

## WRITING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** In second language context, learning writing is often considered burdensome for learners due to the complexity of the process in producing a piece of writing. To succeed in L2 writing, some strategies are employed by learners which are different from learners to learners across L2 contexts or nations. This article attempts to review some theories in L2 writing and altogether, synthesizes some findings of research about strategies employed by L2 learners in writing. Theoretically, there are at least four theory of L2 writing, namely, *Contrastive Rhetoric Theory*, *Cognitive Development Theory*, *Communication Theory*, and *Social Constructionist Theory*. Meanwhile, there is storage of strategies in L2 writing different in name but similar in practice.

**Keywords:** writing strategies, L2 learners

The success of learning second language depends mainly on the learners who are different to each other in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in learning. Some learners are classified as good learners who apply some effective learning strategies, while the others are not. Naiman et al.'s work (1978) was considered as one of the best investigations about how more successful language learners are different from less successful ones. They found out that successful learners employ more strategies to accomplish the task. Another outstanding work about learning strategies was the one of Rubin's research (1975). She reported that better language learners made positive efforts to use the language through practicing language system, oral communication, self-monitor, self-correction, and the like.

In learning second language, writing is considered as the most difficult language skills to learn, especially compared the other skills such as listening, speaking, and reading since the differences lay upon between the first and the second language. They include; discourse and rhetorical organization, ideas and content of writing, rhetorical modes, reliance on external knowledge and information, references to sources of knowledge and information, discourse and text cohesion, employment of linguistics and rhetorical feature of written texts (Helinkel, 2004:10). Silva (1993) points out that his research showed that writers asked to perform in L1 and L2 devoted more attention to generating material in L2 than in L1 and found content generation in L2 more difficult and less successful. Some successful learners employ strategies in writing which are

effective in helping them to write well. This paper is intended to explore further about writing strategies employed by L2 learners altogether with the taxonomy of writing strategies.

### **WRITING IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

To some extent, the development of L2 writing instructions is similar to the development of L1 writing instructions. Researches finds out that like L1 writers, L2 writers also tried out and could express meanings, rather than just manipulate the language but struggle with writing (Beare, 2000; Berman, 1995; Matsumoto, 1995). However, the peculiar contexts in L2 learning yield some approaches of L2 writing instruction. Together with the succession of approaches in L2, according to Silva (1990) in Kroll (1990: 12) perspectives of L2 writing also alter from controlled composition, current-traditional rhetoric, process approach, and English for specific purposes. Mu (2007) supports Silva's opinion by providing some theories corresponding to Silva's categorization of approaches, namely *Contrastive Rhetoric Theory*, *Cognitive Development Theory*, *Communication Theory*, and *Social Constructionist Theory*.

#### **Theories in Second Language Writing.**

The first theory to be discussed here is Contrastive Rhetoric Theory that is introduced by Kaplan in 1996 (Mu, 2007). Research in contrastive rhetoric sought the differences between text produced by native and non native writers and if these difference are culturally bound. A study by Silva (1993) found out that differences between L1 and L2 writings lay upon generating ideas, grammatical aspects, and stylistics. In conclusion, Silva states that L2 writing is less effective than L1 writings. Another study by Kohro (2009) shows that L1 global structure does not correlate with that of L2. It is assumed that L1 writers fail to transfer L1 global structure in L2 composition. Connor (2002: 498) identifies four domains of his investigation related to contrastive rhetoric theory, they are, 1) contrastive text linguistic studies: examine, compare, and contrast how texts are formed and interpreted in different languages and cultures using methods of written discourse analysis; (2) studies of writing as cultural and educational activity: investigate literacy development on L1 language and culture and examine effects on the development of L2 literacy; (3) classroom-based contrastive studies: examine cross-cultural patterns in process writing, collaborative revisions, and student-teacher conferences. (4) genre-specific investigations.

This theory, however, meets some criticisms from some L2 educators such as Zamel (1997) and Kubota (1999) who accused that studies of contrastive rhetorics essentialize and stereotype L2 students. This is because contrastive rhetoric emphasizes traditionally on cultural differences of both L1 and L2. Despite the criticism rises up, to some respects, contrastive rhetoric theory make fruitful contribution on the development of writing strategies taxonomy, especially as the supporting theory of *rhetorical strategy* as noted by Silva (1990) in Kroll (1990) that the elements of paragraphs such as topic sentences, support sentences, concluding sentences, and transitions as well as various choices for its development such as illustration, exemplification, comparison, contrast,

partition, classification, definition, causal analysis are attended in contrastive rhetoric theory.

The second theory is cognitive development theory. This theory emerges with the development of cognitivism in Europe during the eighteenth century. As cognitivism put an emphasis on cognitive process in acquiring language this theory view that writing also includes processes of making a plan, generating ideas, editing, and revising. In other word, cognitive development is the underpinning theory of process writing approach. Tribble (1996:37) suggests that “process approaches stress . . . writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the ‘publication’ of a finished text.” The criticism to this theory is that it overlooks the contribution of contexts or writers’ variability in writing. It fails to differentiate between skillful writers and unskillful writers. Flower (1994) notes that it is purely cognitive in nature and does not give credit to the social factors involved in writing.

The third theory in L2 writing is communication theory. From this theory, genre-based writing approach is derived. According to communication theory, writing occurs in many different forms depending on social or political discourse. Cooper and Odell (1977) in Mu (2007) identify many styles of written discourse such as dramatic writing, personal writing, reporting, research, academic writing, fiction, poetry, business writing, and technical writing. Freeman et al. (1991) state that students entering academic disciplines must learn the genres and conventions of that particular disciplinary community. Understanding the convention of particular discourse community will set up special literacy needed to be acquired as a writer. In relation to communication theory, Cohen (1996) proposed a classification of language learner strategies, language use and learning strategies. According to Cohen, a communicative strategy belongs to language use in which the L2 writers employ to express the ideas in a most effective way.

The fourth theory discussed in L2 writing instruction is the theory of social construction. This educational approach arises from the point of view of social constructionist. Social constructionist believes that understanding of a concept, model, and knowledge is constructed more by the learner himself (Mu, 2007). When such view is applied is second language writing, some of the L2 writing teachers, in fact, believe that writing comprises a mode of communication of certain community. In general, texts can represent how a community defines its writers and writing, how certain knowledge is constituted and reconstituted, and global communication happens in the community. In practice, social constructionist involves some aspects of product approach and process approach to teaching L2 writing. It emphasizes both on using writing products to help the learners construct meaning and the process of collaboration and converse with other to construct written text. In short, this theory involves socio affective aspects of the learner in the process of constructing meaning. In relation to this theory, Mu (2007) defines this theory as strategies that writers use to interact with the target discourse community for the support and to regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitude in the process of writing.

To sum up, all those theories –contrastive rhetoric, cognitive development, communication, and social constructionism- indicate that, in L2 contexts, writing process is a very complex development influenced by many factors such as writer variable, culture, politics, education, economy, social environment, community and language.

### **Second Language Variable.**

Previously, it has been discussed that there are many factors affecting writing process. Among those factors, writers variable is the most the remarkable since differences of writing products are resulted from different writers. Writers variables include at least three constituents; writing proficiency, writing development, and writer perception.

In term of writing proficiency, L2 learners are categorized as more skilled writers and less skilled writers (Leki, Cumming, and Silva, 2008). Mu (2007) uses the term of novice writers and expert writers. The categorization indicates wide range of differences between the two categories. Researches show that more skilled writers exhibit confidence in their writing ability (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994 in Leki, Cumming, and Silva, 2008). Their product shows that such writing is purposeful and maintains an awareness of the reader, a term called as commitment to writing task (Leki, Cumming, and Silva, 2008:99). Skilled writers are well prepared because they spend more time on planning, and change and revise the original plan flexibly and freely whenever they have come up with a new idea in the writing process. (Matsumoto, 1995). More skilled L2 writers practice more on writing activities such as writing free composition not assigned for them to practice. Leki, Cumming, and Silva, (2008:99) call this as more self initiated in writing. More skilled writers employs more writing strategies during the process of writing.

Another writers variables in L2 writing is writing development which is truly different from one writer to another. In the field of second language acquisition, there is no unanimous conclusion that age correlates very much with the achievement of the learners. Ellis (1997:68) suggests that the varieties of achievement might be due to “differences in the social conditions in which L1 and L2 learners learn have some kind of impact. Thus, giving judgment of the development of writing skill on the basis of the development of age does not make sense at all. There is no profound evidence that adult L2 learners write better than teenager L2 learners.

There are abundant factors affecting the development of L2 writing. Leki, Cumming, and Silva, (2008:104) synthesize some results of researches investigating the contributing factors to L2 writing development including previous educational experience, length of time learning English, aptitude development, L2 academic environment, loss of L1 writing ability, attitude toward L2 writing, time practice and study, active vs passive learning, cognitive and social growth, early vs late start in L2 learning, recognizing different discourse needs and associated styles, and multiple opportunities to write in many genres. Those factors, in fact, influence the selection of strategies taken by the L2 writers in producing written texts.

Another variable in second language writing is the perception of the writer toward second language. The different linguistics system between first

language and second language affects the writer's perception, especially the difficulty in producing written texts using second language. For example, Indonesian learners often difficulty when they have to apply irregular verbs because in Indonesian there is no change of verb, whether the subject in first person singular or third person singular, or whether the action happens every day, yesterday, or in the future. Silva (1992) notes that the most common differences in L2 writer perceptions are the ones related to writing, planning, vocabulary, sentences, and phrases; on the whole, fewer differences were noted in rhetoric. L2 writers perceived that their limited vocabularies meant they were unable to express themselves accurately and precisely. Moreover, grammar and vocabulary are the most distinctive differences.

### **Taxonomy of Writing Strategy**

To overcome the problems in L2 writing, learners apply some strategies which help them ease the burden in writing. The strategies used vary from one writer to another. Studies, thus, are conducted in order to define the concept of writing strategy and to search of the varieties of writing strategy. Scholars in the field of second language learning use different terms such as 'writing strategy', 'processes', 'writing behaviors', and 'strategies' to describe the efforts of the writers to generate, edit, revise, and publish their ideas in second language. The differences in using the terms of strategy prove that there is no consensus among the scholars about the operational definition of the strategy construct (Manchon, De Larios, Murphy, 2007). Writing strategies are needed to make the written product become logical in the sense that it uses correct reasoning and well formed in terms of unity, coherence, and cohesion. In short, strategy is a term that is commonly used but never defined operationally. Writing is a demanding skill. As noted above, writing involves recursive process from generating ideas until publishing the written product. This indicates that a variety of studies might be conducted to explore the writers' strategy in writing. However, the surprising fact is most L2/FL writing strategy research has focused on identifying effective writing strategies rather than on teaching them, and that though the process approach to L2/FL writing instruction has been used for more than three decades, relatively little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of writing strategy instruction. It can be noted that most of the studies on writing strategy instruction have been conducted in the L1 context rather in the L2/FL context. This surprising fact is not actually surprising anymore since not many researchers come from non native English origins.

Many studies have been conducted to seek the use of writing strategies, or how strategies are used by different skilled writers –more skilled or less skilled, however none of the research come up with a fixed taxonomy of writing strategies. Mu (2007) comes across with myriad of classifications of writing

strategies and processes which were termed with different labels. ESL learners are often confused with so many classifications ESL writing strategies. Moreover, few of these classifications have been discussed from a theoretic stance.

Referring to some analysis on writing strategies, this paper identifies classifications of writing strategies which may be totally different from each other or using different naming but actually it refers to the same strategies. The following discussions are of different taxonomy of writing strategies by different scholars at which ends up with a synthesis of writing strategy taxonomy.

The first scholar classifies writing strategies is Arndt's (1987) in Mu (2007) who carried out a research to Chinese students writing strategy. The research results on the information that Chinese students tend to revise for word-choice more in the ESL task than in the L1 task, but rehearse for word-choice more in L1 than ESL. The classifications are as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1. Arndt's Categories of ESL Writing Strategies

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Planning	Finding a focus, deciding what to write about
Global planning	Deciding how to organize the text as a whole
Rehearsing	Trying out ideas and the language in which to express them of
Repeating	key words and phrases - an activity which often seemed to provide impetus to continue composing of what had already been written down
Re-reading	As a means of classifying ideas, or evaluating what had been written
Questioning	
Revising	Making changes to the written text in order to clarify meaning
Editing,	Making changes to the written text in order to correct the syntax or spelling

Another classification of writing strategies is taken from Wenden (1991) who investigated eight students of ESL, requiring them to write a composition at the computer and to introspect as they wrote. She studied how the students used metacognitive strategies in their writing and discussed what task knowledge they searched for before and while writing. The strategies mentioned by Wenden are summarized as follow:

Table 2. Wenden's (1991) Classification of Writing Strategy

<b>Metacognitive</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	
Planning	Clarification	Self-question Hypothesizing Defining terms Comparing
Evaluation	Retrieval	Rereading aloud or silently Writing in a lead-in word
Monitoring		Rereading the assigned question Self-questioning

	Writing till the idea would Summarizing what had just or of rhetoric) Thinking in one's native language Ask researcher Resourcing Deferral Avoidance Verification
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Sasaki (2000) in Mu (2007) describes the results on investigating Japanese working on writing processes and found out that (a) before starting to write, the experts spent a longer time planning a detailed overall organization, whereas the novices spent a shorter time, making a less global plan; (b) once the experts had made their global plan, they did not stop and think as frequently as the novices; (c) ESL proficiency appeared to explain part of the difference in strategy use between the experts and novices; and (d) after 6 months of instruction, novices had begun to use some of the expert writers' strategies.

Table 3. Japanese ESL Students' Writing Strategies by Sasaki

Writing strategies	Definition
Planning	
(1) Global planning	Detailed planning of overall organization
(2) Thematic planning	Less detailed planning of overall organization
(3) Local planning	Planning what to write next
(4) Organizing	Organizing the generated ideas
(5) Conclusion planning	Planning of the conclusion
Retrieving	
(1) Plan retrieving	Retrieving the already constructed plan
(2) Information retrieving	Retrieving appropriate information long term memory
Generating ideas	
(1) Naturally generated	Generating an idea without any stimulus
(2) Description generated	Generating an idea related to the previous description
Verbalizing	
(1) Verbalizing a proposition	Verbalizing the content the writer intends to write
(2) Rhetorical refining	Refining the rhetorical aspect(s) of an expression
(3) Mechanical refining	Refining the mechanical or (L1/ESL) grammatical aspect(s) of an expression
(4) Sense of readers	Adjusting expression(s) to the readers
Translating	
Rereading	Translating the generated idea into ESL
Evaluating	Rereading the already produced sentence
(1) ESL proficiency evaluation	Evaluating one's own ESL proficiency
(2) Local text evaluation	Evaluating part of the generated text
(3) General text evaluation	Evaluating the generated text in general
Others	
(1) Resting	

(2)	Questioning	Resting
(3)	Impossible to categorize	Asking the researcher a question Impossible to categorize

Riazi (1997) conducted a research to Iranian students in order to map out the strategies that are commonly used by the students. The result reveals that the strategies commonly employed by the students are metacognitive, cognitive, social, and search. The following is the summary of Riazi's research on composition strategies.

Table.4. Composing Strategies Proposed by Riazi (1997)

Composing Strategies	Constituents	Phase of Composing Process
<i>Cognitive Strategies</i>	Note taking	Reading & Writing
Interacting with the materials to be used in writing by manipulating them mentally or physically	Elaboration	Reading & Writing
	Use of Mother Tongue	Reading & Writing
	Knowledge and skill transfer from L1	Reading
	Inferencing	Writing
	Drafting (revising & editing)	Task representation & reading
<i>Metacognitive Strategies</i>	Assigning goals	Writing
Executive processes used to plan, monitor, and evaluate a writing task	Planning (making & changing outlines)	Reading & writing
	Rationalizing appropriate formats	Reading/writing/task representation
	Monitoring & Evaluation	Task representation Writing
<i>Social Strategies</i>	Appealing for clarifications	Reading and writing
Interacting with other persons to assist in performing the task or to gain affective control	Getting feedback from professors & peers	
	<i>Search Strategies</i>	Searching and using libraries(books, journal, Eric, microfiche)
Using guidelines		
Using others' writing as model		
Search and using supporting sources		

Previous review on the definition of writing strategies proves that the definition and the classification of writing strategies lead to confusion. Different scholar uses different terms to refer to similar features of strategies. Therefore, synthesizing all those strategies found out will simplify the concept of writing strategies.

Table. 5. Synthesis of ESL Writing Strategies

Order No	Strategies	Proposer
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1	Planning	Arndt (1987), Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997), Sasaki (2000)
2	Evaluating	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997), Sasaki (2000)
3	Use of L1	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997), Sasaki (2000)
4	Monitoring	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997)
5	Re-reading	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997)
6	Questioning	Arndt (1987) Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997), Sasaki (2000)
7	Repeating	Arndt (1987) Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997), Sasaki (2000)
8	Revising	Arndt (1987)
9	Resourcing	Arndt (1987), Riazi (1997)
10	Clarification	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997)
11	Retrieval	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997)
12	Rest/deferral	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997)
13	Organising	Wenden (1991), Riazi (1997)
14	Rehearsing	Sasaki (2000)
15	Comparing	Arndt (1987)
16	Summarising	Wenden (1991)
17	Defining terms	Wenden (1991)
18	Lead-in	Wenden (1991)
19	Avoidance	Wenden (1991)
20	Note-taking	Wenden (1991)
21	Elaborating	Riazi (1997)
22	Assigning goals	Riazi (1997)
23	Rationalising	Riazi (1997)
24	format	Riazi (1997)
25	Getting feedback	Riazi (1997)
26	Modelling	Riazi (1997)
27	Inferencing	Riazi (1997)
28	Sense of readers	Riazi (1997)
29	Generating ideas	Sasaki (2000) Sasaki (2000)

## CONCLUSION

Writing in second language is often regarded as laborious for some L2 learners since there are differences between L1 and L2. Language often becomes a constraint because lack of competence over linguistics will exhibit a range of difficulties in mastering second language. Therefore, maintaining writing strategies is a must for the L2 learners. Researches on L2 writing prove that some differences on the L2 writer also contribute to the differences of L2 writers such writing proficiency, writing development, and writer perception. In fact, the researchers studying learners' writing strategies has not come to the uniformity of operational definition writing strategies. As a result, on the basis of researches that emphasize on the investigation of writing strategies, a synthesis or taxonomy of writing strategies can be drawn. At least, there are 29 strategies, which are used by the L2 writers in learning writing.

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