A Brief Historical Sketch of Second Language Writing Studies: A Retrospective

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Introduction

Research on second language writing (L2 writing) has been widely acknowledged from a disciplinary to an interdisciplinary field of inquiry in second language studies and applied linguistics for around half a century. The growing field of L2 writing still expands theoretically and pedagogically among L2 writing scholars. Even so many researchers have already contributed their speculative thoughts into a range of research analyses from practical, pedagogical, methodological, and theoretical standpoints to this specialized field and also to literacy education (e.g., Belcher and Braine, 1995; Belcher and Hirvela, 2001; Carson and Leki, 1993; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005; Grabe and Kaplan, 1996; Hyland, 2004; Kroll 1990, 2003; Leki, 1992; Matsuda and Silva, 2005; Reid, 1993; Silva and Matsuda, 2001a, 2001b; Zamel and Spack, 1998).

L2 writing deceptively exists elsewhere in second language education as well as in composition studies. However, historically, the field of L2 writing has only a short history as a disciplinary area due to its consolidation in the realm of English as a second language (ESL) around the 1960s. Thus, the value of teaching writing in English to non-native speakers focused little attention on second language education. For the past twenty five-years or so, empirical research on L2 writing has flourished. Various research issues have been published in second/foreign language studies and educational journals: Foreign Language Annals, Language Learning, The Modern Language Journal, TESOL Quarterly, and so forth. Nowadays, L2 writing studies have been presented in L1 composition journals such as College Composition and Communication, Written Communication, Journal of Basic Writing, The Writing Instructor, and other composition monographs (Polio, 2003). An exclusive L2 writing journal, Journal of Second Language Writing, has substantially contributed to negotiating theoretical and viable writing explorations in ESL/EFL contexts with L2 writing specialists, researchers,
as well as practitioners. The journal also has provided progressive development of the L2 writing field since 1992. Still today, L2 writing researchers critically discuss numerous issues in a wide range of books and journals in L2 language education. Especially, annotated bibliographies (e.g., Silva, Brice, and Reichelt, 1999; Tannacito, 1995)\(^1\) encourage researchers to increase their historical understanding of the L2 writing field and to make assumptions about broadened analyses.

In one of the L2 writing research issues, historical inquiry of L2 writing emerged around 1990 (Matsuda, 2003, 2005; Polio, 2003; Raimes, 1991; Silva, 1990). This historical analysis can offer L2 writing scholars, especially novice researchers and L2 writing practitioners, thoughtful insights into profound second language scholarship as a metadisciplinary inquiry. Such a metadisciplinary approach aims to examine the actual progression of the history of this specialized field in depth (Matsuda, et al., 2003). The historical research exploration of this specialized field would “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 33). It is plausible that historical accounts concerning this specific field enable professionals to gain fruitful knowledge enlightening novel scholarship from the empirical evidence. Thus, a historical overview of L2 writing leads us to develop meaningful scholarship and to reconstruct identity as a valid field of scholarly research.

This paper retrospectively provides a brief overview of second language writing research issues via historical accounts. Although this study has a limitation of showing all research issues of L2 writing, I will demonstrate the characterized analyses in the particular era; contrastive rhetoric and process research in addition to further implications of L2 writing as well.

The general purpose of this study is to reflect on how the discipline of L2 writing has expanded and to examine the empirical L2 writing inquiries chronologically. This study begins with the context of second language teaching in North America from the 1940s. Afterwards, the prevalent research issues: contrastive rhetoric and process approach which were notably argued in the L2 writing field at each particular time are discussed. Finally, I will demonstrate the implications as well as the future prospects of L2 writing studies. This inquiry finds that L2 writing requires abundant studies covering a great deal of ground with disciplinary intellectual views pedagogically and methodologically. The disciplinary practices in the ESL/EFL settings as the field of L2 writing have still been traced through its various stages of development within second language studies and applied linguistics.
A brief overview of second language writing

1. Background of second language writing during the 1950s

Few studies of L2 writing were investigated in second language studies during the 1950s. Teaching English to foreign students was not regarded seriously as a significant matter in this age. According to Matsuda (2003), mainly Spanish-speaking learners rather than foreign students received education in ESL classrooms in the 1940s. Leki (1992) also mentioned that education provided the Spanish speakers with an opportunity to be inculcated with naturalistic as well as dogmatic ideas or beliefs and independence, prioritizing the political issue over language teaching. Because of the sociopolitical facet in early ESL education, ESL pedagogy was virtually not enhanced.

By the 1960s, the number of international students had rapidly increased allowing language teachers to consider L2 pedagogy and practice. Nonetheless, literacy education was not emphasized in L2 language classes. The central teaching method during the 1950s put undue focus on oral rather than written proficiency. Theories such as the “audiolingual method” by behaviorists dominated the pedagogy of ESL classes especially in the 1950s and early 1960s (Leki, 1992; Matsuda, 2001, 2003; Silva, 1997). Linguists emphasized instruction of the sound structures with the audiolingual approach. They presumed an importance of phonological awareness and practice in ESL classes. Those linguists who became aware of the significance of writing expertise argued that writing should imply an advanced and extensive language technique (see Matsuda, 2001, 2003). The literary person’s intention of writing ability also indicated that acquiring the sound structure should be preceded above all and took priority in reinforcing language development. Learners should master writing techniques extensively after achieving phonological awareness. From the viewpoint of the social as well as educational context, it is appropriate to mention that teaching L2 writing itself was marginalized during the 1950s.

In the 1960s, large numbers of foreign students entered higher education in the U.S. At this stage, L1 composition instructors perceived major differences in writing between L1 and L2 learners. These differences seriously rekindled interest in teaching writing to non-native speakers. Along with this, a sudden reconsidering of pedagogical approaches to L2 learners developed. Since studies and approaches to teaching ESL writing had been fully neglected in the past, teaching writing in English to ESL students became a significant subfield of second language studies. The differences of teaching writing between native and non-native speakers resulted in controversial issues. Composition teachers became critical concerning how to teach...
writing in English to ESL learners and manage classes for ESL writing. Then, writing pedagogy was divided into L1 and L2 issues to establish the “disciplinary division of labor” between composition studies and L2 studies (Matsuda, 1998, 1999, 2003). Thus, it is quite problematic to explicitly demonstrate how writing was instructed in L2 writing settings owing to the little attention put on the pedagogical inquiries. Taking a case in point, Pincas (1962) illustrated prescriptive writing instruction to ESL students, mastering the target language structure with controlled pattern practices. Her method applied the behaviorism approach to writing instruction since the theoretical pedagogy was insufficient for ESL teachers. Since then, writing teachers have recognized substantial progressive practices in writing beyond the sentence level, encompassing the structural exercises of paragraphs. L2 learners were required to have a fundamental knowledge to produce full compositions with paragraphs (Leki, 1992). Such a practical application of syntactic structure to paragraph creations led second language scholarship to yield to the emergence of “Contrastive Rhetoric” (CR) whose pivotal concern has greater cultural influence on L2 writers’ rhetorical conventions (see Connor, 1996; Kaplan, 1966, 1987, 1988).

1.2 Emerging Contrastive Rhetoric Research

As mentioned above, the rhetorical patterns of L2 learners, which potentially culturally impacted on L2 writing, were considered as native language transfer and drew attention in L2 writing classrooms. Considering ESL students’ written products, native speakers might perceive L2 writing as somewhat ambiguous, illogical, and incomprehensible products relative to that of L1 writers. The written organizational structure, for instance, comprises unique models which native English readers have difficulties in understanding. Under favor of such cultural notions of writing, Robert Kaplan had an eye on the difference in rhetorical forms between L1 and L2, and then investigated the rhetorical patterns of more than seven hundred L2 compositions.

Kaplan (1966) asserts that such idiosyncratic rhetorical patterns of ESL writing resulted from their native language and cultural impact. He drew a diagram of five different linguistic characteristics (English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance, and Russian) which he named “cultural thought patterns.” According to his contrastive rhetoric study, English-speaking writers employed a linear structure with specific details to support the theme. As opposed to English speakers, Kaplan made distinguishing statements on the rhetorical models of other languages. Arabic learners utilized a considerable number of coordination words compared with English writers’ compositions. Asian learners exhibited an illogical structure, encircling the topic.
Spanish and French writers strayed from the theme with irrelevant descriptions. After Kaplan’s contrastive rhetoric research was revealed, empirical studies beyond CR features (CR in addition to syntactic explorations) were conducted across diverse languages (see footnote, Kaplan, 2001)\(^2\).

To cite a case of Japanese learners, Kobayashi (1985) examined the differences of writing organizations between Japanese and English. Her analysis indicated that American students utilized general-specific patterns. The writers initially mentioned a general statement and followed it with details, whereas non-English major Japanese writers employed specific-general cases, in which they implied specifics first that reflected a general description. Moreover, Hinds (1983, 1984) examined the argumentative writing structures between Japanese and English. The English-speaking writers followed the linear and deductive pattern as in Kaplan’s rhetorical model. In contrast, the Japanese writers utilized the Japanese rhetorical mode, *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* (起 承 転 結). Each section of the structure has its own distinguishing feature. For instance, an introduction in English demonstrates the entire content and thesis statement with specific points (e.g., background of the topic, problem, reason, result, etc.). On the other hand, an introduction in Japanese puts a succinct topical sentence without any explicit statements. The thesis statement is, instead, inclined to be shown in the final section, *ketsu* (結) in Japanese writing, rather than in an introduction. Besides, a conclusion in Japanese writing has to leave a vague statement (Hinds, 1980, 1984). Japanese writers show their ideas indirectly and inductively maintaining an ambiguity in a conclusion or the major part as an inference for the reader to make. In fact, the sentences are difficult to comprehend. Yet, Japanese writers may not feel responsible for their vague texts underlying their knowledge (Hinds, 1987, 1990).

After his article appeared, Kaplan’s CR exploration had a critical impact on L2 writing research. However, his analysis aroused much controversy as well. Several researchers admonished the deterministic rhetorical model, perpetuating a negative complex towards the writing patterns of L2 learners (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005, Kubota, 1997, 1999; Leki, 1991, Zamel, 1997) and “privileging the writing of native English speakers, as well as for dismissing linguistic and cultural differences in writing among different languages” (Connor 223). That is, the diagram that Kaplan drew typically generalized L2 writing features. At any rate, it is quite obvious that Kaplan’s research sparked the field of second language writing. The issue of contrastive rhetoric still exhibits theoretical and educational perspectives with various methods since Kaplan’s analysis emerged. Specifically, several composition specialists argued for a critical writing pedagogy to adjust L2 learners to the target discourse community
even when applying contrastive rhetoric research to ESL/EFL writing classrooms drawing considerable criticism from writing scholars (Connor, 2001; Kubota, 1999; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1998). However, Ramanathan and Atkinson (1998) warn that teaching ESL/EFL learners writing in English to follow the English rhetorical pattern explicitly would result in an ideological dilemma and debase the values of the learners’ social as well as cultural identity.

Contrastive rhetoric research had a great influence upon L2 writing issues. It indicated the nature of L2 writers’ texts and highlighted impact of the writers’ cultural contexts on the texts (see Connor and Kaplan, 1987) comprising grammatical and lexical features (Hinkel, 2002). Nowadays, research on contrastive rhetoric is redefined with the new horizons of contrastive rhetoric pedagogy (Panetta, 2001). As for future implications, Connor (2001) points out that “future contrastive rhetoric research needs to be sensitive to the view that writers be seen not as belonging to separate, identifiable cultural groups but as individuals in groups that are undergoing continuous change” (76).

1.3 Process-oriented Research

From the 1970s to the early 1980s, the ESL writing research paradigm focused primarily on the writing process rather than on written product. This trend significantly resulted from process-based research in L1 composition. Researchers of L1 composition censured the written product per se through prescriptive writing pedagogical approaches such as the sentence structure questions and ruled pattern practices which had prevailed in previous years. As alternates, they endeavored to investigate the individual writer’s approaches to writing; how learners managed to follow the process through writing. Such process inquiry in L1 composition studies played a huge role in exploring process writing in L2 writing contexts. It aimed to discover diversities of the process approach between L1 and L2 writers and the L2 learners’ native language influence on L2 writing (Kraples, 1990; Zamel, 1976, 1983). Distinct writing instruction (an expressive process and product process approach) was treated as process-oriented pedagogy in L2 writing classrooms. Reid (2001) provides a precise distinction between them. The expressive process aims at writers in orientation, demonstrating the original tasks with the writers’ own feelings (e.g., personal writing, reflective journals) and emphasizes fluency rather than accuracy (Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005). This process trends toward individual development through self-detection and concentrates entirely on adequate writing procedures rather than on a complete product (Elbow, 1973, 1981; Zamel, 1983). Thus, writers focus on
themselves as the audience and improve their writing ability. Meanwhile, product process literally attributes to the products themselves following appropriate written discourse. These product processes force learners to place a large emphasis upon academic principles. However, Reid (2001) claims that the controversy that arose between the process and product approach in L2 classrooms is “a false dichotomy,” and mentions that many L2 writers were guided by “process writing strategies to achieve effective written communication (product), with differences occurring in emphasis” (29).

Respecting the use of the process approach in L1, Zamel (1976) claims that research on L1 writing should take fully into account L2 composition because it is valid for L2 writers. Her intention is that teaching ESL writing should place greater importance on learners’ ideas and creativity rather than on teaching grammar. However, Raimes (1985) questioned the applicability of L1 composition pedagogy to L2 classrooms. Zamel’s research (1983) indicated some similarities of writing processes between L1 and L2 writers, even between the similar levels, whereas the study by Raimes (1985) found the differences of processing between them. Moreover, a greater difficulty of the process approach was found between L1 and L2 as well as among L2 writers. For instance, Silva (1993) identifies that L2 writers placed restraints upon writing process contrasted to L1. L2 writers tend to show less fluency and have difficulty in producing the ideas of topic albeit a lot of writing repetition. Hirose and Sasaki (1994) attempted to investigate the traits of process writing between experienced and inexperienced L2 writers. Their study clearly illustrates that the experienced writers pay attention to macro (planning, coherence, and revising) and micro (cohesion, vocabulary use and texts) levels. On the other hand, the undeveloped learners reveal the process to a limited extent because of few writing experiences and motivations, as in similar research by Cumming (1989).

In the early 1990s, writing researchers recognized that the process approach differs completely from the product approach. Process-oriented research came to emanate the issues of institution which emphasize a particular purpose such as EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to value the audience in writing rather than the writer (e.g., Kaplan, 1988). After 2000, a new process inquiry into more social issues, the post-process, has developed in the L2 writing context. Atkinson (2003) suggests that the post-process which previously dominated learners’ process feature as a cognitive process should be disdained. Then, Atkinson declares in the post process “we seek to highlight the rich, multifocal nature of the field” and “go beyond now-traditional views of L2 writing research and teaching”
2. Discussion: Further implications of second language writing

L2 writing has been fully established as an area of second language studies and teaching. This field has been notably familiarized in various writing monographs since the late 1980s, notwithstanding little research appeared before the 1990s. In addition, L2 writing scholars continue to offer their valuable research insights at the professional conferences. The researchers discuss various issues with other specialists to advance L2 writing scholarship further. Around the 1990s, second language writing emerged as an “interdisciplinary field” comprised of numerous dimensions rather than a single aspect. L2 writing studies required researchers to recognize that social, cultural, and educational aspects surely have a critical impact on second language writing investigations. Thus, no single theory or pedagogical approach by any means applies to and validates L2 writing scholarship.

The topics of L2 writing research contain diverse issues from the late 1980s to the present. Such topics encompass L2 writing theories, literacy development, reading-writing connections, ideology and politics, research methodology, text interactions, writing assessment, curriculum design, material design, and technology-assisted writing, and so forth. As are evident from the clear study cases, L2 writing goes beyond a mere single issue of discipline and into the realm of field of inquiry. Now, writing specialists have to find themselves in the significant position of considering how these theoretical and pedagogical research issues should be adopted in L2 writing practices (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

As a growing number of non-native English speakers continue to enroll in North American education still today, the significance of L2 writing has become much higher among teachers and language institutes. Such a realization of L2 writing instruction enhances ESL writing pedagogical processes and practices for both L1 and L2 writing teachers. However, since the division of labor between L1 and L2 composition remains, a liaison would potentially require L2 writing scholarship to improve and remove the distinction between L1 and L2 so that composition studies may subsume the prospects into the L2 writing field (Santos, et al., 2000), although a liaison requires institutes to have experts with more professional experience and knowledge in both L1 and L2 writing (Severino, 2001).

Finally, it is indispensable for L2 writing to take fully into account the issue of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Since primary research on L2 writing
dominates the aspects of ESL learners rather than EFL, the number of studies of EFL writing is virtually limited. In Japanese writing research contexts, for instance, numerous investigations written in both Japanese and English have been demonstrated in domestic publications rather than international journals. Several studies indicate that instruction in the writing of English is not emphasized in the English curriculums, especially junior and senior high schools because the English classes rely exclusively on the entrance examination practices. The ruled-pattern grammar tasks and translations of Japanese into English become a key part of the English curriculum in junior/senior high schools (Watanabe, 1993). As free-writing essays as well as argumentative compositions are still alienated, it seems to be difficult to adjust ESL research issues to Japanese writing research contexts. In addition, the Ministry of Education has full bureaucratic authority to design the educational curriculums. The English curriculum concentrates heavily on the development of speaking proficiency so that learners can internationalize themselves. This bureaucratic power would refrain from both facilitating the writing discipline and from providing writing experts with sufficient discussions of the field in the international academic society.

Through this succinct overview of L2 writing research, I recognize that L2 writing scholarship has an infrastructure as a specialized field but does not have sufficient emphasis on second language studies. I would like to mention that it is certain that this field has exponentially advanced with interdisciplinary areas, reflecting on the historical viewpoints of L2 writing research. This historical study contributes to new discoveries in the field and identifies a deeper analysis with self-definition perspectives as shown in merit of a metadisciplinary approach. Personally, this research offers us a richer knowledge of L2 writing scholarship through concrete empirical research as well as provides an opportunity to reconstruct an academic identity as an L2 writing craftsman.

3. Summary

This study retrospectively offered a brief history of second language writing studies. It began with the educational background of second language teaching in North America around the 1940s and demonstrated the empirical second language writing research issues: contrastive rhetoric and process research and further perspectives on L2 writing as well.

L2 writing was paid little attention during the early 1960s because of the disciplinary division of labor. Additionally, writing instruction for L2 learners concentrated mainly on the target language structure through a prescriptive controlled
practice. Then, writing teachers noticed the necessity of adopting progressive practices of writing beyond the structure levels.

Kaplan (1966) took particular note of distinctive rhetorical features of ESL writers caused by their language and cultural influence. After Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric model was shown, numerous contrastive rhetoric and written discourse analyses across diverse languages were explored.

From the late 1970s, the ESL writing research paradigm shifted from the written product to the writing process significantly influenced from process-oriented research in L1 composition. The writing process approach emphasized not the ruled structure pattern practices but how learners managed to follow a process through writing. Process-oriented research learned to emphasize in institutes that have a particular purpose: EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) to assess the reader rather than the writer. Nowadays, process inquiry in L2 writing has entered the period of “post-process era” which adds more social dimensions to writers ignoring cognitive science to exceed prevalent points of view in L2 writing research and teaching.

Finally, L2 writing requires abundant studies covering much ground with disciplined intellectual views and practices in ESL/EFL settings. It needs to consider how to apply these theoretical and pedagogical research issues to L2 writing practices as the field of L2 writing is still underdeveloped in second language studies and applied linguistics.

Notes

2. In Kaplan’s research (2001: viii), he illustrates various contrastive studies beyond contrastive rhetoric between English and diverse foreign languages.

References
Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002


要旨
第二言語ライティングの歴史的概要
内省的研究
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この研究は、過去の第二言語ライティング研究を内省的に振り返り、その分野研究の歴史的概要を述べた論文である。第二言語ライティング研究は、第二言語研究や応用言語学の一研究分野として認知され、現在では学際的分野へと発展している。また、様々な分野事項を取り入れた第二言語ライティング研究は、第二言語ライティングの実践教育やリテラシー教育へ応用されていることが分かっている。しかし、第二言語ライティングの学者や専門家は、第二言語ライティング研究は理論的、教育学的において発展途上であると指摘し、過去の研究を基盤にした第二言語ライティングの実践論、教育論、方法論、そして理論などの幅広い研究分野が必要であることを示唆している。

第二言語ライティング研究が進む中、この分野の歴史的研究が注目されている。歴史的研究事例をまとめた研究はあまり発表されていないが、特定分野における過去の研究を見直すことは、専門的知識をより深めるばかりでなく、その研究分野の問題点を示唆し、将来の教育的展望をつかむという利点がある。

この研究の目的は、第二言語ライティングの分野がどのように発展してきたかを、過去の研究をたどり歴史的に調査することである。本論は、1940年代頃の北米での第二言語教育の背景描写から始まり、第二言語ライティングの研究分野で特に議論された対照修辞学（contrastive rhetoric）とライティング過程研究（process-based approach）を取り上げる。この研究で、第二言語ライティング研究は、教育論や方法論的に広範囲な学術的観点を持った研究と同時に、ESLとEFL両方の場における実践研究事例が必要とされる。