

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As early as 1963, researchers began to question the effectiveness of teaching writing based on research on the end product. Braddock et al. (1963) conducted a study on writing researches and noted that the focus of research was on evaluation of compositions that students wrote i.e. the written products. These studies seemed to conclude that improvement in writing could be achieved through a pedagogical approach that focused on usage, structure, or correct form. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), at that time writing classes focused on end products i.e. written products rather than process of writing. They added that researches on composing processes were prompted by a few factors. Some of these factors were high dropout rate of non-native students such as Puerto Ricans, Indochinese and Hispanics in tertiary institutions as a result of ineffective writing ability and dissatisfaction among teachers with the traditional approach to writing instruction emphasizing on products. Faigley et al. (1985:96)) are of the opinion that text analysis fell into disfavor because it could not provide direct evidence about composing processes and the evidence was unreliable.

In rejecting the emphasis on product analysis in writing research, Janet Emig conducted the classic research on composing process in 1971 looking at what her students did when they wrote. One of Emig's crucial findings was that writing is a continuing act of discovery of what one wanted to say. Her research marked a shift in the focus of research from product to process. Other significant researches that followed Emig's classic research on composing

processes were those conducted by Sondra Perl in 1978 and Nancy Sommers in 1980. Whilst initial researches on composing processes tried to encapsulate all the processes involved in writing, later researches in the 80s were more focused on specific processes like planning, revision and re-writing.

Researches on composing processes of first language writers provided a guideline to earlier researches on second language writers where researchers were prone to compare their findings with that of the first language writers' research. According to Krapels (1991), researchers of second language writing not only used the research methods but also in most cases concurred with the findings of the first language writing researches. Research methods such as coding scheme formulated by Sondra Perls in her research conducted in 1978, writing tasks in Pianko's 1979 and questionnaires by Faigley, 1984 have been adopted in some L2 studies.

2.2 Research on the Composing Processes of First Language Writers

Researches on composing processes of L1 writers can be traced back to Janet Emig's landmark research in 1971 entitled "The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders" where she studied eight high school seniors as they wrote. Her research methodology included "think aloud protocol" whereby her subjects verbalized their thoughts while composing, which was audio taped and observed by her. Emig also conducted retrospective interview with each subject to gather information on his or her writing process and she collected the students' written products, notes and outlines. According to Emig, the students exhibited a variety of behaviors while composing thus indicating the non-linear and recursive nature of writing, that is, writers move back and forth in the act of writing such as planning, drafting,

rehearsing and revising. This finding opposed the past assumptions about composing where composing was thought to be a linear process. An important finding from Emig's study was that writing involved a continuing attempt to discover what it is one wanted to say.

According to Zamel (1982), other findings from researches done by Sondra Perl in 1978 and Nancy Sommers in 1980 were consistent with Emig's. Perl found that even unskilled writers employed consistent and stable composing strategies to discover meaning when they re-examined what they had already written in order to discover the direction of their thoughts. She also discovered that less skilled writers who view composing as more mechanical and formulaic are inhibited by their concerns with correctness and form that they cannot get beyond the surface in order to anticipate the needs and expectations of their readers. In her study on the writing strategies of more proficient writers, Perl observed the recursive nature of the writing process where the writers go back in order to move forward (Zamel, 1982:197-198).

Nancy Sommers who studied the writing strategies of less experienced and more experienced writers in 1980 also found that less skilled writers revised in the most limited way; concerned with lexicon and teacher-generated rules and rarely modified ideas that had already been written down. Sommers observed that the more experienced writers viewed their writing from a more global perspective where they changed whole chunks of discourse in the process of discovering meaning. She also concurred with both Emig and Perl that writing is a repeated process of discovery (Zamel 1982:198).

Studies on composing processes of L1 writers done by Emig, Perl, Sommers and other researchers provided invaluable insight for researches on L2 writers in terms of methodologies and findings as can be seen in the following researches.

2.3 Research on the Composing Process of L2 writers

According to Krapels (1991), the first few researches on composing processes of L2 writers were replications of L1 composing studies, for example Zamel in 1976 and Raimes in 1979. Both these researchers encouraged others to apply the knowledge gained from L1 composing studies into their writing research and instruction. This marked the beginning of investigations of L2 writing processes and also the usage of process oriented pedagogy in the teaching of writing (Krapels, 1991). As L2 studies replicated the L1 studies, earlier researchers not only utilized similar research design and methodologies but also tended to compare the L2 writers' behavior with the findings in L1 studies.

2.3.1 Comparison of Composing Behaviors of L2 and L1 Writers

In 1983, Zamel conducted a study on six advanced L2 students with a conclusion that L2 writers have similar composing behavior as L1 writers. Using a case-study approach, Zamel obtained her data from observing her subjects while they composed, conducting a retrospective interview upon completion of their writing and collecting all their written materials. She found that the skilled L2 writers did more revision and spent more time on their essays than the unskilled writers. Her other findings on the skilled L2 writers concurred with the findings of Pianko (1979) and Sommers (1980) on skilled L1 writers. Among her findings were that skilled L2 writers were similar to skilled L1 writers in

aspects such as concerned with ideas first, revised at the discourse level, exhibited recursiveness in their writing processes, and saved editing until the end of the process. Zamel's unskilled L2 writers also exhibited similar composing behaviors as Sommers's (1980) where they revised less, focused on small bits of the essay and edited from the beginning to the end of the process.

In contrast with Zamel's findings, Raimes (1987) contended that whilst similarities existed between L1 and L2 writers, there were also differences between them. Raimes found differences when she compared her L2 subjects to the L1 subjects of Pianko (1979) and Perl (1979). She noted that her L2 subjects wrote more, exhibited more commitment to the writing task, produced more content, and paid less attention to errors than Perl's subjects. This view is shared by Perego and Boyle (1997) citing one of the differences as the limitations in expressive ability faced by second language writer in terms of vocabulary, syntax and idiomatic expressions.

Lay (1982) conducted a study to determine how four adult Chinese ESL learners compose in English using case-study approach. She obtained her data using think-aloud protocol with audiotapes and her subjects' written products. One of her research questions was to determine whether composing process was more difficult for ESL students. She found that the composing process was more difficult for L2 writers although they used similar strategies as L1 writers such as rereading topics, going back and forth in the text and re-evaluating organization.

Taking a look at researches on Malaysian students, Dryden (1987) conducted her study in New York where she examined the composing processes of five Malaysian Malay

ESL/EFL college writers using a multi-method approach to obtain her data. Apart from think-aloud protocols, she used questionnaires, retrospective interviews and written products as her source of data. She noted that all her writers found writing a recursive process thus affirming Emig's finding. Apart from this, she found that the advanced writers reviewed their writing extensively while the weaker writers revised less although all five writers edited globally. In her analysis of data, she noted that four of the writers translated from Malay to English when experiencing problems writing in English.

In the Malaysian context, Lee (1989) conducted a study on the composing processes of two skilled and two unskilled undergraduate writers using case-study method. She sought to determine if the writing behaviors observed could be distinguished in terms of the writing proficiency of the subjects. Her sources of data were videotape, written products, questionnaire and retrospective interview. She found several differences between the skilled and unskilled writers. One of her findings was that the unskilled writers were more concerned with the surface level demands of the task in terms of grammatical aspect while the skilled writers focused on the more demanding aspects of the writing assignment i.e. fulfilling the rhetorical demands of the task. Her findings thus concurred with Perls (1979) and Sommers (1980) who both suggested that inexperienced writers pay more attention on form. Another finding is that the skilled writers thought in English while the unskilled writers thought in Bahasa Malaysia for the most part.

What has been reviewed thus far are researches on the composing processes of L2 writers that are then compared to the findings of researches on L1 writers. In the following section, the researcher will look at studies conducted on bilingual writers writing in their first language and in the English language. In studies with bilingual writers, the subjects

were asked to write in two languages, usually their first language and in the English language. Researchers such as Edelsky (1982), Arndt (1987) and Cumming (1989) reported the transfer of L1 writing knowledge into L2 writing. Although there are not many comparison studies on bilingual writers, the few that have been done are relevant to my present study.

2.4 Researches on the Composing Processes of Bilingual Writers

Researches conducted by Edelsky (1982), Arndt (1987), Tam (1988), Cumming (1989), Kobayashi(1989), Friedlander (1991) and Noorchaya (1994) are the few comparison studies on bilingual writers. These researches compared the composing processes of bilingual writers writing in their first language and in English. Noorchaya went a step further by comparing trilingual composing processes. Most of these studies show that composing behaviors cut across languages where writing and revising process in L2 are similar to those in L1.

Edelsky (1982) conducted a longitudinal study on writing in a bilingual program where she examined the relationship between first language and second language writing. She attempted to provide an insight as to whether children's knowledge of first language writing would be viewed as interference to L2 writing or as an application. Her subjects were twenty-six children whose regular classroom writing in Spanish and English were collected over a period of one school year. She concluded that "what a young writer knows about writing in the first language forms the basis of new hypotheses rather than interferes with writing in another language" (p.227). By this, she implied that L1 composing processes were applied to L2 composing processes rather than interfered and what was

being applied was everything “from directionality of print to spelling hypotheses to general principles and processes” (p.225).

Similar findings were reported by Arndt (1987) in her exploratory study of the composing activities of six Chinese postgraduate EFL students to compare their composing activities in two languages. Her subjects were asked to write academic texts in both their first language, that is, Chinese and in English. Protocol analysis was her major source of data in addition to the written texts and interviews. Using Perl’s research design and analysis scheme, Arndt found that each individual writer used similar processes and strategies when writing in L1 and L2 which was in tandem with Edelsky’s finding that L1 composing processes were applied to L2 composing processes. Another crucial finding noted by Arndt was “the lack of similarity in writing behavior among members of a group assumed to be relatively homogeneous with regard to academic achievement and language proficiency” (p.260). According to Krapels (1991), this finding was similar to Raimes’s who commented on the great variety among L2 writers.

Tam (1988) did a self-study on composing descriptive essays in English and Malay to trace the similarities and differences between her composing strategies. As she was more proficient in English, she observed many differences when composing in Malay where there were more pauses and cancellations, truncated ideas, disrupted flow of thought, lower level of composing strategies and more simple structures and sentence patterns when compared to composing in English. Apart from these differences, she noted that the language in use was English even though she was composing in Malay and she avoided words that she could not translate from English to Malay. She concluded that “a certain

level of proficiency has to be reached before the students could go beyond the basic level of description into the stage of subtlety and nuances” (p.28).

Noorchaya (1994) conducted a comparative study of multilingual writers’ composing processes with six Malaysian Chinese writers as they composed in their three school languages i.e. Chinese, Malay and English. Her study was a qualitative case study using multiple method approach i.e. think-aloud protocol, bio-data questionnaire, Rose’s Writer’s Block self-report survey and retrospective interviews. She attempted to examine and describe the role of language dominance or influence in the composing process in the three languages and to trace their composing processes across the three languages. She also found that transference of writing skills cut across three languages but individual writers used each composing behavior in different degree in the three composing processes. This finding concurred with Ardnt where her subjects also displayed different composing behaviors among themselves.

2.5 The use of first language in the second language composing process

This section will focus on the use of first language in the second language composing process, which was noted in various studies on the composing processes of second language and bilingual writers. The review of literature in this area provided a basis for this study to test the hypothesis that pre-intermediate ESL students use L1 as the dominant language to think when composing in both their first language and the English language. Although some of the studies did not specifically examine the usage of language while composing, the researchers noted the use of first language by their participants when writing in the second language.

In her study to examine how four adult ESL learners compose in English, Lay (1982) directly addresses the issue of first language use while composing in second language. Her investigation attempted to address the questions of the extent of native language usage and whether there was a pattern in the use of the native language in the composing processes of second language learners. Lay found that "second language students translate key words into the first language to get a stronger impression and association of ideas for the essay" (p.406). She added that her subjects wrote essays of better quality in terms of ideas, organization and details when they employed more native language switches.

Her subjects' reliance on first language in their second language composing process was also noted when they were generating ideas. Lay inferred that usage of first language to generate ideas in second language writing depended on the writers' experience with the essay topic, where her subjects used more of their first language when writing about topics that were related to their Chinese background. According to Lay as quoted by Friedlander (1991), first language is more likely to be used at certain stages of language development where first language use would lessen when writers acquire more English. Friedlander (1991:111) added that "Lay's results suggest that foreign students will be able to plan more easily and will have less constraint on composing in English if they write about topics acquired in an English language setting."

Arndt (1987) in her exploratory study of the composing activities of six Chinese postgraduate EFL students noted that her subjects faced difficulty in word choice when writing in English due to limited second language vocabulary which disrupted their text production. She observed that her subjects made more changes on their choice of words in

the L2 task as compared to the L1 task. On the other hand, more word-choice rehearsals (i.e. trying out a variety of words) were evident in the L1 task than the L2 task. She deduced that “the writers seemed able to call upon a wider range of lexical alternatives in L1 than in L2 and felt more secure as to whether the choice of lexis was appropriate for their communicative intent.” (p.44)

Krapels (1991) mentioned that Martin-Betancourt’s study in 1986 on the composing processes of Puerto Rican college students of English as a second language also considered the use of first language in second language writing processes. According to Martin-Betancourt as quoted by Krapels, she found two composing behaviors that were different from L1 process i.e. the usage of more than one language and translating. “She indicated that her subjects’ writing processes involved solving linguistic problems and that the use of the first language in L2 writing added to the problems, especially in vocabulary” and added that some of her subjects incorporated translation into their second language writing processes (1991:46). Her findings here did not concur with Edelsky (1982), Lay (1982) and Arndt (1987) who considered L1 as an aid to L2 writing.

Dyden (1987) in her study on the composing processes of five Malaysian Malay ESL/EFL college writers reported that her writers admitted using L1 in their English composing process. Four of her subjects reported that they translated from Malay, which is their L1, to English when they experienced problems writing in English.

Usage of L1 when writing in English was also reported in the study conducted by Lee (1989) on two skilled and two unskilled undergraduate writers. She found that the unskilled writers did most of their thinking in Malay and then translated their thoughts into

English. "Her subjects reported that thinking in Malay facilitated their flow of ideas" (p.107).

The use of a language that writers are proficient in during the composing process in another language is evident in the self-study conducted by Tam (1988). She reported that whilst she was planning for her writing in Malay, her ideas were in a language that she was more proficient in, which was English. She noted that when she could not translate words from English to Malay, she avoided those words in her Malay writing.

Cumming (1989) in his study of Francophone Canadian adult students reported that his subjects tended to use their first language when generating ideas whilst writing. He observed that inexperienced writers used L1 to generate ideas only whereas the expert writers used L1 to generate content and to check style especially diction. The subjects also used their first language to conduct searches for appropriate words although they did not rely totally on their first language in their second language composing process. This was observed when one of the subjects, Claudine used French to seek appropriate words when writing her English letter.

A study on the effects of first language on second language writing conducted by Kobayashi and Rinnert in 1989 concurred with Lay's (1982) and Cumming's (1989) observation about the benefits of first language use in second language writing. Their study on forty-eight Japanese university students revealed that lower proficiency students who composed initially in the first language produce higher quality compositions through translation. This result suggested that "composing initially in the first language allows

students, especially those of lower language proficiency, easier and freer discovery of meaning” (p.240).

Friedlander (1991) conducted a study on composing in English to determine the effects of a first language on writing in English as a second language. He tested the hypothesis that “ESL writers will be able to plan more effectively and produce texts with better content when they are able to plan in the language related to the acquisition of topic-area knowledge” (p.113). His subjects, 28 Chinese-speaking students at Carnegie Mellon University, were asked to write in two types of condition. The first type was match condition where the subjects planned in the language of topic knowledge and wrote their texts in English i.e. planned in Chinese on a Chinese festival and in English on a subject related to life at an American university. The second type was mismatch condition where the subjects planned in the language not related to topic knowledge and wrote the texts in English i.e. planned in English on a Chinese festival and in Chinese on the English topic subject.

Friedlander found that the subjects in the match condition performed better in terms of details, length and quality of their plans as well as their written products as compared to those in the mismatch condition. He reported that “writers retrieved more details about their topic areas when they used Chinese for the plans on Qingming and English for the plans on Carnegie Mellon” and “the plans produced when writers were able to use the language of topic knowledge acquisition were richer in information” (p.115). He concluded that writers using their first language would be able to retrieve ideas more effectively whether they were writing in their first language or English.

Noorchaya (1994), in her comparative study of multilingual writers' composing processes also examined the role of language dominance or influence in the composing processes of six Malaysian Chinese students when writing in the three languages i.e. Malay, Chinese and English. She found that her subjects made use of English when composing in Malay and Chinese. This finding can be related to what Tam (1988) experienced when she was writing her Malay essay where she thought in English. Noorchaya's findings contrasted with the other studies such as Lay (1982), Ardnt (1987) and Friedlander (1991) where the subjects used L1 when composing in English. Noorchaya deduced that the dominance or influence of English in her participants' Malay and Chinese composing processes could be attributed to their use of English in all their writing task at the time the research was conducted. Other reasons given by Noorchaya were the participants' ongoing development of academic language in English and "their strong instrumental motivation in using English as a result of their perception of English as a prestigious language and its functional value as a world language" (p. iv – v).

2.6 Conclusion

The review of literature in this chapter focused on researches conducted in first language and second language composing processes with emphasis on second language researches as compared to first language researches. The researcher also reviewed some literature on bilingual composing processes which provided some insights on the way bilingual composed.

Findings on the composing processes by Zamel (1982), Dryden (1987), Lee (1989) and Norrchaya (1994) will help the researcher of the present study to examine whether these

pre-intermediate ESL students in the local context exhibit similar behaviors like the subjects of these researches.

The usage of first language in second language composing noted in studies conducted by Edelsky (1982), Ardnt (1987), Cumming (1989), Kobayashi (1989) and Friedlander (1991) provided the hypothesis to be tested in the present study. The researcher will observe the usage of language amongst the pre-intermediate ESL students in the present study to see whether L1 is the dominant language used by them when writing in their first language and the English language.

The research methods and the results of all the studies reviewed in this chapter not only guided the researcher in carrying out the present study but also in drawing conclusions on the processes used by the subjects of this study.