

Effects of Noticing Model Texts Using the Translanguaging Approach on L2 Learners' Syntactic Awareness in Multimodal Texts

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ABSTRACT

Writing is challenging for any ESL learner, even at tertiary level. This study investigated the effects of noticing model texts using the translanguaging approach on L2 learners' syntactic awareness in multimodal texts in a private college in Malaysia. This mixed method case study employed a pretest-posttest design to measure participants' writing performance before and after the intervention, which involved the participants to work collaboratively to produce multimodal texts on Instagram based on selected eight-picture stories in two phases. In both phases, participants had to compare their multimodal texts with a model text employing the translanguaging approach to discuss the similarities and differences of the texts in group chats on Instagram and then, renarrate another eight-picture story. All the texts went through error analysis and the Instagram chats underwent content analysis. Findings revealed that the noticing of model texts using the translanguaging approach in Instagram chats helped the participants in heightening their syntactic awareness which was evident in the writing improvement of the group tasks but not as obvious in individual writing performance. This study is significant because it shows that using model texts for students to notice linguistic features through comparison with their own writing empowers them to be more student-centered and the texts act as a scaffold for the students to assist one another to learn the target language. Future studies are recommended to include individual multimodal writing tasks in the intervention to reduce participants' reliance on 'more knowledgeable others' and internalize syntactic awareness better on their own.

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1. Introduction

Writing has always been a challenge for EFL or ESL students at tertiary level (ESL). Teaching second language (L2) students to write is a difficult task, according to [Teng and Huang \(2018\)](#). [Wu and Zhang \(2017\)](#) reported that the ESL linguistic environment is the biggest challenge to tertiary writing learning. A lack of language skills and unsatisfactory experiences with English tutors have also been highlighted as major challenges ([Finn, 2018](#)). As a result, English language instructors have used technology, Written Corrective Feedback (WCF), and translanguaging to teach writing. The technology approach includes the use of multimodal texts ([Shin et al., 2020](#); [Lim](#)

& Polio, 2020), screencast feedback, and text-based electronic feedback (Cunningham, 2019). Kress's (2010) multimodal social-semiotics theory, which focuses on meaning, social context, and cultural context, inspires the usage of multimodal texts, which Bull and Anstey (2010) defined as a piece of writing that combines linguistic and nonlinguistic components.

Understanding how technology-mediated feedback is used in students' multimodal texts (Shin et al., 2020; Lim & Polio, 2020) may help researchers better understand how teaching writing can improve students' writing performance. This is relevant especially now, in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020a) when language instructors are forced to do remote online distance learning, so that learning continues to take place, increasing the usage of technology.

In the literature reviewed thus far, many studies (e.g., Hanaoka, 2007; Coyle et al., 2018; Coyle & Larios, 2020; Kang, 2020; Luquin, 2021) introduced Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) to help students enhance their writing skills, the current cognitive theories of Written Corrective Feedback processing believe that learners benefit from seeing L2 features during input processing (Schmidt, 2001) and output production (Swain, 1995). The noticing hypothesis suggests that what learners see in input becomes intake for learning (Schmidt, 1995). Many of these studies have focused on L2 learners' lexical aspects, vocabulary, and content rather than verb forms (e.g., Hanaoka, 2007; Coyle et al., 2018; Coyle & Larios, 2020; Kang, 2020; Luquin, 2021). Studies have demonstrated that effective noticing improves syntactic awareness (the ability to monitor the relationship between words in a sentence) and hence improves writing performance. Since syntactic awareness is a crucial indicator of written production, understanding syntactic rules can help writers produce ideas more clearly and accurately (Tong & McBride, 2016). As a result, syntactic awareness is vital in learning writing as it demonstrates a learner's progress.

To date, to improve noticing, language instructors have employed Target Language (Kang, 2020), native language (Hanaoka, 2007), and translanguaging (e.g., Coyle et al., 2018; Coyle & Larios, 2020; Luquin, 2021) to teach writing. García (2009) defines translanguaging as "'multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds". In ESL, translanguaging is a natural technique that helps L2 learning (Moody et al., 2019) and promotes L2 learners' collaborative learning (Carroll & Sambolin Morales, 2016; Fang & Liu, 2020). While the use of Target Language and translanguaging has been proven to assist learners in their L2 writing discussion in terms lexical forms (e.g., Hanaoka, 2007; Coyle et al., 2018; Coyle & Larios, 2020; Kang, 2020; Luquin, 2021), less emphasis has been paid to the noticing of verb forms using model texts, and how verb form awareness increases their syntactic awareness and writing performance.

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the noticing of verb form errors in model texts using the translanguaging approach on L2 tertiary learners' syntactic awareness in multimodal texts. This is particularly pertinent because in much of the literature reviewed, tertiary level students have not been the focus nor context of the noticing studies which have used model texts.

2. Method

This study is a case study that employed a mixed method design using explanatory sequential research design, in which quantitative data is collected first, followed by qualitative data collection. The independent variable of this study is the treatment or intervention given to students which is the model text that they need to compare to their own writing and notice linguistic features, in particular the verb form errors and they were allowed to do the noticing and to make the comparison using the translanguaging approach. The dependent variable is the writing performance that is quantified by the number of verb form errors committed by the students.

In this study, it should also be mentioned that there is no control group, only an experimental group that underwent the intervention. This is because studies done by Hanaoka (2007), Coyle et al., (2018), Coyle and Larios (2020), Kang (2020), and Luquin (2021) which

employed model texts as their Written Corrective Feedback all showed that the L2 learners in the experimental groups, regardless the context whether they were adults or school children, always improved their written output due to their noticing of the model texts. In comparison, all the control groups in the studies listed did not show much improvement as they had nothing to compare their own writings with, thus they did not gain any new vocabulary or new awareness of the language or content. Therefore, it could be generalised that even if this study had a control group, the results would be the same. Hence it is better to maximise the number of participants in the experimental group and not have a control group.

This case study included a purposive sample of 45 Year 1 L2 diploma students from two intact classes aged 19 to 22, who were studying for Diploma in Business Management and Diploma in Civil Engineering at a private college in Kuantan. Because the course was offered during the short semester, the classes were six contact hours a week for seven weeks. The duration of the intervention was four meetings within two weeks of class. This is equivalent to 24 hours for two intact classes. In addition, there were 12 groups with three to four members each. The research procedures are divided into five stages, which are as follows:

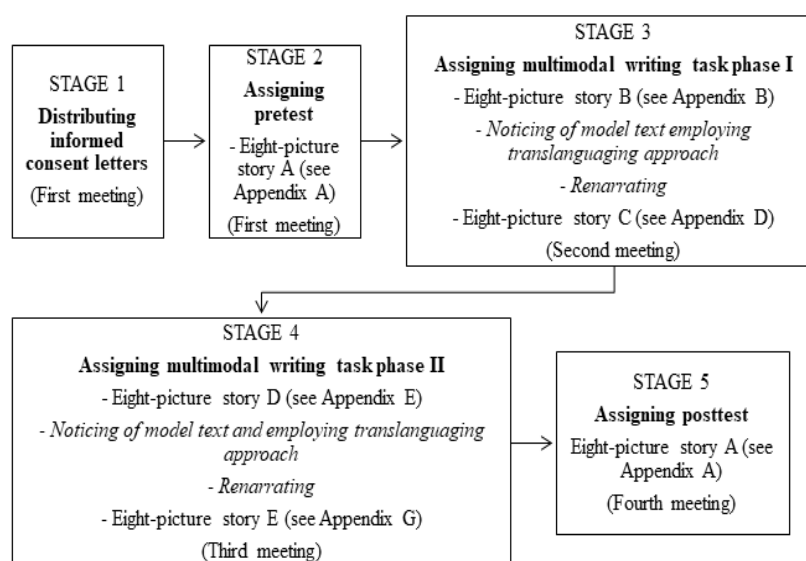


Fig. 1. Research procedures

Fig. 1 shows each stage and the time (*i.e.*, which class session) each stage was executed. As the semester was a short semester, all classes would be completed within 7 weeks compared to 14 weeks in a typical long semester. Students and lecturers would meet 3 times a week, each time for 2 hours. That was why the time each stage was executed was very close to each other. In each stage, the words in **bold** represent the names of the stages and the words in *italics* represent the activities conducted at every stage. As only 12 of the 45 participants completed all the five stages, this paper reports the findings based on these 12 participants.

Error analysis would be the main data analysis tool in this study, involving the analysis of pretest-posttest, participants' multimodal written texts, with an emphasis on simplification errors, interlingual errors, and overgeneralization errors. Besides, content analysis on participants' noticing and translanguageing was also done by examining the participants' Instagram group chat screenshots. Therefore, any interaction between the participants on Instagram group chat that was related to the noticing of verb forms would be analysed through two categories of noticing: (1) Solely Noticing (whenever a participant actually notices a certain feature of texts without specifying any justifications); and (2) Acknowledge the Model with a Reason (the case in which a participant supports the comparison made by providing specific reasons).

3. Findings and Discussion

In this section, findings will be discussed based on the pretest analysis, Multimodal Writing Task Phase I (henceforth Phase I), Multimodal Writing Task Phase II (henceforth Phase II) and posttest analysis. Phases I and II comprise analysis of the narration of an eight-picture story in their multimodal texts, noticing of verb form errors comparing model texts and own writing in screenshots of Instagram group chats, and renarration of another eight-picture story in their multimodal texts.

Pretest

The pretest was conducted to assess participants' writing ability prior to any intervention and to provide a baseline to see if the participants improve after the intervention (i.e., Phase I and Phase II). The posttests would provide useful data for the researcher to observe if the participants have indeed improved after learning how to write paragraphs using Instagram.

The pretest was done on 45 Year 1 L2 diploma students but the researcher only received 37 answer scripts with one answer script failing to meet the task requirements by deviating from the topic given. In the pretest, students were asked to write a paragraph based on eight-picture story A entitled Sarah's Bad Day (see Appendix A) to be completed in 20 minutes. The pretest analysis shows that verb form errors make up the bulk of student errors. The pretest analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency of pretest Language Errors

Language Errors		
<i>Types</i>	<i>Frequency (N)</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Verb form	360	78.6
Noun	39	8.5
Articles	30	6.6
Preposition	7	1.5
Spelling	6	1.3
Conjunction	5	1.1
Capitalization	5	1.1
Punctuation	3	0.7
Adverb	2	0.4
Adjective	1	0.2
TOTAL	458	100

Table 1 shows that the verb form category has the highest frequency of errors found in the pretest (78.6%). Verb form errors were identified specifically when participants used incorrect verb forms and tenses in their pretest. Meanwhile, the noun category ranked second with 8.5% of the frequency of error, while articles ranked third with 6.6% of the frequency of error.

Phase I

In Phase I, error analysis was done on participants' narration texts (i.e., Eight-picture story B, see Appendix B), the noticing and the renarration texts (i.e., Eight-picture story C, see Appendix D).

The error analysis shows that the most common verb form errors found in participants' multimodal writing texts in Phase I were due to simplification. Table 2 shows the frequency of verb form errors made by participants, as well as its subcategories and examples.

Table 2. Analysis of verb form errors in narration texts

Verb Form Errors			
Subcategory	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Examples
1 Simplification	342	67.9	Uzair: She <u>is wake up</u> at 7 a.m. in the morning (She woke at 7 a.m. in the morning)
2 Interlingual Error	16	28.6	Asyraf: She <u>not realize</u> (She did not realize)
3 Overgeneralization	2	3.6	Nikmar: Sarah <u>woked up</u> early at 6 a.m. (Sarah woke up early at 6 a.m.)
TOTAL	360	100	

According to Table 2, simplification had the highest frequency (96.6%) of verb form errors found in the participants' pretests. The example given was taken from Group 2 and it indicated that they omitted "s" in the present simple verb form "start" to be used with singular subject, resulting in a simplification error. Meanwhile, interlingual errors ranked second, accounting for 2.7% of the frequency of verb form errors. An example would be from Group 5, who wrote "Then the clock was rang loudly..." instead of "Then the clock rang loudly..." because they were influenced by L1 (Malay) that uses "*sudah berdering*" in its past simple verb form. In Malay, past tense is not embedded in the verb like it is in English, and a word like "*Sudah*", which loosely means "*already*" needs to be added to show that action is completed. Hence, this group wrote "was rang," presumably meaning "already rang".

Next is overgeneralization. It is an error that was only found once (0.7%) in the pretest, that was produced by Group 5. Group 5's first mistake was thinking the story should be told in the past tense instead of the present tense. Furthermore, they seemed to have incorrectly applied the wrong form of the past tense of the irregular verb "fly". The past tense of "fly" is supposed to be "flew" but they wrongly overgeneralised it by using the past tense verb "fell". That is why they used "were felling" instead of "are flying". When questioned in class, what "were felling" meant, Group 5 clarified that it meant the birds were hovering in the sky. Therefore, they overgeneralized that "were felling" referred to flying while hovering.

For noticing using the translanguaging approach in the Instagram group chat screenshots, the findings revealed that only 3 groups (Group 5, Group 6 and Group 11) remarked on verb form errors. Fig. 2 shows how Solely Noticing occurred in the discussion of the model text.

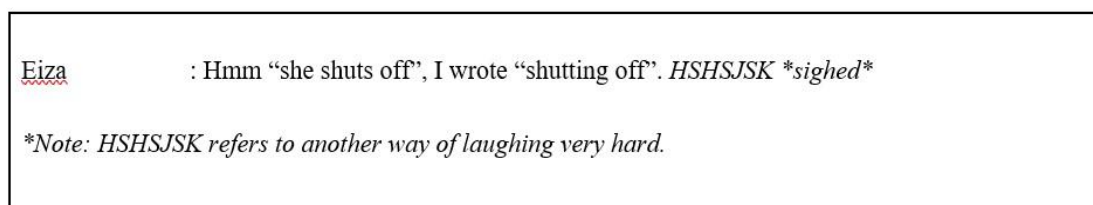


Fig. 2. Group 5 solely noticing Phase I

In Fig. 2, it is observed that only Eiza (pseudonym) noticed an error she made in the group's composition while comparing it to the model. Her noticing, however, received no response from the other members.

Fig. 3 shows how participants acknowledged the model text with a reason in their discussion in Phase I.

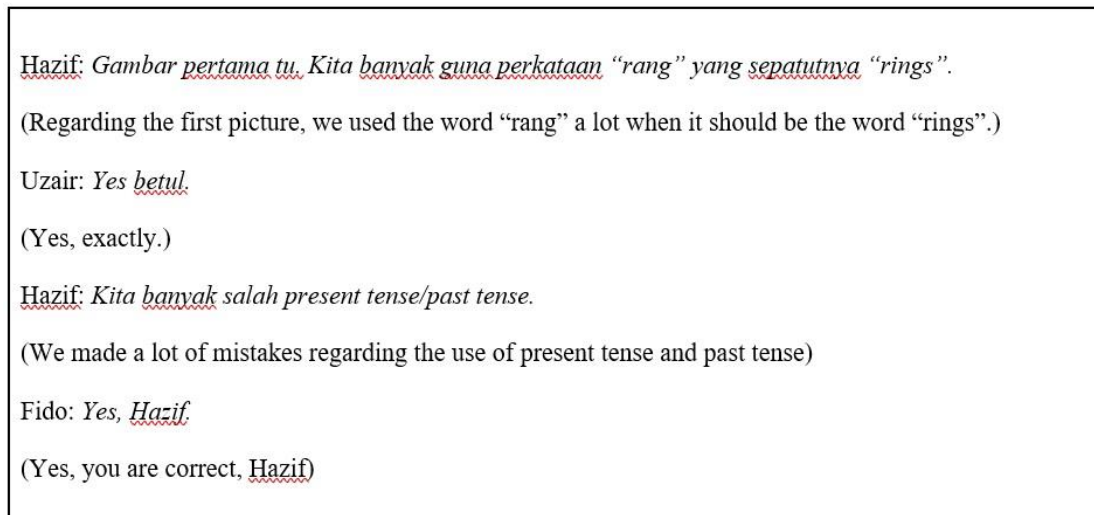


Fig. 3. Group 11 Acknowledge the model with a reason Phase I

In Fig. 3, Hazif (pseudonym) acknowledged that the model used the verb tense "rings" (present simple) with their writing, which used the verb tense "rang." Uzair (pseudonym) responded to his noticing by saying, "Yes, exactly." Hazif then continued the discussion by explaining why they should have used the verb tense "rings," which indicated present simple tense, in the particular writing in which they made numerous errors in the use of the present and past tenses. Fido, another group member, agreed with his explanation, saying, "Yes, you are correct Hazif".

Since the previous procedure was only completed by 3 groups (Group 5, Group 6 and Group 11), therefore, the analysis of renarration text was performed only to these groups to see whether their noticing would improve their writing particularly the verb forms. Findings show that Group 5 improved their writing by a margin of 20 in the frequency of verb form errors (narration text: 33, renarration text: 10). However, Group 6 did not seem to improve, as the frequency of verb form errors increased by one error (narration text: 12, renarration text: 13). Meanwhile, Group 11 improved their writing by a small margin of 4 errors in terms of the frequency of verb form errors (narration text: 15, renarration text: 11).

Phase II

A second narration task was carried out in the third meeting to reinforce the learning that had taken place on the effects of an intervention being studied. Participants who worked in the group were given eight-picture story D (see Appendix E) via an Instagram Reel (a 15-second video with music). At this stage, only Groups 5, 6 and 11 were analysed to track the improvements of the writing produced in terms of verb form errors as these groups were the only groups who did the noticing in Phase I. In narration text Phase II, all three groups have improved greatly. For example, Group 5 improved by 5 in terms of verb form errors (renarration text Phase I: 10, narration text Phase II: 5). Group 6 also seems to improve by 9 in terms of verb form errors (renarration text Phase I: 13, narration text Phase II: 4). Finally, Group 11 considerably improved their writing by 6 errors in terms of verb form errors (renarration text Phase I: 11, narration text Phase II: 5).

Result shows that simplification still caused the most common verb form errors in participants' multimodal writing texts. Additionally, the findings also revealed only Solely Noticing occurred in the discussions of the three groups. Fig. 4 shows how participants acknowledged the model text with a reason in their discussion in Phase I.

Uzair	: <i>Patutnya ayat "because of that my kite flew" bukan "flying".</i> (It should be "my kite flew" not "flying").
Hazif	: <i>Okay paham.</i> (Okay, I got it).

Fig. 4. Group 11 Solely Noticing Phase II

Fig. 4 displays Solely Noticing. As they wrote "Because of that, my kite flying," Uzair (pseudonym) pointed out that the right verb form was "flew," not "flying." On the other hand, his noticing was not explained, but the fact was that the verb form had changed since they should have used the past simple tense. His noticing, on the other hand, drew Hazif's (pseudonym) attention, but there was no further discussion.

In renarration task Phase II, all the groups were required to renarrate eight-picture story E (see Appendix G) via an Instagram Reel. Result shows that Group 5 improved their writing by a small margin of 1 in the frequency of verb form error (narration Phase II: 5, renarration Phase II: 4). However, Group 6 did not seem to improve, as the frequency of verb form error increased by two errors (narration Phase II: 4, renarration Phase II: 6). Meanwhile, Group 11 improved their writing by a small margin of 1 error in terms of the frequency of verb form error (narration Phase II: 5, renarration Phase II: 4). Surprisingly, during this stage, Group 7 also made a noticing concerning verb form in their Instagram group chat during Phase II, therefore the researcher revisited all of the texts written by this group. Group 7 displayed a great improvement and achieved a substantial improvement with a margin of 5 verb form errors (narration Phase I: 15, renarration Phase I: 10). The analysis of Phase II, on the other hand, revealed that the improvement had been reduced by a small margin of one verb form error (narration Phase II: 5, renarration Phase II: 6).

Posttest

Like the pretest, the posttest again required each participant to complete the same eight-picture story A (see Appendix A). During the fourth meeting, the researcher was only able to gather 32 posttest answer scripts instead of 45. From the members of Groups 5, 6, 7, and 11, the researcher expected to have 15 posttest scripts but three participants (Fadza, Farhah, and Juna) were found to either have not submitted the pretest or posttest, hence analysis was made on the written output of only 12 participants, who completed all the five research stages.

Based on the analysis of the frequency of verb form errors, three participants (Eiza, Natalia, and Syamir) showed improvement after the posttest, with margins of 18 (pretest: 23, posttest: 5), 6 (pretest: 10, posttest: 4), and 2 (pretest: 6, posttest: 4). It also indicated Eiza as the most effective participant, having greatly improved following Phase II. Two participants (Syakir and Uzair) did not seem to improve their writing, but their verb form errors stayed constant. Seven participants (Nooralina, Afrida, Marziah, Fathin, Fazira, Dahlia, and Hazif) showed a decline in writing performance, with an increase in verb form errors from pretest to posttest.

Based on the findings, the noticing of model texts using the translanguaging approach increased L2 learners' syntactic awareness when they were assigned multimodal writing task. Using the translanguaging approach helped the participants to discuss comfortably using both L1 and L2 and this encouraged the participants to talk freely and indirectly assisted the participants to increase their syntactic awareness. The finding supports the findings of Moody et al. (2019) who reported

that graduate students typically regarded translanguageing as a natural practice for bilingual speakers. Moody et al. (2019) regarded it as a form of social technique that aided L2 learning, and agreed that translanguageing be applied in higher education as a tool for teaching and learning.

Moreover, participants collaborating to write together and subsequently, to do noticing of model texts using translanguageing to compare with their own writing was found to improve participants' written performance as a group. This is consistent with Vygotsky's (1986) Sociocultural theory, who claimed that contact between learners, sometimes known as the 'more knowledgeable others', might scaffold and help the process of L2 acquisition. This clearly illustrates the necessity of translanguageing for collaborative learning (Carroll & Sambolin Morales, 2016), as well as how translanguageing can help students with limited language proficiency (Fang and Liu, 2020). This result also supports the findings of Hanaoka (2007), Coyle et al. (2018), Coyle and Larios (2020), and Luquin (2021) who employed translanguageing and demonstrated that translanguageing aided participants during discussions to improve their noticing.

Writing Corrective Feedback (WCF), particularly, model texts provided for the noticing stage, used in both phases helped participants notice linguistic features when discussing their multimodal texts. This is aligned with previous studies that reported that Written Corrective Feedback was introduced to provide various feedback methods, including model texts, in order to improve students' writing correctness (see Hanaoka, 2007; Coyle et al., 2018; Coyle & Larios, 2020; Kang, 2020; Luquin, 2021). Although many of the groups did not explicitly discuss verb form errors in their Instagram group chats, their writing output improved in terms of verb form errors declination. This was also reported by Coyle and Larios (2020), who discovered that a large amount of noticing from the models was not given attention in the participants' discussions but later emerged in their written output.

While findings reveal that in group tasks, the writing performance is improved, individually, the improvement is not as obvious. This can be seen in the participants' pretests and posttests analysis as explained earlier. Only three participants were found to improve based on the posttest analysis (*i.e.*, Eiza from 23 verb form errors to 5, Natalia from 10 to 4 verb form errors and lastly Syamir making two less errors from 6 to 4). The findings of the three successful participants strongly validated Ellis' (1997) process of learning implicit knowledge theory that was further adapted by the researcher as shown in Figure 4 below. The conceptual framework developed from the findings of this study also integrated Kress' (2010) Social Semiotic Theory.

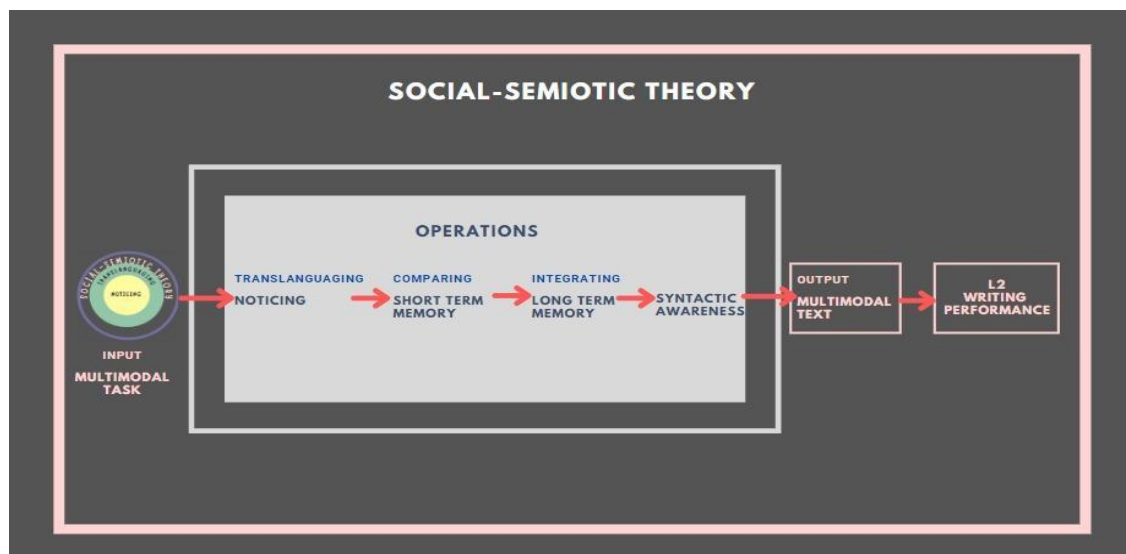


Fig. 5. Framework for Noticing of Model Texts Using Translanguageing Approach in Multimodal Writing Tasks and Texts

Based on Fig. 5, Eiza, Natalia and Syamir, in particular, showed that through their noticing while they chatted in groups, have successfully integrated long term memory of syntactic characteristics, improving their syntactic awareness in their written output. Meanwhile, those who deteriorated during the posttest (Nooralina, Afrida, Marziah, Fathin, Fazira, Dahlia, and Hazif) and those who remained same (Syakir and Uzair), could be regarded as learners who did not really internalise the noticing as they relied highly on the 'more knowledgeable others' in the Instagram group chats. They also looked for these more knowledgeable others when it came to the renarration texts, seeking for help to validate their phrases. [Elabdali \(2021\)](#) who also explored the learning effects of collaborative and individual writing, concluded that collaborative texts were more accurate than individual texts. As such, that is why group written performance was found to be better than individual written performance.

4. Conclusion

The translanguaging approach has allowed L2 learners to notice certain linguistic features, which enhanced their syntactic awareness, resulting in improved written performance. Despite the fact that only three participants improved in their writing, and two showed no improvement, this finding shows that translanguaging does affect L2 learners' syntactic awareness. Translanguaging has also been seen to encourage L2 learners to discuss their multimodal writing tasks more freely and with less apprehension with the support of more knowledgeable others, thus enhancing their syntactic awareness and writing performance. Group members were seen to generally ask whom they perceived as the more knowledgeable others in the group to check their writing.

This study also found that using Instagram for L2 meaning making aligns with Kress' multimodal social-semiotics theory as Instagram's semiotic diversity engaged students in completing the multimodal writing tasks. It was seen that participants were able to effectively discuss their writing tasks assigned via Instagram chat. In addition to writing, the participants used semiotic tools like gif images and music to enhance their writing. By incorporating semiotic components such as linguistic, visual, and auditory, Instagram can be used to teach L2 meaning making to a younger cultural audience.

Also, Written Corrective Feedback, specifically the model texts used in this study, helped L2 learners notice certain linguistic features, thus improving syntactic awareness and writing performance. Thus, collaborative writing is found to outperform individual writing performance in this study. Thus, this study recommends future research to include in the existing intervention model as seen in Figure 1 individual multimodal writing tasks because this will help the students to reduce reliance on more knowledgeable others so they could internalize linguistic features on their own thus, improving their syntactic awareness. The group collaborative writing will be the scaffolding component of the intervention before introducing the individual writing multimodal writing tasks. There should be two phases as well of the individual writing tasks to reinforce the learning and ensure that their syntactic awareness is improved.

Other recommendations include that future research on noticing model texts using the translanguaging approach should (1) be conducted on a bigger sample size so that results are more generalisable and have a narrower margin of error, (2) look at other language errors other than verb form errors, such as the noun subcategory which were the second most common linguistic errors produced by students in this study, (3) include interviews in the data collection process because they can provide the researcher with richer data such as the reasons for errors made and language instructors' and students' attitudes on noticing model texts using translanguaging in ESL.

Lastly, future studies could use multiple model texts for each writing activity, giving students a larger linguistic repertoire to learn from. This is so that the students are not bound to only one example text. This allows students to respond in a number of ways during the writing task discussion. As a result, their writing performance will improve more significantly in the next phase.

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