ASSESSING EVALUATION OF SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING SKILLS AT SECONDARY LEVEL SCHOOLS IN ALIGARH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

ABSTRACT BY
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Chapter One is entitled “Introduction.” It introduces the readers with some socio-cultural and cognitive aspects of writing. Students learning to write in a second language are faced with social and cognitive challenges that affect their second language acquisition. Among social factors, motivation and contact with the target language play important roles. Besides, understanding of cultural conventions eases the learning process. Language is a cultural phenomenon and the influence of culture on language cannot be ignored. Culture also defines the criteria for good writing. ESL writers therefore, should develop sound understanding of the academic conventions of the target language community. Besides, with writing being recognized as an important skill, its assessment becomes crucial. Writing assessment is an important field in the education community. Writing assessment should promote effective learning among students. Assessment should inform teaching and learning.

Chapter Two is entitled “Writing”. The chapter introduces the readers with a brief historical overview of the ESL writing, its growth and development as a multi-disciplinary field. The development of ESL writing as an important academic skill is rooted in historical context. Before the 1940s, language theory was influenced by the scientific theory as defined by prominent linguists like Leonard Bloomfield, Charles C. Fries, and Edward Sweet. Being descriptive linguists, they advocated the mastery of sound structures of language and marginalized writing in favor of speech. However, the need for L2 writing instruction to increasing number of non-native speakers in the US higher institutions soon grew after World War II. As a result, special freshman courses were introduced for non-native English speakers. Parallel to this, ESL writing pedagogy began to develop. However, due to lack of adequate ESL pedagogy in the beginning,
ESL writing instruction was consolidated under L1 composition studies. The L1 composition instructors began to notice the differences in writing between native and non-native English speakers. This led to the establishment of disciplinary “division of labor” between L1 and ESL writing. Thus, ESL writing came under ESL studies. Since then L2 writing researchers developed many ESL writing pedagogies. Between 1950s and 1960s, writing was viewed prescriptively and focused on the mastery of grammatical structures of language. It focused on the finished product of writing. In the late 1960s, discourse approach to writing was developed. It was Kaplan’s pioneering research who claimed that the discourse patterns of languages are different from each other. This pedagogy focused on the logical organization of ideas into coherent paragraphs or larger units like essays. This pedagogy was also known as current traditional rhetoric. In the late 1970s, L2 writing scholars and instructors began to analyze the composing processes of ESL writers. Soon L2 writing studies began an inquiry into what writers actually do as they compose. This approach was labeled as Process approach to writing. Some pioneering researchers associated with it were Janet Emig, Peter Elbow, and Vivian Zampli. The process approach to writing was important in many ways. First of all, it recognized writing as a meaningful discovery process. Then, it studied the composing processes of writers as they plan, draft, and approach a writing task. For example, Zampli (1983)\(^1\) found striking similarities between the composing processes of skilled ESL writers and L1 writers. Raimes (1985)\(^2\) study, on the other hand, revealed significant differences between L1 and L2 writers’ writing processes. The L2 writing researchers gained useful insights from L1 composition theorists and instructors.


to explain L2 writing processes and develop an L2 theory. However, after 2000, a more comprehensive approach to ESL pedagogy, i.e., post process began to develop. The post process recognizes the social context as an important component in order to be accepted as a member of academic community. The last ESL writing pedagogy discussed is English for Academic Purposes. Every academic discourse community adheres to certain conventions of writing that are applied in appropriate and suitable contexts. The writers should master these conventions and adhere to acceptable writing behaviors. Over the past thirty years, the field of L2 writing has grown in scholarship. For example, Journal of Second Language Writing was established in 1992. It was exclusively devoted to L2 writing. Likewise, first symposium on second language writing was held at Purdue University in 1998. All these developments illustrate the maturity of ESL writing studies as a distinct field of enquiry.

The next topic is the L2 writing process. The writing process is an important research concept in the field of composition studies. Research on the writing process focuses on how writers draft, revise, and edit texts. The most common researched area in L2 writing field is the role or use of L1 in L2 writing. L1 plays an important role in L2 writing. L2 writers frequently switch to their L1 while writing in L2. This use of L1 either facilitates or hinders the L2 writing process depending on various variables and contexts in which the transfer has been made. Studies revealed similarities between the L1 and L2 composing processes. L1 and L2 writing often exhibits similar composing processing patterns. L2 writers function like L1 writers (Leeds, 1996). Planning patterns in L1 and L2 are found to be very similar (Armengol- Castells, 2001).
Hirose & Sasaki, 1994\(^5\). Zamel (1983)\(^6\) found striking similarities between the composing processes of skilled ESL writers and L1 writers. Studies concerning L1 use in L2 writing process not only revealed striking similarities but researchers also noted some key differences in them. The differences were due to the interferences caused by L1 writing processes. For example, Raimes (1985)\(^7\) study revealed significant differences between L1 and L2 writers’ writing processes. Further, studies revealing the differences between the written texts of L1 and L2 writers are also elaborated. In short, a large number of studies on L2 writing process have been discussed in the chapter.

The next topic discussed is the Cognitive Approach to Writing. The cognitive or the process approach to writing is entirely different from the traditional product approach which advocated passive learning. The process approach focused on the composing processes of writers as they accomplished a writing task. Generally, the writing process is seen as consisting of three stages—pre-writing, writing, and revising/and editing. These stages are overlapping as writers may use them in a non-linear manner. Some pre-writing techniques such as free-writing, brainstorming, bubbling, clustering, and looping are also listed.

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Next, the models of the process writing have been discussed in detail. Two most popular L1 models adapted by L2 writing researchers are that of Hayes and Flower (1981)\(^8\) and Bereiter and Scardamalia model (1987)\(^9\). These models explained the cognitive processes of L2 writers that operate in the writers mind as they accomplish a writing task. While Flower and Hayes assumed writing as a goal-directed activity targeted at audiences and the writers efforts to present his ideas efficiently to the readers through creating a coherent text. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), on the other hand, distinguishes between simple and cognitively complex tasks and claimed that novice writers make use of “knowledge telling” processes in order to complete an L2 writing task based on the assignment, the topic, or the genre, whereas expert writers used “knowledge transforming” processes and viewed a writing task from multiple perspectives considering not just the cognitive requirements but the audiences, contexts, and task demands. The chapter ends with the advantages and disadvantages of the process approach to writing.

Chapter Three is “Assessment and Evaluation”, It provides a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of assessment and evaluation. Assessment is the systematic gathering of information of a student's progress and achievements. Evaluation, on the other hand, is the interpretation of the evidences obtained from various assessment tools like tests, quizzes, and essays, etc. Here, an attempt has been made to compare and contrast the above two stated terms. The chapter opens up with a brief discussion of the three stages in implementing assessment. Stage 1 specifies the skills to be assessed. Stage 2 corresponds to the development of appropriate

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assessment tasks to tests the intended skills. Stage 3 requires students to perform on tasks designed in stage 2. Then, the writing assessment has been dealt in detail. With writing recognized as an important skill, its assessment becomes crucial. There are many stakeholders in a writing assessment with varied interests. For example, teachers assess students’ writing skills in order to know their progress and achievements in learning. Policy makers use writing assessments in order to monitor the quality of education, to give grants, to maintain record of schools’ performances and compare different schools and universities results over a period of time. Next, some prominent principles of writing assessments have been discussed. Assessment should drive curriculum and instruction. Assessment should match the objectives of the course curriculum. Students should be informed of the course objectives since the beginning of the session. Also, assessment of writing should be recognized as a social skill assessing students’ performances on different genres, topics, settings, and take into account the audiences as well. Besides, it should focus on the global features of writing such as meaning and content and organization rather than superficial aspects like grammar and mechanics. Students should be explained the criteria for assessment in detail. They should be involved to build a checklist of criteria enabling them to understand the essential elements that they should master and demonstrate in their writing. Provision of regular feedback is another prominent principle of writing assessments.

After discussing the principles of writing assessments, the chapter illustrates the differences between direct and indirect writing assessments. Direct writing assessments require students to produce actual writing samples in the form of essays, letter writing, writing projects, and dissertations, etc. Indirect writing assessments, on the other hand, involve no actual writing. They break writing into sub- components like grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, etc. Multiple
choice tests (MCT), yes/no, and fill in the blanks, etc. are some examples of such assessments. Next, readers are introduced to classroom assessments, their characteristics, and purposes, and various forms of classroom assessments. Classroom assessments are learner centered, and actively engage students in the learning process. The process approach to writing transforms the role of learners and gives them autonomy in the learning process. Techniques such as group discussion, self-assessment, and peer review, etc. turns students into mature learners who learn to assess their own work with responsibility. Teachers, on the other hand, assume the role of guides and assists students in reaching the targets. Teachers vigilantly observe students’ daily performances and behaviors and record them in student logs, anecdotal records, and journals to communicate them to students and their parents. Formative and summative assessments, subjective and objective assessments, internal and external assessments, etc. are some common forms of assessments with different purposes. The chapter then discusses the modern contemporary assessments like alternative, performance, portfolio, and authentic assessments that are becoming increasingly popular in both classroom and large scale testing. All these assessments link assessment with learning. Besides, they require students to demonstrate actual writing skills in meaningful contexts and develop audience awareness in them. The chapter ends with a discussion of the process of evaluation. Often used interchangeably, assessment and evaluation serve different purposes. Evaluation is a comprehensive term and covers assessment within it. There are some remarkable differences between the two processes. The most obvious difference is that assessment is formative in nature while evaluation is summative and occurs at the end of a course or session. Assessment informs instruction and learning and provides useful diagnostic information of students’ performances, whereas evaluation is judgmental in nature and is not concerned with qualitative feedback. It is accompanied with grades and scores.
Chapter Four is Methodology that has been applied in the research. Participants for this study were 150 students and 9 teachers in three English medium secondary schools in Aligarh. Classes considered were class VIII and class IX. The teachers’ evaluation of students’ writing in Aligarh schools was the prime research concern. The main modes of data collection of students’ writing samples- in class assignments and timed- impromptu essays, teachers’ questionnaire, teacher interaction, and field diary based on general observation. A pilot study was conducted to test the validity of the research. The chapter discusses in detail the process of data collection and data analysis. The data was analyzed using ANOVA framework. The ANOVA test showed a list of significant and not significant items. However, it was only the significant items (p value .05 or less) that were analyzed.

Chapter Five is entitled “Analysis and Interpretation of Results”. The results obtained from ANOVA framework were descriptively analyzed. The analysis showed interesting results. There were variations among the two classes. Further, variations were also found in three different schools. The teachers’ questionnaire was also statistically analyzed and the results were interpreted.

Chapter Six is the “Conclusion and Suggestions”. The results are significant in a few ways. An in depth analysis of the assessment patterns shows a number of significant findings. The variations among the different groups of learners and among the different schools could be attributed to a number of causes. Classroom instruction should focus on writing as a purposeful activity situated in a context and not just on finished products. Students’ involvement in the assessment of their own work would actually assist their learning and make them critical and reflective learners. Learners should be taught to write on different genres, on varied topics and instill audience
awareness in them as they write. Self-assessment checklist, peer review, and teacher-student conferencing, etc. are some techniques through which assessment can be incorporated in learning. A few suggestions have been proposed in the end based on the research work that has been carried out.