

Writing in Foreign Language Contexts

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SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Series Editor: David Singleton

Writing in Foreign Language Contexts

Learning, Teaching, and Research

Edited by

Rosa M. Manchón

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

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To the memory of my father, José Manchón.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research/Edited by Rosa Manchón.

Second Language Acquisition: 43

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Language and languages—Study and teaching. 2. Rhetoric—Study and teaching.
3. Second language acquisition. I. Manchón, Rosa.

P53.27.W75 2009

808'.0071—dc22 2009017380

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-184-2 (hbk)

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-183-5 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters

UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW.

USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.

Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario M3H 5T8, Canada.

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Typeset by Datapage International Ltd.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group.

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Acknowledgements

All edited books are the result of a collective enterprise. This one has been so in very special ways and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the contributors for helping me shape the vision I had for our joint endeavour and for making the book a reality. I would also like to thank them for their diligence in writing and repeatedly rewriting their chapters, for always keeping to deadlines and for their generosity in reviewing each other's chapters. My sincere gratitude also goes to Ilona Leki for having accepted to write the Preface.

I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewer who read an earlier version of the manuscript and who helped us all to improve our chapters and the book as a whole. I wish to express my appreciation of the help and support by Multilingual Matters: the series editor David Singleton, Marjukka Grover, Tommi Grover, Anna Roderick, Sarah Williams and Elinor Robertson have all helped in different ways in the completion of this publishing project.

Lastly, my heartfelt thanks to my family, Chris, Laura, Beatriz and Helena, for their sustained, sincere and loving support and encouragement in all the projects I decide to undertake.

Preface

As language scholars, teachers and learners around the world increasingly focus their attention on issues related to writing in a second language (SL), the publication of *Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research* is a much needed and welcome bracer for L2 writing research. It firmly reminds us that L2 writing does not take place only in SL contexts, that is, where the target language is widely used outside the classroom. Far greater numbers of L2 writers reside, learn and write in foreign language (FL) environments. Ignoring the research contributions that come out of these contexts and failing to consider writing practices in FL settings badly distorts our understanding of L2 writing.

Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research is unique in its focus on FL writing, and that focus alone would make the collection an important contribution to the field of L2 writing research. But this volume is not the average edited collection with disparate and uneven contributions, some aimed too narrowly, some too broadly. Instead *Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research* is an unusually coherent, thorough and rigorous examination of research on FL writing. Rosa Manchón's fine editorial guidance is evident in the careful organization of the chapters of the text. Each chapter of the two main sections follows similar, though by no means monotonous or lockstep, patterns. In each chapter of the first section, the authors begin by retrospectively re-examining their own repertoire of research studies on FL writing (covering a variety of FL settings and learner proficiencies, ages and uses for L2 writing), then trace the methodological choices that guided that body of work, and, finally, use that contextualization to foreground their more recent studies or reflections. Readers will find the flexible regularity of this 'looking back, moving forward' approach innovative and helpful in drawing attention to the important trends and main findings of the high quality research on FL writing clearly and yet succinctly highlighted here.

A particularly innovative feature of *Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research* is the unique window it

provides into the thinking processes of the researchers. Because the individual pieces of research discussed were often a part of long-term research projects (whether initiated that way or not), we are afforded insights not only into the kinds of methods that the researchers used, but also into their decision-making as each segment of the project yielded information that led the researchers toward the next methodologically appropriate step.

The chapters of the second part of *Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research* are broader reflections on and analyses of the findings of the first part, critically and imaginatively reshuffling them to bring out further perspectives made possible by this juxtapositioning. The authors' frequent references to the other chapters throughout the book contribute to a sense of unity without the artificiality that sometimes plagues this rhetorical move in other texts. The annotated and unannotated bibliography of the last section contributes a final piece that L2 writing scholars and students alike will find themselves turning to repeatedly.

Although language professionals and applied linguists have long noted the distinction between SL and FL learning contexts, it is a distinction that has been insufficiently heeded in L2 writing studies, which have instead been perhaps more concerned with marking the similarities and differences between L2 and L1 writing and writing instruction. Yet, many features of specifically FL writing contexts distinguish them from SL settings and vary across the FL contexts. These features are forcefully foregrounded in *Writing in Foreign Language Contexts: Learning, Teaching, and Research*. As the authors of the chapters of this book emphasize, among other features, in FL settings:

- It is likely that the linguistic, social, cultural and particularly educational backgrounds of the FL students are fairly uniform. This leveling may benefit research by reducing the linguistic and literacy variability among research participants.
- Some of these instructed learners will have had the opportunity to interact with and learn about L2 speakers and their cultures in, for example, study-abroad experiences; others will not have had any dealings with them at all. This differential opportunity has a likely impact on learner proficiency and motivation. Yet, that impact is shown here to play out differently for different groups of learners.
- Educational systems across the globe attend to L1 writing instruction to different degrees so that some students become fairly proficient L1 writers through schooling; others do not. L1 writing

proficiency is one of the many factors that correlate with L2 writing proficiency.

- The social value a particular society places on writing and on the role writing or learning to write is hoped to play in a given society differs. If, for instance, in North American SL settings, learning to write in L1 is conceived in school-sponsored writing mainly as taking and defending a position, then writers will develop certain approaches and attitudes toward writing that differ from the ones developed in cultures or societies where the ability to write or facility in writing is constructed primarily as, for instance, a general sign of a well-rounded education, the ability to self-reflect, personal originality or creativity, moral virtue, patriotic enthusiasm or any number of other orientations. Why a particular society wants its young people to learn to write in L1, if it does, influences the valuing of, approach to and interest in L2 writing that these learners absorb and reflect.
- As L2 writing is less likely to be a survival tool in FL than in SL contexts, motivation to write may be entirely extrinsic and explicit, never more than an obedient response to teacher-set assignments and perceived by the student writers as having no further role whatsoever in their lives.
- Contrary to dogma in SL writing, with its now-traditional de-emphasis of language learning, using writing to develop language proficiency may be a central aim of L2 writing in FL settings.

In considering these issues, the contributors explore FL writers' educational and social experiences in both L1 and L2 writing that drive learner attitudes, which, in turn, influence the variable efforts that the writers as agents are willing to expend to exploit the L2 writing resources available to them. Other influences on FL writing explored here include writers' access to the TL environment and the writers' potential creation of imagined TL communities; age of initiation into L2 literacy; attentional demands of writing tasks and writer allocation of cognitive resources while writing; and the impact of the spread of interest in L2 writing on different populations, such as scholars, English teachers and teacher educators, as well as ministries of education who determine education and language education policy. Consideration of these kinds of issues demonstrates the more comprehensive importance of FL writing studies to theory, research and learning. The chapters of this book explore these and many other subtle and sometimes forgotten or ignored aspects of FL