

The Summary Writing Processes of First Year EFL Learner BA Students

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1. Introduction

The ability to summarize information is the core element of successful information processing. As Kintch and van Dijk's process model suggests, summarization is a very intricate process involving a series of complex underlying mechanisms. Even though their model has its limitations in providing a full explanation of the exact nature of these mechanisms, most researchers of the field agree that the ability of effective summarization is not only connected to text production, but is also an indicator of the level of text comprehension (1978).

According to Tankó (2013), "a summary is the condensed version of main ideas borrowed from a source text. The ideas are restated in the summary writer's own words and their source is acknowledged" (p. 41). Despite being an ability widely drawn on in the academic context, research evidence suggests that formal training or direct instruction of summarization in this domain is almost completely neglected by teachers, even in cases when they give tasks specifically involving the writing of summaries. As a result, students, regardless of their cognitive abilities, usually struggle with effective summary writing (Hill, 1991; St Rose, 2001). The relevance of this problem becomes even more pronounced in tertiary education, where students are constantly exposed to integrative tasks (such as listening-into-writing and reading-into-writing tasks) because during the process of acquiring declarative knowledge, note taking, summary writing, and synthesizing skills are all essential. The necessity of these abilities is also confirmed by high-stakes international academic examinations, such as IELTS, Pearson Academic or TOEFL, which function as entrance examination to higher education, and which include tasks that measure summary writing skills.

The need for summarization skills is further re-enforced specifically in the Hungarian context by the fact that the final examination at some Hungarian universities also includes tasks explicitly targeting the students' ability to summarize. For instance, students of the Institute of English and American studies of the University of Debrecen receive a summary writing task in the Language Skill Assessment part of their state exam, where "the examinee is expected to produce a summary of 250-300 words of an original text of 600-800 words." (State exam topics, IEAS). Furthermore, the ability to successfully synthesize information also requires a solid foundation in summary writing (Tankó, 2013), and according to the specification of the BA thesis on the website of the School of English and American Studies of Eötvös Loránd University, excellent synthesizing is a fundamental requirement by the end

of the BA studies: “Students must be able to demonstrate a high level of academic achievement in synthesizing the knowledge acquired during their BA studies” (Requirements, SEAS Wiki). Consequently, in order to equip students with the necessary skills, first year BA students are provided a formal training in academic skills, and they have to pass a guided summary writing test at the end of the first semester. In the second semester, they study synthesis writing and the integration of synthesized information in source-based argumentative essays or mini-literature reviews.

Whereas studies on the topic of summary writing had already been conducted with L1 and L2 speakers of English in different contexts (Mateos, Martin, Villalón & Luna, 2008; Plakans, 2009; Yang & Shi, 2003), guided summary writing has not been extensively researched yet, either in the Hungarian EFL context, or on an international level. Furthermore, while it is known that cognitive development has an effect on summary writing (Mateos et al., 2008; Brown & Day, 1983), there is no information available on the effect of language proficiency level on summarization processes.

2. Literature review

Research in L1 and L2 summary writing has more than three decades of tradition. For the sake of transparency, in this literature review, relevant studies will be organized under four headings, namely the types of summaries and the importance of summary writing skills, the cognitive processes underlying summary writing, the role of cognitive development and experience in summary writing, and the limitations of previous research.

2.1 Types of summaries and the importance of summary writing skills

“Summary is a superordinate term for a number of discourse types which have in common these relationships with the original: (1) being shortened versions, (2) including only the main ideas, and (in most cases) (3) retaining the original organisation and focus” (Johns, 1988, p. 79). Through summarization, a vast amount of data can be condensed into only a few sentences, and it can also be used to include information from already existing sources into one’s own work without committing plagiarism.

Summaries can be categorized according to several criteria. First, they can be stand alone or integrated, depending on their intended use as either an independent, self-contained piece of writing, for example, thesis abstracts; or an embedded part of a larger text, like a

short synopsis of an article in a literature review. Secondly, based on their function, summaries can be critical or descriptive. Descriptive summaries only restate the main ideas of the source text without any further addition or comments; whereas in critical summaries, the writer not only summarizes the main points but also adds comments and reflections, for example, on the usefulness of these ideas. Thirdly, formal and informal summaries can be distinguished based on their style: Whereas formal summaries are reader-based summaries following the requirements of academic writing, informal summaries are writer-based notes such as lecture notes, sometimes lacking even grammatical correctness. Fourthly, depending on the way the source text is processed, global and guided summaries can be distinguished. Global summaries include all the main ideas of the source text, whereas in guided summaries only the ideas relevant to the specifically defined purpose of the summarization are included. Lastly, summaries can also be categorized based on the purpose of their use. Besides summaries used for academic purposes, like the examples mentioned before, there are summaries used for non-academic purposes; for example, executive summaries, headnotes and memos (Tankó, 2013).

Because of the various types and possible uses, summary writing skills are widely drawn on both in academic and non-academic contexts; so, it appears that good summarization skills are fundamental for every language user. Besides being an essential information processing and study tool, summarization also has several other beneficial effects. According to Rose (2001), summarization enhances the comprehension and recall of a text. By reorganizing and reflecting on the ideas presented and actively engaging in interaction with the text, students manage to memorize more information than through simply reading the text. Moreover, since during summary writing, students have to make conscious decisions about what to include and what to leave out of their summaries, this task also improves their critical thinking. Students have to process, transform and manipulate information in order to be able to write a successful summary, so they have to make inferences and practice critical reading and critical thinking (Casazza, 1993).

2.2 Cognitive processes underlying summary writing

The ability to summarize information is a very complex skill involving the application of a series of highly intricate cognitive mechanisms. As Kintch and van Dijk's (1978) process model suggests, the process of text summarization can be divided into three major steps. First, the meaning elements are organized into a coherent unity, and then information is condensed with the help of macro-operators. As a third step, a new coherent text is generated based on

the condensed information. These steps are not linear; they occur in a circular fashion, presupposing that some of the processes occur in a parallel instead of a sequential order.

Summarization is a rule governed process. The structure of meaning created by organizing the meaning elements into a coherent unity is called macrostructure. The global meaning of the text (macrostructure) is created with the help of four macrorules (Renkema, 2004). One of them, deletion rule is used to eliminate irrelevant or repeated propositions. Trivial or redundant information that has no value to the task is deleted during this operation. Zero rule, another low level processing macro-operation is used to copy propositional content from the source text without any modification. Both rules draw on the ability to recognize and extract the relevant propositional content from the source text. These two rules are supposed to require the lowest level of cognitive processing because research in the field suggests that zero and deletion rules are confidently applied even by elementary school students (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978).

Generalization rule and construction rule are the macro-operators requiring higher level cognitive processing skills. Generalization rule draws on the ability to categorize propositional content in the source text based on one organizing principle in order to create one general proposition; construction rule requires the ability to use background knowledge to identify relevant complementary propositional content and combine it with propositional content from the source text to produce a general proposition. As it can be seen, in order to successfully apply these two macrorules, the writer's world knowledge also has to be engaged. This is the reason why, as research evidence also confirms, younger students often find it difficult to use these two rules (Brown & Day, 1983; Kintch & van Dijk, 1978; Martín, Villalón, & Luna, 2008; Winograd, 1984).

The macro-operators are applied in a cyclical manner, processing the text from left to right, and constantly checking for argument overlaps between the propositions. The first macrorule to be applied is usually generalization. First, all the micropropositions are generalized, then, if they are relevant, they become macropropositions and if they are considered irrelevant, they get deleted. As macro-operators are applied in several cycles, macrostructures become hierarchical.

Since the ability of effective summarization is not only connected to text production but is also an indicator of the level of text comprehension, the term schematic structure must be introduced. Schematic structures, or schemata, are blueprints specified by a set of fixed

categories and rules of formation. When encountering a text, readers subconsciously try to relate it to previously read texts in order to recognize the appropriate schemata. From the appropriate schemata, they can make valuable inferences that can make text comprehension more effective and more successful. For example, by recognizing the genre, readers can make inferences on the underlying text structure, possible vocabulary items signaling the relationship among the ideas presented in the text, and content slots that must be present in a certain text type (Johns, 1988). During text comprehension, Kintch and van Dijk (1978) suggest that the creation and use of a macroproposition depends on whether the propositional content read in the texts is considered relevant or redundant by the pre-set categories and specifications of the schematic structure; this way, the schema deems every proposition of the source text relevant or irrelevant.

2.3 The role of cognitive development and experience in summary writing

Because text comprehension and production are largely influenced by the schematic structures, students who have more experience in reading and writing different genres should be at advantage when they have to produce the summary of a text. This presupposition is also supported by the findings of Johns (1985), who investigated the summary writing of three different groups of university students. Participants with different levels of experience in academic writing had to summarize a short excerpt from an American history textbook in 100 words, and the analysis of their written products suggested that more experienced students were able to integrate two or more pieces of relevant propositional content into a sentence and were also more successful in paraphrasing them. Moreover, Yang & Shi (2003), who also analyzed the summarization skills of university students, arrived at similar results. Their participants were from the same background and had similar levels of language knowledge, and based on the analyzed think aloud data, retrospective interviews, and writing samples, the researchers concluded that the subjects with more writing experience were the most efficient summary writers, potentially because they were also able to apply text processing and writing strategies more consciously during task execution. Furthermore, Plakans (2009) arrived at similar results when she investigated the use of discourse synthesis sub-processes of university-level non-native writers of English. Language difficulties, such as vocabulary use and stylistic concerns emerging during the writing process, were more successfully overcome by the writers who were using writing strategies more consciously.

Since summary writing is a cognitively highly challenging process, age and the level of cognitive development also have undeniable influence on the quality of the process and end

product of summarization. Brown and Day (1983) conducted three experiments to investigate how different age groups, that is elementary and high school students, college students and university students, used the macrorules (Kintch & van Dijk, 1978) when they had to summarize expository texts. Based on their findings, they concluded that college and university students also used the more complex rules, namely generalization and construction, whereas the younger participants relied only on the use of deletion and insertion. These results are in agreement with the findings of Winograd (1984), who also concluded that based on the analysis of their summaries, university students outperformed secondary school students in integrating and effectively paraphrasing of information.

Mateos, Martín, Villalón, & Luna's (2008) study investigating the cognitive and metacognitive summarizing and paraphrasing skills of 15-year-old secondary school students provided further conclusive evidence that cognitive development plays a crucial role in summary writing. Participants' reading and writing processes were closely monitored in order to get insight into their comprehension and composition, so they were asked to perform think aloud protocols and hand in written summaries and syntheses. As a result, researchers found that secondary school students lacked the cognitive skills required for the strategic use of reading and writing.

The studies presented above all seem to confirm the idea that the level of cognitive development has a high influence on the ability to successfully summarize information. However, the results of Johns (1985), Yang & Shi (2003), and Plakans (2009) suggest that cognitive development and age are not the most important factors in this matter because the summarization skills of students from the same age group and presumably with the same level of cognitive development showed great differences. The only salient difference between the more and less successful participants of these studies was the amount of experience they had in summarization and academic writing. This suggests that summary writing is indeed a skill that can be significantly improved through instruction, awareness raising, and practice.

2.4 Limitations of previous research

As the literature review suggests, almost three decades of research in summary writing has already addressed most of the important aspects and questions of summarization. However, it is obvious that some potentially crucial issues have been left out of the discussion. First of all, despite the amount of data accessible about the role of age in summary

writing and the impact of cognitive development on summarization skills, information on the effect of formal training or the influence of proficiency level is hardly available.

Secondly, previous studies appear to focus only on global summaries, being oblivious to the possible differences in the case of subtypes, such as the guided summary. Since, based on Kintch and van Dijk's process model (1978), information processing is influenced by schematic structures, it can be assumed that global summaries and guided summaries are processed slightly differently. While in the case of both task types writers have to be in possession of high level reading skills in order to be able to accurately understand the source text and apply radical changes to it without distorting the original message, there might be some differences between the processes underlying the creation of the different types of summaries. For example, the intention of the summarizer is completely different in the two cases. In the case of global summary writing, the intention is to include and cover equally every main point discussed in the source text. However, because of the loosely defined rhetoric goal, one of the biggest risks of global summary writing is losing focus and only discussing some of the issues presented in the text, thus failing to create a summary that would be an adequate representation in content and rhetorical goals of the original source text (Tankó, 2013). In contrast, in the case of guided summaries, the intention is to include specific ideas relevant to the rhetorical goal of the summarizer. Is such a task, students have a very well defined rhetorical goal presented in the form of a guiding question that sets a distinct goal for information retrieval. This defined rhetorical goal might help the summarizer to stay focused and might make it easier to miss the identification of relevant source text information.

Moreover, guided and global summaries might also differ in terms of the possible order of application of macro-operations. Global summaries seem to follow Kintch and van Dijk's (1978) original idea about the order of macro-operations. Most probably, when writing a global summary, the summarizer first engages in generalizing all the micropropositions and condensing them into as many macropropositions as needed. Contrariwise, in the case of the guided summary, the rhetorical goal set in the task would place the application of macro-operators into a different perspective. First, the summarizer might opt for selecting the ideas relevant to the purpose defined by the task, and only afterwards would he start to generalize the relevant micropropositions.

Taking the above outlined research niches into consideration, the main aim of the current study is to explore the guided summary writing processes prior to and following

explicit training in guided summary writing of English major BA students whose L1 is Hungarian and who study at a Hungarian institution of tertiary education., The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What characterizes the macrorule use prior to and following explicit training in guided summary writing of English major BA students whose L1 is Hungarian?

2. How does language proficiency of English major BA students whose L1 is Hungarian influence their macrorule use prior to and following explicit training in guided summary writing?

3. Methods

The current study is a small scale qualitative exploratory study whose aim is to explore the guided summary writing processes of English major BA students whose L1 is Hungarian, focusing on (1) the characteristics of the macrorule use prior to and following explicit training in guided summary writing and (2) the effect of language proficiency on the guided summary writing processes. Based on the findings of the previously conducted studies, and taking the role of cognitive development on summarization skills into consideration, the research was conducted with the participation of university students. In order to investigate the raised issues, six English major first year BA students enrolled into a Hungarian university were asked to participate.

3.1 Data collection

Data collection was carried out in two parts; the first set of data was recorded during the second week of the autumn semester, before the start of the participants' formal training in guided summary writing; the second set of data was recorded during the first week of December, about two weeks before the end of the semester, after the participants have completed the guided summary writing training. As data collection instruments, two guided summary tasks on similar topics and of matching difficulty level were used. In order to control for method effect, a counterbalanced design was applied, so students of the same English language proficiency level worked with different tasks on both occasions.

Since the study was designed to explore pre- and post-training summarization processes and the effect of language proficiency on those processes, on both data collection occasions participants met the researcher one-by-one for a 1.5-2 hours long interview. At the

first data collection occasion (Phase One), students were notified that the interviews would be audio recorded and were ensured that their privacy would not be compromised. In order to maintain their privacy, they were given pseudonyms before the data analysis. For the sake of convenience, the participants with the same proficiency level were given pseudonyms beginning with the same letter.

As part of Phase One, first, they received an approximately 15 minutes long training in metacognitive think-aloud, following the procedures described in Bowles (2010), and then they had to do a simple sentence formation task (for a sample of the think-aloud practice task, see Appendix A.). After the training, they were given a guided summary task and instructed to verbalize every thought emerging in their minds, irrespective whether it was in their L1 or L2, in order to guide the researcher through their task execution process as much as possible. The students were not allowed to use dictionaries or any other external help during their writing processes; however, they were allowed to ask questions concerning minor relevant practicalities (e.g., whether hyphenated words count as one or two words) any time during the interview, and the text they had to summarize was available for them during the whole process. Besides the instructions concerning how to perform the think aloud procedure, they were provided no other input on how to solve the task, and they were asked to execute the tasks as they normally would for their academic writing class. At the end of the first interview conducted after the participants finished the guided summary task, they were asked questions concerning their personal data, language learning history, and previous academic writing experiences.

The second round of data collection (Phase Two) took place in similar fashion. Before the think aloud protocol, the participants received a 5 minutes long training to recapitulate how to perform a metacognitive think aloud , and they were given the opportunity to practice with sentence formation exercises. They could proceed to the guided summary task only when they felt ready to and adequately familiar with the think aloud method. As in Phase One, no external help besides the source text was available for the students. On both data collection occasions not only the audio recorded think aloud data was collected from the participants but also their written notes, drafts, and final written products. At the end of the task, they were asked about their training experiences and the number of guided summaries they had to write during the semester.

During both data collection rounds, the language of the source text and the guided summary task was English. The language of the training and the interviews was Hungarian,

but for the language of the think aloud procedure the participants were allowed to use both English and Hungarian, and they were asked to verbalize their thoughts in the language in which they were thinking while solving the task. Regardless of their language choice for the think aloud, the final guided summaries had to be written in English.

3.1.1 Participants

As the first step of participant selection, the listening and grammar parts of the Oxford Placement test (OPT) and an IELTS academic reading task were administered in two first year Academic Writing groups. Based on the test results, specific students from the groups were approached and asked to take part in the study. However, participation was on voluntary bases; every student who was asked to participate was also free to refuse the offer. Since the current research also aimed to examine the effect of language proficiency on the process of summary writing, two participants were selected from each proficiency level between levels B2 and C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Based on the results of the placement test and the data gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants, the following participant profiles emerged:

Table 1

Participant profiles

Name	Brooke	Ben	Alice	Alex	Cole	Chris
Age	19	20	18	20	20	20
Proficiency	B2	B2	C1	C1	C2	C2+
OPT Score	139/200	139/200	166/200	157/200	180/200	191/200
Has learnt English for	10 years	10 years	13 years	10 years	10 years	14 years
Has also studied	German	German	German, French	German, Slovak, Russian	Spanish	German, Swedish

As Table 1 shows, all of the participants were Hungarian native speakers between the ages of 18-20 who learnt English for at least ten years. Besides English, they were all studying at least one other foreign language. Furthermore, from the semi-structured interviews it emerged that none of the participants received any training in guided summary writing prior

to the first data collection and that they had very limited experience in English academic writing.

3.1.2 Instruments

For the purpose of participant selection and training, first, the listening and grammar tasks of the 2004 edition of Oxford Placement Test were administered. A standard IELTS academic reading task was also included, since the OPT does not provide information about reading skills. Because of the time limit, only one reading task was administered which intend to measure the academic reading skills of the participants. Secondly, for the training in metacognitive think aloud an arithmetic problem and four sentence formation practice tasks were used.

For the actual think-aloud and data collection, two expository texts of equal difficulty were used; both of them had been specifically designed for teaching and assessing the guided summary writing skills of BA students (Tankó, 2013). The selection of the tasks was informed by the course book author's (Tankó, 2013) notes, by pilot-based student feedback collected on the tasks in earlier semesters, and by data obtained with the help of readability formula (see Appendix B.). In the process of task selection, the length and the topic of the reading passages were also taken into consideration. Both texts discussed issues with which first year university students can be expected to be familiar and to which they can relate based on their experiences: Task A, entitled *Responding to student writing*, was a 19 sentence long description of the types and effects of feedback teachers can give their students; whereas, Task B, *Teaching online*, discussed the problems and challenges of online tutoring. Both assignments required students to write a paragraph of 130 words (+/- 10%), summarizing in their own words specific pieces of information from the texts (for full text, see Appendix C.).

Following the data collection procedure, interviews were conducted with the students according to a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview questions were focusing on the participants' language learning background and their former experiences with guided summary writing and academic writing in general.

3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis procedures for Phase One and Phase Two were carried out in identical ways. The audio recorded think aloud data and interviews were transcribed and together with the written guided summaries were subjected to content analysis. The collected

summaries were analyzed for macro rule use and for structural appropriateness to the genre of guided summary.

First, the transcribed think aloud protocols and the written guided summaries were analyzed together, with close attention to the presence and absence of a predetermined set of propositional content (e.i., content points). The *Teaching online* text contained six preset content points, such as CP1 – setting up the group, CP2 – online tutoring is time consuming and work-intensive, CP3 – implementing institutions underestimate what online tutoring involves, CP4 – not time and place bound, CP5 – online tutor becomes better skilled and has better employment opportunities, CP6 – it makes the tutor feel good to develop professionally; whereas the *Responding to student writing* text contained the following four content points: CP1 – “students may attend to important features of their writing”, CP2 – “students can form groups and (...) identify three or four concerns which should be given priority while working on the second draft”, CP3 – “write a reflection page [...] on the feedback from the teacher on the final draft”, CP4 – “the student might make in a later revision or for another paper” (Tankó, 2013).

As a second step, the participants’ skills of information processing and use of macro-operators were measured by operationalizing the macrorule use. On the one hand, the use of zero rule was measured through a count of the content points identified. Similarly, the use of the deletion rule can was analyzed by counting the number of irrelevant source text information included in the summary. On the other hand, the higher level macrorules require more complex operationalization, so in order to measure the use of the generalization rule the extent to which propositional content was successfully organized into categories based on one organizing principle was looked at. The use of the construction rule was inferred from the extent to which propositional content from different content points was successfully collapsed using complementary propositional information from background knowledge.

Thirdly, the pre- and post-training results of the participants were compared and contrasted, paying close attention to the distinctions between the members with different language proficiency levels. The possible influences of proficiency level on information processing and macrorule use were also analyzed.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Phase One

As the first step of the analysis, the presence of a set of predetermined content points (CP) in the final guided summary products was looked for (for a list of the CPs, see Data analysis). The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2.1

Content points present in the final guided summaries written on Task A (Phase One)

	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	Pieces of irrelevant information included	Pieces of extra information included
Ben	—	partial	—	—	5	0
Alice	—	partial	√	—	2	4
Chris	—	√	√	—	4	0

Note. Extra information means propositional content included in the summary that does not originate from the source text.

As it is shown in Table 2.1, all the participants, regardless of their language proficiency level struggled with finding the appropriate content points to include in their guided summary. For instance, Ben's final product appears to be more like a global summary of the source text. Right from the introductory sentence, it is quite obvious that his information processing was most probably governed by his mental schema of expository texts. Disregarding the requirements of the task, instead of focusing on the activities students can do based on feedback, he summarized the text along the lines of its original rhetorical goals, and wrote about types of feedback and how and why teachers can give feedback to their students. This claim on his approach is also supported by his introductory sentence ("To begin with, there are several significant responsibilities that teachers have."), and by the fact that he included 5 pieces of irrelevant information into his 140 words long summary. Out of the four content points, he only found some parts of the second one, since in a half sentence he mentioned that as a result of the teacher's feedback "the second draft might consists more information". The transcribed think aloud data, the notes, and the drafts all show that right from the beginning, Ben summarized the main points of the original text and focuses on the

teacher aspects presented, so finding some parts of the CP2 might only be accidental, and not the result of conscious effort.

Similarly to Ben, Alice also wrote a global summary of the text. Her introductory sentence shows that her major concern is why teachers should provide feedback (“The task of teachers during the writing process is to give useful and informative feedback to student, so they can be more successful.”). The only content point found and fully included is the third one; but some parts of CP2 also seem to appear. She did include that during group work students can identify the major concerns they should focus on, but from her think aloud it is evident that she misinterpreted that part of the source text. Her summary of the relevant parts of the original text (“...they will write the second draft together, identifying the concerns”) suggests that she read into the text that students write the second draft together, a piece of information that is not contained by the source text. Compared to Ben, she added less irrelevant pieces of information but more extra information in her written product, which suggests that she might have been misinterpreting the text and reading into it information that was not present.

Compared to Ben and Alice, Chris managed to find and include two content points into his writing. Even though both CP2 and CP3 are expressed with two sentences, he managed to grasp the relevant informational content. His introductory sentence (“Eventually, any student might need professional feedback in their studies”) suggested that during his summarization process he intended to focus on the student aspect of the text. However, his writing contains four pieces of irrelevant information referring to why teachers should provide feedback, instead of what students can do based on the feedback. This fact might suggest that the text comprehension and production of Chris, similarly to Ben and Alice, was highly influenced by his mental schema of expository texts, and during summarization, he attempted not only to summarize the required information but also to give a general overview of the whole source text.

Table 2.2

Content points present in the final guided summaries written on Task B (Phase One)

	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	CP6	Pieces of irrelevant information included	Pieces of extra information included
Brooke	—	√	√	partial	partial	√	3	0
Alex	partial	partial	√	partial	partial	—	2	0
Cole	—	partial	√	√	√	√	2	0

Note. Extra information means propositional content included in the summary that does not originate from the source text.

Participants who worked with the *Teaching online* text gave similar performance to the other group. Brooke did manage to focus during writing on the requirements of the guided summary task, but her written product is rather an example of a compare and contrast essay than a guided summary. Although she found three full content points and two halves in the text, she also included three irrelevant pieces of information which refer to e-learning in general, and two repetitions; one of them being the restatement of CP2 presented as a new idea (“The first one is that it takes a lot of time for tutors to constantly update the courses, and it also takes a lot of effort. The other one concentrates on the amount of hours that tutors spend on running a successful online course”).

Contrary to Brooke, according to his notes and first draft, Alex initially managed to recognize at least some parts of all the content points. However, during the changes between the draft and the final product CP6 was completely lost. As for the structural requirements of guided summary, Alex’s writing also shows more the characteristics of a compare and contrast essay. Even though he did not segment his final product into separate paragraphs, he did include a two sentence introductory piece about online tutoring in general.

Compared to the other participants, Cole succeeded in finding and including four full content points into his final product. Paraphrasing appears to impose the least difficulty on him; however, he also included two irrelevant pieces of information: one about the extra financial expenses online tutoring means, which in the text is mentioned as a problem of the students and not of the teachers; and the other about the future of online teaching. Out of the

six guided summaries written in Phase One, Cole's seems to be the most appropriately written in terms of the requirements of the task and the structure of the guided summary.

4.2 Phase Two

The data collected during the second phase was subjected to the same analysis as the data of Phase One. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

Table 3.1

Content points present in the final guided summaries of Task A (Phase Two)

	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	Pieces of irrelevant information included	Pieces of extra information included
Brooke	—	√	partial	√	0	0
Alex	—	√	√	√	1	0
Cole	√	—	√	partial	0	0

Note. Extra information means propositional content included in the summary that does not originate from the source text.

According to the findings, all three participants working on Task A managed to find most of the content points. Most of them had problems with separating CP1 from CP2. For example, from Brooke's transcribed think aloud data it is visible that initially she recognized some parts of CP1 along with the full CP2, but during paraphrasing these separate meanings were lost, and probably because of the inadequate application of construction rule, these two content points were merged together in the final version of the summary. Similarly, in Cole's case, the construction rule seems to cause difficulties because he chose to express CP1 with two sentences. Moreover, he also seems to focus more on the teacher's role in the different phases of the drafting process than on the activities students can do based on the feedback. This phenomenon might also be the cause of the slight information distortion in the reformulation of CP4.

Despite the minor repetitions appearing in the summaries, students visibly managed to stay focused on the task more than during Phase One. The only participant including extra information in this group was Alex, who included propositional content referring to the use of feedback in general.

Table 3.2

Content points present in the final guided summaries of Task B (Phase Two)

	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4	CP5	CP6	Pieces of irrelevant information included	Pieces of extra information included
Ben	√	partial	√	√	partial	—	0	0
Alice	—	√	√	partial	partial	—	1	0
Chris	partial	partial	√	√	partial	—	2	0

Note. Extra information means propositional content included in the summary that does not originate from the source text.

Participants working with Task B encountered similar problems to the other group. Based on their think alouds, initially they managed to find most of the relevant propositional content, but during paraphrasing and in-between the drafting phases some of the relevant content was lost. For instance, in each one of the final guided summaries CP5 was only partially reproduced, and the ideas of skill development and better employment opportunities were collapsed together. This might be caused either by the inappropriate application of the generalization rule or that of the deletion rule. Similarly, CP6 and CP1 appeared to be problematic. The relevant informational content of CP6 always got deleted already at the beginning of the first drafting phases. As for CP1, both Ben and Chris needed two sentences and some repetition to express the propositional content.

Similarly to the other group, Ben, Alice, and Chris also added fewer pieces of irrelevant information and no extra information to their summaries. However, the financial aspects of online tutoring (which in the source text is presented as a disadvantage from the students' point of view) appeared in both Alice's and Chris's summaries.

4.3 Discussion

Comparing the pre- and post training performances of the students, it can be seen that all the participants show notable differences in their summarization skills and ability to use macrorules adequately. First of all, contrary to the first data collection occasion, in Phase Two, all the participants managed to recognize in the initial drafting phases at least parts of most of the content points. Moreover, they also seemed to be more skilled in wording these

CPs accurately in their final written products. Secondly, the improvement of their ability to effectively use macrorules might also be inferred from the amount of irrelevant and extra informational content included in their writing. Contrary to the first occasion, in the second summary none of the participants included any additional content such as personal remarks, and they also included considerably less irrelevant information. In addition, the more successful use of macrorules and the inclusion of less irrelevant information imply that the participants' ability to think critically also improved considerably. Furthermore, during Phase One, most of the participants wrote more than one paragraph, and they appeared to be severely influenced by the rhetorical structure of the source text, producing compare and contrast and argumentative essays reflecting the topic and the genre of the source text. In contrast, during Phase Two every participant managed to adhere more closely to the requirements of guided summary writing. The improvements in the structure and in the effectiveness of the ability to paraphrase information suggest that practice and explicit instruction did indeed have a positive and distinct influence on the summary writing abilities of the participants.

Although all the participants show notable improvement in their macrorule use and guided summary writing skills, the most conspicuous change can be seen in the summaries of Ben. His first writing was noticeably guided by his internal schematic structure of expository texts; thus his written product became a compare and contrast essay. In comparison, his second product fits perfectly the requirements of the task; it is a single paragraph, focusing on the rhetorical goal assigned by the task. He also managed to reduce the number of irrelevant pieces of propositional content from five to zero, and to recognize and to fully and accurately include CP1 (a content point requiring the correct use of construction rule) into his final product.

Similar improvement can be observed in the cases of Brooke, Alice and Alex. They all managed to reduce the amount of irrelevant or extra information included and the accuracy of presenting the content points. In the first phase, all of them lost a large amount of important data because of unsuccessful paraphrasing and ineffective use of even lower level macro-operations, like deletion; whereas, in their second summaries these instances were considerably fewer. For instance, Alex's first summary is a perfect example of how lack of practice in paraphrasing can ruin the end product, even if the relevant propositional content is initially found. It is visible from his think aloud, notes and first draft that he finds CP6, as

well as the complete CP2 and CP4, but because of imperfect paraphrasing, parts of the relevant content disappeared from the final version.

The findings also suggest that the use of higher level macrorules, that is generalization and construction rule, cause major difficulties even for university students. Content points, such as CP1 of task B, which had to be put together with construction rule from parts of different paragraphs, were problematic even for students with very high proficiency level. Taking this into consideration, it might be concluded, that high language proficiency does not necessarily result in more successful macrorule use. For instance, even Chris and Cole, the C2 level participants struggled with the application of higher level macrorules as much as the B2 level participants during their first summaries. However, the fact that Cole manages to preserve more informational content in his final summary than any other participant, might suggest that language proficiency could have a relevant influence on paraphrasing skills.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, compared to the first data set, the summaries produced in Phase Two show that during the first semester all the participants became better skilled in guided summary writing. Regardless of their language proficiency level, all students included less irrelevant or extra information in their final products than in the first phase of data collection. Furthermore, they all managed to find content points more accurately than before, and their final written products all fit to the structural requirements and expected content of the guided summary task.

Based on the results, language proficiency does not seem to play an important role in macrorule use. Initially, most of the participants were highly influenced by their internal schematic structures and processed information and produced summaries according to these schemata; whereas, during the second data collection, they all managed to produce guided summaries that were appropriate both in terms of content and structure. Therefore, practice and instruction seem to improve macrorule use regardless of one's level of language proficiency. However, language proficiency appeared to play an important role in the effectiveness of paraphrasing, because students with higher language proficiency were more successful in accurately reformulating and preserving the meaning of propositional content throughout the different phases of the summarization process.

The results of the current study appear to confirm the findings of previous research. Summary writing is a highly complex process and even guided summary writing, which theoretically should be less challenging than global summary writing because of the clearly defined rhetorical goal, imposes great difficulties on students. Even high language proficiency does not seem to compensate for the lack of instruction and practice. Thus, summarization most probably is not an inherent ability of the students, but a skill, that seems to notably develop by practice. Furthermore, explicit training seems to have a beneficial effect on the improvement of summarization skills.

6. Pedagogical implications

The ability to summarize information is an essential skill in both academic and non-academic context. Since it involves complex underlying text processing mechanisms, summary writing not only enhances the cognitive abilities and critical thinking of the students, but it is also a reliable method of assessing the level of text comprehension and the students' abilities to successfully manipulate linguistic information.

The results of the current study suggest that direct training in guided summary writing can considerably improve the information processing and summarization skills of the students. Consequently, the development of summarization skills should be purposefully targeted given that making guided summary writing part of the high school and early tertiary curriculum might lead to improvement in students' abilities of information processing, critical reading and thinking.

7. Limitations and further research

The current study is a small scale qualitative research featuring only six participants, so the outcomes are not generalizable. Large-scale data collection and analysis of macrorule use in guided summary writing might prove to be helpful. Moreover, the data analysis was done by a single researcher, so the analysis of a second researcher and the calculation of inter-rater reliability might improve the outcomes. Lastly, this study is not an intervention study, since the data collection context did not allow for a control group (standard treatment, no treatment or placebo group) to be set up. Carrying out a proper intervention study in the topic might serve with an even deeper insight into the macrorule use in guided summary writing.

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