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The relationship between first language (L1) proficiency and second language (L2) acquisition has long been a subject of interest in the field of language learning. When learners develop strong writing skills in their L1, they have the potential to transfer some of those skills, including grammar and syntactical structures, to their L2 (Odlin & Jarvis, 2004; Ortega, 2014). This phenomenon has important implications for understanding how L1 writing experience can enhance learners' awareness of text structures and organization, ultimately benefiting their L2 writing abilities. In this study, we delve into how non-native English speaking (NNES) doctoral students' L1 writing abilities correlate with their L2 grammar knowledge.

This study is part of a larger research project, focusing on NNES doctoral students studying in Hungary. To fulfil the research aim, a survey was designed following Creswell's (2012) guidelines and distributed during the academic year 2021-2022. A total of 255 NNES doctoral students willingly participated in the survey, expressing their self-assessed levels of L1 writing and English grammar knowledge on a 1-6 Likert scale.

According to the descriptive analysis results, the students reported relatively high levels of confidence in their L1 writing ($M=4.67$, $SD=1.33$), as well as their English grammar knowledge ($M=4.66$, $SD=1.08$). Notably, students who perceived themselves as proficient L1 writers tended to rate themselves higher in L2 grammar knowledge. To explore this further, a one-way ANOVA test was performed, revealing a significant difference between the student groups ($F(5, 249) = 2.884$, $p = .015$). Furthermore, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between L1 writing ability and L2 grammar knowledge. The analysis unveiled a statistically significant relationship between the two variables at the $p < .001$ level ($r = .214$).

The results suggest that there is a positive connection between L1 writing ability and L2 grammar knowledge among NNES doctoral students. Learners who have strong writing skills in their L1 appear to be better equipped to develop grammatical proficiency in their L2. This supports the notion of transferability of writing skills from the L1 to the L2, where the grammatical rules familiar in the L1 can positively impact the understanding and usage of grammatical structures in the L2. However, it is essential to consider factors that might influence the correlation's magnitude.

One such factor could be the difference in text processing systems between the learners' L1 and L2. Despite the observed relationship, the correlation coefficient ($r=.214$) indicates that the transfer of L1 writing skills to L2 grammar knowledge might not be entirely straightforward and is subject to other factors that influence language acquisition. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the relationship between L1 writing proficiency and L2 grammar knowledge among NNES doctoral students.

Key words: L1 writing, self-assessments, correlation analysis, non-native English-speaking students, L2 grammar

References

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