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TASK- BASED LESSONS AS A TEACHING STRATEGY TO DEVELOP NON-FICTIONAL
WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH WITH EMPHASIS ON GRAMMATICAL COHESION

JUAN CARLOS PEREIRA BURGOS

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RAE

Title: Task- based Lessons as a Teaching Strategy to develop non-fictional writing skills in English with emphasis on grammatical cohesion

Author: Juan Carlos Pereira Burgos

Key words: Task- based Lessons - English Writing Skills - Grammatical Cohesion

Description: This study proposes task-based lessons as a teaching strategy to develop non-fictional writing skills in English with emphasis on grammatical cohesion. The research was carried out with a sample population of 8 students from second semester of the Technology in International Business at SENA in Apartadó, Antioquia.

References: Among the most important we have, WRITING, Arapoff (1975). TASKS, Nunan (1989). COHESION, Halliday and Hasan (1985).

Content: Chapter I discusses the general theory and the key concepts that support the study. Chapter II describes in detail the research type, the design of the proposal, the methods for data collection, and the process and the techniques used for analysis. The last section includes the findings, conclusions, and pedagogical implications plus recommendations for researchers in similar contexts. Finally, the bibliography and annexes to be consulted were included.

Methodology: The study was conducted under the Action Research method and for the design of the didactic proposal the product oriented and the writing process methods were taken into account. Stand alone lesson plans based on a specific objective were designed in order to reach what was required by the program in which the research was done. A series of textual, integrative and transformational tasks built up each lesson plan.

Conclusions: The results of this investigation showed that the participants benefited from the implementation of the proposal since they actually improved their writing skills. Likewise, there were also benefits for the teacher due to base on the key concepts that support this proposal, he could develop a methodological strategy to develop English writing.

Date: April 6th 2016

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a foreign language has increased immensely in Colombia. A crucial factor in this argumentation is the fact that the Colombian government has included relevant policies into its National Plan of Education (Ley 115 de 1994. Art: 20 - 21) oriented towards "having citizens able to communicate in English in such a way that they be in a position to help the country move into universal communication processes, into the global economy, and into a cultural openness with internationally comparable standards". In this respect, there is a law, that controls the education at tertiary levels (Ley 749, 2002), which has included policies that stress that students in technical studies must certify their language performance at an B1 English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Furthermore, the State's technical institution known as *Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje* (SENA)¹ established a policy that was made public by means of a document entitled *Circular 1-6060 de October, 2009* in which it is stated that students after having studied 360 hours of English should have attained the independent level that corresponds to the B1 level of the CEFR descriptors.

In each curricular structure of every technical and technological program at SENA the following English objective is found: "To produce texts in an oral and written manner" (see annex 1). This means that the different training programs should include the teaching of English

¹ SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje) is a national state institution adhered to the Ministry of Labour. SENA is responsible for investing in Colombia's social, economic, and technological development. Its main mission is to offer comprehensive training for the incorporation and development of people into productive activities.

for a person to learn and act in a job if it required. Thus, the role of English teachers at tertiary levels becomes a determinant factor for promoting the achievement of the proposed government's goals.

Moreover, the curricular structures at the technological programs at SENA state that the students must be able to produce simple connected texts on topics that are familiar or of personal interest including formal and informal e-mails, letters, and so on. However, it is known that during the process of learning a language, one of the most difficult communication skills is writing, due to the complexity of processes that it involves.

Current English teaching trends at SENA generally seek the application of processes that assist the students in the improvement of their competences. In this sense, English teachers propose transformations day by day. Thus, the current study entails the design of tasks that present the language needed for real working environments. As a consequence, it refers to the implementation of a proposal developed with second semester students of the program in Technology of International Business at *SENA* in *Apartadó*, Antioquia. In order to help students reach a higher level, this research proposal adheres to the promotion of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an innovative strategy to develop non-fictional writing in English by emphasizing on grammatical cohesion.

The study took shape when analyzing the strengths and weaknesses in the performance of second semester students of the program of Technology in International Business at SENA. Due to the fact that when these students were asked to write a short message (see annex 2), it was found that the majority of the writings evidenced problems by constant errors such as: omission

of personal pronouns, wrong and lack of use of punctuation to separate ideas, lack of use of and linking words, it was essential to introduce teaching strategies that allowed the learners to express appropriately and accurately in English in a written way.

In this view, empirical methods used in this investigation included a structural observation checklist, a teacher's journal, and a structured questionnaire. The structural observation checklist was a valuable instrument (see annex 3) to identify students' writings problems; it consisted of three aspects to be analyzed: pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation marks.

The second instrument to gather data about the teacher's ideas, class incidents, and students' performance when carrying out the pedagogical proposal, to eventually be developed into reports, was a teacher's journal. It was used to record the perception of the students' behavior while they were participating in the development of the class to improve their writing skills (See annex 4). The data collected in this instrument was analyzed by grouping and interpreting the entire textual, integrative and transformational tasks.

The third instrument, a structured questionnaire was applied to the students to identify their preferences regarding their learning process while developing writing. It consisted of six structured questions (see appendix 5). The statistics helped to visualize that a great number of learners were inclined to do written tasks when there were sequential images that represented an idea or messages. Likewise, it was observed that students written tasks were facilitated when they had to make insertion of sentences.

Having identified the existence of a scientific problem, the researcher stated the following research question: **To what extent task-based lessons help students improve their English writing skills when writing short non-fiction narrative texts emphasizing on grammatical cohesion?**

In order to respond the question and offer a solution to the problem, the teacher-researcher took into consideration as the **Object** of the study the teaching of the writing skills and the **Field**, the development of grammatical cohesion in teaching writing skills.

Likewise, to answer the main research question of this study the following sub-questions were established:

- ❖ What are the key concepts that support task-based lesson as a strategy to develop English writing when writing short non-fictional texts?
- ❖ How does the implementation of the proposal contribute to enhance the English writing skills of short non-fictional texts, emphasizing on grammatical cohesion through.
- ❖ What kind of benefits could the proposal based on task have to help students to improve their English writing when writing short non-fictional narrative texts emphasizing on grammatical cohesion?

In connection to the stated problem, the main objective of this research is **To contribute to the students improve their English Writing skills when writing short non-fiction narrative texts emphasizing on grammatical cohesion.**

Likewise, for achieving the general objective of this study the following scientific tasks were established:

- ❖ Review and analysis of the main theoretical concepts to support a didactic proposal that could contribute to the development of grammatical cohesion when writing non-fictional texts in English.
- ❖ Design and implementation of a didactic proposal in order to improve the learning of writing skills in the English program at SENA, emphasizing specifically on grammatical cohesion.
- ❖ Analysis of findings from the implementation of a didactic proposal based on tasks to improve the writing of non-fictional texts in English.
- ❖ Provision of conclusions to answer the research question.

In such attempt, **Theoretical Methods** like historical-logical were useful for building up the antecedents of this study; they contributed to becoming informed about the Colombian legislation and the national and international policies for English programs. Induction and deduction were valuable in the process of revision and study of printed sources of information to construct the theoretical framework in order to clarify concepts about methods, strategies, cohesion and coherent process in writing. Analysis and synthesis were also useful to make correlations between theory and practice for designing the didactic proposal, for analyzing the data collected and for processing the scientific foundations.

Needless to say, the **Qualitative Action - Research Method** (Kemmis and McTaggart 1998) was valuable for it provided an outline of the actions of our daily practices and served as a guide for analyzing the data and for elaborating informed judgments.

Concerning the organization, this report follows the logic organization of the research model suggested by *Universidad Libre* which consists of an introduction, two chapters, conclusions and recommendations, bibliography and appendixes.

Chapter I discusses the general theory and the key concepts that support the study of concepts and characterization of literacy, writing skills, Methods to teach writing, the concept of cohesion, the process of teaching writing cohesion, tasks, and task-based language teaching.

Chapter II describes in detail the research type, the design of the proposal, the methods for data collection, and the process and the techniques used for analysis. Additionally the data analysis was done by a qualitative description of the whether the general objective was achieved, with the corresponding questions and scientific research procedures.

The last section includes the findings, conclusions, and pedagogical implications plus recommendations for researchers in similar contexts. Finally, the bibliography and annexes to be consulted were included.

1. JUSTIFICATION

Although writing is one of the most basic forms of literacy in a society, in order to help learners write texts in a foreign language it is necessary to implement a strategy in which they are taught in an encouraging way. Consequently, the current study takes shape after an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the performance of second semester students from the program in Technology of International Business at *SENA, Apartadó*, specifically their capacity to write. As a result of this analysis, it was found that the written production is a skill that must be strengthened in a different way to which it was usually taught until then. It was then when the idea of implementing task-based lessons as strategy to help students develop grammar cohesion of non-fictional texts was devised.

It is essential to introduce teaching strategies to help second semester students of the program in Technology of International Business at *SENA, Apartadó* to reach one of the final goal established by the English Competence regarding English writing: "Write simple, clear and well linked, detailed a wide range of subjects related to their speciality, understand and express facts, ideas and points of view, in a proper sequence and detail, describe processes among others". That is to say, actions to enhance students to write coherent and cohesive paragraphs are needed.

Due to the fact of the difficulties on how to write short writing texts in English, when second semester students of the program in Technology of International Business at *SENA Apartadó* were asked to write a short messages, etc (see appendix No. 2). It means that it was essential to introduce teaching strategies that let the learners express appropriately and accurately

their points of view and ideas in English in a written way; it implied the development of the writing skill through strategies that enhance the learning process.

Enquist & Oates (2009) argue that “Cohesion is achieved through the use of devices to link sentences together so that there is a logical flow between ideas from one sentence to the next and the Coherence is achieved through the effective grouping and arrangement of ideas in a logical order” (p. 34). To my concern, cohesion implies to write linked sentences to each other, it is important to teach the learners the appropriate use of linguistic patterns that creates a logical sequence, meanwhile coherence must be a self- learning process because it indicates the domain of ideas to be justified linguistically to form a whole.

CHAPTER I

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Some research has been done at an international context regarding the need for enhancing the learning of English at tertiary levels. The bulk of this research has been undertaken in order to analyze interrelationships between writing and reading comprehension (first writing then reading or first reading then writing), or simply to analyze whether students learned grammar properly. Not much has been done on the interrelation between writing and speaking.

A study that looked at the correlation between writing and reading was developed at Nottingham College International in the U.K. by Esfandiari (2012). She set out a quasi-experiment to explore whether helping students write through the use of tasks would help them read better. Esfandiari chose 24 students whose first language was Arabic. She then taught writing via tasks to 12 of these students (the experimental group). She gave them an hour and a half lessons for a 12 week period and gave the other 12 learners (the control group) lessons which were more oriented towards reading. At the end of the 12-week period she gave all the students a test and compared the results. Esfandiari found that the experimental group did better than the control group during the test. She concludes that “writing may help to make developments in reading” (p. 49) but acknowledges the need for more research of this kind.

Another study that evaluates this somewhat innovative methodology to the teaching of writing was also carried out at Nottingham College by Zacharias (2012). Her approach was the

use of task-based lessons to teach Reading-to-Write that is using academic texts in order to extract information for reports and such. She had a natural group composed of 16 international students who had previously been given comments on their writings telling them, for instance, that their paraphrasing was too close to being a quotation. She, then, proposed a series of steps to teach reading-to-write: First, model the process. Second, summarize with the students. Third, make sure the students understood the texts. Fourth, switch attention to form. This process is similar to the one adopted in the present research but was more demanding on the students. Unfortunately, Zacharias does not give an account on whether the process was effective or not. She does, however, suggest interviewing students on their learning process in order to collect their insight on the effectiveness of the reading tasks.

Another significant research dealing with the enrichment of the writing skill was a case study developed by Trang and Hoa (2008), aimed at exploring the problems as well as the process of writing academic assignments of a particular Vietnamese student when studying at an Australian university. The study specifically addressed three major questions: how does the student perceive the requirements of the academic essay? What does he actually do in the process of writing? What are the problems he encountered and strategies he used during the process of writing the essay in English? Data relevant for the study was collected by means of interpretation of the student's written products, in-depth interviews, and stimulated recall. Data analysis demonstrated that the subject did not pay much attention to grammatical errors or spelling mistakes and he met many problems and used a lot of strategies to solve them. Furthermore, it was demonstrated the use of writing tasks such as short notes, postcards, letters, and short stories enhanced the writing of academic texts.

However, the most relevant research for the current proposal was conducted by Miao Hai-yan at the School of Foreign Languages in Nanchang, China. Hai-yan specifically established an Action Research investigation in order to analyze task-based lessons to teach writing for writing purposes (not for improving reading comprehension). This research was, nonetheless, directed at the teaching of large classes. This researcher advocates the teaching of writing “by doing a series of well-designed tasks” (p. 64). Also, Hai-yan strongly suggests the use of needs analysis before starting the teaching of writing “so that they [teachers] can get an idea of how students will need to use the language in real life” (p. 64) and also the use of authentic teaching materials. This teacher-researcher taught writing to 4 natural groups totaling 196 students by using tasks and concluded that:

“The task-based approach to writing has proved to be quite a success, having benefited both teacher and students. On the one hand, it reduces the stress and load on the teacher for teaching big classes. On the other hand, students find more opportunities to clarify meaning through interaction and the negotiation of meaning. Since the introduction of the task-based approach into the classroom, students are more willing to cooperate with their classmates and teacher in order to write better English essays. The task-based approach to writing has been popular with the majority of the students in the author’s English classes, but there are some factors that need further attention” (p. 68).

Traditionally, children in Asian cultures are taught to pay utmost respect to elders and figures of authority such as teachers. Thus, the main factor to which attention should be paid stems from the switch of attention which TBLT entails, from teacher centered to student centered. To this author, the fact that TBLT requires students to be more independent could cause problems in the context of this research.

On the topic of English for Academic Purposes at tertiary levels, Julia Molinari (2012) defines the need to teach students to write well at university by saying that “writing is the main skill through which students’ academic and research competencies are measured” (p. 14). She explored EAP and specifically the teaching of writing via Task-Based Learning (TBL). Molinari argues that there is a need to give writers a purpose for doing so (2012). Also, she suggests elsewhere the need to integrate skills.

On the same subject, Evans and Green (2007) found out that most of the undergraduates “not only require language support at university, but also that this support should be oriented towards academic rather than general English” (p. 5). This means that the English teachers at tertiary levels need to guarantee the learning of the English language as well as the necessary competences to use it effectively in a specific area.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the objective of this investigation was to contribute to the students' improve their English writing skills when writing short non-fiction narrative texts emphasizing on grammatical cohesion through task-based lessons as a teaching strategy, theoretical aspects such as Literacy, Writing Skills, Methods to Teach Writing, Cohesion, Developing of Writing Cohesion, Tasks, and Task-based Lessons are presented as a significant foundation to the understanding of this work.

3.1 LITERACY

The first aspect to be addressed at this point is the term literacy, what it involves, and why this term is important for the purpose of this study. Wagner (1999) states that literacy is often associated with the most positives aspects of civilization. Then, a clear definition is stated by UNESCO (1950) “a continuum of skills including both reading and writing”. In this respect, UNESCO establishes that there are at last two levels of literacy, namely:

- ◆ A minimal level in which an individual demonstrates the ability to read and write, and
- ◆ The functional level in which a person uses literacy for practical purposes.

It is precisely this functional level of literacy what students at SENA must put into practice if they want to be competent in working contexts. However, the assumption that writing is one of the most difficult skills to be developed in the first language and therefore in a foreign language makes the literacy functional level difficult to develop. That is why it is important to

review the concept of writing skills as well as some of the concepts regarding methods and tasks for enhancing them.

3.2 WRITING SKILLS

Sampson (1985) argues that “writing is a system to represent utterances of a spoken language by means of visible and permanent marks” (p. 29). This implies displaying the ideas that someone wants to communicate in a readable code. Writing texts in a foreign language entails that people get informed about the basic elements necessary to construct texts so that sentences are well-connected and have a real significance.

This study is aimed at enhancing the students’ abilities to develop grammar cohesion of non-fictional texts. In this regards, Richards and Renandya (2002) state that “writing is the most difficult skill for first and second learners to master, because the difficulties lye not only in generating ideas, but organizing and translating them into readable text” (p. 303). That is to say, English teachers should pay attention to two aspects, the input for generating ideas and ways for teaching linguistic elements to create coherent and cohesive written texts in English.

For this reason, Arapoff (1975) states that writing skill “is a thinking process characterized by a purposeful selection and organization of ideas” (p. 167). This assumption is important because it highlights the notion that writing skills are not a finished process but require a cycle of learning that includes thinking, selecting and organizing ideas according to the writing purpose, writing and revising.

As a consequence, to accomplish the process previously mentioned learners need to develop the ability to select what is important and relevant for the writing message. In order to do this they require coherence and the ability to organize how this information could be linked, which is cohesion. The current study is focused specifically on the enhancement of cohesion; thus, it is relevant to describe some of the aspects that this term involves.

3.3 METHODS TO TEACH WRITING

Researchers who have specialized in the field of composition agree that to express one's ideas in written form with clarity, accuracy, and coherence is a difficult skill to master (Rivers, 1996). This is true when writing either in a first or a second language. Consequently, teachers of writing usually frame its teaching within several methods. In this respect, three methods are presented and briefly discussed for the purpose of guiding the activities designed in the current research, these are: Product-Oriented Method, Free writing Method, and Written Process Method.

3.3.1 THE FREE WRITING METHOD

This method is based on the idea that “it is more important to have students produce large quantities of material than to produce perfect copy” Erasmus (1960, p. 128). The fact that students have to produce extensively with little regard to the number and types of error is evident and although this is the advantage of this method (to get students to produce long written texts), it is not possible to apply it to the target population of this research since the students' English language level does not allow it. Also, the objectives established in the English modules by SENA do not take into consideration writing long compositions.

3.3.2 THE PRODUCT-ORIENTED METHOD

Known in the U.S. as the *Traditional Paradigm* (Berlin, 1987; Bloom, Daiker & White, 1997; Clark 2003) and by others as *Product Approach* (Kroll 2001), in the Product Oriented Method (Ferris & Hedcock, 2004) the teacher introduces and defines a rhetorical form of patterns or mode, and establishes rules or formulas for the writing composition. This contribution is valuable to the current research because it implies that students receive an input, most of the times the input is related to writing reading passages.

Some aspects of this method are valuable for this study since it responds to the SENA requirements regarding the production of specific products. Nevertheless, the present study took into account not only the reading passages as input but real writing samples used in real working environments to communicate in English. In this case, the input given to the students contains what is intended to be taught, as well as the shape of writing and the feature of cohesion.

3.3.3 THE WRITING PROCESS METHOD

This approach to composition emphasizes the importance of helping students become active participants in the process of learning to write; that is, emphasizing on the individual as a writer, as creator of original ideas. This tradition focuses particular attention on procedures for solving problems, discovering ideas, expressing them in a written way, and is considered by authors as a series of sequences that describe stages. In other words, the importance of this method is to help students in the process of learning to write because it focuses on procedures to discover or generate ideas to be expressed in written form.

In such view, the writing process consists on some phases as described in *SAT Writing Process* (2012), namely: *Pre-writing, drafting, revising and publishing*. These stages are considered important to this investigation since the researcher designed activities taking them account.

According to *SAT Writing Process* (2012), in the *Pre-writing Phase* the writer usually begins by generating ideas using techniques such as brainstorming or word maps to focus ideas on a specific topic, problem, or issue in a written way. In the design of the activities students get involved by thinking about the topic to be developed. Once they have brainstormed ideas, they put them into a logical order. In this first stage, teacher guidance and motivation are of great value.

The second stage deals with *Drafting*; that is, getting everything down on paper. Students start to write, linking sentences based on the ideas outlined in the pre-writing phase, so that they give coherence to the written text with the support of linguistic elements of cohesion such as conjunctions and punctuation marks.

For the purposes of this proposal, this phase plays a special role since in order to be able to use the linguistic resources of cohesion students need to know them and how to use them properly according to the circumstances of the ideas stated. This is the connection between what is in the brain and what has to be expressed in the text for it to be finally understood as it was meant.

The third phase is *Revising*, this is the time for the writer to get everything right, the writer has to improve what his/her composition says and how it says it by editing it, *SAT Writing Process* (2012). A long writing composition needs an introduction, a body with examples or details and a concluding paragraph. Also, at this stage the logic of the text should be revised (coherence). Finally, in each part of the text, grammar structures and punctuation marks should be checked (cohesion). For the current study, this phase is indeed very appropriate for the application of the analysis of this proposal.

The last step in the writing process is *Publication*, this step is primary the teacher's responsibility and can range from reading the final work aloud in the classroom, posting it on a bulletin board, uploading it on a webpage, or making a book. In this respect, it is worth noting that a well-written text should be acknowledged as a success (SAT Writing Process, 2012). Thus, in the present proposal, reading aloud in the classroom and posting some students' writings in a weblog designed for this purpose were used. In this way, relevance to the students' written composition was given since what they write has to be shared with an audience.

Thus, the Writing Process Method is ultimately used in this research since this approach frames some of the activities that are suitable to help students to overcome problems when writing. At this point, it is necessary to state that, since this method of guiding composition also applies to other genres, it would be possible to ask students to write stories or essays but they are not prioritized in this proposal because these are not in the curricular structure to be developed. Instead, English competence related to writing clearly indicates working on shorter compositions such as: postcards, short messages, memos, announcements, e-mails, letters, as well as describing processes related to their particular studies.

3.4 TASKS

The concept of *tasks* has become important since it is at the core of classroom teaching strategies. According to the CEFR (2001), “tasks are features of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domain, which involve that an individual develops specific competences in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and specific outcome” (p. 10). In other words, tasks are activities in which students use language to achieve a precise objective. They reflect real life and learners’ focus on meaning in particular. Tasks can be applied to broad areas.

However, this study adheres to the following characterization of a task: “Task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than on form” (Nunan, 1989, p. 10).

Nunan (2004) also suggests five pedagogical tasks types: “cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal, linguistic, affective, and creative” (p.60). Eventually, the Task-Based Learning Approach, which will be addressed next, contributed to the design of the tasks related to the frame in which writing was conducted. The task-based lessons included in this research were aimed at creating a combination of different types of tasks and, in so doing, they are an attempt at responding to the process of learning to write non-fictional narrative texts based on grammatical cohesion.

3. 5 TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

The influence of the Communicative Approach on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is widely recognized. Littlewood (1981) argues that the teacher's role in the Communicative Approach as a facilitator of the learning process is "to assure students get involved in processes such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction by using task-based materials" (p. 7). In this respect, TBLT attempts to materialize the principles of the Communicative Approach.

Furthermore, the TBLT approach provides the ground to the design of tasks that empower learners' language skills and motivate students to be aware of their own learning process. Nunan (2004, p. 1) lists its characteristics:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

3.6 COHESION

Cohesion is a term that is applied to both oral and written skills. Halliday and Hussian (1976) argue, cohesion is “the ability to put in practice through a set of semantic resources for linking a sentence with what has gone before” (p. 10). How to teach students to write cohesive texts depends on the type of text to be produced. Also, Halliday and Hasan (1985) argue that cohesive texts refer to the use of two types of cohesive devices: non-structural and structural. The first one, is composed by grammatical and lexical cohesive devices and the second one is structured by parallelism, theme rheme development and new given organization. These concepts are clearly summarized in the following table:

Table No. 1

Cohesion in English

Non-structural cohesion

Gramatical cohesive devices

A: Reference

1. Pronominals
2. Demonstrative
3. Definite articles
4. Comparatives

B: Substitution & Ellipsis

1. Nominal
 2. Verbal
 3. Clausal
-

Lexical cohesive devices

C: General

1. Repetition
 2. Synonymy
 3. Antonymy
 4. Meronymy
 5. Hyponymy
-

Structural cohesion

- A: Parallelism
 - B: Theme-Rheme Development
 - C: New-Given Organization
-

This research focuses on the description of grammatical cohesive devices due to the students' English level. Consequently, the non-structural cohesion of linguistic elements such as pronominal reference, conjunctions, mentioned by Halliday and Hasan (1985), are valuable for this study since they help students enhance the functional level of literacy. At this point it is necessary to state that Hussan (1985) lists three types of reference: Personal, demonstrative and Comparative.

3.6.1 PERSONAL REFERENCE: It is a reference to nominate the person who participates in the speech: the first person (I, We) corresponds to the speaker, the second person (you) to the hearer and the addressee (she, he, they) to the person who is being talked about. Nunan (1993) states that personal reference items are expressed through pronouns and determiners. They serve to identify individuals and objects that are named at some other point in the text, as the following table shows.

Table No. 2.

Personal Reference, Cohesion in English, P. 38.

Semantics category:	Existential	Possessive	
Grammatical function:	Head	Modifier	
Class:	Noun	Determiner	
Person:			
Speaker (only)	I, me	Mine	My
Addressee(s), with/without other person.	You	Yours	Your
Speaker and other person(s)	We, us	Ours	Our
Otherperson, male	He, him	His	His
Otherpersonfemale	She, her	Hers	Her
Otherperson; object	They ,them	Theirs	Their
Object; passage of text	It	(its)	Its
Generalizedperson	One	—	One's

3.6.2 DEMONSTRATIVE REFERENCE: It is essentially a form of verbal pointing, so the speaker identifies the referent by locating it on the scale of proximity,

Table No. 3.
Types of demonstrative reference, Cohesion in English P. 38

Semantics category:	Selective		Non-selective
Grammatical function:	Modifier/ Head	Adjunct	Modifier
Class:	Determiner	Adverb	Determiner
Proximity			
Near:	This - These	Here [now]	-----
Far:	That - Those	There - Then	-----
Neutral:	-----	-----	The

3.6.3 COMPARATIVE REFERENCE: It is indirect reference by means of Identity of similarity

Table No. 4.
Type of comparative, Cohesion in English, P. 39

Grammatical function:	Modifier: Deictic/Epithet	Submodifier/Adjunct
Class:	Adjective	Adverb
General comparison:		
Identity	Same - identical	Identically
General similarity	equal similar additional	similarly likewise so such
Different (ie non-identity or similarity)	Other different else	Differently otherwise
Particular comparison		
	Better, more etc... (comparative adjective and quantifiers)	So more less equally

3.6.4 CONJUNCTIONS. Baker (1992) asserts that conjunction is a relationship which indicates how the subsequent sentence or clause should be linked to the preceding or the following sentence or clause by using cohesive ties which relate a sentence, a clause or a paragraph to each other. With conjunctions “sentences are semantically connected to what has gone before” (Halliday and Hassan (1976, p. 38)

Moreover, Halliday and Hassan (1976) classify the conjunction as : Additive Conjunction, connect two sentences that have similar ideas (and, also, beside, nor, or else);Adversative Conjunction, connect two sentences that have opposite ideas (yet, though, only, but, however, nevertheless, despite this, on the other hand, at the same time, in fact, actually, as a matter of fact); Causal Conjunction (so, then, hence, consequently, because of this, as a result, in consequence, for this purpose, in this respect) and Temporal Conjunction (then, next, after that, at the same time, before that, finally, in conclusion, first, in the end among others). For the purpose of the current research, the useful conjunctions are related to the additive, adversative, and temporal categories since they are closely connected to the English taught at SENA, especially to its writing requirements.

Likewise, Minnelli (2005) argues that “punctuation marks are elements of textual cohesion that play an important role in determining the meaning of a text” (p. 18). In this respect, punctuation marks are defined as “the set of universal and accepted and standardized symbols such as period, comma, quotation mark, colon, exclamation mark and so on that help clarify the meaning of a sentence or a structural portion of a writing” (Robbins, Lara 2007, p. 89). These linguistic elements are significant to be included in the design of the activities since students in this study showed a lack of consistence using them as they wrote different types of texts.

The above aspects become relevant to be taught in writing, particularly the use of quotation marks, periods, and commas which are main aspects for the understanding of a text. All of these topics were taken into account for the design of some class activities.

In this respect, learning to punctuate involves learning the function and the rules of punctuation marks. Hence, a *period* is used to provide conclusion to sentences, a sentence is then a group of words which make sense by themselves. The sentence can be a statement, a mild command or an indirect question. The statement can be the reporting of fact or an opinion a declaration a remark or an assertion. They are used within abbreviations as well as in initials. (Robbins, Lara 2007)

On the other hand, a comma is used as separator within sentences, allowing a short pause. It is the smallest break value within the structure of a sentence's. Commas fulfill technical uses as well, including mathematical and bibliographical uses. Commas also provide separation for a string of related words. (Robbins, Lara 2007).

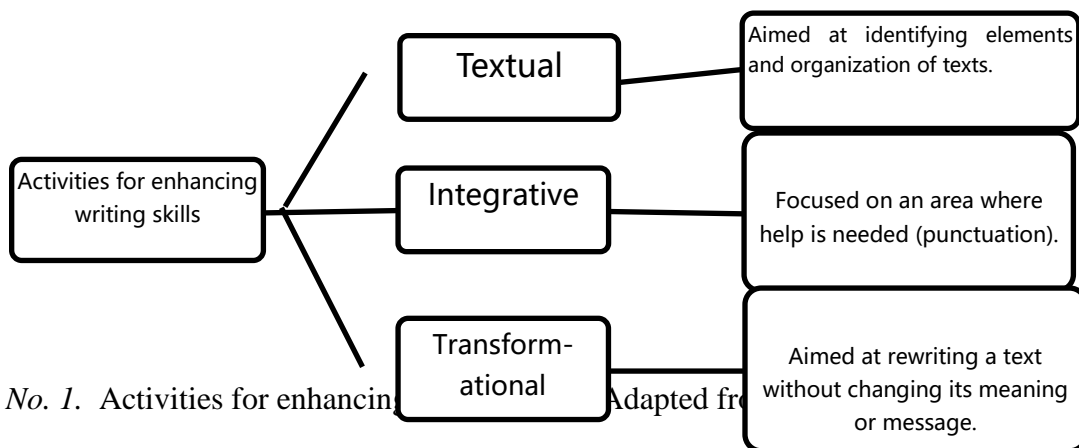
Finally, the Question mark as the basic definition states the symbol ? which is used at the end of a sentence to show that it represents a question. Question mark should not be combined with others punctuation marks. (Robbins, Lara 2007). These are then the punctuation marks to be taking into account in the design of the methodology.

3.7 DEVELOPING COHESION

With regards to the Methodological Approach to teach writing cohesion, Dolz (1994), Bain and Schneuwly (1998), and Camps (1996) suggest that the teaching of cohesion should be framed within what they called Writing Projects or Didactic Sequences, which are a set of activities arranged in a certain manner and take into consideration the learners' improvement. This approach is valuable since the English program at SENA has been constructed by learning modules, that means that after all the workshops in the term, students must end up with a final production.

Yet, due to the amount of hours available, it was necessary to find an approach for teaching cohesion which was much more practical. This approach is simplified in the following diagram which shows how the activities for helping students improve their writings became lesson-specific tasks.

Textual activities: Activities for writing skills



Graph No. 1. Activities for enhancing

Adapted from

Jimeno (2006) explains that “the activities are carried out through specific learning items” (p. 45). That is, in order to facilitate the production of written texts, simpler activities have to be

carried out. However, some students' compositions show a weakness in shaping the writing macro-structure or a style of the different kind of a text type. In this sense Jimeno (2006) proposes textual activities to encourage students to avoid this kind of weaknesses. A textual activity refers to "a way to encourage connection, integration, elaboration consists on giving to the students a sequence of statements that really constitute the text macro-structure (p. 46)."

What is stated above implies that in this research textual activities are designed and given to the students as part of the pre-writing stage of the written process. The idea is to make students identify the basic parts of a written text and how they are presented in the different types of writings: Postals, short messages, memos, announcements, descriptions of sequential processes related to their needs, e-mails, and/or letters.

3.7.1 INTEGRATIVE ACTIVITIES

These kinds of exercises consist of expanding a referent phrase, integrating a word or phrase that has been already written to be inserted in the text, Jimeno (2007). The word(s) or phrase(s) can be added at the beginning, middle or at the end of the text. With these Integrative activities, students are supposed to practice flexibility of the language to expand an introduction, to give more details about the referent, to give example or to conclude the text. As far as, the purpose of this research is to help students write cohesive text, integrative activities become useful since these provide the basis to make an emphasis on written cohesion.

In other words, integrative activities are used while writing, since there are tasks in which students have to introduce a linguist element of cohesion, a specific punctuation mark or expand information about a referent given. Jimeno (2007) recommends that for the integration activities,

the sentence which is going to be inserted should be no more than twenty words long. Also students should know the punctuation rules in writing since in many cases learners have to make decisions that include the proper use of punctuation marks. All these aspects are considered in the design of the proposal.

3.7.2 TRANSFORMATION WITH SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

A brief interpretation of what these kinds of activities are is based on Jimeno's proposal (2007). "In this case, the activity is starting from a short properly written text. The student is asked to rewrite the text, modifying the syntactic structure, the use of punctuation marks without changing the text meaning or text message" (p. 50). This kind of activity is based on the fact that the language system offers many possibilities for writers to express a same message.

In brief, this research uses as teaching approach method of writing activities which compiles textual, integrative, and transformative tasks since they deal indirectly with the way students should start a text, the way they should connect sentences, and the way they have to use punctuation marks.

Also, transformation exercises are very useful because people consciously or unconsciously transform, adapt, or reproduce statements based on pragmatic, syntactic and stylistic criteria. As Jimeno (2006) suggests, the more learners practice these exercises, the easier they will develop written texts. Bearing in mind that for constructing written texts it is also necessary to revise what type of texts will be written, the researcher refers to non-writing

narrative texts. This is due to the fact that texts are classified into narrative, descriptive, directive, expository and argumentative:

Narrative texts are characterized by a sequencing of events expressed by dynamic verbs and by adverbials such as: and, then, first, second, third; also, they have to do with real-world events and time, they may be fictional (fairy tales, novels) or nonfictional (newspaper report). Descriptive texts are concerned with the location of persons and things in space. Directive texts are concerned with concrete future activity. Expository includes text forms such as definitions, explications, summaries, and many types of essays (Gramley et al. 1992).

In this view, this study concerns with the writing of non-fictional texts since these have to do with topics about something that is true or real, the information is told like a story, the order of events is clear even though the information may not be presented in a direct chronological manner, there is an overarching, minor controlling idea to the piece with the main idea. Examples include news and magazine articles, and essays. Nonetheless for specific purpose of the study, the researcher included the teaching of writing short messages, e-mails, and descriptions of a process.

CHAPTER II

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter deals with the process of describing the research type, methods, context, participants, and the process of constructing the instructional design whose objective was to assist second semester students of International Business at SENA in Apartadó Antioquia, in the production of non-fictional narrative texts emphasizing on grammar cohesion through task-based lessons as a teaching strategy.

4.1 RESEARCH TYPE AND METHODS

This study was framed into a qualitative Action Research approach since it allowed the researcher the “understanding of complex issues, for explaining people’s beliefs, processes, and behaviors for identifying the social and cultural norms of a culture” (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 10). In this sense, participants had the opportunity to be part of the cycle of Action Research which, according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), cited by Anne Burns (2010, p. 7), implies the following phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Since this was the model used as a plan for the organization of this study, these phases will be explained briefly next (adapted from Burns, 2010) and then dealt with in more detail as they unfolded during the project:

- ◆ **Planning** consists on the identification of a problem and the development of a plan to solve it.
- ◆ **Action** involves the careful consideration of the plan and an intervention by the teacher-researcher.
- ◆ **Observation** implies the systematic documenting of the action in order to analyze its effects.
- ◆ **Reflection** requires the evaluation and description of the effects of the action.

4.1.1 THE PLANNING PHASE

During the **Planning Phase** the second semester students of International Business at SENA Apartadó, Antioquia, were asked to write a short message as a type of non-fictional narrative writing in order to corroborate a general situation sensed by the teacher in terms of the students' writing ability. At the end of this phase, a structured observation checklist (see appendix 3) was created as a data collection method in order to identify the problems regarding elements of cohesion in subsequent stages.

Since in AR the initial phase includes the design of a plan to solve the problem found, a series of lessons to teach students how to create short compositions were designed. This general plan involved setting aside some hours in order to carry it out. The allocation of those hours is summarized in the following chart:

Table No 5.
Estimated scheduled to spend in the investigation

Stage	Allocated Hours
Design of a Plan	10
Corroboration and Analysis of the Problem	10
Selection of Materials	15
Application of Lesson Plans (pre-writing, drafting, editing, and publishing)	24
Collection of Data	12
Analysis of Data Collected	40
Total hours	111

4.1.2 THE ACTION PHASE

As the main focus of the course was the pragmatic competence, the second phase took into account the curricular structure from the International Business program at SENA, the objectives established by this institution in its English program, and the ‘Can do’ Descriptors from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for the design of the lesson plans.

This second phase, **Action**, dealt with the implementation of the didactic proposal to contribute to the students’ production of non-fictional texts. As a consequence, the application of three different lesson plans was carried out using 6 weekly hours of English lessons. In this stage, the researcher acted as a planner, guider, and facilitator of the English learning process and students became active participants in the construction of their knowledge.

The action stage of this research was carried out by means of a series of stand alone lessons. That is, each lesson was self-contained; nevertheless, at the same time all lessons taken as a whole had a sole purpose: To get students to develop grammatical cohesion. In order to do so, students needed to be taught first what was expected from them. Thus, each lesson included examples of the type of final product they had to write. This idea was adapted from the Product Oriented Method discussed in the theoretical framework.

4.1.3 THE OBSERVATION PHASE

In the third phase, the researcher made use of several instruments to collect data, namely: a structured observation checklist, a teacher's journal, and a questionnaire directed to the students. These instruments allowed the verification of the effectiveness of the lessons and will be explained in further detail in the section 6.2 (data collection instruments).

4.1.4 THE REFLECTION PHASE

Finally, the fourth phase, **Reflection**, took place after the implementation of the proposal when analyzing the students' written texts by using the structured observation checklist. In this stage, the written performance of the students became important since its analysis helped the teacher to do the appropriate interventions to improve his teaching strategies and thus, in turn, help the students to write in a more appropriate manner. It is crucial to acknowledge that since Action Research involves cycles, after the first lesson plan was completed there was a need to start a second cycle (i.e. action, observation and reflection phases). This was also done at the end of the third lesson plan.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

In order to collect data during this investigation, four components were used: the students' compositions created during the lessons, a structured observation checklist, a teacher's journal, and a questionnaire. They were designed to draw perceptions from two different points of view: the teacher-researcher and the students' about what was observed during the whole process.

4.2.1 THE STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS

The first of these methods, the actual writings made by the students, was used in the planning phase to validate the existence of the problem. This method allowed the research not only to corroborate that there was indeed a problem when writing but also that the learners were somewhat unwilling to write in English. In the reflection phase, learners' writings were used to analyze whether the didactic proposal worked or not.

4.2.2 THE STRUCTURED OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

The second instrument to gather data was adapted from Halliday (1986). It was called a Structured Observation Checklist and consisted on a grid that was used in order to identify the problems regarding elements of cohesion (see appendix No. 3). Thus, it took into account some linguistic resources, namely: Referent, conjunction, and punctuation marks. It was used to collect data during the observation and reflection phases of this research in order to analyze quantitatively some aspects of how students build non-fiction compositions.

4.2.3 THE TEACHER'S JOURNAL

The third instrument to gather data about the teacher's ideas, class incidents, and students' performance when carrying out the implementation of the pedagogical proposal was a journal. According to Murkheji and Albon (2012) a journal can be used to "record experiences and feelings about how the research is going, to eventually develop into informs" (p. 15). This particular teacher's journal was used to record the perception of the teacher while in the development of the class to improve writing skill. The data collected in this instrument was analyzed qualitatively.

4.2.4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The fourth instrument to gather data was a questionnaire which consisted on six inquiries (see appendix 4). It was designed by the teacher-researcher as an attempt at collecting data related to the learning process. It also helped as an instrument to compare the progress of the students' writings according to their own point of view.

4.3 CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

Regarding the context of the study, this was developed at *SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje)*. This is a government's educational institution whose mission is to provide students with programs at the technician, technological and technological specialization levels. This particular study was carried out in the *Apartadó-Antioquia* site (*Complejo Tecnológico Agroindustrial Pecuario y Turístico*).

The participants were students from the second semester in the program of Technology in International Business. The group was composed of 27 students. However, due to the demanding nature of the course, the participation of students in the present study was strictly voluntary, thus reducing the initial group to 8 learners. This final group of students was composed of five girls and three boys whose ages ranged from 18 to 30 years old. Their main virtue was their willingness to develop their English level by participating in this research.

With regards to the student's English level, the researcher classified the participants from A- to A1 according to the levels defined by the CEFR. This classification was made based on a prior empirical judgment according to their participation in class during both oral and written activities. The socio-economic status of the majority of the participants in the study was mid-low. Consequently, all of these learners had graduated from public secondary institutions. Except from the case of one pupil, by the time of the study they all had finished their high-school recently. These were the main reasons why the teacher-researcher decided to implement the proposal with them and also, to reiterate, because they were really motivated to participate in the project.

4.4 THE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

This section deals with the elements taken into account for constructing the methodological design that contributed to the students' production of non-fictional texts. It shows how the lessons to be used in the action phase were developed. Therefore, in this section there is a description of how the descriptors the objectives, and the tasks used in the different stages of the writing process were put together to create the lesson plans.

As the main focus of the course was the *pragmatic* competence, the second phase took into account the curricular structure from the International Business program at SENA, the objectives established by this institution, and the 'Can do' Descriptors from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for the design of the lesson plans. These aspects are summarized in the following table.

Table No. 6
Comparatives Language Objectives and Final Outcomes

SENA COMPETENCE	INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR THE ENGLISH PROGRAM	CEFR CAN DO DESCRIPTORS FOR A1 and A2 LEVELS
To produce texts in English in a written as well as in an oral manner (Producir textos en inglés en forma escrita y auditiva).	To write short and simple postcards and short announcements (escribir postales cortas y sencillas y anuncios cortos). To write e-mails in order to give information, ask or answer questions in a simple and technical way (redactar e-mails para dar información, preguntar o responder de forma sencilla y técnica). To write clear and detailed texts about an ample series of topics related to his/her specialty (escribir textos claros y detallados sobre una amplia serie de temas relacionados con su especialidad).	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write very simple personal letters, for example thanking someone for something.

Taken from
the Common European Framework (p. 26).

It is important to reiterate at this point that the language level of the participants ranged from A- to A1, thus one of the intentions of the study was to help students increase their level to A2. For this reason, the descriptors regarding the language proficiency of A2 were taken from the CEFR. Also, as was shown in the previous table, the institutional policy guidelines were used to establish the final outcomes.

Furthermore, taking into account that the mission of the SENA is related to the development of different competences, the process of writing was guided by the principles of both Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI). Therefore, these concepts will be briefly addressed in the following paragraphs.

4.4.1 COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Communicative language teaching is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching rather than as a method, “it is based on the theory that the primary function of language use is communication. Its primary goal is for learners to develop communicative competence” (Hymes 1971, p. 18). In other words, its goal is to make use of real-life situations which also implies that the learner develop a range of abilities: the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (*linguistic* competence); the ability to use the language appropriately in different social situations (*pragmatic* competence); the ability to start, contribute to, and end a conversation, and the ability to do this in a consistent and coherent manner (discourse competence); and the ability to communicate effectively and repair problems caused by communication breakdowns (strategic competence).

It should be clearly established that the CLT is not a method but it embraces and reconciles many different approaches and points of view about language learning and teaching. This allows CLT to meet a wide range of proficiency-oriented goals and also accommodate to different learners' needs and preferences. Wesche and Skehan (2002) describe some qualities that could be considered as requirement to justify the use of the communicative approach:

- ◆ Activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems.
- ◆ Use of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to “real-world” contexts, often emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels.
- ◆ Approaches that are learner centered in that they take into account learners' backgrounds, language needs, and goals and generally allow learners some creativity and role in instructional decisions (p. 208).

In order to put into action the three CLT concepts presented above, the teacher-researcher decided to design a plan that addressed them in three stages which are also deeply related to Communicative Language Teaching. These are: presentation, practice and production.

4.4.1.1 PRESENTATION

At this stage, students were involved on tasks that promoted oral interaction as the main input, using *Wh questions* about the topic presented or a problem to be solved.

4.4.1.2 PRACTICE

This second stage was devised for the recognition and use of certain grammatical structures as well as vocabulary; thus, after some necessary grammatical and lexical aspects were dealt with, written texts taken from books and the internet were used to enhance students' reading skill. The teacher included in this part a modeling and explicit teaching strategy, which means the presentation of paragraphs to students where they had to alter a given structure throughout. It is important to mention that at this stage students only developed controlled writing in order to contribute to the learning of aspects such as punctuation, acceptable core of words, verbal tenses, and to express meaning in different grammatical forms.

4.4.1.3 PRODUCTION

This stage was in turn divided into four stages: drafting, revising, editing and publication.

Drafting: This stage dealt with the process of encouraging students to write their own non-fictional narrative text according to the context and taking into account macro skills of writing such as the use of cohesive devices, conventions, and appropriate layout for writing their texts.

Revising: The teacher researcher provided feedback after revising the produced non-fictional texts. This revision included writing features such as: layout of the student's writings, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. Those traits were highlighted based on previous taught convention symbols, namely: WW = wrong word, WT = wrong tense, EW = extra word, SP =

spelling, MW = missing word, WO = wrong order, P = punctuation, CL = capital letter (Cower et al., 1995).

Editing: This stage was really time consuming since students needed to check their own mistakes and revise if there was connection of context, coherence (Kintsch and Van Dijk 1978), grammar, use of punctuation marks (Van Dijk 1980), and connectivity of the surface text, cohesive devices (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Publication: This stage dealt with the process of publishing the students writing by both, sharing by reading aloud their final writings in the classroom and displaying them in a blog to be commented by their classmates.

4.4.2 TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION

As stated before, the task-based focus of the lessons emerged as an alternative to help students enrich their process of writing non-fictional texts. The emphasis on grammar cohesion was based on the fact that the literacy practices of the classroom attempted to follow actions that encouraged students to be aware of the development of their own learning process. In this view, it is important to state that the objectives were selected keeping in mind language and process as the main features since they could contribute to enhance two significant competences for learning the English language: the linguistic and the pragmatic competence.

Nunan (1989) and Prabhu (1987) suggest using tasks as central units that form the basis of daily and long-term lesson plans. Thus a Task-based Instruction appears and Norris et al. (1998)

argue that the best way to learn and teach a language is through social interaction which permits students to work toward goals which are clear, such as: sharing of information and opinions, negotiation of meaning, getting the interlocutor's help in understanding input, and receiving feedback on their language production. In the process, learners not only "use their interlanguage, but also modify it, which in turn promotes acquisition" (p. 31).

The different tasks were built based on the principles for doing specifically communicative tasks as Larsen-Freeman (1996) state: "The motivation of the activity is to achieve some outcomes, using the foreign language, activities takes place in real time, achieving the outcome requires the participants to interact, listen as well as speak; because of the spontaneous and jointly constructed nature of the interaction, the outcome is not 100% predictable, there is no restriction on the language use" (p. 52).

In order to prepare students with possible difficult words they would find during the Presentation stage, games as pedagogical tasks were used to motivate the oral production of ideas. In the Practice stage, tasks that dealt with Textual, Integrative, and Transformative actions were selected (Jimeno, 2006). For the Production stage, the tasks were drawn to specifically accomplish what the course syllabus required. In this stage, the basic assumption of the Communicative Approach "students could be more motivated to study a foreign language if they felt they were learning to do something useful with the language they were studying" (Littlewood cited in Nunan 1999, p. 120) was taken into account.

With regards to the teacher's role, Larsen & Freeman (1996) argue that "the teacher is a facilitator of his student's learning" (p. 130); that is to say, the teacher establishes situations

throughout the activities to promote communication. Thus, he must also act out as an advisor answering students' questions and monitoring their performance. Hence, in order to have a clear representation of the aspects of the lesson plans elaborated and the detailed descriptions to follow in the application of a class, the researcher presents the following scheme.

LESSON PLAN #	LEVEL: A2		PRODUCT: A short writing composition describing someone's daily routine using connectors of sequence.		
DATE:	TOPIC: Present Tense		TEACHER: Juan Carlos Pereira Burgos		
GENERAL OBJECTIVE:	Students will be able to write an event in a sequential order in present simple.		METHODOLOGY: Communicative Approach WRITING STRATEGY: Transformation Paragraphs		
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	To talk about common actions in a day. To read to identify sequence. To write a paragraph describing someone's daily routine.				
GLOSSARY:					
STAGES	PROCEDURE (ACTIONS)		TIME	TEACHER'S ROLE	RESOURCES
PRESENTATION	WARM UP	Task 1. Students are asked about the activities they do in a normal study day. Students brainstorm ideas and write them on the board. Examples: I eat breakfast, get up ..., I watch TV, I study, play etc..... Task 2. Labeling activity. Vocabulary about students' daily activities. After students finish task 2, they are asked to read them. The teacher supports students to pronounce well.	12 Minutes	Motivator	Teachers' voice Ss answers Board, marker Slip papers

PRACTICE	MODELING	<p>Task 3. Students are asked about what they do first, what they do then, what they do after that etc...; (The teacher takes advantage of numbers or body language to explain the sequential order) The teacher continues asking. Do you take a shower or have breakfast first? Etc..., the idea is to make them organize the daily routine using connectors (the connectors will be written on the board as they are required). The idea is to teach students the order of using connectors to describe sequence order.</p> <p>Task 4. Students are given an input (reading in present simple describing someone daily schedule). Students read it to identify the sequential connectors and its action. Students have to answer some questions about the article. “Karen: And how about your weekends John? 5m John: I usually have a lot of fun on weekends. On Saturdays, first I get up early and take a shower. Next, I have breakfast, sorry or we have breakfast (my mother and father), after that I go to dance classes at 9:00; I practice for about 2 hours every Saturday. In the afternoon, I go to the shopping center with my mother to buy the groceries and what we need for the week. In the evening sometimes I go out with my friends to watch a movie or share and have a good time, after that I go to my house around 10, talk with my parents about many things and finally go to sleep about 11 Pm”.</p> <p>What does Karen do first? (15 minutes for all this questions) What does she do after taking a shower? What does Karen usually do on Saturday night? Finally, what time does Karen go to sleep?</p> <p>Task 5. The teacher starts asking the first question but then has students to interact by asking each other the question and answers.</p> <p>Task 6. Students are given a reading about an interview to a student, he/she needs to organize the correct sequence by inserting the connectors being studied (first, next, then, after that and finally). After students finish the task, some of them are asked to read it The teacher supports students to pronounce well.</p>	25 Minutes		Handout
	PRODUCTION	Drafting, Revising, Editing	<p>Task 7. Students are to write a short written composition describing in chronological order his or her daily routine, using connectors of sequence.</p>	20 minutes	Controller
Publishing		<p>Task 8. Students do both, write a short written composition describing in chronological order a process and post it in the “http://blogforenglishwriting.blogspot.com/” according to its instructions” Students should make comments on their classmates’ work.</p>	10 minutes	Advisor	

Graph No. 2 Sample of the scheme of the lesson plans used in the study. For the students guide see annex No. 6

5. DATA ANALYSIS

This section deals with the process of describing the results that emerged when analyzing the data collected after the implementation of a study which entailed task-based lessons as a means to promote the writing of non-fictional texts, emphasizing on grammatical cohesion. So that the data could be analyzed in an orderly manner, it was looked at after each lesson had ended and will be presented in the same form.

5.1 LESSON # 1: DESCRIBING YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

5.1.1 THE STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS

These compositions were analyzed by using the Structured Observation Checklist. What is shown next is the result of the drafting stage, which was preceded by a series of tasks developed in class. They are merely shown in this section but are analyzed in subsequent ones.

Student # 1

Task 8. Write a short written composition describing in a chronological order your daily routine, use connectors of sequence.

First ¹ I get up, ² After that ³ I work, ⁴ then ⁵ I have lunch, ⁶ Next ⁷ study in the song family ⁸ go to sleep

not sentence, a paragraph Use punctuation!
curves!

missing pronoun

skipping punctuation mark

Student # 2

I usually me first get up de lay, and then a shower
After that breakfast. then I me put watch tv, finally go to study.

Student # 3

first I get up after that
I work then I have lunch
next I study in the senu
and finally I go to
sleep.

Student # 4

1 first I get up
2 next I take a shower
3 after that I have breakfast
4 next I work
finally I watch tv

Student # 5

using connectors of sequence first I get up, after I take a shower, Next I
have breakfast, Then I study and finally I go to sleep.

Student # 6

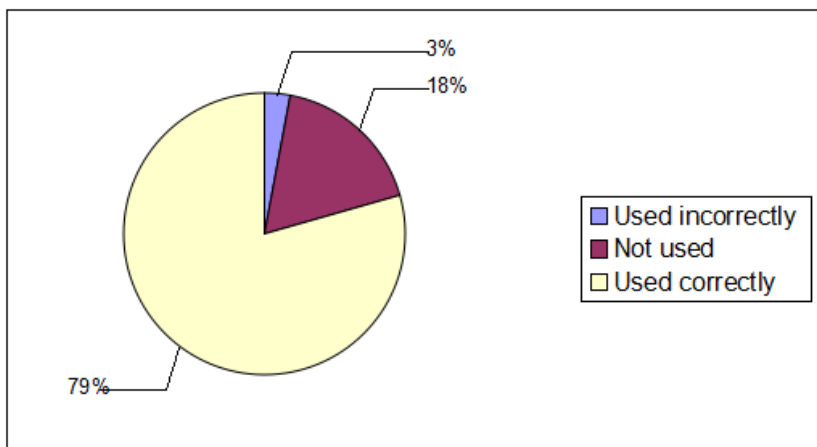
first I get up, ^{5:30 am} then I take a shower, after that I work.
next I study and finally I go to sleep about 10:00 pm

5.1.2 THE STRUCTURED OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Analysis of Students' Compositions after Lesson Plan # 1

The students were asked to turn in a written composition at the end of lesson plan # 1, it was analyzed by means of the Structured Observation Checklist. According to this checklist, it can be confidently stated that the pupils had problems in two main aspects: the use of pronouns and the use of punctuation marks. The former aspect was looked at in terms of the use of the first person singular *I*.

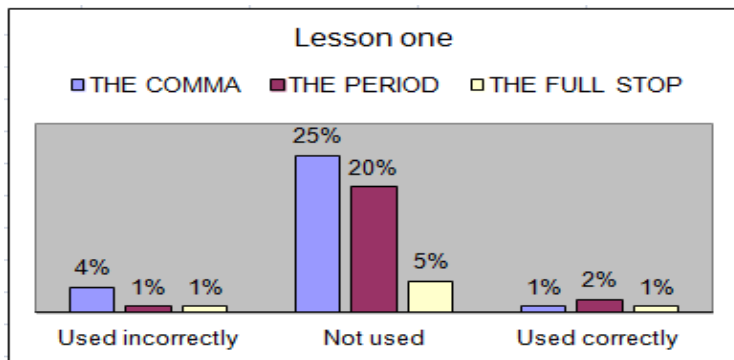
These learners had previously been taught and given examples of how to use it. The task asked of them to write it in every single sentence (which is contrary to what happens in Spanish in the sense that in their first language it can be omitted completely). It came as a surprise that most of the students who turned in their work (6 out of 8) used it correctly most of the time. This fact can be seen in the following pie chart.



Graph No 3. Use of the personal pronoun “I”

I must admit that, according to my experience, students usually omit the use of the personal pronoun *I* almost altogether regardless of how many examples they have seen. So, it was pleasing to see that these particular students used it correctly most of the time.

The latter aspect, punctuation marks, was analyzed in terms of the use of three elements: the comma, the period, and the full stop. These aspects had also been previously taught by means of both examples and practical exercises (as can be corroborated in the lesson plans). Nonetheless, their results were less than satisfying as is shown in the next bar chart.



Graph No. 4. Use of punctuation marks

It was unfortunate to witness that students, for the most part, do not use punctuation. Paradoxically, they did use capital letters when they should in spite of the fact that they did not write periods. However, capitalization is beyond the scope of the current study and therefore it will not be addressed here.

5.1.3 THE TEACHER'S JOURNAL

Part of journal is annexed as an example of how the data was collected (See annex 4); therefore, in this section only a couple of comments related to a relevant task were taken into account in order to try to make sense of the students performance. These were the comments made about task 4 (oral exercise):

Students were asked to answer orally the teacher's questions about their daily routine. "In this task, some of the students had to look back at the different actions studied to answer what was asked, perhaps because they were starting to get the knowledge of the topic. Another aspect to highlight is that these same students answered the question leaving out the correct syntax structure, I mean they just answer the action, omitting the connector and the pronoun, in this case the personal pronoun."

"On the other hand, some others students were confident when answering the questions asked by the teacher."

In task four students had to *answer orally the teacher's question about Karen's daily routine*. After the fact, it was interesting to see how what they had formerly done in an oral manner related closely to what they would later do in a written way. For instance, they would simply answer 'have breakfast' to the question *What does Karen do after taking a shower?*

5.1.4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was composed of questions related to how students felt in terms of both their learning and the teaching process as the class progressed. Nevertheless, the most relevant answers to, again, try to make sense of the students' performance were highlighted at this point.

Question # 1: What did you learn from this composition class? (¿Qué aprendiste de esta clase de composición escrita?)

“I mainly learned the vocabulary that we use to describe the daily routine and the connectors to use it.”

Principalmente aprendí el vocabulario que utilizamos para describir la rutina diaria y los conectores para organizarla.

“How to write a daily routine using connectors to order it.”

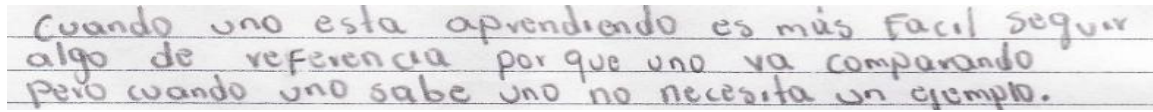
Como escribir una rutina diaria empleando conectores de se orde

“I learned to make a written sequence using the connectors.”

Aprendí a elaborar una secuencia escrita empleando los conectores

Question # 4: For you, the process of developing the ability to write is facilitated when:
(Para ti, el proceso de desarrollar la habilidad de escribir se te facilita más cuando:)

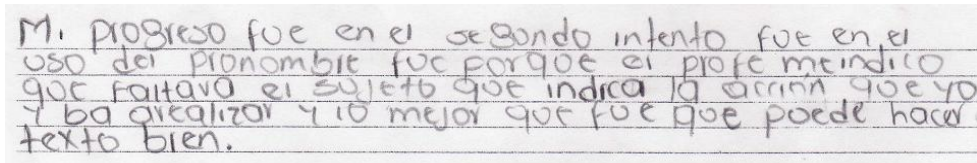
“When one is learning it is easier to follow something of reference because one is comparing but when one knows then an example is not needed.”



Cuando uno esta aprendiendo es más facil seguir algo de referencia por que uno va comparando pero cuando uno sabe uno no necesita un ejemplo.

Question number 6: What do you think was your progress after having been corrected by the teacher? (¿Cuál consideras que fue el progreso de tus escritos después de haber recibido las correcciones sugeridas por el profesor?)

“My progress was in the second attempt. It was in the use of the pronoun because the teacher told me that the subject was missing, the one that indicates the action that I was going to perform and the best part was that I could write the text well.”



Mi progreso fue en el segundo intento fue en el uso del pronombre fue porque el profe me indico que faltava el sujeto que indica la accion que yo iba a realizar y lo mejor que fue que puede hacer texto bien.

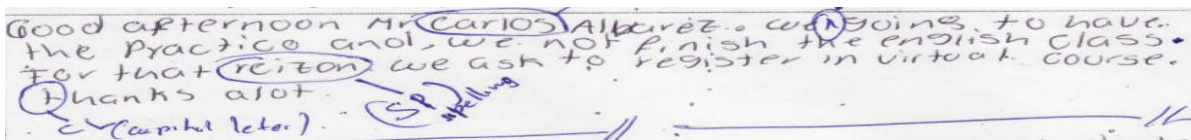
As can be seen in the way three students responded to the first question, their answers tended to be similar (see appendixes). Therefore, there is no need to transcribe all of them. Also, it can be noted that these particular learners seemed not to have any prior knowledge whatsoever of the topic, even though they had gone through high-school (in which English is taught). Moreover, because of the way they write in Spanish, it can be confidently stated that they do not know how to write or punctuate in their own language. This aspect is particularly worrisome.

5.2 LESSON # 2: WRITING A FORMAL E-MAIL

5.2.1 THE STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS

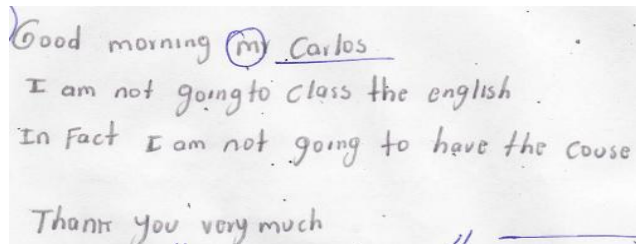
The compositions were analyzed via the Structured Observation Checklist. They are shown in this section after the drafting stage, which was preceded by a series of tasks. The students' writings are, again, merely shown in this section and analyzed in subsequent ones.

Student # 1



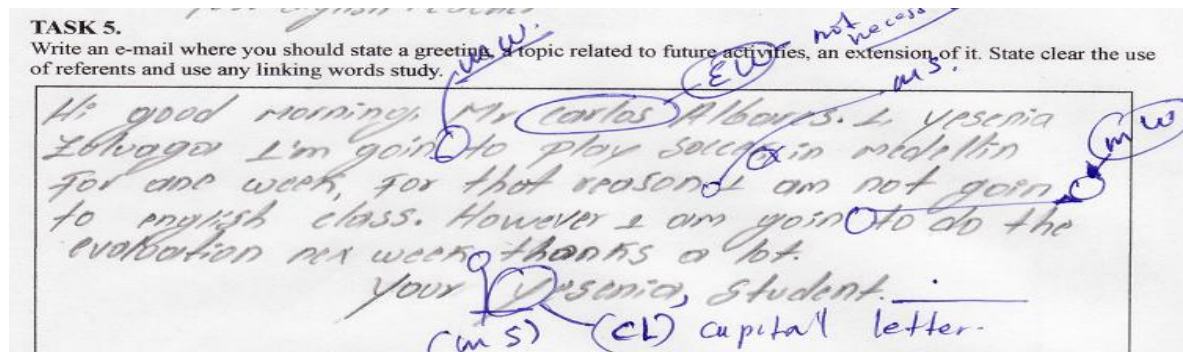
Good afternoon Mr. Carlos Alvarez. We are going to have the practice and we not finish the English class. For that reason we ask to register in virtual course. Thanks a lot. (capital letter). (sp) spelling

Student # 2



Good morning (m) Carlos
I am not going to class the English.
In fact I am not going to have the course
Thank you very much

Student # 3



TASK 5. Write an e-mail where you should state a greeting, a topic related to future activities, an extension of it. State clear the use of referents and use any linking words study.

Hi good morning Mr. Carlos Alvarez. I Ysenia Zolva I'm going to play soccer in Medellin for one week, for that reason I am not going to English class. However I am going to do the evaluation next week. Thanks a lot.
Your Ysenia, student.
(m s) (CL) capital letter.

not necessary
m s.
m w

Student # 4

Dear Instructor My name is Carlos Oyda Cuesta Student
SENIA wants say I happy because have the course of english
with you. thanks a lot. Student International bussness-
technology. *Mr. Pinar* *plum* *pre position missing*

Student # 5

Good morning instructor Carlos alvares
The following is to ^{not necessary} inform that on setember first the students
and teacher of sena are going to meet at two pm in the sena
Apartado, it is about our practices
Thanks a lot - your secretary Cindy.

Student # 6

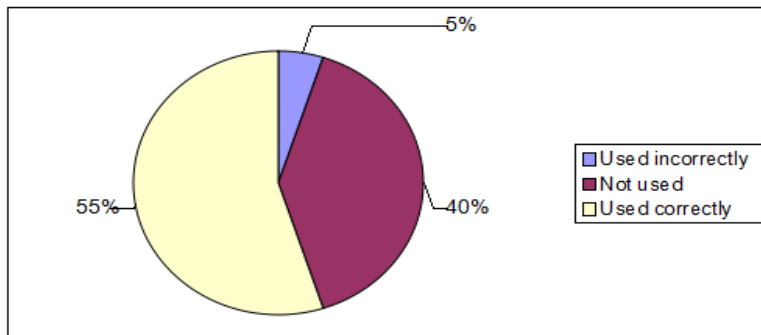
Dear coordinator carlos. my name is Sandra ciro
I am going to have a difficult with the virtual
english. I don't like it. I am going to cancel.
Thanks a lot my name is Sandra.

5.2.2 THE STRUCTURED OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Analysis of Students' Compositions after Lesson Plan # 2

At the end of lesson plan # 2, students were expected to turn in a written composition. In this case they had to write a message for their coordinator. This message was analyzed by means of the Structured Observation Checklist. According to this checklist, it can be argued that the learners still presented problems in the same main aspects as they had done in the first lesson: the use of pronouns and punctuation marks. On the other hand, they did not show any problem whatsoever with the use of linking words.

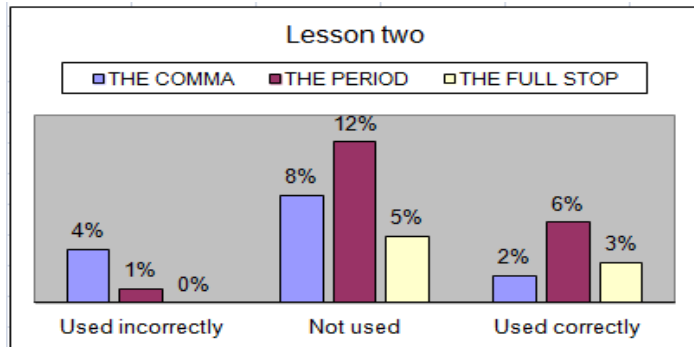
As in the previous lesson, pupils had already been taught and given examples of how to use pronouns. This task asked of them to write pronouns such as: we, us, it, etc, and not only *I* as in the former lesson. It was somewhat relieving to see that students actually used pronouns a bit more than half of the times these had to be used. This fact is shown in the following pie chart.



Graph No. 5. Use of personal pronouns

After having taken a closer look at the times in which they did not use pronouns, it became clear that in these specific cases the pronouns were somewhat above their current English level. To illustrate, a student wrote: “we ask to register in virtual course” instead of “we ask you to (please) register us in the virtual course. Another instance was when a different learner wrote: “want to Say I am happy because have the Course of English With you” instead of “I want to say that I am happy because I am having the English course with you.” This last example could be similarly explained by what had been detected in the previous lesson, that is: students usually omit the use of the personal pronoun *I*. This happens, arguably, because personal pronouns do not have to be used all the time in Spanish.

Punctuation marks were analyzed in terms of the use of: the comma, the period, and the full stop. To reiterate what was explained in the previous analysis, these aspects had also been taught by means of examples and practical exercises. Nevertheless, these learners were still struggling with understanding when to use punctuation marks, as can be seen in the following bar chart.



Graph No. 7. Use of punctuation marks

These students were still inconsistent in their use of punctuation. At times they would use periods correctly and others they would not bother to use them but they would begin the next sentence with a capital letter. This is frankly perplexing.

Finally, it was pleasantly surprising to see that these learners did not have difficulties using connectors. In spite of the fact that they misspelled them at times, they used them correctly all the time. For illustrative purposes, here are their sentences (see the appendixes section to read the whole Structured Observation Checklist):

- > For that reason we ask to register in virtual course:
- > In fact, I am not going to have the course.

- > I, yesenia zuluaga I'm goin to play soccer in medellin for one week, for that reason I am not goin to english class.
- > want to Say I am happy because have the Course of English With you.
- > However I am going to do the evaluation nex week, thanks a lot.

It could be argued that linking words are both easily transferable from Spanish into English and that they have an intrinsic learning value, which makes them interesting for pupils to study. In other words, after having been taught these words, students immediately saw their value; thus, they made an effort to learn them (even memorize them).

5.2.3 THE TEACHER'S JOURNAL

These are the most relevant comments related to the students' performance in this lesson:

About the sample email (task # 2): "I could notice that students did not have difficulty in comprehending the message. However, at the moment of classifying its elements, most of the learners had problems to classify all the referents. I mean, they did it but just the ones related to pronouns and nouns. Thus, it was the opportunity to explain the other types of referents. In this way students could complete the task."

About unscrambling an email (task # 4): "Most of the students showed self-confidence in organizing the E-mail though they exceeded the time established to do it. Maybe because they were getting familiar with the part of a formal E-mail."

About the final composition (task # 5): “Though the students did well in the instructions to get the final product, it was necessary to use the designed grid to develop writing more than 2 times in order to correct grammar, spelling and the use of punctuation marks to get a refined product.”

In this summary of a step by step approach to the teaching of writing (through tasks), it can be seen that: first, no matter how much you facilitate a task in a foreign language, students are always going to present problems. And second, as they stated in the interviews themselves (see the next section), practice is the most important part of writing. It is through practice and through the further correction of their mistakes that students learn to write.

5.2.4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questions related basically to the students’ learning progress and also to the teaching process. The most important answers to try to understand the students’ performance will be shown in this section.

Question # 1: What did you learn from this composition class? (¿Qué aprendiste de esta clase de composición escrita?)

“I learned how to organize an unscrambled message and to write a message taking into account elements such as the greeting, a short and clear message, and linking words to write in a better way.”

1. Que aprendiste de esta clase de composición escrita para desarrollar la habilidad de escribir?
 Aprendí a organizar un mensaje en desorden y a redactar un mensaje teniendo en cuenta los elementos como el saludo, el tema claro y corto linking usar words para escribir mejor.

Question # 5: In order to develop the ability to write, what do you think you need the most?

- a) Being taught
- b) Practice
- c) Reflection

“I need more practice in order to improve writing in English.”

necesito mas practicas para mejorar la escritura en ingles

“We need to be explained, to be taught, and then we practice more, since this is the way we do things well.”

Necesitamos que nos expliquen, nos enseñen y despues nosotros practicar mas, ya que esta forma es que hacemos las cosas bien

“Because through practice the ability to write is facilitated to me.”

Porque a travez de la practica se me facilita desarrollar la habilidad de escribir.

“We need more practice because there is where we perform what we learned and also through practice we learn from the mistakes we make.”

Necesitamos mas practica porque alli es donde realizamos lo aprendido, y ademas en la practica se aprende de los errores cometidos

As was shown in the way three students responded to the fifth question, students do consider practice even more important than being taught or reflecting on a topic. Apparently they are aware that when they practice, and the teacher corrects them, they realize what the errors they made are. As a student put it: “The second time, I corrected these errors and that was it.”

La segunda vez corregi estos errores. y ya

5.3 LESSON # 3: A CHRISTMAS POSTCARD

5.3.1 THE STUDENTS’ COMPOSITIONS

The compositions shown next were the result a series of tasks which students did in class. These samples are the result of the drafting stage. They are merely shown in this section but are analyzed in subsequent ones.

Student # 1

Dear Alex, ^{amissings} All our best wishes ^{in health} ~~(C)~~ merry christmas and a happy new year
 we look forward to sharing _____ ^{complete idea}
 From Gloria Martinez

Student # 2

Task 6. Make your own formal business postcard as the examples studied. State clear all its parts.

EW *not necessary* Dear Gleibus
 We wish you a prosperous new year. and merry Christmas.
 In the new year ~~(C)~~ fill you with blessing
 We look forward to... ?? ^{complete the idea.}
~~(C.P.)~~ ^(C.P.) capital letter
 Dear Gleibus *(W.O.)* *wrong on*

Student # 3

Hello Lois
 We wish you and your family a prosperous new years
 we look forward to ~~with~~ you ^{MW (missing word)}
 from Kelly company

Dear ROSE,
 we wish a merry christmas and a prospero new year
 to thank ~~for~~ ^{proven} ~~for~~ ^{missing} working. ~~complete the idea~~
 we look forward to catching with you in 2017

Student # 5

Dear Cindy
 I wish merry christmas
 and prosperous New Year
 we look forward to working. ~~complete idea~~
 Sincerely, copy company.

Student # 6

Dear clients
 we wish you Merry Christmas. ^{capit letter}
 in the new year wants ~~what~~ ^{delete} god fill you with blessing
 and you ~~and~~ your family ^o
 we wish prosperous 2016.
 from Transport Air.

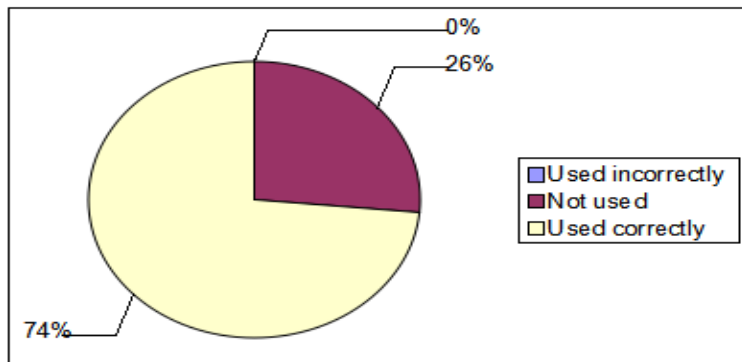
Student # 7

Dear Aida
 we want to wish you ^{something missing} christmas
 all students sena ^{not necessary} and
 thank you for your attention

5.3.2 THE STRUCTURED OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Analysis of Students' Compositions after Lesson Plan # 3

Since this was a composition lesson, students were asked to turn in a writing. In this third lesson, the writing was a Christmas postcard. According to the results that the Structured Observation Checklist yielded, it can be positively declared that the learners presented difficulties mainly in the use of punctuation marks. On the other hand, they showed a sharp increase in the correct use of pronouns. This fact can be seen in the following pie chart.

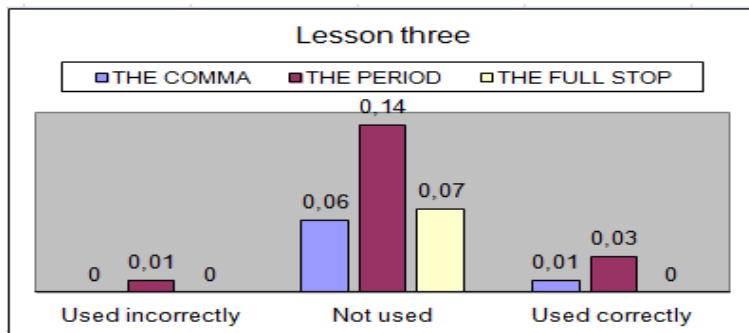


Graph No. 8. Use of personal pronouns

In this final writing lesson the learners had to use pronouns in a slightly more advanced manner than in the previous two. That is, they did not have to use only the pronoun *I* as in the first lesson or *I* and *we* as in the second, but also *you* and *your*. In other words, they did use four pronouns correctly: *our*, *we*, *you*, and *your*. This improvement can be attributed to the teacher's intervention since they were guided step by step until they were in a position in which they could use these pronouns confidently.

A second aspect analyzed after this final lesson was punctuation marks. These were observed in terms of the use of three elements: the comma, the period, and the full stop. These aspects had already, as in the previous lessons, being taught by means of examples and practical

exercises. However, the pupils' results were not as expected. This aspect is shown in the next chart.



Graph No. 9. Use of punctuation marks

These students kept, mostly, ignoring the use of use punctuation. A case could be made as of how they have been affected by new technologies such as *Whatsapp*, an application in which they do not have to punctuate, accentuate, or highlight for messages to be understood and in which emoticons (little faces and such) help them get their meanings across with ease.

5.3.3 THE TEACHER'S JOURNAL

The journal was used as a way of recording the teacher's point of view during the learning process. Therefore, in this section some comments related to relevant tasks will be shown in order to understand the students' performance. These were the notes taken as the students were working through the final lesson:

About the sample formal postcard (task # 3): "I could notice that all students concentrated on the reading. A student called and asked me 'what is the receiver?' I said: 'you can use your

dictionary' but another student supported him by saying the meaning. In the reading aloud part, again I supported them by correcting their pronunciation. This was the part when I explained the components of a formal postcard and some generic expression to write one. Students were paying attention so that they were writing and asking questions about it. This activity was done in the time established: 15 minutes.”

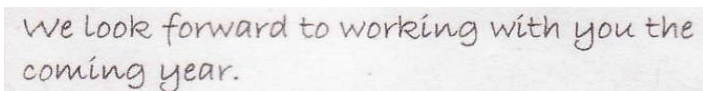
About inserting elements to complete a postcard (task # 4): “I could notice that some of the students completed the spaces of the postcard message by inserting the words and the phrases by using their intuition rather than common sense. So, they were wrong. For example in the greeting, one of them wrote *hello*. In the expression: ‘look forward to’ some students didn’t conjugate the *ing* in the verb used. Others students didn’t write the infinity after the verb “want” to complete the sentence. This activity was done in the time established 10 minutes.”

About unscrambling a message (task # 5): “Though students understood the instructions of the task, the time to do it was not enough. I think that it was because students had to read, think, give coherence and cohesion to the sentences to organize the message. After revising the developing of the student’s task, I could notice that some of them didn’t organize the message correctly; some of them had to reorganize the message twice.”

About the final writing (task # 6): “At this moment students were more confident to do the writing task, so they started to make the message of the postcard; however, not all of them did it the first time. Some of them had to rewrite the message of the postcard twice or three times.”

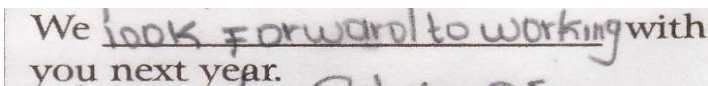
After analyzing this gradual approach to the use of tasks to teach writing, it became clear that writing in a foreign language is such a complex process that as a teacher I cannot expect my students to get it correctly the first time because even the second or third they are likely to regress to a previous learning stage. In order to exemplify this point, I will make use of an expression which, despite being shown and practiced repeatedly, was used incorrectly by all students. The expression was: 'look forward to.'

In task # 3 this expression appears in the sample they had to read.



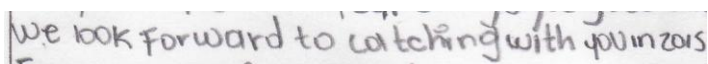
we look forward to working with you the coming year.

In task # 4 this expression appears again, this time students had to complete it (which this particular student did correctly).



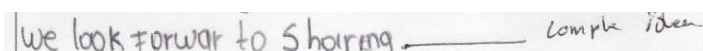
We look forward to working with you next year.

In task # 5 the same expression reappears, this time learners had to unscramble a postcard (the same student who had done it correctly in task # 4 did it correctly again in task # 5).



we look forward to catching with you in 2015

In task # 6 students had to use the same expression again as a way of ending the postcard. However, they did not use it properly. To exemplify, here is what the same student analyzed previously did.



we look forward to sharing. ——— complete idea

It was only after the teacher's correction that this student could finally use 'we look forward to + verb in ing form' appropriately (even if forward was misspelled).

A photograph of a student's handwritten work on a piece of paper. The text is written in cursive and reads "we look forward to sharing with you in 2016". The word "forward" is misspelled as "forwar".

This kind of mistake could be attributed to the fact that this is a pattern which belongs to English and is not something that we would say in Spanish (it roughly translates as: "Estamos ansiosos de..."). Moreover, in Spanish it is followed by an infinitive and not by a gerund. Thus, it is not easily transferable into the students' first language.

5.3.4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

There were several questions related basically to how students felt as the class went on. Nevertheless, the most relevant answers to try to comprehend the students' performance were brought to light in this section.

Question # 1: What did you learn from this composition class? (¿Qué aprendiste de esta clase de composición?)

"First of all, I learned to take into account the formal greeting when writing a postcard, to organize some ideas, not to forget to specify things with the article and that the expression *look forward to* is always followed by ing and I did not do it this way. Later I corrected the errors and that was it, I did the task well."

Primero que todo aprendi a tener en cuenta el saludo formal
al escribir una tarjeta o organizar algunas ideas, no olvidar
de precisar los cosas. con el artículo y que siempre de la expresión
look forward to siempre el verbo ing y yo no lo hice así después
corregí los errores y esto hice lo tarea bien.

This particular student was conscious of the difficulty of using the expression analyzed in detail in the previous page (look forward to). Also, as was mentioned throughout basically all the written questionnaires, to correct errors was evidently very important for students in all areas. This is further emphasized in the following opinion.

“I learned that *one makes mistakes when practicing* and the teacher helps to analyze them and one corrects them. And to end, you learn from mistakes.”

Aprendi que uno practicando hace errores y el profesor le ayuda a analizarlos y uno los corrige y para finalizar de los errores se aprende

Question # 6: What do you think was your progress after been received the teacher's corrections?

“My progress was that I have to take into account punctuation marks since it is through them that any writing that we do is understood in a better way, and ending ideas. Also punctuation marks when writing and also that I have to finish the idea that I want to say.”

mi progreso fue que debo tener en cuenta los signos de puntuación ya que por medio de ellos se entiende mejor cualquier escrito que hagamos y terminar las ideas. también los signos de puntuación al escribir y también debo terminar la idea de lo que quiero decir.

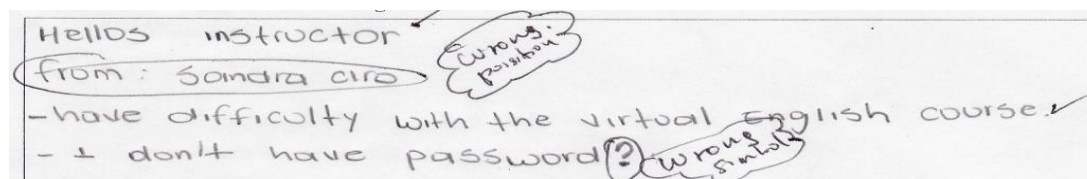
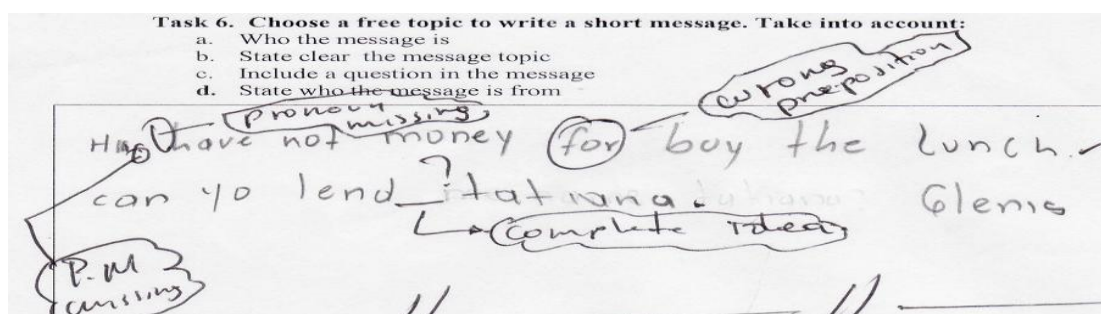
This last answer was intriguing because seemingly this student did not already know the importance of punctuating in his/her own language. Nevertheless, this answer was positive because it showed that he or she was becoming aware of the importance of punctuation marks in English.

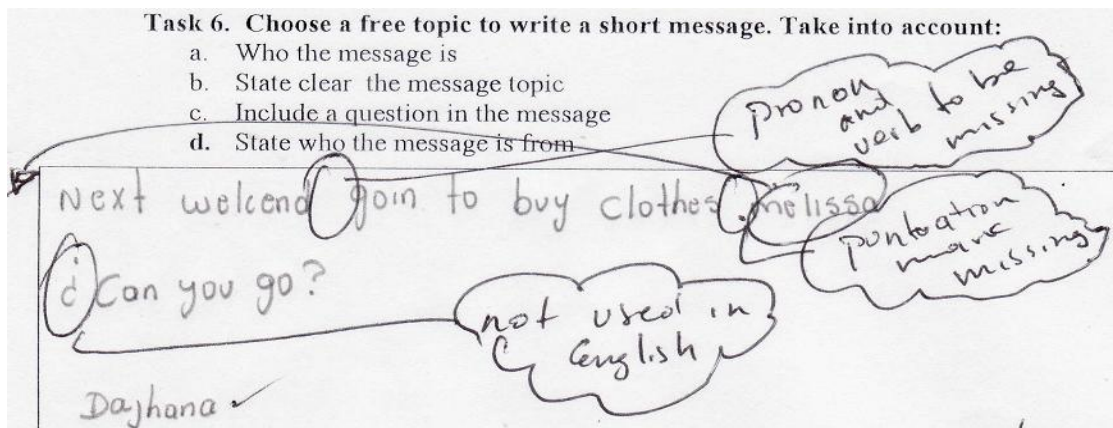
6. FINDINGS

This section considers the following aspects: first, what was found in the planning stage of the Action Research cycle. That is, the results of the teacher's empirical observations. Second, the total results of the three lesson plans used during the whole research. And third, the questionnaires answered by the students.

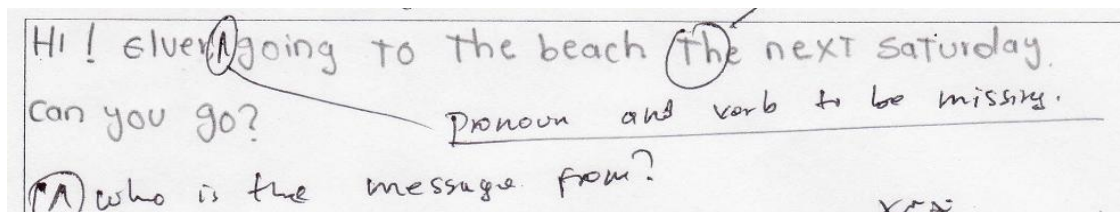
6.1 THE PLANNING PHASE

In the planning phase of the current research some problems related to grammar, conjunctions, and punctuation were detected: Missing pronouns, an excessive use of the conjunctions 'and', wrong or no use of punctuation marks, and missing or wrong use of auxiliaries. In order to illustrate this aspect, some samples of the students' writings at this stage will be shown next.





The fact that these types of errors emerged was attributed to several reasons, especially: interference from the first language, lack of knowledge on the part of the students, and lack of opportunities to write.



It has to acknowledged that the task itself played a crucial role on the presence of those errors. Even though tasks were being used, they were not sequential but rather used in a more traditional, non-linear, manner. In task # 6, specifically, there were too many instructions related to a single task.

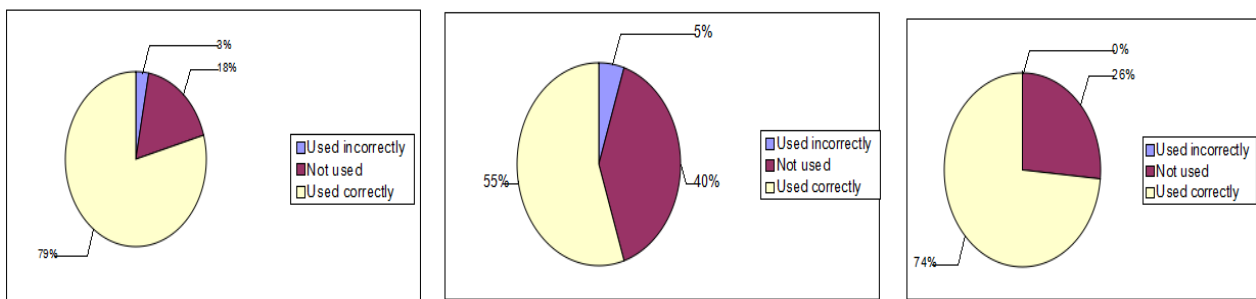
After a careful analysis of the errors made by the learners, it became noticeable that most of these errors were associated to the use of **linguistic elements of cohesion** (i.e. referents, conjunctions, and punctuation marks). Therefore, a plan was devised to tackle these problems through the use of a series of lessons based on a combination of different types of tasks.

6.2 THE REFLECTION PHASE

For this phase, the following components were analyzed individually: a structured observation checklist (used to examine the writings created by the students during the lessons), a teacher's journal (devised to record observations during the development of the different tasks), and a questionnaire for the students (designed to facilitate the collection of students' perceptions of their own progress in the implemented tasks).

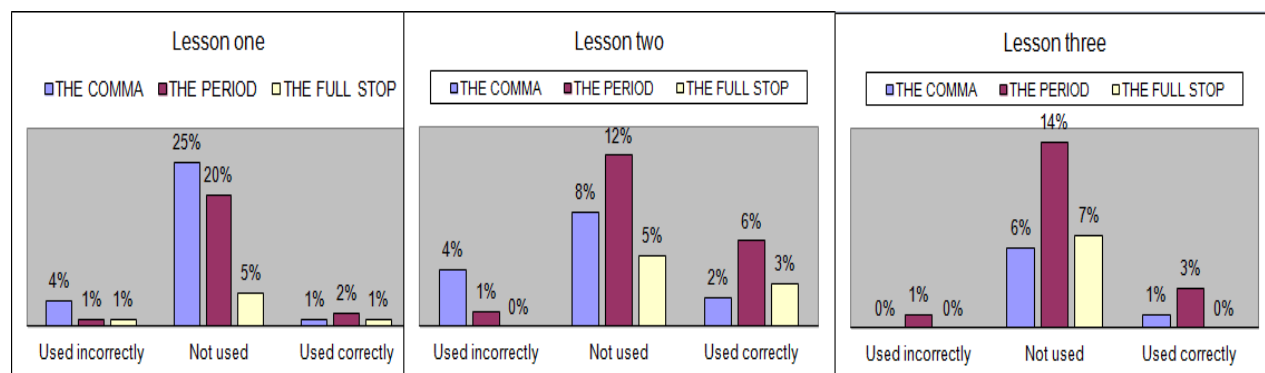
First, the students' compositions were examined by means of a Structured Observation Checklist. The checklists were looked at singly. However, when taken as a whole this instrument allowed the examination of linguistic elements of cohesion for the whole research.

It can be clearly stated that the participants of this research project actually improved the use of pronouns, especially subject pronouns such as I, we, and you. That is, they did not omit them as much as they used to before. This fact can be seen in the following graphs.



Graph No. 10. Comparison of the results in the use of Pronouns among lessons plan 1, 2 and 3

In regard to the punctuation marks examined, the students showed some improvement in the use of commas and periods. On the other hand, they did not show any improvement in the use of full stops. This can be seen in the following graphs.



Graph No. 11. Comparison of the results in the use punctuation marks among lessons plan 1, 2 and 3

Also, they improved the use of connectors. In the first lesson, they all followed the model given as an example. Therefore, they wrote: First, then, after that, next, finally in a correct way. In the second lesson, they used correctly these conjunctions: for that reason, in fact, because, and however. The appropriate use of conjunctions was definitely attributed to the models given to the students during the lessons; that is, task-based lessons indeed helped students improve this aspect of their writing.

Second, a journal was used to gather data related to the students' performance, teacher's ideas, and class incidents when carrying out the pedagogical proposal. Thus, the data collected through this instrument was analyzed in motivational, methodological, and learning terms. Here is a summary of the most important findings from an examination of the teacher's journal.

From the journal, as a general aspect, it can be seen that students were gaining confidence to participate and do the tasks as the lesson plans were being applied. The students' willingness to write in English increased at the end of the the implementation of this research project in contrast to what was observed at the beginning of the process. Also, it was noticed that learners under this study turned from being afraid to write simple texts in English, as it was seen in the diagnosis, to writing with more self-confidence about what was taught.

The journal also reflected that tasks actually proved to be simple yet effective. Most of them were carried out within the time established. It must be clarified that the majority of the tasks focused on meaning rather than on form. That is, although students made some mistakes related to grammar, they did pretty well in terms of communication. Also, there was a clear correlation between the simplicity of the tasks and the students' increased confidence, which allowed peer correction and feedback.

A final aspect which could be seen from the journal was that, although not perfectly, students were in fact communicating what they wanted to communicate. Moreover, the messages from the readings were understood by students effortlessly. These are extracts from the teacher's journal which exemplify this aspect: "I could notice that students did not have difficulty in comprehending the message." Also, "Students did well in terms of communication and pronunciation." The above discussion means that the pedagogical proposal helped the students in the following manner: since the messages were analyzed step by step students could comprehend them with ease, which made learners boost their confidence to get messages across.

Third, a structured questionnaire was applied to the students in order to identify problems while developing writing skills. It consisted of six questions, both open ended and closed. The answers helped realize that a great number of learners were inclined to do written tasks when there were sequential images that represented an idea or message. Students demonstrated preferences for tasks that implied identification of images and giving oral descriptions. Likewise, it was observed that written tasks were facilitated when students had to make insertion of sentences.

A second aspect worth mentioning about the questionnaire was that the majority of students felt that reading a text and answering questions about it was the most difficult task. This particular point from the students' answers signified, for my own practice, that there was a need to reevaluate the teaching of reading comprehension.

A final issue from the questionnaire that could be noticed was that the majority of students became aware of their difficulties when they were given back their writings with the mistakes highlighted using correction symbols. For instance, instead of 'wrong word,' they would find 'ww' (the list of the conventions was included in the theoretical framework). However, students were unable to make corrections by themselves at first so there was a need to insist on the use of these conventions until the learners internalized them.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Second semester students of a Technology in International Business at SENA, Apartadó, had demonstrated problems to construct written texts; that is, the comprehension of what they wrote was hindered mainly because there was a lack of cohesion. Hence, a pedagogical proposal was developed to focus precisely on cohesive devices. This proposal was designed taken into account the English level of the participants and tried to provide useful insights to answer the following research question: To what extent task-based lessons help students improve their English writing when writing short non-fiction narrative texts?

In order to answer the above question, some subquestions were established. What are the key concepts that support task-based lesson as a teaching strategy to develop English writing skills when writing short non-fictional texts? A review and analysis of the main theoretical concepts to support this proposal was carefully done, in this regard, the author of this research chose the most important characteristics of the Product Oriented Method and the Writing Process Method. From the Product Oriented one, the teacher-researcher chose to teach formulas to help students write (such as polite greetings and farewells) and real writing samples in order to show students what the final product should look like.

Also, from the Writing Process Method the following characteristic was chosen: students had to become active participants through the generation of ideas. And, from the same method the stages of pre-writing, drafting, revising and publishing suggested by as described in the *SAT Writing Process* (2012) were integrated into the lesson plans. In the *pre-writing* phase, the

generation of ideas by using techniques like brainstorming and word maps to focus about a specific topic was really important. This involvement got students to think about the topic since pupils who rejected to participate changed their attitude positively and took risks for brainstorming ideas. It was also observed that in second stage, *drafting*, students started to link sentences based on the ideas of the outlining given in the pre-writing phase, they gave evidence that demonstrated coherence in their written texts using linguistic elements of cohesion and punctuation marks.

The *Revising* phase was utterly vital because by using the task-based lessons, students not only helped other students to correct their mistakes but also aided the teacher to do the appropriate variations in his way of teaching during the proposed tasks. Finally, in the phase of *Publication*, reading aloud was used in the classroom and posting their writings in a weblog (<http://blogforenglishwriting.blogspot.com/>). This stage got students to feel happy about their final products, thus building their confidence further.

The most important concept to support the didactic proposal in the action phase was *tasks*. Each lesson would begin by giving students examples of what they had to end up with as a finished product; tasks allowed the teacher and students to analyze, deconstruct, and reconstructed these samples. Different tasks were designed taking into account the linguistic features of cohesion; that is, the use of reference, conjunctions and punctuation marks, in particular the comma, the period and the full stop. In addition, to be consequent with the process of developing writing skills these elements of cohesion were taught and practiced. Finally, after having identified the most important concepts to support task-based lessons, what followed was the application of all of the above mentioned components by the students in a first draft.

With respect to the subquestion: How does the implementation of the proposal contribute to enhance the English writing skills of short non-fictional texts, emphasizing on grammatical cohesion? It is worth mentioning that the lessons went rather smoothly to move from one task to the other; that is, beginning from the easiest tasks to the more complex ones. As mentioned elsewhere, the students' participation in class was enhanced by the method used. Moreover, it was concluded that students were able to develop consciousness of the use of particular aspects of cohesion and conveyed the messages more accurately.

In addition, the analysis of findings from the implementation of a didactic proposal based on tasks to improve the writing of non-fictional texts in English, the current study revealed that there were direct benefits on the students, the teacher, and on the educational community. With regards to students, this investigation opened a space to observe that they were able to learn the English language in a different way. They were also able to change their attitude towards learning English in class by recognizing their own mistakes and by taking an active role in each task. Furthermore, the task-based lessons awoke the curiosity for hearing others' opinions, seeing each others' tasks, and for making comparisons and promoting thoughts.

About the benefits from having applied the proposal, it can be said that there were benefit to the teacher, I was able to focus on the students' process and final products after having arranged a set of lessons that were student-centered. Thus, the stress of teaching writing was greatly reduced (Richards and Renandya, 2002, state that writing is the most difficult skill for

first and second learners to master because the difficulties lie not only in generating ideas, but organizing and translating them into readable text).

Regarding the impact on the educational community, the teaching of English in modules which contain tasks was proposed in order to assure that the competences required in the program were met. Aspects of this proposal were indeed taken into account as a contribution to the program, namely: the use of step by step tasks to teach writing, as well as the use of the same approach to teach reading comprehension.

In regard to the proposed scientific task, provision of conclusions to answer the research question, there is a general conclusion to be made: although this project was designed to teach writing, pronunciation and speaking were indeed practiced in class. Speaking was used in the presentation stage in order to brainstorm ideas on what students would later write. Thus, it can be declared that students did profit the opportunities to speak English in class and that they did quite well in the speaking activities. Consequently, it can be stated that the use of the didactic proposal discussed throughout the current investigation will ultimately affect positively not only the learners' writing skill, but also their speaking skill. However, since it was not really measured, it is not possible at this stage to establish just how much learners' speaking is affected by the improvement of their writing skills.

8. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Students at tertiary levels are required to reach an adequate literacy competence to attain the objectives proposed by their institutions. Lawton and Gordon (1996) define that Literacy involves a functional level which is “the necessary skills in reading and writing that any individual needs in order to cope with adult life” (p. 108). Then, it must be understood that being literate not only means to be able to read texts but also to write them.

Students in the present action research did not show difficulties to comprehend texts; however, they displayed difficulties to accomplish the other part of literacy. That is, they showed problems to fully accomplish the writing of ideas accurately in English. As a consequence, it was necessary to offer a space in which they were able to improve their faulty English. From the pedagogical point of view, this had to be achieved by starting from the reading of samples of well written texts.

Therefore, in an attempt to contribute to the enrichment of grammatical cohesion when writing non-fiction narrative texts, a pedagogical proposal which implied the use of task-based lessons was designed. It is worth mentioning that during the implementation of the proposal, I took into account the principles of several theories for the teaching and learning of English.

This study revealed that it is necessary for teachers to acknowledge that writing has to be taught in basic levels (according to my point of view, writing is usually rather neglected in the first levels). This is because this productive skill is necessary for developing other skills in the classroom, i.e. reading comprehension and speaking, and the grammatical competence as well.

Actually, I believe that more ambitious longitudinal research is necessary to investigate the correlations between reading comprehension, speaking, and writing.

Also, this study enriched my teaching practice by looking into effective tasks which not only contributed to the enhancement of writing non-fictional writing but also made me more sensitive about the great influence that teachers have on the learners' intellectual aspect. Finally, this study allowed me not only to answer the questions proposed but also made me inquire about how to find balance between process and product oriented methods when teaching writing to students at tertiary levels of education.

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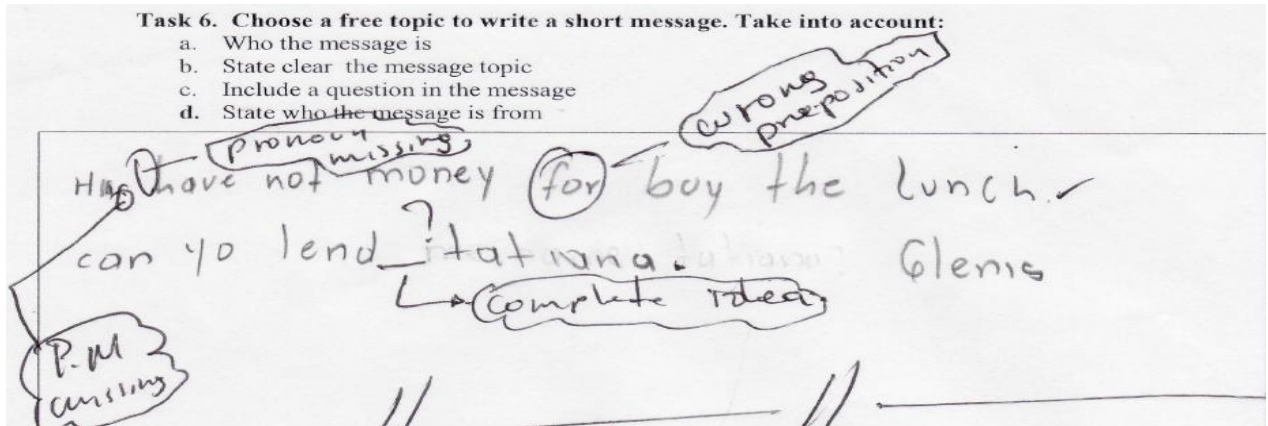
ANNEXES

Curricular Structure – Competences to be developed in the program where the research was carried out. The last two competences correspond to the English ones.

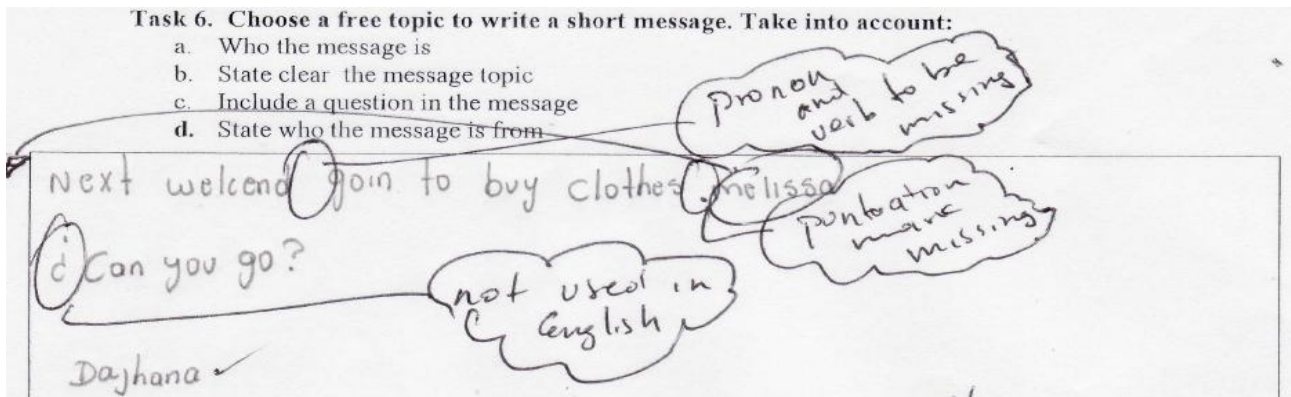
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INFORMACION GENERAL DEL PROGRAMA DE FORMACION			
CÓDIGO		DENOMINACIÓN DEL PROGRAMA:	
122702		NEGOCIACIÓN INTERNACIONAL	
DURACION ESTIMADA DEL APRENDIZAJE EN MESES	MAXIMA DEL EN	Lectiva	Total
		18 meses	24 meses
		Práctica	
6 meses			
NIVEL DE FORMACIÓN		TECNÓLOGO	
COMPETENCIAS A DESARROLLAR:			
CÓDIGO		DENOMINACIÓN	
260101011		Determinar oportunidades de mercado de acuerdo con las tendencias del entorno y los objetivos de la empresa.	
260101016		Planear actividades de mercadeo que respondan a las necesidades y expectativas de los clientes y a los objetivos de la empresa.	
210101005		Dirigir el talento humano según necesidades de la organización.	
210101001		Proyectar las necesidades y requerimientos según el proceso o unidades de negocio.	
260101001		Proyectar el mercado de acuerdo con el tipo de producto o servicio y características de los consumidores y usuarios.	
260101027		Procesar información recolectada de acuerdo con los manuales de manejo de información.	
260101004		Desarrollar los canales de distribución a partir del mercado, idiosincrasia, cultura y necesidades de los clientes.	
210301029		Analizar los resultados contables y financieros según los criterios de evaluación establecidos por la organización.	
240201500		Promover la interacción idónea consigo mismo, con los demás y con la naturaleza en los contextos laboral y social.	
240201501		Comprender textos en inglés en forma escrita y auditiva.	
240201502		Producir textos en inglés en forma escrita y oral.	

Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the writing performance of second semester students of the program of Technology in International Business at SENA Apartadó.

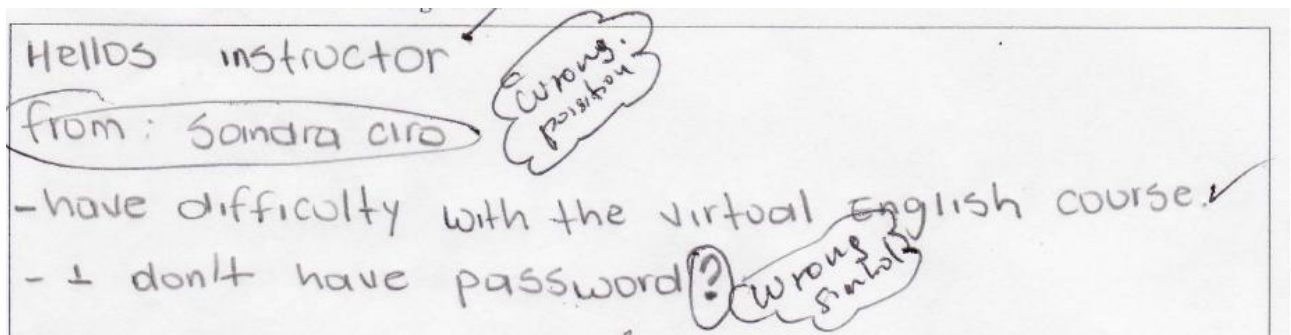
Example 1.



Example 2.



Example 3.



Annex No. 3.

STRUCTURAL OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Instrument to identify students' writings problems; it consisted of three aspects to be analyzed: pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation marks. (Aspects of Grammatical Cohesion)

Linguistic Elements of Cohesion	Used incorrectly	Not used	Used correctly	Student's version	Corrected version
Referent					
Pronouns (personal, subject, object, possessive, reflexive, possessive adjectives)					
Total					
Demonstrative					
Comparative					
Conjunction					
Cause and effect					
Condition					
Concession					
Comparative and contrast					
Total					
Punctuation Marks					
Comma					
Total					
Period					
Total					
Full stop					
Total					
Question Mark					

Adapted from Halliday (1985).

Lesson Plan No. 1

<p>Task 1. Students were eager to participate writing on the board what they were asked, I think that it was just because they had to write in an isolated word any action they do and know; that is, students were self-confident about the previous knowledge of vocabulary related to daily activities. Some of learners draw a cloud around the word, another circle the word and another made a rectangle around it; I asked them the reason and answered that it was to make the different from the partners</p>
<p>Task 2. Vocabulary about students' daily activity</p> <p>Many of the students did the matching activity fast, even they did before the established time to do this. However, two students had difficulty to match the images related to study and to do works, maybe students got confused because the images were similar in actions; Likewise it happened with the image of having dinner, one student asked What is Have dinner? Other student supported the answered and said in an admired reaction, ¡cenar!, I could notice that students help each other and cooperated to clarify the mining of an action.</p>
<p>Task 3. read them aloud</p> <p>After having drilled the students in the pronunciation of these actions, I called a student to pronounce all of them and so on, the students answered in a funny way that she did not remember how to pronounce that. I answered “do not worry miss, Paola a good student from the group will help you”. Paola immediately reacted, “teacher, but I do not know either! Though, this situation happened maybe because students were afraid of making mistakes and being laughed by their partners. Thus, at the end the task was done and students got confident.</p>
<p>Task 4. Answer orally the teacher's question about your daily routine.</p> <p>In this task, some of the students had to see the different actions studied to answer what was asked, perhaps because they were starting to know and get the knowledge of the topic. Another aspect to state is that these same students answered the question leaving out the correct syntax structure, I mean they just answer the action, omitting the connector and the pronoun, in this case the personal pronoun. On the other hand, some others students were confident in answering the questions ask by the teacher.</p>
<p>Task 5. Read the following article</p> <p>At the beginning of his task some of the students tried to present difficulty due to in the reading there was an expression at beginning of the reading that block their interpretation of the first sentence (a lot of). I clarified the meaning and I told them that though they were going to find new words or maybe expression, what was important was to identify the connector and the action that accompany it, that is, to focus on the instruction. This task required much time that was establish for it.</p>
<p>Task 6 Answer these questions and practice them orally with a partner</p> <p>They did pretty well the activity in terms of communication, however in answer they did some mistakes related to the grammar, for example some of them omitted the pronoun at the beginning of the sentences. It was necessary to correct the first and the second students because immediately the rest got the idea and I just had to continue supporting students to pronounce well some words or phrases.</p>
<p>Task 7. Read the following interview to a student, then organize the correct sequence</p> <p>In this task the students had a little of difficulty since to do the task they had to interpret a reading that involved two people talking, that is, there were questions and answers. This context confused students at the beginning but with a help of mine for the first question, they could complete the rest of the task. At this moment, I noticed that students had self- confidence at the use of cohesions elements to do the final product. It was seen that by the time I assigned the students to read the correct order, they did well</p>

both in organization and pronunciation.


Task 8. Write a short written composition describing.

It could be seen that students had more self-confidence to write, in fact, most of the students did well in the use of connecting the sequential activities; the difficulty was in the conjugation of the verb in third person and the use of punctuation marks, not in the use of the elements of cohesion studied. However, in the revision and editing step of the writing process, students' self-awareness to identify their mistakes was very useful, since it helped to develop their writing skills. Thus, some students had to correct their writing 2, 3 and more time till the product was refined to be published. (The task took much time that it was established).

STRUCTURAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Instrument to identify students' preferences regarding their learning process while developing writing. It consisted of six structured questions.

<p>1. ¿Qué aprendiste en esta clase sobre escritura para desarrollar esta habilidad?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>2. Para ti, ¿cuál fue la tarea más difícil en este tipo de ejercicios? 1.) 2.) 3.) 4.) 5.) 6) 7) 8) ¿Por qué?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>3. Para ti, ¿cuál fue la tarea más motivadora para comenzar el proceso de desarrollar la habilidad de escribir? 1.) 2.) 3.) 4.) 5.) 6) 7) 8) ¿Por qué?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>4.) Para ti, el proceso de desarrollar la habilidad de escribir se te facilita mas cuando: A) El profesor establece un modelo de texto escrito a seguir. B) El profesor dice que escriban libremente. Justifica tu respuesta</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>5.) Para desarrollar su habilidad de escribir, ¿Qué crees usted que necesitas más? a) Que le enseñen b) Practicar c) Reflexionar Explica la respuesta</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>6) ¿Cuál consideras que fue el progreso de tus escritos después de haber recibo las correcciones sugeridas por el profesor?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

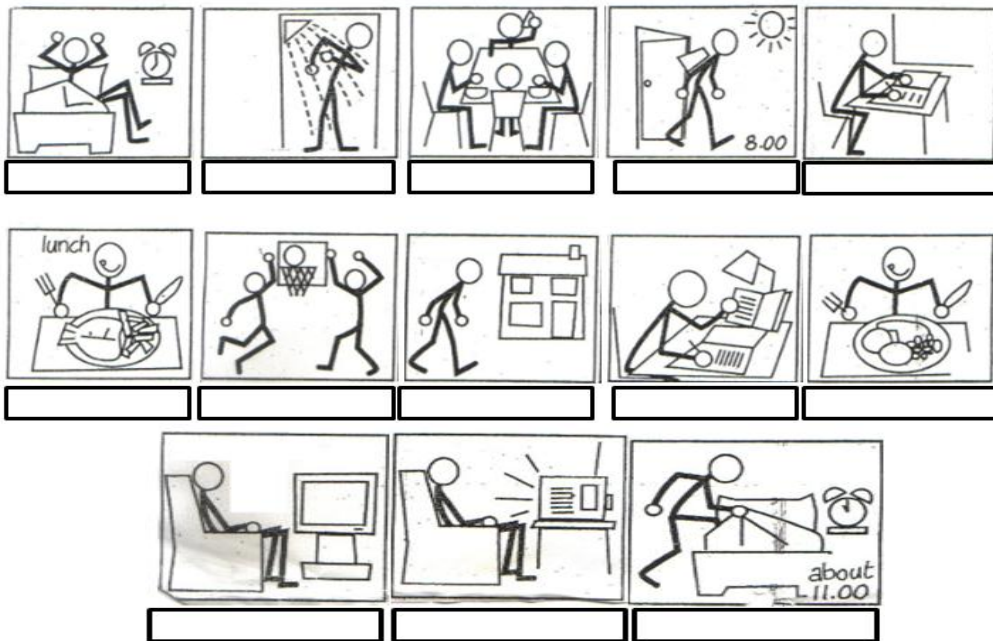
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Task 1. Go the board and write any daily activity you do or know

Task 2. Match the vocabulary about students' daily activity from the box with the correct picture

Look at the picture and label them with correct students' daily activity

- Have breakfast - have lunch - play - go to study - take a shower - watch TV –
- Get up - go to sleep - do the homeworks - listen to music - study – go home
- Have dinner



Task 3. Be ready to read them aloud

Task 4. Answer orally the teacher's question about your daily routine.

Task 5. Read the following article; identify the sequential connectors and the actions underlining them.

“John: And how about your weekends Karen?”

Karen: I usually have a lot of fun on weekends. On Saturdays, first I get up early and take a shower. Next, I have breakfast, sorry, we have breakfast (my mother and my father). After that,

I go to dance classes at 9:00; I practice for about 2 hours every Saturday. In the afternoon, I go to the shopping center with my mother to buy the groceries. In the evening sometimes I go out with my friends to watch a movie or share and have a good time. After that, I go to my house around 10, talk with my parents about many things and finally, I go to sleep about 11 Pm”.

Task 6. Answer these questions and practice them orally with a partner

- What does Karen do first?
- What does she do after taking a shower?
- What does Karen practice?
- What does Karen usually do on Saturday night?
- Finally, what time does Karen go to sleep?

Task 7. Read the following interview to a student, then organize the correct sequence by inserting the connectors (**first, next, then, after that and finally**).

Interviewer: What’s your daily routine like on weekdays Paola?

Paola: My classes start at 7:00 AM, so I get up at 6:00 and commute to school

Interviewer: when do your classes end?

Paola: They end at noon; then, I have a job at the library

Interviewer: so, when do you study?

Paola: My only time to study is in the evening, from eight until midnight.

- _____ she goes to classes
- _____ she takes the bus
- _____ she works
- _____ she studies
- _____ she gets up

Task 8. Write a short written composition describing in a chronological order your daily routine, use connectors of sequence.

Homework. Make a free writing composition describing a process in a sequential order using (first, then, after that, next and finally) and post it “<http://blogforenglishwriting.blogspot.com/>” according to its instructions”