Theory and Practice of Writing

An Applied Linguistic Perspective

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and
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Foreword

This volume presents an applied linguistics perspective on the theory and practice of writing. An examination of writing and writing instruction from an applied linguistics orientation, however, is a daunting task. First, a comprehensive study of writing in first-language contexts is itself a difficult interdisciplinary undertaking. One must consider perspectives from English, education, linguistics, psychology, and sociology. In addition, there are radically different issues and concerns which emerge when discussing the teaching of writing to children at elementary schools as opposed to tertiary (undergaduate and post-graduate) students.

An applied linguistics perspective complicates the situation further. As an interdisciplinary field in itself, applied linguistics adds new dimensions to the study of writing. The varieties of writing to be accounted for, the increased complexity of purposes for learning to write, and the added cross-cultural variations created by different groups of second-language learners all force the study of writing into a larger framework. We have attempted to survey the nature of writing and the teaching of writing from this larger framework, and, in doing so, have inevitably remained faithful to an applied linguistics inquiry. As applied linguists, we may also have made assumptions about the nature and development of language abilities that may be unfamiliar to some teachers and teacher trainers. We sincerely believe that such potential obstacles to understanding can be rectified with an introductory text in linguistics.

Adopting a broad interdisciplinary orientation, the book discusses major issues in writing research, current directions in the teaching of writing, and the somewhat ill-defined set of

connections between theory and practice in many instructional contexts. As applied linguists, we intend this volume to contribute especially to an understanding of those connections between theory and practice in writing and, at the same time, to reveal the many different and complex settings in which such connections must take place. To the extent that these connections are clarified, attendant problems raised, and directions for resolution suggested, the volume will have achieved its primary goal. Of course, it would be unreasonable to think that any volume could be fully successful in achieving this goal. The undertaking of this volume has certainly revealed to us the limitations under which we have laboured, particularly with respect to the demands of an applied linguistics framework.

This volume is expected by its publisher and by its audience to have genuinely international interest; that is, the discussion is expected to contain information that transcends national boundaries and has universal applicability. We believe that in the discussion of theory we have succeeded in providing notions that do indeed transcend the local – that do reflect the cutting edge of research everywhere. However, to the extent that we have dealt with practice, we have had to imagine an idealized classroom, some specific context of teacher/student interaction, and some real characteristics of teachers and students who enter into such an interaction. It is, we believe, impossible to create these idealized situations without starting from some specific context.

We confess to some bias in creating the framework within which our theoretical discussions occur. We, as authors, both work primarily in the USA and, as a consequence, are more familiar with US-based publications and US-based scholars. We primarily attend conferences that are convened in the USA; we exploit the resources of libraries in the USA; we communicate largely with other scholars who share our geographic (and philosophical) constraints, and – because we work in the USA – we have concentrated our individual and collective research on the solutions of applied linguistic problems which derive from, and apply to, conditions in that country.

This is not to suggest that our experience is entirely myopic. We have both, at various times and for various intervals, worked in other environments in other geographical areas and, together, we have had at least some experience in approximately a score of

educational systems. But as this exposure is certainly not universal and covers a great many years, our knowledge of other educational systems is often dated.

In compiling this volume we have tried to incorporate a wider international perspective, drawing upon our collective experience of other educational systems, and have looked carefully at the applied linguistics research deriving from other literature that was available to us in international journals and books. On occasion, we have been randomly assisted by colleagues in other countries who have made more local research materials available, and the extent to which we have succeeded in drawing together such international, or perhaps more accurately *multinational*, resources, will determine the broad applicability of this volume and will reflect perspectives from at least those parts of the world in which applied linguistic research is done on the teaching and learning of English.

If we are to any extent guilty of an academic myopia, we apologize to our colleagues and readers. We trust that readers who are interested in any larger issues that have been omitted will bear with us, as we believe that we have covered the various facets of most of our research paradigms fairly and fairly exhaustively. Some of the issues may appear to have pertinence only in the US context, but the linguistic and cultural diversity of that country is so great that notions deriving from that base will certainly have wider implications.

With respect to the matter of practice, many of our ideas and illustrations have admittedly been drawn from a US context, but many of the suggestions we offer will be of use to teachers in any geographic location. Nevertheless, we cannot pretend that all of the suggestions have universal applicability, nor can we pretend that, given our conceptual constraints, we have exhausted the possibilities for practice in all possible contexts. We hope that the readers of this volume understand that we are not offering a perfect set of pedagogical practices – or that our notions of things to do exhaust the possible or the useful – but rather we hope that this volume will be regarded as an ideas supermarket in which readers are welcome to shop.

In closing this foreword, we would like to thank a number of individuals who have been willing to provide us with feedback on various parts of the volume – Angela Barker, Jena Burgess, Ulla

Connor, Tom Miller and Fredricka Stoller. We would also like to
thank Chris Candlin and Longman for their guidance and
patience as we managed to work through a project that extended
us far beyond out initial expectations.

April 1996

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This volume is respectfully dedicated to
Kathe Rositzke and Audrey Kaplan

General Editor's Preface

'Good soup needs no salt' strikes one as an apt maxim for General
Editors to bear in mind with any volume such as this that seeks to
offer an extensive account of a central topic of applied linguistics.
The scope of this latest contribution to the *Applied Linguistics &
Language Sudy Series* is necessarily so extensive not only because of
the obvious pervasiveness of *writing* but because of the signal sig-
nificance of its plural roles; as a means of measuring cognitive
abilities, as a central skill area in the design of educational cur-
ricula and in the patterns of their delivery in teaching and
assessment, as a way of understanding some of the occupational
and social demands of daily communication in living and working,
in revealing its key gatekeeping role in enabling or disabling the
sheer accessibility of life chances for all in contemporary indus-
trial and post industrial societies, and its ethnographic significance
in exploring and explaining cultural variation and relativities. And
yet, despite the extensiveness of the treatment here, there is room
and a place to highlight why this book is needed now. The reason
lies partly in the need to highlight and unpack these ever-differen-
tiating roles and multiple purposes, and, more than that, even in
the face of apparently major distinctions of first and second lan-
guage performances, in so doing to reassert the essential nature
of writing and the writing process as overarching, despite that vari-
ation and that fragmentation.

Appropriately enough, then, the authors begin with an explor-
ation of the nature of writing, its authorships, their individual
ande collective purposes, and the rationales that motivate these
writing processes and their varied output texts. They argue that

the facets of writing sketched above cannot at one level be treated individually, nor can one facet be asserted as necessarily prime: their discussion of *composing*, for example, is at once cognitive, social, personal and educational. Nor, in their view, can writing be appropriately addressed without reference to its histories. Not only the genesis of writing *per se*, (though that is interesting in itself in just such a complex way) but in the varied histories of writing development in different socio-cultural and socio-political contexts – the relative conditions of production and reception of writing at different times and in different circumstances – in short, the socially and culturally embedded and contested multiple literacies of writing. Nor again, as they demonstrate, can writing now be usefully discussed as a domain entirely distinct from that of speech. Research on text structure, into the social practices of literacy and oracy in different communities, into the interconnectedness of speech and writing in public discourse, into the intextextuality and interdiscursivity of many if not most contemporary genres, all point to a needed multidimensionality in the study and practice of writing.

From this point, then, Bill Grabe and Bob Kaplan embark, and provide in their first introductory Chapter a cogent and defining account of writing research in English in first and second language contexts, drawing on the facets of the writing process identified above, and in the context of varied responses to a plurality of writing needs. Such an account permits them a second overlay of interdisciplinarity – that of the methodologies of writing research. Here they show how some asserted distinctions between L1 and L2 writing, already problematic cognitively and also socially in many contexts, similarly blend and become fuzzy in research terms as experimental, linguistic/textual, ethnographic and social psychological techniques form aspects and tools of a common repertoire.

We should, however, be properly cautious in celebrating this unity in diversity. Seen from the point of view of the history of writing practice and writing pedagogy, especially in English, there is now and has been at once much more overt sectarianism and at the same time masked differences of purpose, than one might assume. 'Genre-based', 'process-focused', 'whole language', 'product-orientated' may be less descriptions of academic or educational value than they are manipulated slogans for the credulous, yet they do signify importantly distinguishable

positions, if as I say, often exploited. Approaches to textual description are not uncontested, nor are their 'applications' to instructional materials. Teaching strategies ought not to be simply read off from some linguistic analysis, however successful a blend of the formal and functional. Students' writing practices should not be assessable simply as solo performances in terms of a belief that some targetted cognitive strategy can mutate into acceptable linguistic form. Nor in the context of writing development seen as a not too covert recruitment into some disciplinary or professional specialism, should such individual writing performances merely be seen as momentary personal and individual responses to some given instructional task. The value of this book is that while acknowledging this variability, it is still bold enough to assert and document the core issues that writing research and writing practice has addressed and still must address.

It does so in thorough detail in its following chapters. Beginning appropriately enough with the text as product, it locates it, equally convincingly, as a tangible, analysable artefact deriving from two related inferrable processes of discourse: the discourse of the writer and the discourse of the reader. Such discourses are at once cognitive and socially conditioned, personal and functional, to a degree accessible through experimental, ethnographic and social psychological accounting, but always to be seen as mutually influencing through the potentially explanatory evidence of the text. Writing and reading processes are thus interconnected in the text. It is this position which permits the authors to warrant their other characteristic close interconnection in this book, that of research and practice. Indeed, one might see writing and reading as their own research laboratories, their own research methodologies, their own research agendas. After all, what is a writer (or a reader for that matter) doing except to test out theories about the realisation of some mental discursive process within the general and actual constraints of the personally available formal system of the lexicogrammar?

Nonetheless, despite this mutuality, the relationship between theory and practice in writing research and instruction has not been self-evident. In part, as the authors argue, this has been a consequence of a more general separation of powers between the academy and the school (let alone the home or the workplace, one might add, in respect of both). In part this has been due to a lack of clarity within each institution about the range of writing skills, knowledge bases and writing processes and how these may be

integrated in a descriptive model of language processing in a manner such as that which Grabe and Kaplan outline in their keystone Chapter 8 'Towards a theory of writing'. In part this has been due to an understandable if perverse unwillingness to grasp fully in either teaching or research practice the verity of writing: that interdependence of writer, reader, text and topic I focus on above.

In the sections of this notable chapter, who writes what, to whom, for what purpose, why, when, where and how is, of course, at one level simply to transpose and extend Fishman's famous dictum about sociolinguistics. At another, it defines the questions and conditions for research and for practice. You could build a curriculum on addressing those questions, and as the authors show in their subsequent chapters, some educators have done so, though few, if any, with all the questions in the air at the same time. The conditions, as Brecht wrote, were not right. In a similar way, you could construct a research agenda from those questions, but here, disappointingly and with less excuse, the need for a concurrent consideration of these mutually influencing questions has also been less evident. One might speculate why. My view is that the particularity of the research response derives from the particularity of applied linguistics training. A focus on text without a focus as well on discourse, a focus on the individual rather than as well on the cultural or institutional collective, a focus on the actual rather than as well on the historically conditioned, a focus on the cognitive in the absence of a focus as well on the social, a focus on the instruction rather than as well on the learning, a focus on the linguistic rather than as well as on the subject-matter, all these particularities work to create the conditions which make such an interdisciplinarity of the questions impossible to conceive for researchers, and thus to turn into relevant and authenticated research practice.

Seen in this way, this book about the theory and practice of writing turns out to have a wider implication. Read this way, it becomes a book about the state of the art of applied linguistics, and how the problem-focused nature of the discipline, identified by the authors at the outset, is shown to be relevant not just for its 'applications' but for the discipline of applied linguistics itself.

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Issues in writing research and instruction

1.1 Introduction

Applied linguistics has concerned itself with the development of writing skills for at least the past 50 years, and that it has done so is entirely appropriate. If one is to take seriously the relatively straightforward definition of applied linguistics as the attempt to resolve real-world language-based problems, then the development of writing abilities, whether for learners of English as a first language (L1), or as a second language (L2), or learners of any other language, surely falls well within the domain of applied linguistics.

There are, however, significant differences between the two groups of learners, since there are wide variations in learner issues within each of these major groups. These differences and their consequences for writing theory and instruction will be explored throughout the book. The treatment of both groups within a single volume is, however, the only logical applied linguistics perspective to adopt since both groups subsume learning and instructional problems which are language-based, and there is significant overlap in their historical evolution over the past 20 years. The decision to ignore English first-language research and practice would not only lead to a badly distorted view of L2 writing approaches, it would also misinterpret the true scope of applied linguistics inquiry with respect to issues in writing development.

This chapter outlines many of the larger issues and problems implicit in the theory and practice of writing instruction, adopting a broad applied linguistics perspective. In exploring issues in writing, basic assumptions about the nature of writing must be considered. For example, *why* do people write? That is to say, *what*

different sorts of writing are done by *which different groups* of people, and for *what different purposes?* More fundamentally, one must ask: *What constitutes writing?* Such basic questions cannot be discussed in a vacuum but must also consider the larger issues raised by literacy skills development and literacy demands in various contexts. Literacy, incorporating specific writing issues with a related set of reading issues, highlights the necessary connections between reading and writing as complementary comprehension/production processes. It also introduces the distinctions between spoken and written language forms, and the specific constraints of the written medium. Thus, a brief overview of literacy provides an important background for understanding the recent developments in writing theory and instruction.

Any discussion of basic foundations must necessarily incorporate outlines of research on both writing in English as the first language and writing in a second language. From the L1 perspective, many theoretical issues and concerns in L1 contexts also affect writing approaches in L2 situations. From the L2 perspective, research in L2 writing also highlights differences between the two contexts. The many additional variables introduced in L2 contexts – not only cognitive but also social, cultural and educational – make considerations of writing in a second language substantially different in certain respects.

This chapter also explores the gap between research and instruction and considers how that gap may be bridged. The translation from theory to practice in L1 writing contexts has changed considerably over the past 20 years. Such a translation has also had a profound impact on L2 applications from theory to practice; some of these applications have been appropriate, while others have been much less appropriate, given the distinct L2 context. For example, L2 instruction may:

- place writing demands on EFL students, and for some of them, English may not be perceived as a very important subject;
- place distinct writing demands on English for Special Purposes (ESP) students, or on English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) students – demands which may be very different from those on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students planning to enter English medium universities;
- include writing demands on adult literacy and immigrant survival English students – both groups experiencing very different demands from those which occur in academic contexts;

- include academic writing demands in which a sophisticated level of writing is not a critical concern.

All of these issues form parts of an overview of writing theory and practice from an applied linguistics perspective.

1.2   On the nature of writing

The need for writing in modern literate societies – societies marked by pervasive print media – is much more extensive than is generally realized. When one examines the everyday world, one finds people engaged in many varieties of writing, some of which may be overlooked as being routine, or commonplace, or unimportant. These varieties, however, all represent the ability to control the written medium of language to some extent. It is fair to say that most people, on a typical day, practice some forms of writing. And virtually everyone in every walk of life completes an enormous number of forms. In addition, many people write for reasons unrelated to their work: letters, diaries, messages, shopping lists, budgets, etc.

Describing the various tasks performed every day by writers offers one way of classifying what people write, but a slightly more abstract taxonomy of writing types will prove more descriptively useful. A list of actual writing tasks does not provide a way to group these tasks according to similar function – a goal in understanding what gets written and why. In fact, many different functional sorts of writing constitute common occurrences. These sorts of writing, depending on the context, task, and audience, may be classified functionally in numerous ways, including writing to identify, to communicate, to call to action, to remember, to satisfy requirements, to introspect, or to create, either in terms of recombining existing information or in terms of aesthetic form. Thus:

- writing down one's name identifies
- writing a shopping list may identify, communicate, and/or remind
- writing a memo may communicate and remind
- writing a student essay may at least satisfy a requirement
- writing a diary may promote introspection
- writing a professional article may communicate, recombine, and allow introspection

■ writing a novel or a poem may exemplify what is known as aesthetic creativity.

At yet another development level, one may distinguish writing which involves composing from writing which does not; this distinction is useful because most of what is referred to academically as writing assumes composing. Composing involves the combining of structural sentence units into a more-or-less unique, cohesive and coherent larger structure (as opposed to lists, forms, etc.). A piece of writing which implicates composing contains surface features which connect the discourse and an underlying logic of organization which is more than simply the sum of the meanings of the individual sentences. Figure 1.1 illustrates the composing/non-composing dichotomy in terms of audience. The matrix suggests the possible options that are available for writing with or without composing.

Composing, further, may be divided into writing which is, in essence, telling or retelling and writing which is transforming. Retelling signifies the sort of writing that is, to a large extent, already known to the author, such as narratives and descriptions.

Audience	Writing without composing	Writing with composing	
		For knowledge telling	For knowledge transforming
Self	Shopping list	Personal diary	'Journal' notes
One known other	Note to milkman	Personal letter	
One unknown other		Business letter	
Small group known		Lesson plan sermon	
Small group unknown	Questionnaire	Newsletter item	Proposal
Large group	Tax form Driver's licence application form		Poem, drama novel Short story

Figure 1.1 Patterns of composing with differing audiences

The planning involves recalling and reiterating. Transforming, on the other hand, signifies that sort of writing for which no blueprint is readily available. The planning involves the complex juxtaposition of many pieces of information as well as the weighing of various rhetorical options and constraints (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). In this type of writing, the author is not certain of the final product; on the contrary, the writing act constitutes a heuristic through which an information-transfer problem is solved both for the author and for his or her intended audience. This notion of composing is much·more comprehensive than the idea of drafting or 'shaping at the point of utterance' (Britton 1983), since it takes in the 'final' product. Many sorts of what traditionally have been labelled expository and argumentative/persuasive texts, as well as 'creative' writing, involve transforming. In Figure 1.1, an attempt has been made to distinguish between retelling and transforming, even though both organizing strategies are available for many sorts of composing.

In most academic settings where students are learning to write, the educational system assumes that students will learn to compose with the ability to transform information. In fact, many students learning to write before they enter the tertiary level have little consistent exposure to writing demands beyond retelling. In some cases, students, both in L1 and L2, have minimal practice even with simple retelling. The problems created by these students as they enter the academic environment certainly deserve the attention of applied linguists. Moreover, writing places constraints on student learning that are distinct from the development of spoken language abilities.

To understand these developmental constraints on students, and the more complex demands made by academic institutions, it will be useful to examine briefly the historical development of writing and the changing writing/literacy expectations which have arisen over the last two centuries.

Writing is a rather recent invention, historically speaking. Unlike spoken language – coterminous with the history of the species – written language has a documented history of little more than 6000 years. And while it is generally accepted by linguists that certain aspects of spoken language may be biologically determined, the same cannot be said of writing. While all normally developing people learn to speak a first language, perhaps half of the world's current population does not know how to read or

write to a functionally adequate level, and one-fifth of the world's population is totally non-literate. It seems a bit absurd to suggest that this difference is accidental, due to the inaccessibility of writing instruments or material to read. Nor does it seem appropriate to label this one-fifth of humankind as somehow 'abnormal'.

The distinction between spoken and written media calls attention to a significant constraint on the development of writing abilities. Writing abilities are not naturally acquired; they must be culturally (rather than biologically) transmitted in every generation, whether in schools or in other assisting environments. While there are many distinctions between the two media in terms of lexical and structural use, the acquired/learned distinction deserves particular attention. The logical conclusion to draw from this distinction is that writing is a technology, a set of skills which must be practised and learned through experience. Defining writing in this way helps to explain why writing of the more complex sorts causes great problems for students; the skills required do not come naturally, but rather are gained through conscious effort and much practice. It is also very likely, for this reason, that numbers of students may never develop the more sophisticated composing skills which transform information into new texts.

The crucial notion is not that writing subsumes a set body of techniques to master, as might be claimed, for example, in learning to swim; rather, the crucial notion is that writing is not a natural ability that automatically accompanies maturation (Liberman and Liberman 1990). Writing – particularly the more complex composing skill valued in the academy – involves training, instruction, practice, experience, and purpose. Saying that writing is a technology implies only that the way people learn to write is essentially different from the way they learn to speak, and there is no guarantee that any person will read or write without some assistance.

1.3   Literacy and writing

The history of literacy development supports such a writing-as-technology perspective for the nature of writing. Indeed, a number of literacy scholars have argued for this view strongly; any other definition of literacy does not stand up to the historical evidence (Goody 1987, Graff 1987). Since there are, in fact, many types of literacy which have developed historically under very different contexts and for very different uses, any more complex definition tends not to hold up equally well in all contexts (cf. Cressy 1980, Graff 1987, Houston 1988, Purves 1991). Moreover, the history of literacy demonstrates that reading and writing skills were developed and passed on to following generations only in response to cultural and social contexts; these skills were not maintained when appropriate social and cultural supports were removed.

In fact, the definition of writing-as-technology fits extremely well with historical perspectives on literacy because many literacy movements and developments were little more than the wider dissemination of very basic skills, such as the ability to write one's name or fill out a ledger or a form. Such literacy developments hardly count as the sort of writing-as-composing discussed earlier or as the type that is valued academically; yet, these literacy developments undeniably reflect aspects of writing abilities.

The history of literacy development is both enlightening and commonly misunderstood. It is enlightening because the many and varied literacy movements and contexts of literacy development provide a better understanding of the current use of, and expectations for, students' writing abilities; it is often misunderstood because many assumptions about literacy have been widely promoted and accepted without careful documentation and analysis (cf. Graff 1987). One significant point that the study of literacy has demonstrated, both synchronically and diachronically, is that there are many different sorts of literacy skills just as there are many different sorts of writing abilities. Most students who display writing problems in educational contexts do, in fact, have writing skills; they are just not the skills which educational institutions value (Barton and Ivanic 1991, Street 1993). This is particularly true for L2 students in EAP contexts; they clearly come to higher academic institutions with many different literacy practices and many different views on the purposes of reading and writing.

The history of Western literacy begins (from *c.* 3100 BC) with the early uses of writing for recording events, traditions, and transactions by scribal specialists who were able to translate orally for the masses as was necessary. The powers of priesthood can be attributed to the apparently mystical properties associated with the ability to read and write. The rise of the Greek city-states signalled a greater dissemination of literacy skills among the

populace. However, literacy among the classical Greek citizenry was less widespread and less sophisticated than has commonly been assumed. Perhaps only 15–20 per cent of the Greek population consisted of 'citizenry', and oral traditions were still the trusted and preferred means of communicating. Similarly, the Roman period was marked by a limited literacy among the populace; in this context, literacy was due in large part to the rise of public schooling, the need for civil servants to do government business in the far-flung regions of the empire, and the rise of commercial literacy needs. Nevertheless, it was a very small intellectual, political, and religious élite that possessed literacy skills (cf. Goody 1987, Graff 1987).

The decline of Rome saw the role of literacy relegated primarily to the religious infrastructure which emerged across Europe from the fourth to the eighth century. While many schooling traditions of the Roman era persisted throughout Western Europe, most were taken over by the church for the training of priests, clerics, and other functionaries. The development of literacy for other than religious uses began during the eighth to tenth centuries; and contrary to popular belief, the 'Dark Ages' was not a period of complete illiteracy beyond the monastery walls. The tenth and eleventh centuries marked the beginnings of a commercial literacy and set the stage for literacy practices across Europe from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. It is evident from the research of such scholars as Harvey Graff that literacy has a continuous history in Europe from the Greek city-states to the present. What must also be understood is that literacy was still restricted, tied to church, state, or economic necessity, and to particular practices in particular contexts. The mass literacy to which we are accustomed simply did not exist and, during most of this time, the ability to compose was extremely limited.

As noted above, religious institutions played a critical role in the history of Western literacy. It was not until the evolution of Protestantism in the sixteenth century that popular literacy became necessary. Unlike the Roman Catholic church, Protestant theology took the view that personal salvation could be achieved through direct access to the biblical gospels. Protestant sects have contributed importantly to world literacy through missionary activities which supported the translation of the Bible into hundreds of non-Indo-European languages as well as the teaching of literacy in the languages of the missionaries (e.g. English, French, German, Spanish) for purposes of access to the Bible in European languages (e.g. the work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the Wycliff Bible Translators).

The first well-defined popular literacy movement in Europe may arguably be traced to the English revolution and the rise of Oliver Cromwell or to Martin Luther and the Protestant reformation. (The earlier development of Hangul in Korea should not be overlooked, though it is unlikely that literacy beyond the aristocracy was a serious objective.) The clearest early case of a successful mass literacy movement, however, is attributable to the Swedish movement of the seventeenth century to require of all Swedish citizens the ability to read the Bible (Arnove and Graff 1987, Graff 1987). This movement was remarkably successful since reading the Bible was a prerequisite for religious confirmations, and confirmation in the church was a requirement for marriage. For the first time, women as well as men were trained in literacy skills. This literacy campaign, however, as in much of the previous history of literacy, concentrated almost exclusively on reading, and in particular on reading the Bible. The role of writing in common literacy development can only be seen as an innovation of the last 200 or so years. Even rudimentary writing skills (beyond signing and recording) among the populace were unknown until very recently.[1]

In the modern historical era, the rise of popular literacy – including the uses of writing for secular purposes beyond government and business – emerged in the late eighteenth century, primarily in England, France and the USA. As traced by Cook-Gumperz (1986; see also Resnick and Resnick 1977), the rise of modern literacy (including writing skills) can be seen as occurring in three stages. Roughly, the period between 1750 and 1850 can be considered to mark the rise of common literacy (not school-directed or taught). In the mid-nineteenth century, parts of continental Europe, the UK, and the USA supported the rise of schooled literacy along with the beginnings of compulsory education. Literacy then became a means whereby the ruling classes could train the larger populace to be more efficient workers – a tool in support of the status quo, a gateway for upward mobility for a chosen few, and a means to control the spread of information to the larger society. It is also the case that the quantifiable level of skills needed to be considered literate were subject to definition by the élite. As the pressure on the élite increased, in part

through the spread of literacy, the élite redefined the degree of literacy necessary for entry – thus, a constantly increasing literacy demand evolved.

In the twentieth century, literacy has undergone at least one profound transformation. The growth of positivism and the belief that scientific progress would resolve all problems led to the use of psychometric testing and evaluation procedures in European and American educational systems. This pervasive influence on educational systems led to gradually increasing expectations of literacy uses in society and of literacy expectations in academic training. It also served to compartmentalize and stratify students at many levels of skills and abilities; finally, it introduced to education the notion of failure and remediation. Students could be classified as deficient in particular skills and the notion that literacy could be a problem rather than an opportunity took hold.

After the Second World War, the increasing demands for professional uses of literacy concomitantly increased demands on reading and writing training. Professional literacy now is the goal of educational systems throughout much of the literate world. The rise of professional literacy has also led to an increasing demand on the sort of writing ability that involved composing (Kaestle *et al.* 1991, Purves 1991, Stedman and Kaestle 1987). It is also through the growth of compulsory schooling during the twentieth century that writing has come to be emphasized both in school and in white-collar employment. It remains to be seen what impact computers will eventually have on the conception of literacy. While there have been a number of extravagant assertions that the computer will transform literacy, and the 'word', it may be quite some time before such a transformation is realized. The Greeks took centuries to make the alphabetic system a tool of wider literacy for its citizenry (Graff 1987), and the printing press (a technological innovation of enormous importance in the increasing dissemination of texts) as an agency of change took centuries to have a major impact on mass literacy (Eisenstein 1979, 1985). It may therefore be generations before the capabilities of the computer cause significant transformation in literacy practices.

The last two centuries in the history of Western literacy are paralleled by changes in the demands and expectations in students' writing abilities. Most school rhetorics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries amounted to rudimentary guides to usage and

etiquette. At the tertiary level, however, writing instruction and composition became important aspects of a university education as part of rhetorical studies, coinciding with the influential rhetorics of Campbell (1776), Blair (1783), and Priestley (1777). As one outcome of this trend, Freshman Composition courses were initiated at Harvard in 1874 (Berlin 1984); instruction in freshman composition in the USA has never looked back (Berlin 1984, 1987, Crowley 1990, 1995). Why this trend should take hold so strongly in US but not European institutions is a question which deserves study. Whatever the motivations, they led to a rapid institutional growth in composition instruction in the USA which was not paralleled elsewhere. And while the recent history of rhetoric and composition is long and complex, the still accepted 'current traditional' approach to writing instruction has at least a 100-year tradition going back to the inception of freshman composition courses in the USA. Such approaches are recognizable through the emphasis on handbooks, the use of model texts, and theme writing in the various modes of discourse (which, even until 20 years ago, was uniformly popular).

The current academic interest in literacy and writing is readily traceable to the recent historical evolution of professional literacy. Over the past 15–20 years, educators have complained of a 'crisis in the schools' because of the observed decline in national test scores in the USA (and elsewhere in the English-speaking world – e.g. Australia, Canada, New Zealand – as well as in new nations which rely on English as a national or official language – e.g. Hong Kong). In the USA, arguments have been advanced by politicians, educators, and parents that literacy standards have been declining at the time when political and economical skills are in greatest need. These concerns, of more importance to administrators and politicians, do not seem well-founded in the light of a sober history of literacy, nor do they reflect the realities of an ever increasing school population. As more lower socio-economic class and minority students were added to the population taking these tests, it should have been expected that a temporary decline would occur (Coe 1986). It is only symptomatic of the effect of larger numbers of people aspiring to higher education and social mobility; it is not an inevitable sign of cultural decay or of educational literacy failure (cf. Bracey 1995, Stedman 1994).

The current popular concern over literacy has generated a number of theories concerning its nature and its consequences on

both the individual and society. The consequences of literacy on society are well attested and quite profound, as literacy is a socially motivated phenomenon; its purposes, uses, and values are determined by the society in which such literacy skills are practised. Literacy is not a universally uniform set of skills, but rather a set of highly contextualized skills, determined by the society in which it functions (Street 1984, 1993). An opposing view focuses more directly on the cognitive influence of literacy on the individual: the theory, commonly referred to as the 'Great Divide' or the 'Great Leap' theory of individual cognitive development, claims great individual cognitive changes as a consequence of the acquisition of literacy (Goody 1977, Olson 1977; cf. Gee 1986, Goody 1987, Olson 1994). In brief, this theory holds that learning to read and write alters the cognitive thought processes of the individual; literacy transforms the way in which the mind functions.

Since the mid-1960s, various scholars have argued for this 'Great Divide' position, primarily on logical rather than historical grounds. The seminal article triggering this view of literacy and its consequences for the individual was published by Goody and Watt ('The consequences of literacy') in 1963. This article argued for the 'Great Divide' theory as a result of the Greek adoption of the alphabetic principle. The alphabetic principle led to mass literacy among the Greek citizenry – a change in Greek society, it was argued, which subsequently led to the (asserted) inventive genius of classical Greek civilization. Goody and Watt argued more generally that the rise of literacy led to a number of dramatic changes (both social and individual):

- the domination of history over myth
- the distinction between the natural and the supernatural
- the ability to store and access greater amounts of knowledge
- the creation of abstract logical deduction
- the ability to analyse language itself as an object
- the awareness of the individual as distinct from the group and consequently the need for private introspection
- the rise of critical scepticism towards previously reified knowledge and beliefs
- the rise of democratic institutions.

This long list of consequences reads remarkably like a set of educational goals in modern Western school systems. Thus, it is easy to see how literacy has come to be equated with the essence of aca-

demic education. The 'Great Divide' view has received support from a variety of sources over the last 30 years. Scholars such as Havelock (1976), Olson (1977), Ong (1982), and Vygotsky (1962, 1978) have raised arguments of a similar nature with respect to the acquisition of literacy.

In the last 15 years, a number of strong refutations of this theory of individual cognitive differences have emerged. Even earlier, Gough (1968) compared the rise of literacy in Greece with similar historical evolutions in India and China. Her research indicated that different societies do not necessarily follow the same paths of developments as a result of literacy dissemination among the population. In particular, the notions of history-as-concept, deductive logic, and democratic institutions as consequences of literacy were not supported. Her research led later scholars to qualify early claims for individual differences since she demonstrated that societal contexts play a large role in the uses and consequences of literacy.

The line of reasoning that literacy is a social phenomenon (in service to the social milieu) rather than a universally consistent cognitive phenomenon was strongly supported by the research of Scribner and Cole (1981). In a series of studies on the acquisition of literacy among the Vai people of Liberia, they showed that literacy alone did not account for any generalized cognitive differences among the subjects; rather, they found that specific skill differences among subjects were a consequence of specific skills and tasks emphasized by each type of literacy (Vai, Arabic, or English). Schooled education rather than literacy appeared to predict the sorts of individual cognitive skills – such as abstract deductive reasoning, drawing logical inference, and connecting unrelated information – which are assumed to result from learning to read and write. Rather than literacy being the cause of the cognitive skills valued by academic institutions, it would seem that the skills are inculcated by the institutions, which then attribute to these skills the idea that they represent basic cognitive development.

The cognitive impact that may be attributed to literacy is more probably the result of the gradual extension of specific literacy-related skills learned in particular situations (cf. Goody 1987, Olson 1991, Scholes 1993) which, themselves, are socially embedded. Further support for the socially embedded nature of literacy skills has appeared in a range of educational research (e.g. Boggs 1985, Cook-Gumperz 1986, Heath 1983, 1986b).

This current research, in combination with the historical research of Graff, demonstrates that literacy skills and literacy acquisition do not constitute a single unitary cognitive process across cultures and social groups; rather, there are different sorts of literacy skills which develop to serve the needs of each social/cultural group. School children, when they participate in schools, are typically not literate or illiterate; they bring the practices of their community or social group or family to the classroom (cf. Bernstein 1972a, 1990, Halliday 1978, Hasan 1989, Heath 1983, Wells 1986). Problems occur when the sorts of literacy practices of certain students do not conform to the expected literacy practices of the school community. The central issue in literacy development is not the development of uniform cognitive skills, but the recognition that there are many different literacy practices, of which only a few are likely to be valued by a given educational system. At the same time, it is likely that the availability of the technology of literacy modifies the way in which a society behaves; no specific theory of cognitive change is necessary to support such a notion (cf. Goody 1987, Olson 1991, 1994).

Akin to this history of literacy, the study of writing – its history, uses, purposes, and consequences – must be seen as socially contexted. There is not a unique set of writing skills which universally defines all of writing, apart from particular social contexts. There are many different ways to practise writing, and an educational system typically values one particular set of writing practices, and not every student – particularly not every immigrant student – will come into the educational context having practised that set of writing skills valued by the educational structure.[2] This does not necessarily mean that such students 'don't know how to write' or that they are cognitively deficient; but only that they are not well versed in the practices of writing which are valued institutionally. Following this line of reasoning, it is not enough simply to teach the valued practices of the academic discourse community; it is also necessary for all members of the institution to understand that students may come with sets of writing practices that have been valued and purposeful in other contexts. Such an awareness should change the way in which the teaching of writing and the writing practices of students are approached.[3]

The long history of literacy, and the current debates which beset it, provide critical insights about the nature of writing devel-

opment, and provide lessons which should be heeded if the simple erroneous assumptions of earlier literacy research are not to be perpetuated.

1.4   Oral and written language

The study of literacy and its relation to writing shows that oral language and written language are not contraries, nor are they exact reflections of each other. The history of literacy has demonstrated that oral and written language coexist in many complex patterns of use. Even when literacy became widespread in European societies, most reading was performed aloud as a social activity; the written form was closely linked with oral presentation. Silent extensive reading as a deviation from oral interaction is only a relatively recent practice. Present-day uses of language often go hand-in-hand with various oral practices such as lecturing, recounting, and debating. Moreover, certain oral practices can either reinforce or obstruct the writing practices that students are expected to master. Recent educational research, for example, demonstrates that methods of oral interaction have a strong influence on the later development of reading and writing skills (Bloome and Green 1992, Cook-Gumperz 1986, Purves 1991, Wells and Chang-Wells 1992).

Throughout the history of modern linguistics, most linguists have taken the position that oral language is primary and written language is simply a reflection of oral language (cf. Biber 1988, Halliday 1989). Most education researchers have taken the opposite position – i.e. the written language is a true representation of the correct forms of language and should be valued and practised. The past ten years have seen these two positions coalesce in sociolinguistic research on the ethnography of education and on register variation in different types of oral and written texts. This research has tried to come to terms with the conflicting assumptions of two major disciplines involved in language and language teaching. Research by Biber (1988, 1994), Chafe (1982, 1985), Halliday (1989), Kress (1989), and Tannen (1982, 1985) has pointed out the various ways in which oral and written language vary and overlap. Findings from this research have greatly extended the knowledge of properties of both media.

The work of these scholars indicates that patterns of variation

across oral and written language texts differ on a number of dimensions: structural and organizational differences; different frequencies of use of various language features, different production constraints; and different uses for the varieties of oral and written language texts. Chafe (1985) and Tannen (1982) in particular have argued that any understanding of oral and written text variation cannot be determined along one dimension of variation; rather, they have claimed, texts vary and overlap with other texts along a number of functional dimensions. From this perspective, it is not enough to consider texts as simply oral or written; texts vary in ways that cannot be captured by such a single continuum.

In a recent series of studies, Biber (1988, 1992, 1994, 1995) has clarified the complex set of relationships that hold among various types of oral and written texts. In his research, Biber has developed a multidimensional model of textual variation that compares relations among 23 different genres of spoken and written texts. By incorporating a large number of linguistic features, a large number of texts, and a sophisticated research design, Biber (1988) sought to overcome the difficulties of much of the earlier research on spoken and written textual variation which often led to confusing if not contradictory findings. Text features were analysed by an automated counting program. The resulting frequency counts were then used in factor analyses to determine the co-occurrence patterns among the linguistic features for all of the texts in the corpus (approximately one million words). His factor analysis model identified six interpretable dimensions; that is to say, the linguistic features co-occurred together on six different factors, each of which could be interpreted as a communicative/functional dimension of textual variation. The communicative interpretations were based on the grouping of linguistic features which have been seen as having compatible discourse functions in previous discourse analysis literature.

The results of his research indicated that three of his six dimensions are related in some way to orate–literate variation (involved versus informational production, explicit versus situation-dependent reference, and abstract versus non-abstract information), though none of the six dimensions interpreted provided an absolute distinction between oral and written genres; that is, no dimension clearly distinguished all types of written texts from all types of spoken texts. Thus, the traditional dichotomy between

oral and written texts that is so often assumed does not appear to be represented by any single dimension of textual variation in a strict interpretation of his results. Biber's results also provide strong evidence for the multidimensional nature of textual structure. No small set of feature counts and no single notion of a communicative dimension will offer a satisfactory interpretation of textual variation or textual structure.

A major conclusion to be drawn is that the spoken–written continuum does not exist in any strict sense as *a single dimension* of textual comparison. The implications of this line of research for the study of writing and composition is that all texts are complex multidimensional structures, including texts written by students; claims made in writing research about distinctions between oral and written language, as well as oral features in student composition, are, for the most part, greatly oversimplified, requiring caution with respect to many of the assertions based on these premises.

Many of the issues addressed in the comparison of oral and written language and in the discussion of literacy point to basic assumptions about the nature of written language which should be clarified so that the interpretations of current research on writing are given an appropriate context. It has been argued to this point that:

(1) the study of writing is an appropriate domain for applied linguistic inquiry (including language-based problems with English L1 and L2 students);
(2) writing is a technology insofar as it is a culturally transmitted set of practices;
(3) writing involves many different uses and functions, not all of which are valued academically;
(4) the study of literacy demonstrates that writing should be viewed as a set of practices which are socially contextualized – academic writing is simply one valued set of practices appropriate to that context – rather than as a single universal set of cognitive skills;
(5) academically valued writing requires composing skills which transform information or transform the language itself;
(6) the uses of oral and written language interact and reinforce each other as sets of practices that serve social functions;
(7) research on spoken and written language demonstrates that

all texts are highly complex multidimensional structures, and the actual linguistic-functional nature of many of these dimensions is just beginning to be explored;

(8) oral and written language variation points out that different types of written texts vary greatly according to task, audience, and purpose;

(9) assertions about sweeping differences between oral and written language made by composition theorists must be regarded with some scepticism based on recent sociolinguistic research.

These and other related assumptions guide the following discussion of research in writing, both in L1 and L2 contexts.

1.5   Research on writing in English L1 contexts

Generally speaking, writing research in L1 contexts has been conducted along four distinct but interacting dimensions which can be represented, though only somewhat loosely, by four respective disciplines: education, psychology, linguistics, and rhetoric/composition. While there are a number of analyses of writing research which divide the territory somewhat differently (cf. Hillocks 1986, North 1987, Phelps 1988, Witte 1992), this particular synthesis is not meant to be definitive but only to provide an organizing guide to the somewhat confusing array of extant research. The first of these research strands is the study of literacy development or the acquisition of writing, particularly at the early stages. Researchers in education, applied sociolinguistics, and educational psychology explore ways in which children learn to write, as well as why some students experience difficulties in learning to write.

Educationists and educational psychologists have been primarily concerned with the socio-educational contexts for learning to write, the need to express meaning in writing, the need for students to view writing as a purposeful activity, and the various stages of learning through which young writers are nurtured. Much of this research has centred on case studies of individual children, learning experience approaches (LEA) and whole-language approaches (Calkins 1986, Dyson 1989, 1993, Graves 1983, 1984). Many of the practical approaches are also in line with Vygotskean perspectives on literacy development (Moll 1990,

Tharp and Gallimore 1988, Vygotsky 1983, Wertsch 1985, 1991). In addition, current research in Australia addresses the role of language form and genre knowledge as critical aspects of learning to write from early grades (Christie 1992, Cope and Kalantzis 1993).

The research is also paralleled by the ethnographic research in educational contexts undertaken by sociolinguists. The ethnography of education explores ways in which children from divergent social and linguistic backgrounds learn in educational contexts that are designed for mainstream students. Such research has examined different groups of high-risk students and the differences between school expectations and home environment (Boggs 1985, Heath 1986b, Philips 1983, Poole 1991, Snow *et al.* 1991), the impact of conversational style and interactional discourse on learning (Bloome and Green 1992, Cazden 1988, Cook-Gumperz 1986, Wells and Chang-Wells 1992), and the attitudes of students and teachers in the classroom context (Williams 1976). In particular, researchers have found that exposure to literacy events, attitudes towards school literacy, and the teaching of meaningful literacy tasks are important conditions for writing development.

A second strand of research involves study of the cognitive aspects of writing. Researchers in cognitive psychology, education, and composition represent those interested in modelling and explaining the mental processes used in the act of writing. Much of the research is empirical in nature. While earlier cognitive research on writing principally studied the written products and used experimental research on text recall (Britton and Black 1985b, van Dijk and Kintsch 1983), more recent research on cognitive processes has included studies of the actual process of writing on-task (that is, as it is occurring in real time), as well as protocol analyses, and task intervention (e.g. Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987, Flower 1994, Flower *et al.* 1990, Hillocks 1986, Kellogg 1994, Smagorinsky 1994).

Other approaches involve the use of retrospective case studies and observational research as ways to examine qualitatively the nature of the composing processes and their development. Important results from this research include the findings that writers constantly shift among pre-writing, writing, and revising tasks. Writing is not a linear process; instead, it involves the complex combination of content information, rhetorical demands, and reader interpretation. Good writers and poor writers also appear to make use of processing skills in different ways.