



Overview of Second and Foreign Language Writing: Characteristics, Perspectives and Pedagogical Approaches

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Writing plays a crucial role in communication and knowledge construction. In the era of globalization, under the impact of English as a lingua franca, there is an increasing need for written communications in English. This paper provides a review of both theoretical and empirical research on second and foreign language writing, for the purpose of informing ESL/EFL teachers especially those in Asian countries. The review first discusses distinctions between first language (L1) writing and second and foreign language (L2) writing with more focus on L2 writing situated in Asian contexts. Then it presents approaches to teaching writing in L2 contexts which originated from L1 writing pedagogy. Next, it provides a review of empirical research on the implementation of these approaches in L2 contexts, especially in Asian contexts. Finally, the paper concludes with pedagogical implications for L2 writing instruction in this particular context. It is hoped that this paper could offer Asian EFL/ESL teachers a series of pedagogical choices and help them improve the quality of English education in general, and English writing in particular.

Keywords: L2 writing, Asian contexts, characteristics, perspectives, instructional approaches

Introduction

The field of first language (L1) writing has informed much of what we know about texts and composition (Hyland, 2016), whereas the field of second and foreign language (L2) writing has emerged only recently as a discipline. L2 writing scholarship, which is composed mainly of EFL/ESL studies, began to flourish in 1980s due to the impact of English as a lingua franca (Manchón & Matsuda, 2016). Unlike L1 writing, the field of L2 writing still lacks a unified understanding of how L2 learners learn to write and of how formal instruction might best benefit L2 learners. The field has been shaped by its 'parent' disciplines, applied linguistics and L1 composition studies (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014), so approaches to teaching L2 writing have traced L1 writing pedagogy. Unfortunately, L2 writing is different from L1 writing in many aspects; therefore, it is helpful to raise teachers' awareness of distinctions between L1 and L2 writing so that they can make appropriate pedagogical choices in their classrooms. This paper first discusses key differences between L1 and L2 writing with special attention paid to research in Asian contexts. It then moves on to approaches to teaching writing in L2 contexts guided by those developed in L1 contexts. Next, it presents empirical research on the implementation of these approaches in L2 contexts, especially in Asian countries. Finally, it concludes by providing pedagogical implications for L2 writing instruction.

Distinctions between L1 and L2 Writing

The writing activity involves texts writers produce, actions writers engage in to produce such texts and socio-cultural contexts where writers write (Larios, Conesa, & Coyle, 2016). Guided by this view, differences between L1 and L2 writing are grouped into three categories: Text-related, writer-related and context-related aspects.

Text-related Aspects

Micro features of writing

While L1 writers have a stock of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge when writing, L2 writers often carry the burden of learning the language and learning to write at the same time (Hyland, 2003). Therefore, L2 writers' texts are often shorter, less fluent and contain more errors (Hedgcock, 2012; Hinkel, 2011; Purves, 1988). Drawing on a considerable number of research studies conducted to compare L1 (English) texts with other L2 texts, Hinkel (2011) offered a summary of differences between L1 and L2 texts, focusing on morphosyntactic and lexical features. For example, L2 texts employ less lexical diversity, fewer adverbial modifiers and more incomplete sentences (see Hinkel, 2011, p. 529 for further information).

Wang's (2011) study on Chinese students learning to write revealed that learners felt they had good ideas, but lacked linguistic resources (vocabulary and grammar) to express themselves in a foreign language. This shows that even when students have ample interesting ideas to write, they are likely to produce short, low-quality texts due to their grammatical errors and/or poor vocabulary. Currently, it has been clearly demonstrated that L2 writers' limited vocabulary and grammar disadvantage the quality of their written texts (Hinkel, 2011). These studies show that providing L2 learners with linguistic resources is crucial in writing instruction.

Discourse structuring

L1 and L2 texts may be different in terms of organizational preferences, perspectives on reader orientation (i.e., writer-responsible vs. reader-responsible writing), uses of cohesion markers and the ways the linguistic features of the text are used (Hinkel, 2011; Silva, 1992, 1993). For example, Hinds (1984, 1987, 1990, reported in Hedgcock, 2012) discovered that in their compositions, Korean and Japanese people utilized an inductive rhetorical pattern, that is, delaying exposing their purposes until the end of their texts because in their culture, directness may offend readers who expect a subtler way of reasoning. In contrast, Anglo-American writers follow a deductive rhetorical pattern, that is, pre-revealing their purposes for writing right at the beginning of their texts.

Phan (2011) also pointed out major differences between Vietnamese and English academic writing. While English writers are responsible for making everything clear for the reader, in Vietnamese writing, the responsibility of the reader is to interpret the message in the text. This is manifested in the fact that English writers use concrete and accurate words as well as explicit signposts, whereas Vietnamese writers use abstract and 'poetic' words to generate interest and curiosity in readers. Vietnamese readers seek something not only academic and formal, but also "nice to their ears, touches their hearts and pleases the sense of romance popular in Vietnamese poetry and literature" (p. 28). These findings inform L2 teachers of the importance of raising L2 students' awareness of differences in structuring texts to meet readers' expectations.

Writer-related Aspects

L1 writers are not influenced by the schematic or rhetorical knowledge of another language, but L2 writers may have L1-related schematic knowledge which can support or inhibit the learning of L2 writing (Hedgcock, 2012). Rinnert and Kobayashi (2009) examined twelve studies conducted with Japanese students to explore possible effects of L1 writing instruction/experience on students' EFL writing. They reported that novice writers' early L1 experience in personal expressive writing, (when not combined with any other kind of training), led to frequent use of self-expression in their L2 essays. In addition, novice writers who could organize L1 essays well were able to write more organized L2 essays. Likewise, Bennui's (2008) study confirmed that L1-related schematic knowledge interfered with 28 Thai EFL students' writing at three levels, namely words, sentences and discourse, with more negative transfer than positive transfer. Therefore, it is important that teachers should be aware of learners' prior knowledge so that they can design tasks that activate L2 learners' existing schemata or build new schematic knowledge.

In terms of composing skills, besides research confirming similar composing processes in L1 and L2 (Beare, 2000; Matsumoto, 1995), other researchers like Silva (1993) further indicated that writers found it harder and less effective to generate content in L2 than in L1. Manchón et al.'s (2007, as reported in Larios, Conesa, & Coyle, 2016) review of writing strategies shows that L1 has been found to be strategically used for writing processes such as planning, formulating and revising. L1 use may result in better essays in terms of content and textual organization (Larios, Conesa, & Coyle, 2016). However, under time pressure, according to Cohen and Brooks's (2001) and Pappamihiel, Nishimata and Mihai's (2008) studies, the use of L1 or translation when writing may have positive or negative effects on L2 writing, depending on the nature of the task (e.g., the topic), the learning style preferences or proficiency level of the writer.

Context-related Aspects

L1 and L2 writers may have different expectations or preferences about teaching and learning (Hyland, 2003). One of these preferences is writing topics that are potentially culture-sensitive. Personal or family issues, for example, may be appropriate for some groups of learners but inappropriate for others (Hyland, 2003). Another area that teachers need to be alert to is students' feedback preferences. Yang, Badger, and Yu's (2006) research showed that while Chinese students recognized the importance of peer feedback, they valued teacher feedback more highly than peer feedback. This research suggested that to help Chinese learners develop their L2 writing, peer feedback on drafts should be followed by teacher feedback on final texts.

Apart from the issues mentioned above, a number of studies conducted in Asian countries show that contextual factors like big classes (You, 2004), exam-dominated educational culture (Lee, 2008; You, 2004), teachers' heavy workload (You, 2004), or prescribed curriculum (Lee, 2004) may prevent the implementation of L1 context-based writing instruction from being successful. This requires Asian teachers or L2 teachers to take their contextual factors into consideration before making decisions on writing pedagogy.

Approaches to Teaching Writing in L2 Contexts

Approaches to teaching L2 composition has, in many respects, paralleled those to teaching L1 composition with respect to theory and practice (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). In this section, the focus is on major approaches to teaching L2 composition (Hyland, 2008, 2014, 2016; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, 2014; Manchón & Matsuda, 2016). This discussion is guided by Hyland's (2008, 2014, 2016) identification of three approaches: text-oriented, writer-oriented and reader-oriented approaches.

According to Hyland (2008), this categorization should not be seen as rigid divisions because these three approaches to teaching writing “respond to, critique, and draw on each other in a variety of ways” (p. 1).

Text-oriented Approach to Teaching Writing

Text-oriented approaches consider writing as the words on a page or screen - a text rather than the activity itself. There are two views of this approach. The first view sees texts as objects and the second one sees texts as discourse (Hyland, 2008, 2014, 2016).

Texts as objects

The first perspective sees writing as a ‘thing’ separated from contexts, writers and readers. It is a textual product - a coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentences according to a system of rules (Hyland, 2014). This view of writing underpins the current-traditional paradigm originating in America, which is also called a product approach (Andrade & Evans, 2012).

The product approach to teaching writing follows a linear method of teaching. The teacher introduces a model text, and helps students analyze it, highlighting features of the text in terms of grammatical structures, organizational patterns and general stylistic characteristics. Students then do controlled practice of identifying the highlighted features. After that, the teacher assigns a composition based on the source text, instructing students to prepare a linear outline. Last, students individually produce a writing product that is evaluated by the teacher (Hedgcock, 2012). In short, the product approach focuses on learners’ final written products which are read and evaluated by the only reader – the teacher. There is no space for students to interact or discuss their writing with their peers and teacher to receive guidance or feedback during the processes of developing their writing.

Some scholars criticized that the product approach places unwarranted emphasis on form and not enough on content. It does not take purpose, audience and the process of composing into consideration. In addition, by offering models of imitation, this approach inhibits student writers rather than empowers or liberates them (Pinca, 1982; Zamel, 1982).

Texts as discourse

A second perspective sees texts as discourse, “the way we use language to communicate, to achieve purposes in particular situations” (Hyland, 2016, p. 6). Teachers working with this view of writing help learners identify how texts actually work as communication by analyzing texts to identify conventions for organizing messages of a genre (Hyland, 2008). Genre was defined by Martin (1987) as staged, goal-oriented social processes, structural forms that cultures use in certain contexts to achieve various purposes (as reported in Hyon, 1996). Each genre has its own organizational pattern and linguistic choices. For example, while *descriptions* make use of ‘be’, ‘have’ and present tense, *recounts* use more action verbs and past tense (Hyland, 2008). Genre-based writing instruction helps raise learners’ awareness of the ways that texts are structured in terms of grammar and vocabulary choices to achieve a social purpose.

Like the earlier view of writing as texts, the view of writing as discourse also focuses on writing as an outcome of activity rather than as activity itself. Teachers adopt a highly interventionist role to lead students through the typical rhetorical patterns of the genres they need to produce. Although teachers shift their focus from autonomous meanings to discourse, writing largely remains the construction and arrangement of forms (Hyland, 2016).

Writer-oriented Approaches to Teaching Writing

The second broad approach focuses on writers rather than texts. More specifically, it focuses on composing processes through which writers formulate ideas to create texts. There are two broad classroom approaches: expressivist and cognitivist (Hyland, 2008, 2014, 2016).

The expressivist view of this approach suggests that writing is a creative act of discovery. This approach encourages teachers not to impose their views on or give models to students (Hyland, 2014), but to invite learners to write freely through pre-writing tasks like freewriting or journal writing (Hedgcock, 2012). Students choose their own topics and genres and write from their own experiences or observations (Raimes, 1983). This approach is more concerned with helping learners generate ideas by providing meaningful content for writing tasks than with producing grammatically correct prose.

The major shortcoming of the expressive approach is that it tends to assume student writers possess all the inner resources necessary to write well, and once these have been awoken, little else is needed (Breeze, 2012). However, to write successfully, besides knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, writers need to possess knowledge of genre, the ability to use language appropriately in different situations and the ability to use a variety of communicative strategies. These are not innate abilities but are achieved through conscious teaching and learning (Hyland 2003). In addition, some critics argue that self-expression is not the only reason for writing. Writers also need to be able to write in other genres, including resumes or reports (Breeze, 2012).

Completely differently, cognitivism focuses on the cognitive aspects of the task. Cognitive perspectives suggest that writing is a non-linear process of planning, writing and reviewing (Zamel, 1983). The 'nonlinear' nature of this approach is manifested in the fact that writers can move back and forth between the stages of writing. The stage of reviewing is not individual but collaborative with the assistance of peers and the teacher (Murray, 1992). This approach, also termed as a process approach (Ivanič, 2004; Hyland, 2014, 2016), gives students opportunities to improve their drafts to produce stronger final papers. However, this approach neglects the social dimension of writing, i.e. reader expectations and conventions of academic and professional communities (Hyland, 2004).

Reader-oriented Approaches to Teaching Writing

The third approach, reader-oriented view, sees writing from sociocultural perspective. Writing always has a purpose, a context and an intended audience, and involves making best choices to communicate with readers effectively. A major implication for teachers is that teachers need to make learners aware of the purposes, genres and readers they need to communicate with before writing. Drawing on this view, a cycle of teaching and learning cycle has been developed to support teachers in teaching writing. As described by Zammit and Tan (2016), this cycle consists of four main stages: *Negotiation of the field*, *deconstruction*, *joint construction* and *independent construction*.

The first stage, *negotiation of the field*, helps teachers find out about students' prior knowledge of the topic to better meet students' needs through various activities like picture talk, group discussion, etc. The second stage is *deconstruction* which involves explicit teaching and learning of the context and text of a genre. At this stage, the teacher guides learners to analyze and compare representative samples of a genre from different contexts to draw students' attention to the context and textual features of a genre explicitly. The third stage, *joint construction*, consists of two stages: preparation for joint construction and the joint construction of the class text. This stage helps learners build topic knowledge explicitly. Then the teacher and students work together to create a text. The fourth stage is *independent construction*. First, students work individually, in pairs or small groups to gather information on the writing task. Then students apply what they have learned to plan, draft and produce their texts individually or with a partner without the teacher's help. This cycle is a flexible procedure, allowing teachers to return to any stage where necessary for the purpose of best meeting students' needs (Zammit & Tan, 2016). Reader-oriented, genre-based

teaching follows modern theories of learning, recognizing the importance of collaboration, or peer interaction, and scaffolding, or teacher-supported learning (Hyland, 2016).

Some scholars criticized reader-oriented, genre-based instruction for inhibiting students' creativity through conformity and prescriptivism (e.g., Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002; Dixon, 1987). However, Hyland (2007) points out that reader-oriented, genre-based instruction does not dictate the way we write but "it enables us to make choices and facilitates expressions" (p. 152). Learners would be disadvantaged without explicit teaching of genres because they are often unfamiliar with L2 rhetorical conventions or with the expectations of L2 readers (Hedgcock, 2012).

The Implementation of Approaches to Teaching Writing in L2 Contexts

Several studies have been conducted in Asian contexts to explore the impact of process-based instruction on students' writing performance and their attitude toward this approach in comparison with product-based instruction (Ho, 2006; Meeampol, 2005; Sun & Feng, 2009; Tyson, 1999; Wang, 2014). Three of these five studies showed that students who received process-based teaching gained better scores than those receiving product-based teaching (Ho, 2006; Meeampol, 2005; Sun & Feng, 2009). Four of these five studies also revealed that students had a positive attitude toward the process approach (Ho, 2006; Meeampol, 2005; Tyson, 1999; Wang, 2014).

While it is true that the process approach has been proved beneficial to L2 writers, it is also problematic for this approach to be implemented in some contexts. Dikli, Jernigan, and Bleyle (2014) provides a reflective look at the implementation of process writing in their ESL classrooms in the U.S. Although they favored process writing, they had to incorporate a product approach in their curriculum because they wanted to prepare their students for timed essays, a required part of assessment. Students planned, wrote and revised within a specific amount of time (e.g., 90 minutes). In addition, process writing may not be feasible for large classes since teachers may not have enough time to provide feedback on every draft each student writes. To overcome this drawback, Dikli, Jernigan, and Bleyle (2014) suggested using peer and tutor feedback.

Likewise, many researchers have investigated the effectiveness of the genre approach on different types of writing such as email writing, letter writing or argumentation in Asian contexts. These studies have shown that genre-based instruction improved students' confidence in writing. After receiving genre-based instruction, learners gained control over features of target genres and thus their writing quality improved (Krisnachinda, 2006; Promwinai, 2010; Swami, 2008; Udomyamokkul, 2004; Yasuda, 2011; Zare-ee, 2008).

Based on the research on the application of a genre approach to university students in Thailand, Kongpetch (2003) underscores three points to note. First, the participant students perceived field-building activities and oral presentation in small groups as irrelevant because they were not actually writing. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to explain the purpose of each activity and relate it to a specific writing goal. Second, explicit teaching of L1 and L2 genres by using contrastive analysis greatly benefits students. Third, for students who are not accustomed to taking an active and collaborative role in study, teachers need to introduce new ways of learning to students and provide them with opportunities and time to practise their new responsibilities and roles.

Implications and Conclusion

Research on second and foreign language writing has attempted to provide the understandings of L2 texts, writers and contexts and sought pedagogical models for teaching L2 writing. The studies presented here offer new knowledge and some implications for practice. The first implication is that L2 writing teachers should have a comprehensive view on the nature of writing. Writing is not only a textual product

but it also involves composing processes and interaction with readers. Therefore, teachers should provide students with an understanding of lexical and grammatical features, readers' expectations, genres and writing processes. In addition, it should be kept in mind that there are distinctions between L1 and L2 writing in a considerable number of ways. Thus, the effective application of an approach to teaching writing in L1 context does not guarantee the success of implementing this approach in L2 context.

To facilitate the successful implementation, teachers should be aware of how L1 writing is different from L2 writing, which helps them to make appropriate instructional choices. Four major points are worthy of consideration when teachers design writing activities. First, teachers should provide L2 learners, especially low-proficiency level L2 writers with linguistic resources relevant to the topic before writing because L2 writers do not possess a stock of vocabulary and grammar as L1 writers do. To provide learners with vocabulary items relevant to the writing topic, teachers can ask learners to collect reading texts related to the topic and read them at home, then teachers brainstorm with them in class, using flowcharts or mind maps (Gibbons, 2015). Regarding grammar, according to Amin's (2015) study, teaching grammar in context helps minimize students' grammatical errors in writing. Teaching grammar in context involves using authentic or simplified texts to introduce and explain target grammatical structures inductively and then providing learners with practice in using these target structures via communicative activities (Mart, 2013; Nunan, 1998).

Second, teachers should raise students' awareness of differences in how L1 and L2 texts are constructed in terms of rhetorical patterns and language features through making comparisons. Teachers should show students multiple L1 and L2 texts of the same genre and offer guiding questions to help learners identify similarities and differences between L1 and L2 texts. For example, to teach learners how to write formal letters, teachers should provide learners with several formal letters in L1 and L2, using questions to elicit similarities and differences between them, e.g. what do all L1 or L2 formal letters always seem to have in common? What expressions are used for the salutation/closing? etc.

Third, teachers should be aware that L2 writers may be influenced by their L1-related schematic knowledge which can support or inhibit the learning of L2 writing. Therefore, teachers' understanding of learners' L1-related schematic knowledge is essential. In case there are similarities between students' L1-related schematic knowledge and L2, teachers should activate their existing schema and help them positively transfer their prior knowledge into L2 writing. On the other hand, if there are differences between learners' L1-schematic knowledge and L2, teachers should help learners identify these differences to avoid negative transfer. For example, when teaching Thai students to write in English, teachers should emphasize that English essays use paragraphing with topic sentences and thesis statements (the purpose of writing) in introductory paragraphs because many Thai writers rarely use paragraphing and they convey the purpose of writing at the concluding paragraph (Bennui, 2008).

The use of translation when writing has been discovered to have different effects (positive and negative) on L2 writing (Cohen & Brooks, 2001; Pappamihel, Nishimata, & Mihai, 2008). Therefore, it may be a choice for teachers to introduce translation to L2 learners and let them decide on their use of this strategy. However, teachers should emphasize that when using translation for L2 writing, learners should avoid word-by-word translation and translated writing seems not to work in timed writing for most novice writers. (see Cohen & Brooks, 2001; Pappamihel, Nishimata, & Mihai, 2008 for further information).

Finally, contextual factors should also be taken into account when pedagogical decisions are made because they may have positive or negative impact on teaching and learning. Teachers' understanding of the sociocultural context will help them make appropriate choices in their classrooms. For instance, two Hong Kong secondary teachers, according to Tsui and Ng's (2010) research, creatively exploited Chinese traditions such as self-group relationship, face saving and teacher authority, which were seen as constraints on the process approach to teaching writing. These two teachers turned these constraints into powerful learning motivators. Their pedagogical strategies, developed out of profound knowledge of the sociocultural context, successfully engaged students in peer feedback, and effectively exploiting opportunities for learning opened up by process writing.

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