

“I Was Interested in Learning English but not Study It”: Two Case Studies of Saudi Arabian Developmental College Writers

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ABSTRACT

Given the importance of metacognition (i.e., learners’ knowledge of their cognitive processes) in L2 development, and because rhetorical grammar raises writers’ awareness of the connections between grammatical structures and their rhetorical purposes, this study is grounded in a dual theoretical approach: metacognitive rhetorical grammar. To examine the benefits of this approach for multilingual writers’ grammatical automaticity (i.e., ease of use), I conducted two case studies of Arabic L1 developmental English L2 writers in the United States to address two research questions: (1) How do multilinguals’ individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition? (2) When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing? This study employed textual analysis of participants’ Literacy History questionnaires, metacognitive exercises, and writing produced throughout the semester. The findings indicate that integrative motivation, when coupled with instrumental motivation, shaped metacognitive practices differently than instrumental motivation alone. Additionally, explicit instruction shows promise in facilitating the automatization of rhetorical grammar. Pedagogical implications are discussed.

Keywords: metacognition, rhetorical grammar, automaticity, individual differences, developmental L2 writing, motivation

Literature Review

As a multilingual writing instructor of multilingual students, I often feel conflicted about grammar instruction in the classroom. I suspect that many instructors who teach multilingual writers face a similar dilemma: on one hand, students identify the necessity of grammar instruction, requesting instructor feedback on their grammatical concerns; on the other hand, explicit grammar instruction and feedback are not automatically internalized or transferred to students’ future writing. As instructors, we often wonder how multilingual students’ might intuitively and fluently integrate grammar instruction into their writing. Despite broad consensus that L2 implicit knowledge develops acquisition (Rebuschat, 2015, p. xvi), defined as “intuitive,” “automatic,” and “not verbalizable” (Ellis, 2008, p. 418; Dalili, 2013, p. 3), there is no consensus on how such knowledge is achieved (Rebuschat, 2015, p. xvi) or the role of explicit “conscious” and “verbalizable” knowledge (Ellis, 2008, p. 418; Dalili, 2013, p. 3–4). There is further disagreement concerning the role that explicit knowledge plays in L2 performance automaticity (Pawlak, 2021), referring to “the speed and ease with which we carry out... tasks” (DeKeyser, 2001, p. 125). For example, Krashen (1981) advances the non-interface position, which denies any role for explicit knowledge in spontaneous L2 performance (Rebuschat, 2015) and argues that explicit L2 knowledge cannot be transformed into implicit L2 knowledge. Pedagogically, the non-interface position promotes a focus-on-meaning approach that discourages attention to form-based instruction, prioritizing fluency over accuracy (Dalili, 2013, p. 7). However, this position has been heavily criticized by proponents of both the strong and weak interface positions, who argue that explicit rule presentation and form-focused instruction support L2 grammar acquisition (Dalili,

2013, p. 10). The strong interface position holds that L2 learners must explicitly and consciously learn rules through instruction and error correction, and that repeated practice converts explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge (Dalili, 2013, p. 11). Continued exposure to rules through instruction supports automatization, transforming learners' knowledge of *what* to knowledge of *how* in L2 performance (Dalili, 2013, p. 12). In other words, automatization occurs gradually through prolonged, systematic practice, with repeated retrieval and deployment of L2 knowledge supporting the transition from explicit to implicit use (DeKeyser, 2003, 2007; Williams, 2012). Pedagogically, L2 instructors holding the strong interface position use a focus-on-form approach, which is critiqued for its emphasis on grammar drilling rather than "meaningful learning" (Dalili, 2013, p. 13).

Conversely, the weak interface position argues that converting explicit to implicit knowledge results from rule presentation, taught structures, and "gap noticing" (Dalili, 2013, p. 11-14), in which students detect discrepancies between the input they receive and their own output (Ellis, 1997). Thus, automatization occurs when learners' explicit knowledge of the *what* transforms into implicit knowledge through formal instruction, and subsequently the *how* through language use (Dalili, 2013, p. 14). Pedagogically, weak interface advocates promote a focus-on-form approach, drawing learners' attention to specific linguistic forms within communicative, meaning-based instruction, where repeated exposure allows learners to induce and internalize L2 rules as patterns in the input (Dalili, 2013, p. 16). A comprehensive review of the evidence favoring the weak interface over the non-interface and strong interface positions is beyond the scope of this article. I ground my pedagogical approach in the weak interface position given the evidence favoring it over the non-interface and strong interface positions (see Dalili, 2013). Nevertheless, my students' "inert" knowledge (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; 2015), or inability to apply explicitly taught L2 grammar rules during communication, remains challenging. I wondered whether IDs, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, affect how students exploit the learning potential of a written task.

Learners' (IDs) in cognitive and motivational factors play an important role in L2 learning. Gardner's motivation theory, for example, distinguishes between integrative motivation – affective, interpersonal, and tied to positive attitudes toward the L2 community – and instrumental motivation – practical, utilitarian, and linked to concrete benefits (as cited in Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 75–76). Furthermore, learners with clear goals, intrinsic interest, and positive self-efficacy are more likely to notice gaps in their knowledge and engage in problem-solving that promotes language acquisition, whereas those lacking motivation may complete tasks without deeper cognitive engagement (Kormos, 2012, p. 399). Learners' perceptions of past experiences shape their future actions, and their self-perceptions inform their motivation (Guan et al., 2024, p. 4). Self-efficacy and self-concept are precursors for learners' motivation. Self-efficacy refers to learners' perceptions of their ability to perform a task and is future oriented. Self-concept refers to learners' perceptions of their self-worth based on past learning experiences; it is retrospective (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Kormos, 2012). As precursors for learners' motivation, self-efficacy and self-concept determine the extent to which L2 learners exploit a writing task to create opportunities to learn L2. Thus, L2 acquisition requires increased intrinsic motivation and a future-oriented, positive belief in one's ability to perform tasks. However, "very few studies...have considered the extent to which

motivational factors influence how students exploit the learning potential of ... written communication tasks" (Kormos, 2012, p. 400). Even with this gap, I was unconvinced that students' lack of motivation was the only factor preventing them from engaging cognitively and applying the rules in the written tasks and, thus, considered other grammar learning strategies (GLS).

The GLS domain examines the "deliberate thoughts and actions that students consciously [employ] for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structures" (Cohen & Pinilla-Herrera, 2010, p. 64). Learners intentionally choose and apply these strategies in specific contexts to develop self-directed, autonomous L2 grammar, enhancing both immediate task performance and long-term learning outcomes (Oxford, 2017, p. 244). One prominent strategy is metacognition, defined as "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products, or anything related to them" (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). More specifically, metacognition is "knowledge of cognitive tactics," "procedural knowledge to enact [those tactics]," "conditional knowledge about occasions to enact [those tactics]," and "knowledge of task parameters and self-parameters" (Winne & Perry, 2000, as cited in Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 164), which fosters intentionality and perseverance in learners. Additional factors such as language proficiency and bilingualism influence metacognition; L2 learners with high proficiency use more metacognitive strategies than their low proficiency counterparts, and bilinguals use more metacognitive strategies compared to monolinguals (Raoofi et al., 2014). Thus, creating opportunities for multilingual students to implement metacognitive strategies is beneficial. Though metacognition typically predicts L2 performance (Raoofi et al., 2014), most scholarship has focused on reading and speaking performance, rather than writing. While Schoonen et al. (2011) examined the relationship between metacognition and writing, they did not address grammar specifically. Moreover, how metacognitive processes support the automatization of grammatical rules remains unknown.

When a learner is aware of the cognitive tactics of using structures for rhetorical purposes (i.e., rhetorical grammar), ways of applying those structures, and the conditions that deem those structures effective, that learner is engaging in metacognitive knowledge. In other words, rhetorical grammar instruction offers students opportunities for metacognition as they deliberately consider (and apply) grammatical structures, with effective communication in mind. Furthermore, rhetorical grammar helps writers effectively communicate their intended meaning, raises their awareness of the intended audience and of the connections between form and meaning, and "encourages students to experiment with language" (Micciche, 2004, p. 722). Scholars advocate for using rhetorical grammar to raise writers' awareness of the connections between grammatical structures and meaning in relation to audience and purpose (Kolln & Gray, 2013; Micciche, 2004). Similarly, a creative writing scholar employs rhetorical grammar in workshops to help writers recognize the "tools" available for finding focus, controlling emphasis, and making meaning in their sentences (Salvatore, 2021, p. 91).

Despite all these benefits of rhetorical grammar, particularly its basis in metacognitive knowledge, rhetorical grammar is not widely used in multilingual writing classes. Nevertheless, it served in my

classroom as the core focus of my multilingual instruction, raising the question of how best to implement it. I ultimately paired explicit rhetorical grammar instruction with metacognitive activities, guided by research suggesting that explicit instruction can influence unconscious L2 knowledge, thereby accelerating and enhancing acquisition (Marsden & Slabakova, 2018, p. 154).

Despite the metacognitive essence of rhetorical grammar, no scholarship has examined how or whether rhetorical grammar supports the automatization of rules in English L2 learners' writing. Therefore, I wanted to understand whether explicitly teaching rhetorical grammar sufficiently supports the automatization of rules in English L2 learners' writing. Furthermore, I wanted to evaluate the benefits of engaging students in *additional* metacognitive tasks, and the extent to which their IDs affect how they capitalize on those tasks.

Thus, my research questions were:

1. How do multilinguals' individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition?
2. When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing?

To answer these questions, this study examined a pedagogical intervention in an English L2 developmental writing course I taught in Fall 2019 in the U.S., focusing on two critical instance case studies (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010) of the Arabic L1 learners from the MENA region.

Method and Methodology

Institutional and Pedagogical Context of the Study

Thomas Jefferson University (TJU) is a four-year private university located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with a sizeable international student population. According to the International Admissions office, the university attracts students from the MENA region, including Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. At the time of participant recruitment, students were awarded the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) scholarship.¹

Participants were recruited from an Introduction to Academic Writing course for English L2 writers at the developmental level at TJU. The course has no prerequisites and introduces international and

¹ was valid during the recruitment of students for this study. Due to the recent termination of the program, the Saudi Arabian student population has drastically declined. The International Admissions office added that SACM was replaced with a more rigorous program called The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program, which is "geared to sending students to the top 125 ranked U.S. universities. As Jefferson is not ranked in the top 125, we do not qualify" (S. Iseminger, personal communication, October 21st, 2025). In its efforts to attract international students, the university is "under contract with INTO University Partnerships which does have a recruitment agent network in the [MENA] region" (S. Iseminger, personal communication, October 21st, 2025).

multilingual students to academic writing. The class consisted exclusively of multilingual students and met twice a week for 2.5 hours over a 15-week semester.

The pedagogical approach I independently piloted in this course drew on Oxford et al.'s (2007) explicit deductive L2 learning framework, in which learners focus on the grammatical structures being taught in relation to their rhetorical purpose and challenge themselves to employ those structures in their own writing (p. 127-129). I used rhetorical grammar, metacognitive activities, and both directive and facilitative feedback to increase L2 writers' syntactic complexity and promote grammatical automatization.

The course textbook was Kolln and Gray (2013)'s *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects*. In line with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, I explicitly taught rules so that learners noticed the L2 grammatical structures. For example, students read short sections, located the rules, and verbally articulated their rhetorical value to hopefully, use the rules in their subsequent writing.

I assigned four essays: (1) a Reflective Narrative examining students' experiences as writers in their L1 or L2; (2) an Extended Definition in which students explained a term from their L1 to a monolingual English speaker; (3) a Reflection on Genre Translation, in which students selected a genre text they composed in their L1, adapted its conventions for an American audience, and then composed an essay reflecting on how audience awareness shaped their writing; and (4) a Comparative Genre Analysis wherein students compared and contrasted the conventions of a genre in their L1 context with its counterpart in an L2 context (see Appendix B for prompts).

To add another metacognitive component, I asked students to write a cover letter (CL) for each of the four projects. These CLs asked students to identify two newly acquired rules, articulate their understanding of those rules to self-evaluate their comprehension, and create opportunities in their writing where applying the rules would help them communicate their intended meaning. I encouraged them to use the textbook for rule retrieval. Having learners engage in metacognitive strategies allowed them to "look[] for opportunities to practice grammar structures" (Pawlak, 2018, p. 360). Thus, learners reflected on both their explicit (deductive) knowledge (as they showed their understanding of the rules in the CLs) and implicit knowledge of grammar (as they produced said rules in their writing). I designed these metacognitive activities to tackle learners' fears of making mistakes.

The Study²

The data included two critical instance case studies of the only two Arabic L1 Saudi Arabian students enrolled in the course: Fatima and Khaled (pseudonyms). This approach involves "examining a

² I received approval for my study (project #7610) from Thomas Jefferson University's Institutional Review Board and data collection took place in Fall 2019.

situation of unique interest with little to no interest in generalizability” (Becker et al., 1994–2023) and responds to calls to move away from quantitative, generalizable descriptions of language learning strategies (LLS) and toward qualitative methods that better capture contextual richness and variability (Woodrow, 2008). Furthermore, this approach allowed me to shift the focus away from theoretical generalization and instead foreground the questions that emerged during data analysis, as well as those that point toward future research. Although focusing exclusively on Saudi Arabian learners limits generalizability to other populations, it reduced variability related to learners’ L1 backgrounds, such as the influence of different first languages on L2 performance. Moreover, my understanding of Arabic and shared background as an L1 with the participants was advantageous in my role as the primary investigator and data analyst since it enabled me to draw on my understanding of the language and its structure.

This exploratory study does not reduce Saudi Arabian students to a fixed set of IDs or make generalizable claims. Instead, it identified traits that emerged from the data and situated them within the specific group of learners and instructional context in which they were observed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since I was the principal investigator and class instructor, the consent form made it clear that participation was not mandatory, and signed forms remained in a sealed envelope until after final course grades were posted. To achieve interrater reliability, a research assistant, Shreya Shah, and I read and analyzed the data³. Shreya was trained to 1) understand the rhetorical rules taught and 2) conduct textual analysis to trace said rules and calculate their frequency for both case studies. Over one semester, I met with Shreya every two weeks for 75 minutes per session to compare the results of the data analysis and reach consensus, ensuring that all rule application instances were accounted for.

How Research Questions Were Addressed

RQ1: How do multilinguals’ individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition?

To address this question, I examined participants’ stated motivations for learning English and their persistence in applying the grammatical structures identified in their CLs. First, I analyzed participants’ responses on the Literacy History questionnaire (Appendix A) that they completed earlier in the semester to identify IDs, including stated motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept.

I then calculated the normed frequencies of rule application after metacognitive reflection across the four essays using the equation:

³ The Honors Institute at TJU offers full-time faculty the opportunity to mentor students under the Honors Research Assistant Program, whose goal is to provide honors students the opportunity to learn from faculty engaged in academic research.

$$\text{Normed frequency} = \frac{\text{Raw frequency}}{\text{Text length}} \times 1000$$

where 1000 words is the standard reference length.

These normed frequencies elucidated whether automaticity of explicitly taught rhetorical grammar structures occurred (and persisted) post-metacognition in the CLs. Specifically, I distinguished between rules applied only in the corresponding essay, indicating momentary use, and rules consistently applied across essays, suggesting automatization and integration into the student's rhetorical repertoire. Line-by-line textual analysis located each instance of applied rhetorical rules and traced them back to the rules articulated in the CLs.

RQ2: When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing?

To assess automaticity, the speed and ease of rule application, I calculated the normed frequency of each applied rule, including those not identified in the CLs. This allowed me to distinguish between rules applied with articulation in the corresponding CL and rules applied without prior articulation. The latter suggests that metacognition was not essential for automatization, pointing instead to other factors such as learners' proficiency levels or prior knowledge.

Findings

Analysis of the First Case Study⁴

Literacy History

In her responses to the Literacy History questionnaire (Appendix A), Fatima provided her TOEFL and IELTS scores.⁵ She indicated that before being admitted to TJU, she attended an English Language Institute (ELI) for four months, which offered six levels. She placed at level 3. After completing the ELI, she took the IELTS multiple times before ultimately achieving a score of 7 overall (6 on the writing section). She also took the TOEFL iBT, scoring 78 overall (19 on the writing section). Upon admission, she completed a placement test, which assigned her to my class.

Table 1 describes the IDs that emerged from Fatima's Literacy History: self-concept, self-efficacy, and instrumental motivation.

⁴ Access to the complete dataset of both case studies is available on IRIS upon request

⁵ International students must score at least 79 on the TOEFL iBT or 6.5 on the IELTS for admission

Table 1. IDs and Evidence of IDs in the Literacy History of First Case Study

Individual Differences	Evidence of IDs
Self-concept	<p>“Because English courses in our schools, in my opinion, were not advance and good as they should be, I did not have that much of experience.”</p> <p>“The shock that I faced in the university because of the English made me to really think to master this language. So here I am.”</p> <p>“The summary writing [is the most difficult] because I should restate a good piece of writing by using my own words. I also feel I can not”</p>
Self-efficacy	<p>“I am more familiar with formal writing due to the type of schools I went to. I have been writing in formal about a year and a half”</p> <p>“I started learning English when I was 19 years old—when I attended the university”</p> <p>“Nevertheless, after high school, my journey have started”</p> <p>“...really think to master this language. So here I am.”</p> <p>“...; however, the real start for me in learning the English language was when I came to the United States—one years and a half ago”</p> <p>“And since I came here, I am still working on improving my writing. I am seeing my development. From a person who just knew how to write her name to one who learned to write a whole 4 pages in English”</p>
Instrumental motivation	<p>“If you speak English in Saudi Arabia, that adds a lot to your CV. Also, my future job require learning English so that I can communicate with others over</p>

CLs and Corresponding Essays

Fatima’s first CL showed not only her awareness of the rhetorical purposes of the rules, but also her clear rationales for choosing the rules. She incorporated the two rules, “show, don’t tell” strategy and short sentences, accurately in the corresponding essay, with normed frequency of 5.2 and 1.3, respectively.

Other rules that Fatima applied in the first essay without acknowledging in the corresponding CL included: complex sentences (14.4), compound sentences (10.4), conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (10.4), and time frame shifts (6.2).

Fatima’s second CL identified the em-dash and semicolon as the rules she incorporated in the corresponding essay. She incorporated both rules, each at a 2.6 normed frequency. She indicated

using the semicolon "to show the logical connection between two independent sentences," and she also used the semicolon in a sentence using "however" as a conjunctive adverb.

The rules that Fatima applied in her second essay without acknowledging them in the corresponding CL were: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (17.1), parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (7.9), time frame shifts (6.6), and compound sentences (6.6).

Fatima's third CL identified three rules: there-transformation, parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses, and the "both...and" correlative conjunction. In the corresponding essay, she used there-transformation at a normed frequency of 3.6, parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses at 5.4, and the "both...and" correlative conjunction at 1.8. Fatima's use of there-transformation reflects both an understanding of the structure and its rhetorical purpose. Fatima's use of parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses was also accurate; in the CL, she clearly identified the rhetorical purpose of the two commas: to emphasize "the additional comment." Finally, the "both...and" correlative conjunction was applied accurately, and its rhetorical purpose was correctly articulated in the CL.

The most prominent rules that Fatima applied in her third essay without acknowledging in the corresponding CL were the time frame shifts rule (normed frequency of 18.0), complex sentences (12.6), and conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (12.6).

Fatima's fourth CL articulated two rules: the colon to create a list, and the known-new contract "to strengthen the cohesion among the sentences." She applied the colon and the known-new contract at 1.1 normed frequency. Neither the colon nor the known-new contract rule was applied in any of the previous essays.

Other rules that were applied in the fourth essay without being acknowledged in the corresponding CL included: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (21.3), the passive voice (11.2), and parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (8.9).

Analysis of the Second Case Study⁶

Literacy History

In his responses to the Literacy History questionnaire (Appendix A), Khaled provided his TOEFL and IELTS scores.⁷ About a year before the study, Khaled took the IELTS twice, scoring 5.5 on both attempts. Realizing that most U.S. universities require a score of 6 or higher for admission, he enrolled in an English Language School (ELS) which offered twelve levels, typically completed at one level per month. Placing at level 4, he spent eight months completing the program. After finishing

⁶ Access to the complete dataset of both case studies will be available on IRIS upon request

⁷ International students must score at least 79 on the TOEFL iBT or 6.5 on the IELTS for admission

level 12, he submitted his graduation certificate to TJU, which required him to take a placement test; the results placed him in my class.

Table 2 demonstrates the IDs that emerged from Khaled’s Literacy History: self-concept, self-efficacy, integrative motivation, and instrumental motivation.

Table 2. IDs and Evidence of IDs in the Literacy History of Second Case Study

Individual Differences (IDs)	Evidence of IDs
Self-concept	<p>“Before I came to America, my English was so bad.”</p> <p>“I remember when I was in ELS, we wrote an problem solution essay. Problem solution essay is one of the most difficult essays I have ever wrote. Because first you have to find a problem. Then you need to find a solution. After that, you have to object their solution. I remember I got a bad grade on this writing”</p> <p>“In ELS, there are many kinds of essays. For example, classification essay, problem solution essay, and other kinds that I don’t remember. However, we had never done informal essay”</p>
Self-efficacy	<p>“I started studying English in a English school. I have spent 9 months studying there. I graduated from ELS on 19th of August”</p> <p>“Once I had the chance to study in America, I accepted it without thinking”</p>
Integrative motivation	<p>“Speaking of studying English, I’ve been studying English for 2 years. However, I was watching English movies since I was a child. So, I was interested in learning English but not study it”</p>
Instrumental motivation	<p>“One of my dreams is to graduate from America. So, the main reason I’m learning English is to graduate”</p> <p>“Once I had the chance to study in America, I accepted it without thinking”</p>

CLs and Corresponding Essays

Khaled’s first CL identified “show, don’t tell” and time frame shifts as the rhetorical rules used. He clearly explained the rules, and stated that “show, don’t tell” made his writing “more interesting” and allowed him to “increase the length of [his] essay.” He added that time frame shifts allowed him to distinguish past events from facts. In the corresponding essay, he applied “show, don’t tell” at a normed frequency of 2.7 and time frame shifts at 8.1.

Other rules that Khaled applied in the first essay without acknowledging them included: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (12.1), complex sentences (10.8), and compound sentences (5.4).

In the second CL, Khaled reflected that he "used some rules in [his] first draft without thinking about it. It was kind of neutral [natural] thing." Those rules included the following: compound sentences (7.3), the colon (6.1), and ordering a series (1.2). His rationale for the "ordering a series" rule, was, "'the far it's [it is] the less important it's [it is]," which is the opposite of what this rule does—indicate an increase in importance. In this CL, Khaled also added two newly applied rules: correlative conjunctions (e.g., not only...but also) at 3.7 normed frequency and versatile verbs at 1.2. Although the 'not only...but also' structure was not used: "Not all the people respect mothers because of the culture, some people respect them because of the religion," his rationale was accurate: "to emphasize the rule [role] of religion." As for versatile verbs, he changed 'get' to 'obtain,' stating that the latter "is more meaningful" and that he changed "the basic verbs that I used to verbs that have more meaning. In other words, I used more academic words." However, the corresponding essay presented no additional versatile verbs.

Khaled also applied rules that were not acknowledged in the corresponding CL, the most frequent of which were conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (14.7), the passive voice (8.6), and complex sentences (4.9).

Again, Khaled's third CL identified not only rhetorical rules that he was implementing for the first time but also rules from earlier CLs that he found himself continuing to use. The rules that he was implementing for the first time were power words and known-new contract. His rationale for implementing power words was to stress the adverb and the verb, and his rationale for the known-new contract was to add cohesion between his sentences—a struggle area for him. His rationales in this CL were accurate. In the third essay, he used power words and known-new contract rules, each at 3.7 normed frequency.

The rules that he found himself continuing to use from earlier CLs were compound sentences (9.4), parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (3.7), and ordering a series (1.9). Two of these rules, compound sentences and ordering a series, were articulated in the second CL as rules that come to him naturally.

Khaled's fourth CL identified two rules: the known-new contract and the correlative conjunction (not only...but also) rule. These two rules were not new to Khaled: He identified the known-new contract in the third CL and the correlative conjunctions in the second. His rationale for implementing the known-new contract was to create logical connections between sentences, and using correlative conjunctions was to emphasize the words after "but also." Both rationales were accurate. He used the known-new contract at 4.0 normed frequency and the correlative conjunction at 1.3.

Like in the second and third CLs, Khaled listed rules that he “use[s] without thinking:” compound sentences (4.0), parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses (2.7), and ordering a series (4.0). He explained, “they have become a part of my writing.” Those were the same rules he identified as rules he was now using naturally.

The rules used but not mentioned in this CL included: conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases (29.2), complex sentences (12.0), and power words (10.6). Out of these three rules, power words were mentioned in his third CL.

Discussion

RQ1: How do multilinguals’ individual differences, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and self-concept, shape their engagement with metacognition?

Both Fatima and Khaled showed three trends in their use of rhetorical rules: 1) present pre-metacognition and maintained post-metacognition, 2) consistently continued post-metacognition, and 3) used only during metacognition (see Table 3). What distinguished Khaled’s engagement with metacognition from Fatima’s was his persistence in reiterating rules (namely, compound sentences, ordering a series, known-new contract, and parentheticals as non-defining relative clauses) in his CLs and applying them, as he claimed, naturally. That persistence is reflected in the total number of shaded cells in Table 3 (17 cells to Fatima’s 9). Possible interpretations include that the rhetorical value of these rules was clearer to him, that they better aligned with his needs, or that their subjective difficulty matched his competence level.

Table 3. Normed Frequencies of Rule Application of Both Case Studies & Points of Metacognitive Engagement (Shaded Cells)

	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4
Fatima				
Show, don’t tell	5.2	0	0	0
Short sentences	1.3	2.6	0	0
Em dash	0	2.6	0	2.2
Semicolon	0	2.6	0	1.1
Parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses	5.2	7.9	5.4	8.9
There-transformation	0	0	3.6	3.4
Correlative conjunctions	1.3	2.6	1.8	3.4
Colon	0	0	0	1.1
Known-new contract	0	0	0	1.1

Khaled				
Show, don't tell	2.7	0	0	0
Time frame shifts	8.1	4.9	7.5	2.7
Compound sentences	5.4	7.3	9.4	4.0
Colon	0	6.1	0	0
Ordering a series	0	1.2	1.9	4.0
Correlative conjunctions	1.3	3.7	0	1.3
Versatile verbs	0	1.2	1.9	0
Power words	0	0	3.7	10.6
Known-new contract	0	0	3.7	4.0
Parentheticals as nondefining relative clauses	0	1.2	3.7	2.7

However, this difference in metacognition may also be linked to IDs. Both Fatima and Khaled demonstrated pursuit of competence in their Literacy Histories and shared several IDs: self-concept, self-efficacy, and instrumental motivation. Self-concept appeared in Fatima's disappointment with past literacy resources and in Khaled's frustration with a low grade, while self-efficacy was evident in both learners' pride in their rapid language acquisition. However, one ID distinguished Khaled: integrative motivation. Khaled's integrative motivation manifested in his desire to "learn English but not study it." These observations suggest that integrative motivation may influence multilinguals' engagement with metacognition more strongly than instrumental motivation.

The pursuit of competence is evident in both Fatima's and Khaled's Literacy Histories, and their experiences also illustrate principles of attribution theory. Attribution theory helps explain their motivation by linking past experiences to the dispositions that shape future actions – that is, how they interpreted prior experiences influenced their subsequent engagement with learning (Weiner, 2010, as cited in Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Both self-efficacy and self-concept serve as precursors to their motivation to learn English. For instance, positive self-efficacy was reflected in Khaled's pride in recalling the exact date he graduated from the ELS, and in Fatima's attribution of her familiarity with formal writing to the high quality of schools she attended. Some negative self-concept, by contrast, appeared in Khaled's lingering frustration over a poor grade on a problem-solution essay and in Fatima's doubt in her ability to paraphrase a strong text. Motivational factors shape how L2 learners engage with and learn from writing (Kormos, 2012, p. 390). In this study, Khaled's integrative motivation may have accounted for his persistence in applying and reiterating rhetorical rules post-metacognition, distinguishing his engagement from Fatima's.

RQ2: When multilinguals are not capitalizing on metacognitive opportunities, can explicit grammar instruction facilitate the automatization of rhetorical grammar in their writing?

Both Fatima and Khaled implemented rules consistently—even when they did not capitalize on metacognitive opportunities altogether. Such consistent rule application (see Table 4) provided

evidence of rule automatization by both learners, who were determined to apply rules they were explicitly taught.

Table 4. The Normed Frequencies of the Rhetorical Rules that Fatima and Khaled Did Not Engage with Metacognitively, but Implemented Consistently

	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4
Fatima				
Complex sentences	14.4	5.3	12.6	4.5
Compound sentences	10.4	6.6	3.6	2.2
Time-frame shifts	6.5	6.6	18.0	6.7
Conjunctive adverbs and transitions	10.4	17.1	12.6	21.3
Passive voice	1.3	2.6	1.8	11.2
Khaled				
Complex sentences	10.8	4.9	7.5	12.0
Conjunctive adverbs and transitions	12.1	14.7	16.9	29.2
Passive voice	1.3	8.6	9.4	5.3

The fact that neither of them referred to those rules in any of the CLs might imply that metacognition does not play a significant role in multilinguals' automatization of rhetorical grammar rules (or at least these two learners). In this sense, explicit instruction leads to rule automaticity, even without metacognition. However, explicit instruction relies on other factors to be efficient. Various levels of grammar rule complexity demand various levels of explicit teaching (DeKeyser, 2003). DeKeyser defines rule difficulty as "the ratio of the rule's inherent linguistic complexity to the student's ability to handle such rule." For example, a rule with an intermediate complexity might be easy for a learner with high language aptitude. For a learner with higher aptitude, instruction may function primarily to accelerate the learning of a rule rather than to initiate learning that would not otherwise occur. By contrast, for a learner with lower aptitude, instruction may not immediately result in acquisition but instead serves to draw attention to form, with the expectation that acquisition may emerge through continued exposure. Consequently, "for one and the same rule, the goal as well as the degree of effectiveness of explicit instruction will vary depending on the *subjective difficulty* of the rule" (2003, p. 331-2). In this case, Fatima's and Khaled's levels of competency could have impacted the effectiveness of explicit instruction. For example, the subjective difficulty of a rule for each of those two learners likely shaped the effectiveness of explicit instruction and both learners' rule automatization. Alternatively, if those rules were part of these learners' prior knowledge (which would disqualify those rules from being included in the CLs), explicit instruction could have helped learners notice the rules, which is vital for L2 acquisition and development.

Conclusions and Implications

The strength of critical instance case studies lies in their capacity to illuminate patterns and insights within a specific context, allowing researchers to explore emergent questions and identify directions for future research. The results of this study suggest that instrumental motivation is most effective when paired with integrative motivation, rather than when it presents alone. However, this raises the question: what happens when a learner lacks motivation? The findings indicate that explicit instruction of rhetorical grammar supports rule noticing and automaticity, as learners consistently and determinedly applied the rules. Yet neither learner took advantage of opportunities to reflect metacognitively on those rules, even when prompted. This leads to further questions about what distinguishes instances when learners engage with metacognition from those when they do not. Possible factors include the structure of the metacognitive task, such as limiting learners to two rules, or not excluding rules already familiar to learners. Whatever the cause, these findings highlight the need for further research into what drives learners' decisions to engage—or not engage—with metacognitive reflection in the context of rhetorical grammar instruction.

Additionally, this study has clear pedagogical implications. As Larsen-Freeman (2015, p. 274) noted, one of the most important contributions of research is to challenge teachers to think differently, experiment with new practices, and make the tacit explicit. This study challenges L2 writing instructors to reconsider the role of explicit grammar instruction in promoting rule automaticity and encourages them to experiment with rhetorical grammar. Rhetorical grammar, by its nature, fosters metacognition and aligns with Micciche's (2004, p. 722) argument that it raises writers' awareness of audience and the ways form conveys meaning, while inviting students to experiment in their writing. Creating opportunities for learners to notice and reflect on language rules is essential: as DeKeyser (2003, p. 317) observed, there is little evidence of learning without awareness. Assigning CLs offers learners a structured way to exercise metacognition, identify gaps in their knowledge, and apply grammar rules rhetorically in context. This study also underscores the importance of harnessing multilingual learners' metacognitive abilities. Finally, understanding learners' motivations is crucial. Tools such as a Literacy History questionnaire (see Appendix A) allow students to share their language learning experiences and inform pedagogical decisions, recognizing that motivations to learn English in, for example, North America, may differ significantly from those in the MENA region.

L2 instructors, whether in North America or the MENA region, can leverage metacognitive rhetorical grammar as a pedagogical approach to enhance students' writing. Rhetorical grammar functions as a bridge connecting audience awareness, rhetorical purpose, and stylistic choices, emphasizing that these choices do not occur in isolation. By incorporating metacognitive activities, instructors provide learners with opportunities to identify both their existing knowledge and the gaps in their understanding. Over time, integratively motivated L2 learners may internalize these rules to the point that their application becomes automatic, as evidenced by Khaled's experience. Of course, integrative motivation cannot be directly taught or instilled through instruction. The

ongoing challenge for educators remains: How can we effectively motivate students to learn, regardless of the subject? Instructors can at minimum recognize and support integrative motivation in their students, building on it to foster deeper engagement and sustained learning.

Future Research

Despite the exploratory nature of this study, it offers valuable insights into the role of metacognition in L2 writing, highlighting a promising area for future research. It would be particularly illuminating to replicate this study in the MENA context to investigate factors that influence learners' automaticity of rhetorical grammar rules. For instance, how might the findings differ if the study were conducted on a larger scale? What role does genre play in the development of rule automatization? How might metacognitive reading exercises support the acquisition of rhetorical grammar? While the findings are not intended to be generalizable, the pedagogical value of integrating metacognitive rhetorical grammar is clear: it provides English L2 writers with opportunities to take risks, experiment with language, and develop greater control over its rhetorical possibilities.

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Appendix A

Literacy History Questionnaire

1. What are your experiences as a multilingual learner of English, such as your English language background and the age (or grade) you started learning English?
3. Before coming to this class, what types of formal or informal writing were you most used to or familiar with? For how long have you been doing this kind of writing?
2. Before coming to this class, how much experience did you have with reading and writing in English?
3. What does academic writing mean to you? What kinds of writing do you associate with it?
4. it?
5. What kinds of writing do you find most difficult? Why?
6. What are your motivations for learning English? For example, do you intend to stay in America or return to your home country? If you intend to return home, would your proficiency in written English help you professionally?

Appendix B

Project Prompts

Project One: Reflective Narrative

Reflecting on writing experiences in your recent past (i.e. high school onward), tell a story about a writing experience that you felt was particularly effective, OR that you felt was particularly ineffective or unsuccessful. Describe the experience in detail and reflect on what made the experience a pleasant one or otherwise.

To help you write, you might answer the following questions:

- What responses from your readers made you feel especially competent or especially inadequate?
- Assuming you're the protagonist/main character, are there any villains or heroes in this story?
- What was the main conflict and what was the main moment of crisis? What was the pinnacle moment of the story? (For example, your teacher called you out in the middle of class, or you failed a written test)

Target Audience

Your audience is me and the rest of the class. This essay will introduce you as a writer to the rest of the class; it will help us get to know each other as writers as we learn to write in this new language of academic discourse. Because we are sharing our writing with one another, please do not write anything you do not want others to read.

Purpose

Since this is a narrative, you are expected to tell a story. A narrative is often used to highlight an important point, prove the credibility of the author, or create an inviting or intriguing point of entry. When you narrate a situation, you tell a story that has a beginning, middle and an end. There are characters, setting, dialogue, conflict and resolution. Many of us are used to stories that move in a linear way through time.

This narrative is also expected to be reflective. In other words, you should think about the story and your experiences in an abstract way. You may have either learned from that experience, or it may have shaped the person you are today.

The required length of this project is 500 words.

Project Two: Extended Definition

For this project, you are to choose one word, expression, or slang term from your first language and explain the different meanings and uses of that term to someone who does not know your first language. To compose a rich paper, your choice of the term really matters; the term needs to be complex, with some cultural value or significance.

Target audience

The audience for this project is somebody who does not speak your first language, but is expected to travel to your home country in the near future.

Purpose

The goal of this project is to educate the target audience, informing them about the various uses and misuses of the term as well as its cultural significance.

To explain a term to someone who does not know your language, you might need to, first, provide some context as to how your language works and why it is important to learn that term. Not only will you need to explain the different meanings of the term, but also who typically uses it, with whom, when they use it, and why they use it.

For your audience, it may also be important to learn when it would be deemed inappropriate to use that term or when they should *not* use it. Providing synonyms and antonyms can help, but providing myriad examples of how to use that term in a sentence is especially important.

The required length of this project is 700 words.

Project Three: Reflection on Genre Translation

This project is two-fold: translation of genre conventions, followed by a reflective essay where you reflect on that translation process.

To get started, you, first, need to pick a piece of writing you have composed recently in your first language. Preferably, such composition should have happened in your home country. That piece of writing can fall under any genre, such as a short academic essay, a poem, a short story, a letter, an email, a graphic novel, a blog, etc. That genre, though, must have an audience other than the self. In other words, a genre such as a personal diary or the like cannot be considered. The target audience of that writing, however, must have been someone in your home country.

Once you have chosen the piece of writing, you, then, need to translate it to an American audience. In other words, you are not merely translating the *language* of the writing into English, but you are also *adapting the genre conventions and the writing context so they would appeal to a North American audience*.

That translation must be followed by a reflective essay in which you explore the changes you needed to make in order for the North American audience to understand the chosen genre. To help you write that reflective essay, you can start by answering the following questions:

- What genre did you choose and what was the context of its composition?
- How did the North American audience expectations as well as knowledge shape your translation?
- What components, such as language, references, examples, tone, organization of document, did you have to adapt to that new audience?
- How did you adapt the purpose of writing that genre to fit the new context?
- What did you learn from that genre translation process?

After responding to the questions above, consider a thesis statement that reflects the central theme of your essay, then think about how you will organize your ideas into cohesive paragraphs. As always, wrap up with a reflective conclusion in order to help the audience consider the big picture.

Project Four: Comparative Genre Analysis

For this project, you are to choose one genre that is produced in your home culture and its equivalent in the United States. Examples of such genres can be romantic comedy movies, pop songs, graphic novels, advertisements, tourist brochures, or any other subgenre that is produced in both cultures.

After making your choice, you are asked to analyze the genre, pointing out the similarities and differences between the genre and its equivalent. To do that, you need to show your understanding of the conventions of the genre and how those conventions vary across cultures. In other words, how do you see the genre conventions transform to meet the expectations of a different audience in a way that also accommodates the cultural context?

The target audience for this project is an American who is unfamiliar with your home culture and unsure how genres change across cultures.

The required length of this project is 800 words.

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