

## The relationship between lexical richness and the higher levels of English proficiency

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### Abstract

In a previous article (Smith, 2001), the author investigated the relationship between the lexical richness of free writing and the holistic score ratings awarded to the free writing samples. The present study aims to investigate the relationship between the lexical richness of free writing and the English proficiency levels of the subjects who produced the free writing samples. The subject population and the lexical richness data are identical to those which appeared in the author's previous study. Both studies were designed to complement and extend Laufer and Nation's pioneering work (1995) in these fields of research, particularly with respect to the choice of subject population. Whereas Laufer and Nation's study assembled subject populations with low intermediate and intermediate levels of English proficiency, the author's two studies gathered subjects whose English proficiencies lie in the intermediate-advanced-native speaker ranges. The present study was designed to provide some complementary analysis of the relationship between English proficiency and the data yielded by the Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP), Laufer and Nation's tool for measuring lexical richness in free writing. Laufer and Nation argue in their 1995 article that, since it is widely assumed that a richer vocabulary knowledge is an inherent part of higher levels of general proficiency, one measure of the validity of the LFP is its ability to discriminate among writers of broadly different L2 English proficiency levels. Their analysis shows that the LFP discriminates clearly among three groups of L2 English writers at low intermediate to intermediate levels of general proficiency. This study investigates to what extent the LFP continues to discriminate among English proficiency levels within a subject population which has higher levels of proficiency than those reported in the Laufer and Nation article. The main finding of the study is that the LFP discriminates significantly between the "low" proficiency group and the "high" proficiency group, but does not discriminate significantly between the "middle" proficiency group and the "high" proficiency group. This suggests that, within the context of free writing, some qualifications need to be made to the assumed association between a richer vocabulary knowledge and higher levels of general proficiency.

Key Words: lexical richness, Lexical Frequency Profile

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper represents a continuation of a study of the relationship between lexical richness and two important measures of English L2 learner achievement: holistic ratings of free written production and general proficiency. In an earlier paper (Smith, 2001), the author presented evidence that there is a significant positive relationship between a standardized measure of lexical richness, the Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP), and holistic score ratings of writing quality in a standardized writing test, the Analytical Writing Assessment (AWA) component of the GMAT. The author summarized Laufer and Nation's demonstration of the reliability and validity merits of the LFP in their original LFP study (1995) and pointed out that the AWA test-taking population, with its relatively high average English proficiency,

represents a different and complementary subject population to the intermediate level subject population in the Laufer and Nation study. This earlier paper concluded that the significant positive relationships between LFP data and holistic score ratings of writing quality that Laufer and Nation reported for their low intermediate and intermediate proficiency level subjects continue to manifest themselves for AWA subjects who have intermediate, advanced and native speaker levels of proficiency. It noted that the positive and progressive relationship between the two sets of writing attributes held true until the highest AWA score ratings (5.0-6.0), at which level the higher essay ratings were no longer reflected in increases in LFP measures of lexical richness.

In this paper, the author continues along the lines of supplementing and complementing the Laufer and Nation study by presenting an analysis of the relationship between the LFP data and the English proficiencies of the same AWA subject population. Laufer and Nation pointed out in their 1995 study that a universal assumption underlying the concept of language proficiency is the association of richer vocabulary with better language knowledge. For this reason, they identified the existence of a broadly positive relationship between the LFP data and English proficiency as one of the tests of the validity of the LFP. As noted above, the subject population of their study had proficiencies in the low intermediate to intermediate range. This study will extend Laufer and Nation's work by examining the relationship between LFP data and English proficiency at more advanced proficiency levels. The study will start with a brief review of previous studies in this area. Within this context, the study will then define its research questions and go on to present and discuss its research results.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

To date, there have been few studies of the relationship between lexical richness in free written production and English language proficiency, and those studies which do exist almost always approach the relationship indirectly as a secondary outcome of a primary focus on the relationship between lexical richness and holistic score ratings of writing quality. This indirect approach to the question has had two main consequences. First, all of the previous studies have assembled subject populations which are cohesive rather than dispersed in terms of their English language proficiency. Second, the measurement of the English proficiencies

of these populations has been in the form of generalized descriptions rather than by reference to standardized proficiency tests.

Among the previous studies, those by Laufer and Nation (1995), Linnarud (1986) and Laufer (1991) are the most relevant because their research aims included, among other aims, an investigation of the relationship between English proficiency and lexical richness. The first two studies involved comparisons of two or more subject populations which were considered to be distinct in terms of their average proficiency level. Laufer and Nation assembled three groups of learners: a “low intermediate” group of language school students in New Zealand, and two “Cambridge First Certificate in English”<sup>1</sup> groups of English majors at an Israeli university, the two groups being separated by two semesters of first year study. In each of the two essays obtained by the study, the three groups of learners yielded LFP lexical richness data which varied significantly according to group. The higher the presumed proficiency level of the group, the more sophisticated were the lexical choices of the group as a whole.

Linnarud (1986) compared the lexical richness data obtained from English essays written by a group of 17-year old high school students in Sweden and from essays written by a group of 17-year old native-speaking high school students in Scotland. The two sets of essays were clearly differentiated on one of Linnarud’s lexical richness measures, *lexical individuality*, though a few of the Swedish students’ essays had ratings on this measure which came close to those of their native speaker counterparts. Similar, though less significant, differences were also found on two other measures of lexical richness: *lexical sophistication* and *lexical variation*. It should be noted, however, that Laufer and Nation (1995) have criticized all three of these lexical richness measures on reliability and/or validity grounds.

Laufer has made two longitudinal studies of the development of productive, or “free active,” vocabulary knowledge among single cohorts of L2 English learners. The first study (1991) focused on fairly advanced freshman students enrolled in an English Language and Literature program at an Israeli university and covered two semesters of development. The second study (1998), which also measured developments in the subjects’ “passive” and “controlled active” vocabulary knowledge, focused on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders between the ages of 16 and 17 at an Israeli high school and covered an entire year of development. In her first study, which she conducted before the Lexical Frequency Profile was available, Laufer used the same measures of lexical richness which Linnarud had used and which Laufer and Nation later criticized. Laufer concluded that, with one exception, for the Israeli university freshmen there were no significant differences between the lexical richness of their English essay

writing at the beginning and at the end of two semesters of study. The exception to this pattern involved those students who started the two semester period with levels of vocabulary knowledge and of general English academic achievement which were below average for the cohort. Several of these students displayed significant increases in lexical richness over the two semester period. In the high school study, Laufer used the LFP to detect changes in the lexical richness of the students' English writing. The results indicated that the lexical richness of the students' writing had hardly changed over a year of study. This apparent lack of progress in the use of free active vocabulary contrasted with evidence showing significant measurable progress over the same period in the students' passive and controlled active vocabulary knowledge. There was, therefore, some evidence that the high school students' overall English proficiency had increased, but there was no evidence of any significant correlation between this proficiency increase and the lexical richness of the students' writing. In both studies, Laufer surmised that the absence of significant change over time in the lexical richness of the subjects' English writing might be explained by the lack of incentives for the subjects to venture beyond what they needed to satisfy the requirements of their educational courses.

The literature on the measurement of *receptive*, or *passive*, vocabulary knowledge and/or of *controlled active* vocabulary knowledge contains a few studies which show that there exists a significant positive relationship between this type of vocabulary knowledge and English proficiency. In a study notable for its large subject population, Borrow, Nakanishi and Ishino (1999) show that there exists a significant positive relationship between levels reached on the Eiken test, an English proficiency test published by the STEP in Japan, and Japanese college students' sight familiarity with an English word list commonly used at Japanese colleges. Studies which incorporate data from the pre-1977 version of the TOEFL, which contained a separate vocabulary sub-section consisting of multiple choice questions oriented towards receptive vocabulary knowledge, show that the scores for the vocabulary sub-section intercorrelate significantly at the .80 level with the total scores for the test (Hosley & Meredith, 1979; ETS, 1973).

The existence of a significant positive relationship between English proficiency and the more receptive, or passive, types of vocabulary knowledge indicates that it is worthwhile testing for the possibility that a similar relationship exists between English proficiency and the *productive* vocabulary knowledge which is required for free writing. At the same time, however, there are signs that we should not expect such a relationship to follow the same pattern as the relationship between receptive knowledge and proficiency. There is a growing

body of opinion that the relationship between English L2 learners' "receptive" and "productive" vocabularies is not a simple one (Nation, 2001). In her discussions of the two longitudinal studies described above (1998; 1991), Laufer argues strongly that the development of "passive" vocabulary knowledge and the development of "free active" vocabulary knowledge progress at different and often independent rates and suggests that the two types of vocabulary knowledge are driven by different acquisition processes.

This literature review shows that the most relevant previous studies deal indirectly, and not centrally, with the question of the relationship between English proficiency and lexical richness in free written production. The general question remains very much an open question.

### 3. THE STUDY

#### 3.1 Aims

This study complements Laufer and Nation's work on the relationship between LFP data and English proficiency at intermediate proficiency levels by determining whether there is a significant relationship between LFP data and English proficiency at the intermediate, advanced and native speaker proficiency levels. There are two specific aims in examining this relationship. The first aim is to compile additional evidence regarding Laufer and Nation's claim that their 1995 study showed that the LFP was a valid measure of lexical richness in free written production because, in addition to other reasons, it discriminated significantly among essay writers of different proficiency levels.

The second and more narrow aim is contingent on the validity evidence obtained in pursuit of the first aim. If there is significant evidence of a positive relationship between the LFP data and English proficiency, will the relationship be a progressive one in which the two sets of data move in the same direction at a roughly similar rate or will there be signs of discontinuity? The earlier study by the author (Smith, 2001) showed that from the "fundamentally deficient" and "seriously flawed" (1.5-2.5) rating levels as far as the "adequate" (4.0-4.5) rating levels there was, in aggregate, a progressive relationship between the LFP data and holistic score ratings of the subjects' AWA essays, but that beyond the "adequate" levels, at the "strong" and "outstanding" (5.0-6.0) levels, the LFP data ceased to rise in unison with the holistic score ratings and rested on a plateau stretching from the "adequate" to the "outstanding" score levels (see Appendices 1 & 2 for the AWA rating

bands and their descriptors). Since it is intuitive to regard writing quality and English proficiency as broadly related, this finding raises the possibility that the relationship between the LFP data and English proficiency might exhibit a similar pattern.

### **3.2 Research questions**

- a. Will the LFP distinguish among different levels of language proficiency in the intermediate-advanced-native speaker range?
- b. If the LFP does distinguish among these proficiency levels, how will these results compare with the differences identified by Laufer and Nation in their 1995 study of writers with low intermediate and intermediate levels of proficiency?

### **3.3 Subjects**

The subjects are the same subjects as the ones from whom data was obtained for the author's earlier study (Smith, 2001). They were fifty-two candidates for admission to the English-medium MBA School at the author's host institution in Japan over the three-year period, 1997-2000. Forty-six of the candidates were admitted and entered the MBA School. The fifty-two subjects represent 20 nationalities: Japan (12), India (6), U.S.A. (6), Indonesia (4), China (3), Philippines (3), Bangladesh (2), Canada (2), Romania (2), Vietnam (2), Guatemala (1), Hong Kong (1), Kenya (1), Malaysia (1), Russia (1), Singapore (1), South Korea (1), Thailand (1), Uzbekistan (1), Western Samoa (1). This nationality distribution was an outcome of the data collection procedure.

### **3.4 Procedure**

Two sets of data were collected for this study. The first set of data comprises AWA scores and the copies of the essays which are the bases for these scores. Detailed explanations of the sampling procedures for the AWA essays and of the lexical richness data extraction from the sampled essays are presented in Smith (2001). The second data set comprises English proficiency data. TOEFL proficiency data was available for forty-four of the selected subjects. TOEFL data was obtained from thirty-four of the subjects within two months of the submission of the GMAT score reports. Twenty-six of these TOEFL scores were obtained from traditional paper-based TOEFL administrations and eight were obtained from the recently-introduced computer-based TOEFL administrations. The scores from these eight computer-based score reports were equated to paper-based TOEFL scores by means of an official TOEFL concordance table (ETS, 1998). Ten subjects were high proficiency

students who took an Institutional TOEFL on arrival at the institution within six months of submitting GMAT score reports. All ten subjects obtained TOEFL scores above 600. The eight subjects for whom TOEFL scores were not available were all citizens of the U.S.A. and Canada.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the two research questions are designed to parallel and complement the questions which Laufer and Nation asked of their study's data sample, the data analysis will, wherever possible, follow the same procedures as the ones in their study.

The first research question asks whether the LFP will distinguish among different levels of language proficiency in the intermediate-advanced-native speaker range. Table 1 shows the distribution of TOEFL scores for the study's subject population.

**Table 1** TOEFL Proficiency Data for the Study's 52 Subjects

TOEFL Score Band	No. of Subjects
Native Speaker (no TOEFL score available)	8
627-650	10
600-623	11
570-597	8
540-567	8
510-537	3
Below 510	4

A TOEFL score of 600 represents the 86th percentile of all test-takers who took the paper-based TOEFL between July 1998 and June 1999 (ETS, 1999). The most recent large scale and widely available survey of graduate schools in the U.S.A. (ETS 1992) showed that it was beyond the 550-600 score band that non-native speakers ceased to face restrictions or conditions on admission to English-medium graduate programs. If we treat a score of 600 as the cut-off point that marks the start of "advanced" levels of proficiency, twenty-nine of this study's fifty-two subjects, a majority, belong to the advanced group.

In the Laufer and Nation study, the subjects were divided into three proficiency bands of roughly equal size, containing 22, 20 and 23 students respectively. In this study, the subjects are also divided into three proficiency groups. Group 3 represents the subjects who have the

highest levels of English proficiency. It comprises eight native speakers and ten “non-native” speakers whose scores are at or above the mean scores obtained experimentally for a large sample of undergraduate native speakers in the U.S.A. (Johnson, 1977). Group 2 comprises the subjects whose English proficiencies straddle the advanced-high intermediate range. Group 1 consists of subjects whose English proficiencies lie mainly in the intermediate range, with a few in the low intermediate area. This asymmetric pattern of proficiency distribution is similar to that reported in the Laufer and Nation study, where the lowest proficiency group was clearly separated in proficiency from the other two groups, but the latter were separated in proficiency by no more than two semesters of freshman undergraduate university study. Table 2 gives a detailed view of these three proficiency groups.

**Table 2** The Three TOEFL Proficiency Groups

	TOEFL Score Band	TOEFL Percentile Band	No. of Subjects
<b>Group 3</b>	Native Speaker		8
	627-650	94 <sup>th</sup> percentile & above	10
<b>Group 2</b>	570-623	70 <sup>th</sup> -93 <sup>rd</sup> percentiles	19
<b>Group 1</b>	Below 570 (mean = 524.4)	Below 70 <sup>th</sup> percentile	15

An analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether or not there are any significant differences among and between the three groups. Table 3 presents the mean percentages of words at the different frequency levels which were used by the three groups of subjects. It also shows the results of an ANOVA and the degree of significance of the *F* test. Nation and Laufer considered the means to be different from each other when the *p* value was less than .05. The Table 3 results lead to the conclusion that there are some significant differences among three proficiency groups across three of the four discrete word family frequency levels.

The author ran a *post hoc* analysis of the ANOVA (using the conservative Scheffé procedure) in order to obtain a more detailed analysis of these differences among the three proficiency groups. Groups 1 and 3 were significantly differentiated by all the LFP measures except the 2<sup>nd</sup> thousand measure. Group 1 used considerably more of the first 1,000 most frequent words and considerably fewer of the *AWL* and *Not in lists* words than group 3. The group 1 essays contained significantly more words from the 1<sup>st</sup> thousand level and



significantly fewer words from the *Beyond 2000* level than the group 2 essays. The discrete components of the *Beyond 2000* level, the *AWL* and *Not in lists* levels, did not discriminate significantly between the group 1 and group 2 essays. There were no significant differences between the group 2 and group 3 essays in respect of any of the LFP measures.

**Table 3** Mean percentages and standard deviations of LFP word families by TOEFL English proficiency level

	1 <sup>st</sup> 1,000	2 <sup>nd</sup> 1,000	AWL*	Not in lists**	Beyond 2000***
Group 1	76.0	7.6	10.3	5.5	15.8
SD	5.7	3.5	3.6	2.1	4.5
Group 2	72.0	8.2	12.8	7.0	19.7
SD	4.6	1.7	4.0	2.7	5.0
Group 3	68.4	8.7	14.1	8.8	22.9
SD	3.8	1.3	2.4	2.9	4.0
F-test	10.48	0.84	5.38	6.40	10.00
p value	.0002	.4366	.0077	.0034	.0002

\* The Academic Word List, which comprises 570 word families commonly found in academic texts and not represented in the most common 2,000 word families

\*\* Word families which are not represented in the preceding three lists

\*\*\* A combination of the preceding two lists

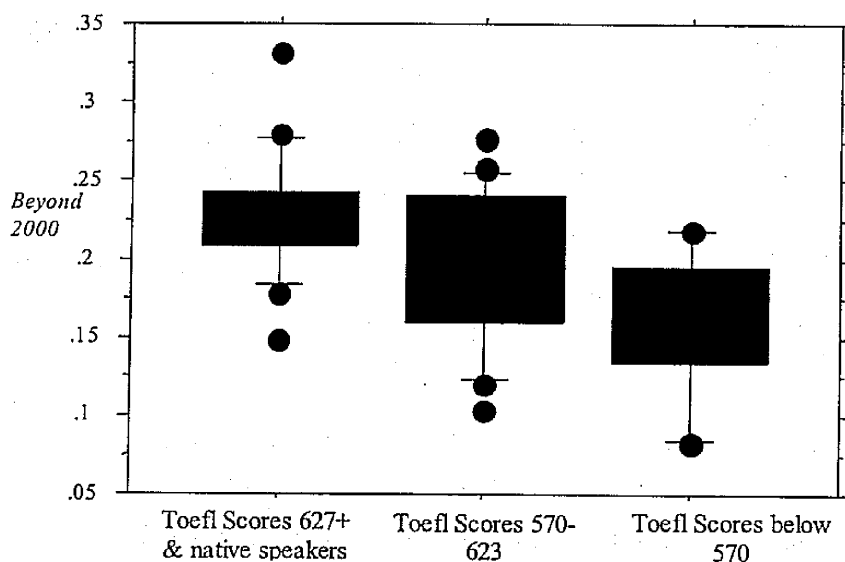
Diagram 1 presents Box plots of the *Beyond 2000* values, which provide a graphical view of these results. It suggests that variances in general English proficiency at more advanced levels have a mild, rather than a strong, influence on variances in lexical richness.

The second research question asks how these differences in lexical richness will compare with the differences identified by Laufer and Nation in their 1995 study of writers with low intermediate and intermediate levels of proficiency. With two important exceptions, these differences mirror in a somewhat more blurred way the parallel differences (*F*-tests in the 10-33 range for all levels except the 2<sup>nd</sup> thousand) which Laufer and Nation obtained for subjects within a lower proficiency range. The first and most important exception is that in this study there are no statistically significant differences between the group 2 (high intermediate to advanced) and group 3 (advanced and native speaker) essays in respect of any of the LFP measures. In the Laufer and Nation study, by contrast, there were significant differences between the group 2 (intermediate FCE 1) and group 3 (intermediate FCE 2) essays in respect of three out of the four main LFP measures.

Laufer and Nation (1995) conclude from their study of intermediate level writers that the differences they identified in the lexical richness in the essays of their three proficiency groups were "in accordance with the concept of language proficiency, which assumes that

richer vocabulary is characteristic of better language knowledge” (p. 316). The present study suggests that there may be a terminal limit to this relationship when certain forms of free written production are elicited from writers at high levels of language proficiency. In his earlier study (Smith, 2001), the author reached a similar conclusion in regard to the relationship between holistic score ratings of writing quality and LFP data.

**Diagram 1** Box Plots of Variances in the *Beyond 2000* Values by English Proficiency



The second exception to the general pattern of symmetry between the results of this study and of the Laufer and Nation study is the rather weak differences between the three proficiency groups in this study in terms of the percentage of words they use from the *Academic Word List*. The results from the Laufer and Nation study show a much stronger tendency for academic vocabulary to discriminate among and between the three lower level proficiency groups. Although the designs of the two studies are not directly comparable because Nation and Laufer used an earlier version of the *AWL*, the *UWL*, (see Coxhead, 1998, for a discussion of the similarities and differences between the two lists), gave their subjects relatively simple argumentative writing prompts and extracted their samples from one text instead of two, it is notable that the percentages of *AWL* vocabulary used by the subjects in this study are consistently higher than the percentages of *UWL* vocabulary used by the subjects in their study (10.3-14.1 per cent versus 4.1-10.1 per cent). This outcome of the

present study may reflect a much greater familiarity with such academic vocabulary among its relatively high proficiency subjects.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING INSTRUCTION

In the final analysis, the value of research on lexical richness of L2 English free writing lies in the insights which it may open up for L2 English free writing instruction. This study and the author's previous study (Smith, 2001) on the relationship between lexical richness and writing quality may have some bearing on the relationship among writing instruction, the general proficiency level of the student and academic and professional writing goals which have an analytical and/or argumentative character.

This study suggests that variances in general English proficiency at more advanced levels have a mild, rather than a strong, influence on variances in lexical richness in free writing produced in response to analytical and argumentative prompts. The author's previous study suggests that at more advanced levels variances in lexical richness have a weakly significant or insignificant relationship with holistic assessments of the quality of such writing. However, both studies show that these relationships are much more significant among subject populations at the intermediate and high intermediate levels of English proficiency. Engber (1995) reaches similar conclusions in a university ESL study which investigated free writing elicited by a simple explanatory prompt and rated with the aid of institutional writing and assessment instruments, though the conclusions in regard to her "more advanced" subjects are necessarily tentative because of their small population size.

Within L2 English academic contexts, analytical and argumentative types of writing constitute a major part, and often *the* major part, of writing curricula. One clear implication for writing curricula which focus on these types of writing is a non-linear conception of the significance of lexical richness for writing success. When the student population has less than advanced levels of general English proficiency, helping the students to expand the lexical richness of their free writing could play an important role in the curriculum. Furthermore, it would appear that the most salient areas to target for expansion of productive lexical knowledge are selected lexical areas which lie outside the most frequent 2000 words and, to a lesser extent, the lexical area circumscribed by the *Academic Word List*. With regard to pedagogy, Laufer's two longitudinal studies (1998 & 1991) warrant the conclusion

that input-based learning processes alone may be insufficient to achieve the desired expansion of productive lexical knowledge.

At the more advanced proficiency levels, however, there is a clear implication that further increases in the *range* of the students' lexical inventories may contribute little to the perceived quality of their analytical and argumentative writing. Engber (1995) points out that more advanced learners who are successful academic writers usually have access to a large repertoire of strategies, including grammatical precision, for getting their points across, whereas lower proficiency learners may rely more on raw lexical knowledge to express their ideas. Of course, learners who achieve advanced levels on general proficiency tests are far from uniform in the precise characteristics of their proficiency. In some individual instances it might be the case that "advanced" learners need the same, or similar, sorts of academic writing instruction that their intermediate counterparts need. Nonetheless, in the absence of specific evidence which indicates the contrary, it would appear sensible for a writing curriculum which focuses on developing the analytical and argumentative writing skills of advanced learners to assume that the learners already have an adequate vocabulary which they are able to access for deployment in their writing. One of the decisions which this position would probably entail is that such a curriculum should pay more attention to *control* strategies which aim at greater grammatical and lexical precision and flexibility than to *expansion* strategies which strive for a wider range of lexical and grammatical expression.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has presented evidence which suggests that, within the intermediate-advanced-native-speaker ranges of proficiency, the relationship between variance in lexical richness in free written production and variance in overall English proficiency as measured by the TOEFL is moderately significant when intermediate level learners are compared with higher intermediate and more advanced learners. This relationship, however, ceases to be significant when the latter group of learners is compared with a group consisting of truly advanced learners and native speakers. These general findings point to a need to make some qualifications to Laufer and Nation's 1995 statement that underlying the concept of language proficiency there is a universal assumption about the association of richer vocabulary with better language knowledge. One qualification which can be made with some confidence is that within a free writing context and among writers with more advanced levels of English

proficiency the relationship between lexical richness and proficiency may not be a smoothly progressive one. More specifically, the study finds that among subjects within this range of proficiency levels the average ratio of academic lexis to total lexis in the subjects' free writing differed moderately significantly according to the three proficiency groupings.

This finding and related observations in the literature of lexical richness studies suggest that overall L2 English proficiency is unlikely to be a very significant variable in studies of lexical richness in free writing involving subjects at the higher end of the proficiency spectrum. Future research in this particular area might, therefore, choose to explore the relationship between lexical richness in free writing and L2 English proficiency at much lower levels of English proficiency.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) describes the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) as an "intermediate" level proficiency test (2001).

**Appendix 1**  
**Analytical Writing Assessment**  
**“Analysis of an Issue” Rating Scale**  
(from GMAC, 1999: 28)

**SCORE**

**6 OUTSTANDING**

A 6 paper presents a cogent, well-articulated analysis of the complexities of the issue and demonstrates mastery of the elements of effective writing.

A typical paper in this category

- explores ideas and develops a position on the issue with insightful reasons and/or persuasive examples
- is clearly well organized
- demonstrates superior control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- demonstrates superior facility with the conventions (grammar, usage, and mechanics) of standard written English but may have minor flaws

**5 STRONG**

A 5 paper presents a well-developed analysis of the complexities of the issue and demonstrates a strong control of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category

- develops a position on the issue with well-chosen reasons and/or examples
- is generally well organized
- demonstrates clear control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor flaws

**4 ADEQUATE**

A 4 paper presents a competent analysis of the issue and demonstrates adequate control of the elements of writing.

A typical paper in this category

- develops a position on the issue with relevant reasons and/or examples
- is adequately organized
- demonstrates adequate control of language, including diction and syntax, but may lack syntactic variety
- displays control of the conventions of standard written English but may have some flaws

**3 LIMITED**

A 3 paper demonstrates some competence in its analysis of the issue and in its control of the elements of writing but is clearly flawed. A typical paper in this category exhibits *one or more* of the following characteristics:

- is vague or limited in developing a position on the issue
- is poorly organized
- is weak in the use of relevant reasons or examples
- uses language imprecisely and/or lacks sentence variety
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

**2 SERIOUSLY FLAWED**

A 2 paper demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits *one or more* of the following characteristics:

- is unclear or seriously limited in presenting or developing a position on the issue
- is disorganized
- provides few, if any, relevant reasons or examples
- has serious and frequent problems in the use of language and in sentence structure
- contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics that interfere with meaning

**1 FUNDAMENTALLY DEFICIENT**

A 1 paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits *one or more* of the following characteristics:

- provides little evidence of the ability to develop or organize a coherent response to the topic
- has severe and persistent errors in language and sentence structure
- contains a pervasive pattern of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics which severely interferes with meaning

0 Off-topic, in a foreign language, merely attempts to copy the topic, or consists only of keystroke characters

**Appendix 2**  
**Analytical Writing Assessment**  
**“Analysis of an Argument” Rating Scale**  
(from GMAC, 1999: 29)

SCORE

**6 OUTSTANDING**

A 6 paper presents a cogent, well-articulated critique of the argument and demonstrates mastery of the elements of effective writing. A typical paper in this category

- clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them insightfully
- develops ideas cogently, organizes them logically, and connects them with clear transitions
- effectively supports the main points of the critique
- demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have minor flaws

**5 STRONG**

A 5 paper presents a well-developed critique of the argument and demonstrates good control of the elements of effective writing.

A typical paper in this category

- clearly identifies important features of the argument and analyzes them in a generally thoughtful way — develops ideas clearly, organizes them logically, and connects them with appropriate transitions
- sensibly supports the main points of the critique
- demonstrates control of language, including diction and syntactic variety
- demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English but may have occasional flaws

**4 ADEQUATE**

A 4 paper presents a competent critique of the argument and demonstrates adequate control of the elements of writing.

A typical paper in this category

- identifies and analyzes important features of the argument
- develops and organizes ideas satisfactorily but may not connect them with transitions
- supports the main points of the critique
- demonstrates sufficient control of language to convey ideas with reasonable clarity
- generally follows the conventions of standard written English but may have flaws

**3 LIMITED**

A 3 paper demonstrates some competence in analytical writing skills and in its control of the elements of writing but is plainly flawed. A typical paper in this category exhibits *one or more* of the following characteristics:

- does not identify or analyze most of the important features of the argument, although some analysis of the argument is present
- mainly analyzes tangential or irrelevant matters, or reasons poorly
- is limited in the logical development and organization of ideas
- offers support of little relevance and value for points of the critique
- does not convey meaning clearly
- contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

**2 SERIOUSLY FLAWED**

A 2 paper demonstrates serious weaknesses in analytical writing skills. A typical paper in this category exhibits *one or more* of the following characteristics:

- does not present a critique based on logical analysis, but may instead present the writer's own views on the subject
- does not develop ideas, or is disorganized and illogical
- provides little, if any, relevant or reasonable support
- has serious and frequent problems in the use of language and in sentence structure
- contains numerous errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that interfere with meaning

**1 FUNDAMENTALLY DEFICIENT**

A 1 paper demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in analytical writing skills.

A typical paper in this category exhibits *more than one* of the following characteristics:

- provides little evidence of the ability to understand and analyze the argument
- provides little evidence of the ability to develop an organized response
- has severe and persistent errors in language and sentence structure
- contains a pervasive pattern of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics that results in incoherence

0 Off-topic, in a foreign language, merely attempts to copy the topic, or consists only of keystroke characters

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