



# Englishes

**for Communication and Interaction  
in the Classroom and Beyond**

**Editors:**

**Bambang Yudi Cahyono  
Nurenzia Yannuar**



STATE UNIVERSITY OF MALANG PRESS

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Nurenzia Yannuar**



**State University of Malang Press**

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## CONTENTS

Contents .....	v
Foreword .....	ix
Introduction .....	xi

<b>PART I</b>	<b>THE NATURE OF ENGLISHES FOR COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Chapter 1	Englishes and English Language Education Curriculum at University: An Undeniable Alteration? Wakhid Nashruddin .....	3
Chapter 2	“Chitti, put the TV” or “Chitti, switch on the TV”? The Pragmatic Relevance of the Subcontinent Englishes from Two Indian Movies “I am” and “Robot” Elvina Arapah .....	15
Chapter 3	Understanding Englishes for Intercultural Communication within Multicultural Schools Sumani .....	33
Chapter 4	Minimizing Phonological Variation among Indonesian Teachers of English Utami Widiati .....	45
Chapter 5	The Borrowed Words in Jakarta Post Newspaper: A Case of Varieties of English Sri Endah Tabiati & Nurenzia Yannuar .....	59
Chapter 6	Code Switching in Radio Broadcasts of a Radio Station in Kuningan Wulan Rahmatunisa .....	71
Chapter 7	Using Yeat’s Poetry <i>The Second Coming</i> for Higher Level Communication and Interaction Reimundus Raymond Fatubun .....	83
Chapter 8	Native English Speaker Teachers (NESTs) versus Non Native English Speaker Teachers (NNESTs) in TESOL Ribut Wahyudi .....	101

Chapter 32	Encouraging EFL Students to Speak More Using Authentic/Natural Atmosphere <i>Lia Agustina</i> .....	451
Chapter 33	Making the Most of Stories from <i>YouTube</i> for Classroom Interaction <i>Bambang Yudi Cahyono</i> .....	467
Contributors .....		491
Subject Index .....		501

Chapter 9	Communicating Critical Thinking through Bilingual Reflective Writing <i>Rohmani Nur Indah</i> .....	113
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<b>PART II</b>	<b>ENGLISHES FOR COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND</b> .....	127
Chapter 10	Speech Anxiety Faced by English Learners to Oral Presentations <i>Irta Fitriana</i> .....	129
Chapter 11	Using Debate to Enhance Students' Speaking Skills <i>Fikri Yanda</i> .....	141
Chapter 12	The Effectiveness of British Parliamentary Debate System on Students' Critical Thinking Ability <i>Syamdianita</i> .....	155
Chapter 13	Communication Strategies Used by Teachers of English for Young Learners at International Class Programs <i>Sri Fatmaning Hartatik</i> .....	169
Chapter 14	Communication Strategies Used by Indonesian Students in an Exchange Program to the USA <i>Isna Rakhmawati &amp; Noverita Wahyuningsih</i> .....	181
Chapter 15	Communication Strategies in ESP Classroom <i>Mariana Ulfah Hoesny &amp; Hilda Cahyani</i> .....	195
Chapter 16	Assessing Students' Perceptions and Difficulties in Making ESP Presentations <i>Ive Emaliana</i> .....	211
Chapter 17	The Importance of Mutual Intelligibility in EFL Classroom Communication: A pragmatic Approach <i>Rainerius Hendro Prasetyanto</i> .....	227
Chapter 18	The Procedures and Implications of Inferencing in English Language Teaching <i>Nur Salam</i> .....	249
Chapter 19	The Rhetoric of English Verbal Humor <i>Dyah Rochmawati</i> .....	263
Chapter 20	I Speak, Therefore I Write: Communicating in Two Modes <i>Lala Bumela</i> .....	279

Chapter 21	Rhetoric in Students' Classification Essays <i>Shirly Rizki Kusumaningrum</i> .....	293
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<b>PART III</b>	<b>ENGLISHES FOR INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND</b> .....	309
Chapter 22	Interactive Problem Solving as a Communicative Strategy to Enhance Students' Speaking Skills <i>Yuli Astuti Hasanah</i> .....	311
Chapter 23	Information-gap Activities to Improve Speaking Ability <i>Khoiriyah &amp; Luky Diah Nurlaili</i> .....	321
Chapter 24	The Interaction Strategies Applied by an English Teacher of Elementary School <i>Diani Nurhajati</i> .....	337
Chapter 25	Language and Interaction in the Teaching of American Literature <i>Didik Murwantono</i> .....	351
Chapter 26	Effective Teacher-Students Interaction Based on Teachers' and Students' Expectations <i>Erikson Togatorop</i> .....	363
Chapter 27	Improving Students' Interaction in Speaking Class through Web-Based Social Networking <i>Ni'matuz Zahroh</i> .....	379
Chapter 28	MOODLE and Improvement of Students' Reading Comprehension <i>Lilik Ulfiati</i> .....	389
Chapter 29	Using Facebook through Process-Genre Based Approach as an Interactive Strategy in Writing Descriptive Texts <i>Dini Kurnia Irmawati</i> .....	403
Chapter 30	Using Conferences to Develop Students' Writing Skill <i>Siti Muniroh</i> .....	421
Chapter 31	The Use of English For Classroom Interaction and Networking Communication In EFL Learners' Context <i>Rida Afrilyasanti</i> .....	439

# Communicating Critical Thinking through Bilingual Reflective Writing

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## **Abstract**

This study is a case study at English Department of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. It seeks the relation between critical thinking as shown in the written evidence of students' writing and the use of English language to communicate their critical thinking through bilingual reflective writing. Theoretically, writing is an effective way of engaging students in critical thinking. Viewing writing as a learning process, the development of writing skill is affected by many aspects involved in generating the dynamic of critical thinking and both reading and writing critically. Apart from the strong emphasis on writing as an integrated critical thinking process, the use of English language also needs to be considered. It may influence whether the students can communicate their critical thinking well or not. The finding of this study shows that in some critical thinking skills, the use of English as foreign language may hinder the communicativeness of critical thinking. Through translating from English to Bahasa Indonesia, the improvement in the communicativeness quality can be seen in stating knowledge, making inference and giving evidence. Yet, it can be inferred from the data that to some extent the critical thinking can be communicated bilingually. It supports the fact that writing and critical thinking have obviously strong link across different languages and various contexts as it is generalizable. Accordingly, the use of reflective writing can incorporate the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills in EFL writing class. As reflective writing enables students to communicate critical thinking, it is recommended for teachers to develop both writing skills and critical thinking skills through other various activities in writing class.

**Keywords:** *Critical thinking, reflective writing, EFL writing*

## **Biographical data**

**Rohmani Nur Indah** is an English department lecturer at Humanities & Culture Faculty and the head of Self Access Center at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. She also posts as an English advisor of Religion and Science international journal and as the editorial board of *Ulul Albab* and *Lingua* journals. She earned her magister on ELT from State University of Malang (2002) and participated in Twinning Program Training Expert on University Management in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (2006). She wrote *Gangguan Berbahasa* (2011), *Psikolinguistik: Konsep & Isu Umum* and Autism awareness bulletin (2008), and two translation publications (2003). Her current studies concern with language acquisition of autism, writing and critical thinking issues.

# **Communicating Critical Thinking through Bilingual Reflective Writing**

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## **A. Introduction**

Human beings are created with a perfect device namely mind to develop thought processing critical thinking skill. This skill also affects the development of language skills including writing. In other words, critical thinking skill shapes writing quality. The skill involved in critical thinking aims at making judgment and utilizing appropriate evaluative standards in the attempt to determine the true worth, merit, or value of something. This might contradict to general knowledge in which some people may have impression that being critical is simply finding fault with others and other's ideas. Therefore, critical thinking involves many skills to develop rather than evaluating things only.

Critical thinking has been defined in various ways. In the literature on the nature of 'good thinking' and how it might be taught, critical thinking is often used to describe competencies which seem to be applicable to teaching-learning in context but also to learning in many workplace contexts (Pithers & Soden, 2001). Thus, it can be inferred that the definition attempts to exclude creative thinking which emphasizes on creativity and imagination as the creative thinking entails specific competencies.

The competencies in critical thinking are articulated in corresponding ways in several definitions. Yet, the common purpose to understand the definitions is the need to develop the learner's critical thinking. Critical thinking viewed from its end is defined as reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do (Hofreiter et al., 2007). Critical thinking is also defined as the skill at conceptual and argument analysis, to recognize false inferences and logical fallacies, to be able to distinguish bias from fact, opinion from evidence, and so on. In other words, this kind critique of unexamined and possible faulty assumptions are perhaps most famously articulated in the scientific method's principle of falsifiability where intellectual effort is devoted (Brookfield, 2007). Critical thinking is the

process of purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, which drives problem-solving and decision-making (American Psychological Association, 1990). To summarize, critical thinking is characterized by one's competencies on using reasoning and logic focusing on what to believe or do based on the mechanism such as conducting conceptual and argument analysis for problem solving and decision making.

In 1990, a group of 30 experts convened in a Delphi study and determined that critical thinking is a process divided into skills and dispositions. This conceptualization of critical thinking encompasses several cognitive skills that include: 1) analysis (the ability to break a concept or idea into component pieces in order to understand its structure and inherent relationships), 2) inference (the skills used to arrive at a conclusion by reconciling what is known with what is unknown), and 3) evaluation (the ability to weigh and consider evidence and make reasoned judgments within a given context) (American Psychological Association, 1990).

Other critical thinking skills that are similarly relevant to science include interpretation (the ability to decide what to believe based on logic and the consequence of the decision), explanation (the ability to communicate the reasoning process to others), and self-regulation (the ability to monitor one's correct flaw in logic). This disposition toward critical thinking can be understood in terms of open-mindedness, inquisitiveness, cognitive maturity, truth-seeking, analyticity, systematicity, and critical thinking self-confidence (Ernst & Monroe, 2004). These have become the most common definition on critical thinking to date attributing the description on what one should do to use critical thinking.

There are two broad conceptions of critical thinking, namely general and specific conceptions. The former relies on the belief that critical thinking is generalizable and accordingly the learners may apply it in different context or matters. The later argues that critical thinking is context specific involving background knowledge on certain subject matter only and in another (Emilia, 2010). In this case, the general conception soundly supports the belief that the teaching of this skill should refer to the development of critical thinking which is expected to be sustained across different contexts and subject matters.

This study tries to seek the relation between the ability to communicate critical thinking through writing self assessment in two languages, English and Bahasa Indonesia. It is based on the assumption that the development of critical thinking skills should be sustained across different context including language used.



## **B. Theoretical Framework**

### **1. Stages of Critical Thinking**

As it is conceived, critical thinking involves abilities in addition to certain dispositions. Although evaluation is seen as a core ability, hence, it deals with more skills such as identifying a problem and its associated assumptions; clarifying and focusing the problem; and analyzing, understanding and making use of inferences, inductive and deductive logic, as well as judging the validity and reliability of the assumptions, sources of data or information available (Hofreiter et al., 2007). These activities are not done all at once but they belong to stages of critical thinking done in continuum or in cyclic process.

Eight essential stages on critical thinking and creative thought are important to underline. They are: asking question and be willing to wonder, defining the problem, examining the evidence, analyzing assumption and biases, avoiding emotional reasoning, avoiding oversimplification, considering other interpretation and tolerating uncertainty (Wade, 1995). These stages encourage the learners to develop their mind and critical thinking although they could perform differently in different stages.

Those who think critically typically engage in intellectual practices of the following sort: monitoring, reviewing, and assessing the goals, the way issues and problems are formulated, the information, the data or evidence presented, and the quality of reasoning being developed. In monitoring, reviewing and assessing, these intellectual constructs encourage them to strive for such intellectual ends as clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, and logicalness (Ernst & Monroe, 2004). Each of these modes of thinking helps us to accomplish the ends for which we are thinking and hence to solve the problems identified. In this study, the students were expected to identify their problem in writing an argumentative essay.

### **2. Critical Writing**

Writing as a process is seen as a recursive rather than linear, meaning that it includes prewriting, drafting and revising activities. During the process, fluency is considered more important than accuracy by helping learners understand well their own composing process (Brown, 2001). In the context of academic writing, this process requires learners critical thinking in treating the information related to the issue to be developed into an essay.

Learners need to stimulate the recall of information for the purpose of reproducing knowledge (Craswell, 2005).

Writing leads to learner's skill to identify a purpose, to produce and shape ideas and refine expression as well (White, 1995). A successful writing class should end with the development of critical thinking which is initiated by finding the learner's interest or expertise (Indah, 2009) and is geared from collaborative writing activities (Indah, 2010). Accordingly, the teaching of reading and writing critically is significant especially for tertiary students. It aims at developing skills of critical thinking as well as critical reading and writing practices.

Critical writing is inseparable from reading critically. In order to write a good analysis and evaluation on a topic, careful critical reading of sources is essential to strengthen the argument. The judgments and interpretations made based on the texts are the first steps towards formulating the writer's own approach (Knott, 2009). By reading critically, learners can develop reflective skill before they actually starting to write critically.

### **3. Writing and Critical Thinking**

Research found how to engage students more fully in deep critical thought through writing. A six month study in science classroom, sought to understand if writing in the science classroom would improve depth of thought primarily displayed through lab reports. The students were involved in co-generative dialogues with the instructor and received feedback from lab report drafts. The results indicate that written assignments in the classroom, critical thinking skills, and instructor feedback on student lab reports promotes deeper levels of thought on scientific concepts (Barry, 2007). This signifies the strong bond between writing and critical thinking.

Not only in science classroom, writing can improve critical thinking skill in a general education biology course. The critical thinking performance of students who experienced a laboratory writing treatment was compared with those who experienced traditional quiz-based laboratory. The results indicated that the writing group significantly improved critical thinking skills whereas the non-writing group did not. In addition, analysis and inference skills increased significantly in the writing group but not in the non-writing group (Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007). Thus, critical thinking skill taught prior to writing instruction

significantly affected critical thinking performance. With improved critical thinking skill, learners will be better prepared to solve problems given in the learning context.

Related finding on the link between writing and critical thinking is also reported in an experimental foods course. In the course, students were given guideline for journal writing about what they think about and to reflect on their own personal values. The topics of the journal entries cover several of the core competencies as well as address several “success skills” needed (such as written communication, critical thinking, professionalism, life-long learning, interaction skills, and organizational skills). Students must reflect on classroom learning, read to understand reference and other material, clarify and understand what went on in the experiment, or take a stand or express an opinion on various value statements. The assessment was made on the gains in learning, comments from the students indicating that learning took place, critical reasoning occurred, and personal values which were analyzed (Iwaoka & Crosseti, 2008). These activities required that the student learn, use, and practice multiple cognitive skills. Such worthwhile learning activities may yield in the development of critical thinking skills.

In the context of public relation course, the connection between writing and critical thinking is obvious in peer-evaluation assignment. This task encouraged students to think critically, synthesize information and write about public relations course material. Because peer reviewers offer concrete suggestions to the original authors, students tended to report that the peer-evaluation process improved their writing skills, critical thinking ability, and their understanding of public relations concepts and theories (Todd & Hudson, 2007). This demonstrates how peer evaluation can be a positive learning exercise that prompts students to develop higher-order cognitive skills and to improve their writing skills while learning content course concepts.

In psychology class, the association between writing and critical thinking is also undeniable. The written work given had several advantages over oral discussion and assessment of student’s critical thinking. The study employed a set of short writing assignment that can tap eight essential stages of critical thinking and creative thought. They are: ask question and be willing to wonder, defining the problem, examine the evidence, analyze assumption and biases, avoid emotional reasoning, avoid oversimplification, consider other interpretation and tolerate uncertainty (Wade, 1995). The finding shows that

encouraging critical thinking through writing could guide them to shape the way they construct thought and to become more critical thinkers.

### **C. Research Method**

This study was conducted in the English department of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. It employs a case study as the object is the real writing process through text analysis to understand the actual experience faced by learners in communicating the skill of critical thinking. Data in this study are obtained from the main source namely document analysis on the reflective writing in English and Bahasa Indonesia.

Students were given assignment on writing an argumentative essay. The type of the assignment is timed writing as it is done in class in 90 minutes. The topic is free using their own background knowledge on both the content and the elements of argumentative essay. As the second assignment, they were asked to make a review of the following aspects:

1. a. The definition of argumentative writing.  
b. The reason why my essay belongs/does not belong to argumentative writing
2. a. The elements or components of a good argumentative essay  
b. The reason why my essay belongs/does not belong to a good argumentative essay
3. a. How to construct a clear thesis statement  
b. The reason why my essay has/does not have a clear thesis statement
4. a. How to construct a good introductory paragraph of argumentative essay.  
b. The reason why my introductory paragraph belongs/does not belong to a good introduction of argumentative writing
5. a. How to construct the development paragraphs of argumentative essay.  
b. The reason why my development paragraphs belong/do not belong to a good development of argumentative writing
6. a. How to construct the concluding paragraph of argumentative essay.  
b. The reason why my concluding paragraph belong/does not belong to a good conclusion of argumentative writing

Each of the response to the questions above is analyzed on the cognitive skills reflected by the shift of thinking both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. The reflective writings taken as the subjects of research are those which show writer's disposition toward critical thinking. It means the work which shows the writer's open-mindedness,

inquisitiveness, cognitive maturity, truth-seeking, analyticity, systematicity, and critical thinking self-confidence.

The text analysis done to the five selected writing concerns with: (1) the statement quality which reflects the writer's knowledge; (2) explanatory or the writer's comprehension; (3) application or the use of evidence; (4) interpretation which deals with the writer's ability to analyze and present his/her point of view; (5) inference or synthesizing ideas from some sources; and (6) self-regulatory or evaluation on his/her own strength or weakness.

The identification of the critical thinking skill is put into the following scoring rubric:

Cognitive Skills	Weight	Scale Point	Score (WxS)
Knowledge	1		
Comprehension	2		
Application	3		
Analysis	4		
Synthesis	5		
Evaluation	6		
Total			

## D. Finding and Discussion

The analysis on the students work shows that among the 30 papers, five show high disposition in which the writers were aware that their work do not belong to good argumentative essays. The writers of the five works chosen (abbreviated into MJ, SY, IR, FZ, and AL) are then asked to submit another reflective writing which is written in their first language. The analysis on both writing (in English and Bahasa Indonesia) is done on six aspects of cognitive skills which reflect critical thinking.

### 1. Critical Thinking Communicated in English

The ability for self evaluation among the research subjects reflects the performance of different cognitive skill involved in communicating their critical thinking. In reflecting whether their writing belongs to an argumentative writing, most of them can report the reason with the explanation on the definition of argumentative writing. FZ knowing that her essay on "Kinds of Veil" failed in task fulfillment wrote:

*Argumentative writing is the type of writing which consists of some reasons on arguable topics. My essay does not belong to argumentative writing because in the first paragraph there is no position of me as the writer and in the development paragraph there is no explanation on the reason related to the position. There is also no refutation.*

The ability to comprehend the gist of information based on some sources also occurs when the research subjects present the reason why their essay do not belong to a good argumentative writing. IR who wrote about “The Fine in Library” found that she failed in presenting arguable topic as shown below:

*Argumentative essay have some elements such as explaining an issue, offering reasons, refuting, conceding a point and following logical argument. As far as I concern, my essay does not belong to a good argumentative essay because it doesn't have a valid point and I can't show that something is erroneous.*

In her essay on “Living in Islamic Boarding School”, AL describes more on what parents’ think about sending their children to Islamic boarding school and not telling much on her own point of view. In her reflective writing, she tries to relate statements as follow:

*A good argumentative essay contains an introduction, support, a refutation and a conclusion. The reason why my essay doesn't belong to a good argumentative essay is because it doesn't have a strong argument to convey to the readers.*

SY wrote on “Intensive Arabic Course for New Students” which failed on concluding the argument. However, in communicating critical thinking, one needs to employ the cognitive skill of application by giving example or the support the thesis with evidence. SY tries to give example by citing from reference as follow:

*To conclude I should give a brief summary and try to make a strong last sentence that people will remember. For example Oprah Winfrey famously wrote “I believe that the choice to be excellent begins with aligning your thoughts and words with the intention to require more from yourself” I think my essay does not have a good conclusion with a brief and strong summary.*

MJ wrote on “Javanese Language shouldn’t Become Extinct” which failed in the organization. He evaluated his essay showing his own weakness as follow:

*To improve the organization in writing, there are some methods such as using examples, process, division and classification, comparison and analogy, and cause and effect. In my essay, I have less examples and I can't use comparison and analogy. Therefore, my essay does not have good development paragraphs.*

The table 1 below presents the critical thinking communicated in English based on each of the responses to the questions given. The shaded area shows the presence of the intended skill in the students’ reflective writing.

Table 1. Critical thinking communicated in English

Question	Knowledge					Comprehension					Application				
	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															
Question	Analysis					Synthesis					Evaluation				
	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															

The distribution of critical thinking among the research subjects is various with the most dominant on the analysis and comprehension skills. While the application and synthesis belong to the least possible. Based on the above table, the critical thinking skill of each research subject is scored as follow:

Table 2. The scoring of critical thinking communicated in English

Cognitive Skills	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
Knowledge	4	5	4	2	1
Comprehension	8	8	12	12	10
Application	3	15	0	6	18
Analysis	24	20	20	24	16
Synthesis	0	30	10	10	25
Evaluation	36	0	30	36	12
Total score	75	78	76	80	82

## 2. Critical Thinking Communicated in Bahasa Indonesia

The analysis on critical thinking communicated in Bahasa Indonesia is done in similar procedure to that in English in the first task. The table 3 below presents the critical thinking communicated in Bahasa Indonesia based on each of the response to the questions given. The shaded area shows the presence of the intended skill in the students' reflective writing.

Table 3. Critical thinking communicated in Bahasa Indonesia

Question	Knowledge					Comprehension					Application				
	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															
Question	Analysis					Synthesis					Evaluation				
	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															

Using their first language, students communicate well their critical thinking in the analysis and comprehension skills. While the application and synthesis belong to the least possible. These are similar to that in English. The distribution variation results in different scoring as listed in table 4 below:

Table 4. The scoring of critical thinking communicated in Bahasa Indonesia

Cognitive Skills	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
Knowledge	6	0	6	6	0
Comprehension	8	10	12	12	4
Application	3	18	3	9	15
Analysis	24	20	20	24	8
Synthesis	0	20	15	15	30
Evaluation	36	0	30	36	6
Total score	77	68	86	102	63

In communicating critical thinking in the first language, some of the research subjects translated the responses of the first task which was given in English into Bahasa Indonesia. The distribution of the translation is shown in table 5 below.

-Table 5. The type of responses written in Bahasa Indonesia

Question no.	MJ	SY	IR	FZ	AL
1.	Translation	Reduction	Translation	Translation	Elaboration
2.	Translation	Reduction	Translation	Elaboration	Reduction
3.	Elaboration	Elaboration	Translation	Translation	Elaboration
4.	Translation	Elaboration	Elaboration	Translation	Elaboration
5.	Translation	Elaboration	Translation	Translation	Reduction
6.	Translation	Elaboration	Translation	Translation	Elaboration



Elaboration is used by the research subjects when they enlarge their explanation in Bahasa Indonesia. For instance, MJ stated that his essay does not have a clear thesis statement. In the second task, he wrote: *Ide utama dalam essay saya masih belum jelas karena kurangnya pendapat yang kuat yang dapat membantu mengembangkan topik menjadi lebih baik*. This characterizes his awareness that his thesis statement is apparently not clear as he knew that a good claim should be supported by a strong argument as well as evidence used to develop the topic into a more convincing argumentative essay. He shows his ability to evaluate his writing, analyze its weakness based on his comprehension on the knowledge of argumentative writing concept.

The elaboration is also made by IR and FZ which also supports the quality of critical thinking as shown by higher score in Bahasa Indonesia than in English (the improvement gained by MJ is 3%, IR 12% and FZ 22%). They obtain better result as they can state their knowledge better, make clear inference and give more examples in Bahasa Indonesia than in English. Thus, it can be inferred that through translating from English to Bahasa Indonesia, the improvement in the communicativeness quality of critical thinking can be seen in stating knowledge, making inference and giving evidence.

The other research subjects, SY and AL got lower score in communicating critical thinking in Bahasa Indonesia since they reduce some information given in the first task. Reducing information results in the lessening of communicativeness quality of critical thinking particularly in stating knowledge, making inference and giving evidence. SY, as an example, stated in English that her essay does not belong to argumentative writing because she did not give good conclusion on the topic. In addition, it only gave information on the intensive Arabic course, its purpose and the existence of those opposing the course. While in Bahasa Indonesia, she reduces the details by writing: *Menurut saya esai saya bukan termasuk esai argumentatif karena belum memenuhi kriteria-kriteria seperti claim and warrant*. Such a response is not as meaningful as that communicates in English as there is no example of the claim and warrant which she means.

Looking at improvement and decrease of score is not adequate without knowing the exact difference between the critical thinking communicated in English and in Bahasa Indonesia. Using T-test of paired sample, the result of computation as seen in table 6 shows that there is no significant difference between both scores.

Table 6. The difference between the scores

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Reflective Writing in English	78.2000	5	2.86356	1.28062
	Reflective Writing in Bahasa Indonesia	79.2000	5	15.48225	6.92387

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	RW in English- RW in BI	-1.00000	16.15549	7.22496	-21.05970	19.05970	-.138	4	.897

From the result, it can be concluded that between the scores of reflective writing in English and Bahasa Indonesia, the difference is very small. Based on the t distribution table, the value for df 4 at  $p < .05$  is 2.132 which means that  $t_{\text{obtain}} (.138)$  is much lower than  $t_{\text{critical}} (2.132)$ . In other words, both reflective writing results in a not significantly different score of critical thinking skills. Therefore, the use of different language gives no significant effect in communicating critical thinking in reflective writing. This demonstrates that communicating critical thinking can be done accross different languages.

As there is no significant difference between both scores, it can be inferred from the data that to some extent the critical thinking can be communicated bilingually. It supports the fact that writing and critical thinking have obviously strong link across different languages and various contexts as it is generalizable. The competence of critical thinking is proven to be applicable to teaching–learning in many contexts as noted by Pithers and Soden (2001). Accordingly, the use of reflective writing either in English or Bahasa Indonesia can incorporate the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills in writing class.

## E. Concluding Remark

Writing is an effective way of engaging students in critical thinking. The development of writing skill is affected by many aspects involved in the process of generating the dynamic of critical thinking and both reading and writing critically. Accordingly, writing critically should incorporate the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills which involve well-designed and specific assessment model.

The distribution of critical thinking among the research subjects is various with the most dominant on the analysis and comprehension skills. While the application and synthesis belong to the least possible. These skills appear to be similar when communicated in either English or Bahasa Indonesia.

To some extent, communicating critical thinking in English hinder the communicativeness quality therefore the use of elaboration in Bahasa Indonesia helps the students to improve their score of reflective writing. Through translating from English to Bahasa Indonesia, the improvement in the communicativeness quality can be seen in stating knowledge, making inference and giving evidence.

However, there is no significant difference between the scores of reflective writing in English and Bahasa Indonesia. Hence, it can be inferred from the data that to some extent the critical thinking can be communicated bilingually. It supports the fact that writing and critical thinking have obviously strong link across different languages as it is generalizable. Accordingly, the use of reflective writing can incorporate the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills in EFL writing class.

As reflective writing enables students to communicate critical thinking, it is recommended for teachers to develop both writing skills and critical thinking skills through other various activities in writing class. Writing teachers can make use of Bloom hierarchy of cognitive domain to break down the critical thinking skills reflected in learner's writing. Writing and critical thinking, generally, has obviously strong link across different language and various contexts. Subsequently, developing learners' critical writing and thinking subsequently denotes acquiring the competence they need to be lifelong learners.

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