CHAPTER 2

Overview of ESL Composition

In general, the progress of NNS (non-native speaker)*—or ESL—composition theory and practice has followed NES composition, but often as much as a decade or more later. Even as recently as the 1970s many ESL composition teachers in intensive language programs used writing mainly as a support skill in language learning. Writing, for these teachers, meant doing grammar exercises, answering reading comprehension questions, and writing dictation. Writing was seen as one of a variety of techniques to add interest to a lesson, or as a testing device to diagnose grammar or comprehension errors.

Today ESL composition has begun to assume greater validity as a cognitive and a communication skill, in part because research in NES composition has influenced the growth of the field of ESL composition. In light of information about composing processes and university writing requirements, ESL writing teachers have reexamined their writing class objectives in intensive language programs. Various problems in teaching ESL students in freshman composition by teachers of NESs have emphasized the need for better pre-admission composition skills and for “sheltered” post-admission ESL composition classes designed for ESL students (Kroll, 1991). Recognition by ESL teachers and researchers of the need for second-language students to write for occupational or academic purposes has led curriculum designers and textbook writers to provide the necessary materials that allow the writing class to assume an equal role with other language skills (R. White, 1987).

Early ESL Methods

During the first three decades of the field of teaching English as a second language (TESL), the audio-lingual method (ALM) (“I say—you

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*In order to avoid confusion between the acronyms for native English speakers (NESs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) in this book, the term English as a Second Language (or ESL) is used to describe non-native speakers of English even though English may be the student’s third or fourth language and even though they may have studied or be studying English in their native countries (English as a Foreign Language, or EFL).
say") prevailed. The ALM is based on the behaviorist work of psychologist B. F. Skinner at Harvard University. Skinner taught rats and pigeons to form habits by rewarding correct behavior with food, and his stimulus-response research formed the foundation of the behaviorist movement in education. Skinner concluded that because “positive reinforcement” was an effective teaching method, students should be taught incrementally, in a series of small steps that allowed each student to succeed by responding correctly, and to receive positive reinforcement such as candy, praise, or approval. The ALM required the teacher to provide oral model language patterns (the stimulus) to the students, who would then repeat the pattern (the response) until the language structure became a language habit. The development of methods and materials for the ALM occurred at the University of Michigan; the so-called “Michigan method” was widely used in intensive language programs for thirty years (1940–1970) (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). It emphasized the teaching of correct oral language through the study of pattern practice, pronunciation, and grammatical structures.

Three major assumptions underlay the ALM. First, because positive reinforcement was vital for success, error had to be prevented and eliminated. Students were taught correct language usage, and mistakes were viewed as deviant. Second, habituation of language was seen as the foundation of fluent language; if students inculcated structures through drilling, they would be able to use the structures without difficulty, even without conscious struggle, outside the classroom. Third, oral language was seen as the pathway to language success, and fluency through reading, and particularly writing, were seen as tangential or “support” language skills. As a consequence, the ALM teaching in intensive language programs virtually excluded written English: students listened, then spoke, and eventually read. Writing was seen as even less critical to language competence. Until the early ’70s, writing in many ESL classrooms was limited to the teaching of handwriting skills to students whose native language differed graphically from English, and to filling in the blanks of grammar and reading comprehension exercises.

Another factor that negatively affected the teaching of ESL writing was the lack of experience and knowledge about teaching composition among teachers and researchers. Most ESL teachers, untrained as writers or as writing teachers, entered the field from undergraduate majors in the humanities and the arts. In many cases, their only experience with the teaching of writing had been their participation in freshman composition classes. These teachers knew almost nothing about the theories and practices in the teaching of writing. If pressured into stating their philosophies about teaching ESL writing, they might
have stated one or more of the following:

1. Writing is just another way of practicing grammar.
2. Just writing “a lot” will improve an ESL student’s language.
3. You can’t really teach writing.
4. The teacher’s job is simply to design, assign, and evaluate writing.
5. If a student can speak English well, s/he will be able to transfer those skills to writing.

While each of these statements contains a small piece of reality, none encompasses the heart of teaching ESL writing; none speaks to the teaching of skills— heuristic, rhetorical, cognitive, and developmental—that result in successful progress in writing effective, communicative prose.

In addition, ESL teachers in training received little education about the teaching of writing. Until the last decade, most ESL methodology courses limited information on teaching writing to one to two weeks during a semester course. Considering the complexity of the writing task, it is little wonder that even trained ESL professionals often chose not to teach writing classes. And, when they were required to teach writing, teachers who had abandoned strict adherence to the ALM often continued to rely, in ESL writing classes, on sentence-level construction and on the teaching of grammatical sentence structures (Kroll, 1991).

**Controlled Writing**

As the need for writing skills for ESL students became apparent, and as research in the field of NES composition became accessible, ESL writing classes became a more integral, if not integrated, part of ESL curricula. In the 1970s, however, most ESL writing classes still focused on grammatical sentence structures that supported the grammar class and on *controlled writing*. Exercises consisted of pieces of discourse, which students were instructed to copy and in which to then make discrete changes or fill in the blanks, as in the following examples.

**Model Paragraph:**

The woman’s a secretary. She’s pretty. She’s intelligent. She’s happy. She’s not sad.

The girls are students. They’re pretty. They’re intelligent. They’re happy. They’re not sad.

**Instructions:** Cover the Model Paragraph with a piece of paper. Copy the sentences below, in paragraph form as they are on the page. Add all necessary punctuation.

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Paragraph Puzzle: Complete the paragraph by choosing the right word to fill in each blank. When choice is difficult, refer to neighboring words or sentences for help.

How do we know that dogs (have, show, are, is) ___________ color blind? This has been tested in (that, a, their, the) ___________ same way that it has been (discovered, heard, told, said) ___________ what dogs can hear. The attempt (have, tell, say, has) ___________ been made to train dogs to (whine, cry, bark, salivate) ___________.

(Bander, 1983, p. 20)

Inwardly he was a disturbed being, a man of nerves, caprices, and stubborn will. Accustomed to a set routine, he lived the disciplined life of a hermit or ascetic. It was difficult to tell whether he had adapted himself to this mode of life or accepted it against the grain. He tried to avoid the kind of life he would have liked to lead. He behaved as one who, already buffeted and battered, had resigned himself to his fate. As one who could assimilate punishment better than good fortune.

(Henry Miller, A Devil in Paradise)

Situation: You are writing a descriptive paragraph about a woman.

Assignment: Rewrite the entire passage, changing he to she each time. Change the nouns and pronouns wherever necessary.

(Paulston and Dykstra, 1973, p. 5)

The philosophy of controlled writing grew directly out of the ALM: students are taught incrementally, error is prevented, and fluency is expected to arise out of practice with structures. Journal articles and textbooks defended those approaches (Dykstra, 1977; J. Ross, 1968), principally on the basis that controlled writing allowed students to practice and habituate correct structures and thereby learn to “write” on their own. Christina Paulston extolled the virtues of controlled writing for another reason: “It will permit busy teachers to give daily assignments of writing exercises—even in large classes—and at the same time insures that the student’s work will be substantially correct and in acceptable form with acceptable usage” (1972, p. ix).
“Free Writing”/Guided Writing

In the late '70s and early '80s, as ESL writing teachers became more aware of current practices in NES composition, a movement from strictly controlled writing to “free writing” or guided writing occurred (Allen, 1981; Carpenter and Hunter, 1981; Raimes, 1978; Sampson, 1980). “Free” was essentially a misnomer, however; in general, the freedom was “guided.” That is, free writing was limited to structuring sentences, often in direct answers to questions, the result of which looked like a short piece of discourse, usually a paragraph. Moreover, the exercises were language-based; they usually concentrated on vocabulary building, reading comprehension, grammar, and even oral skills that culminated in a piece of writing. Typical guided writing exercises in widely used textbooks included the following:

Model Paragraph

There are four seasons in New York City. The names of the seasons are winter, spring, summer, and autumn. In the winter it is very cold and windy, and in the summer it is very hot and humid. The weather in the spring and autumn, however, is very pleasant. For many people these are the only times that the climate is comfortable. There is one thing certain about New York weather. It never stays the same. Like a woman, it is very changeable.

Comprehension Questions

1. How many seasons are there in New York City?
2. What are the names of the seasons?
3. How is the weather in the winter?
4. How is the weather in the summer?
5. What is certain about New York weather?

Vocabulary of Weather

- It is fair.
- sunny.
- mild.
- warm.
- cool.
- windy.

Other Expressions

- It always rains in the winter.
- It always snows in the winter.
- It is always sunny.
- It is usually rainy.

Oral Composition: Follow the model composition and answer the following questions in a paragraph about your country:

1. How many seasons are there in your country?
2. What are the names of the seasons?
3. How is the weather in the winter?
   - in the summer?
   - in the spring?
4. What is the best season of the year? Why?
5. Is there anything certain about the weather?
Written Composition: Now write a composition about Weather in Your Country, following the model composition and answering the above questions.

(Baskoff, 1971, pp. 1–2)

Model 1

I am Mr. Baroni. My first name is Robert. I am twenty-five years old. I am a student. I am in the classroom now. I am at my desk. Mr. Peters is my teacher. He is in the classroom now. He is at the blackboard. He is busy now. The classroom is on the tenth floor. It is a small room. The classroom is in an old building. The building is downtown. The address is 234 N. Clark Street. The building is near the river. It is in the busy city of Detroit.

Instructions: Write one paragraph about yourself and your school setting on 8 1/2 X 11 loose-leafed notebook paper. Follow the model, but change all information that is not correct for you. For example: you are not Mr. Baroni; your first name is probably not Robert. Take as many structures and words from the model as you can use in your paragraph. Your paragraph should look like this:

(Blanton, 1979, pp. 7–8)

Today some ESL writing classes, particularly at the lower levels of language proficiency, successfully use controlled, guided, and “free” writing techniques to build vocabulary, sentence structure knowledge, and self-confidence (Cross, 1991). Some textbooks continue to be based on the principles of grammatical practice and even the ALM principle of accuracy. For example, in the series Write Away: A Course for Writing English (Byrd and Gallina, 1990), the authors introduce their “system”:

The exercises in Write Away are grammatically focused and are always meaningfully contextualized. Students will be able to use their understanding of the content to sharpen their grammatical accuracy. . . . [T]he advantage of using Write Away is that these grammatical operations in writing and revising are anticipated and laid out in the sequence of each unit. The results of the operations applied in sequence will produce a well-formed composition.

(p. xx; emphases mine)

The application of the principles of controlled, guided, and “free” writing may enhance students’ grammatical awareness of a second
language, particularly at the lower levels of language proficiency. The exercises closely reflect the behaviorist hypotheses: with constant practice of correct structures, students will learn the language and will therefore be able to transfer the repeated (controlled, guided) skills to original utterances. Research in second language acquisition, however, has demonstrated that language is not limited to stimulus-response behavior (Bialystok, 1990; Hatch, 1992; Krashen, 1981, 1982; Rivers, 1964, 1968). Rather than language being directed from the outside, learning is a process that the learner controls and to which the learner contributes (Fromkin and Rodman, 1988). Specifically, writing classes that stress repetition and accuracy while severely restricting composing and original thought serve more as grammar classes.

**Language-Based Writing**

Closely related to the focus on guided writing is the focus, by teachers and researchers, on teaching writing primarily as a language skill. In one of the first books written for teachers of ESL writing, *Techniques in Teaching Writing*, Ann Raimes gave the reasons for teaching writing: “We frequently have to communicate with each other in writing” and “Writing reinforces grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary.” Teaching writing is “a unique way to reinforce learning” (1983, p. 3). An early section in the book is headed with the question “How Can Writing Help My Students Learn Their Second Language Better?” (p. 12; emphases mine). Many ESL writing textbooks of the early ‘80s reflected this language-based approach to writing (Bliss et al., 1985; Frank, 1983). Assignments like the ones that follow were based on the practice of language components—a specific verb tense, the use of adjectives, a particular sentence structure—that links them to guided and “free” writing classes.

*Purpose:* to practice using conditional sentences in present tense.
You are an art teacher. You want to introduce your students to the basic principles of mixing colors. You have decided to prepare a brief explanation to distribute to your students on the topic.

(McKay, 1979a, p. 75)

**Chapter 1: Describing a Static Scene**

**Focus on these syntactic structures**
- sentence division and punctuation
- subject and predicate
- fragments and run-ons
- **yes/no** questions

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prepositions of place
agreement: **there is** and **there are**
countable and uncountable nouns
determiners
   articles (a, an, the)
   quantity words (**some**, **much**, **many**, etc.)
-s inflection
sentence combining

Core Composition
1. Look closely at Magritte’s **Portrait** and examine each object in turn. With a partner, discuss what you see in the picture.
2. Individually, write a short paragraph describing the picture as accurately and as fully as you can. . . .
3. Write your answers to the questions below.

Questions
What did you mention first?
What did you mention second? . . .

(Ralms, 1978)

Two other applications of language-based writing techniques are audio transcription and sentence-combining. The former consists of the use of **dicto-comps**, in which the teacher dictates short passages; after listening to the prose several times, students recreate the passage, partially or completely, as they remember it (Kroll, 1991). Some research suggests that dicto-comps may improve student fluency and sense of discourse coherence (Buckingham and Peck, 1976; Kleinmann and Selekman, 1980; Nation, 1991; Riley, 1975). The concept of **sentence-combining**, developed for NESs by Francis Christensen (1967) and William Strong (1973), was based on the ideas that (a) NES readers of prose prefer a style that is full of subordination and free modifiers and (b) writing sentences that are more syntactically complex encourages students to discover and demonstrate relationships between ideas. Sentence-combining techniques have been used with ESL writing students at all levels of language proficiency (Kameen, 1978; McKe, 1983; Pack and Hendrichsen, 1981; Shook, 1978). Advocates of sentence-combining activities believe that discrete instruction at the sentence level extends the cognitive strategies of students, improves the sophistication of their sentence structures, and eventually improves their compositions (K. Johnson, 1992). An example of a sentence-combining exercise:

1. The writer is young.
2. The writer is developing.
3. The writer works with options.
Possible “transformations” or combinations:
1. The young, developing writer works with options.
2. The young writer who is developing works with options.
3. The writer who is young and developing works with options.
4. Options are worked with by the young, developing writer.

(Strong, 1973, p. 4)

This language-based approach to the teaching of writing prevails in many ESL classrooms. For many teachers, however, the purpose of writing classes changed during the ‘80s. Raimes, for example, has stated that ESL writing teachers need what she calls “a new model for language teaching, one that acknowledges the value of writing for generating language, and that sees writing not just as one of the language skills to be learned, or the last skill to be learned, but as an effective way for a learner to generate words, sentences, and chunks of discourse and to communicate them in a new language” (1985, p. 252).

The Pattern/Product Approach

The shift from language-based writing classrooms to the study of composition techniques and strategies was gradual; it began with the recognition of the needs of ESL students in the academic environment. As writing placement examinations became common for university admission, and as ESL teachers and researchers examined the exit requirements from intensive language programs, they found that ESL students were unprepared for those proficiency examinations and for the written work required in academic classes. This recognition led teachers to bridge the gap between language-based writing classes that focused on sentence writing and writing-based classes that focused on creating compositions.

Several ESL teachers and researchers initiated writing-based pedagogy. Mary Lawrence (1973) was an early advocate of detailed problem-solving and invention strategies; Barbara Seale’s Writing Efficiently (1978) gave ESL teachers and students a step-by-step approach that led to the production of what she called academic themes. Sandra McKay (1979a, 1979b, 1981) argued in both her research and her textbooks that grammatical accuracy in writing classes was a secondary concern; she then designed assignments in her textbooks that were audience- and purpose-specific (McKay, 1980, 1983, 1984). Thomas Buckingham (1979) applied theories developed by NES researchers to ESL composition teachers. Concentrating on the advanced language proficiency students, Buckingham compiled several goals for advanced ESL composition students:
1. to become independent of the controls imposed by the teacher or text,
2. to write for a variety of communicative purposes,
3. to extend and refine the use of vocabulary and sentence structures,
4. to write the conceptual paragraph (that is, paragraphs that were unified, arranged appropriately, and had sufficient detail),
5. to write longer units of discourse than the paragraph.

Many textbooks during the early 1980s focused on writing-based classes by approaching writing from a pattern/product perspective (see G. Barnes, 1981; J. Reid, 1982; J. Reid and Lindstrom, 1985; Rice and Burns, 1986; Wohl, 1985). Using pattern-product techniques, teachers focused on the concepts of the thesis statement and the topic sentence, paragraph unity, organizational strategies, and development of paragraphs by “patterns” or modes: process, comparison/contrast, cause-effect, classification/partition, definition, etc. Exercises to teach the logic of English organizational patterns included re-ordering deliberately “scrambled” paragraphs, identifying “irrelevant sentences” deliberately placed in paragraphs, identifying “suitable” topic sentences for specific paragraphs, and writing topic sentences for paragraphs from which the topic sentences had been removed. Writing assignments, which were generally modality-based (or pattern-based), frequently resembled the following:

Paragraph Writing: Cause-Effect (Focus on Effect)

Directions: Using cause-effect development, write a paragraph in which you describe the effects—negative or positive—that a teacher has had on your personality, your feelings about school, or your approach to life in general. Be specific:
1. Mention at least three real effects;
2. Explain each one, using examples, details, or anecdotes.
   (Arnaudet and Barrett, 1984, p. 111)

FORMAL WRITING

Choose one of the five topics below and write a classification paragraph. Remember to state your topic sentence in the introduction, to develop your discussion completely, and to summarize or restate your topic sentence in the conclusion. Try to use classification vocabulary. If you find it helpful, outline the three parts of the paragraph before writing. Write your paragraph on notebook composition paper.

1. occupations
2. sports
3. movies
4. your friends or family
5. any other topic of your choice

(Auerbach and Snyder, 1983)

The movement toward pattern/product teaching was a significant step forward from the language-based ESL writing classroom, and students in many writing classes today are still benefiting from this change. Current pattern/product-based ESL writing classes, both in intensive language programs and in freshman composition classes for ESL students, continue to concentrate on appropriate organization techniques for presenting written material in academic settings (Fazio et al., 1990; C. Shoemaker, 1985). Many of these classes also include idea generation and the concepts of audience and purpose in their curricula; teachers spend time on language issues related directly to writing (such as comma splices and verb tense use), but the focus is on the organizational conventions in U.S. academic prose.

The Process Movement

Nancy Arapoff (1968, 1969), Mary Lawrence (1973, 1975), and Vivian Zamel (1976, 1982) were among the first ESL researchers and teachers to begin stressing the value of process writing in the classroom. Research in the theory of process writing for ESL students paralleled the prior research with NESs: students were encouraged to explore a topic through writing, to share drafts with teachers and peers, and to use each draft as a beginning for the next. Vivian Zamel recommended process teaching as she castigated sentence-combining because it ignored “the enormous complexity of writing (pre-writing, organizing, developing, proof-reading, revising, etc.)” (1976, p. 89). In a direct commitment to the NES expressive school,* Zamel stated that “the act of composing should become the result of a genuine need to express one’s personal feeling, experience, or reactions, all within a climate of encouragement” (1980, p. 74). In later articles (1980, 1982), Zamel followed Murray and Elbow in describing how writing can be taught as a process of discovery, and she encouraged researchers to investigate “what writing is, what it involves, and what differentiates the good and bad writer” (1980, p. 74). Barry Taylor, also reflecting the work with NESs by Peter Elbow (1973) and Nancy Sommers (1980), described writing as “a discovery procedure which relies heavily on the power of revision to clarify and refine that discovery” (1981, p. 8).

Since the middle of the 1980s, many ESL writing teachers have discovered, accepted, and implemented the approaches and

*See Chapter 1 for a description of the expressive school.
philosophy associated with process writing. Linda Blanton (1987) described the use of student journal writing that lowered the anxiety of her writing students and allowed them to discover interesting ideas. George Jacobs reported on the use of “quickwriting” as an invention device; his directions to students reflect Peter Elbow (1973): “Concentrate on ideas. Forget about mechanics, grammar and organization. Take care of those at another stage in the writing process” (1988, p. 284). Ruth Spack (1984) has written about using invention heuristics in the ESL freshman composition classroom; Spack and Catherine Sadow have described their use of “working journals”—ungraded, even unread, true “reader-based writing”—that allows students in a freshman composition class for ESL students to “become aware of writing as a way to generate ideas and to share them” in a non-threatening way (1983, p. 575).

Textbooks that focus on process teaching reflect the NES expressive writing school: they concentrate on personal writing, student creativity and decision making, and the development of narrative voice, sometimes downgrading or even eliminating the product. Using this philosophy, Ann Raines, in her textbook Exploring Through Writing, describes the process to be used: “[S]tudents begin by gathering ideas from their own experience and knowledge, and then turn to other sources as they search for their own topic. [They] are given the opportunity to explore a variety of systematic methods of discovery while they read, write, and talk to each other” (1987a, p. vii). The following are typical writing assignments in process-based classes.

Part I. Getting Ready to Write
Exploring Ideas
1. What do you know about the handicaps that children have?
2. Do you know anyone with a serious handicap?
3. How do parents of severely handicapped children feel?
4. What kind of lives do you think children with severe handicaps lead?

In this chapter you are going to write an answer to this question: Some children are born with severe mental handicaps. Should parents and doctors of these children be allowed to let them die?

Your answer to this question will depend on what you know from personal experience or from your reading. Read these [following] accounts by parents of children with severe mental handicaps. Then in small groups discuss the questions. How do these accounts affect how you feel about the problem? What else do you know about this problem?

(Segal and Pavlik, 1985, pp. 126–127)
Individual Assignments

1. Take a few minutes to think about one of the following questions. (Your instructor will assign one or will let you choose your own).

   Question 1. What vivid memory do you have of a place in your past? For instance, think about a specific room, a house, a building, a town, or a national setting. Think about it as if you were filming it with a movie-camera, trying to capture all the details, so that someone else can see it as you saw it.

   Question 2. What details can you remember about a treasured possession you had when you were younger or a treasured possession you own now?

   Question 3. What do you remember about the events of one specific day of work? . . . etc.

2. Now, use section 1 of your notebook, the section reserved for class writing. Think for a few minutes of the important words that you will need to tell someone else about your memory. Then, list the words in your notebook on the second right-hand page (page 3).

   (Raimes, 1987a, pp. 7–8)

Often process-writing textbooks are also, to a certain extent, language-based; they ask students to use certain grammatical and lexical features as they write. Trudy Smoke’s advanced ESL textbook (1987), for instance, follows each reading with sections on vocabulary development, reading and thinking skills, word skills, and specific grammar foci: plurals, simple present tense, pronouns, modals, etc.

Certainly the process movement in ESL writing research and teaching has fulfilled the needs of some ESL students and furthered the field of ESL composition (Zamel, 1990, 1991). As teachers incorporated process teaching into their classes, writing became “freer” as a result of student discovery activities, journal writing, and lowered anxiety levels. Trudy Smoke echoes the expressive NES school as she explains to teachers in the Instructor’s Manual for her textbook: “Students already have inside them much of what we are trying to teach, and our challenge is to find what is already there” (1987, p. v).

Current Trends and Research

During the past decade, the field of ESL writing research has expanded significantly, in many cases paralleling studies of NES writers. Some researchers have focused on writing processes—composing and revising strategies—while others have concentrated on the developmental processes of student writers. Studies in discourse analysis (the investigation of chunks of language, oral and written, that
are greater than a single sentence) have sought to discover writing problems specific to ESL students and solutions to those problems. Following is an overview of some of that research.

**Composing and Revising Processes**

Many researchers of ESL **composing** and **revision strategies** have used a case study or descriptive approach (that is, ethnographic) rather than large-scale empirical studies (statistically based research) (Hall, 1991; Johnson, 1985a; Jones and Tetroe, 1987; Raimes, 1987b; St. John, 1987; Zamel, 1983). For example, JoAnne Liebman-Kleine examined composing strategies among her ESL freshman composition students (1986) and then organized a similar class ethnographically, asking her students to observe and interview each other concerning their composing processes (1987). Steven Ross et al. (1988) examined several techniques used in the process classroom, among them journal writing; results demonstrated that although increased opportunities for the practice of writing in a low-anxiety context may result in positive attitudinal changes, the results in the improvement of writing quality were mixed, with greater fluency evident only in narrative writing, not in more expository forms of writing. Tony Silva (1990, 1992) and Ana Frankenberg-Garcia (1990) studied the composing processes of both NESs and ESL students; they found that although the students had some composing strategies in common, there were important differences between them. Alexandra Krapels (1990) surveyed second language writing process studies and described the recurrent motifs and issues involved in case study research with second language writers.

Other studies of composing processes focus on cognitive load and language proficiency. One innovative study of composing processes, reported by Alexander Friedlander (1990), asked Chinese students to generate ideas and compose essays in both their native language and in English on two topics. The first essay, about a Chinese holiday, involved student knowledge and background experience acquired primarily in their native language; the second, about the U.S. university they attended, involved student knowledge and background experience acquired primarily in English. Friedlander found that for these students, the composing processes differed: they made many fewer notes when writing about a topic they had learned about in the language in which they were composing; that is, they used fewer overt planning processes when writing about Chinese holidays in Chinese or about computers in English. Another researcher, Allister Cumming, in a series of highly controlled, empirical studies, investigated the relationship between writing expertise (experienced, average, and basic

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writers) and second language proficiency (intermediate and advanced levels). He found that second language proficiency proved to be only “an additive factor, enhancing the overall quality of writing produced” (1986, p. 81), which suggests that second language proficiency and writing expertise are cognitively different. In addition, Cumming (1989) investigated the correlations between composing strategies, second language proficiency, and writing expertise. He found that composing strategies were related to writing expertise, but that second language proficiency was not directly related.

The importance of teaching and researching the revision processes of ESL writers has grown from the ALM objective of correcting all errors to the study of error as a necessary developmental process. Current research indicates that second language error is neither deviant nor random; instead, errors are often both systematic and reasoned (Kroll, 1991; Lennon, 1991; Scovel, 1988). Revision studies report on the ability of students to “monitor,” to identify weaknesses and strengthen writing during revision and editing processes (Gaskell, 1986; Mittan, 1988, 1989; Wong, 1984). Chris Hall, for example, investigated student revision procedures in the ESL composition classroom (1987, 1990); he found that writing students with advanced language proficiency apply revision strategies used in their native languages. Others have looked at the response of teachers and students to error (Chappell, 1982; Davies and Omberg, 1987; G. Jacobs, 1989; T.Kobayashi, 1992; Nickel, 1985; Sheorey, 1986; Zamel, 1985). Raymond Devenny (1989) reported that, in a study of how ESL teachers and peers evaluated and responded to student writing, the dichotomy between teachers and students was not as strong as previous research had indicated. Instead of forming distinct evaluative or “interpretive” communities, the reader responses of teachers and students tended to be based on other factors such as content and overall readability.

**Contrastive Analysis/Error Analysis**

Early contrastive analysis research was essentially language-focused: linguists examined features of a native language (for example, English) that contrasted with features of a foreign language (for example, Spanish or Arabic) to determine what areas of second language learning would be most likely to cause difficulty for the students. Called “transfer” errors, these areas of second language learning often became the focus of the early grammar/writing classroom as teachers sought to anticipate errors before they occurred and to alert students to them. By the early ‘70s, contrastive analysis research had been extended to include error analysis, which examined
the actual language performance of learners in order to determine whether the source of errors was “first language interference” or “developmental.” In other words, researchers investigated the reasons that students made the errors: whether, for example, an error was a natural by-product of student risk-taking, an overgeneralization of rules, the transfer of a rule from the student’s first language, or the level of difficulty of implementing the English language rule. Although error analysis studies have decreased in the last decade, early research results concerning the impact of native language interference or developmental error on ESL writing continue to influence the literature (Abunowara, 1983; Corder, 1981; Lee, 1976-77; Lowenburg, 1982; Nickel, 1989; Picus, 1983; Scott and Tucker, 1974; Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic, 1983).

Another research area links error identification to the revision process: “error gravity” studies view errors from the perspective of the academic reader. Researchers investigate the “irritation” or “acceptance” levels of native speakers—usually university non-ESL faculty—to specific second language errors. That is, researchers study the second language errors that interfere most with NES comprehension in order to help teachers and students edit more successfully. Such studies have shown that some discourse errors are more “grievous” than others (Janopoulos, 1992a; D. Johnson, 1985b; Neuman, 1977; Santos, 1988; Vann et al., 1992). For example, Roberta Vann and her colleagues (1984) investigated the responses of 164 faculty members to twelve typical ESL errors. They found that most respondents did not judge all errors as equally severe; incorrect word order was considered the most serious, and spelling errors the least severe. The data also suggested that the age and academic discipline of responding faculty members were important factors in their responses to the gravity of ESL errors; younger faculty members were more tolerant of error than older faculty, and faculty in the Social Sciences, Education, and Humanities were more tolerant of error than faculty in the Physical and Mathematical Sciences.

Coherence/Cohesion

From the seminal work of Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976) to the present, researchers of both NES and ESL writing have studied the differences between **cohesion** and **coherence,** seeking to discover the bases for underlying organization and comprehension in academic prose (Carrell, 1982; Connor and Lauer, 1985; Johns, 1980, 1986; Koch, 1983; Scarcella, 1984b). Cohesion has been defined as the more limited term: specific words and phrases (transitions, pronouns, repetition of key words and phrases) that tie prose together and direct
the reader (Connor, 1983; Connor and Johns, 1990). Coherence is the broader-based concept: it is the underlying organizational structure that makes the words and sentences in discourse unified and significant for the reader (Tannen, 1984a). This expected logical flow of ideas provides ease in reader comprehension (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Studies of coherence and the use of cohesion devices in ESL writing indicate that ESL writers of English use coherence and cohesion conventions differently than native-speakers do (Connor, 1984; Connor and Farmer, 1990; Gumperz et al., 1984; Hinds, 1987). Dean Brodkey (1983) and Kristie Fleckenstein (1992), for example, investigated the presence of coherence in written prose by using an expectancy exercise with their students: starting with a single sentence or paragraph, they asked students to predict what the following text would be, then examined why those predictions were or were not correct. Ann Johns (1990) has maintained that the defined coherence or incoherence of a text is established through the fit between the knowledge and background experience of the reader, and the organization, content, and argument of the text. In a study of Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Thai writing, John Hinds found that the samples he examined had a "delayed introduction of purpose" and a quasi-inductive style that "has the undesirable effect of making the essay appear incoherent to the English-speaking reader" (1990, p. 98). John Swales (1990b) studied the organization and use of coherence devices in the introductions to research papers and found that teaching ESL graduate students global coherence strategies helped them compensate for difficulties at the local level. Knowledge of the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations by the writer is essential for coherent communication.

The Process-Product Classroom

Recent reexamination of the process approach and of academic expectations (Constantinides and Hall, 1981; Hamp-Lyons, 1986; Horowitz and McKee, 1984; Johns, 1985; Swales and Najar, 1987) suggests that the pendulum toward expressive and personal writing may have swung too far, particularly for ESL students who are neither familiar nor comfortable with the conventions and expectations of narrative and/or expressive writing. Researchers have investigated the parameters of specific assignments given by non-ESL academic faculty (Bridgeman and Carlson, 1984; Kroll, 1979). Horowitz (1986c), in his survey of university writing requirements, found that (a) academic writing assignments are usually carefully controlled, both in topic selection and in rhetorical organization, by the instructor, (b) that they
rarely deal with personal or expressive writing, and (c) that they often call for some kind of research activity. Horowitz (1986a, 1986b) and Horowitz and Stein (1990) recommended the teaching of specific writing skills such as the synthesis of multiple sources, the connection of theory and data, the summary of and reaction to readings, and the report on a participatory experience.

In other surveys of non-ESL faculty, Grace Canesco and Patricia Byrd (1989) investigated the writing demands of business graduate student courses, and Grace West and Byrd (1982) looked at the technical writing assignments required of graduate engineering students. Both studies found that the production of written products is a major part of the requirements for graduate students, and both studies advocate instruction that "focuses on interpreting and responding to topics provided by instructors" (Canesco and Byrd, 1989, p. 314). George Braine (1989) analyzed assignments from ten undergraduate courses and concluded that all the assignments in the sample were highly controlled, and that science and technology majors in particular needed special composition sections to emphasize the skills of paraphrase and summary and to practice identifying audience expectations.

In other studies of graduate and undergraduate student writing, John Swales (1987) examined the use of secondary sources in research papers and described the problems that ESL writers have with those sources. Others (Jordon, 1989; Santos, 1992) have studied the differing perspectives of ESL student writers and academic readers of their academic essays and examinations. Ann Johns (1991) studied one student who had difficulty passing a university exit examination; she found that while he could write acceptable papers in his major field, the more personal, culturally bound topics of the essay exam required language, content, and rhetorical formats with which he was unfamiliar. As a result of such investigations, both researchers and teachers are turning more toward writing assignments and class objectives that consider the future academic writing needs of their students (Budd, 1989; Swales and Najar, 1987). None of this research precludes process writing; rather, Canesco and Byrd suggest that "the process approach to writing can occur within the context of the preparation of a rigorously defined academic product—if process is taken to mean that the writer goes through a process of thinking, selection of evidence, writing, and revision" (1989, p. 311).

**Communicative Competence**

The communicative approach to language teaching, first developed in Britain during the 1970s (Munby, 1978; Widdowson,
1978; Wilkins, 1976), holds four fundamental beliefs:

1. Materials in the language classroom should be **authentic**—or as authentic as possible—because the language of the "real world" is necessary for good language learning.

2. Activities in the language classroom should be "real" and **purposeful**: "With respect to teaching methodology, it is crucial that classroom activities reflect . . . those communication activities that the learner is most likely to engage in."

   (Canale and Swain, 1980, p 33)

3. Language materials should be **contextualized**: instead of extracting or creating discrete pieces of language, materials must be presented in a meaningful context.

   (Bensch, 1988; Schachter, 1990)

4. **Individual learner needs** are paramount in the language classroom; materials and activities should reflect those needs.

   (D. Clarke, 1989; Shaw, 1992)

Although much of the research in communicative competence has focused on oral skills (K. Johnson and Morrow, 1981; Savignon, 1983; Schleppegrell, 1991) and to a lesser extent on reading (D. Clarke, 1989; Grelet, 1981), communicative teaching is certainly occurring in ESL writing classrooms. These communicative approaches stress the **purpose** of a piece of writing and the **audience** for it: authentic audience(s) and purpose(s). In specific ways, communicative writing classes employ:

1. the use of student writing samples in textbooks and of peer review of essays that allow fellow students to read, evaluate, and learn from "**authentic**" responses to academic assignments (J. Reid, forthcoming; Schenk, 1988);

2. the use of the ESL writing classroom to work on writing assignments from "real" academic classes, making the writing **purposeful**;

3. the integrating of skill-based classes in intensive language programs that allows students to write about what they speak and read about; this integration of skills gives students an **authentic, shared context** for writing (Purves and Purves, 1986);

4. the focus on **individual student needs** by teachers who encourage discovery writing and student-chosen writing topics.

ESL writing textbooks for academic purposes that genuinely reflect the communicative approach have as their goals (a) to assist