

PROCESSES OF COMPOSITION IN NARRATIVE AND
ARGUMENTATIVE GENRES : A CASE STUDY OF
MALAY UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory comparative investigation attempts to examine the cognitive processes, concerns and preoccupations involved in writing out narrative and argumentative compositions among ESL Malay upper secondary school students Malaysia.

The subjects are selected from two different Islamic fully-residential schools in Selangor. From them, the following six sets of data have been obtained :-

- i) observation of the subjects writing behaviour.
- ii) the subjects' think-aloud protocols.
- iii) the subjects' narrative and argumentative compositions.
- iv) the subjects' answers to the questions in the Process Log.
- v) the subjects' answers to the questions in the background variable questionnaire.
- vi) the subjects' comments, during the follow-up interviews.

The findings indicate that the narrative genre differs in a few aspects from the argumentative one. However, irrespective of whichever mode a writer is involved in producing, he has to undergo similar composing processes. Besides, there also exist identical linguistic constraints. In addition, if the writer is an ESL learner, there are difficulties to continually produce correct language in circumstances that he has no full control. Indeed, the list of problems does not stop here. Simultaneously, as the writer wrestles with the above mentioned obstacles, he has to strive to apply his knowledge about the narrative or argumentative genre's unique combination of

purpose, audience traits and knowledge, reader's expectation, structure and format options, and other questions about the rhetorical situation. Only then, the ESL writer is able to write successfully in these two genres.

Last but not least, it is hoped that the findings of this study could serve to provide pedagogical enlightenment to ESL teachers and educators.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	i
ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
 CHAPTER	
One :	INTRODUCTION 1
	1.1 Introduction 1
	1.2 Statements of the Problem 4
	1.3 Purpose of the Study 7
	1.4 Definition of Terms 9
	1.5 Significance of the Study 14
 Two :	 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE 18
	2.1 Introduction 18
	2.2 Researchers on the Composing Process 19
	2.3 Overview of Findings on the Composing Process 45
	2.3.1 The Composing Process 45
	2.3.2 Phases of the Composing Process 46
	2.3.2.1 Prewriting 46
	2.3.2.2 Composing 48
	2.3.2.3 Revising 49
	2.4 Genre Theory and the Writing Process 50
	2.4.1 Defining Genre 51
	2.4.2 The Narrative Genre 56
	2.4.3 The Argumentative Genre 61
	2.5 Schema Theory 64
	2.6 Overview of the Findings on the Narrative and Argumentative Genres 67
	2.7 Overall Overview of the Findings on the Composing Process in the Narrative and Argumentative Genres 70
 Three :	 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES 72
	3.1 Design of the Study 72

3.2	Pilot Study	78
3.3	Subjects of the Study	80
3.4	Procedures	82
3.4.1	Elicitation of Information on the Composing Process	82
3.4.2	Elicitation of Information on Composing in the Narrative and Argumentative Genres	88
3.5	Methods of Analysis of Data	88
3.5.1	Methods of Analysis for the Composing Process	88
Four	ANALYSIS OF DATA	95
4.1	Introduction	95
4.2	Composing Process	96
4.3	Phases of the Composing Process	102
4.3.1	Prewriting	104
4.3.2	Composing	110
4.3.3	Revising	117
4.4	Analyses of the Subjects' Narrative and Argumentative Compositions	124
4.4.1	Analyses of the Subjects' Narrative Compositions	125
4.4.2	Analyses of the Subjects' Argumentative Compositions	143
4.5	Similarities and Differences between the Narrative and Argumentative Genre	180
4.6	A Summary of Main Findings on the Composing Process in the Narrative and Argumentative Genres	183
Five	CONCLUSIONS	188
5.1	The Outcome of the Study	188
5.2	Limitations of the Study	190
5.3	Implications for Further Research	193
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	198
	APPENDICES	208
A	Descriptions of Contents of the Three Papers of the SPM English Language 1322/1119 Examination	209

B	ESL Composition Profile	211
C	English Proficiency Test / Cloze 'B' Test	214
D	Subjects' outlines, aborted attempts and drafts	218
E	Subjects' Composing - aloud protocols	241
F	Process Log Writing Behaviours Interview Guide	264
G	Background / Variables Questionnaires / Interview Guide	271
H	Sample Writing Behaviours Checklist	275

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table</i>		<i>Page</i>
1	The Subjects' Writing Behaviours	103
2	Classification on the subjects' revisions according to time of occurrence	118
3	Qualitative nature of the subjects' revision according to Faigley and Witte (1981)	119
4	Length of subjects' essays and the number of revisions they made	121
5	Percentages of subjects' revision against the length of each of their essays	122
6	Divisions of marks according to ESL Composition Profile of each subject's narrative and argumentative essays	124