An Activity Theoretical Investigation into the Dominant Composition and Translation Activities of EFL learners across Persian and English

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the impact of a genre-specific strategy-based instructional intervention on translation quality, dominant translation and writing activities in the persuasive essays of a group of EFL learners within the perspective of activity theory. The main purpose of the study was to see, taking translation as a sort of writing in its own right, whether the kind of instructional intervention implemented influence the writing and translation activities of learners similarly or not. To this end, 22 intermediate EFL learners received 10 sessions of self-regulatory strategy development (SRSD) instruction accompanied by some translation exercises on persuasive writing. Based on the results, SRSD did not have any significant effect on the translation quality of the students. However, the comparison of pretest and posttest scores on the persuasive probe and translation test revealed that the genre-specific strategy instruction influenced the dominant translation and writing activities of the participants. The findings pointed to the fact that the issues related to the students' new learning histories changed the nature of their activity systems both in persuasive essay writing and translation.

Keywords: Activity theory, Dominant activities, Persuasive writing, Self-regulated strategy development, Translation quality

INTRODUCTION

One of the most educationally credited approaches to human learning in the constructivist tradition is Vygotskyan Sociocultural Theory which, according to Swain (2000), is now well documented in the field of second/ foreign language learning research and translator education. One of the best-known proposals in the tradition of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is Leontiev (1978) Activity Theory. Similar to Vygotsky, Leontiev emphasizes the social nature of

learning and through activity theory, he set to examine individuals' dominant activity systems as they are engaged in social interaction via the use of language.

In activity theory, human behavior results, as Leontiev (1978) contends, from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity. Activity theory is a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework which enables researchers to investigate different forms of human practices at both individual and social levels (Kuutti, 1996). For Lantolf (2000), activity theory implies the system which ema-

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nates from the integration of certain artifacts into human activity either psychological or social. Kuutti (1996) defines activity theory as "a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different forms of human practices as development processes, both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time" (p. 25). The concept of activity in activity theory is thoroughly different in connotation from the common meaning of terms activity, action, and task. Activity in this theory refers to the behavior actually produced when a task is being performed (Engestrom, 1999). Opposed to a task which is a behavioral blueprint to be acted upon by learners, activity denotes the kind of behavior actually produced when a task is performed (Coughlan & Duff, 1994).

Another important educational category in the sociocultural perspective is the concept of self-regulation or self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learning is defined as "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). According to Zimmerman (1986), self-regulation pertains more specifically to the way students activate, change, and sustain their learning practices on their own in particular contexts. Students who self-regulate their learning process(s) usually, as Leventhal and Cameron (1987) state, carry out tasks successfully since they exert their best to close the gap between their current level of knowledge/ skill and the goals they have set for themselves.

As with the field of second/ foreign language learning, self-regulation has been recently applied to teach writing skill among the main four language skills. Hayes (1996) corroborates the integral role self-regulation plays in writing skill and suggests that proficiency in writing has to do with high levels of self-regulation in that writing is particularly enough as an intentional, self-initiated and self-sustained activity. Among the attempts made to incorporate the tenets of self-regulation into language pedagogy is the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model proposed by Harris and Graham (1996) used to teach learners strategies for planning and organizing their writing together with self-regulation procedures such as monitoring and goal-setting. The findings out of studies on SRSD indicate that SRSD has positive effect(s) on students' writing performance (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006).

Drawing upon the process approach and strategy based instruction, SRSD was proposed by Graham and Harris (2003) as an instructional framework in writing. The model is primarily implemented to teaching learners planning and organizing strategies boosted by self-regulation procedures such as goal-setting and monitoring. SRSD comprises six stages, which are illustrated in Table 1 below. To date, a number of studies have been carried out with the primary goal of investigating the effects of and the best condition for incorporating the SRSD component into L2 writing instruction. Due to space considerations and the fact that SRSD in this study has been implemented as a framework to examine students' writing and translation activities, for a rather comprehensive review of SRSD studies as well as activity theory, interested readers may consult Graham and Harris (2003) and Kuutti (1996). Keeping this in mind and assuming translation as a legitimate type of writing, this study set out to examine whether SRSD influences the translation quality of EFL learners as it did in case of second/ foreign language writing.

Table 1.
The Six Stages in SRSD Model of Writing Instruction

Stage	Description
Develop background	Existing prior knowledge is activated and discussed to ensure students have pre-requisite knowledge and skill necessary for the writing task.
Discuss it	Students' current writing performance is examined. The new strategy is introduced and discussed. Students commit to mastering the new strategy.
Discuss it	Using "think-alouds" and visual aids, the teacher models the new strategy for students.
Model it	Students use mnemonic devices and visual aids to memorize the new strategy.
Memorize it	Students practice the writing strategy with scaffolded assistance.
Support it Independent performance	Students independently use the writing strategy

Note. Reprinted from "Using self-regulated strategy development to support students who have "trubol giting thangs into werds,"" by T. Santangelo, K. R. Harris, and H. Graham, 2008, Remedial and Special Education, 29(1) , 78-89. 2008 by "SAGE Publications".

Translation and Target Texts

Instructing students to write effectively is part of any language-centered curriculum whether in L1 or L2 and regardless of students' age. The only difference between these two writing curricula, apart from the medium of instruction, is that in L1 learners have not already learned how to write in another language while in L2 they already know the composition norms of their first language.

Despite its plausible advantages, such previous knowledge (e.g., first language), might cause certain problems to the foreign language learner (e. g., negative transfer, defensive mechanisms, etc.). Translating a text from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) or the other way round entails high competency in the writing system of the codes involved taking other competencies for granted. Accordingly, the translator's composing skill in his/her native tongue as well as in the L2 is fundamental to quality translation. Assuming the translator's mother tongue as the SL, if the translator is not proficient enough in TL, s/he might fail in conveying the SL's intended message par excellence into TL. The same holds true where the translation direction is from TL to the translator's native code. In the same vein, the translator's imperfect mastery of the writing standards together with his unfamiliarity with the different discourse and stylistic conventions governing the SL (here the L2) is most likely to result in a poor translation. Considering the preceding issues, teaching certain TL (English in our case) writing strategies to students is potentially useful.

In assessing the quality of translations, the study utilized the model developed by Farahzad (1992) where she suggests two major item types for examining translation quality: limited-response and controlled free-response. When it comes to the scoring procedure, Farahzad (1992) places emphasis on accuracy and appropriateness as two distinct features that have to be carefully checked for each unit of translation (i. e., the sentence and clause).

The aims the present study sought were threefold: first examining the impact of the instructional intervention on the translation quality of participants; second determining the changes, within the framework of Leontiev's Activity Theory, in their writing activities and third identifying the dominant activities in their translations a corollary of instructional intervention they underwent on the basic aspects of SRSD. Accordingly, the following research questions were put forth:

> *1. Does SRSD significantly enhance the translation quality of persuasive texts translated by Iranian intermediate EFL learners?*
>
> *2. Does SRSD influence the dominant writing activities of Iranian interme-*

diate EFL learners while they perform the same kind of task (persuasive writing)?

3. Does SRSD influence the dominant translation activities of Iranian intermediate EFL learners while they perform the same kind of task (translating persuasive texts)?

METHODS

The main focus of this study was to examine the plausible effects of instruction in the form of SRSD on the translation quality and the major writing and translation activities of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. To this end, a mixed-method design was adopted. That is, a qualitative paradigm was followed to find the answer to the first research question and qualitative analyses were exerted to pinpoint the other two questions.

Participants

A total number of 22 Iranian intermediate EFL learners were chosen based on their scores on a sample Preliminary English Test (PET) out of 35 students. The students were studying advanced writing as part of the compulsory courses they had to pass at Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah branch. The learners whose scores on the PET fell within ±1 standard deviation of the mean score were chosen as the main participants of the study (N=22). Out of the 22 students, there were 12 females and 10 males. The participants constituted the one experiment group of this study and due to the nature of the research questions, there was no control group required. The participants received instruction on SRSD through two major mnemonic strategies of POW and TREE.

Instruments

To collect data, three instruments were used in the study. First, a sample PET was run among the participants to check their homogeneity before the instructional treatment. Second, the students were presented with two writing prompts on persuasive essays both in pretest and posttest on

which they had to write. The persuasive prompts (writing tests) were chosen keeping in mind the participants' proficiency level. To use more authentic topics, the prompts were adopted from the IELTS and included particular statements- questions to encourage persuasive writing. The prompts asked the students their opinion on college issues (e.g., *Should instructors test students' achievement once at the end of the course?* and *should students be consulted in the selection of the main source(s) of English courses?*). The persuasive writings of participants in both pretest and posttest were qualitatively analyzed based on a reliable and valid scale in order to examine the possible changes in the dominant persuasive writing activities of the participants from the pretest to the posttest.

To probe both the plausible effects of the instructional intervention on the participants' translation quality, and the possible changes in their translation activities, the participants were asked, as a translation protocol, to translate the same persuasive essay (from English to Persian) once before the study actually began (as pretest) and later after the treatment (as posttest). The persuasive essay was authentic, written by a native speaker. The essay comprised five paragraphs of 100-150 words entitled *"Why Email Spam Should Be Outlawed"*. The participants' translations in the pretest and posttest were assessed by two experienced raters based on the model presented by Farahzad (1992) that is known as holistic scoring.

Treatment Procedure

Having run the English proficiency test, the translation and persuasive writing pretests were administered in two separate sessions. Thereafter, the participants received SRSD instruction in the form of POW+TREE self-regulatory strategies to plan and write persuasive essays. The instructional treatment involved six lessons each teaching students one of the six stages of the SRSD instruction (See the literature review). The lessons were delivered to the participants during ten 60-minute sessions.

During the first two sessions and as the main strategies, the class, led by the teacher, reviewed the major parts in a persuasive essay. Later, the two persuasive self-regulatory strategies, i. e., POW+TREE mnemonics, were presented to the participants in the form of graphs for the sake of better understanding. The letters represented by the mnemonic POW+TREE were clarified in the following way: **POW** stands for **P**ick my idea, **O**rganize my notes, and **W**rite and say more. As to help the class with the second stage in POW, "Organize my notes", the persuasive genre strategy (TREE) was introduced. Accordingly, the class focused on generating ideas/statements specific to the persuasive genre of writing. The mnemonic **TREE** was decoded as standing for the four integral components of a persuasive essay: **T**opic, **R**easons and counter reasons, **E**xplanations, and **E**nding (wrap it up). To make sure the class has come into terms with the mnemonic, several model essays were analyzed working out their four main elements (for a detailed discussion of the whole steps involved in the instructional treatment refer to Fahim and Rajabi, 2015).

Additionally, the treatment also involved working on Ernest Hemingway (1963), *The Old Man and the Sea* and its Persian translation by N. Daryabandari. The reason for using this novelette and its translation lied in its explicitness in sentence structure, choice of diction, and the style. The intention behind this very exercise was two-fold: first to provide the learners with a good translation model and second to make them familiar with the different aspects of translation enterprise. The translation is among the first and most well-known translations in Persian. The teacher first followed by one of the students reading its Persian translation read certain paragraphs of the source text. Then, the class led by the researcher analyzed the paragraph sentence by sentence to see the way the source text was rendered at different syntactic, semantic, and discourse levels. Wherever possible before reading the target text, the students were asked to translate certain sentences in a paragraph and then their trans-

lations were checked against Daryabandari's translation.

The translation part of the treatment, as stated, was taught quite implicitly without any overt, explicit explanations. This was intentionally done to let the students ponder on the class discussions and consequently build their own self-perceived understanding of what constitutes good translation independently. In activity theory, there is much emphasis on the individualistic construction of reality by students. Such self-construction of one's own learning is most likely to eventually lead to life-long learning. One more relevant and critical aspect of activity theory has to do with the history of the activity at hand as part of activity system based on which the more experienced an activity is, the stronger the activity system would become. Following the instructional phase, the same translation and persuasive writing tests given to participants in the pretesting phase were administered once more as the posttest.

Further to examining the effect of the SRSD instruction on the translation quality of the participants, the study also set out to investigate the ways in which they engage in the writing and translation tasks within the framework of activity theory. Accordingly, the participants' essays as well as the target texts they came up with were qualitatively analyzed. That is, the dominant translation and writing activities of the participants were subject to careful content analysis to figure out the modifications in the way they approached the same tasks as a corollary of the SRSD instructional intervention at two different intervals (e.g., pretest and posttest). Owing to the fact that the studies conducted on activity theory include a few number of participants, largely to present an in-depth and comprehensive account of the activity under investigation, the content analyses were run with the data of 10 out of 22 participants.

Assessing the Quality of Translations

In the present research, translation quality in tandem with writing quality were considered as two

similar composing activities and analyzed within the framework of activity theory to figure out how each was influenced by instruction on certain writing-specific SRSD. To this end, the SRSD particular to the persuasive genre of writing was presented to the participants to see whether it affected the translation and writing activities of EFL learners differently. More specifically, the study aimed to find out how the internal activity structures of writing per se, as an activity taking its ideas directly from the writer's thought, and translating, as a composing activity taking its ideas from an already written text, are modified because of SRSD instruction.

Since the 22 participants in the present study translated persuasive essays, the Holistic Scoring method (as opposed to the objectified one) was adopted to assess the quality of translations. Drawing on Farahzad's (1992) scoring scheme, the translated texts/essays were assessed by two experienced translation instructors on the basis of the scheme presented in Table 2 below. The target texts that the participants translated were first rated by the examiners independently and their inter-rater reliability was checked (r = 0.86, *p* = 0.0001 < 0.05).

Table 2.
The Scheme Based on the Text as the Unit of Translation

Items	Score
Accuracy	20 percent
Appropriateness	20 percent
Naturalness	20 percent
Cohesion	20 percent
Style of discourse/choice of words	20 percent

Note. Reprinted from "Moving toward objective scoring: A rubric for translation assessment," by H. Khanmohammad and M. Osanloo, 2009, JELS, 1(1), 131-151. 2009 by "SID".

Assessing Writing and Translation Activities

Another aim the study set out to achieve was to investigate the impact of persuasive SRSD instruction on the persuasive writing and translation activities of the participants while carrying out the same kind of tasks. More specifically, in so far as translation is viewed as a legitimate and autonomous writing system as a code in its own right (Frawley, 1984) with fluctuations in the quality of the target (translated) texts brought primarily about due to the differences in the translators' associated interlanguages, it is not uncommon to conceive of translation/ target text as encompassing particular internal structure resembling the translator's current activity system. Therefore, the composing activities, both in writing persuasive essays and in translating authentic persuasive texts, the participants engaged in prior to and after the genre-specific persuasive treatment, were scrutinized both in the pretest and posttest phases primarily to pinpoint the kind of variations, if any, in such activities.

To this end, Connor and Lauer's (1985) writing discourse analysis approach was utilized to analyze the translated persuasive texts as well as the persuasive essays. This scale was used solely because it is almost the only valid and reliable measure available in analyzing persuasive texts, which centers almost exclusively on the notion of coherence. Additionally, coherence as an indispensable element to successful writing, taking into consideration the concept of 'learning history' as one pertinent axiom in activity theory, is most allegedly affected by the participants' prior learning experiences and/or histories. Moreover, coherence is more likely to be implicitly influenced by SRSD. To wrap it up, coherence as Connor and Lauer (1985) put it, is viewed as one of the key measures in assessing persuasive texts regardless of the code (English and/or Persian).

As far as coherence is viewed as a defining feature of persuasive texts, it follows that in translating such texts much care has to be exerted to render them as coherent as possible in the TL.

This in itself contributes quite vividly to House's (1997) functional equivalence. Adopting such an approach to translating persuasive texts, the researchers used the same measure, that is, Bamberg's Coherence Scale (as cited in Connor & Lauer, 1985) to examine the dominant activities in persuasive essays participants wrote as well as the target texts they translated.

Two notes have to be made here on assessing translation activities; first, taking Frawley's (1984) notion of translation as a third code, the target Persian texts the participants translated were analyzed as being autonomous with reference to their current interlanguages albeit comparisons are made with both English and Persian codes where necessary, and second, the main categories considered in examining the translation activities were the elements of organization/order (whether the translator organize details according to the discernible plan that is sustained throughout the translation), cohesion/explicitness (to what extent the translator uses cohesive ties such as lexical cohesion, conjunction, ellipsis, and such to link translated sentences and/or paragraphs) and closure (does the translator end with a statement that gives the reader a definite sense of closure). These elements were selected due to the fact that theyare the universal components of persuasive texts composed in the first code (English), second code (Persian), and/or third code (translated texts) and as such could be conceived of as the translation activity systems of the students in our case.

Employing Bamberg's Coherence Scale, the categories of a. Focus (whether the writer identifies the topic and does not shift or digress), b. Context (whether the writer orients the reader by describing the context or situation), c. Organization (whether the writer organizes details according to discernible plan that is sustained throughout the essay), d. Cohesion (whether the writer skillfully uses cohesive ties such as lexical cohesion, conjunction, reference, and such to link sentences and/or paragraphs), e. Closure (whether the writer wraps up with a statement that gives the reader a definite sense of closure), and f. Grammar (whether the writer makes few or no grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interrupt the discourse flow or reading process") were taken carefully into consideration in examining writing activities in essays the participants came up with in pretests and posttests. Similarly, the categories of organization/order, cohesion/ explicitness, and closure throughout translated texts at the pretests and posttests were analyzed to determine the kind of variation(s) in the dominant translating activities inherent in them.

RESULTS

Addressing the First Research Question

To begin with the first question (Does SRSD significantly enhance the translation quality of persuasive texts by Iranian intermediate EFL learners?), the mean scores of the participants' target texts in the pretest and posttest were statistically compared through a paired samples *t*-test. As stated earlier (Table 2), the target texts were rated on the basis of a rubric out of 100. Table 3 below tabulates the descriptive statistics of the participants' scores in pretest and posttest.

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Performance in Pretest and Posttest

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair1 VAR01	57.1000	30	12.12905	2.21445
VAR02	56.9667	30	12.38376	2.26095

As evident in the Table, the mean scores of the participants' target texts in the pretest and posttest do not reveal much difference. However, to test the null hypothesis pertaining to the first question, the mean scores were compared through a paired samples *t*-test. Table 4 presents the results of the paired samples *t*-test.

Table 4.
Paired Samples t-test Comparing Participants' Performances in the Pretest and Posttest

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair	1 VAR01 - VAR02	-.06667	1.57422	.28741	-.65449	.52116	-.232	29	.818

It has to be noted here that the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality indicated that the participants' scores were distributed normally ($p = 0.059 > 0.05$). According to Table 4, the results of the comparison of the participants' performances on the translation pretest and posttest showed no significant difference ($p = 0.818 > 0.05$) in participants' performances on the two administrations of the persuasive essay translation test pointing to the fact that the null hypothesis was retained. It follows that the instructional intervention did not significantly influence the translation quality of the participants. In other words, SRSD together with partial translation explanations delivered to the students as treatment did not improve their translation quality.

Addressing the Second Research Question

To answer the second question (Does SRSD influence the dominant writing activities of Iranian intermediate EFL learners while they perform the same kind of task (persuasive writing?), the essays participants composed at pretest and posttest phases were carefully examined on the basis of Bamberg's Coherence Scale which has been particularly developed and validated to assess persuasive writing. The scale as pointed out earlier draws up on the elements of focus, context, organization, cohesion, closure, and grammar to assess coherence in persuasive essays. Accordingly, an in-depth content analysis was run by researcher to pinpoint the changes from the pretest to posttest in the writing activities of the participants while they engaged in the same kind of task (persuasive essay).

Analysis of Persuasive Writing Activities

The results of the analysis of writing activities at pretest revealed that the individual participants' activities did vary a lot from each other. In other words, the students wrote a number of different forms while performing the same task. Additionally, the writing activities the participants engaged in were often incomplete and at times contained irrelevant information. To start with, the element of focus, that is, the proper identification of the topic, almost half of the participants did not stick to the topics with several digressions from them. For instance, the essay written by Payam A. was full of sentences, which did not contribute any significant elements to the overall message.

Another student, Asem H., failed to present the topic directly in the thesis statement. What he emphasized here was the necessity of introducing up-to-date textbooks by instructors without any reference to the focus of the study, and/or negotiation between the instructor and the students in course book selection? His essay as a result initiated with an incoherent and less significant introductory paragraph. In other words, Asem failed to come to terms with the main topic and consequently digressed from it.

With regard to the element of context, few students oriented the readers to the context of the essay. The participants moved to the main arguments immediately without setting the scene. Peyman Kh., another participant, failed to orient the reader properly towards the main issue. As with the element of organization, the majority of sentences were organized one after another. Rather than describing the setting required to encourage the readers to keep on reading the essay,

Peyman moved spirally forward reiterating the initial sentence of the introduction within the same paragraph. Throughout the next three paragraphs, Peyman's persuasive writing activities continued to be incoherent without any discernible organization.

The next element in Bamberg's Coherence Scale regards the use of cohesive devices to link ideas together. Except for two essays, the cohesive devices exerted to link ideas in the essays did not exceed four in each single essay, an observation pointing to the lack of a coherent and unified writing activity system. As for the feature of closure, surprisingly enough, the concluding paragraphs across all examined essays contained various ideas except presenting a clear ending. In other words, the participants failed to come to a final resolution as to the conclusion of the essay. For instance, Alireza M. wrapped his essay up with the following sentence, "The [our] instructors mostly do not consider students' interests in class management", an idea, which does not contribute to the main function of the composition, which is persuading the instructors …

As with the grammar, almost all the essays enjoyed a good deal of different grammatical structures with few syntactic errors. However, there were certain lexical problems, which is common to much EFL writing. For instance, one student used the word "election" instead of selection in the phrase "course book selection". Considering punctuation marks, dots were the mostly utilized mechanic device with commas, semicolons, etc. used sporadically.

In the post-intervention phase, the same participants' persuasive writing activities were examined to figure out whether SRSD as a model of writing instruction has any considerable impact on the writing activities the participants engaged in while doing the same task. To start with, the element of focus, the participants' activities seemed clearer and more consistent compared to those in the pretesting phase. The kind of emphasis put on the importance of a clear and well-developed topic sentence/thesis statement in the course of the instructional

treatment well justifies such a change in this specific writing activity.

Additionally, the essays were of quality in setting the scene (identifying the context) after following the treatment. Therefore, from the perspective of activity theory, the new learning activity within a supporting discourse community helped participants build upon and reorganize their dominant activity systems in the domain of foreign language persuasive writing. In fact, the kind of scaffolded instruction delivered by the researcher/instructor throughout the intervention has had considerable influence on the past writing activities of the participants.

Such assistance allegedly led to certain modifications in the way(s) students approached and internalized the activity at hand. In case of the second element in the Coherence Scale, i.e., context, Payam set the context quite explicitly, "*One of the problems in any EFL curriculum including that of Iran is the teacher-centered nature of such curricula*". Interestingly enough, this participant was successful in mixing the first two elements together in two sentences. With regard to the organizing activity, Payam's essay followed a discernible order of presenting different but related ideas.

It seems most likely that the instruction presented to the participants has encouraged them to keep a clear and organized plan throughout the whole essay. Similarly, the use of cohesive elements such as cohesive markers and conjunctions showed an increase in the posttest persuasive essay writing. Largely due to the kind of emphasis put upon the necessity of including three reasons or more to persuade the reader, the students were cautious to utilize cohesive devices like ordinal numbers to order the so-called reasons according to their importance. Alireza ended his essay in the posttest with this sentence, "In conclusion, instructors had better involve the students in deciding on the main textbook of the course since the students are…". This very sentence signals the end of the essay quite clearly. Despite the fact that the element of grammar in essays across the two administrations (pretest and posttest) under-

went very few alterations, however, there were substantial improvements over the pretest performance. Since the SRSD put the least emphasis on the syntactic aspect of persuasive essays, much change in the element of grammar is logically not expected.

The analysis of the other essays in the posttest pointed to similar results. Generally, this in itself confirms the vital role of novel learning experiences in the form of scaffolding in boosting and strengthening the activity systems of the learners.

Addressing the Third Research Question

To answer the third research question, (Does SRSD influence the dominant translation activities of Iranian intermediate EFL learners while they translate persuasive texts?), the target texts the participants came up with as they translated an authentic persuasive essay from English to Persian at pretest and posttest phases were carefully examined on the basis of the elements of organization/order, cohesion/explicitness, and closure. Accordingly, an in-depth content analysis was conducted by the researcher to determine the changes, if any, from pretest to posttest in the translation activities of student translators while they worked on the same kind of task (translating persuasive essays).

Analysis of Translation Activities

The SL text the participants were asked to translate into Persian was a five-paragraph persuasive essay on "*Spam email should be outlawed*" which enjoyed almost all features of authentic persuasive essays since a native speaker of English had written it. The first paragraph presented the focus of the entire essay after a few motivator sentences right at the very end. The paragraphs in the body discussed the reasons for outlawing spam emails and the last two sentences of the fifth paragraph wrapped the essay up. Each paragraph was linked to the preceding one through its first sentence. A good deal of cohesive markers, conjunctions, and embedded structures was easily detectable. The main arguments/reasons were ordered according to their pertinent importance

hence rendering the whole essay well organized. However, for practical reasons, the third one to see the way participants reacted to it in pretest and posttest purposefully replaced the second paragraph of the body.

For convenience, the realization of each of the three categories in the target texts was contrasted from the pretest phase to that of the posttest. The first category examined was organization/order of ideas in the target text. In the pretest, the students' translations with specific reference to organization had the following features: first, the sentences were arranged across the five paragraphs with some variation from the arrangement of the sentences in the source text. In other words, writing in their mother tongues, the test takers ordered sentences in a manner bearing not much resemblance to their dominance in the source text. For instance, Alireza translated the first paragraph failing to consider all of the beginning motivator sentences (n=3) and reversed the arrangement transposing two motivator statements after the thesis statement. Second, compared to the source text in which the ideas in specific paragraphs were first presented and later elaborated upon through examples, the target texts also introduced the ideas followed by further elaboration but the order of elaboration examples was not the same as that of the source text. For instance, in the fourth paragraph, the last sentence of the source text was an example of further elaboration. Asem H. translated this sentence right in the middle of his paragraph.

Furthermore, the organization and ordering of ideas in the target texts following the instructional treatment was subjected to analysis. The sentences in the introductory paragraph, for example, were apparently arranged similar to their ordering in the source text; nevertheless, it became obvious that most students translated the third motivator sentence as the second sentence in their translation. Moreover, the order of body paragraphs, which had been intentionally manipulated in the source text prior to the study practically, began was modified in the target texts. Only 40 percent of the participants could detect the

paragraph ordering mismatch; however, this is an indicator of the way certain new experiences (e.g., learning history of learners) influences the dominant translation activities of students.

The second category highlighted in the target texts across the two administrations was cohesion/explicitness. For the purposes of this study, target text explicitness refers to the elaborative components injected into the text in order to make it primarily more understandable. This universal trend, according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) refers to the tendency in which the translator makes explicit in the target text the information that is left implicit in the source text. The target texts the students composed in the pretest contained several cohesive markers, which were quite similar in quantity to those used in the source text. With respect to the factor of explicitness, the participants made more explicit several technical terms like "*Trojan*", "*captcha*", and "*AOL*". In the posttest, the frequency of the use of cohesive devices and conjunctions was almost the same as that of the pretest. However, their quality showed improvements meaning that the students used more elaborate terms/phrases to convey these connecting tools.

The third element investigated across the translations at the pretest and posttest was closure. The source text essay participants translated ended up with the following statement, "*Taking into account the problems associated with spam messages, email spam should be outlawed*". At the pretest, most students translated this sentence as accurate as possible without repeating the problems already discussed in the body. The participants added certain ending signals like " روی هم رفته", "در پایان" which were not present in the source text. In the posttest, the target texts involved the repetition of problems presented in body paragraphs. Additionally, the target texts began first by translating the last sentence followed by the translation of the beginning sentences of the concluding paragraph of the source text.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

In activity theoretical terms, the socio-historical backgrounds the participants and the instructor have a lot to do with the maintenance, weakening, or strengthening the internal ties among the different elements of the dominant activity systems. This study presented scaffolded SRSD instruction to participants in ways that both the students and the instructor interacted with each other to reinforce the previous efficient activities and to encourage the new constructive ones. Put briefly, the SRSD instructional intervention seems to have been successful in internalizing and activating jointly constructed activities.

Traditional and more cognitively oriented approaches to teach second/foreign writing have for long focused on the individual student's linguistic abilities divorced from the social interactions, which are thought to play a vital role in developing learners' language skills. The model practiced and examined in the present study reflects a more socio-cultural and socio-historical (Lantolf, 2000; Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978) approach to teaching writing skill. Such a model further prioritizes the significant role of discourse communities and shared historical experiences together with scaffolded instruction.

Discussing the results obtained from the analysis of the participants' persuasive essays in relation to the results of similar past studies does not seem that time consuming in that perhaps the only study to date carried out on persuasive writing within the activity theory perspective is that of Coughlan and Duff (1994). Taking a sociocultural approach to second language acquisition, this study showed that "the 'same task' does yield comparable results when performed by the same individual on two different occasions" (p. 175) due to differing person perception of the task and differing interpersonal relationships, respectively. Coughlan and Duff's work, like most others in the Vygotskian tradition emphasized private speech and other communicative activities rather than composition.

Coughlan and Duff (1994) point to a limitation in their study, which the present investigation seems to have overcome. The participants' story-telling production activities were affected by the interviewer's knowledge and expertise. On

the contrary, the composition activities that the participants of the present study engaged in while performing the same tasks at two different situations were not influenced by the researchers' knowledge or expertise. In other words, the researchers did not contribute anything to the participants throughout the whole essay writing process.

The finding, however, did not show any significant improvements in the translation quality of the students because of the instructional intervention. In fact, such finding does not seem strange in the face of the idea that the treatment mainly focused on the internal linguistic and discourse structure of persuasive essays, albeit participants also worked on certain translation modeling exercising. Compared to similar studies, which took the effect of strategy instruction of students' translation quality as their main focus, the present research yielded almost opposite results due to the reasons stated elsewhere in this paper.

Finally, as with the findings out of the analysis of the participants' translation activities, it was found that their new learning experience (learning history) modified the target texts they composed while translating persuasive texts. To this end, persuasive-related criteria were considered in examining the translation activities involved in rendering a source text into the target text. A look at the results of the analysis of target texts in both the pretest and post-tests demonstrates that the elements of organization/order, cohesion/ explicitness, and closure underwent certain modifications.

More specifically, in so far one takes into account the students' new learning experience (e.g., the treatment), these modifications can be attributed to changes, although partially, in their current translation activity systems. In other words, the persuasive- specific strategy instruction did influence the way participants approached the task, hence setting goals to translate a source text as elaborately and accurately as possible in their L1. From activity theory perspective, the goals the students set directly af-

fected their motives in a way that they exert their best to compose a quality persuasive essay in the TL freeing themselves from the constraints of the source text. Consequently, the modifications observed in these three elements have to be viewed within the context of the target texts rather than with reference to the source text overall discourse. It follows from the preceding discussion that target texts, in our case, have to be examined as legitimate, autonomous linguistic products. Therefore, the results out of this study confirm Frawley's (1984) notion of the third code.

To regress back to the three categories analyzed, it is incumbent at this particular point to argue for the beneficial effects of SRSD instructional intervention on the translation quality of the target texts, of course, if one views them within Frawley's (1984) formulation. An important implication of the findings for translation research goes with the idea that the target texts have to be also considered as linguistically composed (composing the text anew)texts which operate on highly specific syntactic, semantic, morphological, and discourse levels owing fairly exclusively to the target code current interlanguage of the translator.

CONCLUSION

This study was primarily motivated by the need to broaden the scope of sociocultural theories within translation studies. The results of the analysis of the participants' performances on both translation and writing tests across the two administrations indicated that SRSD as a scaffolded instructional framework influenced both writing and translation activities of the students. Activity theory can potentially provide researchers with a flexible view of participation with specific reference to multiple perspectives such as local and global positions. It follows that the potential capacity of activity theory in representing multiple perspectives/voices can be particularly built upon by researchers in that it provides them with a strong means to account for the dynamic interplay between the teacher as the one who designs and guides through the learning activity and the

student as the one who tries to achieve the outcome of the activity. Accordingly, further studies are called upon to examine whether teachers and students share similar pictures of the learning activity at hand and determine how other factors affect learners understanding of the learning activity.

In the present study, students learning English as a foreign language received writing instruction through SRSD on persuasive genre to examine the kind of changes in their dominant writing activities from the perspective of Leontiev's (1978) Activity Theory. Moreover, the students were administered translation tests prior to and after the SRSD instruction first to investigate the effect of persuasive writing instruction on their translation quality and then to scrutinize their major translation activities, taking Frawley's (1984) autonomy of translated texts as a legitimate kind of writing into account, before and after the treatment. Assuming a target (translated) text as a unique and autonomous written form on its own right, translation activity for the purposes of this study refers to the kind of writing actually produced when a source text is translated to a target one.

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Biodata

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