

LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

Theory & Practice

Claire Gaudiani

**Teaching
Writing
in the FL
Curriculum**



LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE

43

Teaching Writing in the Foreign
Language Curriculum

Claire Gaudiani

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*To David Graham Burnett, Jr.
and
Maria Elizabeth Burnett*

who write and read well

and

*my composition class students at
Purdue University
1977-80*

who helped shape this course

Acknowledgments

A teacher's best inspiration is students who want to learn. I am grateful for the energy and eagerness of my students at Purdue University. They dedicated themselves not only to learning to write French but to helping me shape a better approach to the development of this skill in future students. I especially thank Kitty Werner and Peter Hollenbeck for their help.

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I am also grateful for the suggestions of four very able readers before I wrote the final version of this book. Elaine Maimon, Beaver College, generously shared her extensive knowledge of English composition theory. Her many sensitive suggestions have broadened the scope of this book and my outlook on the relationship between writing in English and FL classes. Erika Lindemann, UNC-Chapel Hill; Carol Herron, Emory

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Any errors or other sorts of folly exist despite the advisors I have been fortunate enough to have.

Preface

Teaching Writing in the Foreign Language Curriculum makes it practicable to teach students to write in a language that is not native to them. Instructors who use this book will find that students will learn the target language more effectively, while at the same time becoming more fluent writers in their native language. As a composition teacher, I am delighted with the appearance of this first major guide to the teaching of writing in the foreign language curriculum. I see this work as an invitation to foreign language teachers and English composition teachers to join in the promotion of an inclusive literacy.

Truly literate people are not confined to a single language but are able to read and write using more than one language system. The unfortunate fragmentation of modern education has sometimes prevented foreign language instructors and English instructors from seeing the symbiotic nature of our tasks. Too often the English teacher does not adequately understand that second language study can help students' fluency in their native tongue, while foreign language teachers are sometimes too ready to give up on students who have not learned grammatical terminology and fluency in their native tongue. Professor Gaudiani reminds us that English and foreign language teachers are members of the same community--a community made up of individuals committed to improving language and critical thinking skills.

Professor Gaudiani also understands the appropriate division of labor between English and foreign language teachers. Students need effective composition training in their native language. Writing in the foreign language program can build upon and reinforce first language instruction. Learning to write is a life-long task, and writing in the foreign language classroom can help students sort through some of the complexities of the general process. Students can see and hear style more clearly in a foreign language than in their own because they are more sensitive to matters like the length of sentences and the choice of words. Students can also more easily understand the merit

of sharing work in progress when everybody in the classroom is struggling to communicate in a foreign medium.

Professor Gaudiani calls for systematic research on the relationship between students' English writing skill level and foreign language composition ability. I would like to second her request. My own instruction and experience tell me that *Teaching Writing in the Foreign Language Curriculum* will improve writing across the curriculum.

The existing research of Janet Emig and others indicates that an emphasis on writing improves foreign language learning. Writing helps students to integrate all learning in the foreign language. Writing provides the students with a means for immediate feedback through review and evaluation. Writing also establishes connections between the students' experiences and a foreign code for the communication of those experiences. Writing is active, engaged, and personal.*

Teaching Writing in the Foreign Language Curriculum thus gives the instructor a powerful tool for achieving the general goals of the foreign language course. Professor Gaudiani makes this tool easy to use through her clear, detailed suggestions. Not only does she provide a blueprint for a foreign language course that is designed to be devoted primarily to composition, but she also makes it practicable to teach writing in elementary, intermediate, and advanced courses. Her guidance is always tactful and flexible. She knows how to avoid muddle: she understands that learning to write in a second language differs in several important ways from learning to write in a first. One needs, for example, a much more comprehensive study of the grammatical structures of a foreign language. Professor Gaudiani is also realistic. She charts a manageable course through the sea of paper that could overwhelm the instructor in this enterprise, and she provides optional suggestions for instructors of oversize classes.

I will mention one additional virtue of this text and then leave the many others for readers to discover on their own. *Teaching Writing in the Foreign Language Curriculum* could be read as a guidebook for collaborative learning. Professor Gaudiani knows how to transform a classroom into a community. I hope that in the larger academic community of those of us committed to an inclusive literacy, this text will be an important step toward a partnership between foreign language and English composition teachers.

Elaine P. Maimon
Department of English
Beaver College

*Janet Emig, *Writing as a Mode of Learning*, *College Composition and Communication* 28 (May 1977), 122-28.

Foreword

Improvement of student writing skills is a great challenge for teachers at all levels of the educational system. Yesterday's crisis over Johnny's reading and writing has become today's curriculum committee assignment. Many high schools have begun to strengthen the curriculum to produce improved student literacy rates. During the last ten years, several projects have attracted attention for the positive impact they have made on the development of composition skills in students. The Bay Area Writing Project and the Beaver College "Writing across Disciplines" project offer some encouraging results to those concerned about good writing. Many colleges and universities have increased or upgraded composition course requirements in the last three years.

It is clear that no one way exists to teach students to write. It is also clear, however, that one of the best ways to learn is to write a great deal, and even to write, revise, rewrite, and edit the same texts.¹ English departments ought not to shoulder the responsibility for composition skill building alone. Each faculty member from kindergarten through graduate school bears some responsibility for the encouragement of good writing. English and foreign language departments, for instance, can offer each other and their institutions joint leadership in advancing student literacy levels. Both faculties are especially qualified to work with language and literature. They deal regularly with vocabulary use, grammar, syntax, composition, structure, interpretation, genre, and related issues. While both groups have prepared, for the most part, to teach literature, each group finds itself increasingly responsible for teaching students to use language effectively. While both faculties may have developed proficiency at this art, they have rarely been taught how to teach others to write. It would seem, therefore, that English and foreign language faculties and their students would profit from the development of some common methodologies that would reinforce the learning experiences in these disciplines.

It appears natural to suggest that foreign language composition courses be designed specifically to enhance composition ability in both English and the foreign language. They would

in some cases even be defensible as alternative ways for students to fulfill some part of their composition requirements. Through constant practice in writing, revising, and editing, and through concentration on basic elements of prose style, these courses might offer many advantages to students hoping to improve their ability to write.

The following approach to teaching writing in the foreign language classroom is an attempt to strengthen general student literacy while building composition skills in the foreign language. For the past two years I have experimented with this strategy in teaching foreign language composition. The course I taught was designed for a class of 15 fourth- or fifth-semester foreign language students, although some of these students were actually freshmen. Their major fields covered the spectrum available at a large university. While developed as a prototype for the French section, this course is adaptable to other second language composition classes. As the following chapters will indicate, this approach to writing could be adapted to composition segments of combined composition/conversation courses or segments could be tailored to strengthening the writing skills of elementary-intermediate foreign language students. The approach could be further adapted for use in advanced language, literature, and culture courses.

The design of the method relies on in-class editing of the compositions the students produce each week. During these sessions, the class reads and discusses student essays, not only correcting any grammar errors, but noting elements of style and organizational strategy, using either English, the target language, or a *mélange* of the two. The class offers suggestions to the writer. In peer groups, students practice making increasingly sophisticated and syntactically complex sentences. Students also practice writing well-developed paragraphs and structuring paragraphs into essays. The editing process gradually sensitizes students to nuances in choice of vocabulary and syntactical arrangements. Ultimately the course provides a grounding in the elements of prose style.

The objective of the text-editing approach, stated to students at the outset, is to help them learn to express themselves coherently in the target language and to become sensitive to the dynamics of good expository writing in general. They are to develop the ability to express their thoughts effectively in essentially correct and well-structured prose. The systematic study of grammar and vocabulary indicates to students that these are indispensable tools to achieve the course goal. Learning to write is not, however, simply learning another set of grammar or spelling rules.

Student commitment to regular writing assignments in foreign language forms the core of the approach. Ideally, students write a composition each week, keep a daily journal, and rewrite each effort until they achieve the level judged by them and the teacher to be satisfactory. From mid-term on, students write

compositions every other week, and in alternate weeks, they read a short selection from a prose masterpiece in the foreign language they are learning. After studying this text, they write a two-page prose style analysis in English and then attempt to imitate the author's prose style in a foreign language composition of their own. In my experience, these one-page pastiches in a foreign language, coupled with the prose style analyses in English, advance students' understanding of the dynamics of good writing. I hope to see extensive systematic research on the relationship between English writing skill level and foreign language composition ability. Meanwhile, my experience and my students' evaluations encourage me to suspect a positive link between improvements in each area.

Writing and rewriting, and reading and editing offer students practice in the very skills that they will always need to write well. Just as important, however, is the fact that writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills are reinforcing each other in the learning process. This may account for the high degree of satisfaction I have found among students taking writing courses based on this approach.

This book is not intended as a presentation of composition theory in foreign languages or in English. It is not a book on stylistics or on comparative linguistics. It will not provide a way for students to learn research methods in English or in foreign languages.

The book aims to give foreign language teachers with busy schedules a clear, complete guide to changing the way they teach writing all through the foreign language curriculum. The sample syllabus on page 8 and the introductory packet information found on pages 53 through 62 can, with appropriate modification, go to a curriculum committee that evaluates a new course. Trial and adaptation alone can make a teacher feel comfortable with a new course or approach. I hope this book can provide a useful starting point for FL teachers' creativity as they make their important contribution to improved literacy levels in our students.

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Teaching Writing In The Foreign Language Curriculum

Introduction

This book grew out of my belief that the skills needed for good expository writing are not language-specific (at least, not in the Indo-European language group). In simple terms, good writing focuses on three levels: the word, the sentence, and the paragraph. At the level of the *word*, writers consider issues like suitability, specificity, clarity, and nuance. Choice of words also involves selection among parts of speech. A preponderance of nouns or adjectives or verbs affects the final project. At the level of the *sentence*, writers weave words into meaningful syntactical arrangements. Simplicity, complexity, and variety, among others, are concerns at this level. Each word choice in a syntactical arrangement necessarily limits the options for the rest of the sentence. Finally, the level of the *paragraph* involves the sorting, ordering, and organizing of the information. Introductory or topic sentences followed by developmental sentences build toward the summary sentence and thus create an accessible, standard format for paragraphs.

Foreign language students can practice expository writing at all levels of FL instruction, where these general patterns are reinforced, evaluated, developed, and, at times, successfully broken by student writers. As they acquire confidence, students can consider additional issues, such as tone, audience, level of sophistication in expression, point of view, and reader reception. Three notions about learning and writing underlie the text-editing approach to teaching FL composition:

- . Teachers should try to write assignments *with* students whenever possible.
- . Students must understand and accept the course goals.

While adapting certain elements from English composition-teaching methods, FL teachers must remain aware of the large differences between English and FL composition skill building.

Writing for Teachers

It is easy to forget how hard it is to write. One way for teachers to remain close to this task is for them to write with their students. If teaching load prevents a weekly composition by the instructor, biweekly writing assignments may work better. In some settings, it may be inadvisable for students to edit their teacher's compositions. Should this be the case, several foreign language teachers in the school, the community, or the region should share the task of writing and then reading each other's short compositions, even if they can meet only once a semester to do a text-editing session. In fact, composition skill building might form an appropriate focus for a professional development team of local high school and college faculty in foreign languages. Whatever the schema, faculty who teach writing should themselves, if possible, be engaged in some writing effort.

Building Common Goals

Writing is a lonely activity. The success of the course experience will depend in large measure on the spirit of collaboration of the students during class time. Their efforts during their hours of writing alone will be redoubled if they feel a spirit of mutual support and expect a specific reaction to their work from their colleagues and their teacher.

The ambiance in the classroom is a vital element in the success of the method. To help establish a serious, mutually supportive atmosphere quickly, each student receives a packet of materials on the first day of class. This packet contains

- (1) a course syllabus--how the course operates, goals, expectations, procedures, dates and descriptions of tests (see pp. 8 and 56);
- (2) a personal assessment statement (see p. 53);
- (3) a copy of some student evaluations from a previous class (see p. 60);
- (4) a copy of some student compositions (names blocked) from a previous class. I usually choose an example of early, middle, and late composition work from two or three students (see pp. 74-92 for some samples); and
- (5) a copy of the mid-term grammar test. The particularly