



32

What Research on Second Language Writing Tells Us and What it Doesn't

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Introduction

Over the past half century, the overarching goal of research on second language (L2) writing has been to create pedagogical models for teaching L2 writing. Many of these models have sought to identify instructional areas and techniques for constructing discourse and text in order to shed light on the tasks of teachers and their students who need to learn to write in an L2.

Formal investigations in L2 writing began to emerge as a research venue in the 1950s and 1960s when international students first began to enroll in colleges and universities in substantial numbers in English-speaking countries. In keeping with the classical western literary tradition, early studies focused primarily on discourse and ideational structuring, and they brought to the foreground the fact that discourse and ideational paradigms differ greatly in and across languages and cultures.

In a large measure, the theoretical frameworks and research methods for analyses of L2 writing are derived from those developed and formulated in various domains of applied linguistics such as text linguistics, discourse analysis, ethnography, and cross-cultural communication. Although much research on first language (L1) English-language writing has been carried out in such disciplines as rhetoric and composition, on the whole, the study of rhetoric has had a minimal influence on the investigations of L2 text.

Speaking generally, discourse analysis undertakes to study global (macro) features of text, such as the sequencing of ideas, and the organization of information in writing. The original and primary goal of such analyses was to examine the structure of discourse in the writing of L2 students in US universities in the early days of applied linguistics. Many studies undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s had the objective of developing new knowledge, based on empirical studies, that could provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the teaching of L2 writing and teacher education. However, L2 studies and publications achieved prominence and began to proliferate only in the 1980s and 1990s, largely as an outcome of a dramatic growth in the enrollments of students who were nonnative speakers (NNSSs) of English.

In the past three decades, an ever expanding body of work has come to elucidate a broad range of properties of L2 discourse and text, as well as regularities in the structure of L2 written prose. For instance, since the 1990s, much has been learned about the structuring of ideas in written prose and the smaller, essential components of discourse, also called discourse moves (e.g., Hinds, 1987;

Swales, 1990). Along these lines, cross-cultural investigations in the uses of L2 linguistic properties of learner writing also began to take a closer look at the local (micro) features of L2 text.

A large number of investigations in the language and discourse features of L2 prose have identified important and significant differences among the properties of L1 and L2 text in similar or proximate written genres. To a great extent, research on discourse construction and language usage patterns in L2 writing has led to a greater understanding of many issues that confound English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) writing and its teaching and learning. These studies have provided important insights into a broad range of connections between L2 discourse and text, such as advance discourse organizers and divisions, topic introductions and shifts, persuasion devices, and lexical and syntactic means of establishing cohesion, e.g., lexical ties, repetitions, and the uses of tenses, pronouns, and sentence adverbials (Aziz, 1988; Choi, 1988; Field & Oi, 1992; Hinkel, 2001a, 2002a, 2002b, 2003a; Mauranen, 1996; Montano-Harmon, 1991; Poole, 1991).

To make sense of the enormous number of studies, this chapter provides a brief overview of L2 writing research and its findings to highlight what is known and what still requires further investigation.

Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Research in L2 Writing

Analyzing written discourse frameworks and text properties became the objective of many studies that worked with L1 writing of native speakers (NSs) of English in, for example, Australia, Canada, the US, the UK, and New Zealand, and those in the English L2 writing of speakers of many other languages. To date, research has thus far compared discourse and textual features employed in L2 writing of speakers of such languages as (in alphabetical order, not a complete list by any measure):

- Amharic;
- Arabic;
- Bengali;
- Bulgarian;
- Burmese;
- Cambodian;
- Catalan;
- Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Han);
- Czech;
- Dutch;
- Farsi;
- Finnish;
- French;
- Haitian Creole;
- Hawaiian Creole;
- Hebrew;
- Hindi;
- Hmong;
- Hungarian;
- German;
- Gola;
- Greek;
- Gurjartic;
- Ibo;
- Indonesian;
- Italian;
- Japanese;
- Kanjoval;
- Korean;
- Lambya;
- Lao;
- Malay;
- Marathi;
- Navajo;
- Norwegian;
- Polish;
- Portuguese;
- Romanian;
- Russian;
- Serbo-Croatian;
- Sinhala;
- Somali;
- Spanish;
- Swedish;
- Tahitian;
- Tagalog;
- Tamil;
- Telugu;
- Thai;
- Tigringa;
- Turkish;
- Ukrainian;
- Urdu;
- Vietnamese;
- Western Apache; and
- several varieties of English.

By and large, the studies of L2 discourse and text have sought to address immediate and long-term research, curriculum, and instructional development goals, as well as pedagogical needs of specific groups of L2 learners in various locations, available sources of text data, and/or attempts to apply the findings of predominantly English language-based text linguistics to L2 text (e.g. Al-Khatib, 2001; Carlson, 1988; Hinkel, 1999, 2005; Laufer, 2003; see also Grabe and Kaplan, 1996) for a discussion).

Despite a great deal of research into L2 writing, a coherent picture of syntactic, lexical, rhetorical, or discoursal features of L2 text has yet to emerge. However, in sum total, much has been learned about features of text produced by L2 writers in different contexts and for divergent academic, social, and communication purposes, as discussed throughout this chapter.

The Range of Research in L2 Writing

An enormous number of works on writing in general and L2 writing specifically are published every year. In fact, the quantity of publications and research reports has become so overwhelming that a new genre of work has begun to appear in growing numbers: research syntheses. The emergence of this type of work has been driven predominantly by the need to make sense of the vast body of research on L2 writing. A few examples below include the recent research synthesis publications to demonstrate how vast the body of work on L2 writing actually is (Table 32.1).

A vast body of published studies has investigated discoursal, rhetorical, cohesive, lexical, and syntactic properties of L1 and L2 writing. To date, research into L2 discourse and text has identified the important and systematic differences in how L1 and L2 writing are constructed. These will be reviewed in broad strokes later in this chapter.

Educational and Social Contexts of L2 Writing

To date, the majority of investigations into L2 writing have focused on the organizational and ideational structure of L2 discourse and the morphosyntactic and lexical characteristics of L2 text. Comparative studies have sought to account for differences and similarities between the properties of L2 discourse and text and those identified in the L1 writing of English NSs who can be, for example, university students, authors of published research articles, or employees of multinational companies.

In such examinations, comparisons can be made in regard to L1 and L2 global (macro) discourse construction, arrangements of ideas, cohesion, and coherence. Additionally, researchers can

Table 32.1 Examples of recent synthesis publications and writing research overviews (in reverse chronological order)

Author	Years covered	Number of works examined	Research areas covered
Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008)	1984–2004	1,144	Contexts for L2 writing Curriculum, instruction, and assessment Basic research on L2 writing
Troia (2007)	1983–2005	150	Writing instruction only primarily in L1 English and some L2
Juzwik, Curcic, Wolbers, Moxley, Dimling, and Shankland (2006)	1999–2004*	1,502 total; 387 analyzed	Contexts for writing only (L1 and L2)
Hedgcock (2005)	1985–2005	135	L2 writing research and pedagogy
Paltridge (2004)	—	255	Academic writing (mostly L2)
Silva and Brice (2004)	2000–2003	360	Around 20 research areas related to teaching L2 writing, e.g. written texts, assessment, plagiarism, grammar and vocabulary, reading and writing, computers and technology
Weigle (2002)	—	255	Assessment and testing

Note: * Books excluded, journal articles only.

scrutinize textual (micro) features that have the function of marking discourse organization and aiding in the development of cohesive and coherent prose (e.g. Cutting, 2000; Hinkel, 2001b, 2002b; Markkanen & Schroeder, 1997). As with the research on L2 discourse, the primary objectives of practically all L2 text analyses and comparative studies have stemmed from instructional or curriculum development needs for teaching or learning to write in L2.

Learners of L2 writing can be, for example, school-age youngsters or adults, new immigrants who seek employment on their arrival in a new country or region of residence, professionals, employees of a broad range of organizations as well as their family members, university students, or academically-bound language learners who seek to obtain L2 writing skills prior to the beginning of their careers. Furthermore, research has examined the properties of L2 text produced by adult L2 writers in colleges and universities with an English medium of instruction (e.g. in Hong Kong, the Philippines, India, or Singapore), as well as the writing of young language learners in the course of their schooling. In short, those who undertake to learn to write in a L2 can be of all ages and as young as five years of age, and they can come from all walks of life and pursue their learning objectives in practically any location around the globe.

Predictably enough, L2 writing takes place at all levels of educational, vocational, community, and professional enterprise, as well as literacy training. Some specific contexts for L2 writing and writing development include:

- elementary school;
- secondary school;
- school-based newcomer programs for young learners;
- undergraduate and graduate studies in colleges and universities;
- community programs;
- resettlement, refugee, and adult education centers;
- professional contexts;
- academic and scholarly pursuits;
- the workplace.

With the possible exception of resettlement and refugee programs, which are rarely established for L1 writers who are, by definition not resettled in a new location, L2 writing probably takes place in the same contexts as L1 writing does.

Research Findings on Discourse (Macro) Properties of L2 Writing

Studies of L2 writing have delved into such global features of writing as discourse organization and information structuring, topic appropriateness, development, and continuity, types and arrangement of evidence, as well as text cohesion, coherence, clarity, and style. These constructs appear to be greatly influenced by the rhetorical and text construction norms that can differ substantially across languages and cultures. As has been mentioned, it is crucially important that comparative analyses of discourse and language features employed in L1 and L2 prose be carried out on the basis of similar or proximate written genres. For example, a comparison of linguistic properties of romantic fiction with its flourish of adjectives and adverbs to published scholarly articles in, say, biology or business memos may render results of any study less than valid. For this reason, discussion below is concerned only with the findings of many studies of L2 discourse (macro) properties, as well as the linguistic (micro) features, based on similar and comparable genres of writing.

By and large, the analyses of discourse properties in L2 writing pivot on scores and rankings assigned by raters, whose judgments are required to be consistent (see, for example, Connor-Linton, 1995;

Crowhurst, 1980; or Hamp-Lyons, 1995 for detailed discussions of the rating processes involved in evaluating L2 writing). Speaking broadly, virtually all studies to date have identified fundamental and pronounced differences between all facets of writing in L1 and L2 discourse and text. For example, the process of constructing L2 discourse is consistently and significantly different from that involved in producing L1 written prose, and L2 writers undertake less discourse planning, reviewing, and revising than L1 basic writers.

According to some researchers, however, the divergences between L1 and L2 discourse structuring, paragraph organization, and ideational cohesion can also be attributed to L2 writers' developmental constraints and inexperience rather than the transfer of L1 rhetorical paradigms (Mohan & Lo, 1985). Along these lines, examinations of published reports written by Chinese and English speakers (Taylor & Chen, 1991), and essays written by Korean students in a US university (Choi, 1988) demonstrated that discourse structuring in L1 and L2 writing can show both differences and similarities. In both cases, the authors note that due to the internalization of scientific discourse and the impact of English writing instruction in many countries, the paradigmatic disparities between the Anglo-American discourse structuring patterns and those in other rhetorical traditions have been noticeably declining over time and are likely to become even less pronounced in the future.

Based on the findings of hundreds of studies, compared to the discourse structuring and ideational development in L1 writing, the following characteristics of L2 writing seem to be prominent.

Discourse Structuring and Ideational Development in L2 Writing

Compared to L1 writers of similar social and educational backgrounds, and based on research in similar genres, L2 writers

- organize and structure discourse moves differently;
- utilize discourse moves and their contents differently and inconsistently, primarily due to the negative transfer of discourse structuring conventions across various cultures;
- construct or place thesis statements differently, as well as omitting them altogether;
- take a logically and conceptually different approach to rhetorical development, argumentation, persuasion, and exposition/narration;
- often neglect to account for counterarguments and to anticipate audience reactions;
- support their arguments and claims by means of statements of personal opinions and beliefs in lieu of more substantive information;
- significantly more often leave their argumentation unsupported;
- sequence ideas and explanatory information differently: the norms of rhetorical structuring of discourse often do not conform to those expected in comparable written genres in English;
- construct less fluent and less detailed/explanatory prose;
- produce shorter and less elaborated texts;
- rely more on personal opinions and include less fact-based evidence in argumentation and exposition;
- over- or under-estimate the amount of readers' background knowledge and the need for textual clarity, explicitness, and specificity;
- differently orient the reader to the content, as well as differently introduce and develop topics;
- delay or omit thesis/main point statements, and also omit or dramatically shorten conclusions/closings (e.g. one-sentence closings, as in: *Hopefully, scientists will find a solution to this problem soon.*);
- employ different strategies for extracting/citing information from sources, as well as paraphrasing, quoting, and including source material in their writing;

- develop text cohesion differently, with weak lexical/semantic ties and theme connections, and a preponderance of overt discourse-level conjunctions;
- rely on different given-new (theme–rheme) idea development;
- use different sequencing, parsing, ordering, and connecting paragraph divisions, e.g., in some cases, such as those found in academic essays, L2 paragraphs need to be re-organized or divided into shorter ones, or short paragraphs need to be combined into longer ones;
- differently—and often inconsistently—establish text cohesion: less frequent and less dense usage of cohesion devices, such as lexical, discursal, and referential cohesive ties;
- rely on repetition in order to paraphrase or establish cohesion at rates twice as high as those found in L1 writing;
- develop prose that is oblique (e.g., hints) and vague (e.g., questions and allusions in lieu of direct statements);
- often take moralistic and emotionally appealing approaches to argumentation and persuasion (e.g. Field & Oi, 1992; Indrasuta, 1988; Johnson, 1992; Hinkel, 1997, 2001b; Leki, 2007; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008; Mauranen, 1996; Paltridge, 2001, 2004; Silva, 1993; Spack, 1997; Swales, 1990; Markkanen & Schroeder, 1997).

Many researchers have concluded that L2 written discourse paradigms are principally, strategically, and globally different from those found in L1 writing. In light of these crucial and profound differences, it stands to reason that instruction in constructing L2 written discourse cannot be derived from that developed for L1 writing pedagogy; that is, learning to write in an L2 is a process foundationally and substantively distinct from learning to write in an L1.

The effects of L1 discourse structuring and rhetorical organization of information represents a prolific area taken up in numerous studies of L2 writing. Many investigations of written discourse paradigms in a range of rhetorical traditions and cultures have shed a great deal of light on various issues that continue to confound the teaching and learning of writing.

To this end, research into how L2 discourse and text are constructed, as well as comparative analyses of discourse in similar genres, have proven to be highly fruitful in the teaching of L2 writing and creating more appropriate curricula in L2 writing instruction (e.g., Leki, 1992; Reid, 1993; Weigle, 2002). In particular, an important outcome of research into L2 written discourse is the increased knowledge about discourse and text in writing traditions other than Anglo-American, including such written genres as news reports, academic publications, student writing, email messages, business letters, recommendations letters, email messages, article abstracts, conference proposals, sales letters, grant proposals, formal essays, university term papers, and diploma projects produced by L2 writers (e.g., Al-Khatib, 2001; Bouton, 1995; Choi, 1988; Hinkel, 2001a, 2001b; Jenkins & Hinds, 1987).

Morphosyntactic and Lexical Attributes of L2 Text

Unlike the ratings of the discourse attributes of L2 prose, studies of morphosyntactic and lexical features of L2 text, as well as error analyses, are typically quantitative. Such investigations allow for identifying statistically significant differences between the textual properties of L1 and L2 prose. To date, much research has investigated a broad range of lexical and syntactic features of L2 prose, such as the uses of personal and other types of pronouns, modal verbs, sentence structure (e.g., subordination and coordination), phrase and sentence conjunctions (e.g., sentence transitions), prepositional phrases, concrete and abstract nouns, verb tenses and aspects, cohesive devices (e.g., lexical repetition), lexical synonyms and ties, active and passive voice constructions, and lexical and grammatical errors. Much research, for example, investigated the uses of discourse markers (e.g., *well*, *you know*, or *I mean*), cohesion and coherence devices (e.g., *so*, *the cause of*, *a result*), modal verbs, hedges, and

modifiers in L1 and L2 prose (Field & Oi, 1992; Flowerdew, 2000; Hinkel, 1995, 2001b, 2002a, 2004; Johns, 1984, 1990; Johnson, 1992; Khalil, 1989; Mauranen, 1996; Swales, 1990).

For this purpose, researchers may compare the frequencies and contexts of sentence conjunctions (e.g., *furthermore*, *however*, and *thus*), coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*, *yet*, and *so*), and/or summary markers (e.g., *in short* and *in sum*) (e.g. Field & Oi, 1992; Hinkel, 1999, 2001a, 2003a, 2003b; Schleppegrell, 2002). Similarly, to analyze the uses of modal verbs, usage measurements can be computed separately or together for possibility and ability modals (e.g., *can*, *may*) or obligation and necessity modals (e.g., *must*, *should*).

Overall, based on a vast body of research, limited vocabulary and grammar are the most frequently cited/noted properties of L2 text.

Micro Features (Grammar and Vocabulary) of L2 Writing

Compared to L1 prose, L2 texts

- exhibit less lexical variety and sophistication;
- contain significantly fewer idiomatic and collocational expressions;
- have smaller lexical density and lexical specificity, and more frequent vocabulary misuses;
- rely on shorter sentences and clauses (aka T-units) with fewer words per clause and fewer words (e.g., nouns and modifiers) per verb;
- involve high rates of incomplete or inaccurate sentences (e.g., missing sentence subjects or verbs, incomplete verb phrases, sentence fragments);
- repeat content words more often (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs);
- provide twice as many simple paraphrases or avoid paraphrasing altogether with a preponderance of referential pronouns (e.g., *this*, *that*, *it*);
- use shorter words (fewer words with two or more syllables), more conversational and high frequency words (e.g., *good*, *bad*, *ask*, *talk*);
- incorporate fewer modifying and descriptive prepositional phrases, as well as a higher rate of misused prepositions;
- employ less subordination and two to three times more coordination.

L2 texts also employ

- fewer passive constructions;
- fewer lexical (e.g., adjectives and adverbs) and syntactic modifiers (e.g., subordinate clauses) of sentences, nouns, and verbs;
- inconsistent uses of verb tenses;
- more emotive and private verbs (e.g., *believe*, *feel*, *think*);
- significantly higher rates of personal pronouns (e.g., *I*, *we*, *he*) and lower rates of impersonal/referential pronouns (e.g., *it*, *this*, *one*);
- markedly fewer of abstract and interpretive nouns, and nominalizations (e.g., *rotation*, *cognition*, *analysis*);
- fewer adverbial modifiers and adverbial clauses;
- fewer epistemic and possibility hedges (e.g., *apparently*, *perhaps*) and more conversational hedges (e.g., *sort of*, *in a way*);
- more conversational intensifiers, emphatics, exaggeratives, and overstatements (e.g., *totally*, *always*, *huge*, *for sure*);
- fewer downtoners (e.g., *almost*, *hardly*);
- more lexical softening devices (e.g., *maybe*).

At present, research has clearly and unambiguously demonstrated that L2 writers' skill level in vocabulary and grammar disadvantages the quality of their formal prose. A number of studies report that, even after several years of language learning, the micro properties of L2 writers' text continues to differ significantly from that of novice NS writers in regard to a broad range of features. The results of dozens of analyses indicate that even advanced and highly educated L2 writers, such as doctoral students enrolled in universities in English-speaking countries and professionals, have a severely limited lexical and syntactic repertoire, compared to their NS peers. In many cases of undergraduate L2 writers, for example, a restricted access to advanced language features results in simple texts that rely on the most common language features that occur predominantly in conversational discourse. In fact, today, in light of a large body of research findings obtained after about a half a century of comparative L1 and L2 text analyses, this conclusion seems rather obvious and trite (Carson, 2001; Hamp-Lyons, 1991, 1995; Hedgcock, 2005; Hinkel, 2009; Jenkins & Hinds, 1987; North, 1986).

Analyses of Errors in L2 Prose

It is important to note at the outset that L2 writers' ability to identify and correct grammar and vocabulary errors is a developmental process at least to some extent. That is, as their experience with constructing L2 text grows, the frequency of errors in many instances of L2 writing can decline. However, researchers have also found that, for a majority of L2 learners, eliminating all morpho-syntactic and lexical errors is virtually impossible. Furthermore, while some types of sentence- and phrase-level errors can be reduced with experience, other classes of errors are a great deal more difficult to eliminate. Although studies of L2 writing have shown that errors can occur in the L2 uses of a broad range of language constructions, the following error types have been recognized as highly common and pervasive (e.g., Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2002; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Cutting, 2000; McCretton & Rider, 1993; Schleppegrell, 2002).

Examples of Frequent Error Types in L2 Writing

The following error types have found to be frequent in L2 writing:

- Sentence divisions, fragmented and clipped sentences, and run-ons, e.g., **So, I ask. *Sometime, one can be lack.*
- Subject and verb agreement, e.g., **Teachers of math and reading is serious about teaching.*
- Verb tenses and aspects, and verb phrases, e.g., **I remember the time when I receive a phone call from my boss that they were not satisfy with the work we've done.*
- Word-level morphology (i.e., absent or incorrect affixes) and incorrect word forms, e.g., **nation pride, *America class is more interested than in my country.*
- Incomplete or incorrect subordinate clause structure (e.g., missing subjects, verbs and clause subordinators), e.g. **when try to be success, *although economic is not a factor.*
- Misuses (or under-uses and over-uses) of coherence and cohesion markers, such as coordinating conjunctions and demonstrative pronouns, e.g., **At last, I completely agree with this. *The next reason is not willing to try again.*
- Singular or plural nouns and pronouns. **People want to go to school, so he work very hard on his subjects. *The elder are given many equipments to help them in the old age.*
- Incorrect or omitted prepositions, e.g., **from my opinion, *At some time there is this young businessman who just about takes a taxi of the airport.*
- Incorrect or omitted articles, e.g., **Finally, some people can not take good exam and telling very sad. *Some students sleep in classroom, play cellphone, play game.*

- Incorrect modal verbs, e.g., **It is also important to have adults by their side whom could advice hem when they may make a mistake.*
- Spelling errors.

Since the 1980s, analyses of L2 language errors have become a familiar venue in investigations of written computer corpora of learner writing (Granger, 1998; Granger & Tribble, 1998; Green, Christopher, & Lam, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2005). In general terms, the analysis of grammatical and lexical errors in L2 prose is rooted in the contrastive (error) analysis that predominated in L2 learning research between the 1950s and 1970s.

One of the most popular comments on the studies of errors in L2 writing is that L1 writers who are NSs of English also make mistakes. This observation is unquestionably true. A recent empirical study of L1 undergraduate writing in 24 US universities (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008) identified the most frequent types of errors (in declining order):

- wrong word;
- spelling (including homonyms);
- incomplete or missing documentation;
- mechanical error with a quotation;
- missing comma after an introductory element;
- missing word;
- unnecessary or missing capitalization;
- vague pronoun reference;
- unnecessary comma;
- unnecessary shift in verb tense;
- missing comma in a compound sentence.

It seems clear from this list that the L1 errors in formal prose are fundamentally distinct from those in L2 university writing because the former are unlikely to impede comprehension (see also studies of error gravity in L2 writing, e.g., Vann, Lorenz, & Meyer, 1991; Vann, Meyer, & Lorenz, 1984; and Santos, 1988).

Research in L2 Writing Instruction and Curricula

To date, research in effective writing instruction lags far behind studies into the features of L2 written discourse and text. As Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008, pp. 72–73) point out,

indeed, one would be hard pressed to identify foundational concepts that have aspired to provide a single, guiding basis on which to organize writing curricula comprehensively. ... [L]ittle research and few models of L2 writing have tried to relate curriculum content directly with L2 students' writing achievements.

These authors further note that abundant research is available about cross-cultural variations in discourse paradigms and “L2 composing processes” and that it may inform certain curricular decisions about teaching or organizing of teaching activities for specific groups of learners. However, research on principles for effective curriculum design or instructional methods for L2 writing is conspicuously missing.

In this light, the trends in L2 writing instruction and curricula have gravitated toward various sets of incremental teaching techniques and theoretical approaches that have gathered enough momentum to form particular schools of thought (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Paltridge, 2004). It is important to note, though, that few, if any, combinations of techniques

or theoretical models have been empirically validated in terms of their pedagogical effectiveness or even usefulness. Rather, many of the currently prevalent approaches to teaching L2 writing have become established instructional practices that typically fall under the umbrella term of “what works” (also known as “best practice”) in pedagogy and curriculum design. However, this term can refer to any number of issues in teaching or learning L2 writing. In some educational contexts, it can point practicing teachers to a productive activity that can help learners to improve the quality of their discourse organization, or enrich their vocabulary in writing, or provide for an enjoyable classroom task. Although in the teaching of L1 writing to school-age learners and college students a number of studies have undertaken to determine whether specific teaching techniques do in fact lead to a noticeable improvement in writers’ skills, few such investigations have been carried out in the contexts of L2 writing (see Troia, 2007 for a thorough discussion).

Techniques in Teaching L2 Writing

In the 1970s and 1980s, much in the methods and techniques for teaching L2 writing was derived from pedagogy in L1 composition. In later years, L2 writing instruction has striven to move away from composition studies at least to some extent (Frodesen, 2001; Hinkel, 2006). For past two or three decades, techniques prevalent in the teaching of L2 writing have sought to address an extensive array of issues that have traditionally represented major and minor foci of instruction modified to meet the needs of L2 learners specifically. These techniques encompass generating ideas and producing L2 text, organizing ideas in keeping with L2 discourse conventions, planning and outlining, paragraph and text development, drafting, revising at the discourse and sentence levels, considerations of audience, lexical choice, precision, and vocabulary changes, dictionary uses, spelling, punctuation, editing, and error correction, as well as using computers for writing, grammar practice, and vocabulary development.

In many prototypical activities, students are expected to read one or more selections on particular topics that vary in the degree of their content complexity and language sophistication depending on learners’ proficiency levels. While at the beginning or intermediate levels, the selected readings can be on such simple topics as “preparing for a trip” or “holidays in my country,” at advanced or pre-academic levels, the model texts can deal with more elaborate material on consumer behavior, psychology, or climate change. Following the reading portion of the activity, learners can be asked to perform a variety of tasks that include responding to the excerpt, recounting their own experiences associated with the topic, or providing their views on the subject matter.

By and large, these activities have the goal of teaching L2 writers how to construct meaningful and reasonably fluent and accurate texts, and organize ideas to meet particular communicative goals in context (e.g., see Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, for a detailed overview). As a follow-up, learners usually receive instruction in paragraphing, discourse structuring and organization, sentence construction, vocabulary, narrative or argumentation conventions, cohesion development, revising, and editing, as well as linguistic aspects of text (Silva & Brice, 2004). More recently, additional and innovative teaching techniques have also gained popularity, e.g., dialog journals, writing from sources, analyses of language uses in print and online media, examinations of language elements in model texts, such as those in academic disciplines or business writing, producing critiques or letters to express a point of view, or collaborative writing (e.g., (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002; Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, & Swann, 2003; Cotterall & Cohen, 2003; Myers, 2001).

Methodological and Theoretical Directions in L2 Writing Curricula and Instruction

As Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008) comment, “there have been surprisingly few research-based descriptions of L2 writing classroom instruction” (p. 80). A handful of publications that have

appeared since the early 1990s take the form of professional reflections or testimonials to recount teachers' experiences in L2 writing classes or working with individual L2 writers enrolled in writing courses (e.g., Ferris, 2001; Lillis, 2001). In part, due to the fact that various techniques and theoretical approaches to teaching L2 writing have not been substantiated by empirical research, several prevalent methods and schools of thought have evolved in tandem, and in addition to these, other pedagogical schemes continue to thrive.

Generally speaking, a number of methodological approaches to developing curricula and teaching L2 writing, as well as academic L2 writing, have emerged in the past half century. These have diverged to varying extents depending on the prevailing fashions and contemporary views on the effectiveness of a particular writing instruction, political trends in academic writing and composition teaching, language learning, L2 learning, human development, and cognitive maturation (e.g., Paltridge, 2004). Although novel perspectives on the teaching of L2 writing continue to emerge regularly, few (if any) of the once-predominant methods or sets of particular teaching techniques have disappeared completely. Each of the once-popular approaches to teaching L2 writing has its core of devoted supporters among researchers and instructors who remain steadfast when another methodological innovation appears on the disciplinary scene (see, for example, an extensive discussion of historically dominant and now less prevalent methods in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005).

In this light, the brief discussion below touches only on the prevailing trends among the many methodological and theoretical directions that currently predominate in the curriculum design and teaching approaches in L2 writing pedagogy.

At present, different schools of thought on L2 writing curricular and pedagogy predominate in different world regions. These are distinct in regard to how L2 writing should be taught, what L2 types of writing L2 learners should be able to produce, and what type of curricula and instruction best serves the needs of these learners. For instance, content-based language and writing instruction is commonly found in the US-based curricula, while genre-based teaching of L2 writing is prevalent in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand.

Content-based instruction and L2 curricula occupy a prominent place in the teaching of L2 writing to school-age learners and academically-bound students in English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for specific purposes (ESP) programs (Mohan, 1986). According to the principles of content-based teaching, L2 reading, writing, and language instruction are integrated together with that in content, while grammar and vocabulary play the role of attendant foci (e.g., Snow, 2005; Snow & Brinton, 1997). In content-based instruction, L2 reading and writing play a central role, and the instruction in these skills is typically combined to improve the quality of L2 prose in terms of both discourse (macro) and morphosyntactic and lexical (micro) properties. For example, combined with instruction in content and language uses in thematically-selected readings, the teaching of L2 writing can address matters of discourse structuring and information flow, as well as the uses of grammar structures and contextualized vocabulary. Additionally, features of formal written register and academic language can be emphasized in context (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000, 2005). Content-based teaching can also have supplementary foci on teaching incremental academic skills, such as text and information analysis, text and discourse construction, critical thinking, library research, or information gathering (Paltridge, 2004).

A wide adoption of content-based instruction in L2 reading and writing has given rise to numerous variations of the prototypical content-based instructional models that include such representative exemplars as immersion learning, partial immersion learning, sheltered instruction, or academic language learning. Other instructional variants have more closely followed approaches popular in the teaching of writing to L1 school-age learners and college students, such as academic literacy learning, cooperative learning, whole language instruction, or language-content-task instruction (e.g., Mohan, Leung, & Davison, 2001; Snow, 2005).

In practical terms, however, several important issues have been noted in connection with content-based instruction and the teaching of L2 writing. One of these, for instance, regards the level of expertise in matters of content and writing in the disciplines required of language teachers who work with content-based teaching and curricula. Many published reports have pointed out that practicing L2 teachers are well-equipped to deal with language instruction, but far less so in the areas of content and discipline-specific academic writing and discourse frameworks (e.g., Met, 1998; Snow, 2005). Along these lines, in the context of L2 writing curricula, it is not always clear what content should be included for the purposes of language and L2 writing instruction in content-based courses. In addition, given the great amount of work entailed in teaching content to L2 learners, in many cases, the teaching of grammar and the features of formal academic prose often receive short shrift. At present, practically all pedagogical materials on content-based instruction explicitly direct teachers to focus intensively on L2 writers' needs for grammar and language instruction (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2005; Hinkel, 2004; Paltridge, 2004; Snow, 2005).

In the UK and Australia in particular, *genre-based approaches* have predominated among methodological and theoretical directions in L2 writing instruction and curricular designs. Like content-based instruction, genre-based pedagogy also represents an integrated approach to teaching L2 writing together with reading and supplementary foci on attributes of written registers. The genre-based approach and teaching techniques draw on the foundations of the systemic functional linguistics and genre theory. These analytical approaches have informed the teaching of L2 writing mostly for academic and special purposes (EAP and ESP), as well as research in the uses of language in written discourse and texts in diverse genres, such as, say, university essays, assignments, or technical communications, ranging from email messages to news reports and to doctoral dissertations. Genre-based instruction seeks to enable L2 learners to analyze academic discourse while reading and to produce academic writing that adheres to the sociocultural norms of a particular academic (or professional) genre (e.g., Christie, 1999; Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, 2000; Martin, 1992). More recently, genre approaches to teaching L2 writing have made important inroads in North American research of school discourse, writing pedagogy, and, to some extent, instructional practices and teacher education (e.g., see Schleppegrell, 2004; Schleppegrell & Columbi, 2002).

In genre-based instruction, the language focus addresses features of discourse and text in the social, cultural, and practical contexts in which the written prose is constructed and the purposes that it is expected meet. Thus, pedagogical activities may undertake to analyze written prose in an array of genres, such as narrative, exposition, or argumentation, with the goal of increasing learners' awareness of how particular grammar and vocabulary are employed in authentic written text and discourse. Such practice in text analysis can become a useful springboard for an instructional focus on the specific uses of grammar structures and contextualized lexis. Similarly, the features of school writing or formal written discourse and register are emphasized in conjunction with the social and situational variables of language in the context of its use (e.g., Christie, 1999; Schleppegrell, 2002, 2004).

However, usage of a genre-based methodology and teaching activities in education, and more specifically in L2 curricula and instruction, have not been without controversy. Many experts in writing pedagogy and, more generally, in L2 teaching and learning believe that genres and their linguistic features may be subjective, culture-bound, vaguely defined, or even irrelevant to diverse types of ESL/EFL learners (e.g., see Silva & Brice, 2004 or Leki, 2007 for a discussion). For example, Widdowson (2003, p. 69) states that "the conception of genres as stable entities is only a convenient fiction: they are in reality sociocultural processes, continually in flux." He goes on to say that genres "are not controlled by native speakers of English, so neither is the language which is used to realize them" (p. 69). According to Widdowson, the findings of genre analyses represent



impressionistic judgments about their distinctiveness, and, therefore, such findings simply have limited validity. Thus, given that genres are far from well-defined, the pedagogic viability of the genre-based approach and the attendant teaching of genre-driven discourse conventions and language features is in fact "limited" (p. 70).

As has been mentioned, in addition to these dominant methodological and theoretical directions in L2 writing instruction, other models of curricular and pedagogical orientation have made their mark on the vast expanse of L2 writing research and practice. These include, for instance, innovative work on L2 literacy and biliteracy, a broad-based construct of multiliteracy, as well as literacy instruction with multimedia and technology (e.g., Hornberger, 2003; Kress, 2003; Luke, 2004). Research on the meanings and implications of literacy, multiliteracy, and literate discourse in the contemporary age of technology and international communication is that, for L2 learners and writers, it is essential to attain capacities for multimodal communication in order to achieve social and educational equality and opportunity. In this, there is no doubt.

Conclusions and Future Research Directions

In the past half century, a large body of work has been developed to identify the uses of discoursal, textual, syntactic, and lexical properties of L2 prose. Many studies of L2 text have identified the important and significant differences that exist between L1 and L2 writing in similar genres and among similar populations of writers. To date, research findings have established that L2 writers need intensive and extensive instruction in practically all aspects of constructing discourse and reasonably fluent and accurate text. Research has also demonstrated that, in many cases, crucial factors that confound L2 writing and text have to do with shortfalls of writers' language proficiencies and restricted linguistic repertoire that significantly undermine L2 writers' ability to produce high-quality texts. Based on the results of their studies, many researchers of L2 learning and development have emphasized that even school-age children or highly educated adult L2 learners require years of language training to attain the levels of proficiency necessary to produce effective written prose.

However, it also seems clear that research on what L2 writers need to learn, what they should be able to do, and how L2 writing can be efficaciously taught is conspicuously lacking. As Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008, p. 81) note, "the curriculum and instructional practice has been a perplexingly overlooked and underrepresented aspect of research on L2 writing." While there are a number of theoretical and methodological approaches to curriculum and pedagogy in L2 writing, such as content-based and genre-based instruction, none has been empirically and practically validated. Admittedly, the range of settings and contexts where L2 writing is taught and learned is enormous, as are the types of learners who set out to attain language proficiency and skills requisite to produce quality L2 writing. Nonetheless, the need for research in comprehensive curriculum design and effective instruction in L2 writing is indisputably great.

The well-established research venue on the properties of L2 written prose has also been accompanied by a vast literature on English language corpora, the features of formal academic writing in published works or that written by professional writers. Similarly, much has been learned about how L1 writers, who are NSs of English or other languages construct formal prose in school- or university-level writing. At present, however, it is not known what L2 writers are to be taught to enable them to meet their academic, occupational, professional, and vocational goals. New research, the development of principled classroom practice, and well-rounded teacher education are urgently needed. In the end, the overarching objective of novel and empirically-grounded and principled pedagogical models is to provide L2 writers with access to social, educational, and economic opportunities and to enable L2 writers to communicate effectively in a broad range of contexts.

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