Analysis of Iranian Writing Performances in Virtual and Real Environments

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Writing has always been considered an important literacy skill for foreign/second language learners. The Internet provides such unique applications for the writing skill as weblogs, wikis, and social networking Web sites. Up to now, researchers have put their focus on the learners’ performances in the traditional paper and pencil environment or wikis and blogs; it is time to also consider learners’ performances in the social networking Web sites. In this respect the purposes of the present study were: 1) to identify the most frequent Iranian learners’ errors in the virtual environment of social networking Web sites 2) to compare Iranian performances in the traditional and virtual environments. With respect to the requirements of the research questions, this study had two phases of data collection. For the first phase, the researcher selected 30 Iranians, female and male, aged 18 to 21 from one of the social networking Web sites and collected a 3200 word corpus from among their comments and wall posts. All of the learners were students of Computer Engineering and IT. For the second phase of the study, another 3200 word corpus were collected from 30 Iranians, male and female, aged 18 to 21 who were studying Computer Engineering and IT at Sheikhbahaee University who were asked to write an essay on an assigned topic. The analysis of the results revealed that most Iranian participants’ errors were verb forms, dictions, prepositions, articles, plural ‘s,’ quantifiers, and relative pronouns in the virtual environment of social networking Web site. Based on the results of the t test, Mann-Whitney, and Chi-square tests interesting similarities and differences were observed within and between error groups in each corpus.