

**L**anguage Teaching and Testing

*Selected Works of Renowned Applied Linguists*

世界知名语言学家论丛（第一辑）

Series Editor: Rod Ellis

Dana R. Ferris

# 外语写作

## WRITING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE



上海外语教育出版社

SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS

www.sflp.com

**L**anguage Teaching and Testing  
*Selected Works of Renowned Applied Linguists*

世界知名语言学家论丛 ( 第一辑 )

Series Editor: Rod Ellis

**Dana R. Ferris**

**外语写作**

**WRITING IN  
A SECOND LANGUAGE**

## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

外语写作 / (美)费里斯(Ferris, D. R.)著. — 上海:上海外语教育出版社, 2013

(世界知名语言学家论丛)

ISBN 978-7-5446-2931-7

I. ①外… II. ①费… III. ①第二语言—写作—研究—英文 IV. ①H05

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2012)第245176号

**出版发行: 上海外语教育出版社**

(上海外国语大学内) 邮编: 200083

**电 话:** 021-65425300 (总机)

**电子邮箱:** bookinfo@sflep.com.cn

**网 址:** <http://www.sflep.com.cn> <http://www.sflep.com>

**责任编辑:** 许进兴

---

**印 刷:** 上海华教印务有限公司

**开 本:** 700×1000 1/16 印张 35 字数 532 千字

**版 次:** 2013年5月第1版 2013年5月第1次印刷

**印 数:** 2 000 册

---

**书 号:** ISBN 978-7-5446-2931-7 / H · 1432

**定 价:** 88.00 元

本版图书如有印装质量问题,可向本社调换

# Contents

Chapter 1	My Story: It Was Always about Writing .....	1
-----------	---	---

## **Part I L2 Writing & L2 Writers**

Chapter 2	Lexical and Syntactic Features of ESL Writing by Students at Different Levels of L2 Proficiency .....	29
Chapter 3	One Size Does Not Fit All: Response and Revision Issues for Immigrant Student Writers .....	39
Chapter 4	Tricks of the Trade: The Nuts and Bolts of L2 Writing Research .....	61
Chapter 5	Understanding Different L2 Student Audiences: Definitions .....	77
Chapter 6	Written Discourse Analysis and Second Language Teaching .....	113
Chapter 7	Writing Instruction .....	149

## **Part II Responding to L2 Writers**

Chapter 8	Student Reactions to Teacher Response in Multiple-Draft Composition Classrooms .....	169
Chapter 9	Teacher Commentary on Student Writing: Descriptions & Implications .....	197
Chapter 10	The Influence of Teacher Commentary on Student Revision .....	233

Chapter 11	Responding to Writing .....	267
Chapter 12	Responding to L2 Students in College Writing Classes: Teacher Perspectives .....	297

### **Part III Error Correction for L2 Writers**

Chapter 13	Error Feedback in L2 Writing Classes: How Explicit Does It Need to Be? .....	339
Chapter 14	The “Grammar Correction” Debate in L2 Writing: Where Are We, and Where Do We Go from Here? (And What Do We Do in the Meantime ...?) .....	373
Chapter 15	Does Error Feedback Help Student Writers? New Evidence on the Short- and Long-Term Effects of Written Error Correction .....	395
Chapter 16	Myth 5: Students Must Learn to Correct All Their Writing Errors .....	427
Chapter 17	Second Language Writing Research and Written Corrective Feedback in SLA .....	451
Chapter 18	Is Error Treatment Helpful for L2 Writers? .....	481
Chapter 19	Perspectives on Error in Composition Studies: L1 and L2 Interactions and Influences .....	507
Chapter 20	Conclusion: Themes and Trends in L2 Writing Research and Practice .....	533
Acknowledgments .....		547

# **My Story: It Was Always about Writing**

## **Why I Did Not Become a Writer**

When you are a university English major, everyone assumes that you are obviously going to become a teacher because, really, what *else* would you do? However, I was sure that the one thing I would never, ever do was teach. I was going to be a writer.

I was born in 1960 in the Chicago, Illinois (USA) suburb of Evanston, home of Northwestern University where my parents met as students. We moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in Northern California right before I turned five, and I grew up in a small town just outside of San Francisco. When it came time to go away to university, I did not go far, choosing the University of California at Davis, about 70 miles east of my home, for its proximity, its affordability, and its charm. As always planned, I signed up to be an English literature major with an emphasis on creative writing. It did not take me long to become convinced that I had zero talent, none, as a writer of fiction and poetry.

My college creative writing seminars confirmed this negative perspective on my own abilities. Modeled after the famous University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, in these classes, we wrote short stories or poems, circulated them in advance to the rest of the class, and then sat in

a big circle everyday commenting on each other's work. It was brutal: the students seemed more eager to impress the professor and each other with their astute (negative, acerbic) literary insights than to actually assist the hapless author of the day, and the professors did nothing to rein in the carnage. This was *not* the supportive writing community that Peter Elbow described in *Writing without teachers* (1973). I have not written a word in a literary genre since receiving my bachelor's degree in 1982.

I am not telling this story as simply a roundabout way to explain how I eventually fell into teaching because I did not have the talent or the courage to become a novelist, a poet, or a playwright. Rather, these early experiences of positioning myself as a writer and having my confidence and enthusiasm undermined have profoundly influenced my career as a teacher, a researcher, a teacher educator, and a mentor of graduate students, especially my interest in studying response to student writing.

### **Embracing My Destiny: How I Became a Teacher, After All**

When I finished my undergraduate studies, I was at a loss. Convinced that I had neither the talent to be a creative writer nor the assertiveness to be a journalist, I cast about for a new direction. Happily, however, within a year, I was set on the path I have followed ever since: a career in the field of TESOL with a specialization in second language (L2) writing. During my final year of college, I was without any specific direction for the future, but one thing was becoming apparent to me: I was actually quite good at being a student, almost in spite of myself. As my undergraduate studies ended, I kept winning academic honors and awards. This success caused me to consider the idea of postgraduate study for the first time.

But what should I study? I had only lukewarm interest in the discipline (English literature) in which I had received a bachelor's degree. This is where the second theme came in: I had always loved learning foreign languages, and, for an American, had had unusually

rich opportunities to study them. The 1960s work of psychologist Eric Lenneberg on the “critical period” for second language acquisition inspired some more progressive and/or affluent U.S. schools to begin offering foreign language instruction at primary grade levels. This is no exaggeration — Lenneberg’s book was published in 1967, and by 1968, Señorita Chavez was coming to my school twice a week to give our classes lessons in Spanish. I immediately took to this classroom instruction in Spanish — straight audio-lingual method; I can still recite dialogues I memorized — excelled in it, and was the teacher’s pet for the next four years.

When I reached middle school, I decided to change languages and took a year of Italian, followed by a year of German. In high school and university, I took more German, and during my M.A. in TESOL work, I studied French. I was an uneven student — very good at the subjects I was interested in or had aptitude for and very mediocre at the others. I was good at English, I was good at history — and I was good at foreign languages. I don’t know if I enjoyed those classes because I was good at them or if it was the other way around, but I definitely felt that I enjoyed languages and excelled in studying them. As a result, when I looked for an academic field to pursue following my undergraduate years and stumbled across TESOL, a discipline that involved teaching language suddenly seemed like a natural fit.

I applied to the M.A. program in English at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), a large, teaching-focused public university about 25 miles from Davis, where I was still living. I was initially accepted to the M.A. program in literature, which seemed the only graduate degree I could easily qualify for. Then I heard that the English department had just added an emphasis in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) to its M.A. options. I only vaguely knew what “TESOL” was because a college friend of mine had previously earned a TESOL certificate at another school, but I requested to transfer from literature to TESOL and was allowed to do so. I began my M.A. studies



in 1983 and was a member of the program's first graduating class in 1985.

### **TESOL Studies: “Writer” and “Teacher” Converge**

As it turned out, I was not especially well qualified to be in a M.A. TESOL program. I had taken one linguistics course as part of my undergraduate English major (on the history of the English language) and had never had a formal course in English grammar. The first cohort of students was almost entirely composed of people older than I was (I was still only 23) who had taught English abroad and were now obtaining additional training so that they could gain employment and teach in the U.S. I was the only one in my classes who had no prior practical experience to which I could refer.

Fortunately, one of the recommended courses for my M.A. program was a practicum that involved one-on-one tutoring in the campus writing center. Though I had never taken a composition course (I tested out of it in college), I was a competent writer and knew I could probably manage the tutoring with the support of the practicum course. When the supervisor discovered that I was in the TESOL program, I was assigned to work exclusively with ESL students who came into the writing center, and I quickly realized some of the holes in my academic preparation. I vividly remember a tutee asking me, “What’s the difference between a direct and indirect object?” and realizing that I had absolutely *no* idea how to answer him. The next semester I signed up for a class in English grammar, even though it would not count toward my M.A. requirements. Despite my lack of knowledge or training, I learned rapidly and absolutely loved the work and the students, most of whom were either international students from Pacific Rim countries or recently arrived immigrant students from Southeast Asia or Iran.

The next semester, having made a good impression on the tutoring course supervisor, I was hired by the university’s Learning Skills Center

to teach small group tutorials in ESL reading and writing. Again, it was almost entirely on-the-job training, but I was fortunate to have good supervisors who helped me with materials and curriculum and lesson planning. I again enjoyed the students and the work, and my previously suspected talents as a teacher began to develop. I got good reviews for my teaching and received more responsibility each semester as I moved through the program. In my last term, I was assigned to teach my own class, a developmental reading/writing course for ESL students who were new freshmen. I wrote a bit about this class in the introduction to one of the pieces in this collection (Ferris, 2008).

Something else happened as I finished the M.A. TESOL program — I discovered a growing interest in theory and research. As I did extensive reading on second language acquisition, literacy, and pedagogy in preparation for my comprehensive examination to earn my degree, I suddenly realized that I did not simply want to finish my degree and get a teaching job. I wanted to learn more about the field, and I began seriously considering the possibility of further advanced study. In all, this M.A. program in TESOL was incredibly formative for me: My pull toward teaching was confirmed, the experiences were grounded in my own prior love for writing and languages, and I also found the desire and the confidence to push myself further academically and intellectually.

## **Learning on the Job**

After completing my M.A. in 1985, I obtained several part-time, temporary teaching positions in Sacramento. I became head ESL teacher at a community service organization funded by the U.S. government that provided transitional services — English language classes and job placement — to newly arrived Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and mainland China. This was a demanding 30-hour-per-week position working with students whose English proficiency was much lower than the students I had previously taught at the university and whose goals

were practical, not academic. It was a challenging adjustment for me — I tried and quickly abandoned various teaching strategies, such as journal writing, that had been useful in the university setting — but I was young, motivated, and hardworking. As always, the students were interesting and delightful and kept me going as I climbed the learning curve. I still have photos from the surprise 25th birthday party they gave me.

That position was temporary (seven months), and at the same time, I taught another ESL composition class as a part-time lecturer in the Learning Skills Center at CSU Sacramento. Though it was difficult to teach this class in the late afternoons after six hours of teaching in the community center program, I did well and learned a lot from that particular experience. For example, the textbook I was assigned to use had very rigid, formulaic assignments from the “current-traditional” paradigm (see Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998/2005; Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990). Though these tasks were carefully structured to help students with limited English writing ability succeed, my students were bored by them, and so was I. The other thing I learned was about the painful practical realities of being a part-time instructor at the bottom of the seniority ladder in a program. I did very well teaching the class, got great student and supervisor evaluations, and all of my students passed the final — but I was not hired back for the spring semester because they offered fewer classes in the second term. This experience as much as anything else pushed me toward pursuing a Ph.D. so that I could build a more stable career.

As my first two positions came to an end (one because I was not rehired and the other because the grant that was funding the program ended), I was hired for a third, teaching two classes at a local community college. I was the first ESL teacher ever hired there, and despite my inexperience and youth, my newly minted M.A. in TESOL made me by far the most qualified person in the English department to work with diverse students. In fact, during my first week on the job, I was handed a \$5,000 grant to use to buy books and language laboratory materials for the program, something that has certainly never happened to me since!

I was assigned to a listening/speaking class and a writing class. I enjoyed my time there, and again my teaching was well reviewed, but the primary lesson I recall taking from that context was about the diverse backgrounds and goals of the community college student population. Thus, in one year of post-M.A. teaching at a four-year university, a two-year community college, and a community service center, I quickly learned how crucial it is to understand student backgrounds and institutional contexts in conjunction with making instructional choices.

### **Doctoral Studies: Becoming a Researcher**

During that same year, my husband and I began making plans to move to Los Angeles (primarily for his studies) the following year, so I applied to two Ph.D. programs in applied linguistics there. To my delight (and extreme astonishment), I was accepted and offered full financial support at the University of Southern California (USC). I began my studies there in the fall of 1986.

Once again, I found myself academically over my head. My M.A. in TESOL had included coursework in literature and in pedagogy but very little in the way of formal linguistics — just one course in phonology and morphology, and even that proved not rigorous enough to transfer to my doctoral program. In my first semester, I took a course in syntax and semantics, one in statistics, and one on second language acquisition, the latter taught by Professor Stephen Krashen. I also taught in the ESL program for international students offered by the American Language Institute (ALI), where I had a position as an Assistant Lecturer. The stresses of that first semester — many time demands, difficult courses, even adjusting to an urban campus in a rough part of Los Angeles after living in quiet small towns for most of my life — took a toll on my health, and I wondered if I would even make it through the two-year “screening” process (a comprehensive examination and an original research paper) that would allow me to continue for the doctorate rather than being

dismissed with a second M.A.

However, I did adjust and quickly was thriving. I loved teaching in the ALI — it was an excellent program that was on the cutting edge of ESL pedagogy at the time, and graduate student instructors received a great deal of support — I showed a surprising aptitude for statistics, and I was inspired by Krashen's courses. (I took three in a two-year period.) Though he has been a somewhat polarizing figure in the field of second language acquisition, he was a wonderful instructor of graduate students, and I learned many things from his classes that I have taken into my own teaching. For example, he allowed students a great deal of room to explore topics and themes in the course that interested them rather than giving narrow, rigid paper or project assignments. He was also a fantastic lecturer, and I have continued to follow his example of providing good, clear visuals so that students could listen and engage with the material rather than frantically taking notes.

In the ALI, I was assigned to teach a range of courses for undergraduate and graduate international students. Some of these were integrated multi-skills classes, but I taught several that focused primarily on writing, including a course in "Argumentation for Business Majors" (my first real experience in teaching a "writing in the disciplines" class) and a "Writing Lab" course in which I worked intensively with eight student writers in a computer lab and in one-to-one conferencing. The program philosophy was heavily influenced by L1 composition theory on process approaches in writing instruction as well as Krashen's SLA theories. Supervisors discouraged us from teaching grammar formally and from marking errors in student texts, assuring us that students would improve naturally as they wrote on engaging topics and were given opportunities to revise.

Taking classes in applied linguistics and teaching in the ALI was very enjoyable for me, but during my first year of study at USC, I began to fret about becoming a researcher — something I would have to do in very short order in order to complete my screening paper project, my qualifying examination, and my dissertation. The linguistics program

required 1–2 courses in statistics, but there was no other explicit training in research methods. In addition, unlike many of my classmates, I had arrived for my doctoral studies without a clear sense of what kind of research I might like to do.

Fortunately, in my second semester of coursework, my interest was caught by a study I encountered in one of Krashen's courses (Saragi, Nation, & Meister, 1978) on acquiring vocabulary incidentally through extensive reading. I designed and completed a small study on this in the ALI for my course project, and to my delight, my abstract on the research was then accepted for what would be my first professional conference presentation, at TESOL 1988 in Chicago. I also chose to take a summer course on research design offered by the School of Education, and this was tremendously helpful in understanding how to articulate research questions and design a study. I was launched as a researcher, and in my second year at USC, I completed one project that later became a journal publication (Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997) and another that laid the groundwork for my qualifying paper. My screening paper was based on a more elaborated version of the project on vocabulary acquisition, and I passed through that process with high marks.

## **Finding a Research Direction**

At that point, having made a strong connection with Krashen and his work and having achieved some success with the research on the relationship between L2 reading and vocabulary acquisition, I assumed that my dissertation research would continue along those lines. However, in the second semester of that year, I took two courses that changed everything. One was David Eskey's class in the School of Education on teaching reading and writing to adult literate L2 learners. Eskey was an extremely practical thinker who was not afraid to challenge current fads in the field. For example, his 1983 *TESOL Quarterly* article entitled "Meanwhile, back in the real world ..." debated the popular notion that

ignoring linguistic accuracy would be a successful teaching strategy for L2 writers in academic settings. Similarly, his chapter on reading called “Holding in the bottom” (1988) reminded readers that the language of a text is important for reading comprehension, especially for L2 learners, and suggested that teachers should not rely entirely on top-down, whole language-influenced approaches to reach students with diverse needs.

Eskey, in his work and his teaching, stressed *balance* and considering students’ needs alongside and even above our own theoretical and philosophical stances. He exposed us in the class to various raging debates in the field of L2 literacy and taught us to be critical evaluators of those arguments. I will never forget how he referred to hands-off strategies such as avoiding vocabulary or grammar instruction and error correction as “the garden of literacy approach.” Eskey’s pointed yet genial style caused me to question some of my received, possibly idealistic, assumptions about how learning and teaching in L2 literacy might progress.

The other course I took during that semester was a linguistics seminar called “Analysis of Written Discourse,” taught by Professor Robert Kaplan. The readings and discussion in this course provided me with ideas and models for research that involved text analysis, and this background proved foundational for much of my future scholarship. Perhaps even more significantly, in this class I made a connection with Kaplan, who became my dissertation adviser. Before the end of that semester, I had changed research direction — from reading/vocabulary to writing, had asked Kaplan to be my adviser, and had formed my qualifying examination committee, which also included Eskey, my statistics professor, and Douglas Biber, whose work in corpus linguistics would inform my own analysis of L2 writing.

## **Moving On and Finishing Up**

After finishing the screening process and finding an adviser, a research direction, and a qualifying committee, I experienced a short

detour in my academic career when I gave birth to my first child. The economic consequences of that life change led to my reluctant departure from the ALI for a more financially rewarding teaching opportunity in the ESL program for international students at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). In this program, I taught 20 hours a week: 7.5 hours of listening/speaking, 7.5 hours of writing, and 5 hours of a conversation class elective. The students were mostly from Pacific Rim nations, and they taught me to eat sushi and Korean barbecue during our lunch hours. I learned a few important professional lessons as well. For one, I learned what it was like to have little power and input into the curriculum of my own courses. We were typically summoned to teachers' meetings a day or two before a new term started and handed our syllabus and textbook. As a result, I also learned how to quickly assess students' needs and abilities and make on-the-fly adjustments to the required syllabus and textbook.

Further, I learned that teaching students under a different "social contract" than in the universities where I had been working required some changes in expectations. The students in the CSUN ESL program were pre-university, in the U.S. for a short time (weeks or a few months) to work on their language skills. Some were hoping for admission to CSUN or another U.S. university, but many others were simply looking for a good time as young adults studying abroad, funded by their parents. Often one of the first vocabulary words I taught my classes was "hangover" ("Teacher? How do you say — last night too much drink, today feel terrible?"). I learned to de-emphasize homework in favor of in-class, self-contained projects and to make my classes fun (especially on Fridays when attendance could be a problem) by developing language-related games and using popular culture (American TV and movies) as content for lessons.

Taking care of a new baby and teaching a full-time load of classes definitely slowed my progress toward my degree. It was nearly two years before I was able to complete my qualifying examination, which I did



in spring of 1990. For my qualifying paper, I examined and contrasted argumentative texts written by L1 and L2 university students, building upon work by Connor (1987) that I had encountered in Kaplan's Analysis of Written Discourse class. This study was later published in *Research in the Teaching of English* (Ferris, 1994b). Also, as part of my qualifying examination, I had my dissertation proposal approved and formed my committee: Kaplan, the chair; Eskey; and SLA/grammar scholar William Rutherford.

For my dissertation, I took an approach informed by both corpus linguistics and contrastive rhetoric. I collected 160 texts written by international students at USC, 40 each from four different first language groups (Mandarin, Japanese, Spanish, and Arabic). I contrasted the four sets of texts across 62 different syntactic and lexical variables. I later published two articles from my dissertation in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (1993) and the *TESOL Quarterly* (1994a).

At that point, I also made a decision that could have been destructive to my academic goals but instead turned out to be tremendously important to my future. I was offered a one-year full-time teaching position at CSU Sacramento, teaching in the same program where I had completed my M.A. TESOL degree. The interview committee explained to me that the position had opened up due to the sudden death of a linguistics professor in the department, and that they would be advertising it the following year as a permanent tenure-track job. If I took the job, I would have the inside track for the permanent position, but of course there were no guarantees.

Besides the risks of the position being temporary, accepting the job meant moving 400 miles away from my committee when I had barely begun my dissertation studies *and* working full-time at a demanding new teaching position. Kaplan strongly discouraged me from considering any such thing, telling me, "In my experience, nine out of ten students who do what you're doing never finish their degrees." My response: "I'll be the tenth." I had already decided that the inside track for a permanent