Article

Learning Transfer in English for General Academic Purposes Writing

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Abstract

This article was launched to investigate if learning from an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) writing course transfers to other writing contexts. The study focused on the issue of transfer across disciplines, tasks, and two languages (English and Persian). The data were collected through interviews and writing samples from the participants' own EGAP class and their other courses in the university (non-EGAP). The interviews were transcribed and coded for the self-reports of learning transfer, and the writing samples were analyzed for the 10 learning outcomes already instructed in the class. The results demonstrated that transfer of learning was variably achieved within interview-based transcriptions and writing samples, though to a varying degree. Showing high degree of conformity and a roughly similar general regularity, both series of data indicate that learning transfer does occur, though inconsistently, across disciplines, tasks, and the two languages.

Keywords

learning transfer, learning outcomes, EGAP, discipline, task

Introduction

A large number of students learning English are facing the challenges of carrying over their writing instructions to other tasks, disciplines, and languages. In the academic writing contexts of L1 and English as L2, students usually rely on their intuitions developed throughout years of reading different materials to achieve the purpose. To reconcile the discrepancy that usually emerges in the students' L2 writing performances, the English for academic purposes (EAP) writing courses can offer a quick and promising solution (James, 2010). That is, students who are offered EAP writing are very likely to benefit from their learning in such a writing class to perform equally well in other disciplines and also languages (Marini & Genereux, 1995). This idea helps gather that learning in one particular context is tantamount to developing skills for similar contexts. That is, it is likely that mental structure or thought that is developed in one context is to a large extent the determinant of writers' oral or written performance. However, it must be borne in mind that the issue of learning transfer can be a very intricate one which requires in-depth investigation to be exhaustively mapped. In other words, learning transfer can variably depend on context, students, disciplines, languages, language components and even the emotions of the instructor and students. Prompted by the thorny issue of whether such a writing class can be helpful, the present research thus aims to dig a bit deeper into learning transfer from an English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) writing course into tasks, disciplines, and two languages.

Previous Studies on Learning Transfer in Writing

Writing courses can be aimed at either specific goals or general purposes. In other words, writing can be viewed on a continuum ranging from specificity of learning outcomes (English for Specific Academic Purposes or ESAP) to the general features of the disciplines (English for General Academic Purposes or EGAP), where learning outcomes are transferred across disciplines (Jordan, 1997). In ESAP, learning is expected, due to its specificity, to transfer to tasks and contexts which are almost similar to those already learned. In contrast, EGAP is thought to permit transfer of learning outcomes on a global level across similar and dissimilar tasks, contexts, and disciplines. Having said that, the challenge that arose is that while in ESAP transfer indisputably occurs due to the specificity of features, in EGAP general features are reportedly claimed to be elusive and not capable of transferring (Haskell, 2001). Moreover, despite the calls for discipline specificity in university English for specific purposes (ESP) contexts (Wardle, 2009; Zarei & Mansoori, 2011), Hyland (2002) and Petraglia (1995) asserted that writing instruction across the globe has turned to EGAP for the transfer of learning to be achieved. Given the conditions around,

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though EGAP seems to be commonly practiced worldwide, the effective role of EGAP writing instruction from a standpoint of transfer is quite unclear theoretically and practically.

Theoretically, the position on the impossibility of transfer is supported by a few researchers who have cast doubt over the transfer from an EGAP course. For example, Johns (1988) challenged the applicability of such an instruction for preparing English as a second language (ESL) students to start academic activities as he believed that general features of the course are not conducive to enhancing the communication from one course to another. Likewise, Hyland (2002) and Spack (1997) questioned the transfer of discipline-based general skills and strategies across new situations. They assumed that situational differences usually require students to attend to a number of extraneous issues which are not necessarily identical. Apart from the above L2-based explanations, L1 writing researchers present no different comments on the possibility of writing general skills transfer either. As a case in point, Russell (1995) rejected the idea of the writing skills transfer across all genres and activities as he believed there is no generalizable set of strategies to be transferred.

Turning to the practical investigations, the results are far from conclusive and seem quite mixed. The following explanations review further the two important contexts of L1 and L2 writing research and their ensuing conclusions on the issue of transfer of writing skills.

As regard L1 writing instruction context, James (2010) claimed that some general writing instruction projects in L1 have provided evidence of transfer, though they have involved only the participants' self-reports. As two examples, Nelms and Dively (2007) and Allen (2008) concluded their projects with participants showing transfer of general writing skills across different courses and improving their grades. This narrow view of transfer is also evidenced by Ahrenhoerster (2006) who compared the scores of students after one-semester and two-semester long general writing instruction, with the latter outperforming the former and hence concluding the effect being that of transfer. In the same vein, Fallon, Lahar, and Susman (2009) demonstrated the participants' self-reports of transfer in a task and across one field of study, that is, psychology. Contrary to the above pieces of research work documenting transfer, some investigations have reported no transfer through L1 general writing instruction. Wardle (2007) carried out a study on transfer of learning and discovered that students made no use of their instructions in general writing courses. Also, in another study by Wardle (2009), the students could not find any relationship between their general writing course and some similar tasks in different courses. The fact that students were not able to establish any link between their instruction and writing does not necessarily rule out the possibility of transfer (James, 2010).

Unlike contradictory results of L1 settings reviewed above, the research on L2 writing instruction has revealed the transfer of learning from EAP writing courses. As an example, Snow and Brinton (1988) produced evidence of transfer across the two disciplines of geography and psychology. Also, James (2006) showed that a content-based EAP course led to the transfer for engineering undergraduates. Two more studies on L2 writing courses have documented occurrence of transfer to some degree (Leki, 1995; Leki & Carson, 1994). In both of these studies, students were required to identify the aspects or strategies of their previous or current ESL which were helpful in their academic studies. However, these students were concerned with EAP rather than EGAP writing instruction. Spack (1997) investigated academic literacy development in an EGAP writing course. Though not particularly focused on transfer, the study showed that the participant transferred from EGAP writing course the strategies of what to do as for the gist and details in the subsequent readings.

As seen above, all the above-mentioned studies in L2 context have treated transfer indirectly and globally. But, James (2008) focused on a variety of learning objectives determined in advance and concluded that learning can transfer from EGAP writing course to other similar conditions. In another study, James (2010) put transfer into a new perspective as it occurred in genuine tasks and across disciplines. He also showed that transfer is likely where multiple tasks and disciplines are considered.

As the above-reviewed studies in contexts of L1 and L2 give a very conflicting and unclear picture of transfer and also due to the fact that EGAP writing instruction may help students do their composing jobs in other academic programs much better, and also prompted by the fact that inter-lingual transfer of learning, especially from L2 to L1 can be a new arena of exploration, the present study is intended to cast further light on the issue. Moreover, the present study intends to specify a number of learning objectives (targeted learning outcomes) in one part of the study and decide on their transferability in addition to the global self-reported transfers of the elements by students (general learning elements). Note that learning elements refer to those general elements that the participants reported in their interviews to have learned and carried over to their writing tasks. And targeted outcomes are those specific learning elements which have already been determined, focused, and practiced in the writing class and then studied for their transfer in other writing tasks. The interview-based, participant-reported learning elements and targeted outcomes as distinct categories of descriptions were borrowed from the study already carried out by James (2010) and applied as the model of analysis in this study.

Research Question

Research Question 1: Are learning elements in general and targeted outcomes in particular likely to transfer from EGAP to different writing conditions?
Research Question 2: Which learning elements or targeted outcomes are most prone to transfer across disciplines, tasks, and two languages of English and Persian?

Method

Design and Participants

The study used a qualitative design as it is considered appropriate for portraying a detailed picture of phenomenon occurring in natural contexts. Transfer of learning as the main goal of the study was thus investigated qualitatively in a real context of learning. The study conducted in 2009-2010 at Jihad Education Center affiliated to Isfahan University of Technology, involved 13 students of different fields, who volunteered to attend an optional EGAP writing course. This course was an optional one titled "English Writing," offered as extracurricular and to be taken only by voluntary students. These students were rather good at English language proficiency as assessed through English language performance on their university entrance exam (all had achieved 60% up to 76% on the nationwide exam) and wished to improve their language command for pursuing their education at graduate level. Of these participants, 8 were female, 5 male, all junior, with the age range of 21 to 25, and all spoke Persian as their mother tongue. The study continued for one 16-week-long semester as it is believed that transfer requires some time to occur and it cannot happen instantaneously (Haskell, 2001). The study aimed at developing students' writing skills that could be transferred to different university courses. With this goal in mind, it was expected that the treatment would pave the way for the transfer to occur across different disciplines, tasks, and languages. It must be noted that the design of the study was partly a replication of the James's (2010) study on the same topic. Though the textbook and learning goals as categories of description were taken from that study, the context, subjects, and tasks used were not quite identical. Furthermore, this study incorporated some different fields of the study as the students attending the class came from a variety of different disciplines. In respect of disciplines, this study can hardly be considered an exact repetition of James's. Most importantly, James's study did not take into account the reverse direction of transfer which may be likely from L2 to L1. Thus, the present study is distinct from that of James in the analysis of inter-lingual transfer of writing skills.

Materials

Following the study by James (2010), the study used the book named *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* (Axelrod & Cooper, 2004). The book incorporates some general writing exercises such as arguing a position, proposing a solution to a problem and also some writing strategies such as comparing/contrasting, defining, and classifying. An interesting point is that the book lists a number of different learning outcomes for different disciplines (see Appendix A). These learning outcomes were to be clearly studied as transfer elements and herein, modeled on James's study (2010), they were identified as "targeted outcomes." The targeted outcomes are thus distinguished from the self-reported learning elements which are elicited from interviews. The rationale for this distinction is not only to discover how participants deal with and transfer the issues which bear resemblance or otherwise across contexts and languages, but also to see if the analyses through the two modes remain complementary to and supportive of each other, in fact, a cross-verification technique (triangulation).

Treatment

The class was taught by the first researcher who already had a long record of teaching writing courses at undergraduate and graduate levels. On reviewing and enhancing the book contents in each session, the students were required to individually compose, collaboratively revise, and proofread their own drafts on different topics. The sessions were mainly held in the English language with infrequent switches to Persian wherever better communication was needed. The teacher was also involved actively in reviewing and revising the students' drafts to improve and finalize them. The topics students worked on varied from remembering an event, explaining a concept, to arguing for or against an idea. These were supposed to represent three types of writing, namely, narrative, explanatory, and argumentative, respectively; the types of writing are not considered in the present study.

Data Collection

The first step to collect the data was taken through interviews (Appendix B) in which the participants were asked about the possible transfer of general learning elements into their writing samples (certain descriptive categories based on James's study were considered as listed in Table 2). The possibility of transfer was examined across tasks, disciplines, and languages. One session of interview was done for each writing sample. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for the analysis of learning outcomes. The 39 interviews lasted for 15 min and max 22 min each, the average being 17 min.

The second step in collecting the data was related to the participants' samples of writing in the EGAP class and their own university disciplinary courses. They handed in their writing samples written in Persian and in English to the researchers for the analysis (see Table 1). Participants submitted a total of 39 samples from their writing class, each participant with three samples. The EGAP samples were all written at the end of the semester as we expected the participants to make use of or transfer what they had already learned. They also handed in 29 samples of writing from their own fields of studies (non-EGAP), 12 of which were in Persian and 17 of them in English. It must be noted that with the agreement and encouragement of the professors of different courses, theses participants had written their course assignments in English. The writing samples varied in content, length, organization, and format, with some being one page, others more, and also of different kinds of tasks, for example, reports, research projects, summaries of reading, case studies (see Appendix C).

Table 1. Participants and Writing Samples.

			Samples from Non-EGAP		
Participants' disciplines	No. of participants	Samples EGAP (in English) frequency	Persian samples frequency	English samples frequency	Total frequency
1. Chemical engineering	3	9	3	2	5
2. Electrical engineering	4	12	4	4	8
3. Psychology	3	9	5	2	7
4. English language	3	9	0	9	9
Total	13	39	12	17	29

Note. EGAP = English for general academic purposes.

Table 2. Participants' Self-Reported Transfer of General Learning Elements (Interviews).

Learning elements	Freq.	Task (F)	Discipline (F)	Persian (F)	English (F)	Details
1. Voc.	45	R17,RP11,SR9,CS8	E19,P13,C7,EL6	12	33	Total samples: 68
2. Syn.	27	RP12,R8,SR4,CS3	E14,C6,P4,EL3	0	27	EGAP=39
3. Res.	21	R11,SR6,RP3,CS1	C8,P6,E4,EL3	11	10	Non-EGAP=29
4. Coh.	17	SR6,R4,RP4,CS3	P9,E5,C2,EL1	0	17	English=17
5. Org.	16	CS6,R5,RP3,SR2	E9,P5,EL3	0	16	Persian=12
6. Proc.	12	CS3,R3,RP3,SR3	C7,P3,E1,EL1	4	8	
7. Top.	10	RP4,R2,SR2,CS2	E5,P3,C1,EL1	1	9	
8. Ef.	7	R3,RP2,SR2	C4,P1,E1,EL1	1	6	
Total	155	R53,RP43,SR34,CS26	E58,P44,C35,EL19	29	126	

Note. Learning elements: F = Frequency; Voc = Vocabulary; EGAP = English for general academic purposes; Tasks: R = Report; RP = Research Project; SR = Summary of Reading; CS = Case Study. Disciplines: E = English Language; P = Psychology; C = Chemistry; EL = Electrical Engineering; Syn = Syntactic rules; Res = Resource use; Coh = Coherence; Org = Organization; Proc = Process use; Top =Topic development; Ef = Efficient writing.

Data Analysis

First, the data obtained in the interview transcripts were checked for the general learning elements participants reported to have transferred in their samples. Then the writing samples were examined for the targeted learning outcomes transfer from EGAP (see Table 3). For the analysis of interview data, this study drew on the techniques used by James (2010) and Miles and Huberman (1994). First, the transcripts were divided into particular parts which focused on different disciplines and tasks, and then later they were organized into two categories of languages (English and Persian). The tasks were categorized using Horowitz's (1986) framework under four tasks, namely (a) Report (R), (b) Research project (RP), (c) Summary of reading (SR), and (d) Case study (CS) (see Appendix C).

The interview transcripts were carefully read for the transfer of learning elements from EGAP. Learning elements were determined based on the list originally developed by Chapelle, Grabe, and Berns (1997), and used by James (2010). The list of learning elements is presented in Table 2.

Moreover, the targeted outcomes for the writing samples were identified using the list already prepared by James (2010). This list consisted of 10 outcomes extracted from the first chapter of the textbook (see Appendix A). The learning outcomes were all selected from the first chapter of the selected writing book as it is believed that participants must have enough opportunity in at least one semester to transfer the learning elements (James, 2010). To analyze the learning elements in the writing samples, first all different tasks were examined and the elements specified, and then they were checked across languages and disciplines and tasks for their possible transfer. The similarity between the discovered points within the tasks and the learning elements guided the researchers further to investigate the transfers and the exact nature of them. The researchers argued away the differences with one of the colleagues familiar with the procedure and tried to settle the issues convincingly.

To ensure the consistency of the results, the researchers repeated the procedure for data analysis after 3 months individually and coded about 40% of the data again. The intra coder reliability value turned out to be about 95%.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the transfer of learning from an EGAP writing class. Furthermore, it set out to see if transfer can occur across tasks, disciplines, and the two languages of English and Persian. The results of the analysis confirmed

Table 3. Transfer Across Disciplines.

Disc.	Spl. (F)	Targeted outcomes										Total	*MF*
		Vis	Sig	Na	Si	Fra	Tra	Se	Co	Fus	Pas		
1. Ch.	14	6	5	5	0	7	14	8	11	10	12	78	5.5
2. El.	20	8	3	2	1	13	20	10	14	7	5	83	4.15
3. Psy.	16	9	10	7	6	3	18	4	17	10	13	97	6.06
4. En.	18	9	8	15	13	8	23	7	21	7	18	129	7.1
Total	68	32	26	29	20	31	75	29	63	34	48	387	5.7

Note. χ^2 = 17.1; *df* = 3; significance: .002; *p* = .05. Disc. = Discipline; Spl = Sample; F = Frequency; Vis = Describing visually; Sig = Stating personal significance; Na = Narrating; Si = Using similes/metaphors; Fra = Framing; Tra = Using temporal transitions; Se = Using short sentences to draw reader's attention; Co = Avoiding missing commas after introductory time elements; Fus = Avoiding fused sentences; Pas = Using past perfect tense accurately; MF = Mean Frequency; Ch. = Chemistry; El = Electrical Engineering; Psy = Psychology; En = English Language.

that transfer occurs in all the above-mentioned situations to a varying degree.

The following eight categories are the frequency-based list of general learning elements which were discovered as cases of transfer obtained in EGAP and non-EGAP in the analysis of self-reported interview transcripts (see Table 2 for a summary). In the following analyses, the term *case* actually indicates the exact instance of, for example, "vocabulary" (then equal to the number of times), participants reported each of the learning elements they transferred from their writing course to the new writing tasks.

Interview-based learning elements

1. *Vocabulary* (45 cases across all four tasks, disciplines and two languages). In regard to this particular case, the students talked about some vocabulary items which they had transferred to the new writing contexts form the EGAP course. Most of these vocabulary items were used in the English writings (*n* = 33) and also some Persian equivalents in the Persian writings (*n* = 12). As regard the tasks, R, RP, SR, and CS received 17, 11, 9, and 8 of total transferred items, respectively. Also, English writings had the most use of such transferred items (*n* = 19) followed by Psychology (*n* = 13), Chemistry (*n* = 7), and Electrical engineering (*n* = 6). The following is an excerpt from the interview, which shows the student relied on EGAP for composing in other contexts (all the following excerpts are rough translations from Persian):

Researcher: Remember anything, for example, vocabulary, . . . you used from your EGAP?
Student: Well, I think so. Anyway I usually depend on my learning, sometimes things learned recently or in the past.
Researcher: Which vocabulary is here the one already used in your class? Show me, please!
Student: Ok, let me see, . . . please see this example: "indicate," "believe," . . .

2. *Syntactic rules* (27 cases across all tasks, disciplines, and only English language). The second category which was transferred most from the EGAP class was syntactic patterns and rules learned in that course. The subjects made direct or indirect reference to grammar or structure of the language learned in the class which was transferred to other writing contexts. From highest to lowest frequency, the tasks of RP, R, SR, and CS and disciplines of English language, Chemistry, Psychology, and Electrical Engineering experienced the transfer of learning. No mention of the transfer was made concerning structural patterns in Persian writings. In the following excerpt, a participant discussing his task explains that he corrected his sentence structures by resorting back to the EGAP class:

[In response to the inquiries of the researcher,] the student said: "This is [pointing to a sentence before him] the mistake I made in my class, but in this writing I avoided it. I think the class helped me not to make that mistake again."
Researcher: What is it? Can you explain the rule again?
Student: Oh, yes, after the subjunctive clause "require that" I used "is" in the class, but in this "Report," I know the correct form is "be."

3. *Resource use* (21 cases across all tasks, disciplines, and languages). In this category, students discussed their skills in gathering information, summarizing, using quotes, and writing references correctly, taken collectively as resource use. Of the tasks, R, SR, RP, and CS involved 11, 6, 3, and 1 cases, respectively. Also, Chemistry, Psychology, English language, and Electrical Engineering were reported to have used cases of transfer. It is interesting that the two languages used almost equal transfer cases (English 10 and Persian 11). The following is an excerpt from the interview with a student who talked about his attention to the references:

Researcher: In your case study, did you also use your learning from EGAP class?

Student: Yes, that course helped a lot. For example, I tried to follow the referencing according to the instructions from that book.

Researcher: Which of the references, in particular?

Student: All of them, both in the texts and the last list of references, here look! The way this is italicized; the pagination, and commas . . . etcetera.

4. *Coherence* (17 cases across all tasks, disciplines, and English language only). This category involved students' use of devices to achieve coherence such as "transitions," "conjunctions," and the words "whereas, hence, and nevertheless." Of the 17 cases of transfer reported, SR, R, RP, and CS had 6, 4, 4, and 3 cases, respectively. As for the disciplines, Psychology came first and then English, followed by Chemistry and Electrical Engineering. Persian writings were not reported as enjoying the transfers of this category. This does not mean that the Persian language does not enjoy the property of coherence, but that the participants did not mention their uses of coherence-related devices emanating from their writing course, hence not considered transfer. The excerpt below is an example of the use of what a student learned from her class:

Researcher: You have used "whereas" to show the contrast, did you know this before your class?

Student: No, this is also the word I learned from EGAP class. Before that I did not know it.

Researcher: What is the meaning of the word?

Student: I know that this links two distinct and different clauses; I mean in terms of meaning they must be different.

5. *Organization* (16 cases across all tasks and three disciplines and the two languages). The students in this category showed how they organized their writings including the "introduction, body, and conclusion," sequencing of the ideas (problems first followed by solutions) and the unity (thesis statement and paragraph main and supporting sentences). The tasks which were reported to have used this transfer case included CS, R, RP, and SR, listed from highest to lowest. Disciplines of English, Psychology, Electrical Engineering, and Chemistry were the ones in which transfer of this category occurred. Of the two languages, all the transfers were mentioned for the English writings. The following is a piece of evidence from an Electrical Engineering student who was asked about the assignment (Report) he had handed in to his teacher:

Researcher: It seems that you have divided your assignment into a neat sections of "Introduction, body, . . .," Did you do this consciously or is it the way you usually do?

Student: Well, this is certainly based on what I received from my writing class.

Researcher: Did you actually find this method of arranging your assignments suitable and desirable?

Student: Yes, sure. I think this gives your writing a better quality and on the whole can attract the attention of the reader. Also, the reader can track down the steps very clearly.

6. *Process use* (12 cases across all tasks, disciplines and the two languages). This refers to the fact that students carry out their jobs in a series of steps to get completed, form the first drafts to the final one. The four tasks were reported to have used this piece of learning each 3 times. From high to low frequency, the disciplines of Chemistry, Psychology, English, and Electrical Engineering showed transfer. Regarding the two languages, English writings used 8 and Persian writings just 4 cases of transfer. The following example shows that the student of psychology redrafted her writing task before submission:

Researcher: . . . Ok, . . . the next point is, "did you have to revise your writing again and again?"

Student: Yes, of course, one important strategy to complete and finalize the work is to see the drafts again and change them in order to improve the quality.

Researcher: Was this point learned in your writing class or . . .?

Student: I knew something before but the EAGAP course helped me think of this more and more and now I remembered to do it because of the emphasis in the class.

7. *Topic development* (10 cases across all the tasks and the two languages). Students focused on the way they developed their topics through using "examples, definitions, comparisons, and details." The tasks from high to low frequency which relied on such transfer included RP, R, SR, and CS. The disciplines were English, Psychology, Chemistry, and Electrical Engineering. In regard to the languages, English language used 9 cases and Persian 1 of this transfer. For example, the following student from English Major says that he always stops to think of the direction of the discussions and supporting examples, or any piece of document important to the writing.

Researcher: What more did you learn from your class?

Student: I came to understand that writing an argumentative essay needs some advance organization; so I thought about the body and proper contents for my writing.

Researcher: Any particular example for your proper content in this writing sample?

Student: Yes, after completing the introduction, I stopped to think about the main body. There I found, for example, the supporting sentence concerning the reasons for the expansion of delinquencies as the topic of the essay. My EGAP class helped me increase my reliance on the explanations, reasons, and why of things very well.

8. *Efficient writing* (seven cases across three tasks, four disciplines, and the two languages). This category involved easy, fast, smooth writing of the tasks as a result of the learning in EGAP. R, RP, and SR made use of this transfer category. Chemistry, Psychology, English, and then Electrical Engineering also relied on the transfer of "efficient writing." English writings enjoyed six cases of this transfer as reported by the students, and Persian writings had just one case. The following is an example from a student of Chemistry who asserts his writing ability improved a lot due to the instructions received in the class:

Researcher: Overall, do you think your EGAP class affected your approaches to writing?

Student: Yes, of course. Before this class I usually digressed from one point to another and had a hard time finding the track to the end. Now, I first think about the topic and very easily put my thoughts together.

Researcher: Do you mean you can write more comfortably now?

Student: Oh, yes. I think I can finish the job more quickly and at the same time much better in terms of quality.

All in all, of these eight general learning elements, a total of 155 cases of transfer were reported to occur. As for the tasks, Reports (R) registered a record of 53 ranking first and Case Studies (CS) hit the frequency of 26 standing in the last position. In disciplines, it was English language (E) which gained 58, being first in rank, and Electrical engineering (EL) 19, standing last. Of the two languages, English witnessed more transfer of learning (126 cases) and Persian just 29, that is, about 19%.

On the whole, all the participants reported that they had transferred their learning from EGAP. Also, transfer was almost common across all the tasks, disciplines, and the two languages. Nevertheless, variations can easily be observed in the disciplines, tasks, and the two languages. For example, the discipline "English Language" enjoyed more of transfer compared with others. In the same way, the task of "Report" was more prone to transfer. Also, English writings made more use of transfer in comparison with Persian, probably because of the natural linguistic proximity between the instruction and instructional textbook and those tasks.

Targeted outcomes. Apart from the results obtained from interview transcripts above, the writing samples of the students were also analyzed for certain categories of targeted learning outcomes taught and practiced in the EGAP class. The same issues of discipline, task, and language were investigated in the light of the 10 targeted learning outcomes from the textbook (Appendix A). As stated before, students handed in 68 samples of writing both from EGAP class and their own courses where they were given the chance to write their assignments in English in addition to Persian. A total of 387 cases from the 10 learning outcomes were identified to have been transferred (Tables 3, 4, and 5). This total number includes all the three variables of task, discipline, and language, in each of which some variation was visible. To round up the overall findings, we can gather that the students have had the potential opportunity to use the learning outcomes each at least once in their samples, amounting to 10 for each sample and totaling 680 for the 68 samples analyzed. The overall obtained frequency (387) compared with the potential opportunity of 680 generates 57% and a mean frequency (*MF*) of 0.57 for all the 3 variables collectively considered.

Table 3 reveals the proportion of transfer used within the selected disciplines. The 10 targeted outcomes are variably and inconsistently scattered across the four investigated disciplines, with the "English Language" ranking first (*MF* = 7.1) and "Electrical Engineering" last (*MF* = 4.15) and the other two standing in between. As regard individual learning outcomes, the column highlighted under "Si," signifying use of similes/metaphors, unfolds the most marked variation, across the disciplines and also across the tasks and languages. The two disciplines of "Chemistry" and "Electrical Engineering" permit 0 and 1 case of transfer, respectively, while the other two, namely, "Psychology" and "English Language," show a multi-fold increase. This discovery probably originates in the differences between the disciplinary requirements for such an issue as simile or metaphor (Si), indicating that hard sciences unlike soft sciences may tend to concretize the events rather than metaphorizing them. Concerning the maximum observed transfer, the category "Tra" or "using temporal transitions" shows the highest rate (75), again with the first two hard sciences' representatives registering a rather lower number, and similarly "English Language" discipline highest. This finding may be accounted for through the fact that the English major classes are doubly directed and instructed to abide by the principles of writing. The English discipline also shows the highest use of the 10 targeted learning outcomes with the *MF* of 7.1. The differences of the learning outcomes are however found to be meaningfully distinct across the four studied disciplines.

Table 4 shows that the 10 targeted learning outcomes spread irregularly across the 4 categories of the tasks. "SR"

Table 4. Transfer Across Tasks.

Tasks	Samples no.	Targeted outcomes										Total	Mean F
		Vis	Sig	Na	Si	Fra	Tra	Se	Co	Fus	Pas		
1. R	23	17	15	13	7	9	27	9	20	12	18	147	6.3
2. RP	18	5	7	5	5	8	19	10	11	9	10	89	4.99
3. SR	15	6	2	2	1	10	21	7	17	9	10	85	5.66
4. CS	12	4	2	9	7	4	8	3	15	4	10	66	5.5
Total	68	32	26	29	20	31	75	29	63	34	48	387	5.69

Note. χ^2 = 7.3; *df* = 3; significance: .06; *p* = .05. Vis = Describing visually; Sig = Stating personal significance; Na = Narrating; Si = Using similes/metaphors; Fra = Framing; Tra = Using temporal transitions; Se = Using short sentences to draw reader's attention; Co = Avoiding missing commas after introductory time elements; Fus = Avoiding fused sentences; Pas = Using past perfect tense accurately; Tasks: R = Report; RP = Research Project; SR = Summary of Reading; CS = Case Study; Pas = Using past perfect tense accurately.

Table 5. Transfer Across Languages.

Language	Samples no.	Targeted outcomes										Total	Mean F
		Vis	Sig	Na	Si	Fra	Tra	Se	Co	Fus	Pas		
1. English	56	28	21	27	18	27	68	28	55	31	46	349	6.23
2. Persian	12	4	5	2	2	4	7	1	8	3	2	38	3.16
Total	68	32	26	29	20	31	75	29	63	34	48	387	

Note. χ^2 = 6.71; *df* = 1; significance: .000; *p* = .05. Vis = Describing visually; Sig = Stating personal significance; Na = Narrating; Si = Using similes/metaphors; Fra = Framing; Tra = Using temporal transitions; Se = Using short sentences to draw reader's attention; Co = Avoiding missing commas after introductory time elements; Fus = Avoiding fused sentences; Pas = Using past perfect tense accurately.

or summary of reading registers the lowest and highest frequency in regard to the least common and most common transfer categories of learning outcomes, namely, "Si" and "Co," respectively. Whether by accident or design, a possible explanation to this finding is that SR is very much bound by the confines of the text that is read and has to be re-delivered textually. It can be hypothesized that this particular task (SR), because heavily dependent on the already polished content, is thus removed from the imaginative nature of free writing and composing process (in using "Si"), the result being least metaphorical yet at the same time most observant of a mechanical feature (in using "Co"). This may have also arisen from the stylistic or rhetorical nature of special task types, which of course could hardly be verified here due to the holistic design of the study. Whatever the cause, this issue opens up a new rewarding area for further inquiry. Regarding the overall variations, it can be seen that "R" (Report) shows the highest *MF* (6.3) and the other 3 almost very close and around 5. The inferential analysis does not demonstrate a meaningful difference among the tasks.

The last point was whether the two languages of Persian and English differed in the transfer of the targeted learning outcomes. As can be seen, most of the learning outcomes have been transferred in the English language, nearly twice those in Persian (*MF* = 6.23). Also, of the two categories of "Si" and "Tra", representing least and most transferred outcomes, respectively, English language, compared with Persian, shows the highest rate of transfer. One reason for this may be the greater portion of writing samples written in English, though the *MF* also proves the same trend. Another more plausible explanation could be the textbook which was in English and also the instruction which was predominantly given in English. The English dominated medium of instruction may sensitize and thus bias the learners toward the English language as a purported carrier of such learning outcomes taught. It may be claimed that writing performances are strongly pinned down to some predetermined attributes and outcomes which have been attained in the classroom. Furthermore, it must be noted that learners' performances usually tend to find most congruity with the instructional materials especially in the case of language learning, where unlike content courses, negligible latitude is expected on the part of learners. The difference between the two languages, as can be clearly seen, proves meaningful.

And finally, comparison of the two broad sets of data from interview transcripts and writing samples show a high degree of conformity. Interestingly, the cases of transfer are identically represented in the two languages and also disciplines across interview transcripts and samples of writing. In both sets of data, English and Persian as two languages show distinct transfer trends with English accommodating 2 times more. Also, disciplines of English and electrical engineering portray the same image of transfer, the former maximum and latter minimum across the two sets of data. As for the tasks, the maximum transfer reveals a similar disposition, with "R" (Reports) coming first in both sets of data. The only

negligible inconsistency across tasks in the two sets of data concerns the minimal transfer occurring in "CS" for interview transcripts and "RP" for writing samples. Thus, the combined results from the two sets of data show a high agreement and illuminate the ubiquity of transfer across the disciplines, tasks, and languages, though variation is inevitable.

The above-reviewed results of this study reconfirm the significance of transfer to be addressed in EGAP or similarly in EAP classes as students always have to implement their learning beyond their immediate needs to some more practical areas of concern. As this study was partly related to the previous rather identical one by James (2010), a few comparative words are thus in order. In regard to the results obtained from interview-based transcriptions, the present study reveals a different general trend from that of James. The first and foremost point is that the participants in this study dwelled on the "vocabulary" as their first choice of transfer, while this is quite reversed and receives the least attention, thus appearing at the end in James's study. Similarly, and as a radical digression from James's study, the transfer of "syntactic rules" occurs as the second most important component in our study. Apart from the differences, the two studies, however, bear some resemblance. For example, the two transfer cases of "coherence" and "process" stand in the same positions, or also "efficiency" appears to be close to each other in the standing in the two studies, which may show that the participants in the two studies have found these two issues required in the same way. With respect to the transfer across tasks, the two studies seem to diverge widely, as our study reveals a comparatively more consistent tendency with the transfer components occurring across all the four tasks, excluding "efficiency" which has been transferred across three out of four. The across-task transfer for the James's study proves more varied, with "organizing" and "vocabulary" transferred across seven and one task out of seven, respectively. "Disciplines" in the two studies, though different and distinct, also enjoy the varied occurrences of transfer.

The two studies compared on the basis of the second set of data, that is, the samples of writing and targeted outcomes, bear general similarities, though the *tertium comparationis* is not absolutely identical because different tasks and disciplines have been used in the two studies. However, as for the disciplines, the two studies converge on the fact that the disciplines associated with humanities in general, as compared with natural or technical courses, seem to unfold in the same way. But, within the disciplines, the types of targeted outcomes are not similarly transferred. In the present study, the maximum number belongs to "transitions" and minimum to "similes, while this is quite different (min: "vis; sig; nar; sim" and max: "Fus"). As for the transfer across tasks, the two studies show almost the same trend, with all the tasks receiving such transfers though they are not exactly similar. The differences of the two studies point to the differences in the conditions, tasks, and disciplines and also participants and very likely their proficiency levels.

The findings here are in line with James's (2010), indicating that EGAP writing classes can result in the learning transfer, though the transfer of learning may not be uniform across different tasks and disciplines. Hyland (2002) also stated that such writing instruction confirms the view of literacy that maintains technical skills and rules are usable across any situation.

Another important result of this study is that the specific learning outcomes related to the language use and mechanics have been transferred most, especially as shown in the interview-based data above, which is a verification of the results obtained by James (2009) and a near contrast to the study of James (2010).

The results of the study further shed light on the fact that the observed consistency of transfer across tasks, as far as studied here, would not be an indication that the tasks can provide radically different conditions leading to sharp distinctions and demands for transfer variation. Thus, there may be some other factors at work to modify the conditions under which transfer may occur (Perkins & Salomon, 1994).

As an additional dimension of the present study, two languages of English and Persian revealed differences in the transfer from the EGAP course. English language tasks of writing showed twice more instances of transfer than the Persian tasks. Yet, the interesting point is that both languages made most use of "tran" as the targeted learning outcome. The results of inter-lingual analysis of transfer somewhat contradicts the idea that whatever thought developed by the writers can be expressed and regenerated elsewhere not necessarily tied to any special language (Berman, 1994). In other words, this study demonstrates that the participants are relatively less subject to transfer writing skills from L2 into L1 contexts than from L2 into L2 contexts. This finding may be accounted for by the students' unbalanced linguistic repertoires in the two languages, including vocabulary or grammar (Cummins, 1991), which requires further future inquiries. Also the differences of transfer in the two languages show that the second language learning contexts (e.g., James's study) differ from the conditions in a foreign language learning setting (this study) where students may look up to the foreign language instruction for their performance in the same language (L2) and thus distinguish their L1 skills from L2 in a more polarized manner. Of course, this new dimension of the L2-to-L1 transfer interface needs more substantiation before the results could be generalized or practically used.

Conclusion

As a fundamental topic in education in general and L2 contexts in particular, transfer of learning has been empirically under-investigated in the academic writing instruction (Wardle, 2007). This study is thus a response to the call for transfer-focused investigations directed toward the learning-specific components such as exact skills, strategies, languages, tasks, disciplines, or goals which are likely to affect transfer

(Nelms & Dively, 2007). In regard to EGAP writing instruction, the results of the present study contribute to the literature of and discussions around the issue, and in line with Wardle (2009), Spack (1997), and Bergmann and Zepernick (2007) reiterated the transferability of learning outcomes across different tasks, disciplines, L1 and L2. The findings further support Widdowson's (1984) suggestion that broad-based education such as the general ESL instruction can lead to transfer of learning while narrow training such as ESP instruction may fail to produce the same results. The same idea of local knowledge versus global knowledge and the transferability of the latter recommended by Perkins and Salomon (1988) is also corroborated by the findings of the study here. However, it must be noted that the variations observed across learning outcomes and also typologies of tasks, languages, and disciplines suggest that EGAP classes are not to be taken as a transcendental purveyor of skills, tackling the problems of any kind arising in any academic program. In the same vein, James (2010) asserted such investigations cannot meet all the global needs of writing for all the students.

As commonly accepted, the transfer of learning occurs as a function of different variables such as type of knowledge to be transferred, conditions under which to transfer, individuals' preferences for transfer, tasks, and so on, occurring at different rates and in different ways (Smit, 2004). To substantiate the idea and as a piece of evidence, James (2009) discovered that learning outcomes of "language use" are more likely to transfer than those related to "content or organization." Similarly, the findings of this research partly validate James's discovery, as it was also found in the present study that the most frequent category of transfer in interview data, namely, "vocabulary" was an example of language use. Nevertheless, the analysis of writing samples goes contrary, revealing "use of temporal transitions," an instance of "organization," as the most occurring transfer, which obviously stands in stark contrast with James's finding. This last point of contradiction brings up the important issue of conditions under which learning transfers. While L2 settings may call for students' special perception of task for the transfer to be achieved (James, 2010), L1 settings may demand students' motivation (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007) or also their emphasis on amount of writing practiced (Nelms & Dively, 2007). As an interplay between L1 and L2, we have also found that an English-medium EGAP tends to develop biased conditions for the direction of learning transfer as the results indicated the students' inclination toward carrying over their learning from EGAP to the writings in English rather than in Persian. In contrast to the above point, Berman (1994) believed that thoughts that are generated by writers can be expressed in different ways and that thoughts are not dependent on any particular language. He thus tries to associate the transfer of thoughts not to the language of instruction but to the proficiency that students develop in a particular language as well. Thus, he claims that transferability of writing skills requires a threshold of grammatical competence. The role of

proficiency brings up an important point and can encourage further studies on the inter-lingual transferability of writing skills. Still, one point worth attention is that in such a study a distinction must be made between the language-based elements of transfer and other conceptually driven skills in writing such as organization or planning, and so on. This is because not all different learning elements can be transferred universally. Moreover, we need to pay close attention to the direction of transfer as well, to see whether it is L1 which gives way to the transfer of learning more effectively or L2. Theoretically, it seems that Cummins's (1991) interdependence theory of L1–L2 in the context of writing can account for the variations of this direction. However, the differences of conditions and contexts such as a foreign language versus second language context and also limiting role of proficiency and writers' depth and breadth of world knowledge can be very important issues to consider.

Overall, the results suggest that EGAP classes be reoriented toward particular instructional goals focusing on the transfer of certain learning outcomes which are useful to the success of the prospective writers. The instructional goals may be geared toward those outcomes that are more likely to transfer under certain conditions. In this line of thinking, a number of scholars (James, 2010; Johns, 1999; Perkins & Salomon, 1988; Willingham, 2009) recommend modifications to instructional approaches used in EGAP with premium given to teaching-for-transfer techniques. The implementation of such techniques can most probably save students lots of time and energy in achieving the far-reaching and lifelong goals of education. It must be noted that the variability observed suggest that learners' cognitive capacity function flexibly and non-mathematically in response to different types of input. Consequently, we need to transform our classes into some milieus that accommodate learners' individual differences. To achieve this goal and actually that of moving away from teacher-controlled instruction to learner-directed learning, Mahdavi, Fazlollahtabar, Heidarzade, Mahdavi-Amiri, and Rooshan (2008) recommended "relinquishing much of control over planning and selection to learners" (p. 4604).

Limitations

Similar to any other study of descriptive nature, this study suffers from a number of shortcomings, which may confound the external validity of the results. As one important point, this study considered all the participants on a holistic basis while an intra-individual design could analyze individuals' behaviors separately and come up with some clearer picture of the differences and preferences. Also, the study focused on the transfer within a pre-established range of learning outcomes, whereas it could have taken into account peripheral learning transfer not already defined. The present study cannot categorically verify that all the transfers of learning possibly resulted from the writing course. To do this, a different design examining the pre-instruction status of students seems

necessary. For example, it is very likely that students' epistemological beliefs affect their learning and it would be quite illuminating to consider their beliefs a priori. Taking students' feedbacks on their performances, as it occurred in interviews here, can offer an alternative. Furthermore, this study stressed the frequency and amount of transfer while an analysis of transfer effect on the performance of students could make a very good choice of research. Another shortcoming stems from the short period of time, which seems not to fit the longitudinal nature of transfer. This study did not take into account the critical role of the learners' age or socio-cultural backgrounds, which could make a big difference if learners are in their growing years.

Also, the claims made here in relation to EGAP could have been more reliable if ESAP had also been investigated for the transferability of local versus global knowledge.

Appendix A

English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP)–based learning outcomes (James, 2010) analyzed in part two of data analysis (Writing Samples)

Targeted Outcomes: Definitions

1. Describing visually (Vis): People, places, or objects are described by naming observable features (e.g., parts) and/or providing details (e.g., size, number, composition, function).
2. Stating personal significance (Sig): Indication is made that the topic of the text is important to the writer.
3. Narrating (Na): Reference is made to people moving or gesturing.
4. Using similes/metaphors (Si): Simile (e.g., X is like Y) or metaphor (e.g., X is Y) is used.
5. Framing (Fra): There is repetition of a key noun from the beginning of the text at the end of the text.
6. Using temporal transitions (Tra): One or more of the specific temporal transitions listed in the course textbook (e.g., frequently, when, at first, subsequently) have been used.
7. Using short sentences to draw reader's attention (Se): Short sentences (eight or fewer words) are preceded by two or more longer sentences.
8. Avoiding missing comas after introductory time elements (Co): Time-related introductory elements in sentences are followed by commas.
9. Avoiding fused sentences (Fus): Independent clauses are separated by punctuation (e.g., comma) or conjunction.
10. Using past perfect verb tense accurately (Pas): When a verb is used in the past perfect tense, the form is accurate.

Appendix B

Interview questions used in part one of data analysis (There were also some different questions arising from the face-to-face conditions.)

Note: The following questions are asked to help me discover what you used in your writing from your EGAP course.

1. Would you please take a look back at your writing sentence by sentence?
2. Is there anything you used in your writing from the course (English for General Academic Purposes [EGAP]) you attended? (After each sentence was read.)
3. If yes, what is it you exactly learned in the writing course? Please show me.
4. Is there any in/direct contribution you relied on from your EGAP course? (As a final step after direct points [syntax, vocabulary, . . .] were located).

Appendix C

Horowitz's (1986) modified framework for task categorization

1. Summary of Reading (SR): Primary source of information is textual (oral or written) material assigned by the instructor
2. Report (R): Main source of information is an instructor specified experience, not a video, reading, or a lecture
3. Case Study (CS): The goal is to solve a problem, including concrete examples provided by the instructor
4. Research Project (RP): A substantial piece of research where a complex design and rigorous data collection are required

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