

Teaching Writing to Non-Native Speakers: First Language Composing v/s Second Language Composing

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Abstract

The study aimed to evaluate teaching techniques for non-native speakers in terms of first language composing v/s second language composing. The study holds significance since it discusses different aspects of writing, including deep examination of composing process. The study was conducted among skilled and unskilled L2 writers. The results of the study showed that L1 and L2 writers devoted most of their time to generate ideas that display recursiveness in their composing processes. Results also depicted that brainstorming techniques can be approached in different forms, which can also be a good individual strategy that can be used by the students. Pedagogic recommendations need to be based on accurate and practical theories. Results has depicted that time planning and quality of L2 texts among students are positively affected from translating thoughts. Regarding pedagogical implications, the study has postulated that these techniques should be adapted by L2 students.

Keywords: brainstorming techniques, composing processes, first language, excursiveness, second language

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The teachers are advised to adopt similar practices, used to teach writing in the first language (L1) with increased number of international students learning English as a second language (L2). The motive behind such advice is the belief that composing is same in all languages regardless of a native language or a second or foreign language. L2 research findings have shown evidence to support the similarities of L1 and L2 writing in the composing processes that involve planning, writing, editing, revising, and the recursive nature of the composing process (Wang & Wen, 2002). Mostly, learners rely on Language 1 during writing, organizing and generating processes; whereas, the reliance on Language 2 was also found in terms of text-generating and task-examining. On the other hand, the findings also suggest greater differences between L1 and L2 writings regarding other aspects including deeper examination of the composing process itself (Beare, 2002). Moreover, it was found that the learners exhibited different level of interests at local and global levels. As the L1 and L2 composing differences started to be proven by research evidence, the complete adoption of L1 writing practices in L2 classrooms is no longer valid. Jones & Tetroe (1987) strongly support this assumption by stating that: “Second language composing we would argue, is not a different animal from first language composing.” (p. 55)

As researchers began to examine L1 and L2 composing processes, they discovered many areas of similarities and differences which led Kroll (1990) to conclude that: “It should not be presumed that the act of writing in one’s first language is the same as the act of writing in one’s second language.” (p. 2).

The study has reviewed the research conducted on the composing processes of L1 and L2 writings and has discussed the claims for and against the similarities in creating compositions between them. Moreover, study has also focused on implications of such claims on teaching writing to non-native speakers.

Review Analysis

Research on the Composing Process of L1 Writing

Initially, in English speaking countries the main focus of research on L1 composition was mainly on the writing product such as a finished paragraph or a finished essay on a chosen topic. Most of the research consisted of studies investigating pedagogic approaches and treatments of students’ written products and motivational approaches to encourage students for language learning (Gamero-Caleron, 2018). However, instead of viewing the writing activity as a demonstration of learning; researchers started to view it as a tool for learning and became interested in understanding how students write. The shift in interest started in 1980s and indicated the beginning of research focusing on the writing process itself. Many researchers started examining a variety of writers such as high school students, college students, skilled and unskilled writers.

Grabe & Kaplan (2014) responded to the shift from product to process, including protocol analysis, case study approach, and the think-aloud protocol which was highly adopted by both L1 and L2 researchers. The theory also highlighted that there are various differences between each of L1 and L2 group learners due to differences in their writing processes. Flower & Hayes (1981)

based their research methodology on protocol analysis, talk-aloud and transcribing. A closer look at their writing model indicated a number of operational processes that generate the written text, including; planning, translating, and reviewing (Appendix A). Flower & Hayes (1981) pointed out the subcomponents of the planning process which include; generating ideas, organizing information, and setting goals. Therefore, the recursive nature of the composing process is emphasized and highlighted as the writer moves back and forth between these processes while writing a text. Sevgi (2016) also conducted a study which indicated the work of previously presented theories and further led to the categorization of native speakers in terms of composing written texts. The cognitive strategies involved in L2 learning were also discussed in the study which provided deeper understanding.

Another theory of writing process was presented by Bereiter & Scardamalia (1987) that described what writers do when they write and argued that the composing process should not follow a single model. The process needs to include different developmental stages of writing, which showed that the composing process of young students, adults, skilled and unskilled writers were all different. Two models of composing processes were presented that include; knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming model. In the knowledge-telling model, unskilled writers plan and revise less and they also have limited goals (Appendix 2). The knowledge-transforming model showed how skilled writers analyze problems, set goals, and repeatedly change their texts and ideas (Appendix B).

Research on the Composing Process of L2 Writing

The number of foreign students in English speaking countries has grown tremendously. The researchers have curiously started to examine their writing processes in a non-native language. This might be extremely similar or entirely different from composing in L1. Initially, most of L2 research on the writing processes was drawn from L1 research findings and case studies; therefore, most researchers started to compare the composing processes of L1 and L2 writers. Raimes (1987) compared the composing processes of L2 students to findings concluded by other researchers on L1 students. The study claimed that there are many similarities and differences between both groups. Karim & Nassaji (2013) also showed different views related to the transfer of L1 and changes that took place with time. Moreover, the study also showed how L1 learning can be a beneficial communicative strategy in L2 writing. Jones & Tetroe (1987) strongly supported the complete adoption of L1 writings' pedagogical instructions in L2 classrooms. This adoption of pedagogical practices may lead to the assumption that both processes are totally identical

Some researchers have suggested some interesting differences; although, other research observations have shown contradicting results. However, several researchers have acknowledged the similarities between L1 and L2 composing processes. Cook (2016) showed that the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 learners require great attention. Furthermore, the study indicated that L2 learners are significantly different from the L1 learners, since they are already proficient in one language. On the other hand, Silva (1992) indicates that ESL composing processes seem generally more laborious than those in the L1. The notion of writing an essay in a non-native language indicated the requirement of extra efforts by the students to plan, generate ideas, and revise. Raimes (1985) conducted studies to examine the writing processes of skilled and

unskilled writers, which enabled them to further investigate the areas of differences and suggest more effective pedagogical implications.

Similarities and Differences between L1 and L2 Composing

Claims for the Similarities in L1 and L2 Composing Processes. The patterns of the composing process are one of the most obvious similarities between L1 and L2 writing. According to Arndt (1987), the findings of L2 research on writing process indicated that composing skills of proficient L1 and L2 writers are very similar. The study has used protocol analysis and case study techniques to trace the cognitive processes of six post-graduate Chinese students. These students wrote essays in their L1 and L2 (English) so that the researcher can compare the two composing processes in both languages. Both composing processes proved to be recursive, cyclical, nonlinear, and involved generating ideas, planning, and revising. Interestingly, L1 and L2 writers discovered their meaning and what they intend to express in the actual process of writing, which often forces proficient writers to abandon previously planned ideas and adopt newly discovered ones. (Arndt, 1987).

Eckstein & Ferris (2018) also conducted a study to compare L1 and L2 texts and writers in first-year composition. The L2 learners were inter mixed with native learners and their experiences were recorded. The study indicated that a very small amount of research has been commenced to discuss direct relationship between L1 and L2 learners. The results of the study concluded that L1 and L2 learners have a number of similarities among them; however, they also possess few dissimilarities. The L2 learners were found to have self-perceived language needs as compared to the L1 learners. The differences as highlighted in the study included; language-related anxiety, linguistic accuracy and lexical diversity.

Zamel (1982) strongly supported the adoption of the pedagogical practices of L1's writing processes. The study results found that L2 students' writing processes are similar to those of L1 students. The study continued to observe similar findings among skilled and unskilled L2 writers. Similar to skilled L1 writers, the skilled L2 writers devoted their most time to generate ideas which displayed recursiveness in their composing processes, focusing on delivering meaning and postponing editing. The composing of these students was a process of discovering the creativity. On the other hand, unskilled L2 writers were very concerned with linguistic problems and writing mechanics such as grammar and spelling, which obstructed the flow of ideas. Such observation was similar to unskilled L1 writers, which showed that unskilled writers from both languages exhibited similar composing problems (Zamel, 1982). Arndt (1987) and Zamel (1982) noted the similarities between the composing process of L1 and L2 writers and acknowledged the individual differences between various writers. These differences include the variety of strategies and behaviors that writers display while composing. For example, some might brainstorm and write various ideas on notes, others might not write anything until they form a better understanding of the writing task.

On the other hand, Fukuda (2011) discussed the relationship of L1 and L2 reading and writing skills. The results of the study showed that the transference of both reading and writing skills was possible across languages. However, the study also showed that no relationship was found between L1 writing and reading skills. The results of the study indicated some contradictions

with previous studies as they reported positive relationship between L1 writing and reading skills. The results also depicted a positive relationship between L2 writing and reading skills. The study can prove to be significant for teachers in improving the exam-oriented and teacher-centered approach. The findings suggested that exam preparation might be demanding for a number of students; such that, they might believe that only those students are intelligent who get successful grades in their exams. Therefore, teachers must adopt strategies to reduce the chances of raising such perceptions in the mind of learners.

Furthermore, Jones & Tetroe (1987) studied the L1 and L2 generated texts of five Venezuelan students and discovered that these students transfer both good and weak skills from their L1 to their L2. The planning strategies that these learners have developed in their L1 composing processes is aiding L2 composing. The effect of the L1 composing on the L2 was clear as students showed the same good or bad patterns in both the composing processes. Therefore, Jones & Tetroe (1987) claimed that the similarities in both composing processes lead to total implementation of L1 writing practices in the L2 classrooms. Interestingly, Caudery (1997) claimed that such factors add to the complexity of L2 composing processes. The study observed that unskilled L2 writers may have already developed satisfactory writing processes which can be transferred wholly or in part to L2 writing. That is, unlike L1 writers who deal with one language, the writing processes of L2 writers may employ aspects of two languages. For instance, L2 writers may generate ideas in their L1 and then translate them to the L2. However, even with all the research evidence of the similarities between L1 and L2 composing, the complexity and unique nature of L2 composing made many researchers question to research on the findings and conduct deeper research.

Claims Against the Similarities in L1 and L2 Composing Processes. Raimes (1985) strongly opposed the immediate and total adoption of L1 writing teaching pedagogy and claimed that there are more differences between the composing processes of both languages. The study has reviewed the previous research conducted by others and questioned the criteria of measuring skill in writing and stated that the meaning of the term ‘unskilled’ is vague as majority of the writing assessments are based upon the written product (Raimes, 1985). Raimes (1985) compared the findings with previous outcomes of research conducted on L1 writers. The results found that her L2 students showed commitment and attention to the task, unlike L1 writers. It was rationalized that L2 writers write with the goal of learning a language not only completing a writing task. These students generate many ideas in discussions and brainstorming; although, L2 students struggle to produce writing on demand. However, Raimes (1985)’s observation regarding writers’ attitude to errors contradicted with other research findings. Raimes (1985) observed that L2 students did not go back to edit as often as the unskilled native speakers because they are not intimidated by the thought of errors. That is, since these students are language learners, they know that their language is imperfect and expect the existence of errors.

Other researchers started to examine the possible differences of the composing processes of the two languages. Silva (1992) and (1993) acknowledged that the general composing process patterns are similar between L1 and L2 writings. The composing of L2 is more constrained, more difficult, and less effective (Silva, 1992). L2 writers struggled with lack of fluency and proficiency, which affected generation of ideas, setting goals, and caused repetition of content. For L2 writers,

the composing process is more laborious and their generated materials were less detailed, less developed, and less suitable to convey meaning (Appendix C). They reviewed less and focused on form rather than content. Silva concluded that L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different from L1 writing (Silva, 1993). The L2 composing seems to exhibit unique cognitive and linguistic differences from the composition of L1. These differences justify halting the complete adoption of L1 pedagogical practices and call for further research into L2 composing nature.

A major difference between the composing processes of L1 and L2 writers was brought by Leki (1996), as the study discussed the bilingual implications for the cognitive writing processes which ESL students bring to composing in L2. The L2 learners have another language to use in writing, which is considered as the most prominent difference from L1 writers who only use one language. Leki & Carson (1997) studied the effect of cultural differences between L1 and L2 on the complexity of L2 composing. The L2 writers produce their texts in very different conditions from L1 writers. For instance, L2 students write academic texts for university assignments, view language, and approach topics from their native cultural perspectives. In their attempt to prove the different nature of L2 writers and its effect on their composing processes, Leki & Carson (1997) pointed out that cultural distinctions L2 writers affect their planning processes and the direction of the generated ideas. Furthermore, these students bring their L1 based knowledge to their texts and were asked to write academic assignments from multiple readings. All these factors add to the complexity of the whole composing processes of L2 writers.

Another area of differences between L1 and L2 composing processes is brought by Friedlander (1990) regarding L1 use in generating content for L2 composing. The study argued that translating thoughts from L1 to L2 do not negatively affect L2 writers, either on the time they spend in planning or on the quality of their L2 texts. Further research was later conducted by Wang & Wen (2002) on sixteen Chinese EFL writers where L2 writing process was claimed as a bilingual event, i.e. L2 writers have two languages to use for cognitive operations. Many researchers are often seen advising learners to ‘think’ in the target language; although, no one can stop or control the cognitive transfer or translations of two languages happening inside the learners’ mind. Despite all the similarities or differences, the research findings have indicated that some aspects of L1 composing processes have been used in L2 composing. All these research outcomes have recommended or cautioned against the application of L1 composing practices in L2 writing classroom.

Marzban & Jalali (2016) also emphasize on evaluating the differences and similarities between Persian and English learners. The study highlighted the association between both Persian and English writing. Thus, by evaluating the similarities and differences between both type of learners, the EFL teachers can learn about the strengths and weakness of individuals. The study also emphasized on the importance of integrating the instruction of both languages in EFL books which can enhance the pedagogical application of EFL textbooks. On the other hand, Kim & Yoon (2014) showed that there exists a language proficiency difference. The study also showed that the rate of switching to L1 was much higher among high-proficiency participants as compared to the low-proficiency participants. The language switching was done frequently by the high-proficiency

participants during writing tasks; while, low-proficiency students switched languages more during argumentative tasks.

Pedagogical Implication

As researchers started endorsing L1 writing practices and imitating them in the L2 writing classrooms, Leki (1996) cautioned that although successful L1 writing teaching techniques can be used from L1 writing classes, these techniques need to be adjusted for L2 students. The students need the flexibility of extra time to generate, brainstorm, plan, and organize ideas. They need to be given instructions and practices to help them generate and organize content. In short, all focus should be in the actual process of composing. Strategies such as brainstorming in groups or guiding students to find proper reading materials can aid the planning process of composing. Moreover, L2 students need to be aware of the audience who will read their texts; therefore, it is very beneficial and highly recommended to direct their ideas to convey the meaning to the reading audience. Interestingly, it was observed that both L1 and L2 writers did not care for the audience while generating content for their texts. The rationale for such behavior was thought to be due to L1 writers taking their audience for granted presuming that the audience will automatically understand them. On the other hand, L2 writers were focusing on delivering the ideas from their brains to their texts and neglected the audience. If writers took their audience into consideration from the beginning, it would have helped in planning a more effective and useful content.

There should be a balance between instructions that focus on helping students discover effective ways to generate meaning and exercises that focus on form or linguistic aspects. Moreover, individual differences and personal preferences should also be considered in composing instructions. There is no fixed and single method that is the best one to apply in writing classrooms. Therefore, teachers can attempt to satisfy and meet the demands of most students in the classroom by giving students variety of realistic strategies and exercises. One of the most common non-effective practices by writing teachers is leaving the rest of the writing activity as homework. By asking students to do the writing task at home, it simply becomes a test not a classroom activity where the teacher is available to observe and aid the writing processes. However, policy makers, curriculum experts and teachers need to consider giving students adequate time for in-class composing practices while designing writing syllabuses. Majority of Saudi students in writing classes were instructed to write traditional and linear models of writing. However, as research has shown and proved, composing cannot be divided into fixed stages. White & Arndt (1991)'s cyclical model of writing is one of the best pedagogic models to convey the nature of composing processes. There are plenty of exercises and strategies that can be employed in L2 writing classes. However, these pedagogic applications should not only focus on effective instructions and strategies, but also equip students with knowledge of composing processes. Other factors are equally important, such as choosing culturally sensitive topics, giving adequate time for planning, writing, and drafting, and encouraging students to understand and embrace the recursive nature of composing.

Conclusion

As the research has pointed out similarities between L1 and L2 composing processes, another round of research questioned these similarities and explored several differences between the writing processes of both languages. However, the outcomes are still unclear and need further

investigation. Feasible methods to L2 composing practices need to be based on a wider and clearer understanding of the L2 composing processes. Pedagogic recommendations need to be based on accurate and practical theories, case studies with representative samples, and adequate research in all aspects involved in L2 composing. The study has discussed the claims of various researchers for and against similarities of L1 and L2 composing processes and concluded that although some aspects of the composing processes are similar, differences exist and should be considered. The pedagogic implications of the research outcomes have also been discussed in this paper. More research is recommended as the number of L2 writers is growing tremendously.

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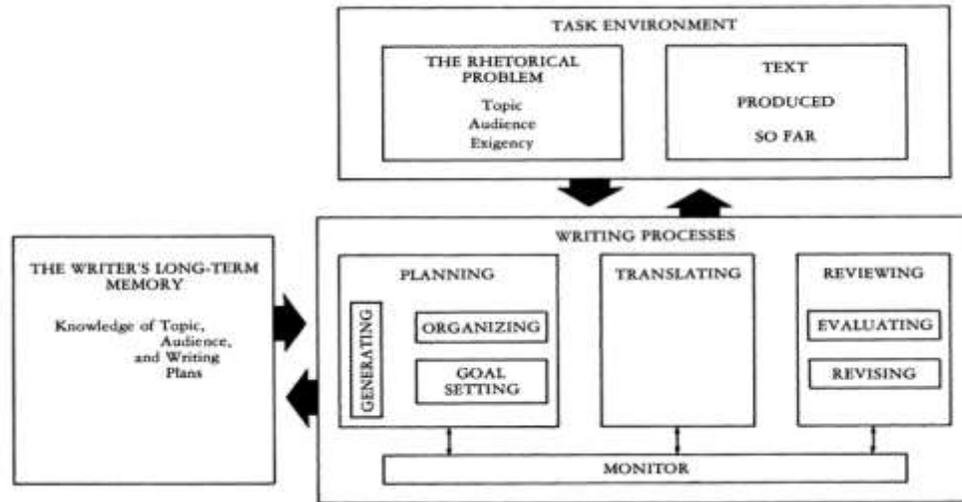
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Appendix A

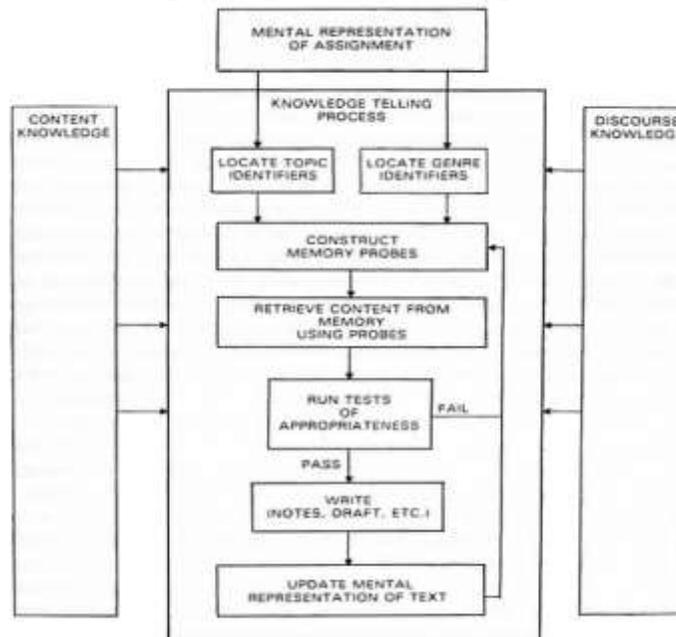
Cognitive Model of the Writing Processes



Adapted from “A cognitive process theory of writing” by L. Flower and J. R. Hayes, 1981, *College Composition and Communication*, p. 370

Appendix B

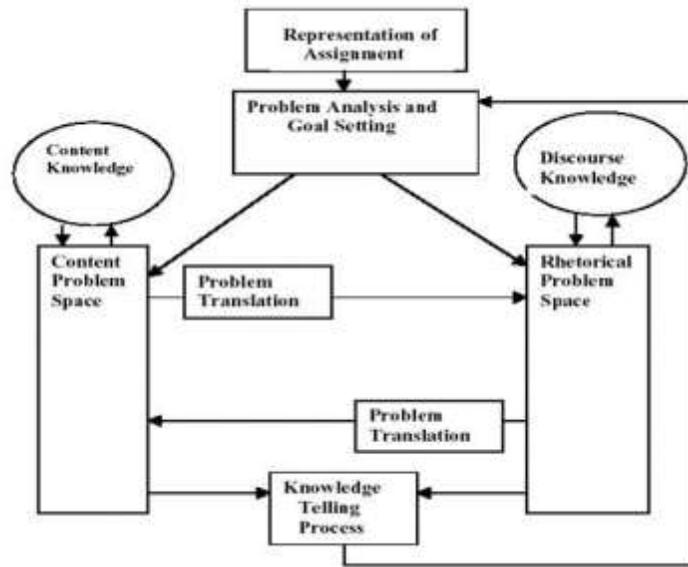
Knowledge-Telling Model of the Writing Processes:



Adapted from *the psychology of written composition*, p.8, by C. Bereiter and M. Scardamalia, 1987, Hillsdale, N.J.; London: Erlbaum.

Appendix C

Knowledge-Transforming Model of the Writing Processes



Adapted from *The psychology of written composition*, p.12, by C. Bereiter and M. Scardamalia, 1987, Hillsdale, N.J.; London: Erlbaum.

Appendix D

Pedagogic Model of the Writing Processes



Adapted from *Process writing*, p. 4, by R. White and V. Arndt, 1991, Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Appendix E

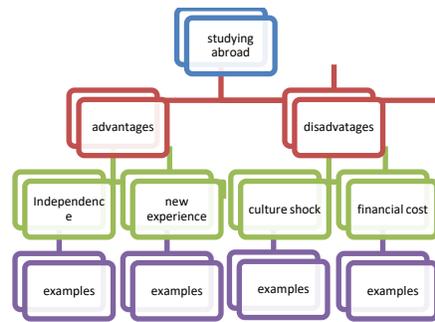
Brainstorming Activity1: Using Mind Maps

1. Teacher encourage students to create a diagram with a central main idea that can be divided and branch off to multiple and correlating words or concepts.
2. This activity will help students generate a well-rounded view, gain insights into the topic or get inspired with new emerging ideas.
3. It can be done as a pair or group work in the writing classroom as well as being a very useful individual strategy to generate content.

See an example below:

Writing task: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad?*

Write a four-paragraph essay with 150 words stating what you think are the pros and cons of such experience.



Appendix F

Brainstorming Activity 2: Using Pessimist Vs. Optimist's Game

1. This brainstorming activity can be used for generating ideas to topics and finding solutions.
2. Divide the students into pairs: a pessimist and an optimist.
3. Ask them to write down a couple of ideas for the topic.
4. In pairs, the pessimist suggests the problem, while the optimist provide a solution starting with 'how about'.

For example, topic about online learning.

Pessimist: 'what if students do not know how to communicate through educational forums?

Optimist: how about making tutorials for them?

5. The pessimist then challenges the answer provided by the optimist.
6. After a few minutes, get the pair to join others to make fours. They should discuss their ideas, solutions and the problems generated earlier. They will build up upon each other's responses and create more ideas.
7. After 10 minutes, ask each group (the pessimists and the optimists) to nominate at least four ideas.
8. Teacher write the ideas on the board and discuss them with the class