

## SECOND LANGUAGE COMPOSITION

JOHNSON, Donna M., & ROEN, Duane (eds.): *Richness in Writing: Empowering ESL Students*, New York: Longman, 1989, pp. 306.

KROLL, Barbara (ed.): *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*. Cambridge: CUP, pp. 246.

Teaching composition in a first language requires teacher expertise in the principles (mechanical, linguistic, rhetorical) of the forms of discourse (genre). Teaching composition in a second language involves the understanding of these principles and forms as well as the knowledge of how L (second language) *proficiency*, *transfer factors*, and *literacy skills* may interact to influence the writing of L2 students.

Approaches to L2 writing instruction have been developing since the 1940s when, in his *Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language* (1945: 8), Fries suggests that «written exercises might be part of the work». In contrast, research in the acquisition of L2 writing skills, as Krashen has noted (1984: 41), has been «sadly lacking». Like Krashen, L2 writing instructors were obliged to turn to first language composition research for insights into student composition processes and to second language acquisition studies, for data on how the L2 proficiency variables might affect the production of written language.

Since the mid-1980s, however, studies which focus specifically on L2 writing have attempted to deal with what *trained ESL teachers* («not just writing teachers», Raimes, 1985: s232) need to know about how their students differ from basic writers in English (Shaughnessy, 1977). These studies consider the three factors influencing L2 writing: 1)

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language proficiency in L2; 2) linguistic and rhetorical transfer from L1; and, 3) the transfer of literacy skills from L1 to L2. Some of the studies examine one of the three variables and suggest ways in which the findings can be translated into effective instructional applications. Other studies consider the effect of two of these variables. None considers the interaction of the three, and much work could be done in instructional composition along these lines, especially in L2 composition in non-native contexts such as Spain. These issues also seem to be of interest for teachers of Spanish to the ever-increasing multicultural population in Spain.

For those who are practitioners or wish to carry out such research into L2 writing, two recently published books constitute an obligatory point of departure. In *Richness in Writing: Empowering ESL Students*, Donna M. Johnson and Duanne Roen have edited a useful resource book for theoreticians, researchers and practitioners. The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, «Settings, Networks, Connections», eleven authors draw on contextual issues of L2 writing: communities across cultures, interaction between writers and readers, individual differences in writing, bilingual writers, speaking and writing, etc. Part II focuses on specific «Rhetorical Concerns» in L2 writing, such as how facts and opinions are introduced in writing, how cognitive and social processes interact in the accommodation of audience, topic and purpose, etc. In addressing cultural issues in the written discourse of ESL students in Part III, «Culture, Second Language Writing and Creativity», the authors promote more pluralistic views of rhetoric. This appeal seems to echo similar directions in feminist critical theory, for instance, positing alternatives to the existing canon of male-dominated rhetorical traditions.

In general, the articles collected in *Richness in Writing* provide in-depth studies of the specific issues involved, although there are some notable exceptions such as Sandra McKay's «Topic Development and Written Discourse Accent». Surprisingly, Mackay uses undefined terms («discourse accent») and comes to such common-sense conclusions as «we need to give careful consideration to the selection of writing topics» so as not to bias production possibilities towards one cultural group or another. In another article, «Responding to Different Topic Types», Joy Reid, an experienced ESL writing instructor and researcher at Colorado State University, concludes that both Arabic and Spanish-speaking students write using more coordinate conjunctions (as compared to Chinese writers of ESL) because both Arabic and Spanish are predominantly paratactic, not hypotactic. A cursory reading of any of the editorial pages of the major Spanish newspapers would drop the lie on that assumption. Ms Reid would be wise to take the advice of the editors of *Richness in Writing* (p. 5): «To help them (students) become better writers in English, it is useful to know as much as possible about their backgrounds and interests so that we can build on these to expand their options for making meaning and having an impact through writing».

The second essential publication, *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*, edited by Barbara Kroll, is much more research oriented than *Richness in Writing*. Of the thirteen articles, written by recognized scholars, more than half address research issues such as topical structure analysis as a revision strategy, the effects of the first language on writing in ESL, and quantitative analysis of students' written production

relative to topic type (the same issue as in Mackay's article discussed above, but treated with a more valid methodology by Joy Reid). Qualitative methods are also included («Feedback on Compositions: Teacher and Student Verbal Reports», A Cohen and C. Cavalcanti) as well as suggestions for practical applications. The other six chapters of the book, which constitute Part I, offer a more theoretical background: «Philosophical Underpinnings of Second Language Writing Instruction». Each chapter addresses a key ingredient in writing instruction: a historical account of writing instruction, evaluation, the relationship between reading and writing in ESL, theories of the L2 composition process, etc. *Second Language Writing* presents a much more balanced account of the issues involved in teaching ESL writing than *Richness in Writing*, but the latter is geared more towards the secondary-school practitioner and, thus, may achieve a greater level of popularity in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts such as Spain.

#### REFERENCES

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AUSTER, Paul: *The Music of Chance*. London: Faber, 1991.

La, por el momento, última novela de Paul Auster —Newark, New Jersey, 1947— supone la profundización en un universo cerrado y personal, ya presente en su primera obra, *The New York Trilogy*, y confirmado en sus obras posteriores: *In the Country of Last Things*, *The Invention of Solitude*, y *Moon Palace*.

Como en sus obras anteriores, Auster parte de las convenciones de un género literario —en *The New York Trilogy*, se trataba de la novela policial; en *The Invention of Solitude*, de la novela memorialista; en *In the Country of Last Things*, del relato de ciencia ficción— para construir unos mecanismos narrativos precisos y acabar alejándose de las resoluciones genéricas e introducir varios elementos de distorsión en el material literario. La constancia de una serie de temas abstractos —el desarraigo, la búsqueda de la personalidad, el viaje interior, la muerte—, tienen así una encarnación en una estructura narrativa sólo inicialmente convencional.

De formación literaria francesa, Auster busca en sus relatos unos objetivos muy