

# Enhancing Students' Fluency in Writing: Learning to Use Transition Words

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## Introduction

- English education in Japan
  - Traditionally accuracy-centered
  - Evolution of writing pedagogy
  - Fluency-oriented instruction

## Primary Purpose

- Primary purpose of this research is
- to investigate whether learning to use transition words results in enhancing students' fluency in writing

## Conceptual Framework

- The use of sentence connectors
- creates logical-semantic relations between linguistic expressions and linking paragraphs
  - Help to link the close to information presented earlier in the text, and to build cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday, 1994)

## Conceptual Framework

- Learning to use different types of transitional words may enable students
- to think of relevant information logically,
  - to write more about the logical information

## Aims of the study

- How did the experimental group of students respond to intentional feedback that explicitly focused their learning to use transitional words?
- To what extent did the students' learning to use transitional words enhance fluency performance in new pieces of writing?

## Methods

### Participants:

- 36 first-year nursing students at a Japanese university
- intermediate level (TOEIC Bridge score 140-150)
- final number of participants: 30 (2 males and 28 females)

## Methods

### Design and measures:

- 12 written homework assignments
- Think and write about reasons to support their opinion or choice
- Control group: the content and form feedback
- Experimental group: additional marginal comments on the use of connectives

## Methods

### Assignments and feedback schedule:

- Period 1 (Weeks 3-7): control and experimental groups were given different types of feedback and comments
- Period 2 (Weeks 8-12): both groups were given identical types of feedback and comments

## Methods

### Measure of fluency:

- Number of words written
- Number of connectives in a written text
- Successful connections: a sentence which is semantically connected with a previous sentence and /or a topic

## Methods

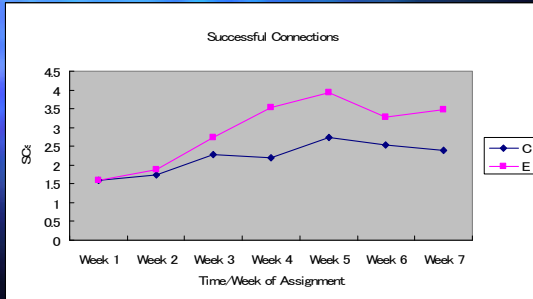
### Procedures:

- Give feedback and/or comments
- Count the number of words and successful connections
- A two-way ANOVA  
between-participants factor: group  
within-participants factor: weeks 1-7

## Results (successful connections)

	Experimental group		Control group	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Week 1	1.6	1.1	1.6	1.2
Week 2	1.9	1.1	1.7	1.1
Week 3	2.7	1.2	2.3	1.4
Week 4	3.5	0.6	2.2	0.9
Week 5	3.9	1.3	2.7	1.0
Week 6	3.3	0.9	2.5	0.8
Week 7	3.5	0.9	2.4	1.2

## Results (successful connections)



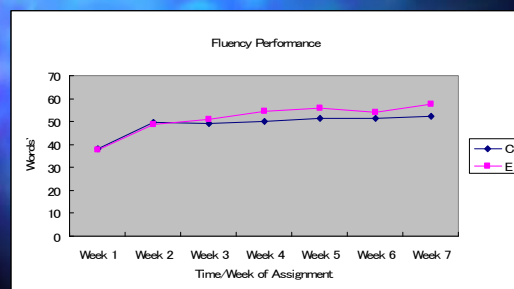
## Results (successful connections)

- Frequency of using connectives  
Experimental group > Control group:  
 $F(1, 28) = 9.69, p < .01$
- Feedback type and time:  
 $F(6, 168) = 2.36, p < .05$   
Experimental group > Control group:  
Week 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

## Results (number of words)

	Experimental group		Control group	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Week 1	37.9	12.8	38.0	15.5
Week 2	48.9	17.0	49.4	16.6
Week 3	51.1	17.5	49.3	22.8
Week 4	54.5	17.4	49.3	13.8
Week 5	55.9	16.9	51.4	13.4
Week 6	54.2	17.8	51.5	16.6
Week 7	57.5	13.3	52.4	9.6

## Results (number of words)



## Results (number of words)

- Number of words  
no significant differences
- Feedback type and time:  
 $F(6, 168) = 6.27, p < .01$   
Experimental group > Control group:  
Week 4, 5 and 7

## Discussion

- Teachers' comments on the use of connectives resulted in fluency performances.
- Teachers should make text-specific comments, which relates to the text rather than general rules (Bates, 1993)
- *Try to use "for example" to mention specific things in order to explain what you mean.*

## Discussion

- Providing comments on the use of connectives can make students think logically and affect their attitudes toward writing.
- Teachers should make useful feedback, which inspires writers (Gordon, 2008).

## Conclusion

- Learning to use transition words enhances students' fluency in writing.
- This study only partly confirms the effects of giving comments on the use of connectives.
- The subsequent research will be conducted on the patterns of improvement over the Period 2.