

REVISITING THE ROLE OF L1 IN L2 WRITING: TWO CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: Translating from L1 to the target language has been commonly seen as an ineffective way to grow in a second language by audiolingual methods and communicative approaches to language teaching. Nevertheless, studies by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), Kern (1994), and Cohen (1994) have revived the issue with some intriguing evidence. According to these studies, students use L1 as a cognitive strategy to understand and produce L2. Furthermore, Kobayashi and Rinnert found that texts translated from Japanese to English were rated higher than those directly written in English for style and content particularly. More recent studies have not only corroborated these findings (GHOBADI & GHASEMI, 2015; YIGSAW, 2012; WEIJEN et al., 2009) but also indicated techniques to use L1 in the FL classroom (YIGSAW). To better understand the issue, the present paper case studied how two international students used L1 while composing in L2 and examined the writing quality of their texts according to which language they used in pre-writing. Interviews about participants' processes after they had produced one composition, observations of four of their classes and their pre-writing material were the procedures. Their writing quality was measured by the students' scores in three essays: a first essay in which the language of pre-writing was English; a second essay in which the language of pre-writing was Malay; and a third essay in which the text was drafted in Malay and translated to English.

KEYWORDS: Contrastive rhetoric; L1 writing; L2 writing; L1 in L2 learning; effects of L1.

RESUMO: A tradução foi comumente vista como uma prática pedagógica pouco eficaz no ensino-aprendizagem de L2 por métodos audiolinguais e por abordagens comunicativas. No entanto, estudos desenvolvidos por Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), Kern (1994) e Cohen (1994), dentre outros, trouxeram novamente o assunto à baila com achados intrigantes. De acordo com esses autores, os aprendizes usam a L1 como estratégia cognitiva tanto na compreensão quanto na produção de L2. Além disso, Kobayashi & Rinnert mostram que textos traduzidos do japonês para o Inglês receberam pontuação mais alta do que aqueles escritos diretamente em inglês nos componentes estilo e conteúdo. Estudos mais recentes corroboram esses achados (GHOBADI & GHASEMI, 2015; YIGSAW, 2012; WEIJEN et al., 2009) e propõem técnicas para a inclusão da L1 na sala de aula de LE (YIGSAW). Para entender melhor o assunto, o presente artigo investigou como dois alunos internacionais usavam a L1 enquanto escreviam em L2 e examinou a qualidade de textos produzidos por dois alunos de inglês como segunda língua de acordo com a língua que usaram na pré-escritura. Para fazê-lo, entrevistou os dois aprendizes sobre o processo de escritura imediatamente após a produção de uma redação e os observou por quatro aulas. Examinou também todo o material de pré-escritura. Já a qualidade dos textos foi aferida pela pontuação obtida em três condições: na primeira a língua da pré-escritura foi o inglês; na segunda a língua da pré-escritura foi o Malaio; e na terceira o texto foi escrito em Malaio e traduzido para o inglês.

KEYWORDS: Retórica contrastiva; escritura em L1; escritura em L2; L1 na aprendizagem de L2; efeitos da L1.

INTRODUCTION

In the last fifty years, translating from L1 to the target language has been commonly seen as an ineffective way to grow in a second language by audiolingual methods (FRIES, 1945; LADO, 1957) and communicative approaches (FINOCCHIARO & BRUMFIT, 1983; SAVIGNON, 1983; HOWATT, 1984) to language teaching. Learners have been trained to believe that they can and should use only English if they want to master the English language. In other words, if they want to learn how to write in English, they have to write in English. Consequently, language learners set in search of this “other self who can and does perform cognitive operations in L2 exclusively” (COHEN, 1994, p.192), banishing L1 from any process related to L2.

However, studies in the 90’s have revived the issue with some intriguing evidence. Some of them show that students function cognitively and psychologically in L1, behaving only externally or socially in L2. Cohen (1994), for example, observed how American grade school children who were enrolled in a Spanish immersion program used English to process math problems presented in the target language. Besides using L1 to perform cognitive operations in L2, Cohen’s subjects reported favoring English in their cognitive processing. Particularly, whenever Cohen’s subjects faced conceptual difficulties, they would shift from Spanish to English. Their external behaviors though were always in Spanish. Cohen theorizes that those subjects’ success relates to the easiness with which they performed on-line translation of math concepts into the native language.

In a slightly different vein, Saville-Troike (1988) and Giacobbe (1992) provide similar evidence. Saville-Troike analyzed the language processing of nine Chinese students while they performed workbook tasks, finding that their internal speech was in Chinese. Giacobbe, for his part, analyzed the

acquisition of French verbs of motion by a Spanish speaking informant, finding that his subject needed to reconstruct incoming information in L1 before concepts emerged in L2.

Other studies show that students use L1 as a cognitive strategy to understand and produce L2 discourse. Kern (1994), for example, used think-aloud protocols to study the role of mental translation in second language reading, concluding that L1 facilitates semantic processing, eases memory constraints, and reduces affective barriers. Similarly, Tudor (1987), based on findings of a short classroom study with ESP students in Germany, suggests that L1 serves to “stretch” learners’ L2 productive abilities by precisely defining communicative goals and forcing them to expand their L2 resources: Oral translation of a text from German to English improved the precision, clarity, confidence level, and quality of his students’ English in written summaries and class discussions of the same text topic.

Reinforcing the perspective that L1 forms the basis rather than interferes with writing in L2, Edelsky (1982) discusses the relation of L1 and L2 texts produced by 28 elementary students enrolled in a bilingual Spanish program in Phoenix, AZ. She maintains that because writing is directly linked to literacy and to previous existing cognitive structures, general writing strategies, higher-level knowledge, and the orchestration of multiple cueing systems, L1 contributes positively to L2 texts.

Lay (1983) and Kobayashi & Rinnert (1992) further supported a facilitative role for L1 while examining how translation affected the quality of L2 texts. Lay conducted a case study of 4 Chinese adult ESL students while they composed in English aloud, concluding that by using the NL her students improved content, organization, and the level of detail of their L2 texts, creating a stronger impression on the reader. Similarly, Kobayashi & Rinnert found that texts translated from Japanese to English by 48 EFL university students in Japan received higher ratings than those students wrote directly in English,

particularly because of style and content. Their study also revealed that translations yielded longer texts and more complex sentences, though that condition increased the number of lexical, form, and transitional errors.

More recently, the topic has been re-evaluated by several researchers (GHOBADI & GHASEMI, 2015; KARIN & NASSAJI, 2013; YIGZAW, 2012; WEIJEN et al., 2009) who have documented the positive effects of the use of L1 in EFLers' composing processes. According to the authors, despite limitations that the use of L1 may bring (for example, less exposure to L2), there are aspects related to L2 writing that benefit considerably from such use, among them generation and organization of ideas. Thus, Ghobadi and Ghasemi as well as Weijen et al. recommend the judicious use of L1 in the FL classroom.

Karim & Nassaji (2013), and Ghobadi & Ghasemi (2015), in a thorough survey of the literature, show that translating into L2 benefits organization and the complexity of the target language essay, especially for students with lower levels of L2 proficiency. The authors not only reinforce previous findings by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), but also cite Uzawa (1996) who have highlighted the same benefits. Karim and Nassaji suggest that "if L2 writers are assisted to develop various composing strategies such as planning, organizing, reviewing and editing in their L1, they may be able to make use of these strategies when writing in their L2" (p.129). According to them, while low proficiency learners may use L1 in their L2 writing to compensate for their lack of L2 knowledge, advanced learners may transfer L1 writing strategies to L2. They recommend that writing instructors raise their learners' awareness of the strategies that work best for them through self-reflecting writing tasks and work to improve grammar and lexical knowledge typical of L2 models of usage.

Experimental studies found similar results (YIGSAW, 2012; WEIJEN et al., 2009). Yigsaw examined how 11 EFLers, Aramaic native speakers, used L1 while writing an argumentative essay in English and found that they make use of the L1 as a composing strategy, to compensate for possible deficiencies in their L2 proficiency, and also as a tool to facilitate their writing process. Participants who used L1 during the prewriting stage outdid significantly in their post-test writing results compared to those who didn't. Yigsaw's results highlight how prewriting in L1 related significantly to reaching the expected goal and improving idea generation, and the relation of proficiency and L1 use in L2 Writing: "More proficient learners transfer a number of other L1-based strategies including metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies to L2 writing [...]. Advanced EFLers appear to be better able to use their L1-based strategies and are also better able to make use of their L1 resources for other matters such as generating idea, monitoring, and lexical-searching purposes" (YIGSAW, 2012, p. 129). To raise the writing quality of EFLer's writing, Yigsaw suggest that pedagogical practice should encourage learners to plan and organize their writing in L1.

Therefore, what appears under audiolingual methodologies and communicative approaches as major obstacles to successful second language writing, students' first languages, may become major strengths if L1 is judiciously used as a writing strategy. When second language learners write in the target language, they activate a complete set of knowledge structures that have been categorized in L1. In using L1, they have freedom to deal with a set of cognitive abilities, stretching from matters of surface detail to abstract expectations and higher-order processing strategies. These assumptions are well grounded in recent research in reading theory, cognitive psychology, and writing as a complex cognitive process (FLOWER & HAYES, 1981; BEREITER & SCARDAMALIA, 1987). According to Bereiter & Scardamalia, writing not only is a challenging task per se (even in L1), but becomes twice as complex

when it brings in issues related to the L2. The lower the proficiency in L2, the higher the complexity (see also Wolfersberger, 2003 for effects of L1 use in the case of lower proficiency L2 writers). Apparently, L1 provides SLers with freedom in their higher level processing. This is why pre-writing in L1 affects the quality of L2 writing positively, as indicated by the reviewed studies.

Although the reviewed studies are unanimous in relation to benefits of L1 use in L2 writing, they also flash out how context and research procedures may interfere with these results. Ghobadi & Ghasemi (2015), for example, list some problem areas. First of all, L1-based techniques can only be used in monolingual classes (EFL contexts). Second, L2 writing classrooms should not be flooded with L2 under penalty of negatively impacting exposure to and output in L2, not to mention exposure to writing usage models. Third, proficiency level needs to be considered. The higher the proficiency, the less students will need L1. And finally, it is complicated to generalize across contexts, even if the study is experimental, because quality of writing is a nominal variable and languages are topologically idiosyncratic. Studies that involved Japanese and English, Spanish and English and Dutch and English may probably not come to similar results. In brief, further research is still necessary to enrich our knowledge of how the use of L1 may relate to writing quality in L2.

In this paper, I undertake this endeavor, examining the role L1 plays in L2 writing in an American university ESL environment. For a semester, I observed if and how two ESLers used L1 while composing in L2 for their freshman composition course. In addition, I examined the writing quality of 3 texts produced by them according to which language they used in pre-writing-- Malay or English only. The specific questions I try to answer are (1) How do these two students use L1 while composing in L2? (2) What major difficulties do they face to write in their native languages? (3) What major difficulties do they face to translate from their NL to English? (4) How does the quality of their texts vary according

to which language they used in pre-writing? Answers to these questions should interest second and foreign language teachers, and researchers in the field of crosslinguistic studies and writing in a second language. In the light of the existing research, I expect L2 texts to benefit from pre-writing in L1 and from translation, especially with regard to content, vocabulary, and organization.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Participants. To select participants, I matched them on variables such as native language (=Malay), major (=Finance), TOEFL scores (550 and 575; paper version), score in a diagnostic composition written in class (=75 on a 0-100 scale), gender (=male), and length of stay in the United States (=two months). In addition, I selected the two learners because they differ in the way they reported using L1 in their L2 writing. One reported never using L1 when writing in English. The other said that he translates words, sentences or ideas that prove difficult and that he thinks about and discusses topics in his native language before writing in English. Private interviews with the two learners revealed that they belong to the upper-middle class in Malaysia, as well as that they are 23 years old and hold diplomas in banking systems. For the purposes of this research, I call the learner who reported never using L1 in L2 writing “Fendy” and the one who reported using L1 “Anuar.”

Sources of Data. Transcripts of interviews held with the students throughout a semester, their pre-writing materials, three final drafts written for their composition courses, and notes of four class observations constitute the data. The final drafts originated from journal entries based on readings of *Transitions*, by Barbara Fine Clouse (1994). After choosing a topic related to the readings, the participants pre-wrote and revised their texts for three times.

Context of the Study. The two participants were enrolled in an international section of Freshman Composition at a university in the Midwestern United States. Their instructor was a Teaching Assistant who has a BA in English, experience in teaching international students, and who was working toward a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language at the time. Instruction focused on the reading and writing connection and included multiple drafting. Furthermore, to meet the instructor's requirements students needed to structure their essays with a thesis statement and clear topic sentences, writing no more than two typed pages to avoid mechanical mistakes. In brief, a traditional "Freshman Composition" approach to teaching academic writing.

Background information. Fendy, in addition to Malay and English, speaks Mandarin and Hokkien. Because his parents are English educated and his mother is Chinese, his family reads newspapers in English and Mandarin, everyday. Although his father is Malay, they never received newspapers in Malay. As to writing, he has done little writing in Malay, though the language at school has always been Malay. Besides, he does not like to write in general and believes "*this drafting thing is a waste of time.*" In addition, he reported having experience with brainstorming, outlining, mapping and other pre-writing techniques because of his business courses-- "*We do that for business, but not for English or Malay.*" His English instructors in Malaysia reinforced the need to use English only to achieve fluency in the language. With time, he reported, "*I think I will be able to think only in English.*"

Similarly to Fendy, Anuar believes it is possible to think only in English. However, he believes people need to start early such as his sisters did. His parents are also English educated and they only subscribe to newspapers written in English. English is prestigious in Malaysia and speaking it is a prerogative of highly educated people. Finally, Anuar made an interesting comment about gender

differences as related to which language they use at school: “*Only girls speak in English at school during breaks. Boys are expected to use Malay.*”

Procedures. With the cooperation of the instructor, I collected data during one semester. Fendy and Anuar received uniform information about the project: what it was, how we would go about it, and why I decided to investigate the topic. They also signed a consent form in which they agreed to participate and authorized their instructor to provide me with copies of their journal entries, pre-writing material, and essay drafts. In this form, I assured them that their anonymity would be preserved and that their participation was voluntary. At any moment they were free to quit. We agreed to meet every week, for at least half an hour.

In the first two weekly meetings, I elicited information about how and if they resorted to their first language while composing the first essay. I also collected information about major difficulties, level of confidence, writing instruction in Malaysia, previous learning experiences, beliefs about how to learn a language, and family literacy habits. By coincidence, both students chose *divorce* as their topic for the first essay.

In the next three meetings, I asked them to pre-write in Malay for their second essay. Fendy chose to write about *shame* and Anuar about *physical fitness*. I explicitly instructed them to write non-stop, disregarding concerns about form and concentrating specifically on ‘downloading’ as many ideas as possible. After ten minutes, I would call time and discuss feelings and difficulties that they faced while writing in their first language. The participants had no further access to the pre-writing material while writing their essays in English. Naturally, they also had to prewrite in English on the same topics to meet the course requirements.

In our fourth and last meeting, Fendy and Anuar not only prewrote but drafted the essay in Malay for later translation to English. We concentrated on pre-writing, drafting, and discussing translation difficulties. The translation itself was done at home, at their leisure. Both Fendy and Anuar decided to write about *euthanasia*.

Independent blind scoring. The three essays were graded by two teaching assistants who were teaching the same section of freshman composition on a 0-100 scale, according to 5 categories: Content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary, and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and format – see Appendix A for the rating sheet and Appendix B for Fendy’s essay number 3). The raters’ scores were averaged.

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer research question number one--“How do two ESLers use L1 to compose in L2”-- I interviewed the participants about their processes after they had produced the first composition for their composition course. I also examined their pre-writing materials and how they went about producing them. To answer research questions two and three--“What major difficulties do they face to write in their NL?” and “What major difficulties do they face to translate from their NL to English?” respectively-- I interviewed them as they produced their second and third essays (Appendix B). With regard to writing quality, I measured it by their scores on the three essays: The first essay in which the language of pre-writing was English; a second essay in which the language of pre-writing was Malay; and a third essay in which the text was drafted in Malay and translated to English. The scores and their sub-components provided the answer to research question number four.

To report the results of this study, I group information according to my research questions. In addition, I include a *background information* heading in which I describe the subjects' previous writing instruction, family literacy habits, and beliefs about learning a second language.

HOW DID FENDY AND ANUAR USE L1 TO COMPOSE THEIR FIRST ESSAY?

Fendy. Fendy related the need to think in Malay with his difficulty with the topic-- "*These essays about divorce, drugs...I don't know the facts...It is too hard.*" He went on to explain that in Malaysia divorce is not a common fact as it is in the US and that it took him a long time to come up with ideas: "*I thought in Malay to find a point, but I did not at all write or jot ideas down in Malay.*" He also mentioned that he discussed the topic with friends and talked aloud to himself in Malay. This report contradicted information he provided in a study I conducted previously, in which he said he never uses Malay when writing in English. When challenged about that fact, he added that he had writing in his mind and that he did not consider thinking or talking in Malay as a form of "using" the NL to write in the target language: "*In Malaysia we do not need to write journals or drafts. We have a topic and we write. Writing is writing.*" This conversation revealed that Fendy used the NL more than he was aware of to write the essay about divorce: He thought in Malay to write his journal entry and to do his pre-writing; he used Malay to find the main points of his essay; he said sentences in Malay and asked friends to help him find the closest meaning in English; and he used the Malay-English dictionary to search for appropriate words. Prompted about his major difficulties, Fendy explained that it is hard for him to write a thesis statement because in Malay people do not do that. Instead, they built the idea throughout the essay. He also noted that the transitions from paragraph to paragraph are hard: "*I never know what word I should use. I try to think in Malay, but it does not work.*"

Anuar. Similar to Fendy, Anuar suggested that topics like divorce and drugs are hard to discuss because they are not part of his family psychological reality in Malaysia: “*I have to use my imagination because I do not have that knowledge.*” Contrary to Fendy, he avowed using Malay to overcome his difficulties. According to him, he has the habit of pre-writing in Malay to “*get things organized.*” However, he never translates from Malay to English. In his own words “*I based my writing on the reading and it became kind of a summary. I had to reconstruct it. To reconstruct it, I wrote in Malay, listed my ideas, wrote some more, and then re-wrote in English. But I did not translate.*” Anuar also revealed that he did not use Malay to produce the final draft except to make some grammar corrections: “*First, I try to do it in English. When it doesn’t work, I think about how it works in my language.*” He tried to work exclusively with the instructor’s comments and the text in English. Anuar’s words are congruent with his report in the previous study I conducted. He used pre-writing techniques in his native language to help him generate and organize ideas before writing essay number one and to help him with grammar correction. His major difficulty was incorporating the instructor’s suggestions to his final draft. Because he misunderstood the comments, he ended up writing an essay that had little in common with his draft and that did not fit his title.

Both subjects reported not being confident about their final products. They felt insecure about their ability to express ideas in good English as well as about interpreting the correction symbols used by the instructor. Fendy, for example, brought up the fact that he can never figure out what is wrong with his verb tenses or with incomplete sentences. Anuar expressed a similar concern. Whenever he tries to follow the instructor’s comments he ends up making other mistakes: “*It is very frustrating.*”

DIFFICULTIES TO WRITE IN THE NL: THE STORY OF THE SECOND ESSAY

In this phase, both subjects pre-wrote in Malay for their second essay. Fendy wrote about shame and Anuar about physical fitness. Clearly, they have not had experience with freewriting even in their own language. Apparently, most of the writing they did in their country had to do with content area courses. They hardly got to write about topics that require them to express their own opinions or attitudes toward life. In Fendy's words *"I refuse to use my own experience in my journal. It is very particular."*

Fendy complained about writing in Malay: *"I do not like writing in my language."* When prompted about the ideas he included in his pre-writing about shame, he said *"Oh...I have a bunch of things...sending parents to nursery homes, girls who smoke, homosexuality...It is easier than English because I know the vocabulary. I know what I have to write."* Though he complained about the topic and about expressing his opinions, according to his oral translation, Fendy did talk about girls who smoke, homosexuality, and taking care of elders in his pre-writing in Malay.

Anuar, on the other hand, seemed more comfortable with the act of writing in Malay. However, he was slow and had to complement our activities at home or working with me for an extended period of time: *"You have to think, you know...even in my language."* When I mentioned that he produced many potential ideas for his essay, he added *"But I am not an expressive person. I do not know how to describe or tell my feelings. It is as hard in English as it is in Malay."* Therefore, similar to Fendy, Anuar had difficulties with expressive essays.

The second essay. Again, the participants expressed concern about fulfilling the instructor's expectations because it is hard to write *"in the English way"* (Anuar). *"In my country we show glances and only at the end the idea is clear. I had to write this thing three times before getting it this way."* They also revealed that they never know what and how they have to do it. Referring to a comment in

which the instructor suggested that he should compare shame in Malaysia to shame in the US, Fendy said: *I never know what and how I have to do. How can I make comparisons with the American culture when I have just arrived here? I know about the Malay culture.*” Finally, both reiterated that using the right form is a major difficulty--*Malay has no grammar* (Fendy). Many times, even though the instructor marks the problem areas, they cannot understand what is wrong. For example, the instructor indicated that in the sentence *“he will be more confidence”* there was a form problem. This sentence became *“he will gain more confident.”* In other instances, usages which were appropriate were incorrectly changed. This was the case of every sentence that had the verb *“to prevent.”* In his drafts, Anuar wrote *“it will help me to prevent diseases such as heart problem or overweight.”* In the final draft the sentence became *“it will help me to prevent from any diseases such as heart problems or obesity.”*

In all, Fendy’s and Anuar’s second essays showed more cohesive paragraphs and a stronger voice than their first essays. To my surprise, I found instances in which the first personal pronoun was used such as in *“I think differently because...”* or *“I exercise.”* These essays also grew in specificity. Fendy, for example, included in every paragraph sentences of the type *“For example, I exercise by doing swimming.”*

TRANSLATING FROM THEIR NL TO ENGLISH: THE STORY OF THE THIRD ESSAY

The two participants were not only skeptical about any positive effect translating could bring to their texts, but were also uneasy with the idea of translating their last essay from Malay to English. According to them, it was too risky. They were sure their final products would be worse because of the differences between the way one writes in Malay and in English.

Some of the major translation difficulties they reported have to do with tense agreement and word order. According to Fendy and Anuar, in Malay there is no marker for past tense, but there are introductory sentences or adverbials that announce that the sentence that follows happened in the past. For example, the sentence “The boy ran to his father’s car” would be literally translated to Malay as “If I rewind, boy small that running toward car father his.” Other times it is the context that will express what English expresses by inflection of verb forms. Therefore, they got confused when trying to express the same idea in English. The same holds true for plural markers and feminine and masculine personal pronouns. In Malay, plural is indicated by reduplication and the second person singular is used in general. There is no gender distinction; it is the context that clarifies what is going on. Anuar added that “*vocabulary in Malay is deep. It always have multiple meanings*” while in English there is always a specific word to convey an intended idea. In his opinion, in Malay the context plays a greater role than in English to shape meaning. That is why his essays seem too broad or full of general ideas and that is why he does not believe translating from Malay to English will improve his writing in English. The same holds true for plural markers and feminine and masculine personal pronouns. In Malay, plural is indicated by reduplication and the second person singular is used in general. There is no gender distinction; it is the context that clarifies what is going on. Anuar added that “*vocabulary in Malay is deep. It always have multiple meanings*” while in English there is always a specific word to convey an intended idea. In his opinion, in Malay the context plays a greater role than in English to shape meaning. That is why his essays seem too broad or full of general ideas and that is why he does not believe translating from Malay to English will improve his writing in English. It took me a while to understand what their translation difficulties were because they could not name the grammatical categories. Again, Fendy mentioned “*Malay has no grammar.*”

The third essay. Surprisingly, Fendy's and Anuar's translations were more organized and clear as compared to their previous work. Fendy's thesis *"I agree with mercy killing because it will bring many economical benefits, lessen the burden of the family members, and end the suffering of the patients's"* [sic] was diligently fulfilled across the three body paragraphs that he produced out of the Malay draft. Anuar, also succeeded in putting a thesis together and developing it. His thesis read *"Euthanasia should be carried upon because it will stop the deep suffering of the patient, lessen the medical cost and time spent, and also benefits that other patients received in terms of organ supply"* [sic]. Additionally, it is my impression that their concerns about translating did not materialize. Even during the on-line oral translation of their pre-writing from Malay to English I did not see more grammar or diction problems than in the first essay, which they produced using only English. Actually, their essays were more fluent and with fewer mistakes as compared to the first and second essays.

HOW DOES THE QUALITY OF THEIR TEXTS VARY ACCORDING TO THE THREE WRITING CONDITIONS?

Results confirm my working hypothesis and previous research: Students produced better texts when they processed information in the native language by translating and pre-writing for content and organization. Table 1 displays the score averages for each component in the rating sheet as well as the overall score by student.

The essays they drafted in Malay yielded higher scores than those in which they used English only. Those they pre-wrote in the native language (research condition number two) yielded mixed results. In the case of Anuar the writing quality improved (essay #1= 61.4; essay #2= 73.6; essay #3= 75.5), whereas in the case of Fendy only content and organization were rated higher. Overall, content is

the area that benefited the most, followed by organization and grammar. Below I describe the results of each case in detail.

Anuar's essays. According to the raters, Anuar, in **essay number one**, provided inadequate support and details for his thesis statement. His paragraphs not only lacked unity and coherence (organization = 16.7 on a scale from 0-25), but were weak in terms of content (content = 17.5 on a scale of 0-30). Though there were some grammar errors, in general sentences were grammatically correct (grammar = 19.8 on a scale from 0-30). However, word choice (rated 5.2 on a scale from 0-10) and mechanics (rated 2.2 on a scale from 0-5) were poor. The overall score average was 61.4.

Essay number two, for its part, got a 73.6 score average mainly because of content (adequate thesis, sufficient details, and main ideas accompanied by relevant support; rated 22.3 on a scale from 0-30), and organization (rated 19.5 on a scale from 0-25), in that order. The raters agreed that the introduction and the body were cohesive and unified, but that the conclusion was weak. As for sentence structure and grammar, the raters considered that the second essay had a fewer number of grammar errors (rated 23 on a scale from 0-30) than essay number one (rated 19.8). Furthermore, the texts produced according to the second research condition showed an advantage with regard to mechanics and vocabulary. In brief, in research condition number two, pre-writing in Malay yielded better results (overall grade = 73.6) than writing only in English (overall grade = 61.4).

As compared to essay number one (writing only in English), **essay number three** (writing in Malay for later translation to English) also improved Anuar's writing quality in terms of content (rate = 22.3 on a scale of 0-30), organization (rate=20.1 on a scale of 0-25), grammar (rate=23.3 on a scale from 0-30), vocabulary (rate=5.7 on a scale from 0-10), and mechanics (rate=4.1 on a scale of 0-5), in that order. In addition, Anuar's writing quality in research condition three improved slightly as compared to

research condition two (overall score=75.5): The sub-components “content,” “organization,” “grammar,” and “vocabulary” yielded similar results. “Mechanics” is the component which yielded the greatest difference ($d=1.3$) between the research conditions two and three.

Fendy’s essays. According to the two raters, Fendy, in **essay number one**, provided a moderately adequate thesis but used inadequate and insufficient amount of details (content =19.7). His organization, however, was moderately weak (rate = 18.6 on a scale from 0-30). The raters agreed that he had an acceptable introduction and paragraph coherence, but a weak conclusion. Furthermore, most of his sentences were grammatically correct (grammar = 23.6 on a scale from 0-30), his word choice adequate (rate=7.4 on a scale from 0-10), and the mechanics good (rated 4 on a scale from 0-5). Overall, Fendy’s essay number one (written only in English) got a grade of 73. The text produced according to **research condition number two** (pre-writing in Malay) got a slightly lower grade (72.3) than that produced according to research condition number one, countering my expectations. Though it yielded higher rates for “content” and “organization”, it yielded lower rates for “grammar”, “vocabulary” (a difference of .5 in both instances), and “mechanics” (a difference of 1.1). Those differences reflected on the final grade.

On the other hand, the **third essay** confirmed my expectations. The use of translation helped Fendy to produce a text that yielded higher rates as compared to that he produced using only English (essay number one) or to that he produced pre-writing in Malay. Essay number three was superior in terms of content, organization, and grammar. Vocabulary and mechanics yielded slightly lower rates than research condition number one and higher rates than research condition number two.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This and previous studies seem to support a facilitative role for L1 in L2 writing (eg. KOBAYASHI & RINNERT, 1994; WEIJEN et al., 2009; WOLFERSBERGER, 2003; YIGSAW, 2012). My interviews with Anuar and Fendy revealed that they use L1 50% of the time to write in English. Fendy uses it most of the time internally, by thinking in Malay, and sometimes externally, by talking in Malay even though he reported not using it. This result confirms previous findings by Cohen (1994), Giacobe (1992), Saville-Troike (1988), and Edelsky (1982). Learners use L1 to write in L2 because writing is directly associated with existing knowledge structures. One can only write about what one knows. L1 then assumes a facilitative role, allowing students to access, retrieve, and manipulate ideas at their own cognitive levels, using their higher level processing skills freely and benefitting from top-down processing.

Their difficulty with topics also reinforces the connection between writing, existing knowledge, and the need to use L1. If divorce is not part of the students' psychological reality how can they describe the feelings or problems associated with it? Worse, how can they perform this cognitive operation in a language that is not theirs and that categorizes concepts and conveys information in different ways? The topics or conceptual difficulties led Fendy and Anuar to switch to L1 internally and externally, most frequently. By doing this, they could search for ideas within their own cultural context and benefit from top-down processing strategies. In Kern's (1994) words, by using L1 the subjects eased memory constraints to process information. Other times, they also switched to L1 because of grammatical, structural or transitional difficulties (see also UZAWA, 1996 who relates improvement in writing quality to *noticing*, as proposed by Richard Schmidt [1993]. Attention resources are activated. As they do so, autonomous perception of the way the language works occurs).

Findings of the last phase of the study explained the difficulties reported with correction symbols. Their problem is the lack of experience with what the symbols mean. That is, if in Malay they do not have gender-related pronouns, articles, tense and number markers, how can they understand the correction symbols? Though they are fully aware that these grammatical categories and inflections exist in English, they struggle to bring that knowledge to the conscious level. They stare at a phrase like “*benefit of physical fitness*” and though the correction symbol is there, they cannot verbalize what is missing or connect a triangle to an article or an “f” to a problem with form even though the keys are in their syllabus. They need to see similar sentences that show the correct usage.

The results of this case study also reminds me that often times ESLers do not lack control of writing skills, but an understanding of how the English language operates in context. Fendy and Anuar made clear that in Malay vagueness is appreciated. Such appreciation is present even in the Malay language structure itself. It is the context that determines when an action occurs, if it is a female or a male who is involved, and what the intended message really is-- “*meaning is deep in Malay.*” According to them, the Malay language depends highly on context and on information which is shared by its speakers. Malay writers expect the reader to engage fully in the process of meaning construction, filling in the gaps with the knowledge reader and writer share, but that the text does not specify. The specificity required by English texts is not something that the Malay culture and literacy traditions value.

Awareness of this issue helped me understand the subjects’ reluctance in using translation. My subjects were afraid of falling into the Malay discourse style. The use of L1 then must then be judicial, as other studies have already indicated (eg. GHOBADI & GHASEMI, 2015; KARIN & NASSAJI, 2013; YIGZAW, 2012; WEIJEN et al., 2009). Students should be aware that using L1 is a means to access ideas, combine information, and structure a text. Literal translation will not do much for them. They

need to take distance and use L1 to access ideas, being aware of how the English language operates in context and what English readers expect to find in a text. Lack of audience awareness transpired in several of Anuar's and Fendy's comments and texts. They expect their English reader, in this case the instructor, to fill in these gaps. Unfortunately, that is not exactly how written texts operate in English speaking contexts. English tends to be a *writer responsible language* (Hinds, 1987).

Finally, both subjects believe that they will get used to thinking only in English with time, which would avoid word-order and diction difficulties in English. Such belief is related to their previous L2 instruction. They were taught to believe that they can think only in English. Anuar mentioned that because his sisters started early enough, now she can think only in English. Given time then, that "other self who can and does perform cognitive operations in L2 exclusively" (Cohen, 1994, p. 192) will come to life. If this is true, bilinguals have then two information processing centers, one in L1 and one in L2. In light of the studies reviewed and of the need to perform cognitive operations in L1, it is more likely that L1 and L2 are simply two ways of externalizing through speech or written language an internal operation that involves conceptual structures. Because conceptual structures derive mainly from life experiences, L1 or the language in which the student has been socialized or enculturated grants flight autonomy in conceptually-driven processes.

Scores seem to support my interpretation. Both students in this case study produced better texts in terms of content and organization when they processed information in L1. Students' texts benefitted from the enhanced top-down processing allowed by L1, confirming previous findings by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), Weijen et al. (2009), Yigsaw (2012) and my own expectations. Grammar and vocabulary also benefitted somewhat from translation.

Contrary to my expectations, pre-writing and translation (research conditions two and three) did not yield similar average scores in the case of Fendy. However, because the score difference between research conditions one and two was .7 and derived mainly from the “grammar,” “vocabulary,” and “mechanics” components, I argue that it should not impact the conclusion of this study. If we understand writing as the process of successfully co-constructing ideas, the second research condition helped the student writer fulfill the goal. Fendy’s grammatical and mechanical problems grew out of his effort to topicalize a comparison between the American and the Malay culture. This was not the point of his pre-writing text, but a suggestion offered by the instructor. Perhaps, if that comment had not been there, the story of Fendy’s essay on shame would have been different. In brief, because the ratings were higher for content and organization and because there is a strong theoretical basis supporting the use of conceptual-driven strategies to improve the quality of written texts, I conclude that L1 facilitated writing in L2 in this study. Further research with students from different language backgrounds and bigger samples may further clarify my point.

Implications. What is the objective of ESL writing instruction? To teach ESLers to produce error-free English like discourse or to teach them to express ideas effectively? Anuar’s and Fendy’s accounts seem to indicate that it is to create error-free English like discourse. They not only have to learn to construct texts around clearly stated ideas, facts, and context independent language, countering their writing experiences in Malay, but also to restrict their texts to two pages to avoid too many mistakes. Both subjects were afraid of using Malay in their writing process in English because they know Malay discourse style values vagueness whereas English values explicitness.

If we understand our mission as being to teach students to search for knowledge structures, combine information, and co-construct messages successfully, processing information in L1, internally

and externally, contributes positively to L2 writing. No matter what surface traces L1 may leave, SL texts become richer at the conceptual level. All in all, to work on mechanics seems less complex than on discourse and logical organization of thoughts. Pedagogical practice could focus specifically on forms that deserve attention. If these results are replicable to other populations and settings, perhaps it is time to review current ESL and EFL teaching methodologies that insist on the truism of the English only approach.

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APPENDIX A: RATING SCALE BY RATER AND STUDENT WRITER**FENDY**

Raters	A	B	A	B	A	B
ESSAYS	1		2		3	
CONTENT	20	23	18	24	22	26
ORGANIZATION	19	22	19	21	20	22
SENTENCE STRUCTURE)	23	22	20	23	25	23
VOCABULARY	7	7	6	7	8	7
MECHANICS	4	4	4	3	4	4
TOTAL	73	78	67	78	79	82

ANUAR

Raters	A	B	A	B	A	B
ESSAYS	1		2		3	
CONTENT	13	16	24	23	21	23
ORGANIZATION	14	16	20	21	20	21
GRAMMAR AND PHRASE STRUCTURE	21	22	21	21	24	21
VOCABULARY	7	7	8	6	8	7
MECHANICS	4	4	4	3	4	4
TOTAL	59	65	77	74	77	76

APPENDIX B: THIRD ESSAY – Fendy’s essay [sic]

To terminate one’s life is known as killing. Often we hear people talking about mercy killing. Some of them agree but some of them disagree with the action. As we know, mercy killing is prohibited in most religions and laws in some states. On the contrary, I agree with mercy killing because it will bring many economical benefits, lessen the burden of the family members, and end the suffering of the patient’s.

When the doctor has no hope of finding a cure, the costs of keeping alive a patient can be more than expected. This issued has been discussed more and more every day. People are trying to determine whether it is worth to keep a patient alive a little longer. As for me, I believe it is not worth of doing so since we have already known that there is no cure for the patient disease. Although it is good to keep the patient alive for as long as possible, but thousands and millions of dollars of costs might incur to up keep the patient. Why spend abundant of money on someone who is going to die when the money could be used for other causes. By saving up the costs of up keeping the patient alive, it will also lesson the burdens of the family.

The financial costs is not the only costs that burden the family. There are other costs as well, such as the time of taking care of the patient every day at the hospital. Although we know the hospital provides de best facilities to its patient, however the nurse cannot afford to be there taking care of a particular patient 24 hours a day whereas there are other patients to look after. The family member will have to take turn taking care of the patient. This will be inefficient as they topo have to go to work and take care of other business. Therefore, I think it is not wise giving trouble to other people because of one l’s illness.

Mercy killing is also a way 6to end a patient suffering. The patient who has no interest to live any longer should be grant the right to die naturally as he/she knows sooner or later he/she will die. Therefore, by prolonging a patient’s life, we will only make life harder for him/her to live. I also truly support these action because we just do not have the heart to see the patient’s suffer longer especially when it involves someone we love.

As a whole, although there are laws that prohibits mercy killing, it should be allowed to be performed because of economical benefits, lessen the burden of the family members, and end the suffering of the patient’s. No one knows whether it is a sin or a reward to do mercy killing. Let Gods be the judge in every action that we made.