

# Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing

Edited by

*Barbara Kroll*

California State University, Northridge



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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2003

Printed in the United States of America

*Typefaces* Sabon 10.5/12 pt. and Arial    *System* L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X 2<sub>ε</sub> [TB]

*A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Exploring the dynamics of second language writing / edited by Barbara Kroll.  
p. cm. – (The Cambridge applied linguistics series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-82292-0 (hardback) – ISBN 0-521-52983-2 (pbk.)

1. Language and languages – Study and teaching. 2. Composition (Language arts)

3. Rhetoric – Study and teaching. I. Kroll, Barbara. II. Series.

P53.27 .E97 2003

808'.0071–dc21

2002074049

ISBN 0 521 82292 0 hardback

ISBN 0 521 52983 2 paperback

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## *Acknowledgments*

For most of my 35 years of teaching, I have been working to address the needs of writers and to investigate the variables that contribute to differing skill levels in the texts that non-native speakers of English produce. I salute all of my colleagues who have worked to create the field that no one could have named when I started teaching: second language writing studies; they have enriched my life immeasurably with their efforts to establish a discipline and seek answers to our common questions. This book represents the work of several members of that scholarly community, each focusing on a specific aspect of our now very diverse field.

I wish to thank the contributors to this volume; they worked diligently to repeatedly revise their chapters, helping me realize the vision I had for this book. They also dealt gracefully with the feedback given by a variety of anonymous reviewers who read multiple versions of the manuscript. I thank the reviewers for putting in such scrupulous attention to the volume; even when their individual suggestions and concerns contradicted each other, their collective advice proved useful in shaping the final text.

Linda Lonon Blanton graciously volunteered to offer focused and speedy feedback on my own contributions to this volume; I am grateful to her. I also appreciate the hard work of the series editor Jack Richards and all of those at Cambridge University Press who encouraged me during this project and who worked closely with me during a fairly lengthy birthing process: Mary Vaughn, Debbie Goldbatt, Judy Bernstein, and Julia Hough. Many thanks to Regina Paleski, my very efficient production editor, and Patterson Lamb, an eagle-eyed copy editor if ever there was one!

Lastly, my bountiful thanks to Ruth; she knows why.

Barbara Kroll

## *Abbreviations used*

ACT	American College Testing Program
ASTP	Army Specialized Training Program
CCCC	Conference on College Composition and Communication
CLEAR	Center for Language Education and Research
CUNY	City University of New York
EAP	English for academic purposes
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELI	English Language Institute
ELTS	English Language Testing Service
ESL	English as a second language
ESP	English for special [or specific] purposes
ETS	Educational Testing Service
FCE	(Cambridge) First Certificate in English
FL	foreign language
GSLPA	Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment
IATEFL	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
IEA	International Educational Achievement
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IRC	Internet relay chat
<i>JBW</i>	<i>Journal of Basic Writing</i>
LAN	local area network
L1	native [or first] language
L2	second language
MELAB	Michigan English Language Battery
MOO	multi-user domain, object-oriented
MUD	multi-user domain
NES	native English speakers
NR	New Rhetoricians
PEG	Project Essay Grader
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SLA	second language acquisition

TESL	Teaching of English as a second language
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TWE	Test of Written English
WAC	writing across the curriculum
WAN	wide area network
WSSE	World Standard Spoken English



## *Series editors' preface*

Whereas it is commonplace to talk of English as the language of globalization and international communication, it is appropriate to recognize that it is written English that is the predominant medium for much of this discourse. Second language writing skills play an increasingly important role today in the lives of professionals in almost every field and discipline, creating a challenge to those responsible for the teaching of second language writing. The growing body of research by scholars in the field of second language writing instruction reflects an international response to this phenomenon, much of the results of which are reflected in the present volume.

*Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing* is a timely collection of original papers surveying theory, research, and practice in the teaching of second language writing. Each of the chapters provides a useful overview of a key topic in second language writing, identifying the major theoretical issues, surveying research findings, and exploring applications to second language teaching.

The book is based on several assumptions:

- The field of second language (L2) writing is an autonomous discipline, though one that draws on a number of related fields, including composition studies, rhetoric, contrastive rhetoric, text linguistics, and genre theory.
- There is a demand today for teachers with a high level of pedagogical understanding and expertise in the different aspects of writing instruction, from curriculum development, to classroom pedagogy, to assessment.
- If teachers, teacher educators, and language teaching professionals are to keep abreast of ideas and developments in this rapidly expanding field, they need access to information on current research theory and practice. Language programs around the world require instructors who can assist international students to meet the complex academic writing demands of a wide range of disciplines.
- The teaching of writing is based on an understanding of the nature of texts, cognitive processes, learners, participants, and learning contexts;

and a variety of different research approaches are needed to explore these variables.

These themes are reflected throughout this book, which draws on theory and research to examine pedagogical issues and to provide a basis for the development of courses in L2 writing. The contributors show how the field has developed in the last 40 years, explain the shifts in theoretical perspectives and teaching approaches that have marked its development, and suggest directions for future research. The book will thus prove an invaluable resource for teachers in preparation, as well as for experienced teachers, researchers on L2 writing, and curriculum and materials developers.

Michael H. Long  
Jack C. Richards

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# Introduction *Teaching the next generation of second language writers*

Barbara Kroll

As a field of academic inquiry, the teaching of writing to second language (L2) learners sits at the junction of the discipline of composition and rhetoric (which concerns itself primarily with identifying the nature of texts and the processes that writers engage in to produce those texts) and the discipline of language learning (which concerns itself with cognitive and affective factors learners engage in as they move toward mastery of a particular linguistic code).<sup>1</sup> No one teaching writing to this population of learners can responsibly serve his or her students without a clear recognition that these two fields intersect, especially at the post-secondary level. This volume is addressed to future L2 writing teachers; the authors of the chapters are steeped in traditions of inquiry central to composition and rhetoric and offer an applied linguistics perspective focused on adult learners.

## **A growing need for English teachers**

If teaching second language skills to populations of adult students who grew up speaking other native languages was ever a simple matter for teachers, it is certainly no longer so in the twenty-first century. The complexity has been intensified by the phenomena known as “globalization” and the Internet revolution. They have brought such an expansion in the use of English throughout the world that one can only partly imagine the still unfolding ramifications, including the changing of the English language itself (Warshauer, 2000). Full participation in the world community, particularly within interconnected economic, technological, and geopolitical realities, can require a fluency in English that goes beyond the spoken language and embraces a variety of uses of the written language as well. Because the English-language cultures (among others) are increasingly literacy-driven cultures (see, for example, Baynham, 1995; Cushman, Kintgen, Kroll, & Rose, 2001; Kern, 2000) and digital-literacy driven (Warshauer, 2001), the pursuit of English entails a pursuit of written English, offering those who acquire skill in this code the possibility for improved life chances. Thus, career options in English-language teaching

seem assured for the foreseeable future, and perhaps especially for teachers who focus on teaching writing skills.

To judge by what is going on in the United States, there is a steady increase in the number of learners of English seeking entrance to our institutions of higher education. The Institute of International Education (IIE) has been tracking the number of foreign visa students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education since 1949 (Institute of International Education, 2001). That number has continued to increase every year, undiminished in toto by any war or economic disaster impacting a particular population or world area. In the decade from 1990 to 2000, for example, the number of foreign visa students in the United States increased by over 140,000 and surpassed half a million<sup>2</sup> for the first time in the 1999–2000 academic year (Open Doors, 2001). And this says nothing of the vast and ever-growing number of L2 students on U.S. campuses not included in these tabulations (or any other official counts) because they are U.S. residents or citizens and do not hold foreign visas.

Further, countries outside the traditional English-speaking world are increasingly drawn into situations where fluency in English becomes critical for their citizens who wish to participate in the global arena. For example, a report prepared for the then Prime Minister of Japan and issued in January 2000 called for a national discussion on making English Japan's official second language and recommended that English-language teaching be introduced in kindergarten (Tolbert, 2000). The document suggested to the late Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi that increased fluency in English among the Japanese would greatly contribute to reversing the economic stagnation Japan was experiencing at the time, but this fluency could be accomplished only with radical changes in the current methods of delivering English-language instruction in Japanese schools (Tolbert, 2000). On another plane, many in our profession worry about the increasing number of languages dying out around the world, often with English as the replacement tongue (Crystal, 2000; Nettle & Romaine, 2000), and the concomitant need for fluency in English. Regardless of how one views such a phenomenon, it contributes to the increasing use of English in geographic regions where, different from such places as North America, Great Britain, and Australia, English does not have a long tradition. To a certain extent, then, geopolitical realities contribute to the expanding need for English-language teachers outside of English-dominant countries.

So far, I have referred primarily to English-language teaching. The teaching of writing is a specialized component of this instruction, one that has come to occupy a prominent place in research and teaching due in part to the ever-expanding student body and the recognition of changes in global realities. Over the past quarter of a century or so, faculty and researchers in many countries around the world have increasingly

recognized that teaching English writing skills to tertiary-level students who come from non-English-speaking backgrounds is a critical part of the higher education system. The growing interest in second language writing as an academic enterprise is attested to by the large number of courses in writing offered to second language students at institutions from community colleges to the most prestigious graduate research institutions; the phenomenal growth in the number of papers on the subject published in books and professional journals; the number of presentations delivered at regional, national, and international conferences sponsored by a wide range of professional organizations; and the founding of a scholarly journal devoted to the topic (the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, established in 1992). The teaching of writing in L2 contexts, once little discussed (see Blanton & Kroll et al., 2002), has come front and center in the profession of applied linguistics.

While this volume is devoted primarily to issues in the acquisition of English-language writing skills, the teaching of second/foreign languages other than English remains a significant part of school and university curricula in many different countries. Indeed, the field of second language writing is an area affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands of students at institutions around the world where they must submit high-quality written work in a language they did not acquire as native speakers; and in fact, multilingualism is alive and well in numerous locales where it might even be considered the norm (Edwards, 1994; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Many users of second languages other than English need to be able to write fluently in their L2, and books and anthologies on specific classroom practices and issues related to second language writing in a variety of European languages (as well as in English) have begun to proliferate (e.g., Brauer, 2000; Kern, 2000; Scott, 1996). Reichelt (1999) reviews some 200 published works relating to foreign language (FL) writing and research pedagogy in the United States alone, identifying ways in which FL concerns overlap with and differ from concerns in English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL). The discussions in the following chapters may also be of value to future teachers of L2 writing in non-English settings, who can adapt some of the English-specific foci to their own situations and contexts.

## Understanding teacher training

With all of these factors, multiple teaching opportunities are likely to await faculty able to provide instruction in L2 writing in a variety of post-secondary settings. A critical question thus becomes how best to prepare teachers to undertake this task. To serve their students well, teachers of L2 writing must be prepared with more than a set of lesson

plans, an interest in their students, and strong skills of their own in the target language. To be sure, these are necessary components, but they are not sufficient. As distinguished researcher Arthur Applebee pointed out: “Teachers of English need to make the distinction between knowledge which informs their teaching, and that which should be imparted to the student” (Applebee, cited in Applebee, 1999, p. 362).

So too, teachers of writing to L2 students need to make the distinction between what can be termed “foundational knowledge” – subject matter content that serves them as professionals – and “procedural knowledge” – ideas and techniques that will shape specific lesson plans for their students. For example, as part of building a foundation of knowledge, future teachers must acquire an understanding of how the profession has evolved and what issues form the core of subject matter (as opposed to methodological) concerns – that is, they must know what drives the field forward. Additionally, teachers should come to see that the tools they will use for analyzing their own students’ progress (or lack thereof) not only serve their immediate needs on a day-to-day basis and form a component of requisite procedural knowledge but can also provide raw data that might contribute to changes in course design motivated by their foundational knowledge of course possibilities (cf. Graves, 2000).

Because good writing teachers must have a rich understanding of the field to be able to make the best possible choices in their uniquely situated teaching positions, this book is designed to help them acquire such understanding. Knowing the field includes being able to recognize how any given classroom choice speaks to a particular approach toward teaching and/or awareness of student learning issues and/or interpretation of what texts are and what they do. Further, even the most classroom-oriented of teachers should be able to contribute knowledgeably to ongoing professional discussions. The so-called theory–practice divide is undoubtedly an artificial one; I would prefer to conceive of the relationship between research and practice in the field of second language writing as an interactive one. As I have pointed out elsewhere, “Research insights drive practice and concerns for practices that do not seem to be working drive additional research” (Kroll, 2001, p. 230).

Foundational knowledge gives faculty the scholarly background to provide the best of instruction to students in second language writing and guides instructors toward making appropriate curricula and classroom choices. Attaining this scholarly background involves exposure to the accumulated knowledge of the profession and an awareness of what tools are available to expand and refine this knowledge base. It is simply not enough for prospective teachers to focus solely on acquiring information about methods and materials, important though they are. While I do not mean to downplay the significance of being able to learn from the



accumulated classroom wisdom (“best practices”) of highly experienced teachers, Edge and Richards (1998, p. 571) caution that focusing solely on the search for “best practices” in and of themselves can lead to the “deskilling of teachers, who are [then] seen as the technicians responsible for learning-delivery systems” (p. 571). Rather, teachers must rely on theory to become well-trained professionals responsible for helping their students gain needed mastery. As Stenberg and Lee (2002) point out in regard to training native language (L1) composition teachers, “theory and practice necessarily function in interplay, and pedagogy encompasses both” (p. 328).

In fact, it is the command of basic foundational knowledge in a given field that allows teachers to make principled rather than ad hoc curriculum decisions. In that sense, this volume, which helps to build subject matter background, is truly a teacher-training book even though it does not provide direct guidance on such day-to-day concerns as syllabus design and lesson planning. Identifying what constitutes the “subject matter” knowledge critical for teachers is not without its controversies, however, and the reality is that the topics selected for inclusion in this volume constitute one vision of the parameters of the profession – a vision shaped by the collective experience of the contributors to this volume and our beliefs about areas of knowledge critical for teachers.

This volume is intended primarily to assist in the preparation of new teachers by providing chapters that offer overviews of key issues, discussions of the relevance of prior and ongoing research to teachers, and insight into current thinking as presented by leading scholars in the field. Whether teachers are trained in programs allied to applied linguistics, second language acquisition, modern languages (including English as a second/foreign language), or education, they must also learn to be lifelong learners themselves, continually prepared to expand their own knowledge and understanding in the pursuit of sounder teaching practices. Thus, the information contained in this book should be considered a starting point and not the end point for promoting teacher engagement with the field of second language writing.

## **A note on theory/model-building**

Unlike introductions to some other disciplines, this book begins with a historical perspective rather than an outline of theory. In contrast, trainees in some fields, including linguistics, are initiated into and expected to become familiar with well-established theories relevant to their education and training. Although many researchers in the field of second language writing, including several contributors to this volume, are particularly interested in theory-building (e.g., Cumming, 1998;