

Learning-to-Write and
Writing-to-Learn in
an Additional Language

Edited by
Rosa M. Manchón

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*To Mia Victori,
In Memoriam*

Preface

Alister Cumming
University of Toronto

Inquiry into writing in second or foreign languages has always involved – and may even be defined by – dialogues among diverse interests and contrary assumptions. Studies of writing, composition, or rhetoric have tended to assume that a single language (often, English) is constant, but studies of writing in second or foreign languages (L2 writing) complicate this assumption, demonstrating how language and cultural variability and change are increasingly the norms around the world, particularly in academic and work situations. Studies of second language acquisition, in turn, have tended to assume that oral communication is the standard medium to evaluate learners' language development, but studies of L2 writing complicate this assumption, showing how writing can be a more valued ability (than oral proficiency) in, for example, classroom or academic contexts, or how L2 learners past the age of childhood use literate resources effectively and integrally in ways that are not possible in the early acquisition of a first language.

These kinds of contrary dialogues tend to be embraced and enacted by the practicing educators, programs, and curricula that draw eclectically on an array of pedagogical resources, approaches, and concepts to guide the teaching of L2 writing (Leki, Cumming & Silva 2008). Over the past few decades, the extent of activity focused on L2 writing has increased enormously, following from increased international mobility and communications, such that studies of L2 writing have become institutionalized in many educational programs, through scholarly and professional associations and publications, and in the form of certification for teachers and basic requirements for advanced research degrees and scholarly investigations. An inevitable consequence of this increased activity and institutionalization is serious deliberation over key concepts as well as systematic research into their fundamental nature.

The present book brings together and evaluates one of these central dialogues about the nature of L2 writing. Contributors address the fundamental and intriguing paradox that L2 writing is not only an ability to acquire, teach, and assess – as is conventionally assumed – but L2 writing is also a means, context, and basis for

learning, both of language and of writing. The central dialogue here is between theories, research, and educational practices on second language acquisition and on written composition. But a multiplicity of dialogues about other fundamental issues inevitably arises: What is learning? What is writing? What is language? What is multilingualism? What is identity in social contexts? What are optimal educational practices? How and why should we understand and distinguish all of these issues as well as their interactions?

An aspect of this dialogue that has personally intrigued me are certain thinking processes that are evident, particularly through think-aloud protocols, as people write in a second language. As I observed in Cumming (1990), and as Murphy and Roca de Larios (2010) have investigated more recently in greater depth, when composing earnestly in a second language people exert remarkable mental effort to search for the best words, ensure the accuracy of their language and rhetoric, and to overcome knowledge lacks. As they do, writers use an array of resources in their first and second languages, analyze their explicit knowledge about writing and grammar, and constantly evaluate and adjust their situational intentions. These cognitive activities are surely a strategic means of controlling one's own text production. Accumulatively over time and experience, they must also represent complex and emergent ways of creating, consolidating, evaluating, making automatic, restructuring, and extending one's knowledge about language as well as one's writing abilities (cf. Ellis & Larsen-Freeman 2009). These self-control or inner-speech dimensions become evident through think-aloud protocols, but they are prompted by the nature of writing itself, which sets a context for language production at a self-controlled pace, in relation to a fixed text that demands evaluation and so editing, and with a premium on effective and accurate communication to suit specific purposes. These cognitive processes must happen during oral communications as well, though perhaps with less time, deliberation, or opportunities. Moreover, as my colleague Merrill Swain and others (e.g., Swain & Lapkin 1995) have demonstrated, peer collaborations while writing or performing other language tasks are also optimal contexts to elicit and scaffold these potentials for learning inter-subjectively – forming a kind of paradigm for organizing second language and literacy learning.

A crucial point that the present book makes evident is the extent to which this paradigm necessarily extends along numerous, interacting dimensions. Language, literacy, and learning have to be recognized to function at multiple levels, ranging from micro-levels of words, orthographies, punctuation, morphology, syntax, and ideas to macro-levels of register, rhetoric, positioning oneself in discourse communities, establishing identities, acculturation, and social action. Chapters in the present book take up and extend this dialogue of multiplicity through an exemplary blend of theories, research, and analyses of practices in education and

written literacy. Rosa Manchón has marshaled together leading scholars from around the world to review key concepts and to present results from new research on L2 writing and learning from these perspectives. Lourdes Ortega's concluding chapter, in turn, neatly points out why these matters warrant serious attention as well as clarification: Misalignments can occur because students, teachers, researchers, or institutional programs may have differing purposes related to L2 writing, but these divergences can be reconciled through synergies between the complementary purposes for writing, language learning, and teaching exemplified in the book.

The opening chapter by Rosa Manchón and the closing chapter by Lourdes Ortega already summarize, eloquently and insightfully, the book's contents, but I feel obliged to offer impressions of those aspects of individual chapters that most captured my attention. Ken Hyland is particularly cogent and comprehensive in reviewing major trends about "learning to write", while nudging genre theory a few steps further forward. Alan Hirvela's chapter provides a neat counterpoint to Hyland's, recounting how an alternative strand of interests in "writing to learn" surfaced several decades ago, proliferated, and has subtly transformed how educators and researchers need to think. Rosa Manchón's review chapter concludes the first half of the book by analyzing these issues in depth, showing how they connect to, align with, and enrich theories about learning languages, proposing benefits for writing and collaboration that have been neglected by the predominant focus on studies of individuals' oral communications.

The second half of the volume presents a range of empirical studies, each using innovative research approaches that produce notable findings. This is where the larger dialogue about "writing to learn" and "learning to write" particularly jells. Ilona Leki's study convinced me to teach from what students know, which she shows can be substantially more than is usually presumed. Suresh Canagarajah's chapter expanded my thinking about multilingual writing in multiple and subtle ways. Heidi Byrnes reminded me how rhetorically complex summary writing really is, and also how comprehensive a theory systemic-functional linguistics is. Fiona Hyland's research convinced me, once again, that language learning and writing have to be conceptualized more broadly and deeply than simply as teachers' feedback on students' performances. The study by Rosa Manchón and Julio Roca de Larios affirmed that learning occurs in diverse, intricate, and often unacknowledged ways while writing in an additional language. John Hedgcock and Natalie Lefkowitz made it clear that curricular decisions need to account decisively for the complexity of students' backgrounds, abilities, and aspirations because these can vary on fundamental bases even for a single language taught in a single institution.

One could simply consider these multiple dialogues as integral lessons for senior students who are aspiring researchers. But the conversations, complexities, and issues that they open up go well beyond academic issues or any single language or educational situation. They establish the groundwork and rationales to prepare new investigations into and to form new perspectives on the relationships between writing, language, and learning in diverse contexts and among varied populations around the world. These dialogues need to and surely will continue, extending rather than confining the multiple boundaries of language and literacy learning, teaching, and development.

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Introduction

CHAPTER 1

Situating the learning-to-write and writing-to-learn dimensions of L2 writing

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This introductory chapter to the book serves to set the scene for both the three strands of research reviewed in Part I (learning to write, writing to learn content, and writing to learn language), and for the empirical studies contained in Part II. It does so by situating the learning-to-write and writing-to-learn perspectives explored in the book in second language (L2) writing and second language acquisition (SLA) scholarship. The aims of the book are accounted for against this background, emphasizing the way in which the collections helps to expand the L2 writing and SLA research agendas. This is complemented with an overview of the structure of the book and of the different chapters in it.

The ultimate aim of the present collection is to advance our understanding of written language learning in an additional language (L2) by exploring together two general dimensions of L2 writing: on the one hand, the manner in which second and foreign (L2) users learn to express themselves in writing (the learning-to-write dimension, LW), and, on the other, the way in which the engagement with L2 writing tasks and activities can contribute to development in areas other than writing itself (the writing-to-learn dimension), be it content knowledge (learning-to-write content, WLC), or language knowledge and skills (writing-to-learn language, WLL).

These three perspectives (LW, WLC, and WLL) traverse L2 writing scholarship and practice, although they have developed almost independently from each other, have been informed by different theoretical frameworks, and have resulted in different pedagogical procedures. As we learn in Chapters 2 and 3, the LW and some WLC perspectives (especially Writing Across the Curriculum, WAC) belong to the domain of mainstream L2 writing research, they have investigated primarily second language (SL) writers, have been informed by L1 composition, English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes research, and

are associated (especially in North America) with composition classes and WAC programmes. At the level of pedagogy, they have materialized, for instance, in process-oriented and genre approaches to the teaching of writing, in the case of LW. In contrast, as detailed in Chapters 3 and 4, other WLC approaches (i.e. Content-based Instruction) and the WLL perspective belong to the realm of second language acquisition (SLA) studies, have investigated both SL and foreign language (FL) writers, has been framed in cognitive and sociocultural theories of SLA, and they are associated with SL and FL classrooms and with pedagogical procedures informed by, for instance, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching).

Given this disciplinary compartmentalization, the present book is based on the recognition of the theoretical and pedagogical relevance of jointly exploring these various learning-to-write and writing-to-learn dimensions of writing for the development of a comprehensive theory of L2 writing. Such a comprehensive theory must ultimately be able to explain the multifaceted nature of L2 writing, which is closely linked to the key elements emphasized in each of the three perspectives that inform the contributions to the book: writing itself and written texts in LW, readers and contexts of use in WLC, and language in WLL, an issue more fully developed by Lourdes Ortega in Chapter 12.

A comprehensive theory of L2 writing must also account for the distinctiveness of the various purposes (personal, professional, and/or educational) that characterize L2 writing in the myriad of contexts in which L2 writing is learned and taught. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that these various purposes are not solely associated with the LW dimension of L2 writing and, what is more, that learning and teaching L2 writing may entail the co-existence of aims related to writing itself (LW), to learning disciplinary subject-matter in the content areas (WLC), and/or to engaging in writing as a tool for language learning (WLL). In fact, this interaction of purposes is one of the most distinctive messages that stem from the research reported in the empirical studies included in Part II of the book.

The dual exploration of the learning-to-write and writing-to-learn dimensions of writing in an additional language undertaken in this edited collection is also intended as an expansion of the L2 writing and SLA research agendas. Regarding the former, a cursory reading of the research on writing in an additional language shows that L2 writing theory and pedagogical thinking have traditionally been explicitly or implicitly equated with the inquiry into the intricacies of the LW process, primarily in SL contexts. This is understandable if we also bear in mind that L2 writing scholarship emerged as a “second language” phenomenon and, more precisely, as a North American phenomenon (see K. Hyland and Hirvela this volume). Despite the efforts of many scholars to widen the focus of

the research and to go beyond the “political borders of North America” (Silva, Leki & Carson 1997:424), L2 writing has remained very much as a synonym of learning and teaching to write in university settings in English-dominant countries (but see Leki, Cumming & Silva 2008 for a review of research on other populations apart from college-level L2 writers).

As noted by Leki, Cumming and Silva (2008), “the L2 writing profession has increasingly acknowledged that it is counterproductive to analyze English learners’ writing or language development without embedding the inquiry in the human, material, institutional, and political contexts where they occur” (Leki et al. 2008:9). The book was also motivated by the belief that this socially-situated approach to the investigation of L2 writing (see also Ortega & Carson 2010) entails taking future L2 writing research along new or partially explored avenues, as done in some of the chapters that follow. To start with, the WLL dimension deserves a more prominent place in the L2 research agenda. As noted in the introduction to an edited collection on FL writing (Manchón 2009), some FL learners might feel the need or the imperative to learn to write for professional or academic reasons, while others may experience writing simply as a language learning vehicle, hence Leki (2009: xv)’s admonition that “Contrary to dogma in SL writing, with its now-traditional de-emphasis of language learning, using writing to develop language proficiency may be a central aim of L2 writing in FL settings.” What we learn in the book is that this is equally relevant in SL contexts. These considerations explain why L2 writing research, in addition to exploring how L2 writers learn to write, also has to make room for the investigation of the way in which writing might affect language learning outcomes, a claim originally made by Linda Harklau (2002) almost a decade ago. What is more, the configuration of intervening factors becomes even more complex in some educational contexts in which learning-to-write and writing-to-learn are inseparable due to educational and linguistic reasons, for instance, in university FL language degree programmes, as clearly evidenced in the research reported by Byrnes (Chapter 7), and Manchón & Roca de Larios (Chapter 10).

The L2 writing research agenda also needs to explore new paths with respect to WLC and LW. As Hirvela (Chapter 3) reminds us, WLC research needs to be extended to the FL context given its almost exclusive focus on SL contexts thus far. In addition, the investigation of the learning-to write and writing-to learn dimensions of L2 writing through a multicompetence lens is another research path worth exploring in the L2 writing scholarship. In this respect, the studies by Leki (Chapter 5) and Canagarajah (Chapter 6) are perfect examples of the type of research that sees “L2 composing as a multicompetent (i.e. biliterate and bilingual) act that is situated and understood in its social context” (Ortega & Carson 2010: 52).

The book also tries to make a case for the relevance of assigning written language learning a more central place in SLA studies. It is therefore not accidental that it is published in a “Language Learning and Language Teaching” book series. Looking into the way in which writing can contribute to advancing language competencies is theoretically relevant due to the secondary role that writing and written language learning have played thus far in SLA theorizing and in the empirical research agenda (see arguments in Adams & Ross-Feldman 2008; Harklau 2002; Williams 2008). In fact, most SLA theories, models, and hypotheses appear to assume, explicitly or implicitly, that SLA results from having access to oral language and from participating in communicative oral exchanges: speaking is what really counts. This assumption may well go back to the early days of the development of the discipline when Hatch (1978) suggested that, in essence, “language learning evolves out of learning how to carry on conversations, out of learning how to communicate” (pag. 63. See Cumming [in press] for further reasons regarding the emphasis on orality in language learning studies). Yet, the printed word plays a major role in the language learning experience of many L2 learners (Harklau 2002; Williams 2008), particularly foreign language (FL) students (Bruton 2007; Manchón 2009, in press a, b; Manchón & Roca de Larios 2007) and adult learners, for whom “second language acquisition may be triggered more through literacy activities than through interaction” (Weissberg 2008: 35). These observations justify the theoretical and practical relevance of exploring the language learning opportunities afforded by reading and writing across educational contexts and learner populations, as done in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 with respect to WLL. In this way, the book constitutes a further step in the exploration of L2 writing-SLA interfaces, which, as recently noted by Ortega and Carson (2010), entails providing principled answers to both “the fundamental question of how linguistic expertise in the L2 may constrain the development of L2 composing abilities and, conversely, the less pondered question of how L2 writing may foster overall second language development” (p. 49).

An overview of the content of the book

Based on the premises and intended aims of the book mentioned in the preceding section, as Editor of the collection, I invited the contributors to use the threefold distinction of LW, WLC and WWL as the heuristics guiding their respective inquiries. The three chapters included in Part I (Learning-to-Write and Writing-to-Learn: Mapping the Terrain) are state of the art accounts and they constitute the theoretical perspectives on the LW, WLC and WLL dimensions of writing explored in the rest of the book: Ken Hyland (Chapter 2) provides an overview of

existing research on the LW dimension, Alan Hirvela (Chapter 3) reviews theory and research on the WLC dimension, and Rosa Manchón (Chapter 4) synthesizes existing empirical research that sheds light on the WLL dimension of L2 writing. Taken together, these three introductory chapters serve to map the terrain regarding the LW, WLC and WLL dimensions of writing by looking back at what has already been discovered, and by analyzing what lies ahead in terms of needed theoretical and methodological refinements, and open research questions.

These analyses serve as the background to situate the empirical studies in Part II (Research Insights) by Ilona Leki (Chapter 5), Suresh Canagarajah (Chapter 6), Heidi Byrnes (Chapter 7), Fiona Hyland (Chapter 8), Rosa Manchón and Julio Roca de Larios (Chapter 9), and Natalie Lefkowitz and John Hedgcock (Chapter 10). Collectively, these empirical investigations constitute worthy attempts to advance along some of the research avenues suggested in the three chapters in Part I. In addition, the body of knowledge reported in Part II chapters represents a wide range of contexts, writers, and languages: these studies illustrate how L2 writing (in several languages – English, German, and Spanish) is learned (by second and foreign language learners with a range of native language backgrounds, various L2 proficiency levels and degrees of language/writing expertise), taught, and practiced in diverse geographical (in Asia, America, and Europe), instructional (covering university education and heritage language learning), and professional (academia) contexts. Contributors were invited to state upfront which aspect(s) of the LW, WLC or WLL dimensions of writing their contribution focused on, as well as the angle from which it was explored. I also asked them to look into their data with the aim of ascertaining in what way their respective studies contributed to the ultimate aim of the book of deepening our understanding of the learning-to-write and writing-to-learn dimensions of L2 writing, and of the potential interfaces among them.

The book finishes with a concluding chapter by Lourdes Ortega (Chapter 11) in which she reflects critically on the learning-to-write and writing-to-learn proposals and insights advanced in the various contributions to the book and offer suggestions for future research.

Part I

In **Chapter 2**, **Ken Hyland** traces the development of research on learning to write for academic purposes in university settings. He distinguishes various research approaches and analyzes their theoretical underpinnings, and the manner in which they have materialized in pedagogical proposals for the L2 writing classroom. He establishes a broad distinction between theories concerned with