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Verb aquisition in students of English as a Second Language: language learning background and attitudes

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VERB ACQUISITION IN STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE:
LANGUAGE LEARNING BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDES

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Abstract

In order to determine how learner background and learner attitudes affected English as a Second Language students' verb production, eleven ESL learners participated in both oral and written tasks. They were given written surveys to determine what was emphasized more in learning English in their home countries: speaking or writing. Another survey was administered to determine which of these activities that they liked best. Next, the subjects watched a movie clip, wrote about it, and then spoke about it. Their written and spoken total amount of verbs produced and total amount of verbs used correctly were compared and analyzed to see if there was a relationship between their learning background and production in speaking and writing and activity preference and production in speaking and writing. While the sample size was too small to obtain reliable correlations, so several subjects' samples were studied in order to determine the effects of preference on production. In the end, individual differences played the largest role in verb production and there was a slight but noticeable relationship between a preference for speaking and amount of verbs produced.

1. Introduction

Second language learners' backgrounds were a topic of great interest in the 1970's, but interest in this subject waned after this time (Schumann 1978, Cohen & Robbins 1976, Holley & King 1974). There was also research in this area performed by other researchers: Plann 1976, Dvorak 1977, and Hendrickson 1976 (cited in Van Patten 1992). However, this is still an important issue from a scientific standpoint as well as a teaching standpoint because it is difficult for each group to relate to each other (Block 1999). Too often, teachers feel that the studies performed by researchers have no bearing on activities in a real-life classroom. Indeed, much of the research indicates that emphasizing grammar or writing abilities does not in fact help the acquisition process (Van Patten 1992).

From a teaching standpoint, this disconnection between teachers and researchers is incredibly frustrating, and of course no teacher wants to believe that his life's work is in vain. Another layer to this story is that perhaps the learner's attitudes towards different areas of language use help shape his acquisition process. Many of the studies that have focused on the learner's attitudes, however, have dealt with learner's apprehension and anxiety towards the language (Samimy 1994). However, a study of actual likes (subject-wise), might be more useful in emphasizing the students' strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses, as evidenced in Lee (2005).

This study draws on the ideas of these form-mentioned studies with the hope that it will be more accessible to English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. This study was designed by a researcher and a teacher and should help bridge the gap between the two groups.

1.1 Background to the Study

1.1.1 Learner Background

Early studies in second language acquisition did focus on language learners' background, whether the emphasis was on their learning writing or speaking. For example, some studies dealt with an informal (someone not learning in a classroom setting) learner's oral output (Schumann 1978), while others dealt with learners' spoken output (Holley & King 1974) or learners' written output (Cohen & Roberts 1976). One study looked at learner's acquisition through naturalistic learning, and the other looked at error correction in writing. Neither study showed significant effects of advanced language acquisition. Of course, these studies took many other factors into consideration as well: past language experiences, language learning strategies, and environment to name a few.

Schumann's study (1978) involved a sample of ESL speakers whose first language was Spanish in order to determine how second language acquisition (SLA) developed independently from teaching. This was an important issue to study, because since the beginning of civilization, people have learned each others' languages without being taught anything at all. Nowadays, though, questions about SLA have to do more with language teaching than with how well the learner learns the language on his own. Schumann's design was similar to that of first language acquisition studies: take a small sample over a certain length of time and observe the subjects' speech. He chose 6 different native Spanish speakers, 2 from each of the following age groups: 4-6 years old, 11-14 years old, and over eighteen. The data collection involved spontaneous speech, elicitations (both of conversation and experimental types), and "pre-planned sociolinguistic interactions" (taking the subjects to restaurants, museums, and parties).

Examples of the spontaneous conversation included conversations instigated by the experimenter about a mutual interest shared with the subject. As the study progressed and the subject got to know the experimenter, the subject often started the conversation himself. There were several different types of elicitations, including imitations, negatives, passives, and questions. In each instance, the experimenter would prompt the subject, who would then reword (if necessary) what the experimenter said into the target form. For example, the experimenter would say, "She took her shoes off," and the subject would be asked to repeat this phrase (imitation). To elicit a negative response, the experimenter would say, "He walks to school," and the subject would be asked to negate the sentence, "He doesn't walk to school." For a passive response, the example would be, "The truck hit the tree," to which the subject would reply, "The tree was hit by the truck." Finally, questions followed the form of "He will see what?" The subject would then question back, "What will he see?" For the "pre-planned sociolinguistic interactions," a transcriber followed along on the excursions, recording the conversations and later transcribing them.

The acquisition targets of this study were auxiliary verb acquisition and its different structures: negatives and questions. This mirrored, again, former first language acquisition studies and also other SLA studies. The subjects in Schumann's study were not "taught," but for negatives, ratios were collected weighing frequency of the negator against the total number of negators in the sample. For questions, the ratios weighed the frequency of inversion of the auxiliary and the subject (Is she happy?) to the total of inversions in the sample. Each set of ratios were placed on graphs. Schumann developed, from this, a criterion for the development of auxiliaries.

After analyzing the results, Schumann chose to focus on one subject, Alberto, a 33-year-old man from Costa Rica, because his development was less successful than the others in the study. It was determined that Alberto's age was the biggest factor in his lack of acquisition of correctly using auxiliaries, and when he did use them correctly, it was positive transfer from Spanish. That is to say, certain similarities between grammatical constructions in Spanish and English could have caused Alberto to produce correct utterances in English. He did not necessarily know what he was saying was correct or incorrect, he was simply following his own Spanish grammatical rules. However, other factors could have been at play as well, including social and psychological language distance. Social distance encompasses the ideas that the learner's social group has about the target language speakers' group (dominance versus subordination or attitudes of the two groups towards each other). Psychological distance includes factors such as culture shock and ego-permeability (the ability to lower one's inhibitions to attempt to learn an L2).

Schumann was able, therefore, to develop a representation of the second language (L2) learning process (1976). For him, L2 learning was a process of acculturation. Below in Figure 1 is an image of this schematic. The different factors, acculturation and motivation for example, influence why a learner learns an L2. As he learns, he undergoes certain cognitive process where he infers and makes generalizations about the target language. Finally, the learner's utterances are a result of the processes he used in the second step; the utterances change as the processes change as well. These utterances represent the learner's "interlanguage," a system developed by Corder (1967) and expounded upon by Nemser (1971) and Selinker (1972) (Block 2003). This system stated that language learners have an intricate learning device, their competence is always internally coherent, and their output is an idiolect that is always changing.

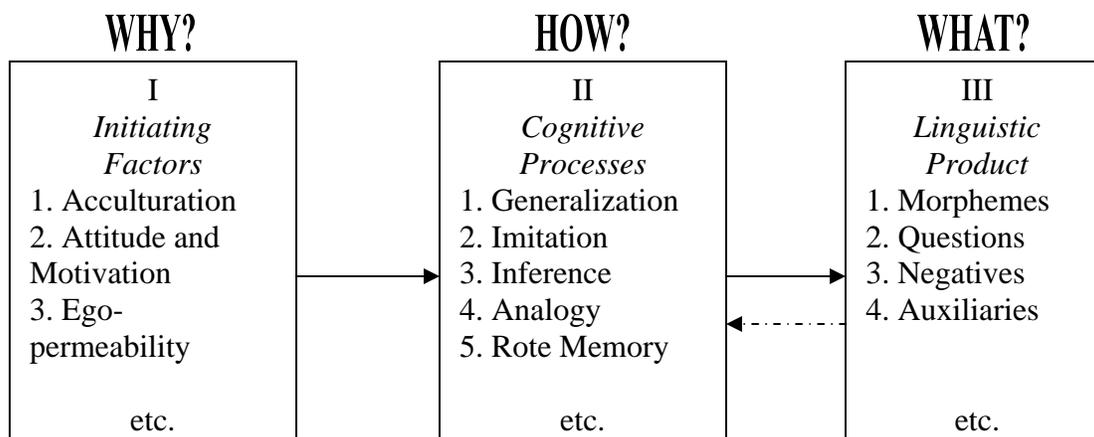| WHY?	HOW?	WHAT?
I *Initiating Factors* 1. Acculturation 2. Attitude and Motivation 3. Ego-permeability etc.	II *Cognitive Processes* 1. Generalization 2. Imitation 3. Inference 4. Analogy 5. Rote Memory etc.	III *Linguistic Product* 1. Morphemes 2. Questions 3. Negatives 4. Auxiliaries etc.

Figure 1

Schumann's Representation of L2 Learning Process

So if not teaching does not help the learner, does teaching really help that much? Holley & King (1974) approached this from the standpoint of grammatical accuracy in teaching. While at the time, practicing and memorizing dialogs was the norm in language teaching and this practice is not as prevalent today, there is still much repetition in today's language learning textbooks (for example, Azar 2003). Teachers over-emphasized the correction of errors in these memorized dialogs, which might have unnecessarily put pressure on students to focus more on grammatical correctness than learning how to use the language. These researchers approached this issue, as Schumann did, from the perspective of first language acquisition. Children do not learn their language by constantly imitating adults. Of course, input is necessary, but parents do not repeat words, phrases, and grammatical rules to their children in an effort to teach them the language. Also, children are constantly hypothesizing grammar rules and trying to approximate that of adult speakers. Children constantly make mistakes because of this yet are not bombarded with corrections as students of a second language are.

For this study, Holley & King used a graduate class in applied linguistics in conjunction with German courses at the university level, first year through third year, so as to obtain diverse proficiency samples. Each week, three students from the graduate course taught the same lesson to three different groups of the German learning students, and these sessions were video-taped. Initially the graduate students/teachers interrupted the German students when they made grammatical mistakes or supplied the correct response when the German students hesitated. After the researchers examined these videos, they asked the teachers, instead, to allow the students five to ten seconds of hesitation, and then to reword the question or phrase in a way that hopefully the students would better understand so they could respond. Alternately, the teachers could give cues, providing a "hint" as to what the next word or grammatical structure should be. Also, instead of jumping in to correct grammatical mistakes, the teachers were asked to allow the students to finish the thought and then reword the sentence so that it was grammatically correct. The students, however, were not asked to repeat the correct sentence because it was probably too complex for them at their level of proficiency.

Sessions were videoed with the students later and the researchers found that the latter teaching methods were much more helpful in the acquisition process. Therefore, they concluded that error correction does help in speaking, but the kind of error correction must be closely monitored. Overzealous teachers may actually do more harm than good for their students.

Cohen and Robbins studied the effects of error correction in writing to determine if this helps produce less errors (1976). For their study, they examined three students who had just completed an advanced ESL class. The students were all proficient in Mandarin and were eager to discuss their language learning experiences. The first step was to administer a questionnaire, divided into three parts. The first part elicited information about the subjects' language

background and their proficiency in all the languages they had studied. The second part obtained a list of language learning activities in which the subjects had participated in their English classes. This part contained a list of activities, and the subjects were to rate the activities on a scale of one to five (one was "like very much," five was "dislike very much," and three was "neutral"). The third section contained a list of questions designed to determine learning strategies. In this section, a hypothetical situation was given to the subject and he had to explain how he would approach the situation. The questionnaire was administered to each subject individually and orally, and the responses were recorded.

The subjects gathered all their written work from their advanced ESL class for Cohen and Robbins to examine. This was all of their assignments, in and out of class. All the assignments were ordered chronologically, and then they interviewed each subject for an error explanation interview. The subjects were asked to identify mistakes in a particular sentence and then explain why they made those mistakes (if they could remember). To aid in the explanation process, there was a list of reasons: carelessness (knew the rule but forgot), was uncertain about the rule, or never knew the rule. Next, the subject was asked for possible reasons for the difficulty with this rule: negative transfer from his first language, the English grammar rule was just too confusing, or the grammar books and/or teacher were too confusing. If an error had been corrected by the teacher, the subject was asked to explain if he had taken the correction into account at the time and whether or not he thought the correction had been helpful. For the analysis, each error was numbered (outside of the original writings) and assigned an error category. While one subject was explaining his errors, the investigators were looking at this master list of all the subjects' errors. These interviews were taped.

After the taped interviews were transcribed, it was decided to focus on errors in verb forms since this was where the majority of errors occurred. The errors were listed in chronological order of writing to ascertain if any errors dropped away by the end of the term. The investigators also counted the frequency of each mistake. So, for example, "man can developes" was counted for errors of modals with main verbs.

Cohen and Robbins found that despite corrections made consistently over the ten-week term of the advanced ESL class, the students did not improve. However, because the grading was inconsistent (a teacher and two assistants alternately corrected the papers), the students' errors were not charted over time, and because explanations did not always accompany corrections, it is hard to say if thorough, consistent error correction in writing could not be of some useful help to learners.

1.1.2 Learner Attitudes

The second issue to be discussed is that of learner attitudes. Surely the way a learner feels towards certain areas of the language is important to how well they perform in any given area. For example, Lee (2005) thought that perhaps learners' positive and negative attitudes might affect their acquisition process as well as what sorts of activities they did in school. While she focused mostly on the negative factors (writer's block and apprehension), positive attributes included the effect of reading on writing. Learners who enjoy reading should prove to be better writers and experience less writer's block and apprehension and should also write more in general. Lee sought to expound upon previous studies that focused on writer's block in a second language, such as Lee and Krashen's 2003 study as well as those that focused on writer's apprehension, such as Daly and Miller's 1975 study (cited in Lee 2005).

For Lee's study, she gathered 270 university students from Taiwan whose first language was Mandarin and were learning English as a foreign language. The students came from diverse departments at their respective universities and ranged from beginner to highly proficient in their English abilities. They were all enrolled in an English writing class. The writing class met once a week for 2 hours and focused on organization, grammar, and error detection and correction. The subjects filled out a questionnaire each on writer's block, writer's apprehension, and literary activities. The questionnaires were written in English but the experimenter discussed the questions with the subjects in Mandarin to ensure comprehensibility. They were then allowed forty minutes to write a composition. The time limit was enforced to create apprehension for the subjects. The essays were ranked into six categories, from clearly competent to clearly incompetent (this was done by raters who made judgment calls). Then, the raters reread the compositions and ranked them from 0-9 based upon vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Thus, the subjects were assigned two-digit scores, the first being level and the second being the rank within that level. This entire process seemed highly subjective, though.

For the questionnaires, the responses were converted to numbers and the reliability computed. The results indicated that there was a connection between writer's block and writer's apprehension; however, neither factor affected the subjects' writing performance. This might have been because the writing assignment was not challenging enough to push apprehension or that the self-reported responses on the questionnaires were not reflective of how the subjects actually felt. In consistency with other studies, this study found that enjoying reading and/or reading a great deal helps improve writing as well as decrease writer's block and writer's apprehension.

As mentioned previously, other studies focused specifically on learners' apprehensions and not learners' comfortableness (Bak & White 1996, Samimy 1994). Bak and White approached the issue of Chinese ESL students in New Zealand who were not used to the classroom style in New Zealand, which is more centered on peer-based activities as opposed to teacher-centered lessons, as in China. So, not only were the ESL students in New Zealand adjusting to new learning styles, they were adjusting to the new language as well. Samimy examined the different reasons for Japanese ESL students' problems in learning English, including apprehensions, motivations, and risk-taking. These types of studies are useful to the larger realm of learner attitudes but do not help address whether personal subject preference aids in a student's success in SLA.

1.2 Rationale

As evidenced from the research, studies about language background have not had much prevalence within the past twenty years. Additionally, studies about learner attitudes have not dealt specifically with the subjects that learners find enjoyable. Coming from the viewpoint of a researcher and of a teacher, it would be interesting to see how the two factors work together to aid in SLA.

This researcher has spent the past several months teaching ESL as a graduate assistant in Louisiana State University's (LSU) English Language Orientation Program (ELOP). Grammar and composition were the classes taught, and it is remarkable how well the students performed on their grammar tests, yet they did not apply that knowledge to their compositions. As a teacher, this was trying. Surely there was a stronger connection between teaching and performance than what the students had demonstrated. Maybe the connection lay with the students' own personal

preferences regarding how they use the language. Perhaps their passion resides within one area of language use and thus influences how well they perform in that area.

As the previously mentioned studies discovered (Schumann 1978, Cohen & Robbins 1976, and Holley & King 1974), teaching (or lack thereof) and/or error correction, in most cases, does not affect SLA. Additionally, enjoying reading does have an effect on writing skills (Lee 2005). However, none of these studies specifically addressed the isolated topics of interest for this study. The language background studies take many more factors into account to explain the problems with teaching certain areas. Those language background studies, however, used uniform subject samples: students of similar backgrounds, ages, or motivations. Because of that, the present study does not take those factors into account; ELOP students of all ages come from all over the world to learn English for many different reasons (go to school in the United States, get a better job in their home countries, or as college credit at their own universities). Therefore, it would be unnecessary to tie those other factors into this study, as it would not be applicable for the ELOP teachers. It would not be feasible for the teachers to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate all the different types of students represented in their classes.

Additionally, since there really are not that many studies that deal specifically with what students enjoy, this study will approach that. The four subjects studied in ELOP are grammar, reading, composition, and spoken English, so their enjoyment of these subject areas should give insight into their performances. Also, if there is a relationship between enjoyment of the class and their performance in that area, and there are areas in which the students are weak, then the ELOP teachers may be able to provide different activities or teaching styles for those classes.

In order to study the students' production, the different forms of the past tense were the focus of this study. This was chosen as the topic because it is something that all the students should have learned already and use frequently.

1.3 Research Questions

This study was designed by a researcher and an ESL teacher who hopes to aid not only the field of ESL/SLA but also specifically to help ELOP at LSU. Taking the knowledge of previous studies into account as well as the nature of ELOP and by administering questionnaires and specific tasks, this researcher hopes to answer the following questions:

1. How do the learners differ with respect to background characteristics?

2. How do the learners differ with respect to attitudes toward writing and speaking?

3. To what extent do learners differ with respect to verb use in writing?

4. To what extent do learners differ with respect to verb use in speaking?

5. How do learners differ with respect to verb use in both the speaking and writing tasks?

2. Review of Literature

In order to study language learner's background and attitudes, previous research was consulted. These included Schumann's small sample study (later case study) of unaided verbal acquisition. His study found that not being taught does not help in the acquisition process (1976, 1978). Other research from this same time period included Holley and King's study of German learners' error correction study, which did find some evidence of error correction being helpful to SLA as long as it was restrained. In addition, Cohen & Robbins (1976) found that error correction in writing has no effect on developing proper writing skills; however this could have been due to a number of factors involving inconsistent grading styles and insufficient explanations of errors.

For learner's preferences, most studies focused on negative factors (Bak & White 1996, Samimy 1994) or partially focused on negative factors (Lee 2005). Lee's study provided the best insight for the current study as it took into account the students' enjoyment of reading as a factor in learning correct English writing skills. Sadly, however, there is not much literature to consult in learning about SLA students' preferences in regards to subject matter.

3. Methods

3.1 Subjects

The subjects for this study were ELOP students at LSU. This program is open to any student of any age anywhere in the world who would like to participate in an intensive English program. The classes in the program include mandatory grammar, composition, spoken English, and reading classes. These classes meet for one hour each day, five days a week, for eight weeks. For an extra fee, students may choose to take the optional classes which are Conversation and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation. Conversation and TOEFL prep start after the term has begun. The mandatory classes are taught by two full-time ESL professionals as well as three linguistics graduate students at LSU. Conversation is taught by undergraduate student volunteers, usually English majors; and TOEFL prep is taught by one of the full-time ELOP faculty.

When students arrive at LSU, they take the Michigan State Proficiency Test and are placed in ELOP classes accordingly. The term during which this study occurred yielded three levels: Level 3, beginning; Level 5, intermediate; and Level 6, advanced. Although Level 6 students are all basically fluent and Level 3 students are struggling to become fluent, Level 3 should still have a basic grasp of grammar, including past, present, and future tenses; and a reasonably sized vocabulary in order to carry on every day conversations.

To recruit these students for the study, it was mentioned to all classes, including this researcher's own classes (Level 3 Composition and Grammar), two weeks before the study. Candy was offered to the subjects as payment, but they were promised that their grade would in no way be affected if they did or did not choose to participate.

The day of the study, even though approximately 25 students had signed up, 11 actually came to participate. The learners were quite diverse, as evidenced in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Subjects' Backgrounds

Subject	Nationality	Native Language	Age	Years Studied English	Level in ELOP
S_1	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	20	8	3
S_2	Taiwanese	Taiwanese	27	15	6
S_3	Taiwanese	Taiwanese	18	9	6
S_4	Korean	Korean	23	10	6
S_5	Korean	Korean	33	6	5
S_6	Korean	Korean	22	8	5
S_7	Korean	Korean	22	10	5
S_8	Argentine	Spanish	19	6	3
S_9	Syrian	Arabic	30	6	5
S_{10}	Argentine	Spanish	48	2	5
S_{11}	Chilean	Spanish	32	0.42	3

Notice that there were mostly Asian students in this sample. This allows an examination of Eastern versus Western learning styles as well as gives a perspective for students learning a language that is very distant from English. Also, learning times ranged from less than 1 year to 15 years, which allows a study of how important time is in learning English.

3.2 Procedures

The goal was to learn from the students about their language background. How long had they been studying English? Where did they come from? What was the teaching emphasis (writing or speaking) in their home countries? Also, what did they enjoy about English: speaking, writing, or even grammar or reading? In order to determine their background, what the subjects enjoyed, and their abilities, the experiment was multi-layered. First, each subject's name was put on a list beside a number. The numbered list was used to keep each subject's information together without using their names.

Next, they filled out three surveys. The first survey included statements that could be used to gauge what the students enjoyed most (Appendix B). This survey was adapted from a similar survey used by Ramirez (1995). The students were asked to circle their agreement with each statement. That is to say, there were five choices: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Some statements were "I tremble when I know I'm going to be called on in my English classes," "I enjoy my writing assignments in my English classes," and "I would rather volunteer to speak during my English classes than to do writing assignments." The second survey (Appendix B) was given to determine what they were taught in their home country. This was a very straightforward survey consisting of only four statements. The subjects had to rank the emphasis of what they were taught, 1 being least emphasis and 4 being most emphasis. The four possible areas were grammar, speaking, writing, and reading. The final survey was just to verify level in ELOP and to determine years spent learning English as well as nationality and native language. This information was later not used in the analysis.

After the surveys were completed, the subjects watched fifteen minutes of the movie, "Back to the Future." These fifteen minutes were toward the end of the movie, at the climax of the story. In this part of the movie, Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) tried to tell Doc (Christopher Lloyd) about the night he went back to 1955 from 1985. Doc did not want to hear about his future in 1985, so Marty gave him a letter detailing the events of Doc's death. Doc later ripped up the letter. After that, they successfully channeled 1.21 gigawatts of electricity into the time machine, a DeLorean, and sent Marty back to his time of 1985. He arrived a few minutes early so he could try to prevent Doc's death at the hands of terrorists. As it turns out, Doc had taped the letter back together and knew he was going to be shot, so he wore a bulletproof vest. After

watching this fifteen minute clip, the students spent as long as they needed writing about what happened, being sure to write their summary in the past tense.

The purpose for using "Back to the Future," besides lacking certain school-inappropriate elements such as excessive violence and blood, sex, and bad language, was twofold. First, there was not a great deal of dialogue, so the subjects would not stumble upon trying to understand everything that the characters said. Second, the action was just confusing enough that they would try to figure out the story more than concentrate on correct verb usage. Some of the students had already seen this movie, but it had been a long time for all of them, so being thrown into the end of the action was just as confusing for those who had seen the movie as those who had not.

When the subjects were finished writing their narratives about the movie, each one was interviewed separately. They were asked to describe what happened in the movie. Each interview was recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder, and the interviews were later uploaded to a computer. The goal originally was to have each talk for about a minute and a half, but as it turned out, some really liked talking and some really did not. The shortest interviews lasted a minute and a half and the longest lasted five minutes. This way, their total verb usage could be compared as well as how well they did.

After this process was completed, both the written and oral summaries were transcribed into a Word document. Each instance of a past tense verb, an attempted past tense verb, or an instance where a past tense verb should have occurred were counted. For the transcriptions of the oral interviews, all pauses, "um"s, and "uh"s were transcribed. Several of the subjects also had false starts on several verbs. For example, Subject 2 said, "The doctor the doctor still be killed was still still be was still killed." The final result was counted in this case. Even if the final result of the stuttering was incorrect, it was still considered the target form for the speaker. The

stuttering was interpreted as a way to think out loud until the correct form was achieved, just as in writing the subjects could go back and erase or make changes to their narratives. Therefore, the result of the stuttering is a true measure of the subject's knowledge of past tense verbs.

Following the transcription, how many total past tense or possible past tense verbs in each written summary and each interview for each subject were counted. Then how many were correct out of all of these were counted. After consulting the data, it seemed necessary to also separate irregular verbs from regular verbs, so the irregular verb totals were pulled from the past tense verb totals. That is to say, out of a sample consisting of "wanted," "wrote," "was," "drove," and "believe" (Subject 2), "wanted" and "believed" were separated into the regular verb category and "wrote," "was," and "drove" were placed in the irregular verb category. Superficially, these results appeared to be unevenly distributed because of the high frequency use of "to be." Another count was done removing "to be" from other irregular verbs ("was," in the example of Subject 2). This provided many variables to use in analyzing the data. Additionally, past progressives (*was* or *were* before the verb with *-ing* added to the end) were counted as well. However, a phrase such as "was walk" as opposed to the correct "was walking" was counted as incorrect even if the context required the past progressive. Past perfect was also counted as correct or incorrect (depending on the situation), but there was only one instance of this form.

For the surveys, all responses were converted to numbers. For the preferences survey, responses 1-5 were weighted with 5 representing the highest preference. So, for example, the statement, "I enjoy my writing assignments in my English classes," received the following scores: a Strongly Agree response yielded a 5 for writing, Agree was a 4, Neither Agree nor Disagree was a 3, Disagree was a 2, and a Strongly Disagree was a 1. The statement, "I would rather volunteer to speak during my English classes than to do writing assignments," was

twofold. A Strongly Agree response yielded a 5 for speaking but a 1 for writing. Some statements were originally interpreted as having more than one preference associated. For example, "I enjoy grammar class" was both writing and speaking. After careful consideration, though, five statements were thrown out or reinterpreted to be associated with only one preference. The total preference was weighted against the total possible preference to obtain a percentage. For example, after revising, there were 3 writing questions, each with a possible total of 5. Therefore, the total writing preference was weighted against 15, and that was the subject's total percentage of "liking" writing. There were, however, some limitations to this survey. The questions could have indicated more of their preference for the class or teacher instead of the specific subject area. Also, it did not compare the areas against each other; it simply determined an arbitrary percentage for how much each student preferred each activity. Despite this, the survey was adequate for the purposes of this study. Perhaps in the future a more refined survey could be designed in order to obtain more accurate results.

The "what was taught" survey was ranked simply as 1-4 since that was the format the survey took. For each statement, a percentage was obtained by weighing the amount of emphasis for each subject against 4, since 4 meant that this particular subject received the most emphasis in teaching in the subjects' home countries.

After everything was converted into percentages, it was possible to examine the students' samples and compare their survey responses to their production. Due to the small sample size, reliable statistics could not be run. In order to gauge the relationship between what was taught and the students' preferences, this study inspected each of the students' samples on a case by case basis.

3.3 Design of the Study

      This was a descriptive study intended to determine, first, how language background affected these students' production and, second, how their attitudes or preferences might affect their production. To aid the understanding of the different variables in this study, refer to Figure 3.1.

Background

| Nationality Native Language Years Studying English Emphasis on Writing Emphasis on Speaking | → | Writing |

| Enjoys Writing Enjoys Speaking | → | Speaking |

Attitudes
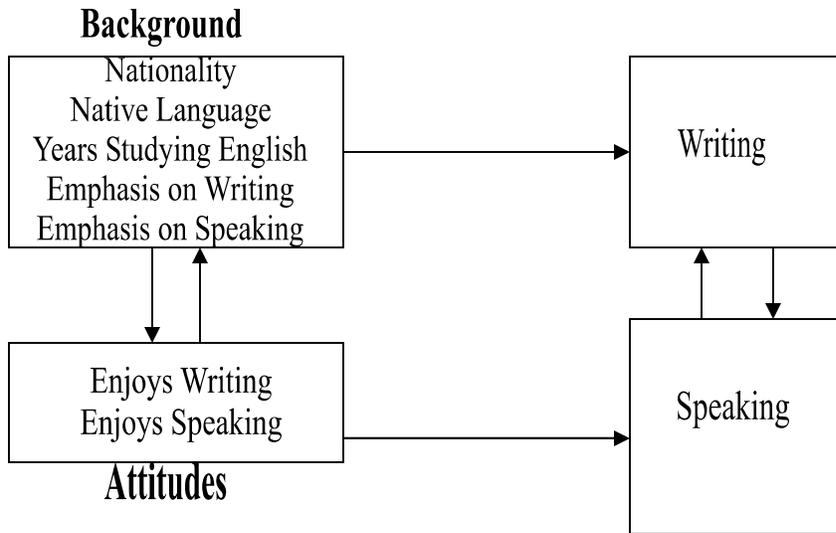
Figure 3.1 Learners' Characteristics

      It is easy to see from this figure that, for each speaker, several factors are affecting his production. A speaker's background, an independent variable, affects his writing and speaking abilities. It could even influence his attitudes. On the other hand, the speaker's attitudes, another independent variable, affect his writing and speaking production as well. Alternately, his attitudes could easily influence his background as well. (If he enjoys writing, for example, he may spend more time learning English.)

4. Results

The best way to analyze the data is to look at each subjects' contributions by writing and then by speaking. Therefore, the first section of this chapter gives an overall perspective of the subjects' verb use in the writing task. The second section of this chapter compares the selected students' samples to each other, and for each sample there are tables depicting that subject's total written verb production as well as what emphasis on teaching the student received and their own personal preferences. The third section duplicates the first section; individual subjects' speaking samples are analyzed. Section four duplicates section two in that it gives a comparative analysis of the students in the speaking task. Again, tables are provided with each sample to show total performance in speaking. Additionally, the emphases and preferences tables are duplicated in aid in reading. The fifth and final section draws on the four previous sections and compares the selected students across all verb types for both the speaking and writing tasks.

4.1 Verb Use in Writing Task

The first task for the students was to write a summary of the movie. They were given as much time as they needed to complete this activity. They were told to write their narratives using the past tense. After that, their summaries were typed into a Word document and their verbs counted. At first all past tense or possible past tense were counted. The possible past tense category included an instance of "The yong men ____ surprised," where a form of "to be" was required in the blank (Subject 7). Also, the verb had to make sense in the context. It was considered incorrect if it was simply the wrong word. After counting, as mentioned previously, it was necessary to separate regular from irregular verbs. For the past tense, a regular verb was counted if the inflection *-ed* was required at the end of the word. An example of this is the verb *walk,* which becomes *walked.* Irregular verbs do not have the *-ed* ending, such as *ran* for *run.*

After examining the totals and percentages for the irregular and regular verbs, it seemed appropriate to break the irregular verbs into smaller categories: forms of "to be" and not forms of "to be." The forms of "to be" in the past include *was* and *were*. Because "to be" is a high frequency verb, perhaps the subjects' were more aware of it and therefore used it more correctly than other verbs. This could conceivably make it appear as though the subjects had a better grasp of irregular verbs than they really did. Therefore, the totals were counted again with this focus in mind.

This total of written verbs ranged from 4-33. Level did not dictate how well the learners performed. That is to say, Level 6 subjects did not write more than Level 3 subjects. Subject 7 (Level 5) wrote the most, with a total of 33. The assumption was that writing would produce more than speaking as well as more correct overall than speaking. This is because in writing, a learner may take his time, think over each word carefully, and look over the writing to correct any mistakes. It was interesting to note that this was not the case for this set of students.

In order to obtain a true glimpse of how well these students did, mini-case studies were conducted on each of the students. With each sample is a list of total written verb production, a table detailing the emphasis in the learner's background, and that subjects preferences in English. These emphases and preferences will be taken into consideration when discussing the mini-case studies. The emphases were studied to determine differences between the two and strength. For example, percentages were considered relatively close if they were within 10 percentage points of each other. For the preferences, a 100% preference was considered extremely enjoyable for the student, 50-75% marginally so, and 25% as not enjoyable at all since 0 was not an option on the survey. For each student, the written form will be analyzed. The verbs are underlined with

the irregular verbs highlighted in gray. This will provide a way to analyze the verbs quickly without stumbling over the other mistakes that the students made in their writing.

4.2 Differences Among the Learners in Writing Task

Subject 1
Male
Vietnamese
Age 20
Level 3
8 Years Studying English

> The young men given the old men are letter.
> The young men drove the car to back to the time When he
> lived.
> My be he want to older men not die.

Table 4.1 Subject 1's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	4	
Total Correct	2	50%
Total Irregular Verbs	2	
Total Correct	1	50%
Total Verbs was/were	0	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	2	
Total Correct	1	100%
Total Regular Verbs	2	
Total Correct	1	50%

Subject 1's learning background emphasized grammar (100%), followed by reading (75%), then writing (50%), and finally speaking (25%). This student's preferences were speaking over writing (76% and 47% respectively).

This student attempted 4 past tense verbs, half of which he used correctly. One of those used correctly was an irregular verb. It is interesting to note that he did not over-regularize the irregular verbs and that he failed to add the proper -ed inflection on one of the regular verbs.

Also, this student managed to avoid any form of "to be" in his summary. There seems to be no pattern or rule of interlanguage for this student. This is surprising since he learned grammar the most out of all the different subjects in his home country. Next on his list was reading. It would make more sense that a student who learned these tasks the most would not only excel more in what he attempts but would also have a more structured interlanguage. However, this student's preferences indicated speaking over writing, so perhaps that would explain the errors in his writing sample.

Subject 2

Male
Taiwanese
Age 27
Level 6
15 Years Studying English

Somebody wanted to kill Michael and doctor, doctor was killed and Michael drove the car to the past. He tried to save doctor's live, so he wrote a letter to warn doctor. But doctor didn't believed him and tore the letter into pieces. However, he still appreciated Michael.

When Michael tried to go back to the future, they faced some problems. Finally, they solved all the problems and Michael successfully went back to the time when somebody tried to kill them.

Back to the future, he still saw the doctor was killed and he escaped to the past. He felt so upset that he thought everything was the same. However, the doctor didn't be killed because he wore a bulletproof jacket. He believed Michael's warning. The reunion warning letter could prove it.

Table 4.2 Subject 2's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	23	
Total Correct	21	91%
Total Irregular Verbs	12	
Total Correct	12	100%

(Table 4.2 continued on next page.)

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Total Verbs was/were	3	
Total Correct	3	100%
Total Verbs not was/were	9	
Total Correct	9	100%
Total Regular Verbs	11	
Total Correct	9	75%

Subject 2's learning background emphasized reading first (100%), followed by writing (75%), then speaking (50%), and finally grammar (25%). This student preferred speaking (76%) marginally over writing (73%).

This student is quite a good writer as he had the highest percentage correct out of all the students, although he attempted 23 verbs (not the most attempted in writing). Twenty-one of those were correct, with 12 of the total being irregular verbs. All of the irregular verbs were used correctly. The only errors were in using regular verbs in the negative. His preferences were almost equal in writing (73%) and speaking (76%). This student learning background emphasized reading followed by writing, then speaking, then grammar. It is too difficult to discern whether any of these factors played a role in subject 2's performance, unless it would be possible to say that an emphasis on reading affected his verb production. This might be the case and would corroborate Lee's study (2005). It could also be attributed to the amount of time he had been studying English: 15 years which was at least 5 years more than all the other subjects.

Subject 3

Male
Taiwanese
Age 18
Level 6
9 Years Studying English

Dr. Brown <u>wanted</u> to help Marty back to his own
generation, 1985. But at that time, they almost felt the chance.

actually Marty wanted to tell Dr. Bown he will be killed 30 years later. Dr. Brown said Marty can't tell the future what will happen by time machine, so he ruined the letter which was Marty gave him. Then Marty back to 30 later, he saw Dr. Brown killed by guilty person, he thought he was too late, so he cried for Dr. Brown's dead. Then Dr. Brown woke up, Marty was so supprised because he thought Dr. Brown didn't read the letter, actually, Dr. Brown rebuild the letter after Marty left, so Dr. Brown weard a bullet proof close for that, it didn't happen anything bad, everything is fine.

Table 4.3 Subject 3's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	19	
Total Correct	14	74%
Total Irregular Verbs	13	
Total Correct	8	62%
Total Verbs was/were	3	
Total Correct	1	33%
Total Verbs not was/were	10	
Total Correct	6	60%
Total Regular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	6	100%

Subject 3's learning background included an emphasis on grammar (100%) followed by all three other factors: speaking, writing, and reading (all 50%). This student preferred writing over speaking (73% and 60% respectively).

Subject 3's summary was a little more difficult to analyze because he used the incorrect verb in one case (felt), but he used the correct past tense if it had been the correct verb. In this case, it was counted as a possible past tense verb as well as a possible irregular verb but not correct in either case. There is simply no way that "felt" could fit into that sentence. A similar situation showed up later with "the letter which *was* Marty gave him." Again, "was" does not belong in that sentence, but if it did it would be correct. In this case it was counted as a usage of

a past tense, an irregular, and a form of "to be." However, it was not counted as correct in any

instance.

Using these guidelines, subject 3 attempted 19 past tense verbs, getting 14 of them

correct. This included 13 irregular verbs, 8 of which he used correctly, and 6 regular verbs with

all 6 correct. This student had only been studying English for one year more than subject 1, yet

he obviously was more verbose in his writing. He had the strongest background in grammar the

and only marginally learned the other three subjects, speaking, writing, and reading. It would

make sense to say that the reason he did as well as he did was because of this emphasis on

grammar, but given the previous subject's lack of verbs at all this is not a reliable claim.

However, this student had a strong preference for writing (73%), so perhaps that played a role in

his writing production.

Subject 4

Male
Korean
Age 23
Level 6
10 Years Studying English

Back to the Future

Unfortunately Fox come to past accidently. So young
doctor (actually he is a same person with present doctor) trying to
Fox to came back home. However, plug is separated by branch.
Doctor go to join the plug and Fox said to him something but he
can't listen anything. After he came back to future. He watches the
doctor's death, so doctor wearing a body armor. In that reason
doctor do not die.

Table 4.4 Subject 4's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	11	
Total Correct	2	18%

(Table 4.4 continued on next page.)

Total Irregular Verbs	7	
Total Correct	2	29%
Total Verbs was/were	2	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	5	
Total Correct	2	40%
Total Regular Verbs	4	
Total Correct	0	0%

Subject 4's learning background involved an equally strong emphasis in grammar and reading (100%) and an equally weak emphasis in speaking and writing (25%). This student's preferences were nearly equal for writing (73%) and speaking (76%).

Subject 4, who spent even longer studying English than subject 3, had not yet mastered the past tense except in the case of 2 irregular verbs: "said" and "came." This student attempted 11 past tense verbs, getting 2 of them correct. Again, those 2 correct were irregular verbs. There were 2 instances of a form of "to be," but neither attempt used the desired past tense form. Interestingly, this student's strongest learning emphasis was in grammar and reading but not writing and speaking. It seems that this student learning background involved English activities that were passive in nature; he did not actively have to use his English skills in conversation or in writing in school. This would make sense as a reason for his almost avoidance of the past tense; but, as with subject 2 who also had an emphasis in reading, there might be a connection between reading and writing performance. Also, there was not a discernable difference between his preferences in writing or speaking, so this could not be construed as a factor in this student's writing.

Subject 5

Female
Korean

Age 33
Level 5
6 Years Studying English

> This movie is showed two actors.
> One is young and another man is old.
> Firstly, older man tried to making by using natural electronic
> material at the heist a church but He was hoble connecting a rope
> which was short. Young man tried to running a strange car which
> was a time machine.
> The time machine moved as there was burst in the sky.
> Next, they arrived in strange street. Old man was shouted a gun by
> strange people. Young man thought he died.
> but, Im lock, the alived there.

Table 4.5 Subject 5's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	14	
Total Correct	9	64%
Total Irregular Verbs	7	
Total Correct	4	57%
Total Verbs was/were	5	
Total Correct	3	60%
Total Verbs not was/were	2	
Total Correct	1	50%
Total Regular Verbs	7	
Total Correct	5	71%

Subject 5's learning background included equally heavy emphasis on grammar and reading (100%) and lesser emphasis on speaking and writing (50%). This student's preferences were also nearly equal with 60% for writing and 64% for speaking.

This student attempted 14 verbs and used 9 of them correctly. She did not seem to perform better in regular verbs or irregular verbs as her total amount correct was split almost evenly between the two categories: 4 correct were irregular and 5 correct were regular. In fact, subject 5's total performance was comparable to subject 4's. They even shared many

characteristics, including native language and strong emphasis in grammar and reading. They

both also enjoyed writing and speaking about the same amount. Interestingly, though, subject 5

was in Level 5 but subject 4 was in Level 6. The difference in level could be attributed to a

number of factors. For example, subject 4 might test better or subject 5 might have been hungry

or tired or nervous about the test. On the other hand, it could be that subject 5 had progressed

that much during her time in ELOP. For her production in the writing task, however, it could be

possible that her strong background in reading or even grammar might have influenced her

production. Her preferences in both writing and speaking were too similar to show an effect on

her writing.

Subject 6

Male
Korean
Age 22
Level 5
8 Years Studying English

> There are two guy in that movie. One old guy and one young guy.
> They were trying to go back to the future. But several troubles
> were occurred. So old scientist tried to solve these problems. After.
> He connected the wire. One young guy could back to the future.
> He faced death at old scientist in future time. But old scientist
> could alive Because at body armor.

Table 4.6 Subject 6's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	8	
Total Correct	4	50%
Total Irregular Verbs	3	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs was/were	1	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	2	
Total Correct	0	0%

(Table 4.6 continued on next page.)

Total Regular Verbs   5
        Total Correct   4   80%

Subject 6's learning background included a strong emphasis on grammar (100%),

followed by reading (75%), then both speaking and writing (25%). This student's preferences

were speaking over writing (76% over 40%).

This student was another Korean learner with 8 years of background in English. Even

though he had studied longer than the previous 2 subjects, his verb production was less than both

of theirs: 8 total with half of them correct. Five of the 8 were regular, and all 4 of the correctly

used verbs were regular. This of course meant that no irregular verbs were used correctly, which

was also quite different from the previous 2 Korean subjects. Since this subject has been

compared the subjects 4 and 5, though, the only other thing they had in common was their

background in grammar. Perhaps grammar and not reading affected the Korean students'

production. Additionally, this student preferred speaking much more than writing, so maybe that

affected the low number of verbs he used in his writing.

Subject 7

Female
Korean
Age 22
Level 5
10 Years Studying English

> There were a young boy and a old men. They tried to back to the
> future. the young boy gave a letter to the old men
> the young boy took the time machine and the old men helped him.
> but the electronic line was not well connected. So old men tried to
> connect. The alam rang, a young drove the time machine. And the
> old men finally connected electronic line that need to back to the
> future.
>   the young boy came back to the future. And a car passed
> the young boy, he rushed to fallow the car. And he arrived
> someplace. a men who ride in the car that was passed the young

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boy. Shoot the old men. he live in the future. and the men fallowed the other person. And the other person ride other time machine. So he went some othe time. the young men cried in fronut of the old men whom the men shoot. but the old men didn't dead because he wore protection vast. The yong men _____ surprised, the old men showed the letter. Finally, they took the time machin that the young men take. and the old men rided the young men's house. and he took off. the old men go back to the sometime with his time machine car… the end.

Table 4.7 Subject 7's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	33	
Total Correct	21	64%
Total Irregular Verbs	18	
Total Correct	11	61%
Total Verbs was/were	3	
Total Correct	2	67%
Total Verbs not was/were	15	
Total Correct	9	60%
Total Regular Verbs	15	
Total Correct	10	67%

Subject 7's learning background emphasized grammar (100%), followed by writing and reading (75%), then speaking (50%). This student's preferences were speaking much over writing (92% and 53% respectively).

This student presented a problem as well. She used the verb "to follow" correctly in her summary, even using the infinitive's form correctly. However, since in writing spelling counts, it was counted as incorrect since she spelled it as "fallow" instead of "follow." At least, though, it is evident that she is developing her own set of rules for her interlanguage since she consistently misspelled it.

She wrote 33 verbs, using 20 of them correctly. 18 of those were irregular and 11 of those were correct. There were 3 uses of "to be" – one was omitted – but the other two were correct. She strongly prefers speaking, which in this case really does not give any indication of whether or not this affected her writing. This student's learning background had an emphasis on grammar, followed closely by reading and writing. She is at least on par with subject 3 and has only been studying English a little longer than he has.

Subject 8

Male
Argentine
Age 19
Level 3
6 Years Studying English

> In the film we know the older man who prepares the car to went to the future. In the Beginning, the young man had a letter to the old man, but he couldn't read it. The young man drove the car and the other had to connect the cable; they had to do it at the same time, if they do it the car will went to the future.
> the young man went to the future, and Doc read the letter who knows what was going to pass in the future. When Martin went to the past, he didn't find where is Doc and he was worried about him.
> After this, Martin went running to found Doc. As it said in the letter, some theifs went to stabbed Doc, but he had read the letter and he put something that covered his body, and he didn't die.

Table 4.8 Subject 8's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	25	
Total Correct	21	84%
Total Irregular Verbs	19	
Total Correct	17	89%
Total Verbs was/were	2	
Total Correct	1	50%
Total Verbs not was/were	17	

(Table 4.8 continued on next page.)

Total Correct	16	94%
Total Regular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	4	67%

Subject 8's learning background included equally strong emphases in grammar and speaking (100%) and weaker emphasis on writing and reading (50%). This student's preferences were nearly equal for writing and speaking (80% and 72% respectively).

This student's abilities are quite astounding because he used the past perfect correctly in his summary. This was considered an irregular verb since forming the past perfect is *had* followed by the past participle. In most cases, the past participle is the same as the simple past tense, and since the simple past of "to read" is irregular, the past participle was considered irregular for the purposes of this exercise. Also, he used the past progressive, and this was counted as regular since the formation of this is always the past tense of "to be" plus the verb with -*ing* attached. This is also remarkable because this student is only in Level 3. However, it should be noted that by the end of the term, one of the ELOP teachers said that this student had made more progress in the short time he was in ELOP than any other student ever had.

Subject 8 used 23 past tense verbs, including instances of "went" when he should have used the bare form of the verb, "go." Since those instances were counted as incorrect, he actually used the past tense correctly for 18 of those 23 verbs. 18 of the total were irregular, and he used 15 of those correctly. He only used 5 regular verbs, but they were all used correctly. Two of the irregular verbs were "to be," but only one of those was used correctly.

He strongly preferred both writing (80%) and speaking (72%), which would hopefully indicate that this accounted for his abilities in writing. However, given the questionable relationship of this factor in the previous students, this is not a reliable claim. He had the

strongest background in grammar and speaking and less in reading and writing. He wrote

remarkably well, so maybe writing preference did play a part in this student's ability to produce

past tense verbs. However, as with other students, maybe an emphasis in grammar did help his

writing.

It is interesting that this student, in the same level as subject 1, did so much better than

subject 1 and had studied English for quite a bit less time than subject 1 had. In comparison with

subject 1, at least, this could be due to a preference in writing (although this claim does not work

when compared to subject 7, for example). Of course, this could be due to many other factors as

well, including Spanish's seeming similarities to English (and alternatively Vietnamese's

differences from English). As well, social and psychological distance probably played a huge

role in these two students. Subject 8 also refused to speak Spanish at all while he was in the

United States, and subject 1 was quite resistant to use English at all.

Subject 9

Male
Syrian
Age 30
Level 5
6 Years Studying English

Back to the Futuer.

This movie <u>talk</u> about man and his son.. he <u>likes</u> to go back to his future. They <u>prepare</u> car like time machine to the son <mark>go</mark> back to his father future.
They <u>adjusting</u> the time at 10:00 PM. suppose at 10:00 PM The time machin <u>start</u> be that future.
It really bad circumstanse <u>happend</u> at that moment to conact the wire. Finally they <mark>do</mark> it… and the machin <u>start</u> accounting the time when the <u>arrie</u> be surprise with his daddy faceing people <u>want</u> to kill him. but they <u>not succeed</u>. look the movie seems to me the son he will has a lot of trouble with his daddy future.

Table 4.9 Subject 9's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	12	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Irregular Verbs	2	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs was/were	0	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	2	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Regular Verbs	10	
Total Correct	0	0%

Subject 9's learning background included a strong emphasis in grammar (100%), followed by reading (75%), then both speaking and writing (25%). This student's preferences were nearly equal for writing and speaking (73% and 68% respectively).

This student actually tested into Level 3 on the Michigan Proficiency Test, but he was so prolific in his speaking that he was moved up to Level 5 (there were no Level 4 students during this ELOP session). Interestingly, he did not use one past tense verb correctly. He almost had "happend" correct, but again, spelling counts. Additionally, this student did not use the *-ed* inflection at all, which is a very basic rule of spelling past tense verbs.

Subject 9's preferences were about the same in writing (73%) and speaking (68%). With such a high error rate but also a fairly strong preference for writing, it is not possible to say that this affected this student's writing. His learning background was in grammar followed by reading. That defeated the earlier notion that an emphasis in grammar might positively affect production. He did not learning writing and speaking very much at all. Technically, this student had studied English the same length of time as subject 8 and also tested into the same level

initially. Perhaps, again, Arabic's social and psychological distances from English affected his

ability to produce past tense verbs.

Subject 10

Male
Argentine
Age 38
Level 5
2 Years Studying English

> The Doctor and the boy were in the past. and they were making
> attempts for put the boy back in the present time. They had many
> troubles in this efforts, because they needs a specific connection of
> devices ??? ??? force of ??? enlighten of ??? ???.
> Finally, they achieved his goals, and the boy returned at the
> present. But he can't went back before that the bad boys shooted
> the Doctor in the present time. Nevertheless, the Doc had a
> protection against shots oud bullets, because he didn't destroy the
> letter that the boy wrote for him in the past, giving him a warning
> about the shots. For this ???, the Doc was safe, and decided go
> again to the time, in this case 30 years after the present time.

Table 4.10 Subject 10's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	13	
Total Correct	10	77%
Total Irregular Verbs	7	
Total Correct	5	71%
Total Verbs was/were	2	
Total Correct	2	100%
Total Verbs not was/were	5	
Total Correct	3	60%
Total Regular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	5	83%

Subject 10's learning background included an emphasis on reading (100%), speaking

(75%), writing (50%), then grammar (25%). This student preferred speaking (80%) over writing

(60%).

This subject caused some difficulties, because his handwriting was almost illegible. Question marks were inserted for unknown words or phrases in his sample. However, for what was evident, there were 13 verbs, 10 of which were correct. There was a fairly even split between regular and irregular verbs (6 and 7, respectively), and the total correct was evenly split down the middle: 5 correct in each category. Two of his irregular verbs were forms of "to be," and he also used those correctly. He preferred speaking much more than writing and also had the strongest learning background in reading over all over activities. This student did well, if not exceptionally well, so it was not possible to make a prediction according to preference or learning background.

Subject 11

Male
Chilean
Age 32
Level 3
.42 Years Studying English

> this movie starts with an old men speaks with and young men. They have a problem to resolv. While the old men trys to connect two cables, the young boy drives a car. I understand that they have to meet in 20 minutes and 30 seconds.
> The old men have many problems to connect the cables, and the young men have problems with a car, it can not starts. But both resolved their problems, and when the 20 minutes and 30 seconds finished, a scrach with a tower and the energy is send across the cable. In the same time, the young men drives a car, and the energy of light is stand to the car and its with the young man disappear.
> The young men into the car appears in other place, 30 years in the future. He sees himself and run and enters into a car, and sees the old men died because other peoples uses weapons with him. He runs to try to help to the old man, but he is alives too, because he used protection in his body. In this moment, the old men shows a letter to the young men, I think this is the reason that saved his life.

Table 4.11 Subject 11's Verb Production in Writing

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	25	
Total Correct	4	16%
Total Irregular Verbs	14	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs was/were	1	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	13	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Regular Verbs	11	
Total Correct	4	36%

Subject 11's learning background included an emphasis on writing (75%), then grammar (50%), followed by both speaking and reading (25%). This student preferred speaking (92%) quite a bit more than writing (67%).

While this student definitely had some problems, he had also been studying English for less than 6 months. Given that short time period, he did very well. He used a few past tense verbs correctly but mostly just used the simple or bare stem of the verb to get his meaning across. He attempted 25 verbs but only used four correctly. Although it should be pointed out that he did inflect "died" correctly, but it appears that he should have used "dead" in this case. He had a fairly even balance of irregular and regular verbs (14 irregular, 11 regular), but his 4 correct verbs were only regular. He attempted one form of "to be," but it was incorrect as it should have been in the past tense.

This student very strongly preferred speaking (92%) versus a lower preference for writing (62%). This did not help with determining if preference played a part in his writing production. Additionally, he did not seem to have a very strong background in any area. He marginally learned writing, but he ranked the other areas as very low. This is interesting because he is

actually a very thoughtful and clever writer; and since the time of this experiment, his abilities have increased drastically.

These students' writing abilities are very diverse. Subjects 7 and 11 wrote the most while subjects 1 and 6 wrote the least. Additionally, subjects 9 and 11 had the lowest percentage of correct verbs and subjects 2 and 8 had the highest percentage.

Therefore, the best writers were arguably subjects 2 and 8, who both wrote a great deal but also used the most verbs correctly. Both students were quite prolific, attempting many verbs and using most of them correctly. In fact, they used the same amount overall. Both of these students were highly motivated; subject 2 wanted to attend a graduate school in the United States, and of course subject 8 refused to speak Spanish while in this country. It seemed as though these various attitudes about language learning helped these students to excel.

Subjects 1 and 9 are probably the most interesting cases to examine. Subject 1 had been studying English longer than subject 9 (but probably not noticeably so), yet seemed almost afraid to use English. Subject 1 actually used more verbs correctly, but he also attempted much fewer verbs than subject 9 did. These two subjects should seemingly be on the same level in different areas of the language. They had been studying English for close to the same number of years. This is probably a case of personality preferences, which of course were not gauged for this study. However, since this researcher spent many hours with these students, it is possible to point out certain conspicuous differences. First, as mentioned earlier, subject 9 appeared to speak so well that he was moved to Level 5. He obviously was not afraid to use the language in any way. Subject 1, on the other, spoke mostly in Vietnamese inside and outside of class, yet expressed strong desires to attend a United States university. Subject 9 seemed to realize that practice does indeed make perfect, and he would keep trying until he got it right. Subject 1 seemed to think

that obtaining English skills happened with no effort whatsoever and never bothered to try to use the language.

In order to visually examine the distribution of these verbs in relation to preferences, Figures 4.1-4.4 are provided below. Figure 4.1 displays each subject's written total compared with their preference for writing. Subjects 2, 8, and 11 had the highest preference for writing and also had the second, third, and fourth highest production amounts. Figure 4.2 shows each subject's written total compared with their preference for speaking. Subjects 7 and 11 had the highest preference for speaking and also had the highest production amount.
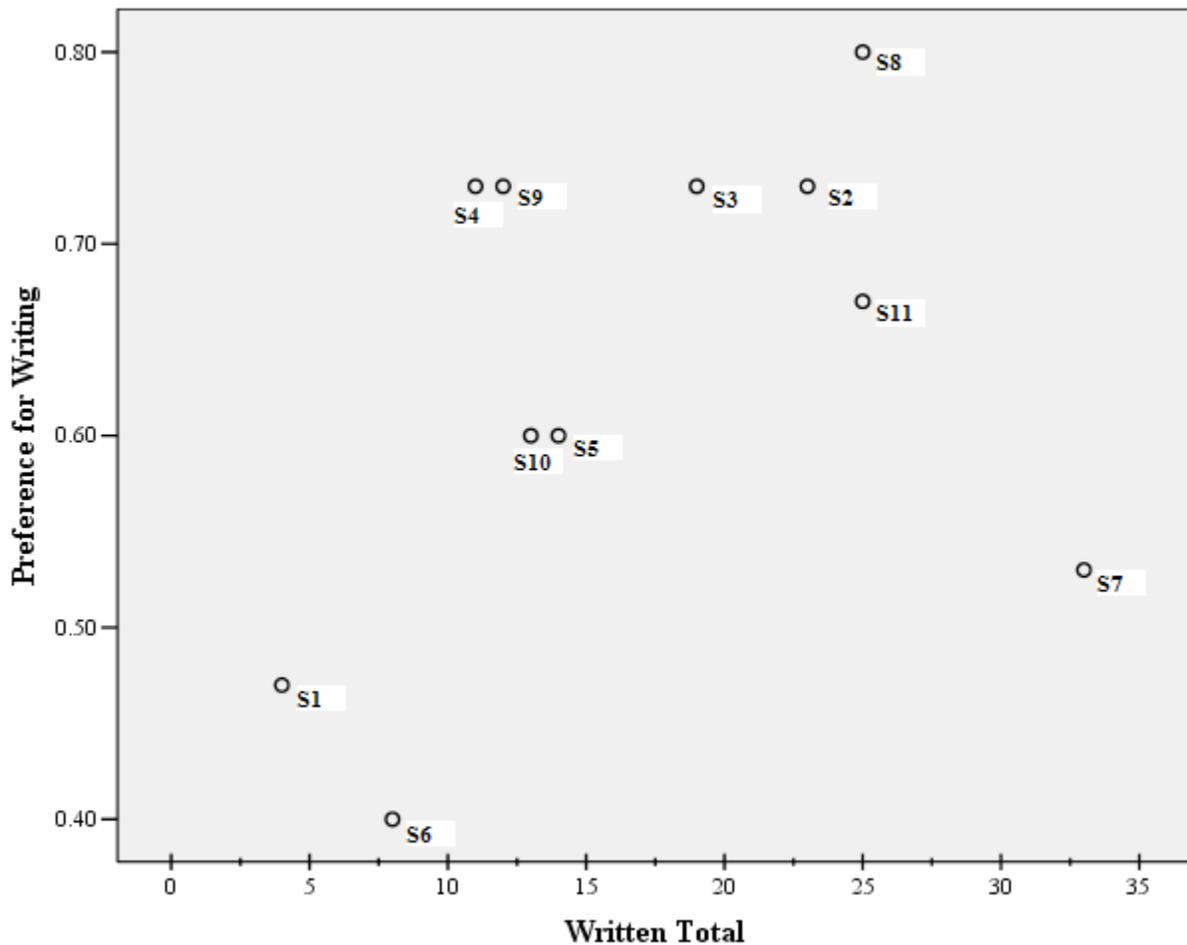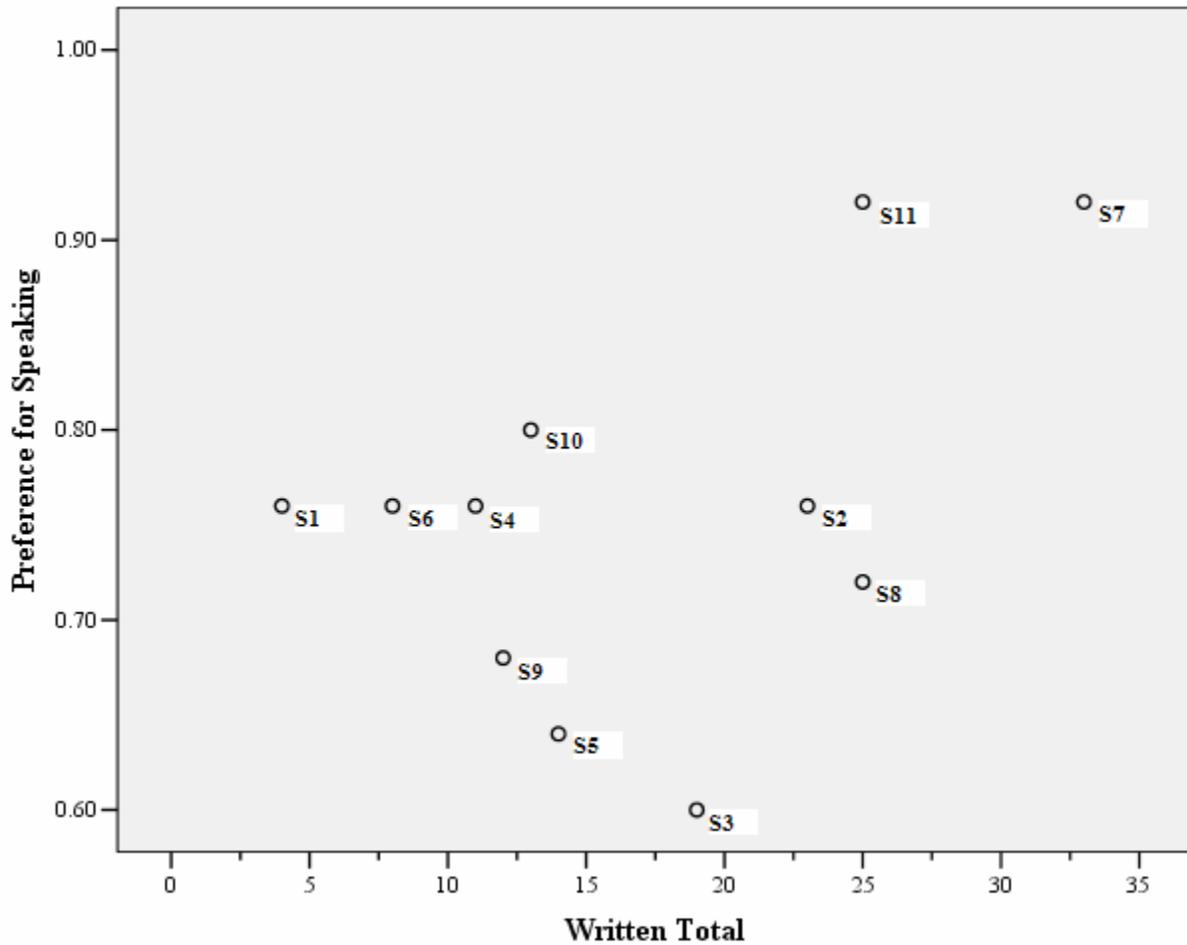

Figure 4.1 Total Written and Writing Preference

Figure 4.2 Written Total and Speaking Preference

Figure 4.3 shows the relationship between the correct amount of verbs used and each student's preference for writing. Notice that while subject 8 had the highest preference for writing out of all the subjects, he did not have the highest number correct. Finally, Figure 4.4 depicts the relationship between the number of correctly used written verbs and the students' preference for speaking. Subject 7 had the highest preference for speaking and also had the highest amount correct. It would seem that even a preference for speaking affected the students' written productions.
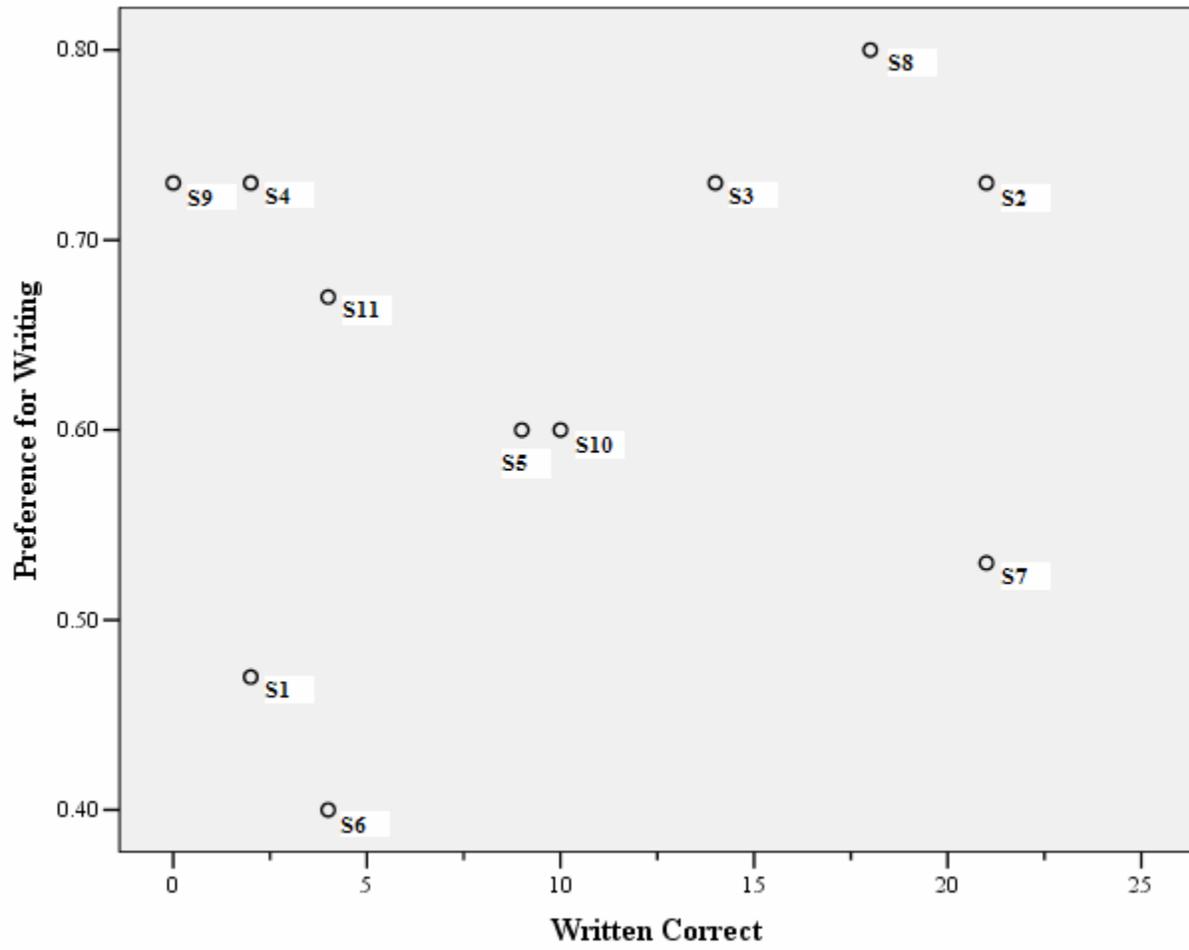
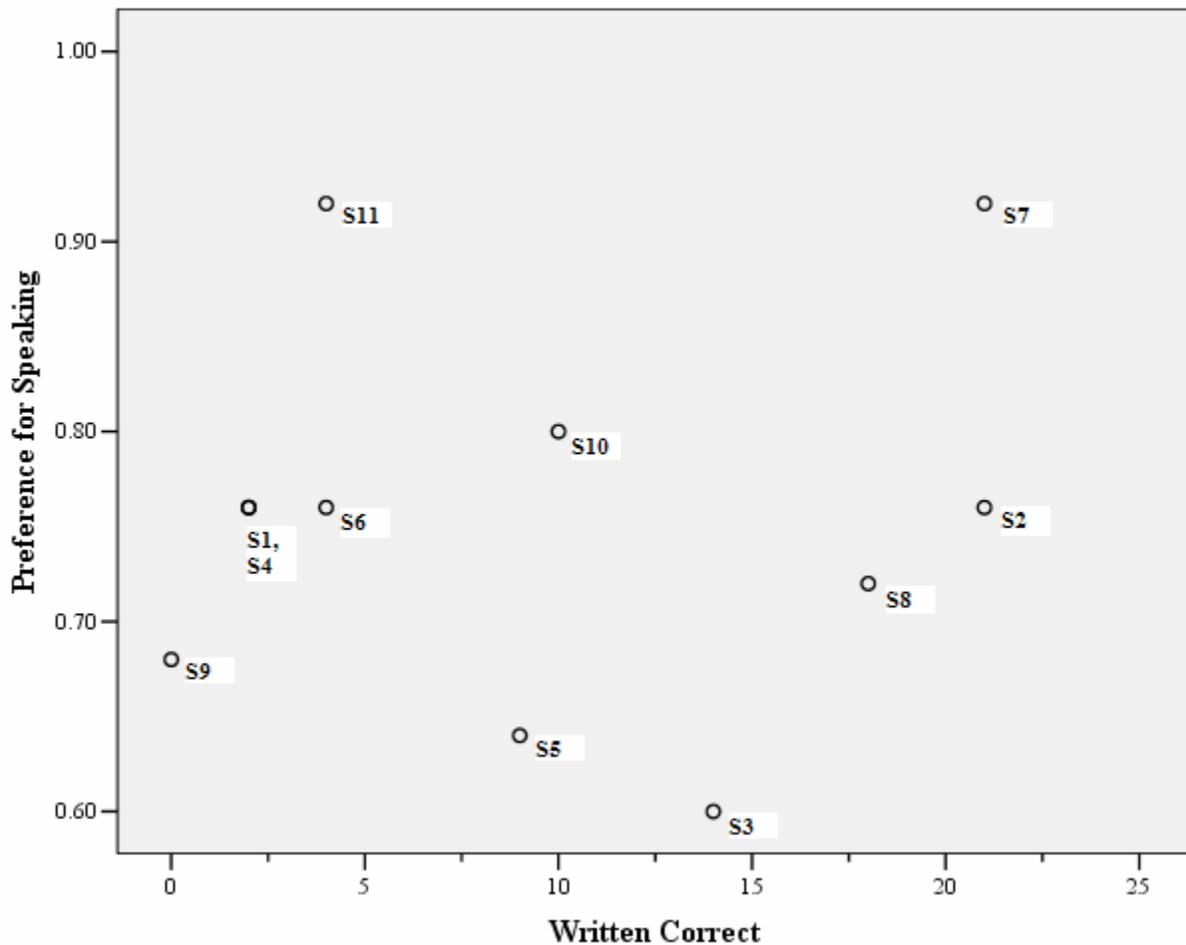Figure 4.3 Written Correct and Writing Preference

Figure 4.4 Written Correct and Speaking Preference

An emphasis on different teaching backgrounds did not help in predicting how well the students performed on this task. While it would appear on the surface that an emphasis on writing helped subject 8, for example, the lack of noticeable relationship between this and the other students' production indicated that this is not a reliable predictor. For the Korean students, on the other hand, it appeared that a background in grammar followed by reading was a predictor, but more Korean students would have to be studied to verify that claim.

Personal preferences seemed to play a negligible role in these students' production. Some enjoyed writing and did not do well and others did not enjoy writing but did do well. However, it did appear that the more they enjoyed writing, the better they performed (in general). Indeed, an enjoyment of writing did lead to more production if not necessarily always more correct verbs. Even enjoying speaking led to higher production rates in many of the students as well.

4.3 Verb Use in Speaking Task

The second task for the students was a speaking task. After the summaries were completed, each student went into a separate room with the researcher who prompted the student to tell "what happened in the movie." They were reminded again to use the past tense. Their responses were recorded with a digital audio recorder, and they were allowed to speak until they felt they were finished. This was done because some students had a lot to say, and others said very little and could not be prodded to add anything to their interview.

The counting took place in a manner similar to that of the writing task. However, in this case, the recordings were listened to and transcribed into a Word document. Once this visual output of the speaking was obtained, it was then possible to count the verbs as they were counted in the writing exercise.

It appeared as if, across the board, the students tended to speak more than they wrote overall. Also, they did not tend towards more of one type of verb over another as both irregular and regular verb forms rose about the same amount. The number of verbal utterances ranged from 7-48, with subject 7 again producing the most. This time, subject 3 produced the fewest number of verbs.

In order to examine these students' productions more closely, the students' spoken samples were analyzed. For ease of reading, the learner background and preferences tables were

duplicated here in order to have them with the samples when examining the students' oral

production. Again, the oral samples' past tense verbs are underlined and the irregular verbs are

highlighted in gray.

4.4 Differences Among Learners in Speaking Task

Subject 1

Male
Vietnamese
Age 20
Level 3
8 Years Studying English

> Maybe the movie want to… uh… The young man, he know…
> uh… about the future, but the old man maybe die. That's what I
> know. Maybe the past and then he come to the future? And um…
> he want to to give him a letter to lets him know he maybe die and
> um… and then he come back to the time where he lived before.
> And the old man he know what happened in the past, and he
> prepared for… for that… and he don't die.
> …
> In that movie, uh, the time, he want to travel, uh, the same time
> when he come to the future and the same time he must come back
> to the past.

Table 4.12 Subject 1's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	15	
Total Correct	2	13%
Total Irregular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs was/were	0	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	6	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Regular Verbs	9	
Total Correct	2	22%

Subject 1's learning background emphasized grammar (100%), followed by reading (75%), then writing (50%), and finally speaking (25%). This students preferences were speaking over writing (76% and 47% respectively).

This student seemed not to want to talk very much. The break in his speech was due to a prompt by the researcher to try to make him speak more. He attempted 15 past tense verbs and used 2 of them correctly. Six of those were irregular, but none of them were a form of "to be." The 2 verbs he used correctly were regular verbs. His learning background emphasized grammar the most and speaking the least; also he actually indicated a preference for speaking. Given how he performed on the writing task, it is odd that he performed so much better on the speaking task than he did on the written task. Perhaps a preference for speaking really did help this student, though. Additionally, in speaking, he showed signs of understanding how to form the regular past tense but still avoided using "to be." This could be due to transfer (perhaps Vietnamese does not use a "to be" copula), or it could still be his resistance to using English.

Subject 2

Male
Taiwanese
Age 27
Level 6
15 Years Studying English

> Somebody tried to kill Michael and the doctor, so… uh… the doctor was killed, the doctor was killed, and Michael escaped to the past. He tried to warn … try to tried to warn the doctor to wear, so he… he… he brought he brought the letter and tried to warn the doctor to wear a bulletproof jacket but the doctor doesn't… didn't… the doctor didn't believe him and tore the letter into pieces. Like the, so… uh… he still appreciated Michael's warning, and then helped him back to the future, but they faced, they faced some problems… yeah… but finally they solve all the problems and Michael was successful and went back to the future. And to the time when somebody tried to kill them. And then he saw Michael, when Michael went back to the future he saw the doctor

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still be killed was still still be was still killed. Yeah, was still killed. He escaped to the past, and he felt really upset because he thought that everything was the same, but the doctor wasn't killed, because he finally believed Michael's warning and wore bulletproof jacket. Yeah. Like that. Just… some of that I just guessed… because I just saw a part of that… maybe maybe maybe like that. And what I talked to you about ____ what I wrote down.

Table 4.13 Subject 2's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	33	
Total Correct	32	97%
Total Irregular Verbs	19	
Total Correct	18	35%
Total Verbs was/were	8	
Total Correct	7	88%
Total Verbs not was/were	11	
Total Correct	11	100%
Total Regular Verbs	14	
Total Correct	14	100%

Subject 2's learning background emphasized reading first (100%), followed by writing (75%), then speaking (50%), and finally grammar (25%). This student preferred speaking (76%) marginally over writing (73%).

This student was very impressive in his verb production. He was much more prolific at speaking than he was in writing, and he did very well on the writing task. He attempted 33 verbs and only missed one; that one was a missing form of "to be." He was actually quite near perfect at speaking, which was not an activity in which he had received as much of a background, nor did he enjoy speaking much more than writing. There were no predictors that would explain his excellence at speaking. Other factors, such as attitudes and motivations mentioned previously, would have to play a role here. Additionally, this student was an exceptional conversationalist. He would talk to anyone about anything just as long as he could practice speaking English.

Subject 3

Male
Taiwanese
Age 18
Level 6
9 Years Studying English

> Uh… it's about Marty and Doctor Brown, and Doctor Brown
> <u>create</u> a time machine to back to another gration… generation. But
> Doctor Brown <u>told</u> Marty you can not use this machine for your
> gambling or tell ever anyone else their future. So… uh… um…
> Marty <u>wants</u> to talk tell Doctor Brown you are killed in 30 minutes
> 30 years later. And but Doctor Brown <u>destroyed</u> the letter. And
> actually mmmhhmmm…. Doctor Brown <u>rebuilt</u> the letter after
> Marty <u>left</u> and so everything<u>'s</u> fine.

Table 4.14 Subject 3's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	7	
Total Correct	5	71%
Total Irregular Verbs	4	
Total Correct	4	100%
Total Verbs was/were	1	
Total Correct	1	100%
Total Verbs not was/were	3	
Total Correct	3	100%
Total Regular Verbs	3	
Total Correct	1	33%

Subject 3's learning background included an emphasis on grammar (100%) followed by all three other factors: speaking, writing, and reading (all 50%). This student preferred writing over speaking (73% and 60% respectively).

This student attempted only 7 past tense verbs, the lowest of all the students, but he used 5 of them correctly. All but 1 of those were irregular verbs. It was interesting that the 2 he missed were regular verbs, as it would seem that the regular verbs should be the easiest to

remember how to put into the past tense. It should be pointed out that the final verb he spoke was

's, which could have been *was* or *is*. This one was counted as correct because in the context

either case would be correct, depending on perspective. (Either at that time in the movie,

everything *was* fine; or speaking about the present now that the actions have completed,

everything *is* fine.)

His background was stronger in writing, so again perhaps this explained why he seemed

to do better in the writing task than in the speaking task. Subject 3 also enjoyed grammar the

most, which in this case actually helped in understanding preferences. He was much more

verbose in writing, although his usage was about the same. He was actually one of the few

students who wrote more than he spoke.

Subject 4

Male
Korean
Age 23
Level 6
10 Years Studying English

> I don't know the doctor's name his exact name, uh… I know about
> the… the main actor's name. His name is Michael J. Fox. Right?
> Fox accidentally came to the past, so doctor tried to… tried to… he
> he came he go to present for in this situation… mhmm... Problems
> accidentally separated so doctor go to the tower to rejoin the
> problem. Mmhmm… After that, he came back to present and he…
> he watched the doctor's death. Mmhmm… but doctor is not really
> dead. He's wearing body armor. So. It's a happy ending.

Table 4.15 Subject 4's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	10	
Total Correct	7	70%
Total Irregular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	3	50%

(Table 4.15 continued on next page.)

Total Verbs was/were	2	
Total Correct	1	50%
Total Verbs not was/were	4	
Total Correct	2	50%
Total Regular Verbs	4	
Total Correct	4	100%

Subject 4's learning background involved an equally strong emphasis in grammar and reading (100%) and an equally weak emphasis in speaking and writing (25%). This student's preferences were nearly equal for writing (73%) and speaking (76%).

Subject 4 barely wrote more than he spoke; his total number of verbs here was 10 with 7 of them correct. Six of those 10 were irregular, and half of them were correct. He used all the regular verbs correctly. Notice that here there are two instances of *'s*, one as part of a progressive tense and one as a copula. In the first instance, it should really be the past progressive, and this student was given the benefit of the doubt. The same applied to the second instance, although it could be argued that past or present would work in this case (as with subject 3 above). However, this student was again given the benefit of the doubt and that verb form was counted as correct.

There was no discernable difference between his writing and speaking preferences, so there was no way to predict if this would affect his speaking. Again, this student had the strongest background in grammar and reading but not speaking and writing. Learning background could not predict how well this student would do either as his writing and speaking samples were approximately the same.

Subject 5

Female
Korean
Age 33
Level 5
6 Years Studying English

Uh… the movie showed… <u>showed</u>… uh… two people. One is uh young man. The other person is old man. Umm… Old man tried to and… <u>tried</u> to a learning, and uh… and then by electronic, electronical, or or material or highest to church on… and young people, young man <u>is tried</u> to uh… engine and straight engine and… and then a strange car <u>is passes</u> uh time machine… um uh… and suddenly the rest, the car <u>is running</u>, the car running as burst in the sky so… um… so… uh… they uh they went to strange street and so… uh… Oh Young man thought old man <u>is dying</u>, but but uh… they ___ alive… there!

Table 4.16 Subject 5's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	11	
Total Correct	4	36%
Total Irregular Verbs	5	
Total Correct	2	40%
Total Verbs was/were	2	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	2	
Total Correct	2	100%
Total Regular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	2	33%

Subject 5's learning background included equally heavy emphasis on grammar and reading (100%) and lesser emphasis on speaking and writing (50%). This student's preferences were also nearly equal with 60% for writing and 64% for speaking.

Subject 5 produced about the same number of verbs in her speaking task as she did in her writing task, but her error rate was much higher for the speaking task. It would seem that more students would fit this pattern as speaking happens so quickly but writing can be corrected over and over again until the writer feels that it is correct. In any case, she attempted 11 total verbs but only got 4 of them correct. She used about the same number of irregular and regular verbs (5 and 6, respectively). For each category, she only used 2 correctly. It was interesting that she used the

verb "try" twice yet only used it correctly one time. (Although it was possible that the last instance was actually "tie" and she misspoke.)

There were no predicting factors here from her preferences as she enjoyed writing and speaking approximately the same; but perhaps her background in grammar and reading had a positive affect on her writing and not her speaking.

Subject 6

Male
Korean
Age 22
Level 5
8 Years Studying English

In the movie, um, impossible events happened. I heard that… time travel is impossible. The movie expressed time travel. There are two people… the one that is old scientist and other is young boy. They try to… they were trying to back to the future, so they uh they invent… uh… invent a… invent a machine operated by high voltage of electronic but they cannot save high voltage of electricity, so they use lightning. From the sky. One day, I don't know, I can't remember the exact date of that day, but one day the day a great lightning come from the sky so they made a devices uh… uh… they bought the device uh… deliver, deliver them to the future. But… several problems occurred. So they were… uh… their work uh… their work has a has a trouble. So old scientist tried to solve their problem. … Uh… several events happened. Um. Old scientist can send him to the future. Uh, in the future time, young, young boy faced a danger of danger of another them another danger… faced another danger. So he tried he tried to uh… obstacle. And mother, mother. But he couldn't. He don't have, didn't have enough time. And the other trouble come and shoot old scientist. Another old scientist, same guy, took next time… They shoot old scientist and they tried to shoot young boy, but they didn't. A young boy can survive. Can avoid from their mother. In the final scene, of the movie, uh… young boy uh… very… cry… cried, cried, cried. He feel sad, he feel sad about the old scientist. But he didn't died. He wore a body armor, so he can survive. Yes. I finish.

Table 4.17 Subject 6's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	38	
Total Correct	20	53%
Total Irregular Verbs	21	
Total Correct	7	33%
Total Verbs was/were	4	
Total Correct	1	25%
Total Verbs not was/were	17	
Total Correct	6	35%
Total Regular Verbs	17	
Total Correct	13	76%

Subject 6's learning background included a strong emphasis on grammar (100%), followed by reading (75%), then both speaking and writing (25%). This student's preferences were speaking over writing (76% over 40%).

This student talked almost five times more than he wrote (38 total verbs in speaking versus 8 in writing). Earlier, subjects 4, 5, and 6 were compared in their writing, but subject 6 surpasses them all in speaking. He was not necessarily an excellent speaker, he only used half of his verbs correctly, but he did speak a lot and was not afraid to make those errors. There must be more in this subject's background that makes him such a more verbose speaker than the previous Korean students. This could have been due to his strong proclivity for speaking, but it could also have been any other background factor such as motivation or attitudes about English.

Subject 7

Female
Korean
Age 22
Level 5
10 Years Studying English

At first time, the young man and old boy, the old boy uh… ____ kind of arguing, and asked they gonna… the man give some letter but he tore that and the man write that, take, write the, write it, the time machine and man took… is right? The man, oh no, the man drove the start line and the old man tried to connect the electronic line because that is not well-connected, so he tried to them, on the… time… the watch… top, kind of that. And the alarm ringing, ring, and he drove, and but the young man drove, drove the car, start drove the car, but the old man didn't connect yet, so he _____ very nervous and even he fell down. But finally he connect well everything, and he… the young boy went back to the future. And when they, he arrived the future, he uh… at almost the same time, some car passed him, so him, he followed the car, and he finally found some place where the car, uh… drove there. So… and the man who ride in the car, and the, he, the man tried to shoot the old man in, in the same… as same as old, past man. And so he shoot the man, and tried to shoot the other, young boy, but he drove the other time machine, and he… go back to somewhere, and they, the car, the man ride the car he crashed some little tiny building, and the man. The man… the young man is running to the old man, and old man is dying so he are almost crying, but the old man… ___ alive! Because he got the letter from the young man, and he restick that… sticked that… and he know about the future event so he protect vest, wearing protect vest, and he _____ alive. And finally they drive the time machine the young man drove to back to future, so they ride to that and they, the old man, drove for… for… to young man's house… I think young man's house and the old man drove again and go back to some time… fine… The End.

Table 4.18 Subject 7's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	48	
Total Correct	24	50%
Total Irregular Verbs	33	
Total Correct	14	42%
Total Verbs was/were	5	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	28	
Total Correct	14	50%
Total Regular Verbs	15	
Total Correct	10	67%

Subject 7's learning background emphasized grammar (100%), followed by writing and reading (75%), then speaking (50%). This student's preferences were speaking much over writing (92% and 53% respectively).

Subject 7 was quite talkative, even though she indicated that she did not have a strong background in speaking as much as other areas of English. However, she produced 47 past tense verbs (or should have; in several instances she left out the copula), but she used only half of them correctly. In speaking, she used several present progressive verbs as well, which should actually have been in the past progressive. Those were counted as regular verbs, giving her a total of 15 regular verbs. Ten of those she used correctly. Out of the remaining 33 irregular verbs, 14 of which she used correctly, 5 of those were forms of "to be." As previously mentioned, 3 of those were left out copula, but the other two were incorrect usages of the present tense instead of the past tense. The copula absence may be due to L1 interference. However, it seems odd that someone with such an abundant pool of verbs would fail to use "to be" correctly. That is to say, this student is very meticulous and studious; it would seem that forms of "to be" would be a main target for her to study and use correctly.

This student very strongly preferred speaking, which might have influenced why she talked as much as she did but probably did not account for her errors as she performed better on the writing task than she did on this speaking task.

Subject 8

Male
Argentine
Age 19
Level 3
6 Years Studying English

> Well, moment, in the movie, they go… the old man and the young
> man prepare a car to go to the future. Them, they… uh Martin…

drove a, the car and… Doc have to connect the cables and they have to do it in the, at the same time and if it happened, they pass to the future. Well, uh, they do it, the car… went to the future, and uh first, uh Martin have, had to read a letter to Doc, but he couldn't read the letter because there wasn't any… there was no time, and he couldn't read the letter. When the car passed to the future, Martin passed to the future, and Doc read the letter, he read the letter. Then, Martin went back to the… to find, went back to found Doc, and… there…. he went to find Doc and then they were in something of… how to say? Supermarket? And... uh… Doc read, he read the letter, and put something that covered the body. And when the thieves went to rob him, he didn't die because he… he put it. And… well… and then, nothing else.

Table 4.19 Subject 8's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	27	
Total Correct	20	74%
Total Irregular Verbs	21	
Total Correct	15	71%
Total Verbs was/were	2	
Total Correct	2	100%
Total Verbs not was/were	19	
Total Correct	13	68%
Total Regular Verbs	6	
Total Correct	5	83%

Subject 8's learning background included equally strong emphases in grammar and speaking (100%) and weaker emphasis on writing and reading (50%). This student's preferences were nearly equal for writing and speaking (80% and 72% respectively).

This student spoke more than he wrote, but only a small amount. He used 27 verbs, using 20 of them correctly. Twenty-one of those 27 were irregular, and 15 of those were correct. Only 2 of the irregulars were forms of "to be," but he used them correctly here as well. There was not a difference in his preferences, which is appropriate since he did approximately the same on both tasks. However, that meant that preference was not a reliable predictor for this student's

production. This student also received a strong background in grammar and speaking but not reading and writing. If background were actually a reliable predictor, it would be safe to say that this was evident as he spoke very well. However, he wrote almost as well as he spoke, so learning background truly is not a reliable predictor of a student's abilities and performance. Additionally, his high performance could again be due to motivation or social and psychological distance.

Subject 9

Male
Syrian
Age 30
Level 5
6 Years Studying English

Uh... I guess it's happened in the movie, uh there is old man with his son. He wanna go back his futures and prepare to make time machine it's shape as a car. They adjust the time at 10 PM.. the time machine start to go back to the future. Really there is bad circumstances happened. The cables or the wires it's not fixed, and uh… it's having something funny. The father has a hard time to connect the wire but finally they do it and the machine starts to go back to the future. And when the son be in the future, he finds his father there, and there is a group of people attacked him to do something and finally they tried to kill his father …but his father _____ lucky. He doesn't die. And at that moment, I guess, the trouble starts the son to see the future for his daddy, but I guess he would not like that future and he would like to go back to his present.

Table 4.20 Subject 9's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	24	
Total Correct	3	13%
Total Irregular Verbs	11	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs was/were	7	
Total Correct	0	0%

(Table 4.20 continued on next page.)

Total Verbs not was/were	4	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Regular Verbs	13	
Total Correct	3	23%

Subject 9's learning background included a strong emphasis in grammar (100%), followed by reading (75%), then both speaking and writing (25%). This student's preferences were nearly equal for writing and speaking (73% and 68% respectively).

Subject 9 truly did have the most interesting results out of all the students who participated in the study. He attempted 24 verbs, 3 of which were correct (these were all regular verbs, too). Ten of those verbs were irregular, and the irregulars had all kinds of interesting permutations. First, it was arguable that *machine it's shape as a car* should be *machine its shape as a car*. Either way, though, the entire construction would be wrong unless the structure of the sentence changed (i.e., *it's shaped as a car* or *its shape was a car*).

Recall that this was the student who was deemed advanced enough in speaking to move to Level 5. His total percentage correct was only 13%, which was the same percentage correct as subject 1. However, this student was quite eloquent and personable when he spoke; he engaged the listener and was always smiling. It would be easy to see why he was advanced when in reality his production was more on par with a Level 3 student.

Additionally, his preferences were about the same which again was appropriate as he performed about the same in both tasks. That of course meant that there was no way to predict how this student would perform on either task. His learning background, too, was not an indicating factor as he received the most emphasis in grammar but not writing or speaking.

Subject 10

Male

Argentine
Age 38
Level 5
2 Years Studying English

> In the movie, the… the boy and the doctor were… um… went to
> the past, in the time that the… the father of the girl… of the boy,
> uh… were a student, but this part does not appear in this moment
> but… um… we view the very moment in that the doctor is trying
> to put the boy against the present moment. Had many troubles
> about this because the device the doctor didn't function, don't
> function, is bad, has many troubles. Finally, they can… put all the
> device in order, and uh… the boy came back came back… to the
> present time, but with no time for save the doctor of the shot…
> save the doctor of the shoots. But the doctor have a steel, steel, in
> the, in the, in the chest. Steel in the chest. Have steel in the chest
> because he don't destroyed the letter that the boy give them in the
> last moment in the past. And in this letter, the boy wrote about
> warning him about the possibility of being dead for bad boys at
> present. For this reason, the doctor was… safe, and planned go
> against to the future, in another trip. OK?

Table 4.21 Subject 10's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	18	
Total Correct	8	44%
Total Irregular Verbs	13	
Total Correct	7	54%
Total Verbs was/were	4	
Total Correct	3	75%
Total Verbs not was/were	9	
Total Correct	4	44%
Total Regular Verbs	5	
Total Correct	1	20%

Subject 10's learning background included an emphasis on reading (100%), speaking

(75%), writing (50%), then grammar (25%). This student preferred speaking (80%) over writing

(60%).

This student used 18 verbs, 8 of them correctly. Thirteen of those 18 were irregular, and 7 of those were correct. However it was interesting that he too had the correct form in one place, "had," but misused it in the same sentence ("has"). His preference was more for speaking than writing, and his spoken production was a bit more than his written production. His error rate, on the other hand, was much higher in the speaking than it was in the writing. Subject 10 also matched the pattern of subject 5 who performed better on writing than on speaking.

Other factors listed above played no role in his spoken production, but perhaps factors such as motivation did play a role. For example, this student was a law professor in Argentina who was taking English classes to enhance his resume.

Subject 11

Male
Chilean
Age 32
Level 3
.42 Years Studying English

> Uh… the movie start with the, uh, young man and with the old man. And, uh, they have to resolve a problem. Um… they… um… they see about they can meet in 20 minute and 30 second. Um, the old man, uh, tried to connect the cable and the young man drive a car. Um… but he have a problem. But in a moment, they resolve the problem, and the lightning hit the tower and the energy is sent to the car, and the young man and the car disappear. Uh, he appear in the future. 20 year in the future, and he saw the old man… dying because other person used weapon and he go to help and the old and he saw that the old man used a protection. And, uh, the old man is alive, too. He took a letter and this letter is the reason of the old man is alive. This is the same letter that I write.

Table 4.22 Subject 11's Verb Production in Speaking

		Percentage Correct
Total Verbs Produced	23	
Total Correct	7	30%
Total Irregular Verbs	15	
Total Correct	4	27%

Total Verbs was/were	3	
Total Correct	0	0%
Total Verbs not was/were	12	
Total Correct	4	33%
Total Regular Verbs	8	
Total Correct	3	38%

Subject 11's learning background included an emphasis on writing (75%), then grammar (50%), followed by both speaking and reading (25%). This student preferred speaking (92%) quite a bit more than writing (67%).

Finally, subject 11 attempted 23 verbs but only used 7 correctly. Fifteen of the 23 were irregular, and 4 of those were correct. This student actually performed about the same on his writing and speaking tasks even though he had a stronger background in writing than speaking but enjoyed speaking much more than writing. Again, neither learning background nor preference was a factor in predicting how well this student performed. It is interesting to note how well this student performed in comparison to some of the other students who had been studying English for much longer (for example subjects 1 and 9). In this case, it was not reasonable to assume that something like desire to learn was related to performance because both subjects 9 and 11 acted as if they really wanted to learn English. In fact, both were pursuing English to add qualifications to their resumes.

It appeared that overall, the students performed much better on the speaking task than the writing task. This time, subjects 2 and 8 did the best overall and subjects 1 and 9 performed least well. The students did much better on regular verbs than they did on irregular verbs. There was not a consistent pattern for production of forms of "to be."

Subjects 8 and 2 were exceptional speakers. Subject 2 had been observed as quite a talkative person, and his proclivity for speaking came through in her speech, which was apparent given his near excellence in speaking. Again, subject 8, who made the most progress during his time in ELOP, did quite well for himself. He had the next highest total number of verbs, but not nearly as high a percentage correct as subject 2. However, he used less forms of "to be" than subject 2, yet he used them all correctly. Subject 2's downfall was leaving out one instance of copula "to be." It is interesting that despite several years' difference in studying English and differences in Level that these two were the best performers out of the group. Again, subject 8's performance might be attributed to his social and psychological closeness to English, but that does not really explain why subject 2 performed as well as he did.

Alternately, subjects 1 and 9 are again the lesser performers of the group. Subject 9 relied heavily on his listener to understand what he was saying while subject 1 seemed afraid of speaking. Recall that subject 1 was prompted to speak more, but this endeavor was less than fruitful. For these two speakers, motivation was almost definitely the reason behind their relative success or failure as English speakers. Subject 1 did not speak in English in class or outside of class, whereas subject 9 was always talking.

Again, for a visual comparison of the students' preferences in relation to their speaking production Figures 4.5-4.8 follow. Figure 4.5 shows the relationship between the total spoken verbs and the students' preference for writing. The student who produced the most (subject 7) did not have a high preference for writing at all. Alternately, the student with the highest preference did not produce nearly as many verbs as subject 7 (subject 8). Next, Figure 4.6 depicts the relationship between the total spoken production and each student's preference for speaking. There is a much more significant relationship here, as the student who enjoyed

speaking the most also produced the most number of verbs (subject 7). Likewise, the student

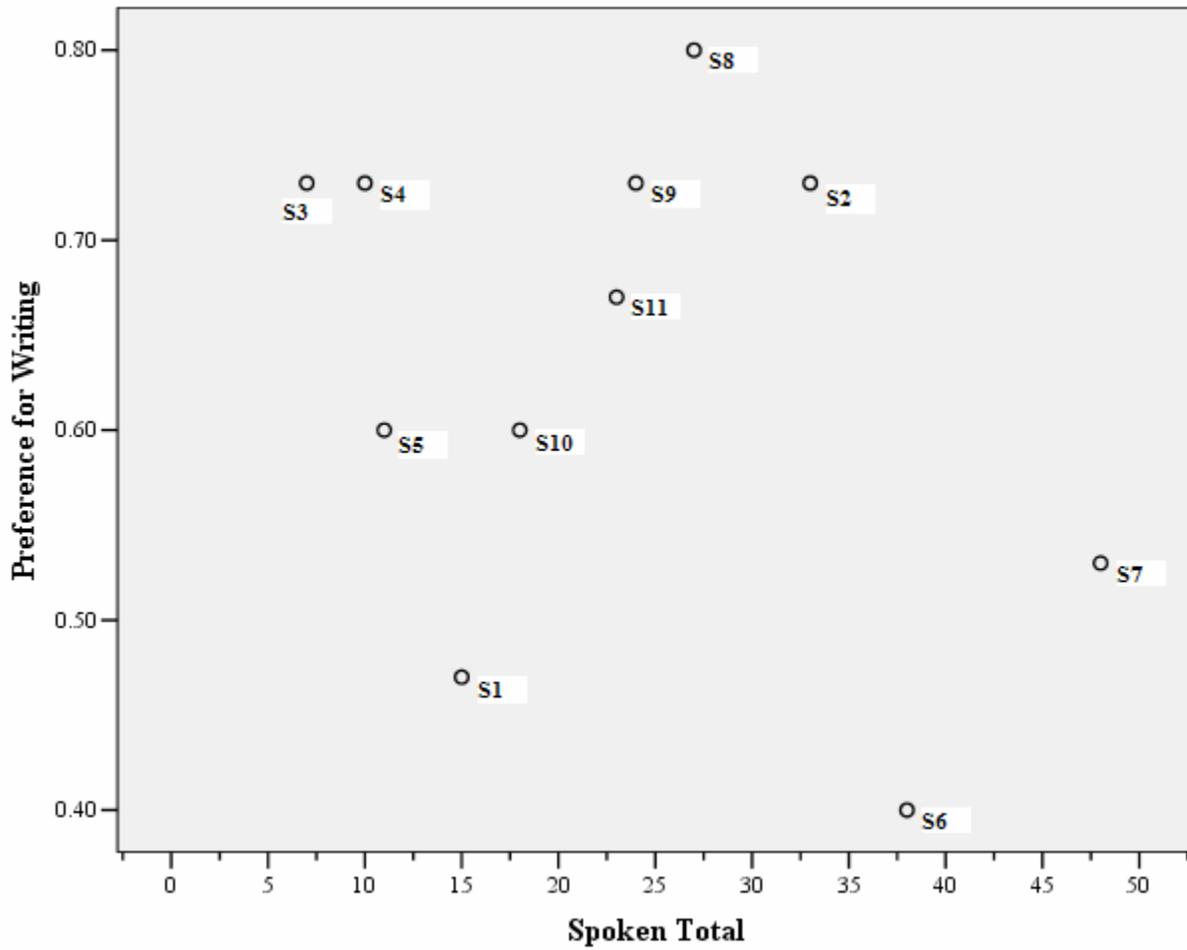who enjoyed speaking the least produced the least number of verbs (subject 3).

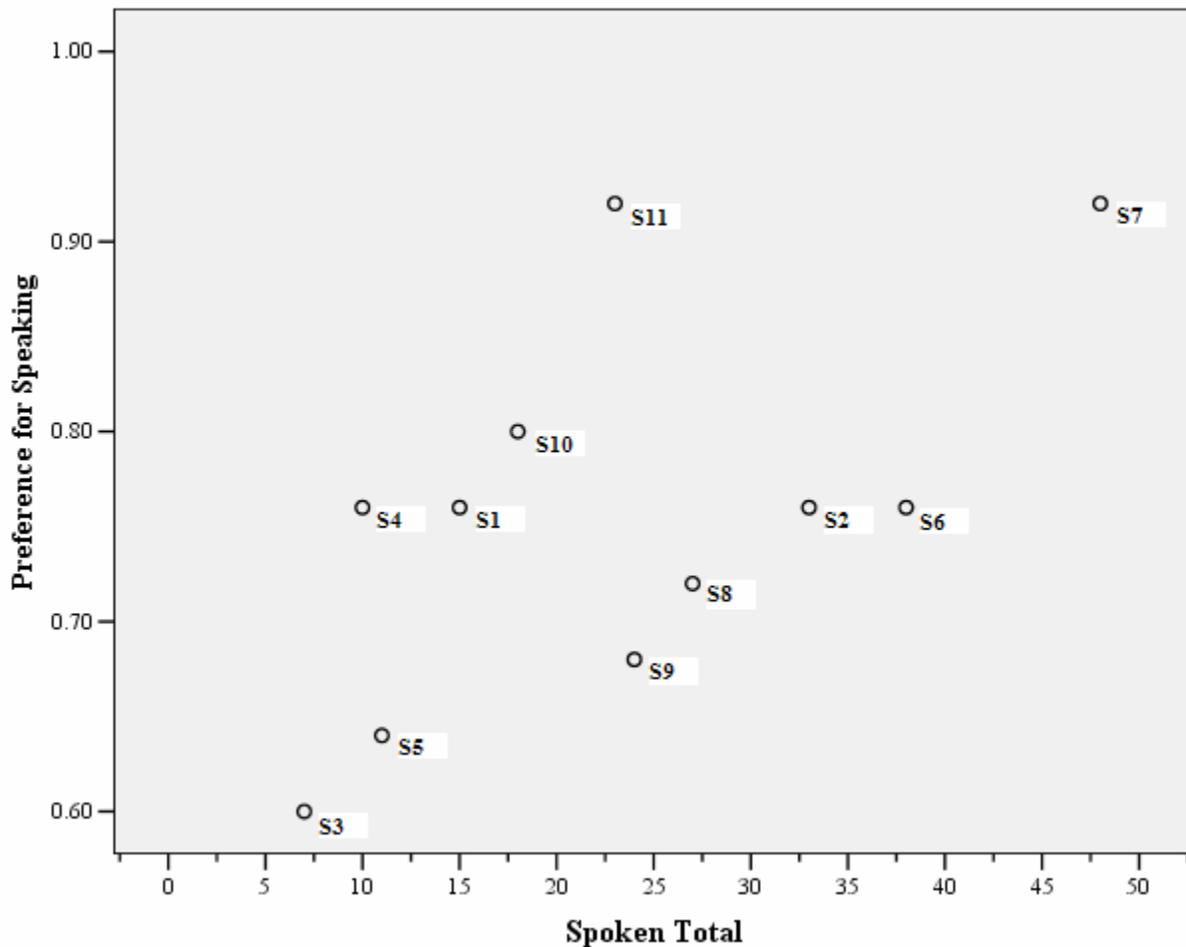Figure 4.5 Total Spoken and Writing Preference

Figure 4.6 Total Spoken and Speaking Preference

Figure 4.7 shows the relationship between the number of correctly used verbs and the students' preference for writing. As with Figure 4.5, there was no real relationship between writing preference and speaking production. Figure 4.8 gives the relationship between the number of correct verbs and speaking preference. In this case, however, subject 7 had the highest preference for speaking and produced the second most amount of correct verbs. Subject 2, the highest producer, did not really enjoy speaking that much. He was, however, an overall stellar producer in both tasks which suggests an overall comfortableness and familiarity with the language.
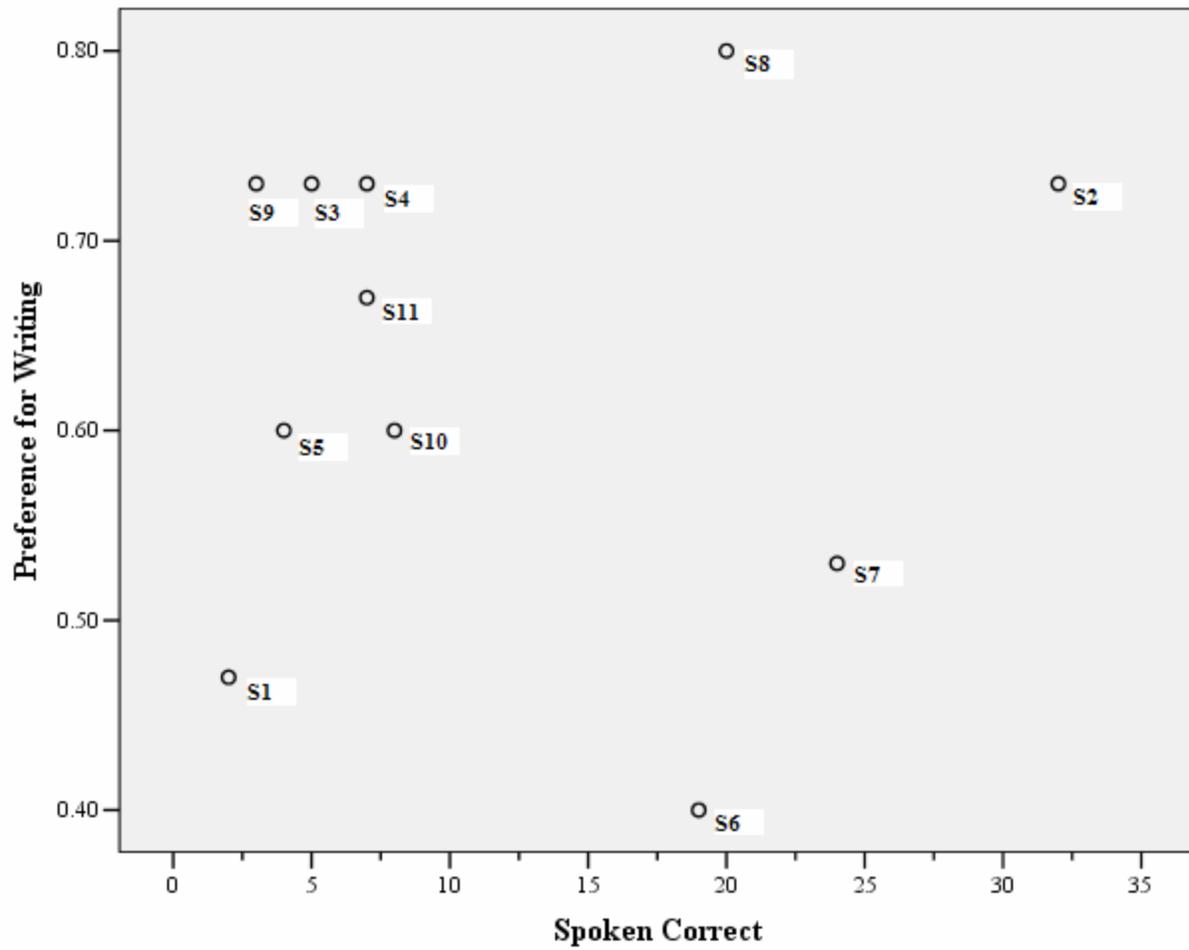
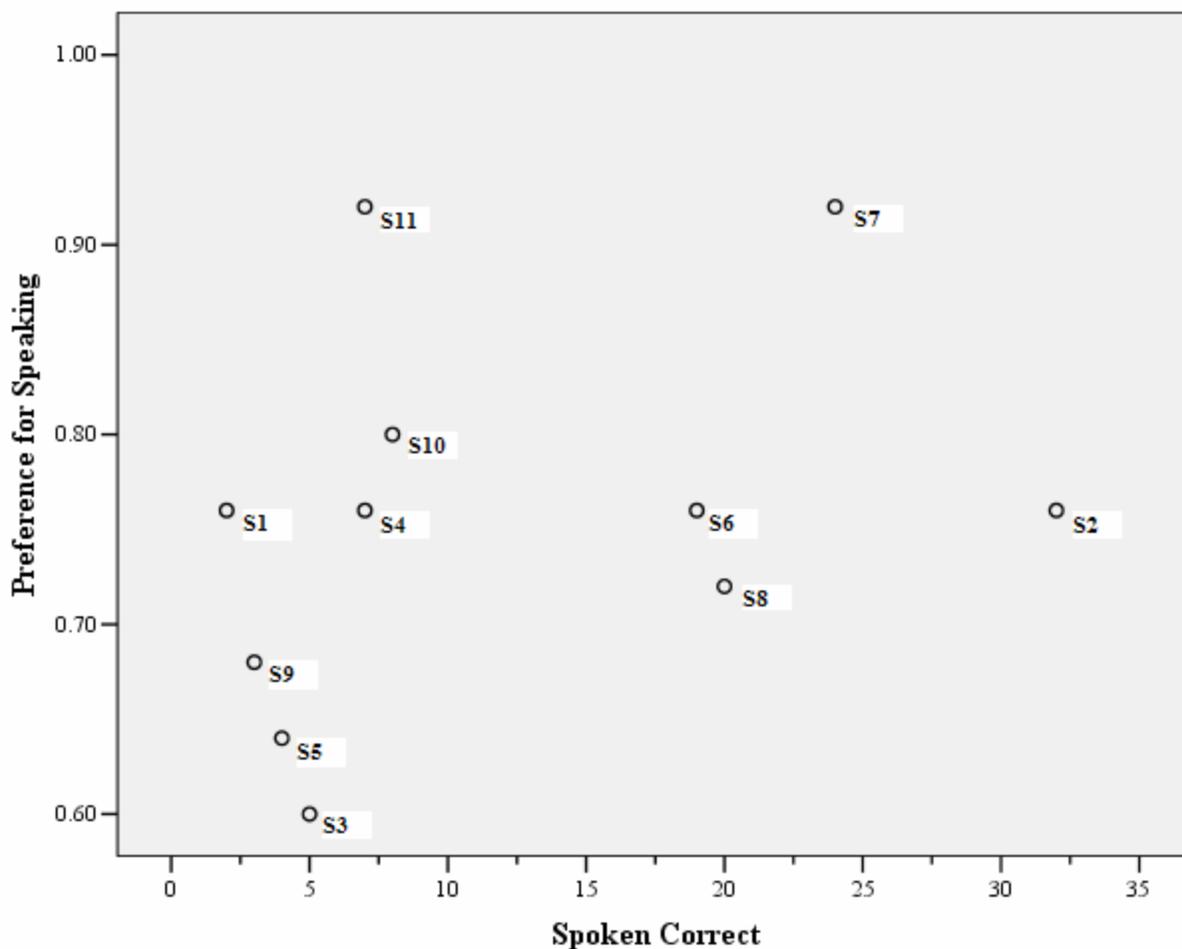Figure 4.7 Total Spoken and Writing Preference

Figure 4.8 Total Spoken and Speaking Preference

An emphasis on a speaking background did seem to help some of the students, but the influence was only slightly noticeable and was not a reliable predictor of performance. Once again, learning background seemed to play no roll in how well these students performed. For the two best speakers, one had almost no background in speaking while the other enjoyed did. For the two with the worst performances, both had strong backgrounds in speaking which is counterintuitive to their production. It is possible, however, to say that preference dictates performance; while these correlations are subtle, they exist nonetheless.

4.5 Differences Among Learners Across Tasks

How did these learners do in each of the tasks with respect to each others' performances? First, the students performed much better in the speaking task than in the writing task. This is remarkable because it would seem that writing would be so much easier than speaking. In writing, students have all the time they need to check spelling and grammar and can even make changes as they see fit. Likewise, it would seem as if speaking would be the most difficult task for the students. There is no time to correct errors, and everything is happening so quickly that it would seem as if more errors were being made. An emphasis on speaking or writing could not indicate performance because the students received nearly the same amount of teaching in each. Also, personal preference could not be playing a role in this as, overall, the students seem to enjoy speaking less than writing. Perhaps ELOP fosters an environment where learners feel comfortable speaking and therefore advance in this area.

To further study these learners across all the tasks, subjects 3 and 11 were examined since they had not received the scrutiny that other subjects had. Subject 3 was one of the few subjects to write more than he spoke; in fact he wrote nearly three times more than he spoke (19 verbs written versus 7 verbs spoken). However, his percentage correct stayed about the same for both (74% written versus 71% spoken). Was there a reason he wrote so much more than he spoke? Perhaps he was shy or uncomfortable talking. Perhaps he fit into the assumption that writing was easier and all the other students were exceptions. Or perhaps subject 3 is the exception and speaking really was easier for the students.

Subject 11 also wrote more than he spoke – although only marginally (25 written versus 23 spoken), but his speaking percentage correct virtually doubled his written percentage correct (16% written versus 30% spoken). Why did he use just a couple more verbs on the writing yet he performed so much better on the speaking? There seems to be no clear answer to this question. It

could be distance, it could be motivation, it could be his strong preference for speaking, or it could be any number of things that this particular student himself had experienced or learned. Subject 11 was studying English to advance in his job field, but subject 3 was studying English to prepare himself for university in Taiwan.

The questions being asked in this study dealt with learner background as well as learner attitudes. It was apparent that learner background did not predict performance: students who shared the Spanish language as a background (subjects 8 and 11) did not perform the same. Students who had studied English for the same amount of time (subjects 8 and 9) did not perform the same. Students from the same level (subjects 1 and 8) did not perform the same. Students from Asian backgrounds, whose social groups should be the most distanced from a western language such as English (subjects 1 and 7), did not perform the same. Any of these differences can be seen in Schumann's depictions of SLA.

There was also not an apparent relationship between learning background or learner attitude and learner performance. There almost seemed to be a relationship between an emphasis on teaching and speaking well (or at least more), and it would not hurt the students to practice speaking more. In fact, for some students, an emphasis on speaking might have even boosted their writing skills. From this sample, however, there was just no way to make a prediction about performance. To be sure, though, students that enjoyed speaking might speak well (subject 8), but the students did not really like writing. Of course, most students performed better at speaking than writing, but this was not definitive proof that lack of enjoyment of writing produced bad writing. Also, there did not seem to be a relationship at all with grammar or reading, either. It almost appeared as if reading affected some of the Korean students, but subject 6 proved that untrue. This was surprising, as Lee (2005) had such a clear correlation between reading and

writing well. That could be because this sample was too small to run any statistics on, however. Perhaps with a larger sample size, Lee's findings could be corroborated.

In the following two tables, Tables 4.23 and 4.24, the subjects are ranked by their total performances in both tasks to compare their overall production. The subject ranked 1 had the highest amount in each category, with subsequent rankings moving farther and farther away from the best. Where there are multiple students ranked in one slot, for example under Written Irregular in Table 4.23 subjects 4 and 5 are both ranked at 6, these students had the same total amount. From this table, it is evident that subject 8's irregular verb use is superior; he used the most in the written task and the second most in the spoken task. However, compared to the other subjects, his amount of use of regular verbs is rather lackluster. For the regular verbs in writing, subject 7 produced the most. In speaking, she produced the second most regular verbs. For irregular verbs in writing, this subject produced the second most, again, and she produced the most spoken regular verbs.

In most cases, the students who produced the most in one category tended to produce the most in all categories. Likewise, the ones who produced the least in one category tended to also produce the least in other categories. A notable exception, however, is subject 2. This student produced the least amount of both kinds of verbs in speaking. His written production, while not the most prolific, was about in the middle of everyone else's production. This is notable because subject 2 rated speaking as a not very enjoyable activity. In this case, subject 2's preferences truly did rule over his production.

Table 4.23 Total Verb Use in Speaking and Writing

Subject	Written Irregular	Written Regular	Spoken Irregular	Spoken Regular	Total Verbs
S_1	8	8	8	5	19

(Table 4.23 continued on next page.)

S₂	5	2	3	3	56
S₃	4	6	10	10	26
S₄	6	7	7	9	22
S₅	6	5	9	7	25
S₆	7	4	2	1	49
S₇	2	1	1	2	49
S₈	1	6	2	8	52
S₉	8	3	6	4	36
S₁₀	6	6	5	9	31
S₁₁	3	2	4	6	48

Table 4.24, on the other hand, displays the students ranked by how many verbs they used correctly. Subject 8, while a profuse speaker, did not use as many correctly as subject 2 did. Subject 2 ranked consistently as second best across all categories except the category of spoken irregular verbs (he ranked first in this category). For the other students, there was not a clear pattern of achievement as there was in Table 4.23. That is to say, the students who did the best in one category did not necessarily do the best in the other categories. This suggests that while the meanings of the verbs are readily available to the students as they speak, they are not necessarily correcting themselves as they speak. This is still helpful in light of their speaking preferences, though, because the more they like to speak the more verbs they use and the more comfortable they feel. It is a language gift that native speakers can understand these students even though they do not use all their verbs correctly in speech.

Table 4.24 Accurate Verb Use in Speaking and Writing

Subject	Written Irregular	Written Regular	Spoken Irregular	Spoken Regular	Total Verbs
S₁	8	6	8	7	4
S₂	2	2	1	2	53
S₃	4	3	5	8	19
S₄	7	7	6	5	9
S₅	6	4	7	7	13
S₆	9	5	3	3	24
S₇	3	1	2	4	45

(Table 4.24 continued on next page.)

S_8	1	5	4	1	41
S_9	9	7	8	6	3
S_{10}	5	4	3	8	18
S_{11}	9	5	5	6	11

What does all this mean? Even though it is possible to say that there is a relationship between the students' preference for speaking and their spoken productions (both totals and toal correct), this is still not a predictor for how well they will do. There is no clear-cut method of prediction for these students as they all came to ELOP with different circumstances and different mindsets. The best explanation for the individual differences was explained by Ellis (1994). His model is depicted in Figure 4.9 below. All the students' differences, their learning backgrounds and preferences, their ages, their beliefs and attitudes about language learning, all contribute to how and why they learn the language. This affects their learning strategies, for example avoiding a certain form because they do not understand it, which in turn affects their actual production and proficiency. Likewise, all of these factors – proficiency and production – impact their backgrounds, attitudes, and strategies as well. Because all of these factors play such an important role in the students' production, it is impossible to disentangle each aspect from the others in order to determine which one is the predicting factor in these students' productions in writing and speaking.
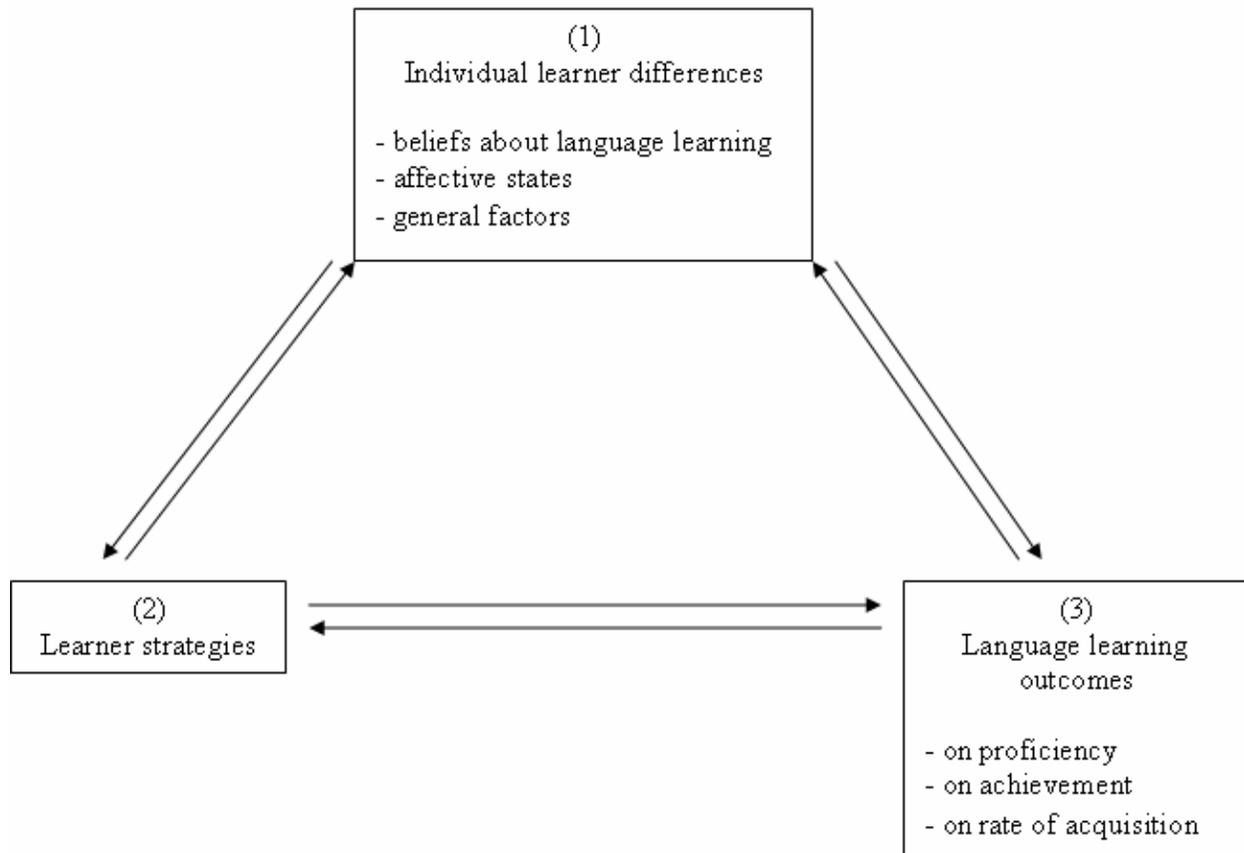
Figure 4.5 Framework for Individual Differences

5. Conclusions and Implications

The learners' backgrounds were quite diverse with students from Korea, Vietnam, Argentina, Chile, Taiwan, and Syria. They had studied English for a range of less than 6 months to 15 years. Some students' background emphases was writing while for others it was speaking. Their ELOP level was either 3, 5, or 6. Each individual, however, no matter the country of origin, the amount of time studying English, or their level in ELOP was unique and had come to English with a unique set of circumstances and abilities.

The students' attitudes, as well, were quite diverse. Some truly enjoyed speaking over writing; a few preferred writing over speaking. These attitudes reinforced the notion that each learner was unique.

For the writing task, the students ranged from 4-33 written verbs. The percentages correct ranged from 0%-91%. Neither the Level in ELOP nor the time spent studying English nor any other learning background or attitude could predict the students' strength or weakness in writing.

Utterances for the speaking task ranged from 7-48 past tense verbs with percentages correct ranging from 13%-97%. Again, no factor examined could reasonably predict how each learner would perform.

Across the tasks, the learners were all unique as well. In fact, subject 3 had the fewest utterances but subject 1 had the fewest written verbs. These two students were vastly different; while they both came from Asian backgrounds, they did not share a native language, nor were they the same level in ELOP. Their learning emphases and preferences were also quite different. Subject 3, though, shared a language background with subject 2 – both Taiwanese – but their productions were also enormously different. Subject 2 was the best speaker and writer, while

subject 3 was merely a competent communicator. There was simply no way to pinpoint a reliable factor that would predict how well each student would perform in each of the given tasks.

There were two tasks for this study. First, the subjects in this study participated in a writing exercise in which they summarized fifteen minutes of the movie, "Back to the Future." Following the writing exercise, the students then spoke about the movie for as long as they wanted to talk. There were many differences across both tasks and for each subject.

Based on these findings, there was not a way to predict how the ELOP students would perform on certain tasks. This is not to say that teaching does not help or that learner preferences should be gauged in order to plan lessons. Besides, that would be impossible given the different preferences of all the different students. It would also be helpful to continue to emphasize speaking; there was not a reliable relationship between teaching speaking and production, but it did appear that those with this learning background were at least more comfortable speaking.

There was a noticeable relationship between a preference for speaking and speaking a lot. That is to say, the more they enjoyed speaking, the more prolific they were. However, that did not necessarily mean that they used all their verbs correctly or even consistently in relation to their written production. The ones who enjoyed speaking simply felt the most comfortable in this task and were not afraid to make mistakes. Indeed, the ideas and meanings of the verbs were readily available to the students which suggests comprehensible proficiency if not grammatical proficiency.

Also, there was a marginal relationship between a preference for speaking and writing well. This may be because speaking could be seen as stressful since it happens so quickly. Therefore, the students who actually do well in this probably feel confident that they are understood and can use their knowledge and confidence in their writing. On the other hand,

perhaps those that write well also speak well because of their confidence. It was impossible to say with this sample as each activity fed upon each other. It is certain, though, that those who knew the language would use it well in both forms of communication.

This study could be taken in several directions from here. The oral and written samples could be studied for other grammatical structures such use of transitive versus intransitive verbs, negatives, or instances of relative clauses. Moreover, this study should be performed on a larger group in order to be able to examine significant correlations. Also, if possible, the subjects should be asked about their writing background (how their previous teachers approached error correction). This could probably be achieved with a simple survey, but it would need to be designed by a teaching professional. Another survey that might prove useful would be of personality preferences. Additionally, a larger sample would provide the data necessary to truly examine the irregular verb forms broken down into forms of "to be." It would also be helpful, in a larger sample, to inspect instances of over-regularization of irregular past tense verbs (for example, *runned* for *ran*). There were not enough of these in this sample to warrant studying, but there probably would be in a larger sample.

Another advantage of a larger study would be to focus on one particular background factor. There were four Koreans in this sample. How would a large group of Korean native speakers perform on these tasks? There were also three Spanish speakers in this sample. How would a large sample of Spanish speakers perform on these tasks? The current study could not pick apart any background factor such as those mentioned here. For the learners in this study, their background factors were intricately linked to their attitudes and to their productions.

Finally, a students' individualism played the biggest role in production. There were so many questions that arose from this sample, and there was no simple answer to any of them. The

students' background (language, years studying English, Level in ELOP) did not affect their production. What they were taught more – speaking or writing – did not affect their production. What they liked – grammar, reading, writing, and speaking – did not affect their production. While this may seem discouraging, it approaches the most difficult factor for ESL teachers: accounting for individual differences.

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Appendix A. Consent Form

<div align="center">
Louisiana State University Consent Form
Baton Rouge, LA
</div>

1. Study Title   Social factors in verb acquisition in students of English as a second language
2. Performance Sites   Louisiana State University
3. Investigators   Arnulfo G. Ramírez, Ph.D. Foreign Language & Literature 225-578-5179
    Erin Rogers Linguistics 225-892-9448
4. Purpose of the study Investigate factors affecting verb acquisition in ESL students
5. Subject inclusion   Students in the English Language Orientation Program who are learning English as a second language
6. Subject exclusion   Students who are not in the program and are not learning English as a second language
7. Description of study Subjects will fill out a survey indicating their reasons for studying English as well as other social factors affecting their language studies. They will then watch a brief clip from the movie "Back to the Future" and write a few paragraphs describing the action in the movie, being sure to use the past tense. Finally, an oral interview will follow and the students will again describe what happened in the movie. Written and spoken verb forms will be compared to determine if they match and if not, why.
8. Benefits   Students will contribute to the field of second language acquisition studies.
9. Risks   There are no known risks.
10. Alternatives   No alternatives are available since there are no known risks.
11. Removal   No one will be removed unless they request to stop participating.
12. Right to refuse   Students may refuse to participate at any time.
13. Privacy   All data will remain anonymous; however, the research will become part of the public domain.
14. Release of information Students' identities will remain confidential.
15. Financial information There is no cost to performing this study.
16. Signatures   This study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, 225-578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

_____

signature of subject   date

Appendix B. Surveys

#_____

Questionnaire for ESL Study

Please answer the following questions by circling the letters that best correspond with how you feel.

SA=Strongly Agree
A=Agree
N=Neither agree nor disagree
D=Disagree
SD=Strongly Disagree

1. I tremble when I know I'm going to be called on in my English classes.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

2. I am usually at ease during tests in my English classes.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

3. Even if I am well prepared for my English classes, I still feel anxious about going to class.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

4. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers during my English classes.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

5. I enjoy my writing assignments in my English classes.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

6. I would rather volunteer to speak during English class than to do writing assignments.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

7. I enjoy grammar class.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

8. I enjoy composition class.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

9. I enjoy spoken English class.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

10. I enjoy reading class.

        SA   A   N   D   SD

11. I enjoy speaking with native English speakers.

SA   A   N   D   SD

12. I enjoy practicing speaking English with my classmates.

SA   A   N   D   SD

#_____

1. When I learned English in my country, the emphasis was on grammar.

       1   2   3   4

2. When I learned English in my country, the emphasis was on speaking.

       1   2   3   4

3. When I learned English in my country, the emphasis was on writing.

       1   2   3   4

4. When I learned English in my country, the emphasis was on reading.

       1   2   3   4

\#_____

Name: _____

Level in ELOP: _____

Nationality: _____

Years studied English: _____

Languages Spoken: _____

Vita

Erin Rogers, a native of Elizabethton, Tennessee, has been residing in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, since August, 2004. She had lived in Tennessee for the entirety of her life, receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree in French from East Tennessee State University in December, 2002. After working several less than stellar jobs, the last being as a salesperson in a lighting store (she decided that while lights are a necessity, her being involved in lighting Tennessee was not), she moved to Louisiana to pursue her master's degree in linguistics. She chose Louisiana because she had read a series of books as a young child about Louisiana's history and became enchanted with the area. After graduating from Louisiana State University, she will work for EMCO Technologies in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, as a technical writer, a human resources agent, and general go-to employee.