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11.

汉语学习者写作过程中交流内容的分析
Interaction of CFL Learners' Writing Practice

田军女士, 加拿大维多利亚大学(U. of Victoria)

Abstract: Writing is a teaching strategy to help second/foreign language (L2) learners examine their own linguistic knowledge of the target language. It can also help L2 instructors to examine the students' progress and evaluate their language performance, besides being one of the four essential skills. However, in beginner Chinese classes, students are only expected to work on sentence-level writings. This paper is to discuss whether it is appropriate and beneficial to try to develop the beginner CSL students' discourse-level writings.

Writing is often used as a teaching strategy to help second/foreign language (L2) learners examine their own linguistic knowledge of the target language and to help L2 instructors examine the students' progress and evaluate their language performance. More importantly, writing is an important skill that language learners need to develop. However, in beginner Chinese-as-a-second/foreign-language (CSL) classes, students are only expected to work on sentence-level writings. The classroom practice, or assignments, is often limited to sentence translations or sentence expansions. It is not often seen that beginner CSL students try to develop discourse-level writings. It is believed by many CSL instructors that students at this level with limited Chinese language proficiency are not capable of writing at the discourse level.

Now two questions arise. (1) Can our beginner CSL students write at the discourse level? (2) What kind of writing activities help student produce better writings? I designed an experimental study to examine our beginner CSL students' writing in three different conditions, an individual writing condition, a peer editing condition, and a co-writing condition. In the current study, individual writing refers to an activity when students produce their writing individually throughout the writing process; peer editing is defined as an activity when students complete their own writing individually and then revise their writing while receiving feedback from a peer; and co-writing is an activity when students

work in pairs throughout the writing process and produce one joint writing. Since both peer review and co-writing require student collaboration in the writing process, although in different stages, the two writing approaches are thereafter referred to as collaborative writing. In this paper, I argue that our beginner CSL students should be encouraged and given the opportunity to write at the discourse level, rather than simply focusing on the sentence-level translation exercises by discussing the theatrical underpins of implementing writing in CFL classes and the two collaborative writing activities.

Eighteen students participated in the study, and they had completed around 110 hours of instruction by the time they produced these writings. These eighteen students are thus high beginning level students. In this paper, I will present three writings produced by the same student in the three conditions. The student is a female Caucasian student.

Example 1 Individual Writing

马力是加拿大人。他去了中国，学汉语在大学。他每天练习汉语语法。

马力喜欢喝咖啡。他常常听了中国人说。每天他明白了很多。

以后晚饭马力去了图书馆。他想看了三个中国书。他也喜欢看中国电影。

马力和一个朋友一起汉语说。他汉语很不错。星期二，星期四，星期五 他去了汉语课。

二月马力去了回家。他觉得中国很漂亮！他去出加拿大在飞机。

马力有一白张照片！他张照片很漂亮。他中国过了很好！

Example 2 Peer editing

马力六点钟起床。今天的天气暖和。每天他一起床，就吃早饭。

每天他吃早饭的时候，马力喜欢喝一杯牛奶，吃片面包。

他也喜欢看报纸。要是他没有牛奶，他喝一杯水。

马力骑自行车去大学。今天他骑很快，常常骑慢有一点。他八点钟上英语课。

马力觉得英语课很有意思。他的朋友常常睡觉！十点钟下英语课。

五点晚上马力和三个朋友去打球。马力有作业很多！今天晚上他想看电视。

马力六点晚上回家。他和女朋友一起吃晚饭。他们吃日本饭，喝两杯酒。

Example 3 Co-writing

她是王英。她想去市中心见面她的朋友。今天上午她等公共汽车。

王英和她的朋友在商店买东西。她们喜欢去买东西。

她的朋友给她小礼物，因为今天是她的生日。

祝王英生日快乐！她们唱歌唱得非常好。她们要吃蛋糕。

王英在家看电视。她现在看天气预报，因为明天她想去海边散步。

王英病了。她在家里休息。她给医生打电话。

他现在在医院看医生。她说 医生 她肚子疼。

医生让她吃药。

Although it is obvious that the student made many errors in all three writing conditions, it is encouraging for us, CSL educators, to see that our students, even at a beginner level, can produce a decent length of writing when they are given the opportunity. A closer examination of the writings at the three conditions also reveals that the student constructed more grammatical sentences, used more varied sentence structures, and made fewer mechanical errors, such as misspellings, in the collaborative writing conditions than in the individual writing condition.

From a theoretical point of view, writing as a teaching and learning technique facilitative to second language acquisition (SLA), is supported by Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985). Peer review and co-writing have theoretical support from cognitive process writing theory, which highlights the importance of the recursive nature of writing (i.e., writing involves several stages from planning to writing to revising) (Flower & Hayes, 1981), and the social-constructivist theory, which advocates that learning occurs when people work together (Vygostky 1978, 1986; Wertsch 1985).

Output Hypothesis

Swain (1985) argues that when students try to put down their ideas using the target language, they are “pushed” to produce the target forms comprehensible to readers. This process is facilitative to students’ second language acquisition. In the longitudinal studies with her colleagues at the University of Toronto, Swain noted that although the French immersion students, who had had ample and years of exposure to their target language in various content-based classes that were instructed in French, still could not speak or write fluently in L2. She thus claimed that simple exposure to the target language is critical, but not sufficient, for second language acquisition. She proposed the Output Hypothesis, which advocates that output plays an important role in second language acquisition. When L2 learners produce the target language, they may find there is something they don’t know or know only partially. They may try to search their existing linguistic knowledge to find solutions to the problem. If they work out a solution, they tend to consolidate their existing knowledge and increase their fluency of the language use. If they cannot find a solution, they may pay closer attention to relevant input. Writing activities in L2 classes provide the students with an opportunity to modify or reprocess their output, a process facilitating second language acquisition.

Cognitive Writing Process Theory

The ‘process approach’ was proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981) in the 1960’s and 1970’s, which has become popular since the 1980’s (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998). It advocates that the writing process should no longer be seen as product-oriented, but

process-oriented, which means that good writing is composed of several different stages: pre-writing or planning, several drafts and post-writing or revision, rather than a single-draft product. Flower and Hayes (1981) further pointed out that writing processes are not simply a linear sequence with one stage following another. Rather, it is a recursive development process.

In terms of cognitive development of individual student writers, Flower (1989) suggests that in a writing class with the implementation of collaborative writing, cognition and social contextual knowledge interact and *construct* one another, and the relationship between cognition and context should not be seen as conflict, but “strongly interactive” (p. 287). She posits that student interaction is an extended social/cultural context in a classroom community within which students construct meaning, while at the same time, in this context composing as a recursive, goal-directed thinking process is also a cognitive process. A shared context is *mediated* by cognition of the individual writer, which explains why students write different essays even after they have worked together in peer groups.

This writing-as-a-process approach has laid a strong theoretical foundation for the implementation of peer review and co-writing in writing classes. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) point out that this approach has freed students from the typical one-draft writing assignment, has freed instructors from the assumption that each student should be working alone, or only with the instructor on summative feedback, and has encouraged students to be exposed to various resources to get feedback. In addition, this approach has encouraged students to collaborate because their goals are constantly influenced by what they have learned through the writing process. When students collaborate, they will unavoidably influence and learn from each other.

This cognitive process writing theory has particular implications for L2 tertiary-level institutions as well because the L2 students have already developed their cognitive abilities and are rich in their L1 and past experience, and they are therefore capable of transforming information to meet specific rhetorical purposes.

Social-construction Theory

Another theoretical basis for writing groups is social-construction theory, which sees social interaction as influencing individual cognitive development. According to the view of social constructionists, “learning occurs among persons rather than between a person and things” (Bruffee, 1986, p. 787). Current social-construction theory owes a lot to the work of Lev S. Vygotsky, a mid-twentieth century Soviet social psychologist. Vygotsky (1978) argues that there exists a complex relationship between individual psychological development and social interaction. According to him, individual cognitive development cannot be achieved or furthered by isolated learning. Rather, he believes that people’s intellectual development is closely related to the people they interact with and the way

they interact. That is, learning occurs when more than one person is involved and when people are engaged in social interaction.

A very influential concept of Vygotskian theory is the Zone of Proximal Development. In explaining the relationship between instruction and development, Vygotsky (1978) introduces this concept of the ZPD to examine “those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (p. 86). Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as “*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*” (p. 86). He contends that within the ZPD students’ actual developmental level will reach their potential developmental level when they interact with more capable people or cooperate with their peers (1978, p. 87; 1987, p. 206). However, he further argues that instruction itself is not development. “*Instruction is good only when it proceeds ahead of development. Then it awakens and rouses to life an entire set of functions which are in the stage of maturing, which lie in the zone of proximal development*” (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 222; cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 71). According to him, the shift from other-regulation, or intermental activity, to self-regulation, or intramental activity, takes place in the ZPD, and the ZPD is “jointly determined by the child’s level of development and the form of instruction involved” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 70). When this learning process is internalized, learner’s independent development is achieved.

The concept of the ZPD also has an implication for collaboration in L2 student writing. Peer review and co-writing should be introduced into L2 writing classes because these two approaches construct a social context for students to interact with one another. In interaction, students, within the ZPD, use what they already possess to develop what they have not mastered independently. When they interact with more capable peers, they may develop new expressions and ways of thinking with their help, which may lead to their intramental development. When interacting with less experienced peers, students may use their existing linguistic knowledge to give suggestions and thus consolidate their known knowledge, a process happening on intrapsychological plane and leading to independent development as well.

In other words, introducing peer review and co-writing into L2 writing classrooms may help direct students towards their zone of proximal development, enabling them to learn in advance of development. At every stage of the writing process, peers negotiate within their ZPD, and they are likely to develop proper and/or more sophisticated expressions which are currently beyond their actual developmental level, but within their potential developmental level. These better or more advanced expressions developed in collaboration will eventually be mastered by language learners and be used in their

subsequent writing. During this process, the target language is not only used to convey meanings, but also to develop meanings. The language itself is developing as well. In Oxford's (1997) words, "Learning occurs while people participate in the sociocultural activities of their learning community, transforming (i.e., constructing) their understanding and responsibilities as they participate" (p. 448).

The above-mentioned theories shed light on our classroom practice. We observe that illustrated student writings do not flow very well. It might be due to the limited exposure to discourse writings in Chinese, since the texts the students had learned prior to this project were all conversation based. They did not develop a good sense about Chinese writing yet. We also see that the student made various mistakes in her writings. However, the paper argues that these errors or mistakes are inevitable in their language development process. Only when students are given the opportunity to practice their linguistic knowledge can they realize if they could communicate successfully with their existing knowledge. If not, they will have to work harder to improve their language competence.

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