# A Comprehensive Review of Studies on Second Language Writing

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## Abstract

*This paper aims at providing a comprehensive review of previous research on second language (L2) writing. Major issues and the relevant findings from five areas of inquiry into L2 writing are presented, namely, L2 writers' characteristics, the L2 writing process, L2 writing feedback, L2 writing instruction, and L2 writers' texts. It is found that L2 writing is quite a complex process which involves participation of various factors. Finally, the inadequacies of the existing studies on L2 writing are summarized and new scope for future research is proposed.*

## 1. Introduction

Second language (L2) writing has always been a difficult area for second language learners and a hot topic for second language researchers. The emergence of the field of L2 writing is a relatively recent phenomenon, but it has come of age. Historically speaking, the field of L2 writing originally focused on the teaching of writing to the increasing population of international ESL writers at institutions of higher education in North America in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. Over around the last 50 years, the number of inquiries into L2 writing issues have grown rapidly and produced fruitful results. Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008) point out that the last 30 years or so have seen several firsts in L2 writing research:

the first journal devoted exclusively to L2 writing in 1992 (*Journal of Second Language Writing*); the first book on the development of writing ability of what is being called Generation 1.5, that is, people who immigrate to a new country before or during their early teens and are high school immigrant students (Harklau, Losey & Siegal, 1999); the first bibliographies of published papers on L2 writing (Silva, Brice & Reichelt, 1999; Tannacito, 1995); and the first conference devoted exclusively to L2 writing in 1998 (Purdue Symposium on Second Language Writing). Especially during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, L2 writing began to evolve into an interdisciplinary field of academic study with its own disciplinary infrastructure (Matsuda et al., 2003).

It has established links with other various fields of inquiry, such as composition studies, applied linguistics, teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), foreign language education, and bilingual education, among others. Researchers from various linguistic fields have carried out inquiries into various issues in five areas, namely, L2 writers' characteristics, the L2 writing process, L2 writing feedback, L2 writing instruction, and L2 writers' texts. Although their outstanding work provides us with invaluable insights, a comprehensive review of major issues and the relevant findings in L2 writing is still rare. As an effort to address this lack, this paper aims to retrospectively provide a relatively comprehensive and systematic overview of the development of L2 writing research and to summarize the unsolved problems so as to inspire future studies. This historical analysis can offer L2 writing scholars, especially novice researchers and L2 writing practitioners, thoughtful insights into profound L2 writing scholarship, because it can "help identify what issues have been discussed, what questions have been posed, what solutions have been devised, and what consequences have come of those solutions and why" (Matsuda & Silva, 2005, p.

33).

Due to quite varied research interests of individual researchers, it will not be possible neither necessary for us to report every study in great detail. So, in the following, a review of the studies on the major topics in the five areas of L2 writing research and their findings will be presented, which, we firmly believe, will help those inexperienced L2 writing researchers and those interested in this field of inquiry to know better about the development of L2 writing research. Also, based on the existing literature, we will propose a few unsolved problems which require further discussion.

## 2. Major Fields of Inquiry into L2 Writing

As has been mentioned, most L2 writing research has been carried out in five major fields: L2 writers' characteristics, the L2 writing process, L2 writing feedback, L2 writing instruction, and L2 writers' texts.

## 2.1 L2 Writers' Characteristics

Studies on L2 writers' characteristics have mostly examined three categories of the writer variables, i.e. L2 variables, L1 variables, and psychological and social variables, and their influence on L2 writing.

### 2.1.1 L2 Variables

L2 variables mainly include L2 writing ability, L2 reading ability, L2 writing confidence, L2 writing grammatical ability and L2 writer perception, among which L2 writing ability received most attention.

In the research, students with higher levels of L2 writing ability,

i.e. more skilled L2 writers, are contrasted with those less skilled L2 writers. More skilled L2 writers tended to be older and female, having spent more time in English-speaking countries, were exposed to writing at home and with peers, and had received rhetorical instruction in both first and second languages. They exhibited confidence in their second language writing ability, a sense of purpose, an awareness of audience, and a commitment to the writing task (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Victori, 1999). Also, these more skilled L2 writers produced written texts with different features as opposed to those by less L2 skilled writers. For instance, it was found that more skilled L2 writers wrote longer texts (Grant & Ginther, 2000; Sasaki, 2000). With regard to parts of speech, they used more adjectives, adverbs, articles, nouns, verbs, personal pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions. In terms of functional categories, they used more amplifiers (e.g. *definitely*), conjuncts (e.g. *however*), demonstratives (e.g. *this*), downtoners (e.g. *barely*), and emphatics (e.g. *really*) (Grant & Ginther, 2000; Kiany & Nejad, 2001). As for grammatical features, they used more modals, nominalizations, past tense, present tense, subordination, third person pronouns, passives, and fewer second person pronouns (Grant & Ginther, 2000).

## 2.1.2 L1 Variables

L1 variables mainly include L1 writing ability, L1 reading ability and L1 education. The majority of the studies in this respect are devoted to examining the relationship between L1 writing ability and L2 writing quality/ability.

A majority of these studies have identified a positive relationship and have suggested that literacy skills could be transferable across languages. Carson et al. (1990) suggested that L2 writing ability correlated significantly with L1 writing ability. They examined the first language and second language

writing abilities of adult ESL learners to determine the relationships across languages (L1 and L2) in the acquisition of L2 writing skills. The subjects, Japanese and Chinese ESL students in academic settings, were asked to write an essay in both their first and second languages. The results indicated that writing skills could transfer across languages. These data suggested that L2 literacy development was a complex phenomenon for already literate adult second language learners and involved variables such as L2 language proficiency and L1 and L2 educational experience. Carson and Kuehn's (1992) research produced similar results. Data from native Chinese speakers enrolled in academic and pre-academic English courses in American universities showed evidence that good LI writers tended to become good writers in their L2, but that L1 writing proficiency may decline as L2 writing proficiency increases. Furthermore, there appeared to be a writing aptitude factor that constrained writing development both in L1 and in L2.

Ma and Wen (1999) found evidence that the L2 writing ability of writers at different L2 proficiency levels could be significantly predicted by L1 writing ability. L2 writing was indirectly affected by L1 writing ability, which in turn directly affected L2 oral expression ability, L2 vocabulary comprehension, and L2 discourse comprehension ability. Wang and Wen (2002) completed a study on the effects of L1 literacy capabilities on the L2 writing ability of Chinese EFL learners, which yielded two important findings. First, Chinese vocabulary and Chinese writing were found to have direct as well as indirect effects on English writing, while Chinese discourse had indirect effects. These three L1 variables could account for about 71.8% of the variance in L2 writing. Second, in the high-ability learners, Chinese writing showed direct effects on English writing, while Chinese vocabulary displayed indirect effects. These two L1 variables together could account

for 62.3% of the variance in L2 writing of the high-ability group. For the low-ability learners, Chinese discourse had a direct effect on English writing while Chinese vocabulary showed indirect effects. Altogether, these two L1 variables could predict 21.6% of the variance in L2 writing of the low-ability group.

A few studies have generated different findings with a negative or no/weak relationship. Carson and Kuehn (1992) observed the role that attrition of L1 writing abilities played in the development of L2 literacy skills as students spent time in an L2 environment. The participants were 48 native Chinese speakers studying in the U.S. in either basic writing courses for matriculated university students or pre-academic intensive English programs. They found that proficiency improvements in L2 writing may have developed at the cost of the loss of L1 writing ability. On the other hand, Aliakbari (2002) argued that L2 writing ability had no meaningful relationship with L1 writing. L2 writing ability and L1 writing ability were two separate tasks; that is, writing in L2 was a language-specific phenomenon, not a writing problem. So L2 writing may not necessarily have been helped by or transferred from L1 writing. The author also suggested that the low correlation might imply that other factors may have been involved.

## 2.1.3 Psychological Variables

Psychological variables are quite inclusive and complex. The most analyzed ones in this category are apprehension, emotion, and extroversion/introversion and field dependence/independence.

Apprehension

Betancourt and Phinney (1988) and Skibniewski and

Skibniewska (1986) found that more writing apprehension was felt by less skilled L2 writers than by more skilled writers and graduate students. Sources of apprehension were different for different groups and for different levels of writing experience. Apprehension would decrease as bilingual writing experience increased, while higher writing apprehension correlated with lower quality of writing. Lee (2005) suggested that free reading could significantly predict writing apprehension in an inverse way. In other words, more free reading was related to less apprehension about writing. Free reading could help reduce writer's apprehension in a second or foreign language and was found to be a predictor of writing performance. However, it couldn't be concluded that the more free writing one did, the less writing apprehension one would experience.

Emotion

There is not much research on this aspect; however, Clachar's (1999) is worth mentioning, which suggested that emotion may influence writing strategies. In this study, L2 writers were asked to write in response to two topics: one designed to elicit an emotional text; the other a non-emotional text. In the emotional text, students spent more time on lexical, morphological and syntactic issues because they hoped to faithfully express their intended meaning and were more concerned with the semantic value of specific linguistic structures. This couldn't be found in non-emotional text writing. Revision strategies were also different. When revising the emotional text, students spent more time on pragmatic and textual issues because they were more concerned about whether the whole text delivered their intended ideas. In the non-emotional text writing, revisions were mostly microstructural changes which did not alter the main idea of the text.

## Extroversion vs. introversion & field dependence vs. independence

Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) found that extrovert or field independent L2 writers were more ambitious, wrote and researched independently, and took professors' feedback seriously. On the contrary, introvert or field-dependent L2 writers tended to be satisfied with B grades, preferred group work, and were indifferent to feedback.

## 2.2 The L2 Writing Process

Research on the L2 writing process has started to thrive since the early 1980s. L2 writing is a complex process of discovery which involves brainstorming, multiple drafting, feedback practices, revision, and final editing. It is different from L1 writing, because L2 writers have more than one language at their disposal (Wang & Wen, 2002). There are two main foci in this area of study: the role of L1 in L2 writing, and writing strategies.

## 2.2.1 The Role of L1 in L2 Writing

In studies on the role of L1 in the L2 writing process, researchers have found evidence of the transfer of L1 writing skills and strategies to L2 writing (Lay, 1982, 1988; Brooks, 1985; Uzawa & Cumming, 1989; Cumming, 1989, 1990; Krapels, 1991). In Lay's (1982) case study of four native Chinese-speaking ESL writers, the writers' think-aloud data revealed that they used their L1 to "get a strong impression and association of ideas for the essay" (p. 406). Brooks (1985), in her investigation of the writing processes of five unskilled college writers speaking Cantonese, French, Spanish and Malay, found that students who had read and written extensively in their native language were able to use those competencies when writing in English,

including "a sense of audience, a variety of composing strategies, and a fund of implicit models" (p. 10). Lay (1988) suggested that L1 use could facilitate the process of thinking and writing in L2 and that L2 learners with limited English skills should be encouraged to use their L1 to generate ideas associated with a topic and develop strategies that would facilitate their learning of the L2. In Cumming's (1989) case study of 23 Francophone students, it was found that these students switched frequently between English and French when composing aloud on an ESL writing task. These students reported using their L1 to search out and to assess appropriate wording, to compare cross-linguistic equivalents, and, sometimes, to reason about linguistic choices in the L2. Krapels (1991), in her overview of L2 writing process research, recognized the use of L1 as "a fairly common strategy among L2 writers" (p. 49). Think-aloud data from five intermediate Spanish EFL writers in Roca et al.'s study (1999) also revealed an extensive use of L1 in the L2 composing process. These L2 writers were found to "expand, elaborate, and rehearse ideas through their L1" (p. 25) and "produce the pretext in L1" (p. 27). Another survey study of ten Anglo-Canadian students taking an "intermediate Japanese" course revealed similar results (Uzawa & Cumming, 1989). Eight learners used English extensively to generate ideas, search for topics, develop concepts, and organize information when composing an essay in Japanese.

Attempts have been made to measure the amount of L1 use in the L2 composing process. The findings show varied amounts for L2 writers of different proficiency levels. In general, proficient L2 learners do not depend heavily on the L1 to drive the writing process because they have a sufficient level of L2 automaticity and knowledge to think and plan in the L2 (Jones & Tetroe, 1987). However, lower L2 proficiency writers rely more heavily on their L1 during the writing process in order to

sustain the process and prevent a complete breakdown in language (Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Raimes, 1985; Uzawa & Cumming, 1989). Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) asked 48 Japanese university-level students to report on how much Japanese they thought they were using in their minds while they were writing directly in English. On average, 48% of the students reported using 50-75% Japanese, 27% of the students felt they used 25-50% Japanese, and 17% students reported using more than 75% Japanese while only 8% reported using less than 25% Japanese. Manchon, Roca, and Murphy (2000) collected the think-aloud data from three intermediate Spanish learners of English engaging in argumentative and narrative writing. They found that one writer was thinking mainly in Spanish for more than half of the thinking-aloud data (56% in argumentative and 61% in narrative), while the third one used Spanish to a lesser extent (43.5% in argumentative and 16.3% in narrative). Studies on French as L2 produced similar results. The vast majority (80%) of the 25 intermediate learners of French in Cohen and Brooks-Carson's study (2001) reported thinking in their L1 (English) "often" or "always" while doing a French essay. The other 10 Spanish-English bilinguals in the same study also reported thinking at least "some of the time" in English when composing in French.

## 2.2.2 L2 Writing Strategies

Various specific writing strategies have been identified in the L2 writing process. Writers with different proficiency levels tend to use different strategies. Some strategies received major attention, namely, planning, translation, restructuring, and backtracking.

Planning

L2 writers with different levels of L2 proficiency tend to use

planning differently. Akyel (1994) examined English compositions written from plans in English and Turkish. Seventy-eight Turkish university students from two different proficiency levels (intermediate and advanced) wrote on three different assigned topics: a Turkish culture-specific topic, a topic related to American/British culture, and a more general topic. The study investigated the following two issues: 1) If there were differences between the plans written in Turkish and English and the resulting compositions which correlate with the topic and proficiency level; 2) If there were differences between higher- and lower-proficiency writers in terms of plan and composition scores for the three topics and if so, whether these differences could be attributed not only to the proficiency level but also to the language used for the plan. The findings indicated that the language used for the plan did not make a significant difference in the quality of the plans written by higher-proficiency students on the three topics but did have an effect on the plans written by lower-proficiency students on the Turkish and American/British culture-specific topics. Moreover, the language of the plan did not make a significant difference to the resulting compositions for either group on any of the three topics. Furthermore, proficiency level affected the quality of plans and compositions, but the language used for the plan had no significant effect on the differences between higher- and lower-proficiency writers in terms of plan and composition scores.

## Translation

Translation is a strategy that is used more by less skilled writers. Gosden (1996) presented interview data from a group of Japanese novice researchers who were asked to comment on their writing practices in preparing their first scientific research articles to be published in English. Evidence was found that some of them would write an entire paper in L1 and then

translate this directly into the L2, using a phrase-by-phrase translation strategy. Sasaki (2000) investigated EFL learners' writing processes using multiple data sources including their written texts, videotaped pausing behaviors while writing, stimulated recall protocols, and analytic scores given to the written texts. Three paired groups of Japanese EFL writers (experts vs. novices, more- vs. less-skilled student writers, and novices before and after 6 months of instruction) were compared in terms of writing fluency, quality/complexity of their written texts, their pausing behaviors while writing, and their strategy use. The results revealed that less skilled L2 writers often stopped to translate their ideas into English and more skilled L2 writers often stopped to refine English expression. Translation is favored by some L2 writers. Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) found that Japanese college students who wrote English essays through Japanese translation were rated higher than those who wrote directly in English. As for the advantages of translating, the students felt that the ideas were easier to develop, thoughts and opinions could be expressed more clearly, and words could more easily be found.

## Restructuring

Restructuring (RS) is a complex phenomenon which is employed for different purposes in the complicated L2 composing process. It is defined as the search for an alternative syntactic plan once the writer predicts, anticipates, or realizes that the original plan is not going to be satisfactory for a variety of linguistic, ideational or textual reasons (Roca et al., 1999). They identified three types of RS strategies. Firstly, ideational RS (change in meaning) allows the writers to formulate an alternative idea once they decide that the meaning they want to convey is not the one that had originally been planned. The ultimate purpose of ideational RS is to seek out and express the

writers' intended meaning. This use of RS may take different forms, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Types and uses of ideational RS

| Types of ideational RS | Uses |
|---|---|
| Message abandonment | The initial message is abandoned because there is no need to provide further information about that idea. |
| Message elaboration | An elaboration is encoded in its own right. |
| Message reconceptualization | The original message is cancelled and writers refined their conceptual viewpoints. |

Secondly, textual restructuring helps writers control the structure of written discourse beyond clausal level and is used for coherence/cohesion, stylistic concerns, register requirements, and textual structuring of information, as illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Types and uses of textual RS

| Types of textual RS | Definition |
|---|---|
| Manipulation of coherence-cohesion | The writer can control the coherence-cohesion of the discourse by manipulating logical connectors that link propositions or clauses/sentences. |
| Stylistic concerns | The writer controls the written discourse by deploying stylistic concerns. |
| Obeying register requirements | The writer adjusts his/her formulations to register requirements of the text type concerned. |
| Textual structuring of information | This is in fact a kind of postponement rather than abandonment. The writer abandons a message temporarily as later sentences will take up the topic currently avoided. |

Thirdly, linguistic restructuring (compensating for lack of L2 linguistic resources or the instability of interlanguage knowledge) was used on lexical problems, morpho-syntactic

problems, and marking connections between clauses, as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Types and uses of linguistic RS

| Types of linguistic RS | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Lexical | The writer has an intended meaning encoded in the L1 and needs to find a suitable equivalent in the L2. |
| Morpho-syntactic | The writer restructures the sentence structures. |
| Markedness | The writer restructures the clause for being more marked or less marked. |

## Backtracking

Backtracking is defined as the actions performed by the writer to take stock of the ideas and constraints of the text produced so far in order to bring them to bear on current needs (Manchon, Roca & Murphy, 2000). They also found that backtracking through the L1 and backtracking through L2 were distinct operations. L2 backtracking involved rereading the prompt, rereading notes, and rereading already written text; L1 backtracking involved direct translation, translation with omissions, and paraphrasing. Direct translation was the type of L1 backtracking used most frequently. Writers showed distinct behavior in terms of how often they reread their texts. Writers used backtracking in the L2 more in narrative tasks than in argumentative essays. Writers maintained their percentage of use of L2 backtracking and their choice of backtracking in L1 or L2 across tasks (Manchon, Roca & Murphy, 2000).

## 2.3 L2 Writing Feedback

Feedback on students' writings is integral to L2 instruction. Writing feedback would help writing teachers to know how well their students have done in the writing assignments,

which is considered one of the most important responsibilities of writing teachers. For students, they also expect feedback in order to know how well they have succeeded in their writing tasks and what they should improve in their future writings. There are two sources that feedback is from in the context of the writing classroom, namely L2 writing instructors and student peers.

## 2.3.1 Teachers' Feedback

The type of feedback a teacher gives will no doubt affect how their students approach the writing process, view feedback, and make revisions to their writing (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Lockhart & Ng, 1995).

What to respond to?

A number of L2 writing research studies have seen quite a wide range of features in students' L2 written texts that teachers respond to, such as students' ideas, rhetoric organization, grammar, word choices, spelling, and punctuation (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1995, 1997; Ferris, Pezone, Tade & Tinki, 1997; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Reid, 1994; Saito, 1994). What attracts researchers most is the teachers' response to students' errors. The strategies that the teachers take in whether to respond to errors are seen as an issue of pedagogical controversy. Truscott (1996) argued that correcting errors in L2 students' writing is not beneficial, and even counterproductive, to students' writing development. Other the other hand, Ferris (2002, 2003) and Goldstein (2001, 2005) provided evidence to support error correction. They demonstrate the value of "judicious, purposeful" error correction and the principles in implementing such correction.

Although researchers found it difficult to show that teachers'

error correction actually improved L2 students' writing (Fazio, 2001; Kepner, 1991), a great deal of error correction research has focused on error correction techniques (Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts & McKee, 2000; Ferris & Helt, 2000). Two major techniques have been identified: direct and indirect error feedback. Direct error feedback (overt correction) involves the provision of the correct forms or structures (Hendrickson, 1980). Indirect error feedback, by simply underlining the errors, identifies student errors without giving the correct forms or structures. Among these two methods, indirect error feedback is considered to bring more benefits to students' long-term writing development than direct error feedback through ''increased student engagement and attention to forms and problems'' (Ferris, 2003, p. 52). However, direct feedback may be appropriate for beginner students and when the errors are "untreatable", which are errors that students are not able to self-correct, such as syntax and vocabulary errors (Ferris, 2002, 2003).

Effectiveness of teachers' feedback

Teacher feedback remains an important component of the L2 writing classroom. Identifying whether teacher feedback is beneficial, and the type of teacher feedback that is most appropriate and effective, remains a key research question (Ferris, Pezone, Tade & Tinki, 1997; Reid, 1994). Results of research on effects of teacher feedback turned out not to be pessimistic, and many of the research revealed its ineffectiveness. Reasons are various. Truscott (1996) blamed the quality of the comments as vague, "rubber-stamp" or error correction being the primary feedback type relied on error correction, because they resulted in students' negative attitudes toward and inattention to the feedback (Robb et al., 1986; Semke, 1984). The lack of positive, encouraging comments (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Leki, 1990) has also been given as a

reason. On the other hand, Nelson and Carson (1998) found that students actually preferred negative comments that showed them where their problems were.

As for appropriate type of teacher feedback, it was found that when teachers provide more specific, idea-based, meaning-level feedback in the multiple-draft context, it can be more effective in promoting student revision (Hyland, 1990). Ferris (1997) and Kepner (1991) both found that longer, text-specific teacher comments did lead to substantial student revisions that positively affected the writing. Makino (1993) found that detailed cues, not correction, can even improve learners' abilities to self-correct grammatical errors.

## 2.3.2 Peer Feedback

Research has addressed the effectiveness of peer review in L2 writing instruction. The advantages of using peer review are: bringing a genuine sense of audience into the writing classroom, helping develop students' critical reading and analysis skills (Keh, 1990), and encouraging students to focus on their intended meaning by discussing alternative points of view that can lead to the development of those ideas (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994). Caulk (1994) and Devenny (1989) argued that peer feedback and teacher feedback could complement each other without contradiction, because students were more adept at responding to a student's work as truly being in progress than the teachers, who tended to judge the work as a finished product.

As for implementing peer review, there appears to be two main issues: the size of the peer feedback group and the form of training. A variation in the size of the groups is seen in peer feedback research. For example, Zhu (2001) worked with groups of three or four with both native and nonnative

speakers of English and noted that group dynamics had a strong impact on how the feedback group functioned. Similar group sizes were used in several other studies (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Rollinson, 2005). Hu (2005) suggested that group size should be limited to two participants. In order for it to be successful, the peer review process requires careful training. There is also some variation in approaches to training students to provide peer feedback. Berg's (1999) study shows the benefits of an 11-stage training plan, ranging in time from 5 to 45 minutes each. This training plan is actually 11 considerations for preparing students to participate in peer response: comfortable classroom atmosphere and trust among students, the role of peer response in the writing process, professional writers using peer response, the teacher using peer response, class peer response to writing, appropriate vocabulary and expressions, the response sheet, response to a collaborative writing project, conversations among authors, responders, and the teacher, revision guidelines, and sample peer response sessions. The students in Zhu's (2001) study received training in the form of watching a video on peer review, while Tsui and Ng (2000) reported that their students were simply given broad categories under which they needed to write comments. The stances that students take in peer review are also important. Lockhardt and Ng (1995) outlined various stances that readers could take during peer review, suggesting that the collaborative stance would be the most effective for peer revision.

### 2.3.3 Comparing Effects of Teacher and Peer Feedback

The effects of peer feedback and teacher feedback have been compared. Connor and Asenavage (1994) investigated the impact of peer and teacher feedback on the revisions of university freshman ESL students from different countries in a university in the USA as they wrote and revised an essay. The

revised drafts were analyzed to determine which revisions were made as a result of the teacher feedback, group peer response, or another outside source. Quite interestingly, most revisions did not result from the suggestions given by either peers (influencing 5% of total revisions) or teachers (influencing 35% of revisions), but from some other source (influencing 60% of revisions). Paulus (1999) investigated the impact of peer and teacher feedback on 11 ESL students in an intensive English language course at a public university in the USA. Peer feedback accounted for 13.9% of all changes and teacher feedback for 34.3%. Teacher feedback was more likely to have an impact than peer feedback with 87% of teacher comments resulting in some changes compared to 51% of peer feedback. Tsui and Ng (2000) looked at the impact of peer and teacher feedback on the writing of secondary school EFL students in Hong Kong. All students responded to a higher percentage of teacher feedback than peer feedback, but there was considerable individual variation. One of their students reported to respond to 100% and 20% of teacher and peer feedback respectively, but another 83% and 78%. They also noted that some students benefited from reading other students' work as they prepared to give feedback and suggested that using peer feedback may contribute to the development of learner autonomy.

## 2.4 L2 Writing Instruction

It is not difficult to find that most research on L2 writing always bears a pedagogical significance. But quite interestingly, in the history of L2 writing research, L2 writing instruction is an area which has been traditionally underrepresented, since only a few studies direct their major attention to discussing instructional matters. Among these studies, instruction models and the use of portfolios are two issues that have been discussed the most.

## 2.4.1 Instruction Models

In the past 20 years or so, the process approach has taken over the product approach and won greater favor from language researchers and educators. The product approach is explicitly described by Picas. She sees writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention focused on the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices (Pincas, 1982). Compared with the product writing approach, in the process approach, the focus of attention has shifted from the finished product to the whole process of writing: experience and question, prewriting preparation, draft writing, editing and rewriting, publication or sharing, and response and feedback. Tribble's (1996) four-stage model is rather typical: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing.

Although the process approach has become more popular than the product approach among L2 writing instructors, it is not always easy to choose the appropriate one for L2 writing instruction. Some researchers have compared the advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches (Han, 2001; Zhang & Zhou, 2002; Chen, 2005). Chen (2005) even carried out an experiment to find out which was the better one. Their results showed that the product approach was suitable for learners of the lower proficiency and the process approach was suitable for those of the higher proficiency. Chen then suggested we should take proficiency of our students into consideration when selecting an instruction approach.

Other scholars carried out studies on implementing the process approach into L2 writing instruction and examining the effect of process writing on learners' writing. Lim (2002) examined how a process approach influenced the writing of eight college ESL students. The author suggested that the process approach had positive effects on the students' writing skills, but students

had varied reactions to peer feedback and group discussions. Baroudy (2008) argued that despite the benefits of process approaches to writing instruction, such approaches have yet to be practically implemented in many L1 and L2 writing settings, due to teacher inexperience.

## 2.4.2 Use of Portfolio

Baack (1997) reported his own experience with using portfolios in ESL writing classrooms in the U.S. and Mexico. He argued for the use of portfolios because it could help to measure students' development as writers, to promote ownership of students' own texts, and to encourage self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses. Coombe and Barlow (2004) argued in favor of using reflective portfolios as an alternate assessment of writing ability. They further noted that portfolio systems provide a multidimensional assessment of students' writing. Liu (2003), by employing a case study approach, described the attitudes of ESL students towards writing portfolios in three different college composition courses. Attitudinal differences were related to the amount of time and effort students put into their respective portfolios.

## 2.5 L2 Writers' Texts

Generally speaking, studies of L2 writer's texts probe two issues: 1) contrastive rhetoric between L1 and L2 texts, and 2) linguistic features of L2 texts.

## 2.5.1 Contrastive Rhetoric between L1 and L2 Texts

Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) research started with Kaplan's pioneering study (1966). He analyzed the organization of paragraphs in around 600 ESL student essays and identified five types of paragraph development. English expository

writing develops linearly. In contrast, in Romance languages and in Russian, writing contains a certain amount of digression and tends to introduce outside materials. Essays written in the Semitic language develop on a series of coordinate sequences while those written in Oriental languages follow an indirect/circular/spiral approach focusing on the subject at the end. Kaplan assumed that each language is characterized by a set of rhetorical conventions unique to it, and these conventions influence how people in those cultures think and write, and consequently interfere with their ESL writing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan & Grabe, 2002; Kaplan, 1966, 2000).

Naturally, the central issue concerning the rhetorical features of L2 texts' is the effect of L1 rhetoric on L2 writing. L1 rhetoric patterns found in L2 writings mainly include: paragraph organization (Kaplan, 1966); reader-versus-writer responsibility (Hinds, 1987); linear organization structure (Connor, 1987); coordinating conjunctions (Söter, 1988); indirectness devices (Hinkel, 1997, 2002); rhetorical appeals and reasoning strategies (Kamimura & Oi, 1998); and the use of metatext (Mauranen, 1993; Valero-Garces, 1996). Although Kaplan maintained that L2 rhetorical organization was the result of the transfer of L1 rhetorical organization, empirical studies have not produced unanimously similar outcomes.

Some studies have supported Kaplan's assertions. Indrasuta (1988) worked on a comparison of writings in Thai and English by a group of Thai ESL learners. The study revealed that transfer of Thai conventional discourse structure was shown in their English texts. Matalene (1985) and Hinkel (1997) found that writings by East Asian ESL learners, such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, tend to use more rhetorical questions, denials and refutations, indefinite pronouns and demonstratives, historical allusions, proverbs and old sayings to state general truth to practically any audience. Wang and Li

(1993) and Yin (1999) discovered that Chinese college students, especially first-year students, obviously did not know how to write in a linear rhetoric pattern. Wu (2003) investigated the textual structures in Chinese college students' English writings. Results showed that they write in a spiral way typical of Chinese writings. Also, the use of thematic sentences is different from the way in which they should be used in English writings. Finally, they are not good at using topic sentences to start paragraph development.

Other researchers hold different views since they found no significant differences between L1 and L2 rhetoric and thought L2 rhetoric was not under the influence of L1. Mohan and Lo (1985) claimed that there were no fundamental differences between students' Chinese (L1) and English (L2) organization with respect to indirectness. They attributed organizational problems in students' writing to developmental factors rather than to Chinese cultural interference. Taylor and Chen (1991) found that organizational strategies in Chinese authors' writings in Chinese and English were guided by the conventions of the genre rather than by language or nationality differences. Becker (1995) pointed out that Chinese students' EFL writing can be characterized by a complex cluster of rhetorical patterns rather than Kaplan's description of 'spiral indirectness'. Zhang (1997), using think-aloud protocols that expressed the composition processes of Chinese and US college seniors, concluded that Chinese writing was not indirect in idea development in comparison to English writing. Kubota (1998) found that half of the Japanese subjects used similar patterns in terms of organization and the location of main ideas in their L1 and L2. However, according to Kubota, this finding was not caused simply by a negative transfer of the L1 writing pattern, but was affected by L1 writing skills, L2 writing experience, and L2 proficiency level. Hirose (2003) found that English-major Japanese students organized both their L1 and

L2 essays in the same way, using a deductive pattern which was typical of English textual organizations.

## 2.5.2 Linguistic Features in L2 Texts

Among the great number of studies on linguistic features in L2 texts, Eli Hinkel's comprehensive analysis of L2 texts are of great value. In 2002, Hinkel produced the most systematic study ever on L2 texts from placement essays of 1,457 college students, a corpus of 434,768 words. She compared the writings of non-native English speakers (NNS) (Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Arabic) to those of native English speakers (NS) (English), both by prompt and overall, on the basis of frequency counts of 68 linguistic and rhetorical features, with the goal of locating patterns to improve L2 writing pedagogy.

The major results of the study were that (1) the L2 texts were syntactically and lexically simpler than the L1 texts; (2) NNS texts exhibited with greater frequency features associated with informal conversation (past tense; vague nouns; first-person, second-person, and universal and coordinating pronouns; predicative adjectives; be-copula; private verbs; and rhetorical questions) and fewer associated with academic writing (passive voice, participles) than NS texts; (3) Four of the L2 groups — Chinese, Arabs, Vietnamese, and Indonesians — produced longer texts than the NSs; (4) Prompts affected writings by both NNSs and NSs. Three prompts about classroom lessons, choosing majors, and forming opinions induced more simple, personal writing by both L1 and L2 writers than did the three prompts on parenting styles, grades and motivation, and celebrity wealth.

Hinkel's comprehensive study has provided us with systematic information about linguistic and rhetoric characteristics of L2

texts by learners of different L1 backgrounds. It is theoretically significant because these results can help us to enrich and examine interlanguage theories in second language acquisition and Contrastive Rhetoric theories. It is also methodologically important because it has set up a model for research on L2 texts.

## 3. Scope for Future Research

(1) As in almost all the fields of second language acquisition, the vast majority of the existing L2 writing research has been dominated by studies on writing in English as a L2 and there has rarely been investigation on writing in other second languages. The lack of studies on writing in languages other than English, especially in languages typologically different from English, has affected the development of L2 writing theories. Therefore, L2 writing researchers should take a more global stance to include languages other than English as the target language in their analysis. The results from these studies would definitely make up for the imbalance of L2 writing theories.

(2) One of the underdeveloped areas of research on L2 writing is early L2 writing. In other words, few studies investigated the development of L2 writing ability of high school students through their high school education. A review of articles published in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* shows that only about 3% of articles have dealt with L2 writers in secondary schools (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). Although recently an increasing number of researchers have come to recognize the importance of understanding the transition from high school to college (Harklau, 2001; Leki, 1999; Tsui & Ng, 2000), research on early L2 writing does not seem to have become a major focus within the field of second language writing. Consequently, it is of great importance to include

learners from high school in this field of studies.

(3) As mentioned earlier, the issue of L2 writing instruction has been an overlooked and underrepresented aspect of L2 writing research. Certain studies have discussed the principles guiding L2 writing instruction, such as the product approach and the process approach. However, there has not been much research on their applications into classroom practices, such as curriculum design, development of L2 writing instruction materials, and L2 writing classroom activities. Therefore, future research should continue to investigate the relevant issues in the pedagogical practices of teaching L2 writing.

(4) Probably due to complex and heavy data analysis and statistical work, most studies on L2 texts have been carried out with only a small collection of L2 texts and not so many studies have really incorporated corpus in their analysis of L2 texts. We only find a few which have based their discussion on data from different corpora, either those already-established ones (Al-Btoosh, 2004; Hyland, 2008; Rahime & Cortes, 2008) or self-made ones (Reid, 1992; Ferris, 1994; Hinkel, 2002). In general, L2 writing studies that are really based on corpus and its technology are in great need compared with the rapid development of various corpora and their use in other fields of linguistic investigation.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, L2 writing is quite a complex process in which various factors play indispensable roles. By systematically reviewing what has been achieved in the existing studies, we are able to help those inexperienced researchers and those who are interested in this field to become acquainted with the major accomplishments. Additionally, to identify the issues which require further discussion would definitely benefit the

development of L2 writing research, since results from future research addressing these issues would help us to paint a more complete picture of L2 writing.

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