Process Approach to the Teaching of EFL Writing

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I. Introduction

The Teaching of writing to adult learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is undergoing some fundamental changes as a result of teachers' and coursebook writers' growing familiarity with various kinds of research and methodologies. Writing classes are no longer characterized by grammar infusion tightly controlled by the teacher. It is less likely that

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the whole class is focused on the teacher who prescribes the way a good composition should be written grammatically intact and then directs the students to follow the model.

Traditionally many ESL/EFL teachers have emphasized the need for ESL/EFL writers to be as correct as possible while writing in English, fundamentally concerned with the final product of writing. But extensive research has revealed that writing is essentially a complex process of thinking, writing, reading, rethinking and revising (Emig 1971). The multitude of studies on writing have shown different aspects of the process and have concluded that it is a recursive process requiring a willingness to make changes and an ability to perceive the need to revise at all stages.

Since ESL writing was first studied as a process in the early 1980s, a variety of methods of observation and interview (Zamel 1982, 1983) and verbal protocol analysis (Raimes 1985) have been made combined with the analysis of changes made in drafts. With the change of writing methodologies, the persistence of this traditional product approach alone in EFL writing classes is not a solution to helping students improve their writing skills. Process-oriented writing which covers a complex process of activities beginning with searching for a topic, pre-writing, drafting, etc. enables the students to practice extensively and master the goal of communicative competence.

Even if EFL/ESL writers attempt to create a coherent piece of writing through the learning of process-oriented writing methodology, it is practically impossible for them to obtain a native-like language competence. Thus many EFL/ESL writers usually use the first

language[1] as a natural means to set up their ideas when writing in L2. This phenomenon is positively regarded and corroborated by the findings of many L2 researchers (Cumming 1987, Lay 1982). Many ESL/EFL writers also generalize this cognitive process to use the first language as a sort of composing behaviors that produce successful and effective L2 compositions.

The classification of writers as good or poor, skilled or unskilled may depend on how well writers establish their intentions for a better product, and in this sense the use of L1 and L2 in the pre-writing and writing stages plays a crucial role in helping the writers to shape their ideas into coherent L2 statements as a whole. From another cognitive perspective, the revision stage is also shown to be an integral part of the writing process. Peer editing particularly is recommended to EFL writers for the reason that teachers may misread, change the meanings, and often make the text less coherent (Zamel 1985).

With reference to effective EFL writing my major concern in this paper is to empirically investigate students' writing strategies:

1. What types of writing patterns do the writers prefer between L1 and L2 in EFL writing environment? Is there any correlation between writing in L1 and L2?

2. How do the writers feel about peer feedback? Do they think it helpful to improve their writing skill?

3. Which one do writers think more important between process writing including brainstorming, writing, and peer editing and

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[1] This paper witnessed that three fifths of the subjects surveyed had a tendency to depend on a bilingual (i.e. Korean and English combined) as a way to develop their ideas smoothly. Following a bilingual did English and Korean come.

product writing such as grammar and mechanics (spelling and punctuation)?

In attempts to provide answers to these questions, I will briefly review studies on process-related theoretical frameworks.

II. Literature Review

In a traditional model of writing its function was to produce a flawless text by correcting surface mistakes of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Such product-focused teaching was, however, no longer deemed appropriate and a paradigm shift (Hairston 1982) occurred in teaching. The emphasis of product-focused writing on accurate grammar and error-free sentence structures was a turning point toward a process which puts emphasis on the significance of content and organization in writing rather than form.

The process of composing was beginning to be understood to consist of three components: pre-writing- the generation of ideas and goals referred to as planning; writing- the translation of these ideas and goals to words; and revising- the constant rereading of what has been written to check that it matches the writer's intentions. Brown (2001:335) described the written products as the result of thinking, drafting, and revision processes and asserted the necessity of process writing from a pedagogical perspective:

Students should learn how to generate and organize ideas

coherently, how to revise text for clearer meaning, and how
to edit text for appropriate grammar.

Further research revealed more of the process: writing is linear only in the product; however, the process is recursive as writers go back in order to move forward (Murray 1980). In addition, Hairston (1982) described the process approach and its methodological features as follows:

It focuses on writing as a process, with instruction aimed at intervening in that process; it teaches strategies for invention and discovery; it emphasizes rhetorical principles of audience, purpose, and occasion with evaluation based on how well a given piece meets its audience's needs; it treats the activities of pre-writing, writing, and revision as intertwining, recursive process; and it is holistic, involving non-rational, intuitive faculties as well as reason.

Flower and Hayes (1981) explained the importance of having and modifying goals by comparing good and bad writers: "Good writers continually revert to their goals, regenerating them as they write, thus opening the way for creativity. Poor writers, conversely, may become dependent on such goals as completing a sentence and fail to deal with higher-level abstract goals." Furthermore, they stressed that the existence of goals and the writer's need to match the writing with these goals motivate the process of reviewing and revising.

A number of ESL researchers chose to examine whether writers transferred strategies from L1 to L2 in EFL writing. Such research confronted the issue of whether a writer skilled in L1 is also skilled in L2 writing, given a certain level of proficiency in L2. Concerning the correlation between L1 and L2 writing, Zamel (1982:203) contended that there is a cognitive similarity between L1 and L2 composing:

> ESL writers who are ready to compose and express their ideas
> use strategies similar to those of native speakers of English.

Silva (1993:656) also supports that L2 writing teachers have been advised to adopt practices from L1 writing. Silva (1989) defined the role of L1 in the pre-writing and writing stages as the primary source of content and alternate medium of expression, keeping the composing process flowing smoothly, setting abstract rhetorical goals, and making meta-comments and side comments. Silva further addressed that L1 seemed necessary and advisable for less proficient L2 writers, while inadvisable and counter-productive for the more proficient L2 writers.

Raime (1985), on the contrary, not assuming the similarity in the writing process, concluded that unskilled ESL writers were very different from unskilled L1 writers in many respects; the L2 writers were focused on the task and on creating meaning rather than being preoccupied by surface form as L1 writers were. Raime warned against treating L2 writers like unskilled L1 writers.

Revision behavior was examined either as part of the ongoing process of composing one paper in one sitting or as a procedure which

took place between one draft and a second. Recently, a peer feedback activity, through which students give and receive feedback on drafts of essays, has begun to emerge as one of many strategies of writing instruction to help EFL writers improve writing competence. Because its focus as a revision is not simply on producing a final product, but the ongoing process of composing from the cognitive perspectives, feedback can trigger rewriting and revising, causing the writer to adjust the writing in response to the readers' reactions until the intended meaning has been adequately communicated.

Zamel (1985:97) illustrated a way the peer editor could help the writer to develop the quality by providing the reader's point of view:

> The reader can discover the underlying meaning and logic of what may appear to be an incoherent text and instruct the writer how to shape, modify and transform the text; the writer can simultaneously discover what lies behind and motivates the complex reactions of the reader and help the reader understand a text that up to this point may have been ambiguous, elusive, or unintelligible.

Chaudron mentioned in connection with peer feedback between students and teachers that peer response might prove better than teacher feedback in terms of improvement in a writing score if it was seen in its rightful place as a valid feedback method in cooperation with teacher feedback. Chaudron (1984:16) pinpointed his perceptions of the benefits of peer response: "...the more the revision process can be learned as an interaction between writers and their readers, the

more L2 learners will fully appreciate the functions, savor the fruits, as it were, of their newly acquired writing proficiency."

III. Research Method

1. Context of the Study

This study took place in two English composition classes of which I was in charge in Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Korea. The composition course lasted for one 16 week semester on a two- hour basis each week. Students learned the concepts of the writing process, including the components of pre-writing and revising as well as gaining practice in a variety of rhetorical styles. Activities in class included such things as brainstorming and sharing of ideas, and reading of peers' work.

The textbook for this course was "Paragraph Essentials: A Writing Guide" by Linda Wang (2002) which consists of seven step approach[2] for writing effective paragraphs. My instruction approach to teaching the composition class was based on the belief that students would benefit from having an awareness of their own writing process, and I attempted to provide students with a momentum to both generate ideas and to try out ideas through textbook guidance and questioning me. I wanted to inspire students to have the confidence in their ability to produce a paper in the academic style expected of a writer in English.

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[2] Linda involves seven steps to become a strong writer as 1. generate ideas, 2.get a focus, 3. gather and organize information, 4. write a rough draft, 5. revise, 6. proofread and edit, 7. prepare the final version.

Preliminary writing occurred that was designed to help with idea generation, and students were directed toward writing an outline or plan. Some writers liked to do draft writing in class, whereas others preferred to write at home. As they progressed with the first draft, a date was set by which every student would have done draft assigned and the peer feedback among students could be conducted according to the directions in the textbook requiring that each reader ask questions, give comments, and make suggestions for the writer to use in order to make the writing more effective.

2. Participants

This research is an empirical case study involving a small number of subjects who are undergraduate students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies on the elementary- to advanced- level of English proficiency. A total of 48 subjects took part in my study who were all my English writing course takers in the fall semester of 2005. The subjects ranged from freshmen to senior majors and minors of the English language, and some of them had taken the writing course before either at school or a language institute. But the writing classes they had taken were primarily confined to grammar and free writing-oriented composition.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

The source of data for this study was from the in-class writing essays and questionnaires from the subjects who took course in my

writing session. For this study subjects were directed to write four full essays along with four short outlines meeting a thesis, topic sentences, and restatement requirement. In addition, they were put into peer editing which was scheduled. Every two or three weeks the type of essay was changed in the order of a narrative, a comparison, a cause-effect, and an argumentative, and students were required to submit each essay accompanied by an outline form just after the termination of essay instructions. The topic choices were all at my own discretion ranging from politics to current issues.

   Through in-class activities the subjects were asked to generate ideas and write drafts followed by peer editing in a cyclical way. In the latter part of the class grammar lectures and exercises were followed. Other instructions included asking the students to pay more attention to the quality of their writing than the quantity of it. Written data were collected in the form of writers' initial drafts and revised drafts following the writing session based on the textbook.

   The test for each essay was administered during the class. Subjects were given 40 to 60 minutes to complete the writing task in English. They were allowed to use dictionaries in order to feel comfortable except for an argumentative essay, ask questions on spelling or grammatical structures, or ask questions to clarify the test questions. The contents students were required to have in each essay were classified into the following four categories:

   1. Ideas: meaning of the text; main ideas; content of thesis statement as representing main idea

2. Organization: Location of parts of the text; introduction, thesis statement, topic sentences, conclusion
3. Language: Grammar, vocabulary, choice of expression, speech register
4. Coherence and Unity: logical sequence for the paragraphs

After the writing task showing the whole content presented above in each writer's paper they were all required to take part in peer editing activity which primarily included the questions about their writing products: coherence and unity of the thesis, topic sentences, restatement, and their suggestions. Peer editors advised the writers to modify the text by explaining where there were gaps in understanding, to expand by giving examples or more details, and to change the organization where it was causing confusion. Thereafter peer editing sheets were returned to the original writers, and there was some discussion between reviewers and writers about the essay written.

A questionnaire survey was conducted at the end of the semester to confirm the degree to which students have equipped themselves with overall knowledge of the process writing procedures and tried its practical application to real writing. The first three questions asked were about what they did during the course of cognitive functions from planning to revision. The fourth question was to check what language students preferred in drawing their ideas from their mind. The last question was their expectation of English proficiency for future writing by the use of process writing method.

IV. Result

The aim of this research was to observe how much process-oriented writing is related to the EFL writing environment: whether or not process-oriented writing method bears the advantage over grammar and mechanics-oriented writing in an EFL writing environment. Unlike the traditional writing criteria that to be more effective EFL writers should be fully equipped with complete grammar, the effect that process-oriented writing approach had on EFL students' writing proficiency surveyed turned out to be overwhelming. Student subjects showed much greater improvement over the course of one semester than those whose attention centered merely on grammar and mechanics.

After the intensive and repeated learning of the way in which an essay is mapped and developed, most of the writers could find a focus for their topic and immediately write an effective thesis statement with a controlling idea. They then proceeded to develop, support, and strengthen the thesis statement to organize the whole essay. Only 4 out of 48 students demonstrated their failure to clarify the thesis statement in the introduction.

The majority of writers held that they could control their ideas from paragraph to paragraph smoothly and logically. But some of them responded that the simultaneous parallel mapping from a thesis statement to restatement through each topic sentence was burdensome and tough enough for them to support. The writing of several subjects disclosed the incomplete mental flow by going off the topic, giving

awkward expressions in the context, or bearing the similar contents between paragraphs.

The use of restatement in the first part of the conclusion witnessed that the writers could easily relate the paragraphs to a thesis statement through repeated key words and reinforce the essay consistently. Only a few students exposed the unmatched relation between a thesis statement and restatement due to their less care for or no knowledge of the process writing procedures.

The correlation between L1 and L2 chosen while generating ideas and writing organizations presented that the English level of the students played a decisive role in the use of the first or the second language. Low- to mid- level writers stated that when brainstorming and drafting they generally used Korean words or phrases and then translated them into English again. They asserted that language switch from L1 to L2 was mainly attributed to their inability to express abstract ideas immediately in English: when they found it difficult to select the exact L2 phrase to elaborate their idea, when they got confused or stuck in their natural flow of thinking, etc..

What was noteworthy from the writers' choice of language in writing is that more than half of the students were using Korean and English simultaneously as a means to thinking of and developing their ideas. Otherwise students whenever disturbed in mental flow tended to unconditionally depended on Korean-English dictionary for a helper. Higher-level students, in contrast, were inclined to be less dependent on the first language.

This survey revealed language switch starting from Korean to English when blocked in their flow of thought or unaware of English

words that they tried to describe. It became obvious that students continued to use a kind of cognitive process, whether in L1, in L2, or in mingled status, when they generated ideas and encoded them in English.

At the editing stage, the lower proficiency writers were deprived of the kind of feedback that was conducted between peer partners. Acknowledging that drafts almost always need to be examined carefully and revised in order to become more effective, student subjects, nevertheless, were scared and expressed a strong reluctance to it. The mid- to higher- proficiency writers, on the other hand, were very positive in their editing behavior; they expressed the strong confidence that they could be grammatically complete as well as keep the main point of their ideas focused on the logical sequence of the content.

The common concern all the students pointed out regarding peer-editing was the relationship between students and teachers. Many students acknowledged the merits of peer-editing in terms of observing the partner's register, idea mapping, formation of essay organization, sentence structure, etc.: "we can exchange our ideas and comments among us. It makes me open-minded in one thing or one idea. I can understand their ideas that I never knew before. Their comments are very useful." But they also wanted and required the teacher to intervene in the editing stage and make comments to writer's essay in person, alleging the misgivings that peer comments might be vague, not helpful, insincere, confusing, or not critical enough.

Concerning the application of the knowledge of process writing schema to real writing most students responded that they would like to learn it to improve their English proficiency and use it more frequently in an EFL environment, gaining a high standard of English proficiency some day. Some, however, were very skeptical about process writing stating that they were still unaware of the respective procedure of the writing as well as had no intention to learn it because without this method they could be fully communicative in writing, resisting going through the process writing. Apart from this extreme reaction students expressed confidence that despite their currently unsatisfactory level of English writing they could and would be qualified for proficient English writer.

Asked about what they put focus on most while proofreading, students as a whole responded that they whether consciously or unconsciously came to fall under the coherence of content and organization as well as grammar and mechanical errors, but not just syntax and mechanical errors, which definitely demonstrates that students are aware of the importance of the logical sequence of ideas when writing.

In contrast the students' reaction to the question of what makes them scared and embarrassed most when writing an essay or an article in English reflected that the majority of them put more concentration on and care for grammaticality, spelling, vocabulary, sentence structure rather than thinking how to organize the topic. Some, more specifically, reflected the frustration confronted by syntax-related dilemma as they went through writing.

V. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

1. Conclusion

Research conducted in this paper is designed to present a full and complete understanding of what relation the process-oriented method bears to the writing context and overall goals of instruction particularly in the writing class. My findings suggest that to express their ideas as clearly as possible, students need to pay attention to equally both sides of writing: punctuation, sentence structure, grammar, or spelling vs. logical sequence for the paragraphs through a well-developed plan.

Current researches on appropriate methodology for teaching writing have been focused on how language may best be acquired in a classroom environment. From the perspectives of the theories of writing process in both L1 and ESL/EFL, as many previous researchers substantiated, ideas should flow smoothly and logically through the whole essay without wandering off topic or losing the focus of overall purpose of the essay. In this connection, process-oriented writing is more convincing and recommendable to ESL writers.

Students surveyed in this paper pointed out that a focus on correcting grammar alone did not comprehensively help to improve the text so much in terms of the general qualities. Rather students showed their growing awareness of the structure of academic writing as the combination of clarity of ideas and appropriate organization together with surface features such as tense choice, word choice, transitions, etc..

Nevertheless this study demonstrated the contradictory aspect that student subjects came to be most afraid of grammatical errors to be committed when writing English and put much attention on grammatical mistakes at the writing and editing stages.

The peer response activity presented as an integral part of the writing process was justified to the effect that it provides students with the opportunity to develop their interaction skills as they give and receive feedback and become critics of their own and others' writing, thus easy enough to be incorporated into a revised paper. Some were negative about peer editing by doubting whether EFL students are able to provide correct and appropriate feedback to their peers. However it cannot be passed over that peer feedback has a positive impact on the improvement of the finished product by offering criticisms and suggestions.

Furthermore, the unilateral selection of either L1 or L2 in pre-writing and writing steps was not appropriately used by writers to generate ideas, organize, and complete the draft. Rather quite specifically many writers showed a tendency to use both L1 and L2 as a means of expressing their ideas within a limited time. Through this strategy writers seemed most likely to relieve the burden of time restriction and pursue the ease of logical flow into the target language.

2. Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study make suggestions for EFL writing teachers.

First, it has been shown in this study that it is possible by a careful selection of language to set up ideas logically and coherently from

brainstorming to writing. About the issue of using either L1 or L2 in EFL writing, there have been many conflicting approaches. But It is the teacher's responsibility to help and encourage students to approach effective writing goals whatever language they may choose.

A second important finding is that the teacher should always keep in mind that students have different levels of writing skill. Not as an authoritative director and arbiter but as a facilitator it is important for the teacher to determine appropriate approaches to writing instruction for each of the L2 writers in different contexts and apply them to helping L2 writers to engage in thinking process of composing. In addition to the linguistic differences of L2 students, writing teachers also need to be equipped to deal effectively with sociocultural differences because the impact of cultural knowledge, expectations, and behaviors cannot be overestimated. Concerning the assessment of L2 writing, teachers need to take into consideration the writers' fundamental differences between most L1 and L2 writing (Brown 2002:339).

The third finding of great importance to the ESL teacher is the task of peer feedback. As this study demonstrates, the students were able to take on what many consider to be teachers' role of critic. Writers showed trust in their peers' feedback to the extent that they incorporated much of it in revisions. Of course there were also some misgivings from the students that they would be reluctant both to give such teacher-like guidance and also to receive it. But the reviewers with sincerity offered their opinions on the general qualities of good writing to the best of their knowledge: grammar, clarity, logical coherence, unity, and mechanics according to the task type. With this

in mind EFL teachers need to assist student writers in practicing revision in order to try out a variety of changes in texts and incorporate the readers' comments into their writing. Furthermore, through peer feedback based on the reader-based questions, the readers would be able to foster the ability to evaluate another student's text.

To sum up, the knowledge of the process approach framework would definitely be of great profit to facilitate the EFL writers' goals: to clarify their ideas in a logical and coherent way and to produce a final well-written product. While there may be individual variation in writing strategies, this writing strategy, along with product approach which primarily concerns surface features of the writing, is needed to provide adequate solutions to a wide variety of writing problems among Korean EFL writers.

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Appendix

Partner's Feedback Form

1. Does the essay have an effective thesis statement?

2. Is the conclusion effective? Does it echo the thesis sentence?

3. Is the essay developed in a coherent and unified way?

4. Did you notice any errors that the writer will need to correct during the proofreading and editing step? Highlight the errors or mark them to draw the writer's attention to them.

5. Provide your partner with suggestions for proofreading and editing.

Questionnaire

1. Where do you think your English level lies on the following scale?

   1) poor   2) average

   3) good   4) excellent

2. What do you usually focus on most when you write in English?

   1) grammar and mechanics   2) organization

   3) content   4) others

3. What do you usually focus on most when you give peer feedback on the partner's writing?

   1) correct grammar and mechanics

   2) revise the draft to make the meaning more logical and coherent

   3) both correct grammar and revise the draft

   4) others

4. What language do you use when planning and writing an essay in English?

   1) Korean   2) English

   3) bilingual (Korean and English)

5. Do you think peer editing is necessary as you go through writing an essay? If so, why?

6. How much do you think your English writing skills will be improved by using process writing procedures? Do you think you need to focus either on grammar more than the process or on the process more than grammar?

Abstract

Process Approach to the Teaching of EFL Writing

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This study examined two L2 writing groups as they became familiarized with the process-oriented writing method and searched for the links between this writing method and writing improvement subsequently made to the draft papers. This was a 16 week study of 48 undergraduate elementary to advanced writers in a regular writing program.

Research revealed that these student subjects demonstrated a growing awareness of the significance of process-oriented writing: the need to consider a thesis statement matched with a restatement in a coherent way. Ironically enough, students were very worried about grammatical and mechanical errors they might commit during the course of writing. In addition, students exposed the tendency to put to use L1 and L2 concurrently while generating and developing ideas so as to avoid the serious interruption of the mental flow.

The analysis of revisions made following peer review revealed students' positive attitudes toward the interaction behaviors between writers and readers: writers learned to trust and use peer feedback in revision, and readers could foster the ability to evaluate another student's text.

Implications for teachers using this methodology in the classroom include the need to assist student writers with synchronizing the

cyclical nature of the writing process and surface form corrections like grammar and mechanics in practicing writing for the better language competence.

Key Words: composing process, EFL writer, peer feedback, academic writing, writing strategy