

SECTION I: PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING INSTRUCTION

Section I presents several chapters which jointly address many of the paramount concerns of the second language writing teacher or researcher who must consider, among other issues, the classroom and the institutional setting of writing courses, the writer and the process of writing, the teacher and his or her responses to writing produced by students, and the written text as a meaning-making event that exists as a component of literacy skills in general. Among the questions the authors of these chapters address are some of the most important and yet complex in the field today.

How has the teaching of ESL writing evolved in the second half of the twentieth century?

Chapter 1, by Tony Silva, traces the history of second language writing instruction in terms of how writing has been viewed within the English as a second language (ESL) curriculum from the 1940s until the 1990s, focusing particularly on how the teaching of writing has changed during the same period. In reviewing the controlled composition model, current-traditional rhetoric, the process approach, and English for academic purposes, Silva provides a diachronic view of composition instruction that can additionally serve to help teachers evaluate curricula and materials in a larger historical framework. Silva's chapter also addresses theory building in the field, and he provides a proposed model within which to view the relationship between theory, research, and practice by focusing on several "givens" of many typical second language classrooms: the L2 writer, the L1 reader, the L2 text, and the L1 context.

What can we learn from work in the field of rhetoric and composition studies?

Chapter 2, by Ann M. Johns, also addresses theory development in ESL composition, but from a very different perspective. She describes the

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necessary components of any composition theory and how best to structure ESL writing classes in terms of three different approaches that dominate L1 literature and research: process approaches (discussed in the next paragraph), interactive views (focusing on the writer as one who interacts with an audience), and social constructionism (referring to the relationship between the writer, the text, and the social context in which that text comes into being). Johns reviews a number of insights from L1 theorists and explains that teachers invariably have a theoretical stance. She believes it crucial that they articulate and examine the assumptions that guide their choices in the classroom. Each of the three theories she discusses is presented in terms of how the theory views several of the “givens” that Silva also discusses: the writer, the reader (or audience), and the text and the context (as they embody reality and truth). Finally, Johns addresses how the function of language is addressed in each of the three theories.

What goes into the process of writing?

One of the perspectives discussed by both Silva and Johns is a concern with the processes by which writers produce text. Often viewed as evidence of a “paradigm shift” (Hairston 1982), the focus on the composing processes of student writers instead of on the written products they produce has had an enormous impact on research into first language writing. Applebee (1986) notes that the process approach “provided a way to think about writing in terms of what the writer does (planning, revising, and the like) instead of in terms of what the final product looks like (patterns of organization, spelling, grammar)” (p. 96). It is research into the composing process that forms the subject of Chapter 3, by Alexandra Rowe Krapels. She reviews the relationship between first language research and the growing body of research into second language, and particularly ESL, writing processes. She provides an extensive commentary on most of the major studies to date, allowing for both a comparative examination of specific research findings and for insights into potential pedagogical applications. (In Section II, several chapters focus on the effects of altering one specific feature of the composing process. Alexander Friedlander, Chapter 7, discusses how the use of one’s native versus one’s second language in the planning stage affects the final written product. Ulla Connor and Mary Farmer, Chapter 8, offer a specific teaching suggestion for dealing with revision. Barbara Kroll, Chapter 9, addresses how the amount of time allowed for the process affects the final product.)

How should we respond to writing that students produce?

Every writing class, regardless of its underlying philosophy and regardless of the varieties of composing processes activated by students, will invariably result in the production of student texts that teachers will need to respond to. A review of the issues involved in written commentary on student writing is provided in Chapter 4, by Ilona Leki. She presents both the advice of writing experts and the opinions of student writers on what kinds of teacher interventions help student writers improve their ability to compose and to revise, when these interventions best occur, and what form they take. Again, much of the research she reports on is based on work with native speakers of English, though the area of teacher response continues to be of major concern to second language teachers and researchers. (Two aspects of teacher feedback are explored in depth in Section II in chapters based on studies of specific teaching situations. Andrew D. Cohen and Marilda C. Cavalcanti, Chapter 10, report on the match between teachers' claimed agendas for providing feedback and the actual feedback they provide, as well as what students think about and do with the feedback. Ann Fathman and Elizabeth Whalley, Chapter 11, report on a study involving teacher feedback on content versus feedback on form.)

How can we assess writing for program and institutional purposes?

In Chapter 5, Liz Hamp-Lyons addresses the field of second language writing assessment, considering topic variables, human and contextual variables, and procedural variables, identified by Brossell (1986) as the factors which "create the conditions of assessment that approximate conditions under which good writing is known or is apt to occur" (p. 180). She presents an overview of the issues involved in both small-scale and large-scale assessment and key aspects of program development, focusing on the many concerns that must be addressed in the direct assessment of writing. After reviewing some of the issues in test reliability, Hamp-Lyons analyzes four kinds of validity: face validity, content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity. She points out that validity must be established for four components in testing – the task, the writer, the scoring procedure, and the reader – and discusses each of them at length. (The task component is addressed in Chapter 12, by Joy Reid, in terms of how variation in task can affect a student's score outcome.) All of these components form part of a complex network

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of interactions, and Hamp-Lyons argues that writing assessment works best and is most fair to the learner when it takes into account who the learner is, the parameters of the situation in which the learner produces writing, and the overall context in which educational success is to be achieved for that learner.

What are some ways to understand the connection between reading and writing?

Chapter 6, by Joan Carson Eisterhold, provides a discussion of the nature of the relationship between reading and writing skills. Classroom teachers are understandably concerned with how best to foster improvement in writing, and two important contributing factors are identifying input that would be appropriate for the acquisition of writing skills and identifying mental processes that promote progress. Eisterhold provides a framework for analyzing how reading may be said to supply that input as well as how particular cognitive processes may enhance the acquisition of writing skills. She reviews various hypotheses that focus on the ways in which processes may transfer across modalities (from reading to writing or from writing to reading) and the ways in which skills may transfer across languages for those already literate in their first language. She concludes by sketching a model designed to capture the various ways in which the transfer of literacy skills might be viewed. (The reading–writing connection is further explored in Chapter 13, by Cherry Campbell, who reports on an empirically based study analyzing how students used a background reading passage in the preparation of a writing assignment.)

References

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1 *Second language composition instruction: developments, issues, and directions in ESL*

Tony Silva

To be effective teachers of writing, English as a second language (ESL) composition professionals need an understanding of what is involved in second language (L2) writing. They need coherent perspectives, principles, models – tools for thinking about second language writing in general and ESL composition in particular, and for analyzing and evaluating competing views. This chapter attempts to supply some of these tools by focusing on approaches to ESL writing instruction – identifying what they are, what they are not, and what they might be. In particular, this chapter offers for consideration: (1) an interpretation of (and brief commentary on) developments in ESL composition instruction during the period 1945–1990; (2) some tentative models meant to provide a coherent context for understanding, describing, and evaluating approaches to the teaching of L2 writing; (3) an evaluation of existing approaches in terms of these models; and (4) suggestions, growing out of this evaluation, for future directions in ESL composition theory, research, and practice.

Historical sketch

There is no doubt that developments in ESL composition have been influenced by and, to a certain extent, are parallel to developments in the teaching of writing to native speakers of English.¹ However, the unique context of ESL composition has necessitated somewhat distinct perspectives, models, and practices.

The history of ESL composition since about 1945 – the beginning of the modern era of second language teaching in the United States – can be viewed as a succession of approaches or orientations to L2 writing, a cycle in which particular approaches achieve dominance and then fade, but never really disappear. This discussion will focus on the origins,

1 See Berlin (1987, esp. Ch. 5–8) and North (1987) for comprehensive and detailed accounts of contemporary developments in L1 composition instruction from two distinct perspectives.

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principles, methods, and implications of the four most influential approaches of this period: controlled composition, current-traditional rhetoric, the process approach, and English for academic purposes.

Controlled composition

Controlled composition (sometimes referred to as guided composition) seems to have its roots in Charles Fries's oral approach, the precursor of the audiolingual method of second language teaching. Undergirding controlled composition are the notions that language is speech (from structural linguistics) and that learning is habit formation (from behaviorist psychology). Given these basic notions, it is not surprising that from this perspective writing was regarded as a secondary concern, essentially as reinforcement for oral habits. Accordingly, in his *Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language* (1945), Fries addressed writing as an afterthought, stating that "even written exercises might be part of the work" (p. 8) of the second language learner.

Some, like Erazmus (1960) and Brière (1966), believed that these written exercises should take the form of free composition – that is, writer-originated discourse – to extend the language control of the student and to promote fluency in writing. However, such free composition was soundly rejected by others, like Pincas (1962), who believed it to be a "naive traditional view... in direct opposition to the expressed ideals of scientific habit-forming teaching methods" (p. 185). She developed this point by explaining that "the reverence for original creativeness dies hard. People find it difficult to accept the fact that the use of language is the manipulation of fixed patterns; that these patterns are learned by imitation; and that not until they have been learned can originality occur in the manipulation of patterns or in the choice of variables within the patterns" (p. 186).

Pincas seemed to echo the majority opinion, one that focused primarily on formal accuracy and correctness, of employing rigidly controlled programs of systematic habit formation designed to avoid errors ostensibly caused by first language interference and to positively reinforce appropriate second language behavior. The approach preferred practice with previously learned discrete units of language to talk of original ideas, organization, and style, and its methodology involved the imitation and manipulation (substitutions, transformations, expansions, completions, etc.) of model passages carefully constructed and graded for vocabulary and sentence patterns.²

2 For more on the principles and practices of controlled composition, see the work of Dykstra (1964), Pincas (1964), Danielson (1965), Moody (1965), Praninskas (1965), Spencer (1965), Dykstra and Paulston (1967), Paulston (1967, 1972), Rojas (1968), Ross (1968), Horn (1974), and Paulston and Bruder (1976).

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In essence, in the controlled composition model, writing functions as “the handmaid of the other skills” (listening, speaking, and reading), “which must not take precedence as a major skill to be developed” (Rivers 1968: 241) and must be “considered as a service activity rather than as an end in itself” (p. 258). Learning to write in a second language is seen as an exercise in habit formation. The writer is simply a manipulator of previously learned language structures; the reader is the ESL teacher in the role of editor or proofreader, not especially interested in quality of ideas or expression but primarily concerned with formal linguistic features. The text becomes a collection of sentence patterns and vocabulary items – a linguistic artifact, a vehicle for language practice. The writing context is the ESL classroom; there is negligible concern for audience or purpose. While some might feel that the controlled composition approach is no longer operative in ESL composition, my own feeling is that it is still alive and well in many ESL composition classrooms and textbooks, even though it is addressed only infrequently these days in the professional literature (typically for ritual condemnation).

Current-traditional rhetoric

The mid-sixties brought an increasing awareness of ESL students’ needs with regard to producing extended written discourse. This awareness led to suggestions that controlled composition was not enough; that there was more to writing than building grammatical sentences; that what was needed was a bridge between controlled and free writing. This vacuum was filled by the ESL version of current-traditional rhetoric, an approach combining the basic principles of the current-traditional paradigm³ from native-speaker composition instruction with Kaplan’s theory of contrastive rhetoric. In this theory Kaplan, defining rhetoric as “the method of organizing syntactic units into larger patterns” (1967: 15), suggested that ESL writers “employ a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader” (1966: 4). Thus, because first language interference was seen as extending beyond the sentence level, “more pattern drill, . . . at the rhetorical level rather than at the syntactic level” (1967: 15) was called for. It was necessary

3 One of the most commonly cited characterizations of the current-traditional paradigm is that of Richard Young. He states that its overt features include “the emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process; the analysis of discourse into words, sentences and paragraphs; the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); the preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper; and so on” (1978: 31). See also Berlin and Inkster (1980) for a succinct yet thorough account of the paradigm’s historical origins and philosophical assumptions.

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“to provide the student with a form within which he may operate” (1966: 20).

The central concern of this approach was the logical construction and arrangement of discourse forms. Of primary interest was the paragraph. Here attention was given not only to its elements (topic sentences, support sentences, concluding sentences, and transitions), but also to various options for its development (illustration, exemplification, comparison, contrast, partition, classification, definition, causal analysis, and so on). The other important focus was essay development, actually an extrapolation of paragraph principles to larger stretches of discourse. Addressed here were larger structural entities (introduction, body, and conclusion) and organizational patterns or modes (normally narration, description, exposition, and argumentation), with exposition typically seen as the pattern most appropriate for use by university-level second language writers.

Classroom procedures associated with this view of writing instruction focus students' attention on form. At their simplest, they ask students to choose among alternative sentences within the context of a given paragraph or longer discourse. Another variety involves reading and analyzing a model and then applying the structural knowledge gained to a parallel piece of original writing. The most complex types ask students (already provided with a topic) to list and group relevant facts, derive topic and supporting sentences from these facts, assemble an outline, and write their compositions from that outline.⁴

In short, from the perspective of this version of current-traditional rhetoric, writing is basically a matter of arrangement, of fitting sentences and paragraphs into prescribed patterns. Learning to write, then, involves becoming skilled in identifying, internalizing, and executing these patterns. The writer fills in a preexisting form with provided or self-generated content. The reader is easily confused and perhaps vexed by unfamiliar patterns of expression. The text is a collection of increasingly complex discourse structures (sentences, paragraphs, sections, etc.), each embedded in the next largest form. The implicit context for writing is an academic one, with the instructor's judgment presumed to mirror that of the community of educated native speakers.⁵ Though current traditional practices have been regularly and vigorously attacked and inveighed against in the literature for a number of years now, their continuing influence is clearly reflected in many of the most well-known

4 Additional discussion of the rationale and procedures for the ESL version of current-traditional rhetoric can be found in Arapoff (1967, 1968, 1969), Carr (1967), Kaplan (1970, 1972), Taylor (1976), and Dehghanpisheh (1979).

5 See Leki (this volume) and Cohen and Cavalcanti (this volume) for further discussion of the ways in which teachers sometimes act as or are viewed by students as the judges of student writing.

and popular contemporary ESL composition textbooks. Indeed, one could make a strong case for the notion that the current-traditional approach is still dominant in ESL writing materials and classroom practices today.

The process approach

The introduction of the process approach to ESL composition seems to have been motivated by dissatisfaction with controlled composition and the current-traditional approach. Many felt that neither approach adequately fostered thought or its expression – that controlled composition was largely irrelevant to this goal and the linearity and prescriptivism of current-traditional rhetoric discouraged creative thinking and writing. Those who, like Taylor (1981), felt that “writing is not the straightforward plan–outline–write process that many believe it to be” (pp. 5–6) looked to first-language composing process research for new ideas, assuming with Zamel (1982) that “ESL writers who are ready to compose and express their ideas use strategies similar to those of native speakers of English” (p. 203). The assumptions and principles of this approach were soon enunciated. The composing process was seen as a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Zamel 1983a: 165). Guidance through and intervention in the process were seen as preferable to control – that is, the early and perhaps premature imposition of organizational patterns or syntactic or lexical constraints. Content, ideas, and the need to communicate would determine form. In essence, “composing means expressing ideas, conveying meaning. Composing means thinking” (Raimes 1983a: 261).

Translated into the classroom context, this approach calls for providing a positive, encouraging, and collaborative workshop environment within which students, with ample time and minimal interference, can work through their composing processes. The teacher’s role is to help students develop viable strategies for getting started (finding topics, generating ideas and information, focusing, and planning structure and procedure), for drafting (encouraging multiple drafts), for revising (adding, deleting, modifying, and rearranging ideas); and for editing (attending to vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and mechanics).⁶

From a process perspective, then, writing is a complex, recursive, and creative process or set of behaviors that is very similar in its broad

6 See also Zamel (1976, 1983b, 1987), Raimes (1978, 1983b,c, 1985), Watson (1982), Hughey et al. (1983), Spack (1984), Hamp-Lyons (1986), Liebman-Kleine (1986), Krapels (this volume), and Kroll (in press) for further treatment of the process approach in an ESL context.

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outlines for first and second language writers.⁷ Learning to write entails developing an efficient and effective composing process. The writer is the center of attention – someone engaged in the discovery and expression of meaning; the reader, focusing on content, ideas, and the negotiating of meaning, is not preoccupied with form. The text is a product – a secondary, derivative concern, whose form is a function of its content and purpose. Finally, there is no particular context for writing implicit in this approach; it is the responsibility of individual writers to identify and appropriately address the particular task, situation, discourse community, and sociocultural setting in which they are involved. Although the process approach has been generally well and widely received in ESL composition, it is not without its critics. These critics have perceived theoretical and practical problems and omissions of the approach and have suggested that the focus of ESL composition be shifted from the writer to the reader – that is, the academic discourse community.

English for academic purposes

To date, much of the aforementioned criticism of the process approach has come from proponents of an English for academic purposes orientation, which seems as much a reaction to the process approach as an attempt to construct a new and distinct perspective on ESL composition. One major part of this criticism is that the process approach does not adequately address some central issues in ESL writing. Reid (1984a, b) has suggested that the approach neglects to seriously consider variations in writing processes due to differences in individuals, writing tasks, and situations; the development of schemata for academic discourse; language proficiency; level of cognitive development; and insights from the study of contrastive rhetoric.

Critics also question whether the process approach realistically prepares students for academic work. According to Horowitz (1986a), the approach “creates a classroom situation that bears little resemblance to the situations in which [students’ writing] will eventually be exercised” (p. 144). He goes on to suggest that a process orientation ignores certain types of important academic writing tasks (particularly essay exams) and that what he sees as two basic tenets of the process approach – “content determines form” and “good writing is involved writing” – do not necessarily hold true in many academic contexts. Horowitz further states that a process-oriented approach “gives students a false impression of how university writing will be evaluated” (p. 143). In essence, he asserts that the process approach overemphasizes the individual’s psychological

7 Friedlander (this volume) discusses process strategies of a group of Chinese ESL writers, for example.