

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation and Goal

Writing is one of the four skills in English language learning. L2 writing could be a joy and a fulfillment in converting thoughts into words; it could also be a torture in draining out the brain to work out the lines. For the writer, both L1 and L2 writing are great ways of conveying thoughts. However, writing is not paper and pens only; it requires constant modification to transmit thoughts into written forms clearly and effectively. The modification may be easy for L1 writers; however, it could be a heavy load for L2 writers, especially for low achievers lacking the skills of developing L2 writing, primarily because of the contrastive rhetoric differences between Chinese and English.

Since Chinese and English thinking patterns are different, it is not uncommon to find that L2 learners' compositions, though correct in spelling and grammar, are loose in organization and illogical in arranging their ideas and developing their content. As shown in Kaplan's (1996) "Culture Thought and Patterns in Intercultural Education," the difference between the spiral thinking pattern of Chinese and the linear thinking pattern of English leads to learners' first language interference in their second language writing. Furthermore, the codes and rules in form and the construction of grammatical stretches of different languages also contribute to distinctive cultures in

writing. L2 learners are rarely cognitively aware of L2 writing culture when they are composing their ideas. They have no idea of how to do the revision in their compositions. It is their insufficient training and knowledge in writing that hinders their development in writing and their self-monitoring in revision. Consequently, a good writing paragraph is not easy to achieve.

In Taiwan, English writing skill has been commanding great attention. The writing items are seen in TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), GRE (Graduate Record Examinations), SAT (Scholastic Assessment Tests), and GEPT (General English Proficiency Test). People should attain a certain level of language proficiency to apply for admission or a job. In other words, possessing good English writing skill helps people extend their job choices, further their study, and keep up with the internationalized world for English is a dominant language in trade, tourism, banking, commerce, research, and technology (Brown, 1991; Wang, 1996).

Teaching English in a vocational senior high school, this writer assumes that students' writing ability has to be developed as early as possible. Before teenage students become molded in their writing habit, some meaningful assignments in writing should help students to develop their L2 writing skill, especially in coherence which Chinese students find hard to achieve. This research will therefore focus on Chinese students' coherence in English writing.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore if participants can improve their coherence in writing through the exercise deliberately designed. Since L2 learners have been

observed to use their L1 to arrange their ideas and perform better organization in their writing (Lay, 1982), Chinese-English translation may facilitate learners' development of L2 coherent writing. Unskilled L2 learners have been found to benefit a lot from translation process, because their L2 compositions translated from L1 show better organization than those written directly in L2 (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992). More specifically, the transformation of L1 discourse structure assists their L2 writing because their first language organization ability serves to enhance their writing (Mohan & Lo, 1985; Cumming, 1989). Their semantic knowledge in L1 has actually helped them to generate a more comprehensible discourse in their L2 writing.

Although L2 writing difficulties in coherence have extensively been claimed, few studies have discussed how to teach coherence in L2 writing to facilitate learners' acquiring of coherence. Furthermore, even though translation of L1 has been found to help organize a better paragraph and generate a more comprehensive L2 writing, few studies have discussed how translation would promote learners' coherent writing. The observation inspires the researcher to further study how to help L2 learners acquire the idea of coherence and then achieve coherent writing. The researcher would develop a series of Chinese-English paragraph translation practice to be conducted in ESL writing classroom to see if the practice can help students write a coherent composition. The result of the study may suggest an alternative for L2 writing teachers to apply in their teaching and improve students' writing in coherence. This study tries to attain two purposes:

1. This paper will present the results of applying Chinese-English paragraph translation in improving students' coherent writing.

2. This paper will show the results of applying Chinese-English paragraph translation in students' improvements in revising their writing in coherence.

1.3 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study will arouse EFL teachers' awareness of the importance of instructing and guiding students to acquire the concept of coherent writing. Teachers will be encouraged to pay more attention to discourse level rather than focusing on the local mechanical problems in students' writing. More importantly, this present study will provide effective solutions to problems in students' acquisition of cohesive devices as a basis for teaching coherence in ESL classroom.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions are addressed:

1. Will participants perform better in coherent writing in post-test than in pre-test compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice?
2. Will participants better apply cohesive devices in compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice?
3. Will participants perform a better job in revising incoherent parts of compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice?
4. Will participants better apply cohesive devices to promote writing coherence while revising their compositions after doing the Chinese-English translation practice?