

WRITTEN LANGUAGE IS NOT SPEECH WRITTEN DOWN !

Many students as well as teachers see eye to eye on the fact that speaking is thought to be easier than writing which can sometimes be a painstaking and even mentally exhausting task since there are grammar and syntax rules to follow (which are at times not abided by in speech) as well as spelling rules (which is not an issue in speech). However, personally speaking, I think quite the contrary; that writing as an activity is creative and it has always sparked my attention. In fact, writing a composition is all about originality; letting our mind feel free for a moment, thinking about a certain topic, quickly jotting down the first thing that comes to our mind, and placing it in a well-formed sentence. I even remember my first writing assignment in elementary school – a one-page long story on the path of a french fry from a bag in the supermarket to the oven in the kitchen! We were told to put ourselves in the french fry's place (which each student gave a name to) and vividly describe his/her feelings! I had so many ideas about my french fry's path towards doom that when discussing them I would have had no problems, but when putting them down on paper I had to think long and hard about the chronological order and use of appropriate vocabulary (conjunctions). Consequently, there is one point that must be taken into consideration when writing – written language is not speech written down, except for cases when it is necessary to stay true to the direct words, to retain the originality of the text, such as in dialogues.

Writing down (or saying out loud) our innermost thoughts and feelings on a given topic serves as a means of expressing ourselves, whether we agree or disagree with the topic. It is generally considered that written language should be slightly more formal than spoken language. For example, in school or in an academic setting, essays or any other type of written schoolwork or homework should be written employing the neutral register (even the formal; depending on the topic) and writers must rely on the grammar and syntax rules of a language to a great extent. “You can’t learn to write unless you know what your language is made up of (sentences, phrases, clauses, participles, infinitives, etc. – they are just as simple to learn as gear shift and brake) – and what these parts of our language do (how they operate), and the rules we must observe when we try to get them all to work together. When we drive a car, we are interested in getting it started and having it take us quickly and safely where we want to go. When we write, we are trying to say something to somebody clearly, simply, and directly so that we can be immediately understood” (Flesch and Lass 1996: 156). In written compositions it is advised not to leave out words or phrases even if they can be understood from the context itself (as opposed to speaking). Word order and punctuation play a major role in writing, especially when employing relative clauses in the text. Writers should particularly be careful when putting a comma in these kinds of clauses, because carelessness leads to mistakes and misunderstanding of the actual meaning (as opposed to spoken English, which replaces the

commas with pauses). Furthermore, the lengthy process of thinking takes up most of our time when writing. In fact, the main difference between speaking and writing lies in the fact that we think while we speak, whereas we always think beforehand and then write. Flesch and Lass advise future writers to plan ahead, to map out beforehand the word-trip they are going to take (1996: 4). As a result of this, our written piece of work should represent a somewhat edited yet true to life image of our ideas, beliefs, thoughts and feelings which we strongly hold. As a warming activity to a writing assignment, students might go on another kind of trip; the teacher can give them instructions to be seated in a relaxed manner in their chairs, to close their eyes, and to go on a mental trip, i.e. they think of any place in the world they would rather be at that moment, and go into as much detail as they can thinking about the place and what exactly they are doing. Afterwards, they open their eyes and quickly jot down several key words of their 'trip' on paper. They can be told to retell their journey to a classmate, and then as a follow-up writing assignment in class they must place their many ideas in a certain order (with the guidance of the teacher) to get a well-structured paragraph. There is better organization of their flow of thoughts when writing.

On the one hand, speech is characterized with intonation, stress, speed and the occurrence of certain gestures and appropriate facial expressions, while fillers are mostly used when there is a brief pause and the speaker is preparing for the upcoming sentence. On the other hand, writing is distinguishable by its use of spelling, special punctuation

marks and capital letters when necessary. But writers should not feel despair whenever they misspell a word or two, because according to Flesch and Lass if people don't spell well, they shouldn't think they have an incurable disease, they can learn to spell better and in a shorter time than they think (1996: 245).

As a conclusion, it can be said that speaking and writing are equally worthy of attention. For our own good, it is advisable to study spoken and written language together, as one unit with distinguishing features. They both represent two distinct halves of language, which as Flesch and Lass state, is a muscle, and if one keeps using it, it remains firm and supple, but if it isn't used, then it soon becomes flabby and useless (1996: 157).

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References

Flesch, R, and A.H.Lass. 1996. *The Classic Guide To Better Writing*.

(New York: Harper Collins)