to complete the task in L2 successfully.

Grammar and Vocabulary

Grammar and vocabulary created an additional challenge for participants because of the large number of unfamiliar words and complicated structures in assigned readings. Having difficulty with target vocabulary and grammar in L2 reading, they reported problems with comprehending a text and finding main and supporting ideas. The importance of taking into consideration grammar and vocabulary in an L2 reading is also discussed by Baba (2009) and Keck (2006).

As we mentioned previously, we chose to view summarizing as a hybrid of reading and writing. Interestingly, all the factors that

emerged during data analysis seemed to have an impact on students' comprehension of the reading or identifying its main idea. The only factor that influenced the writing part of a summary task was difficulty with paraphrasing, which was mentioned during class discussions. Participants considered paraphrasing to be challenging because of their limited L2 vocabulary. In addition, some reported that they had never paraphrased, and it had been acceptable for them to write ideas with or without quotation marks.

Some of the factors described in the literature did not emerge in our study. For example, participants did not report about the influence of the length of a text or the abstractness of its ideas. In contrast, to our knowledge such factors as culturally influenced thinking patterns, writing styles, and motivation were not mentioned in the research literature in connection with summarizing. Our findings lead to a number of implications that ESL teachers may consider in their reading and writing classes.

IMPLICATIONS

In our study, we found that culturally influenced thinking patterns, content knowledge, motivation, L1 and L2 literacy skills, writing style, vocabulary, and grammar influence upper-intermediate-level ESL students' summarizing in L2. However, ESL teachers may help students avoid or overcome challenges related to these factors. First, culturally influenced thinking patterns turned out to be a factor that may limit ESL students' ability to summarize easily. Therefore, we consider it important for ESL teachers to pay attention to this issue before they assign reading and summarizing tasks. In order to develop the positive influence and eliminate any negative influence of this factor, teachers may conduct various preliminary discussions and activities focusing on enriching ESL students' knowledge of the L2 culture and paying attention to different writing styles. In addition, we suggest working on the specific L2 cultural concepts that students will encounter in a text.

Furthermore, it may be challenging for ESL students to write a good summary of a text if they are not familiar with the L2 writing style. In this case, explicit instructions with detailed explanations and examples may benefit students in their organization of information in the summary. Discussions and analysis of sample

texts and models of summaries may increase ESL students' comfort level with the L2 writing style. Acknowledging students' diverse culturally influenced thinking patterns, it is also important to provide good examples of academic writing styles in English.

In addition to the differences in cultural background, students in an ESL classroom may have different interests, majors, and content knowledge. This heterogeneity of the student population may create an additional challenge for ESL teachers. Most ESL teachers are aware of the importance of raising students' interest and motivation and maintaining them throughout a semester. However, it can be challenging for ESL teachers to select readings and topics that will be interesting and familiar for all students in a group. Thus, providing students with a list of possible readings on various topics and giving them a choice may empower students and help them avoid demotivation and frustration. It may also enhance students' confidence and develop their ownership of learning (Kim, 2009). In addition, it may provoke them to search for additional information on the topic. Consequently, this can help expose ESL students to unfamiliar concepts, terms, and content not within their range of interests. They will expand their interests, develop good attitudes, practice necessary skills for summarizing, and feel more confident about their progress.

The remaining two factors, grammar and vocabulary, may present additional challenges to ESL students' summarizing task. According to Hu and Nation (2000), a text must contain at least 95% familiar words in order to be comprehended by ESL students with the help of a dictionary. Therefore, estimation of the number of unfamiliar vocabulary units in a text (e.g., through VocabProfile; Cobb, 2007) may be helpful in determining whether ESL students will be able to cope with reading and comprehending the text. In addition, teachers may want to consider grammar structures that appear in a text and discuss them with students to prevent students' miscomprehension of a text and failure to summarize it. Although our study took place in a university setting, the implications are transferrable to a K–12 classroom as a representation of a descriptive study filled with emic voices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). ESL teachers' awareness of the factors that may influence students' summarizing in L2, and consideration of these factors while

planning reading and writing classes, may help students avoid difficulties with this task.

CONCLUSION

Our study aimed to determine what factors may have an influence on ESL students' summarizing. We found that culturally influenced thinking patterns, writing style, content knowledge, motivation and attitude, L1 and L2 literacy skills, vocabulary, and grammar may impact upper-intermediate-level ESL students' summarizing. Most of the factors created a challenge for the participants, though transfer of L1 literacy skills was beneficial and had a positive influence on students' summarizing in L2. Our study provides insight into the L2 summarizing process and helps to fill a gap in the literature on this topic. The pedagogical implications of this research can help ESL teachers prevent students' difficulties and make their teaching more effective.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the students who volunteered in our study. In addition, our special thanks go to Dr. Wei Zhu and Elizabeth Visedo, Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technologies Program, University of South Florida, for their helpful comments and feedback at different stages of the research. Finally, we are grateful to the anonymous *TESOL Journal* reviewers and editors for their time and feedback.

THE AUTHORS

Oksana Vorobel is a PhD student in the Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technologies Program at the University of South Florida (USF). In addition, she is an ESL instructor in INTO-USF. Her areas of research interest are second language reading and writing, vocabulary acquisition, teacher beliefs, and implementation of technology in language learning classes and teacher preparation programs.

Deoksoon Kim is an assistant professor of foreign language education in the Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Technologies Program at the University of South Florida. She

teaches second language acquisition, reading and literacy, and sociocultural theory. She has taught and done professional development and research in the United States, Korea, and Canada. Her foci include TESOL, second language reading and literacy, and instructional technology in teacher education.

REFERENCES

- Afflerbach, P. P. (1990). The influence of prior knowledge on expert readers' main idea construction strategies. *Reading Research Quarterly, 25*, 31–46. doi:10.2307/747986
- Baba, K. (2009). Aspects of lexical proficiency in writing summaries in a foreign language. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 18*, 191–208. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2009.05.003
- Bachmann, S., & Barth, M. (2007). *Between worlds: A reader, rhetoric, and handbook* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *Qualitative Report, 13*, 544–559.
- Chan, H. M., & Yan, H. K. T. (2007). Is there a geography of thought for east-west differences? Why or why not? *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 39*, 383–403. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2007.00346.x
- Chandrasoma, R., Thompson, C., & Pennycook, A. (2004). Beyond plagiarism: Transgressive and nontransgressive intertextuality. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 3*, 171–194. doi:10.1207/s15327701jlie0303_1
- Cobb, T. (2007). Computing the vocabulary demands of L2 reading. *Language Learning and Technology, 11*(3), 38–63. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Díaz-Rico, L. T., & Weed, K. Z. (2002). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook: A complete K–12 reference guide*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

- Eskey, D. E. (1993). Reading and writing as both cognitive process and social behavior. In J. Carson & I. Leki (Eds.), *Reading in the composition classroom: Second language perspectives* (pp. 221–233). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Ferris, D., & Hedgcock, J. (2005). *Teaching ESL composition: Purpose, process, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fitzgerald, J. (1995). English-as-a-second-language learners' cognitive reading processes: A review of research in the United States. *Review of Educational Research*, *65*, 145–190. doi:10.2307/1170711
- Friend, R. (2001). Effects of strategy instruction on summary writing of college students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *26*, 3–24. doi:10.1006/ceps.1999.1022
- Grabe, W. (2003). Reading and writing relations: Second language perspectives on research and practice. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing* (pp. 242–262). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Hare, V. (1992). Summarizing text. In W. Irwin & M. A. Doyle (Eds.), *Reading/writing connections. Learning from research* (pp. 96–118). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Hidi, S., & Anderson, V. (1986). Producing written summaries: Task demands, cognitive operations, and implications for instruction. *Review of Educational Research*, *56*, 473–493. doi:10.2307/1170342
- Hinds, J. (1987). Reader versus writer responsibility: A new typology. In U. Connor & R. B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Writing across languages: Analysis of L2 text* (pp. 141–152). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Hu, M., & Nation, P. (2000). Unknown vocabulary density and reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *13*, 403–430.
- Janesick, V. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: Minuets, improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 379–399). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kaplan, R. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, *16*, 1–20. doi:10.1111/j.1467-1770.1966.tb00804.x

- Kazantseva, A. (2010). Summarizing short stories. *Computational Linguistics*, 36, 71–109. [doi:10.1162/coli.2010.36.1.36102](https://doi.org/10.1162/coli.2010.36.1.36102)
- Keck, C. (2006). The use of paraphrase in summary writing: A comparison of L1 and L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15, 261–278. [doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2006.09.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2006.09.006)
- Keene, E. O. (2007). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kim, D. (2009). Using sociocultural perspectives of literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy to empower beginning ELLs as readers. *English Leadership Quarterly*, 31(3), 9–11.
- Kirkland, M. R., & Saunders, M. A. P. (1991). Maximizing student performance in summary writing: Managing cognitive load. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, 105–121. [doi:10.2307/3587030](https://doi.org/10.2307/3587030)
- Kobayashi, H., & Rinnert, C. (1996). Factors affecting composition evaluation in an EFL context: Cultural rhetorical pattern and readers' background. *Language Learning*, 46, 397–437. [doi:10.1111/j.1467-1770.1996.tb01242.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1996.tb01242.x)
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London, England: Sage.
- Mateos, M., Martin, E., Villalon, R., & Luna, M. (2007). Reading and writing to learn in secondary education: Online processing activity and written products in summarizing and synthesizing tasks. *Reading and Writing*, 7, 675–697. [doi:10.1007/S11145-007-9086-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/S11145-007-9086-6)
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moser, S. (2008). Personality: A new positionality? *Area*, 40, 383–392. [doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00815.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00815.x)
- Oxford, R. L. (2003). Language learning styles and strategies: Concepts and relationships. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 41, 271–278. [doi:10.1515/iral.2003.012](https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2003.012)

- Perry, F. L. (2005). *Research in applied linguistics. Becoming a discerning consumer*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Seidlhofer, B. (1995). *Approaches to summarization: Discourse analysis and language education*. Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr.
- Uysal, H. H. (2008). Tracing the culture behind writing: Rhetorical patterns and bidirectional transfer in L1 and L2 essays of Turkish writers in relation to educational context. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 17*, 183–207. [doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2007.11.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2007.11.003)
- Yang, L., & Shi, L. (2003). Exploring six MBA students' summary writing by introspection. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 2*, 165–192. [doi:10.1016/S1475-1585\(03\)00016-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1475-1585(03)00016-X)