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ESL Writing in the University of Guanajuato: The struggle to enter a discourse community

by

Dr. Troy Crawford

Acknowledgements

Table of contents Page

List of Tables and Figures

Chapter One
1. Introduction to the struggle, narrative stance, and book outline

> The term 'autobiographical self' emphasizes the fact that this aspect of identity is associated with a writer's sense of their roots, of where they are coming from, and that this identity they bring with them to writing is itself socially constructed and constantly changing as a consequence of their developing life-history: it is not some fixed, essential 'real self'. (Ivanič 1998, p.24)

1.1. Introduction

This book is an investigation into socio-cultural practices that surround the teaching and learning of writing in a second language, and their relationship to the individual inside the classroom. The thesis will focus upon the activity of writing inside and outside the classroom in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Mexico and examine how classroom systems and practices in and outside ELT serve to socialise students into what appears to be a weak view of writing in English as a second language. Although the term ELT refers to a multicultural profession that covers an enormous range of teaching and learning situations in many different contexts, the focus of this thesis is necessarily narrow; I will be investigating the classroom practice of the University of Guanajuato with graduate students in the area of business administration. The background of these students varies, as do their current work situations and as will their future professional application of writing in English. What they have in common is that they learned English in the educational system in the state of Guanajuato as well as in the Language School of the University of Guanajuato and they presently require the use of English in an academic setting to obtain a graduate degree in international management. The common factor here is how they learned to write in English and how they are going to use it in this course and in their academic studies in the University.

Though focusing on classroom systems and practices, the major concern of the thesis is how participants in the learning process perceive the practice of learning writing. Related directly to this is how teachers view the teaching of writing and how they are prepared to deal with this activity. While writing tends to be secondary in the amount of time devoted to it, it is a part of the entire classroom practice. This thesis will contend that classroom practice is related to how the 'second language classroom' constructs the activity of writing through discourse and the construction of discourse communities. I will argue that opportunities for challenging the current system are limited due to the preconceived notions that are sustained around the activity of writing.

In attending to the aspects outside the classroom, I am going to focus on the training in writing from different social institutions and the implicit knowledge of rhetoric that students have of Mexican Spanish before they enter the classroom. This implies that students come to the 'second language classroom' with a view of what writing is and how it functions in their society. As a result, I will argue that this cultural schematic knowledge becomes an obstacle rather than a benefit when the students enter the classroom and are confronted with the teacher's view, creating a 'rhetorical clash'. This in turn will lead to a discussion on the nature of accepted classroom systems and processes in Mexico. Finally, I will be treating the activity of teaching second language writing as a set of systems that is founded upon "otherised" knowledge and then embedded into classroom practice and the systems will be investigated in these terms.

This study has been motivated by a number of diverse elements. At the outset, I was particularly drawn to recent developments in how writing is approached in practice and in research. This led to an analysis based on a personal interest due to intense work debate whose central theme was Mexican students' apparent 'inability to write in English'. This led me to look at the areas of contrastive studies focused on writing such as: Connor (1996), Kroll (1990), Purves (1988); where the focus tends to be comparing other languages to

English. This is important because this type of research plays a role in influencing the design and positioning of materials that are used for the purpose of teaching writing in the classroom. Finally, all of this influences the instructor who is central to the process of learning to write in a second language.

The above served to place politics of writing (e.g., Clark and Ivanič 1997) on my research agenda. This has been done in an arguably limited way, as the study will only explore the extent to which the profession takes into account the social, cultural and political aspects linked to second language writing, and exclude much of first language writing. These social, cultural, and political aspects will be positioned from the viewpoint of Mexican Spanish as the benchmark, with English being the foreign social, cultural, and political penetrating force of the writing process. This is important because it brings the element of the local classroom social processes onto the agenda.

The socio-cultural processes that surround writing are another driving force behind the study. Writing is now generally accepted to be a cultural activity in the sense that different cultures approach the activity of learning to write and using it in different ways. The concept of literacy is an extremely important global issue given the recent developments in written electronic communication, yet the activity of writing appears not to be taken very seriously by the ELT community, nor by the academic programmes that prepare ELT professionals (Canagarajah 2002a, pp.23-29). Not taken very seriously is meant in the sense of how members are prepared to teach writing, but it is taken very seriously when issues of examination or standardisation are present for application on students. As a fellow instructor indicated to me "of course Mexican students can't write, look at their FCE (First Certificate of English) results and it's obvious". In this sense, socio-cultural professional systems and practices are being used to judge a skill that requires years to develop, and which develops differently depending upon one's particular background in

3

writing. As a result, how individuals learn to write a second language has been adopted as a fundamental part of this study.

The concept of how people learn to write has been a significant motivating issue for this thesis. This in turn leads us to look at the nature of writing and the socio-cultural issues that surround this second language learning phenomenon that is experienced in many different cultures. However, the focus of this thesis is the writing process in a second language context in the University of Guanajuato for students who will apply their learning experience of writing in a specific academic programme. Yet, later, they will apply this experience in a wider more diverse professional context. In this study I am looking at one specific place to show what can occur in a much wider context. In a globalised world many of us will at some point experience this process of learning to write in a foreign language. As such this study can be summarised in the following research questions:

1) What is happening when students learn 'second language writing' at the University of Guanajuato?

2) What may be the socio-cultural expectations of second language learners when they are dealing with the activity of writing in English?

While these questions are narrow in the sense of the site where the research takes place, they are at the same time broad in that the activity that is being considered affects all involved in the ELT profession regardless of their locale. I, as the researcher, bring different elements into the process that is being studied and as such I need to expose the terms in which I identify myself with writing.

Within these terms, there are many participants in the research process. There is a group of graduate students, two co-workers, a professional peer, and myself as a participant/observer in the entire process. As I am the researcher, part of the data is positioned by me for you. As such, I need to introduce the reader to how I have come to this research site and the viewpoints that I bring to it.

1.2. Narrative stance

The traditional scientific model of research seems to give an oversimplified account of knowledge in a linear model and I believe that issues related to educational theory need to include issues of subjectivity (Hanrahan, Cooper, and Burrough-Lange 1999). I have chosen the path that is often referred to as autobiographical, or that which shows different voices in the text that relates to data that comes from my personal records (Tenni, Smyth, and Boucher 2003 and Cherry 2000). It is the data that comes from myself because I have experienced what most second language writers have when they decide to integrate themselves completely into another culture. As a result, the data of this research story begins in this Chapter and is present frequently in the text. However, in this case, my involvement goes beyond what is common to speak of in this sense. I am by birth an American. I am Mexican by choice, where my home is. Academically, I have pursued all my graduate work in language studies in British universities. As a result, in learning to write academically I have crossed three linguistic borders. In the words of Gómez-Pena (1995) "I have now decentred my voice and it has become multiple in its representation" (p.152). I have created different speaking selves that explain and show different parts of my academic identity that is bound to three different countries: The United States where I was born. Mexico, where I have lived and worked for the last twenty years; and England: where I have completed most of my graduate studies. As I am attempting to explain and show the results of a research process that is closely bound to my own personal and professional development, I must take an autobiographical approach as this allows me to enter into the confessional reflexivity of personal writing (Foley 2002, pp.473-486). At the same time however, I am presenting the ideas and transitions of others in their own words, so far as is possible. So, it becomes in a sense a biography written by me about what others have experienced in their process of developing as second language writers. Hence the term or separation of (auto)biographical, as the words of many people are being

represented here through my own perception as a researcher into the activity of writing in a second language. The voices that are in this text are not something that I have created for the purpose of this research. They are the result of my own development and are a part of the research.

In this (auto)biographical journey the data from the research study will not be found all nicely bound in one chapter (Tierney 1999 and Fuller and Lee 1997). As in life, writing, or research subjects can become complicated. In this case the research did indeed become complicated. It began to cross different borders: personal, professional, and academic. As such the data is presented through the chapters. In Chapters One and Two you can find personal and professional data. In Chapters Three and Five you find personal and research data combined because

> Autobiography, the genre of choice of many writers of diaspora, is an out-of-bounds genre that captures the fluid character of memory, migration, and transition in an appropriately nuanced fashion. In an age of shifting perceptions of national and ethnic identity, destabilized borders, and nonterritorial coalitions, autobiography, precisely because it is a genre that defies definition and comes under many guises, is uniquely positioned to give voices to structures of experience that resist naming. Autobiographical voices conjugate all the tropes of exile. The basic structure of the narrative of this study is (auto)biographical. Autobiography and autoethnography variously or simultaneously assume the form of a confessional idiom…. (Seyhan 2001, p.96)

In this research memory, migration, and transition are captured through a data presentation that flows throughout the text. As a result, I have chosen to allow my identity to enter into the text, as is allowed in this particular discipline (Abbinnett 2003, pp.15-24). In this case my personal and professional backgrounds shape the research background of this study to the extent that English can no longer be considered my 'native' language in a practical sense, as all my professional writing and most of my academic writing are in

Spanish, I am living in a type of voluntary linguistic exile (Imaz Bayona 2003). In this linguistic exile I have adopted a style of writing that is neither truly American or Mexican, but what might be my own personal hybrid style.

1.2.1. Personal background

Because I have chosen to take the path of an (auto)biographical approach to the writing of the present document, the reader needs to be aware of the personal aspects that influence much of this text. I was born in the United States and spent the first eighteen years of my life in southern Oregon. This is an area that is strongly dependent on agriculture and as such in our political times has always been dependent on migrant workers mostly from Mexico.

In the time that I lived there from 1963 to 1982, I think racism was very prevalent, particularly against Mexicans. Since I chose to learn Spanish from secondary school, and later on chose to study a BA degree in Spanish at Southern Oregon University, and finally even worked as a language tutor for migrant workers, I was often questioned by family and friends about those choices.

My inclinations accrued, and I made the decision to take a short, three-week academic trip to Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico in the winter of 1981. I wanted to see this place that Southern Oregon University had an exchange programme with and to see if it would be interesting. I enjoyed the trip, the people and Mexico. As a result, I left the following year for Guanajuato on the exchange programme.

The first year on the exchange programme changed my life. Learning a new language and integrating myself to a new society was exciting. I enjoyed it so much that after returning to Oregon, I enrolled again as the student coordinator, so that I could return to Guanajuato for another year. After spending two years in Guanajuato and having finished my BA degree in Spanish, I decided that I did not want to leave Mexico. So, I accepted a job as a permanent ESL instructor in 1985 at what was then called the Language Centre

and enrolled in the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) programme at the University of Guanajuato.

The MBA programme changed my life more than I expected. On one side professionally it slowly turned me into a quasi expert in business English for the University and then into the University's expert translator. More importantly I met my wife, who was studying in the same programme. As a result Mexico became even more important to me.

Since 1987 I have dedicated myself to integrating my professional and personal future in Mexico. I have done this to the most possible extreme. I lived a ten year period where I refused to use English unless it was absolutely necessary. I consciously separated myself from other foreigners in Guanajuato and dedicated myself to becoming a member of the community of Guanajuato. This process I think came to its culmination in many ways, when in 1999 I made the decision to change my nationality to Mexican.

I am, I think, as far as possible a member of the community of Guanajuato. My Mexican family and Mexican co-workers do not consider me to be what they call an 'American'. Yet at the same time, I am not a complete member of the community, nor do I think that I ever will be one. What I can say, is that I am more accepted by the local community and more active than many Americans who live in Guanajuato. More importantly, I am classified as pro Mexican and my opinion is considered to be more valuable than other foreigners within the working community, probably mostly due to the fact that I changed my nationality.

This classification is relevant to this current research. As I have lived on both sides of a very political border and have seen and experienced racism on both sides, my vision of ELT teaching carries a lot of professional and personal baggage. As such, I am attempting to separate many issues that are interrelated throughout the research process.

1.2.2. Professional background

By design, destiny, or choice I am a part of the present research. It is, in essence, a reflection of my own life and is at times difficult to separate. The borders that I have crossed both physically and mentally are ever present throughout this entire process, as I am bound to them in many ways. I grew up in the United States where I chose to learn Spanish as a second language starting in secondary school. During my education I was told by my instructors that I did not have the aptitude to learn a foreign language and that in general my language skills were weak. I was labelled as a poor writer throughout my US educational process. I then moved to Mexico where I continued to study and began my professional life as an ELT instructor. Again my writing in Spanish was labelled as weak. Now, as a university professor who teaches students to write in English and writes grant proposals in Spanish for the University of Guanajuato, I am considered by many co-workers to be a very strong writer in both languages. This research and thesis has been written for a British audience and is a reflection of my personal and professional life. Hence, the three borders that are crossed in this text at times are intertwined or fuzzy, but the desire to discover what happens in second language writing is ever present.

The desire to do this research arises from a series of events that are a fundamental part of my personal, educational, and professional life. All of these aspects have a direct or indirect impact on this entire study and in particular affect much of the context and interpretation. Therefore, as I planned to take on the role of a participant/observer in the research process, I consider it necessary to first describe how I arrived at this particular research topic and research questions. How I arrived here also validates much of my professional knowledge of the area in question. During my life I have had the opportunity to learn to write academically and professionally in both English and Spanish. From this personal experience that has covered close to twenty-one years of my life, I have come to consider many of the events that I have lived as central to English Language Teaching. This particular research is

based on a professional concern with the nature of teaching writing to Mexican students who I have observed and been involved with at the University of Guanajuato. The writing courses and the components of learning writing are normally centred on a textbook with little input from the teachers and no input from the students at the University Language Centre. Also, there appears to be present an underlying assumption that our students do not know how to write. This I think is questionable. Our students do write in Spanish and are at a University level in their own culture. This in itself is an indication that they are quite capable of functioning well within their own educational system and work environment.

First, for the last twenty-one years, I have lived, studied and worked in Mexico. During this period I have exclusively worked for the University of Guanajuato in the Language, Accounting, Labour Relations and Engineering schools. In these schools I have taught mostly in three areas: English Language, Organizational Behaviour, and Finance. Outside the framework of teaching, I was the Director and Academic Secretary of the Language School for 11 years. Also, since 1988 I have been the expert translator for both the University of Guanajuato and the Guanajuato State Supreme Court. In this capacity I have been responsible for more than 750 translations mostly related to administrative and economic sciences.

As most of the work that I was requested to do in the University was related to business correspondence, I completed graduate studies in Business Administration and Organizational Development in the University of Guanajuato. This led to me becoming the resident University expert on Business English (at the time I was the only instructor with a business background), an activity that I thought I was completely qualified to perform. I was responsible for designing many, now questionable, technical English programmes for the Language, Accounting and Engineering schools over a period of eight years. I say questionable, because the only thing that I really did was select an English for Specific Purposes textbook and this combined with the fact that I had an MBA made me believe that a technical English

programme had been created as did my co-workers. Then the British Council Mexico and the University of London guided me to re-evaluate most of my professional work through an in-country, MA programme funded largely by the British Ministry of Education.

From 1994-96 I completed my MA TESOL from the Institute of Education on an in-country programme sponsored by the British Ministry of Education and coordinated by the British Council. During the course of my MA all of the optional papers that I wrote focused on issues related to 'Second language writing' and material; after all I was the 'resident expert'. The experience of studying opened a new world to me, making me begin to understand the complexities of second language education. It also oriented me towards reconsidering much of my professional practice and beliefs as a second language professor. Within my professional reflection and MA studies, business writing was the area that received the most consideration.

As a product of my MA TESOL studies, I published an article comparing persuasive banking correspondence in English and Spanish (Crawford 2000). This particular project helped to reshape my entire approach and view of ESP writing. I began to revisit materials, programmes and former students to complete the publication. Finally, I realised that there was clearly something not functioning properly in the ESP courses that were being used in various schools of the University of Guanajuato.

I think that as a consequence, my initial research proposal for a PhD research topic to analyse the internal structure of written texts in both Spanish and English was a direct reflection of my views on the nature of second language writing at that time. I had reached a point where I was convinced that the linguistic differences that can be found between Spanish and English through discourse analysis was the starting point to understanding the differences between writing that exist between the two languages. The results of my personal observations and MA studies, gave me a long list of detectable differences that can be easily shown to others.

As I began to show these differences to others, I became interested by reading more and combined with past teaching experiences and informal observation of my students in ESP courses. I finally grasped that these young people were already quite competent in their future field of work; however, they were not competent or even comfortable with their ability to communicate in written English. All this has brought me back to reformulate and investigate an initial idea that I had suggested that technical written Mexican Spanish is similar on the surface to English, but the underlying cultural constraints make the two languages quite different in their execution (e.g., Crawford 2000, Simpson 2000 and Cordella 1996). This made my thoughts move to the direction of pragmatics. I began to think that through the study of pragmatics I might be able to begin the process of deciphering what was really happening, when students write in English. This, in turn, directed me back to the classroom where this research begins its journey. My aim is to help clarify what is really happening in the learning of written communication in the second language programmes at the University of Guanajuato and to identify how they are intertwined with socio-cultural expectations that extend beyond the 'Second language classroom' boundaries.

1.3. Thesis outline

Next, I would like to outline the chapters of the thesis and give a guide as to their content. In **Chapter Two** I will begin to set the scene of the thesis by outlining some of the current 'sensitive' cross-cultural issues within the second language profession in Mexico. These issues are: approaches, genre theory, contrastive rhetoric, and feedback. These will then be compared to the essentialist and non-essentialist views of second language writing and how these have arrived in to the classroom practice of the University of Guanajuato. This will be done from the perspective of a literature review that will be framed in a heuristic device called an 'imaginary discourse community' to bring out how English is used as an inappropriate benchmark. **Chapter Three** will deal with the research orientation of the thesis as well as the conceptual framework for presenting and discussing

the data. This Chapter also deals with how the topic of how 'second language writing' needs to be dealt with in terms of qualitative research and how as a result the need for an ethnographic participant/observer approach is shown. This approach requires the introduction of autobiographical data to shed light on how the data will be posited against the researcher for later interpretation in the form of a qualitative ethnographic exploration of second language writing. In **Chapter Four,** the discussion of how all the data was gathered and my approach on how to use the exploration group for data collection and how the same is carried out is presented. Also, the initial classification of the data is presented in a quantitative table and in a conceptual format to help show the need for a more in depth qualitative approach. **Chapter Five** is the first of three Chapters based on the analysis of data, and will discuss the different issues of the struggle taken from the research diary written compositions, post-interviews and follow up interviews of the exploration group. The function of this Chapter is to show the data which came from the participants of the exploration group and how it relates to socio-cultural practices that have been revealed in past studies. **Chapter Six** exemplifies a reflexive research practice of incorporating autobiographical data and comparing it with Chapter Five and its relationship to socio-cultural practices and how this relates to students' and the researcher's perceptions of teaching and learning to write in a second language. This Chapter is driven by the introspective data of the researcher's experience of second language writing. In **Chapter Seven** the differences in American English and Mexican Spanish that were briefly mentioned in Chapter Five are drawn out in detail and enhanced with a brief historical literature review. This is done to show that the superficial linguistic differences often found in comparative language studies on Spanish and English are in reality a much deeper rhetorical clash that provokes serious confusion for the second language writer in Mexico. In **Chapter Eight** a 'real world' proposal towards writing emerges from the data that shows the complexities of discourse with the purpose of creating a social framework for

discussing the implications of the research. Then the results from the three data Chapters are tied together to create the study conclusion of the struggle of teaching writing in a second language. Finally, the implications of the struggle that could have an impact in a wider social context are presented in the frame of current struggles and future struggles for the activity of second language writing. Finally, in **Chapter Nine** a brief epilogue of the struggle is presented that discusses the process of the researcher trying to reconcile the distinct 'social controls' and 'socialization' processes that were present throughout the research process. This is to show that the creation of the thesis is also a part of the research context. This is also a way of bringing together the complexities of being a participant observer in a research site that has struggled with the complexities of written language.

2. The cultural rhetoric of 'second language writing'

> Rhetoric is the instrumental use of language. This means that one person engages another in an exchange of symbols to accomplish some goal. It is not communication for communication's sake. Rhetoric is communication that attempts to coordinate social action. For this reason, rhetorical communication is explicitly pragmatic. Its goal is to influence human choices on specific matters that require attention. Such communication is designed to achieve desired consequences in the relative short run. Finally, rhetoric is most intensely concerned with managing verbal symbols, whether written or oral…Rhetoric, then, is the management of symbols in order to coordinate social action. (Hauser 1991, pp.2-3)

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter the use of words is going to be examined to show how second language writing approaches, genre, contrastive rhetoric and feedback fall into the essentialist and non-essentialist views of language in the teaching of second language writing in the University of Guanajuato. A heuristic device, in the form of an 'imaginary discourse community', will be employed to help illuminate this state of affairs. Also, the way in which these essentialist and non-essentialist views coincide in the 'second language classroom' will be uncovered at the rhetorical level, to show that both views appear to be supported by an underlying belief that American English is employed inappropriately, in the classroom, as the benchmark for making value judgments in second language writing (Crawford 2007, Crawford and et al 2006, Richardson 2003, Cliett 2003, Smitherman and Villanueva 2003 and Pennycook 2001).

As such this chapter is about the use of words and:

> Words are essential for thinking about what we see and feel and experience. Words also are essential for expressing these thoughts. When joined in a coherent language system, they bring forth the emotional, ethical, and intellectual contents of our minds in ways that interpret experience and share meaning. Because others can share

meanings, the symbol system of our language allows us to act through words. We use language to manage our environment to conform to our needs. When they do not suit our needs, we use language to induce cooperation in rearranging them (Hauser 1991, p.13.

The problem here is that the ways in which different people decide to rearrange their words in writing does not completely coincide from culture to culture. There is room for conflict. The conflict may be a simple topical issue, or it may a deeper rhetorical issue in how text is constructed. As this research analyzes second language writing it inherently implies that there must be more than one view on how text can be constructed. Therefore, I propose here that for the remainder of this text, American English, as it is represented in the second language classroom, be considered as an outside foreign object that intrudes and damages written communication for a second language writer. To understand how this happens, the imaginary discourse community will help illuminate the relevant approaches to teaching writing, genre theory, contrastive rhetoric and feedback.

The discussion will begin by looking at the essentialist and non-essentialist views of language, as part of the underlying theoretical foundation of the aforementioned. Finally, how these issues are dealt with on a daily basis given the relationship between the US and Mexico in the University of Guanajuato will be considered. Before actually considering the literature, it is necessary to look at two sides of a philosophical debate that occurs with the second language teaching profession.

2.2. Essentialist view of writing

In Philosophy, essentialism is the view, that, for any specific kind of entity it is at least theoretically possible for there to be a set of characteristics all of which any entity of the specific kind cannot fail to have. Holliday (2005, p.17 citing Bullock and Trombley) defines essentialism as presuming "that particular things have essences which serve to identify them as the particular things they are". Holliday argues that:

> The most common essentialist view of culture is that 'cultures' are coincidental with countries, regions, and continents, implying that one can 'visit' them while travelling and that they contain 'mutually exclusive types of behaviour' so that people 'from' or 'in' French culture are essentially different from those 'from' or 'in' Chinese culture...Common variations on this geographical theme are the associations of 'cultures' with religions, political philosophies, ethnicities and languages, where 'Islamic culture', 'black culture', and English language culture' take on the same essence of containment (Holliday 2005, pp.17-18).

This concept has made its way into the field of second language teaching in how instructors can judge other writers ability through a large view of culture. Because it is thought possible to define each large national or regional culture, second language instructors feel they can define their own cultures and those of their students. This notion of the all-knowing ESL instructor as stated by Kubota:

> There is indeed a widespread conception that because English is the international language that bridges multiple cultures, learning English enables understanding of the world and cultural diversity, despite its odd fallacy that any English speaker has international understanding (Kubota 2002, p.22, citing Oishi 1993 and Tsuda1990).

As a consequence it would seem that it is acceptable for the second language instructor to place large culture value judgements on students' writing. Furthermore, this acceptance of English as being 'superior' in large culture terms has led to the essentialization of different cultural groups by members of the English Language teaching profession (Kubota 1999 and 2002 and Holliday 2005).

As a result it has become acceptable to take an entire group of people and place a definition on their language practice in terms of the use of written texts. This process has found its way to the level of rhetorical structures for the purpose of being able to help the second language student learn how to be competent in a 'superior' English language

world, whose specific language, genres and approaches are all found in the 'second language classroom'.

This essentialist approach to 'helping' the second language writing student can be seen in Ramanathan and Kaplan's (2000) view of second language writing:

Sociohistorical/temporal cline
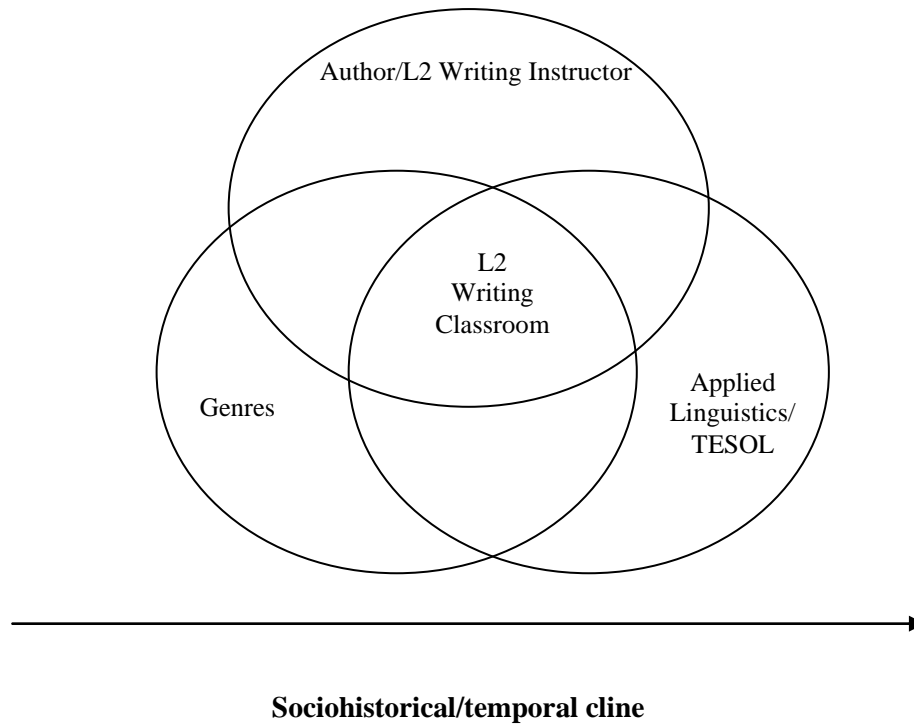
The cohort of writing instructors we have in mind are those student-teachers who are typically enrolled in MA/PhD program (in Applied Linguistics or TESOL) and who fulfil their TA-ships by teaching writing classes in language institutes or by teaching ESL sections in composition programs. Heightening genre awareness would contribute to their overall meta-knowledge. It would make them conscious of their pedagogical practices while also increasing their awareness of their position in macro-level genre/disciplinary processes. Such critical language awareness…is crucial because "not only is education itself a key domain of linguistically mediated power, it also mediates other key domains for learners, including the adult world of work." Social and textual practices that all of us L2 writing people (instructors, researchers, teacher educators) draw upon without thinking embody assumptions that directly or indirectly legitimise the status quo and

conventions, which are seemingly "ordinary," "usual," or "commonsensical" are so because they have become naturalized. Making L2 instructors conscious of at least: (1) how various social practices contribute to genre stability and genre-change and (2) how their participation in particular disciplinary activities contributes to these forces will allow them to locate themselves in a multidimensional constellation of socio-textual practices. Such awareness would, we think, have lasting, positive consequences in the discipline: It would ultimately enable teachers to question, address, and (re)shape disciplinary (socio-textual) practices that they may find problematic and needy of response. (pp.172-173)

Here it is clear that the writing instructor will take knowledge from the specific large culture second language areas of language, genre and approaches into the classroom and guide the student to an understanding of them. Note it does not seem to be appreciated that this implies that English language writing is a 'superior' benchmark.

A response to the above is very necessary because the entire process described is enclosed in one language structure where one single set of social conditions and one type of educational system, those of the U.S., are being considered as 'superior' in the model. Here much care must be taken. On the surface it appears that concessions are being made with regard to the student's previous experience and training. However, if the underlying assumption is considered, the process is oriented towards helping students adapt towards a 'superior' U.S. large culture standard. More importantly the students' previous standards or expectations concerning writing are being confronted with a U.S. model that is then used in the classroom as a measuring device to evaluate students' progress through an artificial learning cycle. While it is appropriate for instructors to take into consideration the prior knowledge that their students bring into the classroom environment, they need to question *all* of the social constraints that are inside and outside the entire classroom process, which affect both their students and themselves.

When looking at the classroom process and taking into account what the teacher is bringing into it from a theoretical point of view, it is easy to detect a pattern. The concepts of culture, the student's native language, the student's previous learning, the teacher's awareness of genre, etc. appear to be present in some form or another in past and current research. What seems to be not taken into complete consideration in the research is the 'superior' nature of the position of a U.S. composition theory as the standard of measurement and evaluation. It is therefore necessary to

> …abandon the current traditional rhetoric's notion of writing as a neutral, apolitical skill; we must recognize that discourse is inseparable from institutions, from organizational structures, from disciplinary and professional knowledge claims and interests, and from the day-to-day interaction of workers. Because discourse is related recursively to social practice and institutions—each shaping the other—we have to face the fact that in teaching discourse we are unavoidably engaged in the production of professional and cultural power (Herndl 1993, pp. 353-354).

This power, based on a presumed, normative-based knowledge of large cultures, needs to be taken away from the second language instructor. Students need to be allowed the opportunity to develop themselves as writers without have to disregard their previous knowledge as writers. This also indicates that research is needed to show that second language rhetoric is more than an alternative way of expressing the written language, but possibly a benchmark for students to try and sort out how to function in the English language when writing.

2.3. Non-essentialist view of writing

On the opposite side, there is non-essentialism, which states that for any given kind of entity there are nonspecific traits, which entities of that kind must have. This implies that "culture is not a geographical place which can be visited and to which someone can belong, but a social force which is evident wherever it emerges as being significant"

(Holliday 2005, p.23). I am not trying to say that students from other cultures do not write differently, but that the way they write cannot be defined in terms of a 'superior' 'Americanized writing system' that finds its way into the classroom. I am instead proposing a much more 'open' and 'democratic' approach to understanding second language writing. However, when trying to apply non-essentialist concepts it is also possible to go astray if not careful. First consider the following quote concerning the idea of a new rhetoric that I think is an honest open attempt to accept other possibilities in determining rhetorical structures:

> This same principle can be applied to teaching the standard rhetorical patterns of development. I have done so frequently, especially when asserting that the *traditional cause-to-effect pattern should be complemented with instruction in casual explanation by constraints.* Explanation by constraints focuses more attention on context as a possible locus of cause and motive, thus improving students' ability to think and communicate about organized complexity (e.g., about human motives, human societies, ecosystems). A similar argument can be made that while the *standard forms of Western thought are effective for thinking about stasis and essences,* teaching the form of reasoning and communication embodied by the Hegelian/Marxist dialectic (or even the Taoist/Buddhist dialectic) helps people think and communicate more effectively about process and change.
>
> Though the kind of instruction I am describing is in a *significant sense formal and sublates certain aspects of traditional formal curricula,* it is worlds (or, more accurately, levels) away from traditional static formalism. For it places form in context with various processes: creative, communicative, mental, social, and learning. Thus formalism is not rejected, but subordinated to process. And we create a kind of process approach that encompasses and transforms formalism, rather than simply opposing it.
>
> What I am advocating is that we teach this New Rhetorical kind of process writing. That in part through theory, but mostly through hands-on

practice, we help our students develop an awareness that will empower them to understand, use, and even invent new forms for new purposes (Coe 1987, pp.25-26, *my emphasis*).

While this appears to be a very empowering idea, there is need to consider some aspects of this quote with caution. First there is an assumption of a western concept of cause and effect. It does not consider that maybe the student will not even be familiar with the concept; it may not even be a part of his first language writing repertoire. Second, if I am not trained in western forms of thought am I not nevertheless capable of dealing with "thinking about stasis and essences" in an effective manner? Third, the foundation of this idea comes from a particular educational system that contains a particular view of writing. Even though this approach falls more to the non-essentialist side of an argument, it still contains traces of essentialism. Essentialist versions of language and of culture are popular and easily accepted thanks mostly to anthropologists (Grillo 2003). What this shows is that it is very difficult to step outside one's native language to consider another unknown view.

I think that what has happened is that even though I think there is an intention to try and create a sense of equality among languages, it tends to get lost in the 'second language classroom' that is dominated by English as the benchmark for judgment of value or 'correctness' (Kubota 1999, 2002, Pennycook 1994, 1998, Rubin and Williams-James 1997 and Phillipson 1992). This leads to the idea that this sort of corrective judgement is directly related to writing in English (Hinkel 1999, Connor 1996, Thrush 1993, pp.276-279, Leki 1991, and Jenkins and Hinds 1987); but in a 'fair' and 'nice' way.

In order to demonstrate how the ideas that have been considered here in the essentialist/non-essentialist dimension operate within the 'second language classroom', when English is applied as a benchmark, I will use an 'imaginary discourse community' as

a heuristic device. Constructing an idealized discourse community to represent the 'second language classroom' will enable us to see its essentialist roots.

2.4. Imaginary discourse community

In 1959 C. Wright Mills published a book called *The Sociological Imagination* in which he wrote a very detailed critique of Parsons' *Social System* by creating a parody that showed that it is not possible for a social system to be a 'fixed' and 'stable' element in the way that Parsons presented it. Mills showed instead that a social system is a living entity in constant change and evolution. I have chosen to take the structure of Mill's critique of Parsons' *Social System* and to adapt it to the concept of a discourse community in the second language classroom. This is to show that in second language education the idea of a discourse community has become 'fixed' and 'stable' in the sense that the English language has become the benchmark to determine what is 'correct' or 'incorrect' in second language writing; and that second language education has created its own genre of classroom learning purposes in second language writing. I say 'fixed' because the second language classroom does exist and events related to writing do occur. I say 'imaginary' because the view of this space is that English seems to be the only 'real' language that exists for the purpose of writing. In this 'fixed imaginary discourse community', consider the following description, which is a slightly edited version of Mills' text (1959, p. 39-41) in which I have replaced 'social system' with 'discourse community':

> Imagine something we call 'a discourse community' in which individuals write 'texts' with reference and to one another. These 'texts' are often rather orderly, for the individuals in the community share standards of value and of appropriate and practical ways to write. Some of these standards we may call norms; those who write in accordance with them tend to write similarly on similar occasions. In so far as this is so, there are 'patterns and written structures' which we may observe and which are often quite durable. Such enduring and stable patterns I shall call

'genres'. It is possible to think of all these 'genres' within the 'discourse community' as a great and intricate balance.

Let us therefore imagine how this system would look within the 'second language writing classroom'. There would be a series of checks and balances similar to those installed by any given society. This social equilibrium would be governed by two major principles, which would tend to be used to orient members on 'how to write' and on what would be accepted for consumption:

1) **'Socialization':** all the ways by which the newborn individual is made into a member of a community. Part of this social formation of persons consists of their learning how to fulfil the written standards and norms that comprise the genres of the community that produce them. By this, I refer to the approaches that are to used to aid in the learning of second language writing (cf. Mills 1959, pp. 39-41)

2) **'Social Controls'**: by which I mean all the ways of keeping people in line and by which they keep themselves in line. By 'line', I refer to whatever action is typically expected and approved of in the community. In this case it would be the rhetorical constraints of the language that govern what is considered to be 'correct' or 'incorrect' sentence and paragraph structure (cf. Mills 1959, pp. 39-41)

'Socialization' and 'social control' now become the 'fixed' and 'stable' elements in the community that is going to be analyzed. 'Fixed' and 'stable' in the sense that a point of reference is needed in order to contrast and compare the different views that exist in the classroom in relation to 'second language writing', so we are going to imagine that these elements are inflexible. I am using inverted commas to indicate *as defined* by the imaginary discourse community. It must be kept in mind that within this 'fixed imaginary discourse community' the second language instructor is responsible for maintaining the balance of 'socialization' and 'social controls' in the classroom. In effect the second

language instructor is the judge of 'value' for all that occurs in the 'second language classroom'. Institutions and standardised exams become the judges outside the classroom. For the case of this research the second language instructor and the English language will be seen as foreign elements (from the point of view of the learner) that enter the 'fixed imaginary discourse community' and impose: 'socialization' processes a.k.a. teaching approaches for learning and 'social controls' a.k.a. rhetorical constraints that limit how text may constructed in the mind of the learner. Now, it is possible to enter into this imaginary domain and see what is going on in relation to 'second language writing'.

2.5. Second language writing practice
Basic assumptions

To begin to analyse the current state of 'second language writing' in this 'imaginary discourse community', first it is necessary to start with the concept of writing and the general developments that 'second language writing' has undergone over the past decades. First of all, it is made clear that speaking and writing are not just different ways of doing the same thing; rather, they are two distinct forms of using language (Brookes and Grundy 1998, Byrne 1988, Halliday 1985, Johns 1997, and Raimes 1983).

> Writing evolves when language has to take on new functions in society.
> These tend to be the prestigious functions, those associated with
> learning, religion, government, and trade (Halliday 1985, p. XV).

Hence, writing tends to take on an elite or educated appearance within society and becomes the standard by which a society tends to classify the correct use of language (Halliday 1985). However, writing does not represent or incorporate all the features of a language (Halliday 1985). Actually, writing tends to lend itself to conformity and standardization to help create a 'pure' language form that is planned, organized, and legislated by society (Johns 1997 and Halliday 1985). As writing becomes institutionalised in the form of education, it comes under more pressure to conform and subsequently lends

itself to the creation of recognisable genres within a society (Johns 1995, Swales 1990, and Halliday 1985).

The idea that writing is in some way a reflection of a given culture is not strange, "writing evolves in response to needs that arise as a result of cultural changes" (Halliday 1985, p.39). The relationship between language and culture appears to be readily accepted in spoken language. There appears to be no disagreement or doubt that cultural factors directly influence spoken language (Richard and Schmidt 1983 and Cordella 1996). However, the relationship between written discourse and culture while evident (Howarth 2000), is at the same time controversial (Jiang 2000). Apparently, there is a tendency to not accept the connection in written discourse or at least to minimize its influence (Leki 1991, pp.124-125 and Swales 1990, p. 64), especially in technical writing (Ornatowski 1997 and Subbiah 1997). Yet there is much evidence available which establishes the influence of cultural factors in how writing is approached and interpreted by the members of a given discourse community (e.g., Rose and Kasper 2001, Crawford 1999, Hinkel 1999, Dong 1999, Dong 1998, Nelson 1997, Kirkpatrick 1997, Connor 1996, Ferris 1994, Thrush 1993, Leki 1991, Montaño-Harmon 1991, Jenkins and Hinds 1987 Harder 1984, and Kaplan 1967). In fact, from the point of view of the theories of linguistic relativity, literacy, and discourse types and genres, it can be assumed that "patterns of language and writing are culture specific, the activity of writing is embedded in culture, and writing is task and situation based and results in discourse types" (Connor 1996, p. 9). Yet, when considering the developments of the teaching of writing to second language students, there is an argument that a pattern devoid of all culture except that of the United States tends to emerge.

Considering that one of composition's most endearing traits is its persistent connection to teaching practices, as James Berlin's (Henry 2000, pp.1-4 citing Berlin) comprehensive history of twentieth-century post-secondary writing instruction in the United States which

traces the dominance of "current traditional" rhetoric, which "makes the patterns of arrangement and superficial correctness the main ends of writing instruction". This critique is extended, noting shortcomings of such instruction in the realms of purpose and audience as well as the narrow range of subject positions offered to writers:

> In current-traditional pedagogy students papers are not constructed as messages that might command assent or rejection. Nor do current-traditional teachers constitute an audience in any rhetorical sense of that word, since they read not to learn or be amused or persuaded, but to weigh and measure a paper's adherence to formal standards. Hence the current-traditional theory of discourse is not a rhetoric but a theory of graphic display, and so it perfectly met the humanist requirement that students' expression of character be put under constant surveillance so they could be "improved" by correction (Henry 2000, pp.2-3).

For that reason composition is conceptualized as: "an endeavour consisting in mastering forms, engaging little disciplinary content knowledge" (Russell 1991, p.50).

As a result, what emerges as traditional 'second language writing' is closely related to "scientific positivism" and tends to view written language a description of facts and rules that are allocated in a two dimensional textbook (Johns 1997, pp.6-8). This was the driving force in the 1960's and 1970's when applied linguistics focused on research that dealt primarily with count features of language. This focused the teaching of writing on lists of grammatical and lexical 'facts' as they have been discerned through quantitative research (Johns 1997, pp.6-19). This coincides with the research of Henry (2000, pp. ix-xiv) in that the dominance of the Harvard model in the 1970's moved classroom practice to aspects of teaching forms and graphic display to students. This was transferred to classroom practice that focuses on factual organizational models through imitation (Johns 1997 and Silva 1990). There are minor differences but the general focus is on surface level standard descriptions of formal language.

The core of traditional theories is: "literacy is acquired through direct practice, focused on the production of perfect, formally organized language patterns and discourses" (Johns 1997, p.7). "Good habits are formed by giving a correct response rather than making mistakes" (Richards and Rogers 1986, p.50). What this type of classroom framing does is lead to a domain where

> …the learner is a passive recipient of expert knowledge and direction.
> Not surprisingly, the role of the teacher is that of expert and authority,
> the person who directs all student learning….for traditional theories,
> language and textual forms are central (Johns 1997, p.7).

Impact and uses

This historical line leads directly to the basic formation of academic concepts that have become the foundation of second language writing and have made a direct impact on instruction in the classroom (Crawford 2007, pp.76-77). As a consequence the teaching of 'second language writing' can be considered from different points of view. Raimes (1991, pp.408-413) in her review of 'second language writing' comments on the beginning of a series of traditions under the following classification: focus on form (1966) where writing was used to reinforce oral patterns of the language; focus on the writer (1976) where the ideas of making meaning, invention and multiple drafts led to the process approach; focus on content (1986) where the demands of the academy are considered and content based instruction emerges; and focus on the reader (1986) where the expectations of the reader are dominant and English for academic purposes is born. Or as Silva (1990, pp.11-17), in his historical sketch of second language composition, outlines the following categories: controlled-composition, current-traditional rhetoric, the process approach, and English for academic purposes it must be noted that Silva (1990) does specify that this approach is oriented to creating writers that will conform to the expectations of an American academic institution. These categories are almost identical in concept to those offered by Raimes (1991, pp.408-413) and supply a general overview of the major developments in the

approaches of teaching 'second language writing'. A similar picture is shown in the overview proposed by Mahfoudhi (2001) in an integrative approach, which categorises those same general ideas, though using slightly different terminology, but offering the same general proposal. What makes these categorisations different and how do they work in theory?

►The Controlled Composition approach sees writing as a secondary activity; as a means of practicing structures and vocabulary learned in the classroom. Therefore, the context for writing is the classroom and the audience is the teacher. This approach focuses on form and accuracy, and writing is simply a means of assessing the students' ability to manipulate the structures practiced in the classroom.

► The Current–Traditional Rhetoric orientation places writing in the limited context of the classroom, and the teacher as the target audience. What differentiates this orientation from the previous one is the emphasis it places on text organization and students have to learn how to identify and use prescribed patterns.

► The Process Approach which is theoretically supported by Flower and Hayes (1981) model of composition focuses on writers and the process they undergo while composing written texts. Writing is thought to convey meaning and is a "complex, recursive, and creative process" (Silva 1990, p.15). Rather than simply focusing on accuracy, the process approach aims at developing students' composition process in a holistic fashion. This goal implies that students need to acquire experience in writing for several purposes, in various contexts, and addressing different audiences (Hairstone 1982).

► English for Specific Purposes is concerned with the production of writing within a specific context and is directed to pre-defined readers. While the former approach aims at wider contexts and audiences, the latter is characterized by specific targets: e.g. the context may be the academic or the business world, and the audience may be members of the academic community or business people. As English for Specific Purposes aims at enabling students to produce written texts that will be

accepted by experts in their fields, courses based on this approach try to "recreate the conditions under which actual… writing tasks are done" (Silva 1990, p.17), and have students practice genres and tasks commonly required in their jobs or educational environment. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes focuses exclusively on the production of writing within a specific context, and it is mainly concerned with the reader's reaction towards the written text. (Silveira 1999, p.111)

Conclusions

In the words of Silva (1990, p.11), "There is no doubt that the developments in ESL composition have been influenced by and, to a certain extent, are parallel to developments in teaching of writing to native speakers of English". In fact the teaching of 'second language writing' is dominated by American composition theory in the four aforementioned approaches (Crawford 2007, pp. 75-78, Henry 2000 pp.1-15 and Canagarajah 2002a, pp. 23-42). Yet, these four approaches are all strongly lacking in empirical research to support them for learning second language writing (Mahfoudhi 2001, Silveira 1999, Raimes 1991 and Silva 1990). Furthermore, none of the above can really be thought of as an adequate approach to teaching the activity of second language writing as none of them address simultaneously the four basic elements of writing: writer, audience, text, and context (Silveira 1999 and Silva 1990). Furthermore, Leki and Carson (1997, pp.39-41 and 49-60) brought out in a study that second language writing is dominated by personal writing at a University level, while the rest of the academic disciplines almost completely exclude personal writing as an element for evaluation, further suggesting the disregard for relevance in the second language writing process. The students seemed to follow four maxims: be original, be linguistically correct, be clear and be engaging; the content did not need to be correct or accurate. Nevertheless these categories do have some common points.

The aforementioned approaches all hold some concepts in common. Written language is different from spoken language. There is a need to aid second language students in

developing their ability to write in English. There are different types of writing events that students need to learn. The latter is apparently evident when considering the assumptions that surround the process approach and English for academic purposes. These categories also hold something much more important in common; they have a tendency to minimize the student's native language or culture and the influence these can have on the production of written texts. Writing patterns are presented as something that the student must conform to in order to be acceptable (Crawford 2007, Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Pennycook 2001, Canagarajah 2002a, pp.125-157, Ramanathan and Atkinson 1999, p.45, and Purves 1998).

This dominant approach to second language writing also lacks consideration for the student's native language. Most of the aforementioned research comes from studies that centre on native English speakers and the results may therefore not have the broad applicability that is claimed (Purves and Purves 1986, p.174).

There is however another body of research, which takes a different line. Indeed, breaking away from this dominant approach, a number of researchers acknowledge that writing is a complex, culturally defined activity that is linked to a wider social context within a given society (e.g., Rose and Kasper 2001, Ramanathan and Kaplan 2000, Hinkel 1999, Kramsch 1998, Nelson 1997, Abbot 1996, Connor 1996, Ferris 1994, Thrush 1993, Leki 1991, Montaño-Harmon 1991, Jenkins and Hinds 1987, Purves and Purves 1986, Breen 1986, Ong 1982 and Kaplan 1967[1]). This leads to the need to adopt a critical position towards much of the past and current research on second language composition, which is aimed almost exclusively at U.S. composition theory and language studies (Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Pennycook 2001, Canagarajah 1999, 2002a and Henry 2000) and

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[1] We need however to be cautious. While some of these authors are on the opposite ends of a spectrum in how culture is dealt with in TESOL, as expressed by Atkinson (1999) in his article "TESOL and Culture"; they are all nevertheless, still making a similar judgment about second language writing to that which is represented in the dominant view. They are still using the English language as the benchmark for classification.

suggests the need for considering the social context of writing (Benesch 1995 and Breen 1986); and it "implies that the whole pedagogical package is cruelly unfair to L2 students in that it amounts to an exclusionary practice" (Prior 2001, p.56).

Hence, writing should not be considered a mechanical process that is purely linear and highly predictable (Purves and Purves 1986, pp.174-176). Writing needs to be thought of as an *activity*.

> To think of writing as an activity is to allow for change in what is an act or an operation and to allow for modification and rearrangement of those acts and operations in particular contexts. To think of writing as an activity is also to realize that in virtually every instance there is a purposive nature to the act, a planned result, which is a particular text for a particular occasion in a particular cultural context" (Purves and Purves 1986, p.175).

Using this type of alternative, critical framework it becomes easier to see that process cannot be separated from product; and language cannot be divorced from culture. This is due to the consideration that a writer may bring different types of knowledge based on experience with the world into the activity of writing.

> The three basic forms of knowledge requisite for the writer in any culture, or, to put it another way, the three major sets of constraints imposed by a culture upon a writer, includes: 1) Semantic knowledge which involves knowledge of words and larger units of discourse and what they mean, so that such knowledge continues growing throughout the life of the individual; 2) Knowledge of models such as text models and other culturally appropriate formulaic uses of language; and 3) Knowledge of social and cultural rules governing when it is appropriate to write and when it is obligatory to write as well as knowledge of the appropriate procedures to use in the activity of writing. This knowledge, which some call pragmatics, includes knowledge of appropriate aims and of what is appropriate to include in certain kinds of writing... (Purves and Purves 1986, pp.178-179).

Therefore, it is possible to consider the argument that the activity of writing is created and governed by cultural and/or social constraints, but unfortunately since it is only the English language that is accounted for it takes on an essentialist tone.

When considering second language writing and culture, the following elements can be considered: a writer, a text and a reader (Silva 1990, pp.17-18). All of these are bound within the framework of a context. When a second language student enters the classroom, she/he brings a different conceptualisation of text and reader. The issue is that the individual has moved into a new environment and the context has been modified. This produces the need to have a more ample understanding of all the elements involved in order to create the necessary conditions for effective learning of writing and the need to study within the context of the non-native speaker's first language (Ferris 1994, pp.50-55).

In the idealized 'second language writing classroom', however, the language structure or the means of text delivery appears to be taken for granted. The focus *seems* to be on composition theory, but the *real* focus tends to be on text organisation and form and; composition theory is weakened in the process. From here the emphasis then moves to accuracy. Basically, what emerges is an area of research that focuses heavily on linguistic accuracy, and fails to acknowledge the importance of rhetorical conventions. The issues of language are dealt with from the perspective of accuracy, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. Presentation becomes an important issue dominating such factors as text organisation and form.

To start to understand all the elements involved in the idealized 'second language writing classroom', and how they interact, it is important to consider the concept of genre.

2.6. Genre theory

Basic assumptions

The idea of genre and the study of the same are often credited to the groundbreaking work of Swales (1990), where he proposed the definition of study for language studies.

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the parent discourse community will view the exemplar as prototypical. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation. (Swales 1990, p.58)

Having read the definition of a genre according to Swales, it seems possible that the 'second language classroom' has taken his idea to create a *new* genre that can only be dealt with within the classroom, in order to make any sense or reason for existence out of it. I think there may be a writing phenomenon occurring that is only understood by second language instructors and students. There are a series of writing activities, which are only understood or recognised by the members of the idealized 'community', and only the expert members know when to use them (Coulthard 1985 and McCarthy 1991). The structure, style, contents and intended audience is specific and displays easily recognisable patterns for the members. This is simple to verify, if one tries to work through the writing activities in a second language course book. Unless the writer belongs to the 'second language classroom' community, he or she will find this difficult to accomplish. I have often had to consult other instructors or even students to work out at times what the course book was looking for in the writing activity.

Nevertheless, in the real world outside the idealized 'classroom community', being able to define genre is not enough. It must be possible to physically identify a genre, so that it is possible to identify where it is being used. Since it is feasible to define genre in an abstract conceptual form, it would seem logical to assume that there are specific components that can be employed to create a practical way to identify a specific genre.

The ability of a person to recognize a genre or a discourse type employs every aspect of language and context. According to Cook all or any of the following may be brought into consideration for identification of a genre (1989, p.99):

1) Sender/Receiver   8) Internal Structure
2) Function   9) Cohesion
3) Situation   10) Grammar
4) Physical Form   11) Vocabulary
5) Title   12) Pronunciation
6) Overt Introduction 13) Graphology
7) Pre-sequence

Consider these elements: 1) *Sender*: the student and the *receiver*: the teacher; 2) *Function*: to receive a grade or evaluation; 3) *Situation*: the classroom; 4) *Physical form*: a textbook or a piece of paper; 5) *Title*: homework or class activity; 6) *Overt introduction*: teacher instructions; and the rest with the exception of the last two are linked directly to the unit in a course book that is being employed in the classroom. Any ordinary person on the outside looking at it would probably want to know why such unusual things are being requested and instructors have no answer other than they need to give the student some type of evaluation.

Impact and uses

What therefore is the impact of what has been so far described? First, the theories mentioned above have helped to shape the concept of writing in the 'second language classroom' in Guanajuato and may help produce a social phenomenon that could be in the process of becoming world wide: the 'second language classroom' writing activity or the

English as a second language genre. The second language teaching community seems to have produced a phenomenon sustained by students, instructors, publishers, government agencies and language schools with the single purpose of obtaining sample text, which fulfil institutional requirements (Canagarajah 2002a).

The second language profession has managed to create a writing process that only exists and has a purpose within this artificial construct that is being maintained by its members and the organisations for which they work. In essence a new writing genre has been created or is in the process of creation, the 'second language classroom' text (Gray 2002). Before making this consideration, "We need to examine the definition of genre itself in order to distinguish it from registerial constructs, with which it is frequently conflated" (Lewin, Fine, and Young 2001, p.11). In this way it is possible to unpack the complex social, cultural, institutional and academic factors that influence how specific types of writing are produced. Consider the definition of a genre which states that only written discourse bind the community (Borg 2003) and "suggests a reinterpretation of genre as a broad rhetorical strategy enacted, collectively, by members of a community in order to create knowledge essential to their aim" (Smart 1993, p.124):

What has happened is that the second language profession has managed to create its own professional genre to use in the classroom inside the textbook (Gray 2002, pp.155-165). As a consequence is it no surprise that students may find English simplistic or refuse to participate in aspects of language learning (Canagarajah 1993, pp.610-620). This is because instead of participating in a learning experience they are involved in what could be considered an exclusionary practice.

Second, the same theories have helped to formulate the genre and second language writing (e.g., Hyland 2004). This has lead to research that considers genre as a foundation for approaches for teaching second language writing.

Genre research and pedagogy in deed focuses on the features of written products, but with a social context thrown in, in that genres are produced for social purposes of communication within groups that share purposes, understandings, and ways of using language (Casanave 2004, p.82, citing Hyland 2002, Johns, 2002, Miller 1984, Swales 1990)

This type of research has generated a particular approach to second language writing that can be referred to as *genre based writing instruction*. This type of instruction presents what are considered to be certain advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages:

- **Explicit**. Makes clear what is to be learned to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills
- **Systematic**. Provides a coherent framework for focusing on both language and contexts
- **Needs-based**. Ensures that course objectives and content are derived from students needs
- **Supportive**. Gives teachers a central role in scaffolding student learning and creativity
- **Empowering**. Provides access to the patterns and possibilities of variation in valued texts
- **Critical**. Provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses
- **Consciousness raising**. Increases teacher awareness of texts to confidently advise students on their writing. (Hyland 2004, pp.10-11)

Disadvantages:

- **Genres should be taught "In Situ" rather than in an idealized 'second language writing class'**: Genres are far too complex to be removed from their social context and taught in the artificial structure of a classroom. This argument is supported by the proponents of new rhetoric (e.g., Dias and Pare 2000). Furthermore, the classroom has a tendency to create its own genres for academic purposes (Hyland 2004, pp.16-17 and Casanave 2004, pp.82-85).
- **Genre teaching reinforces dominant discourses and hierarchies**: The effectiveness of genre teaching as a means of helping second language

learners is based on the idea of introducing the dominant genres of the target language. As such the teaching of genre may be simply reproducing dominant discourses (Hyland 2004, pp.18-19).

- **Genre teaching stifles creativity**: "A group of language teachers from a variety of countries surveyed by Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998), expressed that the view that genre based pedagogies carried the danger of prescriptivism (Hyland 2004, p.19). As such it possible that genre based teaching will create a situation where the student is told what to write, rather than learn it.

Conclusions

What has been described so far as the dominant, genre-based approach is an exclusionary practice because the only language that is being considered is English. If English were the only language being used as a benchmark then the reduced genre that Gray (2002, pp.155-165) argues for, would be an artificial construction based exclusively on the rhetorical structure of the English language. This is further compounded as Hyland (2004, pp.54-83) argues – that genre knowledge is variable and culturally dependent, yet still uses the English language as the benchmark in his argument. This would make it even more difficult for second language learning because the learner would not even have real or familiar models to use as a point of comparison. Furthermore the learner would be acquiring a skill that would probably not have any transfer ability to professional practice since the only social function of the learned genre would be for the second language classroom.

Furthermore, considering that the instructor in the classroom is functioning as a judge that places value on what the students write, this could become a situation where the instructor is limiting the students. Hyland (2004, p.37) states:

> Theorists argue that the SFL (Systematic Functional Linguistics) agenda of extending access to valued genres is fatally flawed. Teachers

who facilitate such access may believe they are improving the life chances of their students, but they are not changing the system because they do not subvert the power of such genres. Genres in others words, function to empower some people while oppressing others, and if writing teachers ignore this dimension of genres, they simply reproduce power inequalities in their classrooms (Hyland 2004, p.37)

As a conclusion I think it clear that more research is necessary on how genre should be employed in the classroom – particularly research in the area of how other languages view concepts of genres and how texts are constructed for social use. This is because "there is enough diversity within and across genres to make it problematic to try and apply the finding of genre studies explicitly to instructional situations" (Casanave 2004, p.83). Furthermore, there is another element that is often overlooked in this process – the student's native language that appears to take on the role of an undesirable obstacle (Dong 1998, pp.89-94 and Dong 1999, pp.277-283). In itself genre is a valuable tool, but when applied to a second language context, it becomes a weak tool with many potential dangers.

To see another side to the whole issue, which may provide part of the solution, I now turn to the area of contrastive rhetoric.

2.7. Contrastive rhetoric
Basic assumptions

In second language writing contrastive rhetoric has played a powerful role in defining many concepts that we often apply. The explanatory framework employed by contrastive rhetoric is useful for this research for several reasons. First, at the core of contrastive rhetoric is the notion that that logic is a cultural phenomenon (Kaplan 1967 and Ruanni and Tupas 2006, p.2) Rhetorical expectation and conventions, therefore, differ among cultures (Liebman 1988, p.6). Second, contrastive rhetoric has its origins in and is partly related to English language pedagogy: it "examines differences and similarities in ESL and

EFL writing across languages and cultures as well as across such different contents as education and commerce" (Connor 2002, p.493). Since this research is concerned with second language writers in an EFL context this framework is useful. Finally, contrastive rhetoric has sufficient empirical evidence to lend some serious consideration to its claims:

> The accumulating evidence from contrastive rhetoric research warrants the view that linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds have some influence in the organizational structures of ESL text, although they are by no means the only factors (Matsuda 1997, p.48)

The birth of the contrastive rhetoric tradition is generally attributed to the classic essay of Kaplan in 1967 where he presented a series of doodles (see figure 2-1 below) that he assumed explained the expository developments of paragraphs written by second language learners that deviate from what would be expected in the United States. Even today this article is still very powerful and early contrastive rhetoric, therefore, has functioned within the various rhetorical structures which emerged from the original article; and still finds its way into teacher training workshops and publications (Kubota and Lehner 2004). In this article Kaplan presents the following 'diagrams' that are supposed to represent the developmental patterns of advanced ESL writers, it should be noted that "according to Matsuda, Kaplan was only trying to show that L2 students were not suffering from cognitive deficits but revealing the influence of different rhetorical traditions in their L1s"(Casanave 2004, p.29):

Figure 2-1 Kaplan's rhetorical structures
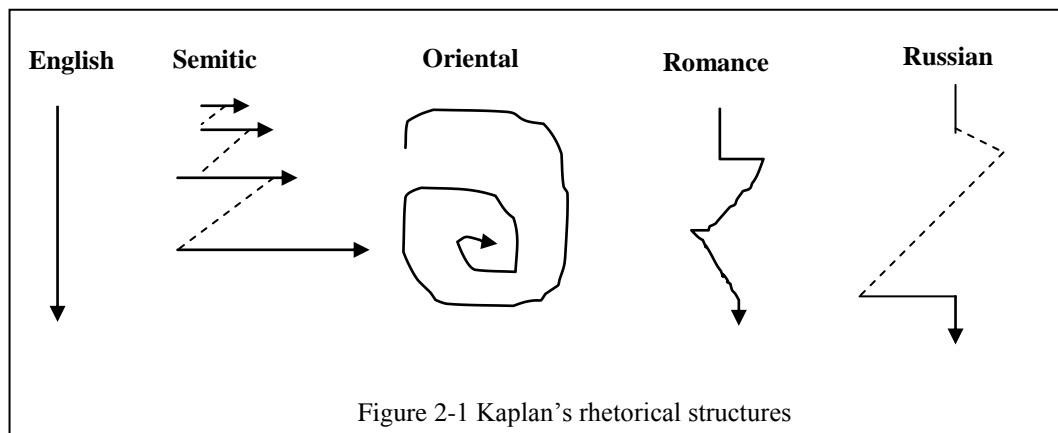
Impact and uses

The impact of contrastive rhetoric on second language writing is clearly noteworthy and has definite had a strong impact based on the well-documented research that exists in the area. In brief contrastive rhetoric:

1. identifies the possible causes for the apparent lack of coherence in second language texts (Matsuda 1997, p. 47);

2. provides teachers with some insights that can guide their decisions in developing curriculum and in responding to second language students' needs (Matsuda 1997, p. 47);

3. develops some understanding of students' native rhetorical choices, bridging rhetorical gaps so writer, instructor, and even peer reader have a common ground from which to work on the writing (Panetta 2001, p.11);

4. helps instructors who teach writing to second language students see that our truth is not *the* truth. (Panetta 2001, p.5);

5. provides students and learners with rhetorical choices (Liebman 1988, p.17);

6. promotes cultural decentering (Liebman 1988, p.17).

However, the results of these studies are not without conflict. The underlying assumptions that exist within these studies tend to reflect an essentialist thinking and may reflect more the prescriptive expectations of US scholars within a particular kind of educational system rather than from an understanding of world Englishes (Casanave 2004, pp.37-39). In themselves, these rhetorical observations are fine, but when English is the benchmark used to interpret them, it becomes potentially damaging to the student.

However, if it is *not* perceived with English as the benchmark, contrastive rhetoric does alert instructors of the need to bring a rhetorical awareness to the classroom. According to

Casanave (2004) teachers and students need to be familiar with: knowledge of rhetorical patterns of arrangement, knowledge of composing conventions, knowledge of the morphosyntax of the target language, knowledge of writing conventions, knowledge of audience, knowledge of the subject (pp.43-44).

Nevertheless, an increase in awareness does not necessarily translate in to an improvement in classroom results, nor does it imply a distinct approach for the teaching of writing. It is more about the creation of a more knowable environment for the second language writers to develop their skills.

Conclusions

It is disappointing that some type of stronger conclusions cannot be drawn in the area of contrastive rhetoric. There are still many ongoing questions that need to be resolved in this field of knowledge. There is clear evidence that the concept of paragraph is different between French and English. In those in French loose collections of data are used; whereas in English it is necessary to use topic sentences (Casanave 2004, p.47). In the German language, scholars write much more digressively. They are less likely than English writers to place topic sentences early in the paragraph (Clyne 1987). Students in Mexico tend to perform at a low level on standardised written exams when they make the decision to study in the United States (Montaño-Harmon 1991, pp.423-424).

It is presumed that it is possible to identify formal features, such as patterns of rhetorical organization across different languages and cultures. Then, this knowledge can be used to help students learn how to write in culturally and rhetorically appropriate ways (Connor 1996). Unfortunately, it seems that more evidence is necessary before this can be considered a fact (Casanave 2004).

Basically the situation is that contrastive rhetoric points out many differences between English and many other languages. The problem is that there are many questions as to what the source is for those differences (Casanave 2004, pp.52-55). Also, there is the

42

issue that maybe more focus should be given to the similarities that exist between languages rather than highlighting the differences. In the end the issue is that clearer evidence is needed to have a definite conclusion.

A further useful area to consider is that of student feedback.

2.8. Feedback

Basic assumptions

Feedback in second language writing has been extensively studied over the years (e.g., Zamel 1985, Kroll 1990, Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990, Fathman, A. and Whalley, E., 1990, Leki 1990 and Johns 1997). There seems to be controversy as to whether or not it has an important impact on the learning of second language writing (e.g., Butler 1980, Knoblauch and Brannon 1981, Zamel 1981, Zamel 1985, Robb, T., Ross, S. and Shortreed, I. 1986, Leki 1990, Conner and Asenavage 1994, Ferris 1997, Ashwell 2000, Hyland 2000, Ferris 2002, and Hyland 2003a). There is even much controversy among second language writing specialists and second language acquisition theorists as to the nature and even existence of 'error' and as to whether any classroom intervention will even help in developing an improvement in writing (Ferris 2002, pp.10-12 and James 1998). Nevertheless, it is an element that exists in the area of second language writing and plays a role in the manner in which instructors grade students' written work.

Impact and uses

Ferris (2002, pp.40-43) proposes the following principles as guidelines to dealing with the issue of treatment of error in students writing:

- Principle 1. Teachers of ESL writing need to study aspects of grammar that are particularly problematic for nonnative speakers of English.
- Principle 2. Teachers need practice in recognizing and identifying errors in students' writing.
- Teachers need practice in developing lessons and teaching grammar points to their ESL writing students.

The problem here is that the concept of error is still without definition and the focus of the principles appears to head in the direction of surface elements that are more linked to issues of vocabulary acquisition and mechanics of writing. Furthermore, since it is difficult to study writing at the level of content and rhetoric, most research tends to be related to students' or teachers' attitude towards written responses (Ferris 2002, Ferris 1997 and Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990).

Regardless of the aforementioned both students and teachers believe that written feedback has a positive influence on the development of writing for second language learners (Casanave 2004, pp.86-95). Considering the amount of research in the area it will probably continue to be an issue of debate in the profession of second language teaching.

Conclusions

In the words of Casanave, "to conclude, both teachers and researchers need to carefully consider what they mean by improvement and whether it is possible or desirable to measure improvement quantitatively or to treat it more qualitatively and descriptively" (2004, pp.91-92). Studies of feedback generally suggest that response practices are unsystematic, meaningless, and unproductive. Zamel (1985) is much more specific in outlining the impact of teacher response in writing:

> ESL writing teachers misread students texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to texts as fixed and final products, and rarely make content specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising texts. (p.86)

Simply put there is still much to be done in order to clarify the issue of feedback for learners of second language writing and what purpose it serves because as stated in Casanave (2004, p.92):

If writing improves mainly through practice and natural development rather than through intervention (Polio 2001), via a kind of written interlanguage (Yates and Kendel 2002), L2 writing teachers are left to ponder what the purpose of their responses are and perhaps to rethink how they and their students spend their time in the L2 writing class.

In summary and in fairness there does not seem to be any real conclusion that can be drawn around the issue of feedback, except that it does exist in the learning of second language writing.

2.9. Geo-political aspects that influence second language writing in the University of Guanajuato

Now, it is time to consider how the all the aforementioned discussion impacts on the 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato. There are several geopolitical factors that must be taken into consideration. First, Mexico and the United States share a long border. Both countries have influenced each other in many different aspects over the years and deal with multiple business and political issues on a daily basis (Crawford and et al 2006, Rajagopalan 2004, Condon 1997, Fuentes 1996 and Kras 1989). From an academic perspective the University of Guanajuato currently has seventy-nine full exchange agreements with universities in the United States and our language school receives a minimum of five-hundred US students per year to learn Spanish. Finally, the Language School hires an average of four US instructors each year (Plan de Desarrollo Institucional 2002-2010 Universidad de Guanajuato 2002). There is a strong local influence in the local community that affects the second language learning process. This juxtaposition between the US and Mexico has therefore led to a natural tendency to the essentialist view of writing described above.

2.9.1. A historical twist to writing in the second language classroom in Mexico

There is also an important historical twist; but before describing this, it is necessary to look back at overarching features of the process of writing. Writing may possibly be one of the most complex items that humankind has managed to invent. It has been used for many

different purposes in its brief existence. Here writing in the 'second language classroom' is being considered, but let's consider where writing came from and how it has been used in a social context. Consider the social context from which writing has emerged historically. Diamond (1997, pp.215-216) offers a concise summary of writings' evolution from a political perspective that mirrors well historical developments in Mexico:

> Nineteenth-century authors tended to interpret history as a progression from savagery to civilization. Key hallmarks of this transition included the development of agriculture, metallurgy, complex technology, centralized government, and writing. Of these, writing was traditionally the one most restricted geographically: until the expansion of Islam and of colonial Europeans, it was absent from Australia, Pacific islands, subequatorial Africa, and the whole New World except for a small part of as a result of that confined distribution, peoples who pride themselves on being civilized have always viewed writing as the sharpest distinction raising them above 'barbarians' or 'savages'.

> Knowledge brings power. Hence writing brings power to modern societies, by making it possible to transmit knowledge with a far greater accuracy and in far greater quantity and detail, from more distant lands and more remote times. Of course, some peoples (notably the Incas) managed to administer empires without writing, and 'civilized' peoples don't always defeat 'barbarians,' as Roman armies facing the Huns learned. But the European conquests of the Americas, Siberia, and Australia illustrate the typical recent outcome.

> Writing marched together with weapons, microbes, and centralized political organization as a modern agent of conquest. The commands of Monarchs and merchants who organized colonizing fleets were conveyed in writing. The fleets set their courses by maps and written sailing directions prepared by previous expeditions. Written accounts of earlier expeditions motivated latter ones, by describing wealth and fertile lands awaiting the conquerors. The accounts taught subsequent explorers what conditions to expect, and helped them prepare themselves. The resulting empires were administered with the aid of

writing. While all those types of information were also transmitted by other means in preliterate societies, writing made transmission easier, more detailed, more accurate, and more persuasive.

Writing has thus long been a weapon of empire. Writing has aided the holding together of many historical conquests; and this applies particularly to Mexico. It is not something that was openly or consciously planned as Antonio Nebrija in 1492 insisted before the Spanish conquest of the Americas, but it is the way in which a group of people communicate. Belonging to a discourse community is a complex task to accomplish if you are not born into it. Even then it is still a complex ability to master and not all members of a community achieve it. It is an activity that affects each person differently and as such this study needs to be placed in a specific setting in order to understand the small part of it that is being considered. Politically Mexico has a complex position in English language education due to the powerful influences of the United States (Rajagopalan 2004). Mexico and the United States share a fifteen-hundred mile border that more people in the world cross than any other; 80% of Mexico's tourism comes from the United States and one million five hundred thousand Mexicans cross with a visa. And an estimated 96,000 find a more creative and less legal form of entry (Condon 1997, pp.xiii-xvi and Verduzco and Unger 1998). Los Angeles is the second largest city in terms of number of Mexicans. NAFTA has thrown Mexicans and Americans into constant daily business communication and increased the amount of shared information (Condon 1997 and Kras 1989). "Studies show that the average Mexico City daily newspaper contains a higher percentage of news about the United States than the average issue of the New York Times contains about all the rest of the world combined" (Condon 1997 p. xv).

> Too little has been done to encourage Americans and Mexicans to come
> to grips with the fact that in a number of critical ways their views of the
> world differ radically and that these differences raise important barriers to
> effective communication and mutually satisfactory working relationships.

They assume that what they know about the other is enough. But it isn't.

More is needed (Condon 1997 p.vxi).

This political presence needs to be considered as it has direct influence on the learning of second language writing in Mexico. Most of the language instructors in Mexico are from the US and bring with them their view of 'socialization' and 'social controls' for the written language and tend to apply them as if they were a direct transfer in the language courses that they have. This has led to an on-site discussion concerning Mexican students' lack of ability to write. There is a strong belief among the American staff that the English language classes are the students' first opportunity to learn how to use the written language 'correctly'. The debate centres on the issues that Mexicans are redundant in sentence construction, have little knowledge of the use of punctuation and have a tendency to deviate from the topic in the writing of their classroom and evaluation activities.

2.9.2. Rhetorical tension between Mexico and the US in the University of Guanajuato.

As I am referring to the teaching process as it occurs in the classrooms of the University of Guanajuato Language School, it is important to note that this process is dominated by the use of commercial textbooks and American instructors. This is important when you consider the frequent argument in Mexico about the importance of 'native speakers' and the intense political relationship, which is sustained between Mexico and the United States and has a multiple agenda, which creates many misunderstandings between the two (Crawford 2007 and Condon 1997). Also, it must be kept in mind that much of the literature on second language writing available in the University of Guanajuato library comes from the United States where there seems to be a marked interest in what is to be called 'correct writing'. Finally, there is the term 'second language classroom' that is also local in this text. I am referring to the teaching context that has been created in the University of Guanajuato. It may have application in other parts of the world making it

indirectly a global term, but I am referring exclusively to my personal and professional experience in Mexico. All comments that centre on the classroom are making reference only to the University where I have been working for the last twenty years.

When it comes to teaching second language writing, a complex, frustrating, and often-contradictory situation almost immediately arises. Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (1991) edited by Marianne Celce-Murcia is a mainstream course book for future second language teachers in the United States and it talks about the general process of teaching writing in the following terms:

> The ability to express one's ideas in written form in a second or foreign language and to do so with reasonable accuracy and coherence is a major achievement; many native speakers of English never truly master this skill. Olshtain's chapter shows how the teacher of even beginning-level ESL/EFL students can provide practice in writing which reinforces the language students have learned and which teaches valuable mechanics of writing (e.g., penmanship, spelling, punctuation, format) right from the start. Kroll's chapter gives the reader a comprehensive overview of current theory and method in teaching writing to non-native speakers of English, especially with reference to teaching ESL students in courses devoted exclusively to the writing skill. Finally, Frodesen's chapter explores the problematic area of grammar (i.e., accuracy) in writing which plagues so many non-native speakers even after they have more or less mastered the more global features of written English, such as organization and coherence (Celce-Murcia 1991, p.233, my emphasis).

Here the future teacher is quickly made aware of the valuable mechanics used in writing and the importance of accuracy; while being promised an overview of current theory. Yet within the same section of the same book, Olshtain (1991, p.241) writes of the opportunity to "focus on linguistic accuracy and content organization." Then Kroll (1991, p.261) indicates that

...as the ability to write well in a second language is no doubt even more difficult to achieve than the ability to read, speak, or understand the language, it is not surprising that many students take several years to achieve even a modicum of success.

It is not surprising that writing has come to be considered a complex task. The teacher is oriented towards a process that focuses on the mechanics, grammar, and accuracy of language; while anticipating that it will be a long and difficult process that not even native speakers of the language can master. This is not the most encouraging overview for a person entering into the 'second language classroom' with the intention of teaching a group of students to write in English as a second language.

Technical writing, workplace writing and writing across the curriculum have become strong areas of academic research in the United States and directly influence movements in second language writing (e.g., Henry 2000, Rainey 1999, Spilka 1993, and Huckin & Olsen 1991). This is because these are the American university areas that receive the EFL writers for training, when taking a degree in the US (Huckin & Olsen 1991). The original idea seemed to be that second language students who were proficient in English needed to "focus on features of scientific and technical English that are known to be troublesome for them" (Huckin and Olsen 1991, p. xvii). This led to the creation of textbooks to help train second language students in the "psychological, social, and rhetorical principles underlying effective communication" (Huckin and Olsen 1991, p. xviii). This particular focus was the predominant direction of most research in the area of technical writing; however, it should be noted some consideration was given to social aspects (Henry 2000, Rainey 1999, and Spilka 1993). This particular focus led to a result where

...much of the research studied is not immediately applicable to workplace communication. What it needs are interpreters to analyse it and formulate ways in which it can be applied in the workplace (Rainey 1999, p.503).

This need for someone to explain what had been researched appeared to be directed towards the inclusion of consideration of second language students' social, cultural and political expectations.

This shift of focus is seen in Nelson (1997, pp.77-83) and Koffolt and Holt (1997, 53-59), where the emphasis is towards writing across the curriculum. Here, consideration is now given, to the second language students' culture and background in the sense of its undesirable interference. Now instead of training students how to write, students are being shown how to adjust their vision of the world to meet an American standard. The central idea is that students need to learn how to meet American expectations of writing (Zielinska 2003, Nelson 1997 and Koffolt and Holt 1997). This 'adjustment of vision' seems to be more visible in the broad and generalized definitions often given to culture and how it impacts on writing in studies where the intention seems to be that of training students to adapt or adjust their expectations to American writing norms (Hinkel 1999, Connor 1996, Thrush 1993, Leki 1991, Jenkins and Hinds 1987 and Kaplan 1967). However, there has been a shift in thinking recently that is taking research in a different direction.

Recently, with resistance have technical communicators acknowledged the relationship between rhetoric and the functional use of words in written language (Ornatowski 1997, Boiarsky1995, pp.245-248 and Spilka 1993). The difficulty in this acceptance seems to be that technical writing is considered as theory and practice, while rhetoric is considered exclusively as a theoretical phenomenon (Ornatowski 1997 and Hauser 1991). This acceptance of the direct relationship between rhetoric and the use of language for written communication has opened up the possibility of giving a new perspective or new interpretation on the study of technical or workplace writing.

By establishing a link between rhetoric and language, a social constructionist view of language can be considered where knowledge is founded on a collective origin and grounded in the conventions, norms, discourse, and culture of the appropriate community

(Howarth 2000, Subbiah 1997 and Sullivan and Porter 1993, pp.221-228). "Social constructionism posits the following:

- Language is inseparable from knowledge

- Language is knowledge

- Language binds a community

- Language is bound by conventions specific to the community" (Subbiah 1997, p.60).

This is an important shift in the way in which writing is viewed. By adopting this stance there are fundamental changes in the manner in which the teaching of writing is approached. Classrooms become discourse communities; teachers and students become members of discourse communities, and the focus of attention shifts from the individual writer and communicative principles and conventions towards discourse communities and the processes of communal knowledge construction (Subbiah 1997). Hence the activity of writing becomes an event or social practice (e.g., Ivanič 1998, Johns 1997, and Miller 1991). However, it must be kept in mind that the focus of the aforementioned research is still strongly influenced by American composition theory (Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Canagarajah 2002a and Henry 2000).

This change in perspective aided in the modifications of the focus of research, where writing in the workplace or writing workplace cultures began to emerge (Geisler 2001, Henry 2000, Spilka 1993, and 1990). At this point there is a change in the focus of technical writing. The term 'workplace writing' becomes the dominant term and the focus of the research becomes more qualitative (Henry 2000, Spilka 1993 and Miller 1991, pp.57-59). Also, as suggested in Rainey (1999), rhetoric from a qualitative perspective becomes the main area of focus in doctoral research and the number of dissertations shows a dramatic increase, as does the number of universities and departments. This is extremely important as

Language does not 'reflect' social reality, but it produces meaning, creates social reality. Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our *subjectivity*, is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses; competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world makes language a site of exploration and struggle (Richardson 2000, p.929).

However, this site of struggle has only occurred at the theoretical level and has not yet been put fully into practice in the 'second language classroom' because of the domination of one rhetorical structure as the benchmark to achieve.

As you begin to look at the material available for instructors in the area of 'second language writing' a possible pattern seems to emerge. There are many books available to teachers to aid in the teaching of second language writing (e.g., Brookes & Grundy 1998, Byrne 1988, Dean 1988, Harris 1999, Hedge 1988, Pincas 1982, and Reid 1993), or at least so it would seem. The aforementioned books all have something in common. They are all based on American composition theory. They are all presenting 'the right way to teach writing' or 'the correct way to write', as a phenomenon that seems to be inherently determined by the English language; with seemingly little concern given to what the students already know before they come to the classroom. Furthermore, they are assuming that the teacher who is going to employ these techniques has mastered the activity of writing in English; something that even ELT experts acknowledge may not be true, even for native speakers (Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Canagarajah 2002a, pp.23-29 and Celce-Murcia 1991, p.233).

This seems to be then professionally reinforced by the "focus on linguistic accuracy and content organization" (Olshtain 1991, p.241), which is the part of the focus of classroom policy and course books. Finally, as the consulted material on the teaching of writing has a

focus of the correct or right way to teach writing, the misconceptions continue to grow and receive positive reinforcement. This situation is not something that is simply created by a single group of instructors in a local university, but something that appears to be generated and sustained through research and so enters into a wider context. It is necessary to look at the different areas of academic knowledge related to the process of second language writing to see how this occurs. Sang-Hee (2002) suggests in a study of second language graduate students that the better writers are the ones who focus on discourse patterns and avoid dealing with grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc. This directly contradicts the aforementioned suggested approaches to teaching second language writing. Also, Sang-Hee (2002) suggests that there is an association between being a good writer in L1 and L2 and this would lead to the possible conclusion that the native language could be a part of the assimilation of this complex process. This is the part that seems to be ignored in the 'second language classroom' This is apparent as in the University of Guanajuato's Language School's focus on form, focus on content, and focus on the writer is often discussed by instructors. However, what is not seen is an analysis or focus on the process of writing and all the elements that it involves. What is seen is a process that tends to concentrate its attention on the more mechanical and grammatical aspects of writing.

The fact that the attention is on the surface issues of the production of text and the mechanics that surround it leads to the possibility that there is a clash occurring in the teaching of second language writing at a rhetorical level that is not at a conscious level for either the instructors or the students.

2.10. The situation of second language writing in the University of Guanajuato

"Written language is imbued with a purpose and interpersonal relationships in just the same way as spoken language is" (Ivanič 1998, p.61) and the structure of written texts vary according to the cultural background of the writer (Bell 2000, Hinkel 1994, and Taylor and Tingguang 1991). Yet, for some reason writing tends to lose its importance and

become a reduced activity when transferred into the second language classroom (Casanave 2004, Canagarajah 2002a, pp. 125-157 and Zamel 1997).

The apparent loss of importance seems strange on the surface. On the one side there are researchers who are questioning the validity of much that goes on in ELT in terms of second language writing (e.g., Casanave 2004, Kroll 2003, Canagarajah 2002a, and Johns 1997). There are also many ELT researchers who make reference to the need to change our perception of our second language students (e.g., Holliday 2005 and Canagarajah 1999), yet the everyday practice appears to continue on without much change in the University of Guanajuato. Possibly, the issue here is the instructor. The ELT instructor receives little, if any academic training in writing (Casanave 2004 and Canagarajah 2002a, pp.23-42). As a result, the average instructor is unlikely to demand a lot of material and information in textbooks on a skill that is not going to be explicitly taught and a skill which the person is not academically trained to work with.

As a consequence, writing seems to be the skill that receives the least amount of attention in second language development. The focus tends to be on simple written activities, which can be used more for evaluating than learning. So, in the end, there are students that are unsure of the 'social controls' that govern writing in English and are placed at a disadvantage when they enter the real world and need to use the written language in a social activity. Basically students are being given a false perspective of what writing is in English. Students are being told that writing is a simple, easy to use tool (Canagarajah 2002a, pp.125-129). In classroom practice students are advised at the University of Guanajuato just be careful with your spelling and grammar and the rest is automatic in the 'fixed imaginary discourse community', this is evident as mechanics and language structure account for the majority of their grade. What is forgotten is that this formula is only good in the 'second language classroom' and that they will have difficulties when they leave it. When the students leave the 'second language classroom', they are

required to enter into a complex social activity, which is in constant development and change with different expectations across institutions and cultures (Clark and Ivanič 1997 Johns 1997 and Purves 1988, pp.176-181). When students leave the 'second language classroom' writing in English is just as complicated as it is in their native language.

Nevertheless, the complexities are quickly reduced to simple practice and revision of mechanics and grammar, when they fall into the constraints of the University of Guanajuato and maybe even in other second language classrooms (e.g., Canagarajah 2002a, Celce-Murcia 1991, Olshtain 1991, Silva 1990 and Kroll 1990).

What is presented is an 'second language classroom' that is seen through twenty years of professional experience along with the consulted literature in the area of writing. First there is the issue of weak professional training (Canagarajah 2002a, pp.23-42). There is the view that writing is a focus on grammar and mechanics (Celce-Murcia 1991, Olshtain 1991, Kroll 1991, Silva 1990 and Kroll 1990). There is little focus on the skill of writing in much of the commercial ELT material that is available in Mexico (e.g., Soars and Soars 2001, Broadhead 2000, Baily and Humphrey 1996, Doff & Jones 1991, Evans & Dooley 1999, Nunan 1995, O'Connell 1992, Lado 1990, Harmer & Surguine 1987, and Richards, Hull & Proctor 1991). I do not think that these textbooks were designed exclusively for Mexico and would suspect that this truth extends to other parts of the world.

This simplified view of writing in the classroom is something that I think may extend beyond the borders of the University of Guanajuato and this research. The suggestion is that this simplistic view of 'second language writing' is being reinforced at many levels. This leads to the possible concept that the professional view of 'second language writing' is one of a simple, linear process requiring limited practice and with a focus on mechanics and grammar. This strips writing of its meaning and purpose within the social structure of society. The instructor now knows that the student can write according to institutional second language

standards and the student has a grade that suggests his/her ability to write in English that satisfies the administrative requirements.

When does a person write only for the purpose of a grade? One place is in the second language classroom in the University of Guanajuato. Students write for other academic purposes where in the end they receive some type of evaluation or grade; however, it is normally the content or the argument that is being questioned or evaluated, not the grammar and the mechanics that fulfil the instructor's expectations. Normally, grammar and mechanics are a minor issue that will be automatically corrected during the process of document creation; instead of converting it into the focal point of the writing experience. I think this focus is creating a conceptual clash between instructors and students concerning how text is constructed.

To show this clash, represented on the following page is not a closed model, but a way of portraying what happens in the 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato given the assumptions that are made about the process of writing. In ELT course books and resource books aspects of composition theory are taken into account particularly in the form of text organization, form, and presentation. Missing is the possibility that Mexican Spanish operates under a different set of social conventions and is worthy of being considered for study and analysis. As such, the information being presented to the students is at best probably incomplete and confusing. Added to this is the instructor, who, if not aware of the language structural differences could add to the confusion in the classroom. As a result instructors are taking an imposition into the classroom, which tends to reduce the role played by institutions and social groups that conform to discourse communities. Furthermore, there is the absence of culturally relevant 'social controls' and 'socialization' because both have been reduced to a simplified view of the social aspects of writing by only considering one language and one set of social conventions for the activity of 'second language writing' in a

community. On the following page in the model the students' first language no longer exists and is disregarded for the creation of written text.
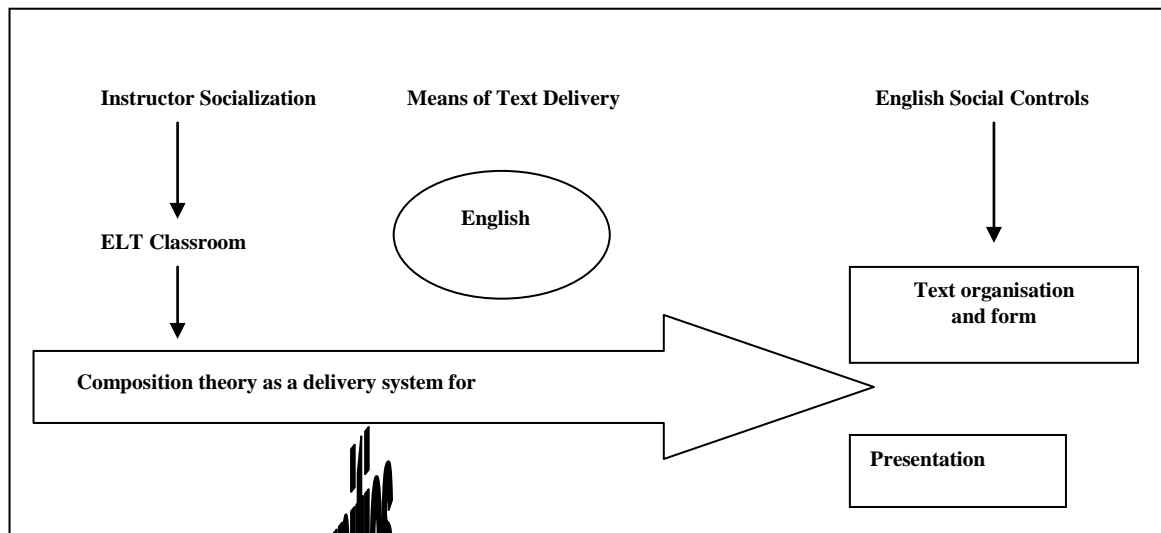
Figure 2-2. The University of Guanajuato 'second language classroom' *from the instructor's viewpoint*

In conclusion, a simplified process is practised that seeks to eliminate the existence of the students' native language and places the students in an unreal world that is working with a process that incorporates only a part of the components that a discourse community actually contains. The students are placed into a social context where they are learning an artificial classroom genre that is not employed in English outside the second language classroom. Furthermore, it is a genre that is constructed on a set of foreign norms that are being imposed at a rhetorical level.

2.11. Summary

From this review of cross-cultural aspects of second language writing some issues are brought to light in the 'imaginary discourse community': 1) There is an argument that research in second language writing may have a certain bias towards English as the

benchmark for 'correctness' in second language teaching; 2) second language instructors wield much social control in terms of writing in the classroom and they may not be completely aware of how much of an impact it can have on students in their development; and 3) students are at a disadvantage in terms of expressing the 'socialization' and 'social controls' of their native language, along with a lack of consideration for the rhetorical conventions. Unfortunately writing is not a completely 'fixed' or completely 'stable' process, once it has been taken out of the 'imaginary discourse community'. Hence most of this tends to become fuzzy or blurred in actual practice. This is part of why writing in a second language is such a difficult and complex task.

Examples of how writing is dealt with are complex and difficult. When considering contrastive rhetoric, the two languages are removed from their social context. This is fine for showing students how errors are made through transfer, but loses importance for second language writing. When 'second language writing' is approached from the viewpoint of discourse analysis, the use of 'socialization' processes and 'social controls' in a particular language become more transparent and it is possible to see how the texts function. However, second language instructors in the University of Guanajuato appear to not show students how or when to write those texts. Finally, when considering writing in a second language it is necessary to draw upon composition theory and written texts. This produces a process where the students are forced to adopt a new rhetorical structure to write apparently without any meaningful explanation or clear social purpose. In essence when looking at second language writing it seems to be often removed from a real context in order to analyse it in some fashion.

In essence what seems to require more attention in terms of research is what is occurring around the process of teaching the activity of writing to second language learners in their social context. By around the process, I mean what is happening outside the scope of classroom process, the abilities and knowledge that the students bring with

them to the classroom. What I think is present outside and inside the classroom is the natural application of socio-cultural processes, which help to shape and sustain the activity of writing. The ability to sustain the activity of writing requires that all involved in the process are aware of the underlying social principles that are governing it. A point of entry is necessary to find out what is really happening, when students learn to write in English as a Second Language at the University of Guanajuato and whether all the members involved in the process are aware of the factors that are influencing the process.

If the point of entry to the 'second language writing' process is located inside the 'second language classroom' itself, then the door is open for the research questions to be applied. The methodological process of deconstructing the activity of teaching second language writing in the University of Guanajuato can begin through the detailed analysis of an exploration group and through a methodologically controlled research process.

Through this process of discovery with the exploration group it will be possible to look at the descriptions offered by the data in order to see how the activity of writing is employed and perceived by second language students when they are engaged in learning how to produce written academic texts in English. This should allow for the possibility of discovering what is really happening in terms of theory and practice inside the 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato.

Chapter Three

3. Defining the research methodology

> Autobiography, the genre of choice of many writers of diaspora, is an out-of-bounds genre that captures the fluid character of memory, migration, and transition in an appropriately nuanced fashion. In an age of shifting perceptions of national and ethnic identity, destabilized borders, and nonterritorial coalitions, autobiography, precisely because it is a genre that defies definition and comes under many guises, is uniquely positioned to give voices to structures of experience that resist naming. Autobiographical voices conjugate all the tropes of exile. The basic structure of the narrative of this study is (auto)biographical. Autobiography and autoethnography variously or simultaneously assume the form of a confessional idiom…. (Seyhan 2001, p.96)

3.1. Introduction

In this Chapter the approach to the field research is described. Because the experience of two early phases in data collection, informal interviews with two co-workers, and my own self-analysis diary, were instrumental in the shaping of the approach, these are also referred to. This thesis is a text that is being prepared for a foreign audience from the point of view of a researcher who is technically researching a foreign culture, although he is a well established member of it as seen in Chapter One. Therefore, much care must be given not only to how the research is conducted, but also to the creation of the text itself in the second language research process. As such, the self-analysis diary data from the autobiographical self is the driving force of how the data is collected and then, later on compared in Chapter Six in order to expand its interpretation. This in turn provides the foundation for the process of considering how second language writing has been researched and the need to try to move towards a more politically balanced approach as seen in Chapter Two.

In this chapter the following data that was collected over a four year period will be considered as part of the methodological construction:

Table 3-1 Data Collected in the Research

Collection technique	Amount of data collected
Organisational interviews	4 interviews of co-workers
Research diary	One 119 page diary
Self-analysis diary	One 22 page diary
Pre-writing samples	28 written compositions, 14 in English and 14 in Spanish
Post writing samples	15 written compositions in Spanish
Classroom descriptions	8 four page format descriptions, 4 in English and 4 in Spanish
Personal observations	One 8 page field journal
Classroom video	21 hours of classroom video.
Post-course interviews	5 interviews of participants of the exploration group at the end of the course
Follow-up interviews	3 interviews of participants after completion of the MBA programme.
Wordsmith analysis	5 statistical analysis of 5 different writing events, 2 in English and 3 in Spanish

3.2. Motivation for the research methodology

In the previous chapter selected literature that is associated with the activity of teaching second language writing was considered from a critical perspective in an 'imaginary discourse community' and it must be kept in mind that I will continue to use this device in this chapter. Nevertheless, as I began to take a closer look at the literature which I consulted inside an 'imaginary discourse community', I was not satisfied with the suggestions that were being offered. Much of the initial literature consulted by me was oriented towards pragmatics and had a general tendency to conclude with the idea that the pragmatic side of language is difficult to deal with in the classroom (e.g., Kasper 1997 and 2000). As my search for some type of explanation continued, I began to find myself

reading more extensively in the area of social anthropology. At first, this made me a little nervous because I felt that I was leaving the field of ELT. More importantly, I now think that the explanations offered on writing from this perspective seemed more coherent and complete. Furthermore, they seemed to explain much of what was happening inside and outside the classroom. At this point in my readings I came to the conclusion that two things were happening in the second language writing process: one appeared to be very social in its nature and the other seemed to be connected to discourse analysis in a partial transfer of linguistic structures in the sense that English is the only language taken into consideration.

This partial transfer of written structures combined with the emerging social aspect led me to address the concept of second language writing in a more social framework through a series of interviews which became a pilot data collection process that involved interviewing two co-workers in the institution where I work. I began first with a series of short interviews/conversations on the nature of writing in Spanish and in English with GRJ[2], mostly because of the questions she asked me about my research. She is a school employee who studied in our English language programme and is responsible for the office correspondence both internal and external for the BA programme in ELT in the Language School. Through our interviews I became more aware of the apparent socio-cultural differences of the process of writing between Mexican Spanish and American English. This was mostly as the result of a comment that she made one day after redesigning a letter in Spanish that I had written. She explained that the problem was that the original letter would be confusing to others because they would not understand the way I think. She pointed out that when she speaks to me in Spanish, she speaks the same way as I do in order to make it easier for me to understand her. This, she called

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[2] These are the initials of a co-worker that was interviewed at the beginning of the research process. The initials of all the participants will be used in presenting data.

"writing like an American" (PD extract 28/02/02)[3].

What she exactly meant by writing like an American, I do not know, but the idea interested me. This suggested recognition of a different writing model or structure that for some reason was not acceptable in Spanish.

The concept of 'writing like an American' intrigued me. In order to see if it was really possible to clarify what this could mean I decided to place her in a more complex situation to see what kind of results would appear. I gave her a copy of an e-mail that I had received from a Spanish graduate student requesting information on possible teaching positions in the University. This was the beginning of the analysis of a critical incident that became a part of the data collection process. This simple everyday work event had the potential to become something more complex and interesting through incorporating my interpretation (Angelides 2001).

> When an incident that surprises the researcher occurs, it becomes the stimulus for reflection, and this reflection leads to the decision about the incident's criticality (Angelides 2001, p.431citing Schön)

I thought that since the sentence structure of this e-mail was identical to English, this might change her earlier comment on "writing like an American". The results were not as I expected, her comment on the e-mail was,

> The idea of subject + verb in present tense is very American and sounds simple in Spanish. This should not be used in formal writing (PD extract 06/03/02).

Here at this point I decided that the activity of writing is more than just grammar and rules of form that need to be followed. It began to take on a more complex and more socially based structure than I had originally supposed. Therefore, I decided to expand the initial

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[3] Throughout this book a different font is used for data as proposed by Ellis and Bochner (2000) pp.733-761 as a way to show distinct voices in a text. For data classification consult table 4-1 on page 111.

interviews to a different area inside the University with the Secretary General's office and see what type of information I could obtain.

3.2.1. Entering the research context

The office of the Secretary General is the second highest authority in our institution. This office functions as the academic overseer of the entire University. Among its obligations is the responsibility of compiling and processing the minutes from all University Committee meetings. I decided to go to this office for two basic reasons. Firstly, I wanted to see if the concept of workplace writing here in Mexico differed from the literature that I had read on the same concept about workplace writing in the United States. Secondly, I wanted to see if I could get some type of additional confirmation of a difference in the structure of writing. Once again, through interviews, my new assumptions seemed to be confirmed in the sense that writing is a socio-cultural process that requires a wider explanation than what is offered by applied linguistics. I felt that the person who is responsible for organising the university writing in the different schools would be the ideal person to discuss the topic of writing.

MF is the personal secretary of the Secretary General of the University of Guanajuato. His BA is in Topography and his graduate degree is in Hydraulic Engineering. He has been working in various academic and administrative positions in the University for seventeen years. For the last eight years he has been working in the Secretary General's office where one of his functions is as a technical writer for the University. This is a rather complex task given the structure of the University of Guanajuato.

All forty-three schools in the University are grouped in seven areas of study that form seven specialized committees, where all academic and administrative decisions are taken. These decisions are based on consensus by representatives of the schools, which form the seven different areas (Compendio Normativo "regulation handbook" 1998 Articles 98 and 119). MF is responsible for maintaining a precise written record of all the meetings

that take place involving these committees. Then he is required to present it in a summarized written format to the hundred and eighty-six people involved to the University Council where the consensus is converted into policy, regulations, and norms for the institution. In the University this process occurs twice each semester in the University over a four-month period.

In our first encounter MF described the process of dealing with written texts in the University as

> Somos supervisores, como orientadores….la Secretaría General tiene que ser la receptora de todos los documentos y revisar que tengan la estructura y forma conveniente y en algunos casos hay que devolver los documentos para revisión (ICW no. 1 09/05/02)
> We are supervisors, facilitators…. the Secretary General's office has to receive all documentation and revise it to see if the structure and form is convenient and in some cases documents are returned for revision.

This is identical to the process described by Spilka (1990 and 1993), in that workplace writing is centred on collaborative efforts and requires constant feedback. While Henry (2000, pp179-181) indicates that the issue of authorship is a question of importance in the United States, MF says

> somos de apoyo, todos lo que estamos haciendo,… el empeño, el esfuerzo, la disposición motivacional de hacerlo es un producto de las funciones y atribuciones que tenemos,…reconocemos el papel que estamos jugando (ICW no.1 09/05/02).
> we are a support team, what we do, the dedication, the effort, the disposition to do it is a product of the functions and attributions that we have. We accept the role that we play.

Here, it appears that ownership of authorship may not be as important to Mexicans as it is to Americans.

3.2.2. Research questions

The above all led me to consider that there may be false assumptions or beliefs sustaining the teaching of writing in ELT programmes at the University of Guanajuato. The principal of these possible assumptions is that Mexican students do not know how to write. I think that

aspects of writing in the University can be clarified through the research questions introduced in Chapter One:

1) What is happening when students learn 'second language writing' at the University of Guanajuato?

2) What may be the socio-cultural expectations of second language learners when they are dealing with the activity of writing in English?

In order to answer these questions I think that some adjustments need to be made on how to approach the qualitative research paradigm in second language writing because English should not be the automatic benchmark. This is because writing is an entrance tool into discourse communities. In this case as I look at how others enter the American English academic community, I compare it to my own entrance in to the Mexican Spanish academic and professional communities, and I am writing a document for entrance in to the British academic community. It is apparent that it is necessary to build an approach for looking at second language writing from a qualitative perspective to allow all the voices to enter.

3.3. Second language research

Second language research has been with us for some time. In the past decades much research has been done in many areas that are related directly and indirectly to how second languages are taught and learned. There is much research discussing many types of differences that are found between English and other languages. This general process of comparing English to another language or using English as the benchmark for studies seems to be quite popular or at least common in second language academic research. Much work has been done in areas such as: comparative linguistics, contrastive rhetoric, language transfer, pragmatics, and error analysis (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Olshtain 2000, Connor 1996, Cook 1989, Kroll 1990, Leech 1983, McKay 1993, Mills 1997, Odlin 1993,

Rose & Kasper 2001, Seliger & Shohamy 1989, Wallace Robinett & Schachter, 1983, and Yule 1996). These areas have a tendency to highlight or place emphasis on the differences that can be found between English and other languages. This type of research has led to more research related to teaching methods or approaches which have given rise to much terminology. For example, 'intercultural dimension', 'intracultrual dimension', 'cross-cultural dimension', etc or the continual reference to approach (e.g., Krashen and Terrell 1983, Larsen-Freeman 1985, Lewis 1993, Nunan 1989, Richards and Rogers 1986, Richards 1998, Stern 1992 and Wallace 1991) are terms used to defined or conceptualise certain aspects of second language teaching. There are lots of common dimensions and approaches that are used with the English language as the central defining signpost.

This apparent tendency seems to also be found in the area of second language writing research (e.g., Connor 1996, Kroll 1990, Byrne 1988, and Purves 1988). These writing reference books have in common what seems to be a general tendency to lean towards a quantitative perspective in the type of research presented. I say a quantitative perspective in the sense that specific words, phrases, or expressions are highlighted and not the textual construction of complete sentences or paragraphs. This seems to create a tendency to show much information in terms of comparative linguistics or to give the impression of a qualitative approach in some of the second language writing research. So by retaining the English language as the signpost or guideline for showing what is happening implies much information on what to write, but little information on how to do it?

In this research a qualitative approach is being employed with the intention of letting the members involved express and show what is occurring in second language writing from students' perspective with the intention of allowing the details of the process that evolve to show the socio-cultural element of second language writing and how it could be potentially problematic to make open contrastive comparisons between two languages, when writing

is the object of study. In essence, the intention of this study is to allow the data generated by the participants to create the story of what is happening in the classroom when students are learning to write in a second language and express it through dialogues. This will be done without using English as a benchmark; it will only be a point of comparison, considered as an intruder. This is important as second language students are often labelled and classified as writers with limited abilities, when they are in the process of learning the activity of writing in English (Thesen 1997); or they are subjected to framing by research in ELT circles such as that by

Canagarajah (1993), Peirce (1995), Pennycook (1996) who have provided useful analytical tools for describing the complexity of identity and literacy, but offer little to explain what might be the underlying explanation.

3.4. Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative Analysis…"refers to analysis which is not based on precise measurement and quantitative claims. Sociological analysis is frequently qualitative, because research aims may involve the understanding of phenomena in ways that do not require quantification, or because the phenomena do not lend themselves to precise measurement." (Morrow 1994, p.54) In recent professional academic research

> …qualitative research is increasing in use in a wide range of academic and professional areas. This type of research methodology has developed from aspects of anthropology and sociology and represents the broad view that to understand human affairs it is insufficient to rely on quantitative surveys and statistics, and it is necessary instead to delve deep into the subjective qualities that govern behaviour (Holliday 2002, p.7).

So, what is qualitative research? This is difficult to define as no one has copyrights on the term. It ends up meaning a variety of things for a variety of people. "As a matter of fact, that is the most important point: qualitative research can be a diverse, rich, and sometimes

self-contradictory world of inquiry" (Chenail 1992, p.1). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define it as:

> Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (p.2).

Creswell (1998) gives a similar definition in a more concise manner.

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p.15).

Thus, qualitative research is in many ways by definition a process of exploration into what is happening in the world we live in and the way in which we perceive it. If we look at the world we live in, it can become a very complicated place. It is even more complex when we position ourselves as a participant/observer in the research process that is going to be explored (Holliday 2002, pp.153-154). This places both the researcher and the research process at a difficult cross road. It becomes even more difficult, when dealing with more than one culture in the research process. It is necessary to ask how to represent the voices that are involved in the process in an understandable fashion, without altering what they represent. I am dealing with Spanish speakers and trying to represent what they think to a British audience that I am unfamiliar with, using a language that has not been my principal form of communication for the last twenty years.

How these voices are represented in the research process is a complex issue (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986, Holliday 2002, and Creswell 1998). It is more complex when

researchers translate them on to paper in a written text because the way a text is viewed can have different norms, organisation, and perception by those reading it. Therefore, not only the research setting needs to be constructed, but also, how it will be represented in the text (Holliday 2002). In this case, I am attempting to represent in a text, a classroom process that contains a series of socio-cultural processes that occur inside and outside the classroom.

What is happening, I think is the natural application of socio-cultural processes that help to shape and sustain the activity of writing. The ability to sustain the activity of writing requires that all involved in the process are aware of the underlying social principles that are governing it. The process of carrying out professional research is a process that is governed by writing.

This research process is centred on the production of a text that communicates what happened inside a specific context. The text that is produced must conform to the socio-cultural expectations of the audience that is validating its social and institutional acceptance. However, in this particular case writing and its teaching to other people in different cultures is the object that is being studied. This places the text itself in a delicate position, along with the members of the community that are being subjected to the research process. As a result, the selection of discourse style and the positioning of authority need to be dealt with very carefully in the research process. As such, consider that writing is the making of texts. This is because writing is no longer marginal, writing has emerged as central to what researchers do before, during and after the investigation (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986). Therefore, the selection of what to write and how to represent it in the text become central issues related to research. In this particular case, this is even more apparent as the object in question has to do directly with writing itself. As such, it is relevant to consider

> …that particularities of each research project are so unique that they require a distinctive method for every study. They may identify research

tradition(s), which inspired their method for a specific project, but they will also allow each study to have its own project-specific method which emerges from the special characteristics of the project (Chenail 1992, p.2).

3.4.1.   The role of writing in qualitative research methodology

…language…It enfolds the whole of literary creation much as the earth, the sky and the line where they meet outline a familiar habitat for mankind. It is not so much a stock of materials as a horizon, which implies both a boundary and a perspective; in short, it is the comforting area of an order space. The writer literally takes nothing from it; a language is for him rather a frontier, to overstep which alone might lead to the linguistically supernatural; it is a field of action, the definition of, and a hope for, a possibility…it is a social object by definition, not by option. (Barthes 1967, p.11)

To consider the question of when to write a particular type of discourse, it is necessary to detail the methodological approach of the writing, as it is part of the research itself, particularly in the area of qualitative research when dealing with ethnography. In second language research attempts to remove politics and culture from English Language education have produced much discussion on second language acquisition and 'best' teaching methods (e.g., Pennycook 1989). It has been taken to the point of methods for the sake of methods (e.g., Clarke 1982). Similar assumptions have been made in the teaching of second language writing, leaving it devoid of culture (Raimes 1991). This type of culturally neutral research makes no attempt to understand the social aspects involved in teaching and learning second language writing. When researching writing from an ethnographic point of view method and text become intertwined.

"The text's style of writing is a crucial factor in the establishment of authority. The stance that the narrator chooses in relation to the target culture shapes the form that the

presentation of the data takes is crucial" (Johannsen 1992, p.75). There are two basic ethnographic styles.

> The first is a basic dialogue with key informants in which interpretation is based on the interactions of the ethnographer with selected persons from the target culture. The second is a style in which the ethnographer is presented as an observer or translator of texts that are presumably authored by members of the culture (Johannsen 1992, p.75).

Unfortunately, neither of these approaches seems to be completely effective, when dealing with writing when two cultures are involved. Given the intimate relationship between culture and writing, it becomes necessary to search for a different way to approach the ethnography of writing.

First of all, consider that qualitative research borders between post positivism and post structuralism using any and all the research strategies available (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Also, qualitative research has no predisposition to privilege discourse over observation. Discourse must be taken as seriously as observation (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2000 and Seale 1999). As such, researchers can only know a thing through its representation. Writing is one of the forms that cultures use to create a representation of who they are as a community.

If I am going to attempt to know or understand the activity of writing as a cultural representation, I have to become a part of the process and allow the participants to express themselves. If I am to allow the participants to express themselves about the activity of writing, establishing a dialogue as a goal to allow the participants to express themselves is necessary (Johannsen 1992, pp.73-75). A dialogic text inherently disperses authority and that alone makes it preferable to standard ethnographies because it is both more truthful and politically superior, even though no one has attempted the dialogic approach in a full-blown and thorough ethnographic study (Johannsen 1992, pp.74-77). As such writing itself becomes a method of inquiry and draws attention to the language itself.

Writing provides the means by which I can investigate how I construct the world, ourselves, others, and even how others write (Richardson 2000, pp.923-925 and Abbinnett 2003, pp.15-24).

In this case as Richardson (2000, p.924) states "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something I did not know before I wrote it." You as well as I were possibly taught not to write until you knew what you were saying (Richardson 2000), but in this case students are taught to be open, to observe, listen, question, and participate. To this point, writing will be conceptualised as an open place, a method of discovery (Boughey 1997 and Richardson 2000) that is an attempt to discover what is actually happening when students learn to write in a second language.

> Entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers. Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community generated and community maintained linguistic entities— or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or 'constitute' the communities that generate them. (Bruffee 1986, p.774)

Here the participants are going to construct the social reality that they live in as students and participants in the process of writing in a second language. As such, they will be able to explain to me what is happening, so that I will have the opportunity to examine and attempt to understand it.

3.4.2. Writing model to create ownership of voice

The term 'small culture' as defined by Holliday (1999, pp.247-249) has a relationship with writing from a certain perspective. This is from the perspective of socio-cultural norms that are stable, but flexible within themselves. I am referring to small culture as a term within itself. Sub-culture, sub-group have negative connotations. As such I am using the term small culture to show that writing groups are small, have their own norms,

changeable, but most importantly an individual may belong to several. In essence it is like a synonym to discourse community, but 'small culture' as the dimension of the cultural influence in writing.

At this moment, I am immersed in two different small cultures that are in constant change and one of their purposes is to write and each has its own vocation, situation, and context that are governed by its own socio-cultural norms. Firstly, I am a PhD student at Canterbury Christ Church University and this places me in the role of researcher with the goal to produce a written document in English. Secondly, I work for the University of Guanajuato and my workplace role requires me to write extensively in Spanish and in English. In both of these roles permanent and temporary members who bring identity and cohesive behaviour to each small writing culture surround me. In each of these small cultures there are specific norms for writing that must be fulfilled. As a PhD student I am aware that my thesis may not be accepted if I do not conform to the accepted school norms outlined in the student handbook for such a document. As an employee at the University of Guanajuato, the documents that I write are rejected or returned for correction if I fail to fulfil the organizational expectations. This illustrates some of the complexities of finding identity as a writer and at the same time shows that social expectations in writing are not necessarily to be found in a step-by-step guide in the sense that it is the community that determines what is acceptable (e.g., Kubota 1999, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, Johannsen 1992, Beattie 1964). In this case the situation is much more entangled as I am using the University of Guanajuato as my research site for the document I will write for Canterbury Christ Church University.

In the case of my role as a PhD student, Canterbury has given me a Student Handbook that outlines the way in which I am expected to present my writing. However, the Student Handbook does not address the complexities of my personal situation. I am a participant/observer in this research setting and perform two very different roles (Spradley

1980). I am an insider and an outsider in the process; however, instead of attempting to hedge this situation, it will be embraced (Atkinson 2001, pp.311-314). Depending upon if I am an insider or outsider of a literary event, I have a different perspective towards how writing should occur (Henry 2000, pp.112-138). Furthermore, as a participant in the research I receive constant feedback in my workplace writing and this feedback continuously alters the finished product. As an observer, my perspective on writing is affected by my literature review of the research. Hence I am confronted with four different voices or perspectives (see p.77 for model) that directly influence and maintain a specific function in the process of the research (Johannsen 1992, pp.74-77). As I consider these all to be valid voices, I want them to be present and represented in the research (Kubota 1999, pp.16-19 and Johannsen 1992, pp.74-77). This I think will help to demonstrate the complexities of writing a text for a specific audience. Also, it will exemplify the concepts of writing as an activity (Purves and Purves 1986) and the term small writing culture and how the two are interrelated in the activity of writing using the image of writing as being like an archaeological dig (Henry 2000, pp.34-36).

My reasoning behind the model for writing as an archaeological dig is structured around the concept that each voice represents a shard of a dig. These shards must be pieced together so as to construct a type of representation of reality. As an individual in this process I am working as a participant/observer. At the same time I am a member of the small culture and I have been writing in Spanish for work purposes for about fifteen years. This places me in two roles. I am trying to investigate a small culture, but at the same time I work within it. As I am an active part of the small culture and the documents that I write in Spanish are validated by the work culture that I am in, I have two perspectives to consider. I need to show the voice of me as a researcher, but at the same time *she* (myself as a

participant)[4] is also an active participant in the process, and this voice must be present as it effects my own interpretation as an observer. Added to this situation is the idea that as a researcher I am going to attempt to interpret and place literature within the document that will help to strengthen the argument. This leads me to believe that there is a need to show that there will be an ongoing debate around how I place it within the document. This leads me to the idea that there will be a dual dialogue that will create the argument.

The first dialogue is centred on how *she* (referring to myself as a participant in the work culture, which is relevant as I learned to write in Spanish as a second language in the same manner as many students: first in class and then through professional practice) functions and interacts within the target small culture and obtains social validation for the documents that she writes at work. This is normally accomplished through oral feedback with different members of the small writing culture. As a foundation to create an exploration group I proposed to represent this interaction with various individuals with each of the names as they appear in the process. Each was a member of the target small culture that is dedicated to workplace writing as one of their professional functions within their organization. Between these elements, I developed and showed the process of validation of written documents from specific communities' functions. This was following the concept that writing is socially constructed to interpret reality. This interpretation of reality is based on a process of ongoing negotiation and validation within the small culture itself. Hence, it becomes paramount that I show the process and give not only voice, but ownership to the participants to reflect more closely the process that normally occurs. The idea of ownership refers to allowing the actual person to retain control of their words as far as realistically possible within the text. This is important because of the other dialogue.

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[4] There is much research discussing the use of 'she' and women's issues (e.g., Weedon 1987). I am only employing the concept as a distancing device to help the reader and myself as a researcher understand and make a distinction between what I think as a researcher and what I have experienced as a second language writer. Finally, it facilitates understand who is speaking in the text. This becomes clearer in Chapter six.

The second dialogue is based on me as a researcher and how I must embed the literature into my analysis. As this implies that I will be placing my own interpretations upon other people's writing, I think it is necessary to try to show this distinction. The intention is to show the distinction between the actual process of creating written documents and the process of analysing them as a researcher. I think this is important because both dialogues are a part of the whole research process and affect the argument. This I feel is worth considering because it is necessary to show not only the voices within the text, but also to attempt to give each voice ownership of her/his words as much as possible. By giving as much ownership as possible I will be attempting to show a clear distinction between my own interpretations of the participants' voices and my own.

To accomplish this in writing, I propose to create a dialogue within the thesis. In one instance it will be developed around me as a researcher and the relationship I maintain with the literature that I am reading for the research. On the other hand, I must consider myself as a participant in the workplace and show the process of feedback and how it affects the activity of writing. This is important because

> …a dialogic text inherently disperses authority and that alone makes it preferable to standard ethnographies because it is both more truthful and politically superior to those approaches that ignore the people being described as an intended readership" (Johannsen 1992, p.74).

It is important to maintain present that in each of these dialogues I am a member and a participant of a different small culture and each one has very different writing purposes. On the following page figure 3-1 shows a visual representation of the dialogue.
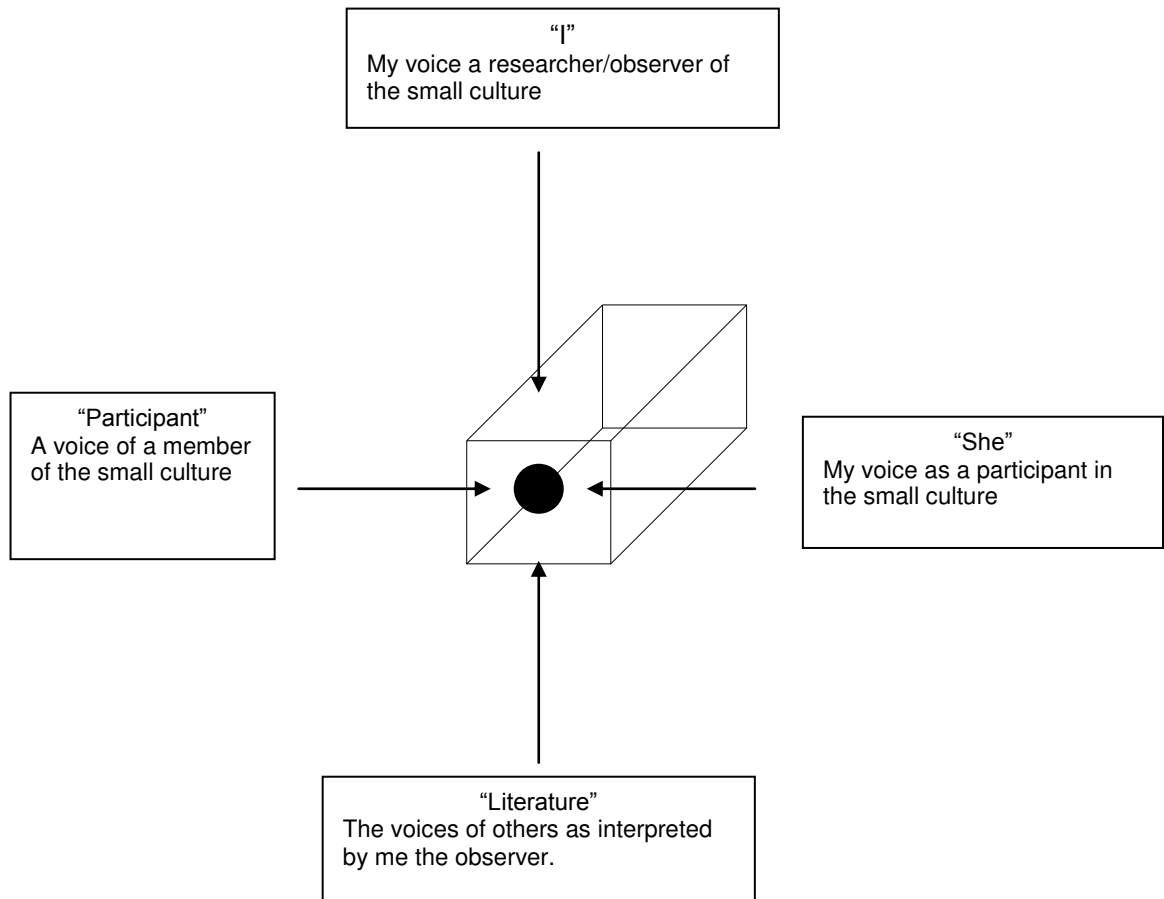
Figure 3-1 Writing Model to Create both Ownership and Voice in Researching Writing

The dot represents the argument that will be developed by means of creating a dual dialogue between the elements. One dialogue is between the researcher and the literature and the other between the member of the culture and me as a participant. The element of the participants in the study will vary depending upon the type of data being collected. Initially the participant was a co-worker and later moved to the exploration group involving several members who were in the process of learning to write academically in English.

From this point on I will refer to myself as *she* when assuming the role of participant in the small culture. I realize that there is much literature that discusses the use of *she* in a narration (e.g., Weedon 1987). My central reason for the use of *she* in the narration is that by using *she*, I am able to disassociate myself better and it makes the self-analysis more objective. Also, I think that this process of depersonalising myself aids in maintaining a distinction between observer and participant throughout the investigation. This is an obligation in qualitative research (Holliday 2002) and it is coherent with the concept of post-modern dialogism (Ward 1994). This is an attempt to try to create as much distance as possible between myself and the research context that is a part of my professional life (Crawford 2005, pp.5-7).

The creation of distance is important in order to try and view an event from different angles and to show the ability to place yourself inside and outside the research context as a researcher (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Denscombe 1998, and Clifford and Marcus1986). Part of this separation of self requires me to go back in time to a period of my life between 1985 and 1989. Due to this it is necessary at this point to introduce another part of me that has been present in an indirect sense up until now within this narration. In order to create coherence in what is to come, I need to show where *she* came from. This is because *her* experience helps to shape the research process and is also part of the theoretical framework for the analysis of data in Chapter Six. *Her* initial experience in the world of writing in Mexico was a painful one related to an organizational manual that *she* had written in one of *her* MBA courses at the University for the Language School where *she* was working. *She* had managed to present the document to the Planning Department and the Director of the school where *she* worked had been very helpful in getting the Planning Department to look at the text. However, it seemed as though it were taking a long time to get such a small and internal type of text published.

...After six months the manual was published in the University. However, there were some changes. First, now instead of one there were three authors (the Director of the Language School and the Director of the Planning Department). Also, the document had been altered. The spelling and grammar corrections did not bother me. However, I became angry to find countless changes in wording, but no change in the basic content because the changes in wording were the explanation for the additional authors. To further complicate matters neither of the two new authors, nor any of my Mexican co-workers seemed to understand or care. This was a very painful experience that opened the door to understanding how Mexicans view workplace writing... (SD 03/07/02)

This event was very difficult to assimilate and caused much stress at work for a brief period of time. All of *her* preparation in writing, along with cultural expectations as to work behaviour was being directly challenged. However, it slowly transformed into a rather tense working relationship with the school director that is difficult to explain, but in retrospect was the beginning of the unofficial process of learning how to write in Spanish in Mexico.

At this point there are four voices participating in the study. I am present as a participant/observer in two distinct small cultures (*I* and *She*). The literature is present as an outside participant that influences the development of the writing. Finally, there is one of the participants, a member of the small culture where I work and the members of the exploration group that is part of the University structure. As mentioned, each artefact represents a small shard of the entire dig. Hence, as a participant/observer in an ethnographic study I need to link together all of the shards into a whole in order to describe the activity of writing (Henry 2000, pp.34-36 and Johannsen 1992, pp.74-77) in the context where I am looking at it. By doing this the complexities inherent to moving from Spanish to English in writing may become more visible. Now I need to return to the voice of the small culture where the research is taking place.

MF said earlier

> Somos supervisores, como orientadores....la Secretaría General tiene que ser la receptora de todos los documentos y revisar que tengan la estructura y forma conveniente y en algunos casos hay que devolver los documentos para revisión (ICW no. 1 09/05/02)
>
> We are supervisors or facilitators….. the Secretary General's office has to receive all documentation and revise it to see if the structure and form is convenient and in some cases documents are returned for revision

I think this demonstrates one of the first traits that vary between Mexican Spanish and American English in writing. Ownership of written documents is an important issue in the United States (Henry 2000 pp.38-45) while in Mexico it appears that there may be a different point of view towards ownership of written documents (ICW no. 1 09/05/02). Curiously, I can see a reflection of this in my own workplace writing. Whenever *she* is writing it is also in a constant state of revision and feedback; however, often *she* is involved in arguments with other foreign co-workers over questions of responsibility and credit. This issue does not come up when the documents in question are directed towards other departments. This only occurs when the effort is internal and the various nationalities present need to come to an agreement on the format or structure of the presentation of written material. Added to this I also consider the comment made by GRJ of "writing like an American" (PD extract 28/02/02), that adds to the idea of a recognisable form of writing that can be attributed to a specific nationality or writing community.

This leads me to believe that while on the surface the process of writing is almost identical between the United States and Mexico, it seems to be perceived differently by those involved in the process. Also, a reader can detect the subtle differences of the national characteristics of final product. This difference in perception, I think may be based on how writing is internally constructed through socio-cultural processes that are created by the individuals who are writing. As a result, in order to detect and discuss the possible differences in perception, I thought a social space had to be selected in order to look at

what was happening when students go through the process of learning to write in a second language.

3.5. Ethnography of a classroom

A classroom has been the final selection of social space for this research on what is happening in the process of learning to write in a second language. This way I was able to be present as an observer from the beginning until the end of the process; I was not intruding upon an institution, as I have been a formal member of it for the last twenty years and a former teacher of the school where this MBA programme takes place. The idea is to look at the process of second language learning inside and outside the classroom, so graduate students with previous professional practice in writing and previous language learning experiences are ideal for the study. This is being looked at as classroom based ethnography because:

> The 1960s and 1970s saw the development of a field of communication ethnography, with several anthologies and field studies and programmatic statements marking its progress (see Bauman & Sherzer, 1975; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1984; Stewart & Philipsen, 1984). A journal, *Language in Society*, was established with the study of speech in social life as its purview: several others, *Language*, *Research in Language and Social Interaction*, and *Text and Performance Quarterly* among them, publish many articles on ethnography of communication (Lindlof 1995, p.48).

This sets up the basis to take ethnography into the area of communication and the foundation to refer to this as an ethnographic description of the activity of second language writing through an interactive process by the participants and researcher is found in the comment of Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 205)

> …much the same interactive process is also involved in other kinds of ethnographic research, including those which are directed not towards

the generation of theory but to other research products, such as descriptions and explanations.

This research will attempt to describe what is happening in learning second language writing and look to offer a description and suggestions at the end of the entire process.

Now, the way in which the research paradigm has been structured and discussed so far in this chapter requires that it be placed in a practical structure with a theoretical framework to support it.

3.5.1. A qualitative ethnographic exploration of written language

This study is qualitative. It has ethnographic characteristics, in terms of underlying principles and research methodology involved. However, it is not a pure ethnographic study, which I would distinguish as a pure cultural description. Here I am only describing a particular social activity of a cultural group.

I think of the exploration group process as **"**a qualitative ethnographic exploration of written language". I chose this approach because I felt that interpretive ethnographic techniques were the most appropriate for a small-scale study aimed at discovering how students approach the process of learning to write in a second language. Ethnographers try to describe the way of life of a specific group of people by observing them in their normal habitat, listening to them, talking with them and recording their accounts of life. I listen, talk and record their accounts of learning to write in English. But at the same, it is an (auto)ethnography, (auto)biography and an (auto)exploration as I also look at myself in much the same way as I look at the participants of the exploration group when considering learning to write in a second language.

Ethnography has developed considerably since its origins in late nineteenth century anthropological field studies and is nowadays practised by social researchers from an increasingly wide range of disciplines (Denzin and Lincoln 2000 and Hammersley and

Atkinson, 1995 pp.1-21). This includes of course the area of ELT, where ethnography has become strongly associated with classroom practice (e.g., Watson-Gregeo 1988 and Hornberger 1994).

Although my research approach is based on an ethnographic tradition, I consciously avoid referring to my research as 'an ethnography' because of the fact that the design involves some elements which place it outside of 'orthodox' definitions of ethnography and tend to move it towards what is often referred to as educational research (Radnor 2001 pp.30-39). In essence the intention of this research is to get inside the classroom and try to discover what is happening in the process of learning to write in a second language by offering a description of a social event.

3.5.1.1. Ethnography and qualitative research

The diverse use of ethnographic methods has led to some debate in recent years as to what truly constitutes ethnography, considering first that qualitative research employs a diversity of method and borrows from many disciplines (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Second, there is this good definition of the development of ethnography by Genzuk (2003):

> Ethnography is a social science research method. It relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation, by researchers trained in the art of ethnography. These ethnographers often work in multidisciplinary teams. The ethnographic focal point may include intensive language and culture learning, intensive study of a single field or domain, and a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods. Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description. This narrative often includes charts, diagrams and additional artifacts that help to tell "the story"(Hammersley, 1990). Ethnographic methods can give shape to new constructs or paradigms,

and new variables, for further empirical testing in the field or through traditional, quantitative social science methods.

Ethnography has it roots planted in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Present-day practitioners conduct ethnographies in organizations and communities of all kinds. Ethnographers study schooling, public health, rural and urban development, consumers and consumer goods, any human arena. While particularly suited to exploratory research, ethnography draws on a wide range of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, moving from "learning" to "testing" (Agar 1996) while research problems, perspectives, and theories emerge and shift. (p.1)

Ethnography has also been increasingly employed in the field of language education research, principally as a means of analysing classroom interaction or identifying language needs (e.g., Green & Wallat, 1981; Doughty and Long, 2005). It has even found its way directly into the area of ELT (e.g., Watson-Gregeo 1988 and Hornberger 1994). Furthermore, as writing has long been a central focus of special consideration in ethnography (Clifford and Marcus 1986), I think that there is sufficient justification to consider the use of a classroom as a site for an ethnographic exploration of how writing is learned under the blanket of the qualitative research paradigm.

3.5.1.2. A qualitative ethnographic exploration of writing over time

This data while mostly taken from the classroom, originates elsewhere, as the students already know how to write. The data collection process began with me, writing in the form of a diary, expanded into workplace interviews, and then into written texts and interviews of the exploration group that lasted for two years. In total the data was gathered in different places throughout the same institution over a period of four years.

Although the actual data was collected over four years and in multiple stages, the results were actually very similar in type and content. By the end, I found that my own

position had changed, in terms of my awareness of possible emerging themes from the data collected as well as giving me increased knowledge about the social process of second language writing.

3.5.1.3. Deciding on an exploration group

The decision of how to go about collecting data was a developmental procedure throughout this research. As can be seen in this chapter, I began the process of research from the point of view of interviews with members of the organisational workplace where I am a member, along with the incorporation of a self-analysis diary. This initial process of collecting data helped to shape the perspective of the narration and the approach of trying to disperse authority within the text itself. However, the initial process also brought up other issues that are directly related to the questions of this research. Particularly, this was concerning what is going on when students learn to write in a second language. In essence, what occurred was that I started with the idea of interviewing colleagues in the workplace. The interviews and the results made me realize that I was not going about the data collection in the most efficient way. I mean this in the sense that I was not finding out the underlying aspects or processes involved in writing. What I was discovering was that writing is very much a social process in that the people involved in a given community determine what it is, but this was not leading me towards any answers in the area of teaching of second language writing, but only that writing is a social activity and is perceived differently by different people. The multi-voice role of data gathering became apparent through the data.

At this point it is apparent to me that writing is a socio-cultural activity. What about the classroom process on learning to write in a second language? This too, should be considered a social process. The issue came up of how to incorporate the classroom process into the research and still maintain the initial perspective of the research on writing

as a socio-cultural based activity. The classroom is a part of society; teaching occurs inside a classroom, students bring some knowledge of writing into the classroom and acquire some knowledge there, so why not start looking in the classroom for some possible answers.

The idea of considering the classroom as a point of entrance into the research process seemed to be the logical way to continue the inquiry. As shown in figure 3-1, writing is a socially based activity that can contain variations depending on the language and the users. Also, the initial data gathered from the first two co-workers that I had selected to interview pointed in this direction. So, as mentioned earlier in order to maintain the presence of both of the languages in the study and to bring in the principal social institutions that affect the second language writing process in the University of Guanajuato, a classroom location was selected as the most representative site available for researching the processes that are a part of the activity of second language writing.

In order to set up the exploration group a series of decisions were made and worked out within the organizational framework of the University of Guanajuato. This in itself was a unique journey through an interesting and archaic hierarchical structure.

3.5.1.4. Setting up and negotiating access for the exploration group

In order to collect research data I had to consider the options available at the University of Guanajuato. Initially I arrived at two possibilities: one being to work with students who were finishing their degree programme in International Trade and taking a course in academic writing in the Language School's EFL programme; and the other a group of MBA students in a joint programme with an American university here in Guanajuato. I selected the second option because these are all people who have experience in writing at a professional level and this would make the data collected richer in content because the students would have the ability to draw comparisons between

academic and professional discourse. However, the process of obtaining permission to work with this group was more complicated than I had originally anticipated.

The MBA programme is a cooperative project between the University of Guanajuato and Southern Oregon University, in Ashland, Oregon. This programme is taught here in the Administrative Sciences division of the University of Guanajuato by professors from Southern Oregon University with some participation by local professors. The degree certificate is issued by Southern Oregon University. Apart from the allocation of physical space, the participation of the University of Guanajuato is limited to the language classes that the students take before starting their academic course work. These language classes are taught by individuals who are hired directly through the Administrative Sciences Division and are not part of the staff at the Language School of the University of Guanajuato.

This is where I encountered the first difficulty. The coordinator[5] of this programme did not want me to work in the programme, even though it was without pay. This happened because when I was beginning my studies in the PhD, I was asked by her to teach this course and I refused saying that I would not have enough time available to do it. I returned a year later to the same person and asked to teach the course that I had refused to teach earlier. This placed me in a situation where I was forced to make my request through the University Secretary General[6] by means of indirect pressure from my sister-in-law, who is the State Comptroller and annually audits the University of Guanajuato. Through this I immediately received an appointment with the University Secretary General to discuss my

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[5] Programme Coordinator: This is a young French woman who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the joint MBA programme that the University of Guanajuato is offering. She is relevant as she is the initial person that I had to deal with for obtaining permission to use the MBA programme as a site for data collection. She reports to the Director of International Relations.

[6] Secretary General: This is the second most powerful person in the University of Guanajuato. This office oversees all academic affairs, external or internal. The Director of International Relations reports directly to this person.

research plans for the PhD. After this, my request was accepted and the Secretary General sent me to the Director of International Relations[7], who is responsible for the operation of the joint project.

In my meeting with the Director of International Relations, he called the coordinator of the joint MBA programme. In this moment he informed her that I would be teaching the writing class and using it for my PhD research. She was to give me all the cooperation that I needed. While this may not be the most recommended way to gain access to a research site, I think that in my particular case it is acceptable. I have been a member of this community for over twenty years and authoritarian organizational styles are still very prevalent in Mexico. Also, the obstacle for me to teach in this particular course was nothing more than an individual who was upset with me and was using the situation as a means to release her frustration. After the act of gaining access was carried out, an interesting event occurred. The Director of International Relations told me that he did not want me to teach a high quality class because the students might complain. This was because he felt that the quality of EFL teachers in the programme was low and he did not want to have to deal with students who might possibly become upset if there was a marked modification in the writing classes. Obviously, I did not take his last comment into consideration and from this point I began the actual design and organisation of the course. However, I must point out that there was a silent objection on my part in the sense that I did not tell the Director that I would not take into consideration his request.

I contacted the teacher who had been responsible for the writing course; she is a co-worker at the Language School, to set up an appointment. During this meeting she told me

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[7] Director of International Relations: This office was created in the year 2000 in the University of Guanajuato and is responsible for promoting, creating, and maintaining academic collaboration with other institutions. It is currently the centre of attention as the internationalisation of the University is one of the principal goals of the current institutional development project 2002-2010. As such, this person is the one held accountable for the success or failure of programmes that the University participates in.

that she had been told to do whatever I wanted. We agreed that I would design and operate the course and that she would attend every class and observe. Here is where I found out that there was no programme and that each EFL teacher was basically doing whatever he/she felt was proper in the academic writing course and in the complementary conversation course. I designed the academic course based on the English academic writing course that is offered in the BA TEFL[8] programme in the University, making adaptations in the topics and articles to orient them towards academic business writing. Also, here I included the awareness raising factors to aid the students in becoming more aware of their own writing. This is founded on the concept of:

> …writing as beginning essentially in other (oral and written) texts and ending when people stop reading and writing: which is, effectively, never; and, whether or not authors literally write and revise together, writing is always collaborative, because writing always occurs as a dialogic process, in situations where everyone who writes does so with two implicit or explicit aims: first, to build on others' knowledge to make "new" knowledge or otherwise bring about change within discourse communities, and second, to provide "written knowledge"   (Bazerman 1988) for others to build on. This more comprehensive, more profoundly social view understands all knowledge making as collaborative. (Reither 1993, pp.197-198)

 The designing of the writing syllabus led the local coordinator of the MBA to have the EFL conversation teacher redesign her class and use the topics, articles, and activities from my syllabus. Hence I had to also write the conversation syllabus. As a result I was indirectly over-seeing the conversation classes that this group of students took in conjunction with the writing course. This could have had an impact on what I did in the

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[8] BA TEFL Programme: This refers to a BA programme that I designed in collaboration for the University of Guanajuato, Language School and I am now responsible for coordinating it. I am also the assigned professor for the areas of discourse analysis and research methodology. Within the area of discourse analysis I teach the course in English academic writing, which is the foundation for the design of the course that was taught to the exploration group.

writing class, but it will be impossible for me know, as I did not have time to observe what actually happened in the conversation components of the course.

The writing course was the specific context that I used to collect my research data. It presented certain unique characteristics for the purpose of a classroom study. The students in this group were all coming together with the purpose of improving their abilities to write academically in English. They also were bringing their own personal and professional writing experience in two languages. They also had similar levels of English (Campbell 1999). I on the other hand was pursuing two different goals with them. In one role I was responsible for teaching them to write for the degree programme they were taking. In the other role I was using the group as a source for research data. I am also a part of the institution where they were studying and I am a graduate of the institution that is offering them their degree. I was in various aspects a participant/observer of the entire process. Hence the concept of exploration group emerges as a learning experience in the research process (Bell and Opie 2002).

3.5.1.5. Defining the exploration group theoretically

The idea of an exploration group is new. It is inspired from an older concept. In World War II "focused interviews" or "group depth interviews" were developed to evaluate audience response to radio programs (e.g., Merton 1987 and Stewart, Shamdasani 1990, and Nassar-McMillan & Borders 2002). However, the focus group "was rarely used in social scientific inquiry, as this field's interests became almost exclusively quantitative in nature" (Suter 2000, p.2). Currently they are called focus groups and widely used in social science and marketing studies (Marczak and Sewell 2002 p.1 and Morgan 2002 pp.144-146). A focus group could be defined as a group of individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue and the context from which it comes (Hollander 2004, pp.604-608 and Nassar-McMillan & Borders 2002).

Using these ideas exclusively as creative inspiration, I began to see myself as type of moderator. Furthermore, I wanted to find a way to discover how people perceived the activity of writing in a second language. Finally, I was looking for a means to stay as 'focused' as possible on the issue of writing in another language. As a result of reading about the above mentioned, I put together the exploration group idea.

The exploration group is a concept inspired on focus groups with several basic fundamental differences. I have not created this group. The group already exists in a formal MBA programme taught at the University of Guanajuato in cooperation with Southern Oregon University. Also, these students came with their own purpose and not one created for the finality of the group, nor did we have focused interviews. So, I did not create this group. It already existed and had goals that were compatible with my research interests. Nevertheless, since this degree programme offers the conditions that I was looking for to explore the process of writing in a second language *focused on a specific issue* with Spanish speaking learners, I am adapting it to my needs. Since the group already existed and the members already had a shared purpose, I decided to change the name to exploration group to distinguish it from a focus group. In essence, what is retained from the focus group concept is that the researcher and the participants were focused on the concept of writing. We all were trying to solve issues related to writing. However it was not something that was completely 'focused', but something that was more 'explored'. The result is that the focus group inspired the exploration group as a research concept for me.

This slow process of development is what led to the writing model that is being employed in this research. This in turn led to the exploration group, which is the foundation of the collected data that has been interpreted, and finally the data analysis process.

3.6. Data analysis

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means things are studied in their natural settings, with an attempt to make sense of or

interpret results in terms of the meanings contexts bring to them. Qualitative research involves the use of a variety of methods that include: personal experience, interviews, and observation that help show the complexities of daily routines and problematic aspects in individuals' lives (Creswell 1998, pp.13-18). Added to this is the observation made by Johannsen (1992) on the superiority of a dialogue in presenting qualitative research findings, I suggest the argument to allow the data to speak for itself and to remain as far as possible in its original form to allow for the participants to conserve ownership of their words. This leads to why the data in Chapter Five is left close to it original form, but does not show the process of how the themes emerged; this keeps in line with the idea of funnelling the data through a process.

3.6.1. Developing themes for data

The initial interviews and all the compositions that were collected in the process were all printed and then cut up into individual sentences. Then the sentences were grouped together according to the topic of the individual sentence. Through this process the initial themes that emerged from the data were:

- *Formal education*

- *Practicing reading*

- *Workplace writing*

- *Cultural differences between English and Spanish*

- *Change in perception of writing*

From these themes the guidelines for the interviews were created and this in turn led to the themes being grouped under the concept of *classroom deficiencies* that allowed more in-depth analysis and data collection. This is where the classroom themes then emerged from the data, which were:

- *Classroom awareness on text structure*

- *Classroom awareness of allowable sentence length*

● *Lack of relevant practice writing*

● *Feedback on text structure*

● *Audience/Reader*

● *Difficulties in Writing*

   The themes were allowed to emerge in this way and then to be rejoined later with the actual statements and writings of the participants in order to allow both my research writing and the writings of the participants to be a joint process of discovery through writing as proposed by Richardson (2000). Then insert the themes into my interpretation with the original texts and transcriptions in order to bring in a reflexive turn (Foley 2002, pp.473-486) to the data by both the research and the participants. Furthermore, in this way the intention was to avoid the possibility of what Asad (1986) warns of when researching using two languages:

> But this pushing beyond the limits of one's habitual usages, this breaking down and reshaping of one's own language through the process of translation, is never an easy business, in part because (if I may be allowed a hypostatization) it depends on the willingness of the translator's language to subject itself to this transforming power. I attribute, somewhat fictitiously, volition to the language because I want to emphasize that the matter is largely something the translator cannot determine by individual activity (any more than the individual speaker can affect the evolution of his or her language)—that it is governed by institutionally defined power relations between the languages/modes of life concerned. To put it crudely: because the languages of Third World societies—including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied—are "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English). They are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries, western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages

produce and deploy "desired" knowledge more readily than Third World languages do. (The knowledge that Third World languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in quite the same way or for the same reasons). (pp.157-158.)

This is avoided by using the aforementioned concept together with the fact that the texts are also placed in their original language in the data chapters. To some audiences this may seem on the surface to be not of extreme importance. However, given the intense geo-political border that Mexico and the United States lives on a daily basis and the very unequal relationship that Spanish and English have (Condon 1997), this is an important issue to consider helping maintain a political balance in the text representation.

3.6.2. Writing and analysis – a combination for representation

As a result of the aforementioned process, the writing and analysis become combined throughout the entire research process, which is expected in ethnography. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.205) state

> In ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research. In many ways, it begins in the pre-fieldwork phase, in the formulation and clarification of research problems, and continues through to the process of writing reports, articles and books.

But at the same time

> Ethnographic research should have a characteristic 'funnel' structure, being progressively focused over its course. Over time the research problem needs to be developed or transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited, and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about; and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.206).

As such, in this research, writing by all the participants across two languages is brought together by comparing how the participants lived the process of learning to write in a second language. These texts in a second language were then delivered to another community for consumption and evaluation. The result is that through the entire 'funnelling' process writing is struggling to find its representation.

Finally, through this complexity of representation ethical issues can arise that require consideration.

3.7. Ethical issues

Being a researcher means to be in a complex cultural dynamic in which one must engage in a process of positioning. This inevitably leads us to ethical considerations. There are no clear-cut methodological guidelines with which to deal with ethical issues in fieldwork. As such I consider again the following quote from Johannsen that was used for the writing model in figure 3-1 (1992, p.74, *my emphasis*)

> …a dialogic text inherently *disperses authority* and that alone makes it
> *preferable to standard ethnographies because it is both more truthful*
> *and politically superior* to those approaches that *ignore the people being*
> *described as an intended readership*.

By building a dialogue in the data where I allow each participating member to maintain their own voice and words, I think I am fulfilling that act of allowing the participants to be empowered by the process and to be able to let their voices speak for themselves. This I think will be a sufficient antidote to ethical concerns about the possible manipulation of those who find themselves caught up in this research and reduce the concerns towards ethical issues brought up by Holliday (2002), Bell (1999), and Creswell (1998). Furthermore, I think that this process of depersonalising myself into *she* aids in maintaining a distance between observer and participant throughout the investigation. It also forces me to submit myself to the same norms as the participants are facing. This is how I address the issue of allowing the participants to maintain ownership of their words;

by subjecting myself to the same process and being a participant/observer in as many aspects as possible.

This underlines the importance of being attentive to the ethics of our research behaviour and attempting to understand the impact and consequences of what is done. Personally, I can say that I felt it was important to attempt to empower all the participants of the exploration group; in the wider scheme of things I imagine it may have seemed quite insignificant to most of the participants themselves as they seemed more concerned that I listen to them. The written text afterwards need not seem to be considered as important as the listening.

That is not to say, though, that there are not ethical questions, which need to be exposed. In this research, I am using both the written texts and transcribed interviews of the participants. Many of these participants work in the University of Guanajuato or work in organizations that are connected to it. In the course of some of the interviews, individuals who work in the institution were discussed. As such, each participant signed a release form that complies with all local and institutional legal requirements for the information that was used during the process of the exploration group. Beyond this official requirement, I have made an effort to maintain contact with all of the participants of the exploration group. Over the course of the research process, an informal agreement has been made where I will give back to the participants that are interested a copy of the completed research project. I think returning a copy of the results to the participants helps to sustain a strong 'honesty' towards the research data that is being used for this investigation.

3.8. Summary

The perceptions of those who participate in learning the writing process are complex issues that are difficult to show in concrete terms. However, I think that by exploring ethnographically the activity of writing with a group of second language students, it is possible to show some of the complexities that exist and how they affect the process of

second language writing. To attempt this, I have developed conceptually what I have come to refer to as an exploration group inspired by the concept of a focus group for research setting design. Within this research design I will try to present the information in the form of a dialogue so that it will be possible for the reader to see what is emerging from the process through the words of the participants. However, before presenting the research data, it needs to be collected. The following chapter is a description of how formal data was collected, based on the initial findings of interviews and self-analysis.

Chapter Four

4. The data collection procedure and the structure of the data analysis

> In the first place, many things that might be significant might not find a place on a formal observation schedule. One might not know in advance what is significant. Second, the meaning of an incident within a social situation might only be revealed by putting it in its historical context. No instrument which I know of can do this. Third, the expressive character of action and speech – their muted messages – are often so subtle that only a perceptive eye and an informed mind are likely to recognize their significance. Balance, trade off, context, and other features of social life must be considered if the interpretation of socially shared meanings is to have validity (Radnor 2001, p.31)

4.1. Introduction

In this Chapter the creation and structuring of the exploration group are told. To give more relevance to this particular story, the reader needs to keep in mind that the idea of the exploration group is the product of the data from the co-worker interviews that was presented in the preceding chapter. As can be seen in Chapter Three, the focus of the investigation began more in the direction of interviewing co-workers within the same institution. The initial information that began to emerge pointed out that writing was more oriented towards being defined as a social activity, with many factors surrounding it.

The investigation was forced to adjust direction due to the suggestions from the data. You could say that speaking for itself, the data said that writing is social, so more members of the community needed to be involved to create a more coherent picture. As a consequence, the exploration group was created in order to continue the research in a social setting, where the learning of second language writing was to be addressed. This is important to consider, as this Chapter in itself is a basic description of a data collection process. However, what gives it real meaning is the way in which it came into existence in the research process.

4.2. The exploration group in practice

In practice I do basically what might be a classroom research or exploration in some aspects, but the distinguishing characteristics that I mentioned in Chapter Three makes me feel it can be given a different label. Added to this, much of the information in this study is written and spoken. So, the information that is written is then used as the foundation for a spoken exploration. Finally considering that the overall aim of this research is to discover what happens with second language writing in the University of Guanajuato's second language classrooms.

These characteristics distinguish the exploration group in the way it is conceptualised. However, there are some other important aspects that are part of the data collection process that enrich the information on the research questions. I started the exploration group with seventeen participants for the initial collection of written data, classroom descriptions and video record; however, after the completion of the course the data collection process continued with sessions with one or two members of the exploration group or classroom observers. Added to this is the aspect of personal observation during the execution of the exploration group later; then the post course interviews; and then finally the follow up interviews one year after the course (Morgan 2002 pp.149-155). These are important elements, as by using these different aspects to collect data, I am addressing the inherent weakness of group data collection in that a group event usually has a limited amount of time and one technique to gather information (Suter 2000 pp. 3-6). Also, I am attempting the creation of a more complete thick description by using diverse forms of data collection on a focused theme (e.g., Denzin 1989 and Suter 2000).

This was a group of seventeen students with a supposed minimum score of 480 points on the TOEFL (supposed, because when I actually began to work with the group it became clear that this was a written requirement that was carefully being not enforced) who came from diverse organizations in the State of Guanajuato with the intention of

obtaining an MBA degree from an American institution. The entire programme was taught in English, and one of the first courses that the students took was academic writing in English; this course was the exploration group. This group of people came together with the same purpose, but I assumed they would have different backgrounds in learning and using writing in Spanish and English. However, they were all coming together to improve their written English. Since I would be teaching the course to them, we would form a group to explore second language writing together; thus as a participant/ observer I was adapting a distinct methodological approach to attempt to answer the research questions that I had proposed through the exploration group.

The course outline was basically a process oriented writing syllabus almost identical to the writing courses offered in the BA TESOL programme in the University of Guanajuato. The general topics that were covered in the exploration group were: principles of clear writing, analysis of audience, editing and proofreading, defining and describing, evaluating and determining criteria, drafting strategies, and problem defining and solving. The exploration group was broken down into four six-hour sessions from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The sessions were held on April 4th, April 11th, May 9th, and May 16th in 2003. Each session was subdivided into approximately two three-hour blocks. In each block a different topic was analysed. The majority of the writing activities for training, peer feedback, and text editing took place in the classroom. The academic texts were written outside of class time.

The course was used in order to collect research data. First, the students wrote two separate brief compositions. One composition was written in Spanish and the other in English. In each they explained how they learned to write and how they use writing in their work lives. This was before the course began. Second, at least ninety minutes of each session was video taped. During each of the sessions there were two observers writing up classroom descriptions based on a guided format. In the final session of the course the students again wrote a composition in English to see if their opinion on writing in English

had changed. This question was selected as 16 of the 17 participants said they had never taken a writing course. Finally, five students were selected to be interviewed over six months to follow up on the impact of the experience on their academic writing in their course work in the MBA programme.

4.3. Data collection process

For the purpose of collecting the data the course that was set up was in essence operated like any other second language class that is offered in the University of Guanajuato. The basic difference from other classes was that due to the structure of this joint programme the classes were set up administratively in six-hour blocks. Classes were held on two consecutive weekends, and then there was a three-week break, then two consecutive weekends. The possible effects of this unusual structure may have been reduced as the course that I taught was the third one in this type of schedule for the group, so they had had a period of time to start to become accustomed to the timetable. Apart from the administrative alterations that were present, the other modification that I had to make in order to collect the data was the use of a video camera. The presence of a video camera in the classroom had to have had some type of effect on the overall course operation. To specify exactly how or what was the impact, I think would be impossible. At least I can say that in appearance, after the first hour of class I think that the student behaviour can be classified as within the norm of what I have seen in Mexican classrooms in the University of Guanajuato over the last twenty years. There were also the two classroom observers. However, these two individuals, I do not think had a major impact on the process. One was a classmate of the group and a second language instructor and the other person the group assumed he was there to operate the video camera. Within these conditions I went about the process of collecting and organizing all the data.

4.3.1. Data collection technique

The data collection process is divided into the following collection categories: organizational interviews, self-exploration diary, the exploration group, pre-writing samples, post writing samples, classroom descriptions, personal observations, video, and follow up interviews.

4.3.1.1. Organizational interviews

At the onset of the research process I had initially considered the idea of comparing or analysing written documents from Mexico and the United States. As a result I began the data collection procedure by interviewing two different members of the University of Guanajuato on the assumption I would later be interviewing people in the United States. These interviews centred on how these individuals viewed the activity of writing in their respective work environments and in personal experience. As seen previously these interviews resulted in the modification of the research direction and helped to shape the research process.

4.3.1.2. Research diary

Just as the name suggests, this was a written account of the entire research process from beginning to end. All events that occurred during the research process were touched upon in this diary. Every note, diagram, or construct was written here. This was both a field journal and notebook for seminars, tutorials, and annual doctoral reviews.

4.3.1.3. Self-analysis diary

This was an extension of the original research paradigm. As I had planned to divide the study between Mexico and the United States, I seemed to be a reasonable subject to include as a participant/observer since I had learned to write both of the languages in the study and I have been a member of both communities. As such I began a self-analysis diary where I tried to reconstruct the process that I lived when I learned to write in Spanish and became a part of the discourse community of the University of Guanajuato. As seen previously, the result of the organizational interviews and the self-analysis diary were the factors that helped in selecting the exploration group as the best available site for

collecting the majority of the data in this study. This data proved to be useful for giving a stronger social orientation to the data.

4.3.1.4. The exploration group

It was a class composed of seventeen students who studied in an MBA programme taught by Southern Oregon University in Guanajuato. Each student had a very distinct level of English and a distinct background in writing as seen in Chapter Three. This class was offered to help the students prepare for academic writing in the programme they are enrolled in and it was not a required course, but an elective. Each student was given the opportunity to decide if she/he needed to take the course. This in itself is interesting because according to the programme requirements the students were required to have a minimum 480 TOEFL score to be accepted into the programme.

4.3.1.5. Pre-writing samples

At the beginning of the course I explained to the students the reason that I was interested in teaching their course and how it related to my own studies. I carefully detailed the work of my PhD and how I wanted to use the information that I obtained from their writing samples and in the video. I explained that the material would be used for research purposes and could be published in the public domain. This explanation is recorded on the video. Then, I had each student sign an individual release form that states what was verbally explained to them. No student made any objections and all signed the release form. After this I had the students write two brief one page compositions explaining how they learned to write in Spanish (this document was written in Spanish) and another in English explaining how they had learned to write in English. The originals were placed with the release form for future use if necessary. A copy of each document was made and then carefully transcribed; conserving any type of error that appeared in the original text.

4.3.1.6. Post writing samples

At the end of the course I had each student write a brief one page composition in Spanish explaining any changes in perception that they had made during the course

related to the activity of writing. Here I chose to exclude the one in English because they all appeared to be more comfortable expressing themselves in Spanish and admittedly on the last day we were together, time ran out. Also, since the event being studied is writing in English I decided that it would be more interesting to use Spanish as the medium to describe writing in English. In this case, for these students, English is a tool that they were learning to use. Also, it had to be taken in to account that it was the final six hour session and they were extremely tired and showed that the students were ready to return home. As a result the final decision was to only have them write in Spanish.

4.3.1.7. Classroom descriptions

In this case I selected two people to work in the capacity of classroom observers to describe what happened in the classroom following a guided format. In this case each observer presents a distinct perspective. Ernesto is a native Spanish speaker with very little knowledge of the English language. He is a graduate student of Mexican history and works in the Humanistic Research Centre of the University of Guanajuato. He has recently completed his MA in History and has been working for the last two years on a nationally funded research project here in Guanajuato on the development of oral history. Aline is a native English speaker from the UK and has been living here in Guanajuato for many years. She has been an ESL teacher here in the University for five years and she is responsible for teaching the writing class that I used for my exploration group. As I assumed the role of teaching the course, she agreed to work as an observer for my data collection process. By incorporating two observers with very different language, educational, and cultural backgrounds, I am breaking the traditional role of the ethnographer as the sole interpreter of events as suggested by Johannsen (1992 pp.74-78). But it increases the possibility of creating a more complete representation of events, which leads directly to knowing something (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2000) or at least giving a thicker description of it. For this reason, I tried to create as many possible

perspectives with the intention of being able to describe more thickly the activity of writing. Finally, I think that having the perspective of three people to combine with the video of the course makes it possible to give a more accurate description of reality. Also, the issue that each observer has a different national cultural background I think has added to the complexity of the data collection and creates a more ample spectrum for reporting the events.

4.3.1.8.   Personal observations

During the first session of the exploration group an unexpected event occurred. The students were in the process of a writing activity and I was watching them as were the two observers. While this was happening, I was looking at the business binder that I had purchased to keep the class material. In the binder was a series of formats: monthly planner, customers, weekly planner, projector planner, and notes. When I saw the format for notes, I just reacted automatically and began to write down my own observations of both the students and the observers in the room. This was a personal breakthrough; I can make observations during the process, too. As such these personal observations became a new category within the research process. Also, I think this is very important from a methodological point of view, as through this I became more of a true participant/observer in the exploration group, making me much more aware of my dual role in the research process. Also, the personal observations placed an element of the unexpected into the research data collection process and I think enhanced the classroom descriptions.

4.3.1.9.   Video

As a means to support the classroom descriptions and create the possibility of manipulating the data in diverse forms, a video record was kept of the entire classroom process. In total twenty-one continuous hours of video were made. This was to be used to contrast the human observations that were made during the research process.

4.3.1.10. Post course interviews

The post course interviews were with the idea of expanding and recycling the information from the initial exploration (Allison 2001, Denscombe 1998 and Silverman 1993). These interviews were carried out at the end of the course.

4.3.1.11. Follow-up interviews

The post exploration group interviews were designed to have the participants reflect more deeply on the concept of writing in a second language. These interviews were carried out in my office or in a quiet isolated space and during each one I made a conscious effort to focus the person on what they had produced during the exploration group experience and the general process of being admitted into a discourse community. I did not use any type of pre-designed format with questions that were previously written. These interviews were carried out one year after of the exploration group had concluded and the participants had obtained their MBA degree from Southern Oregon University.

4.3.2. Quantity and organisation of data

With the exception of the follow-up and post interviews, the entire process was carried out in the Administrative and Economic Sciences Division of the University of Guanajuato. Each of the classrooms on this independent Campus has the same design. Figure 4-1 is a representation of the physical distribution of the classroom that was used for the realization of the exploration group. This same basic organisation was present in all of the sessions. The only change in positioning that occurred during the process was the placement of the video camera that was moved from the right to the left side of the classroom for two of the sessions. This was done with the idea that by changing the angle of the video recording there might be a possibility of noticing a difference or variation due to the camera angle.

By taking into consideration the different stages that were involved in the creation of the exploration group (see map of the classroom on the following page), I have structured an exploration process to deal with the social phenomenon of writing. As a consequence "this

view leads to the conclusion that research methodology should not be something we apply

or select so much as something we design out of particular situations and then argue for in

our studies" (Sullivan and Porter 1993a, p.221).

Figure 4-1 Map of the Exploration Group Classroom

Refreshments	

Observer	

Video Camera	

Students

Observer

Students

Students

Students

Desk

Whiteboard
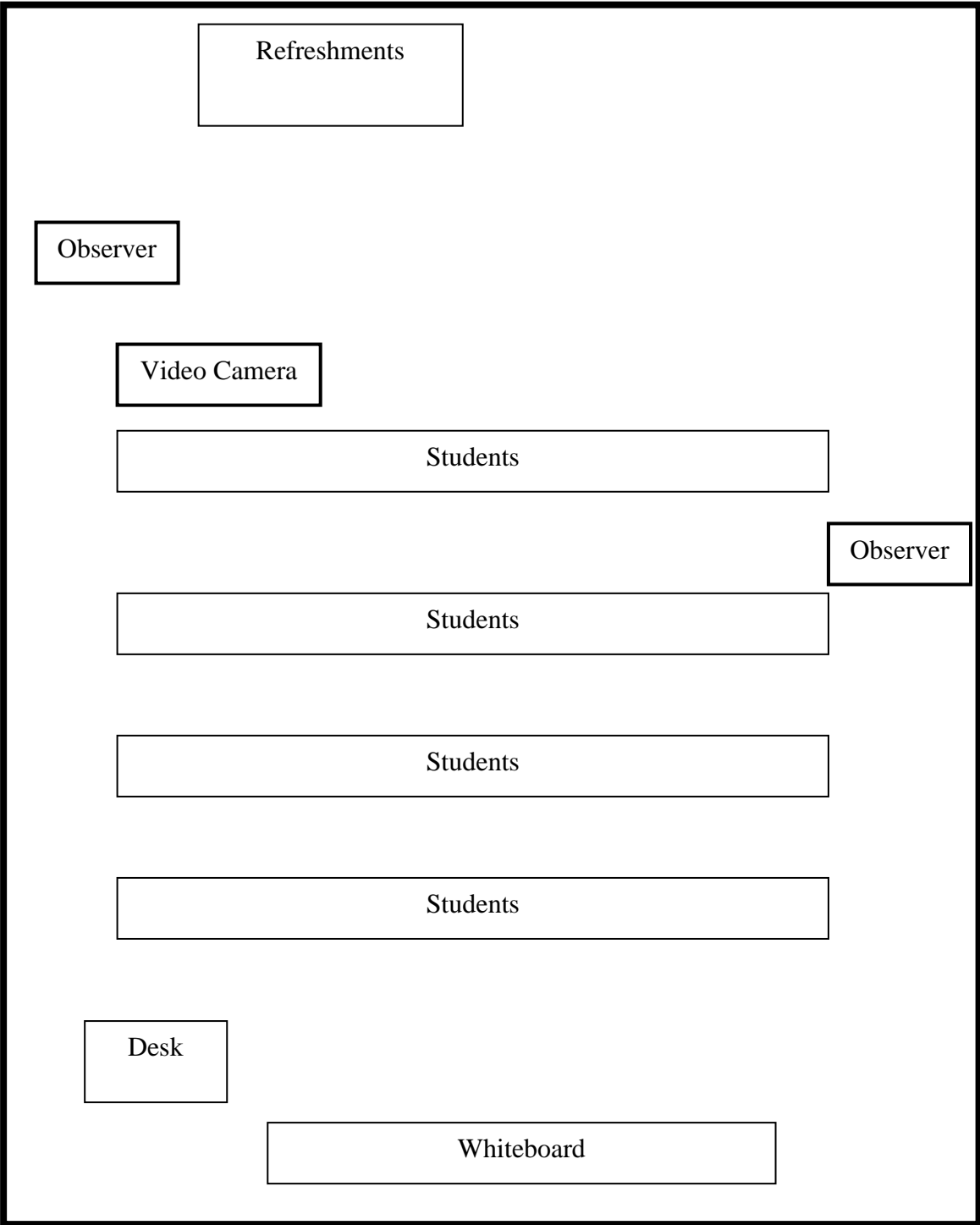
4.3.3. Data filtering process

Before you read the data chapters, an explanation concerning the development of the research process needs to be brought to the attention of the reader. During the realisation of the exploration group, the entire process was recorded on video. This was done with the idea that the video could be used to help develop classroom descriptions of what had happened related to the writing process. Also, I considered that the video would be a useful tool to compare the descriptions that were written by the observers in the classroom. However, the final result was that the video material did not show the underlying social interaction related to writing and was more adequate for showing aspects of second language classroom management that is interesting, but not directly relevant to the present study. The mechanics of dealing with rhetoric is so subtle that by mere observation it is not possible to detect. As a result the focus was moved towards the interviews and written compositions that give a more in depth picture of what was happening underneath the classroom surface in relation to second language writing and its social implications inside the learning processes that surround the activity of writing.

The final decision that I made was not to include the video material. This is not because it in any way contradicts the findings or effects of the outcomes of this research, but because the direction of the video material seems to be more in line with different research questions and this research is interested in finding out more about the second language writing process from the perspective of how it is perceived by the learners.

4.3.4. The data classification for analysis

To summarise then, the data collected and drawn upon in Chapters Five and Six of the thesis consist of the following elements:

- Ethnographically collected observation notes, classroom descriptions, personal conversations with co-workers, a self-analysis writing diary, and a research diary.

- Semi-structured interviews with exploration group participants, recorded, transcribed, and translated to English.

- Three types of compositions, two in Spanish and one in English on the topic of writing from the participants.

- 'Artefacts' from the exploration group, such as handouts, activities and the complete course syllabus.

As a consequence the following is a chronological table that summarizes the type, quantity, and reference of data that was obtained, classified, and used in this research process.

Table 4-1 Data Classified and Used in the Research

Date	Classification of data	Where data was obtained	Quantity of Data Employed	Code
28/02/02	Personal diary	Conversations with co-worker	1 transcribed paragraph	PD
06/03/02	Personal diary	Conversations with co-worker	1 transcribed paragraph	PD
01/04/02	Personal diary	Conversations with co-worker	1 transcribed paragraph	PD
14/10/03	Research diary	Female participant in the audience	Segment from a conversation in a conference paper	RD
09/05/02	Interview	University co-worker	13 page transcribed interview	ICW
21/06/02	Interview	University co-worker	6 page transcribed interview	ICW
03/07/02	Self-analysis diary	Researcher learning to write in Spanish	1 transcribed page	SD
05/07/02	Self-analysis diary	Researcher learning to write in Spanish	1 transcribed paragraph	SD
08/07/02	Self-analysis diary	Researcher learning to write in Spanish	2 transcribed pages	SD
09/07/02	Self-analysis diary	Researcher learning to write in Spanish	1 transcribed page	SD
03/08/02	Self-analysis diary	Researcher learning to write in Spanish	2 transcribed pages	SD
04/04/03	Written classroom compositions in English at the beginning of the course	Exploration group participants	14 written compositions	WCE
04/04/03	Written classroom compositions in Spanish at the beginning of the course	Exploration group participants	14 written compositions	WCS

04/04/03	Written classroom descriptions	Classroom observers	2 four page observation formats	WCD
04/04/03	Written personal observations	Exploration group	1 transcribed page of notes	PO
11/04/03	Written classroom descriptions	Classroom observers	2 four page observation formats	WCD
11/04/03	Written personal observations	Exploration group	1 transcribed page of notes	PO
09/05/03	Written classroom descriptions	Classroom observers	2 four page observation formats	WCD
09/05/03	Written personal observations	Exploration group	1 transcribed page of notes	PO
16/05/03	Written classroom descriptions	Classroom observers	2 four page observation formats	WCD
16/05/03	Written personal observations	Exploration group	1 transcribed page of notes	PO
16/05/03	Written Classroom compositions in Spanish at the end of the course	Exploration group	15 Written compositions	WCS
10/12/03	Post-course interview	Classroom observer	5 page transcribed interview	PCI
16/01/04	Post-course interview	Exploration group participant	4 page transcribed interview	PCI
05/01/04	Wordsmith analysis	Initial written compositions in Spanish	1 page analysis of tokens, types, word length, sentence length, paragraph length, with ratios and standard deviations for each element.	WAS
05/01/04	Wordsmith analysis	Initial written compositions in English	1 page analysis of tokens, types, word length, sentence length, paragraph length, with ratios and standard deviations for each element.	WAE
06/01/04	Wordsmith analysis	Classroom descriptions in English	1 page analysis of tokens, types, word length, sentence length, paragraph length, with ratios and standard deviations for each element.	WADE
06/01/04	Wordsmith analysis	Classroom Descriptions in Spanish	1 page analysis of tokens, types, word length, sentence length, paragraph length, with ratios and standard deviations for each element.	WADS
06/01/04	Wordsmith analysis	Final written compositions in Spanish	1 page analysis of tokens, types, word length, sentence length, paragraph length, with ratios and standard deviations for each element.	WAS
17/01/04	Post-course interview	Exploration group participant	5 page transcribed interview	PCI
04/03/04	Post-course interview	Exploration group participant	4 page transcribed interview	PCI
25/02/04	Post-course interview	Exploration group participant	7 page transcribed interview	PCI
25/02/04	Post-course interview	Exploration group participant	6 page transcribed interview	PCI
09/06/05	Follow-up interview	Exploration group participant	9 page transcribed interview	FUI
17/06/05	Follow-up interview	Exploration group participant	8 page transcribed interview	FUI

For the purpose of referencing the data classification will be used with either a date or a sequential number being added. For example: there are a total of forty-three written compositions classified with the addition of a number (e.g., WCE 2 or WCS 17). This is also the case with all interviews and classroom descriptions (e.g., FUI 2 or PCI 3). The data from the personal observations and dairies include the date, as they are not separate events that lend themselves to numerical classification. The WordSmith analysis is an individual event in each case and each has its own tables in the text. For the rest of the text, the data will be referred to by this classification system.

4.4. Data presentation

One thing is to have collected the data from a research setting; what I do with the data and how it is interpreted is something else entirely. In this case, I am going to separate myself from the social aspect of writing in order to present the data first from a very linguistic and quantitative view point in order to show the similar types of results that have been obtained in comparison with previous studies between Spanish and English. This I think is important because although the students in this process are all native speakers of Spanish, there was a difference in the way that they wrote the two languages and this is shown through a simple statistical analysis. This is important as it suggests that the two languages are being produced differently in a written format and this opens the argument that they are possibly perceived differently. This is relevant up to a point because other studies in the past have arrived at similar conclusions when considering Spanish and English. However, they did not offer an explanation as to why they are different. This seems paramount as I think the lack of apparent consideration of the why behind previous studies is what limits the interpretation of second language writing. For this reason, I will begin the presentation of written data in a statistical format to show what has happened in past studies and then later I will present written and interview data under thematic

headings. This will be done in a reduced format as indicated by Creswell (1998) and Lindlof (1995) to try and show in an orderly fashion what was uncovered in the data collection process from a statistical point of view. The first two data classifications are to show structural aspects that govern the process of writing and open up the possibility to begin the process of understanding why the participants who produced the texts that are being used as data in this research view writing in Spanish and English differently.

4.5. Linguistic data analysis

When the initial composition samples in Spanish and English, where the participants from the exploration group wrote about how they had learned to write in Spanish and English, were run through the computer programme Wordsmith, it produced in one of its options a word list that showed the frequency of each one. Also, in this general analysis is the statistics page that shows the basic structure of the text that is produced. From this analysis there is an interesting result. In the written compositions, the students produced more sentences, more paragraphs, and all these elements were longer in Spanish than in English. This information is interesting in that it coincides with part of the results from the previous studies that have been done comparing writing in Spanish and English in a composition format (e.g., Santiago 1971, Santana-Seda 1975, Montaño-Harmon 1991 and Simpson 2000). Also, it lends support to the concepts presented by Abbott (1996) relating to the rhetorical structure of written Mexican Spanish and how it is different from the rhetorical structure of written American English. Abbott (1996, p.35) states that "Mexica oratory is structurally additive rather than subordinative, stylistically copious and redundant and thematically conservative", as stated in Chapter Two. The statistical results confirm specifically the aspects of stylistically copious and redundant writing in Mexican Spanish. This is particularly compelling because the producers of the texts are not native English speakers, yet they somehow applied a distinct structure to their writing in English that partially eliminated these characteristics that are specific and expected by the audience of

written texts in Mexican Spanish. This clearly stands out when comparing the results of Montaño-Harmon (1991 pp.417-422) with the current data because these students did something that made their texts more English language like in their presentation, as can be seen below.

Table 4-2 is a standard comparison of the texts produced by the students in the exploration group, using the same format as Montaño-Harmon (1991 p.420 as seen in Chapter Two) to display the structural differences between the two languages. The students were asked about the process of how they learned to write in English and in Spanish in the course of their educational and professional experience. The following is a summary of the statistical information generated by the programme Wordsmith based on the fourteen compositions written in English and twenty-nine compositions written in Spanish (see sample compositions below) by the students in the exploration group at the beginning and at the end of the exploration group process.

Table 4-2 Wordsmith Analysis of Compositions[9]
Student compositions

	Spanish	English
Sentences	22	17
Sentence length	31.09	17.82
Standard sentence length	30.12	11.77
Paragraphs	43	32
Paragraph length in words	37.35	31.41
Standard paragraph length	38.22	33.57

Sample Composition WCE no. 7
My professional needs have conducted me to learn English. myself.

Unfortunately I have not the opportunity to take a formal English course.

(The written English is) I have not proficiency in written English, but I used

for academic proposes: letters and scientific papers. In this way, I write

---

[9] The complete student texts are in appendices E and F

English using technical terms and medical oriented compositions, a little bit more easy for me. When I have difficulties for compositions, I only transcribe words and sentences for other compositions. I am not agree for that and I hope soon improve the written English proficiency. (WCE no. 7 LHL)

Sample Composition WCS no. 15

<u>Formación académica</u> – La manera en que enseñan en la escuela pre-primaria y primaria a escribir en base a la repetición constante de letras, sonidos, oraciones e incluso textos completos.

<u>Lectura</u> – En lo personal, la lectura diaria de algún texto, revista o periódico, ha ayudado a mejorar mi escritura y gramática así como la ortografía.

<u>Práctica</u> – El realizar tareas, proyectos, ensayos e incluso cartas ayuda a mantener un cierto estilo para estructurar y redactar.

La redacción en mi vida profesional es una herramienta que utiliza mucho para el desempeño de mis labores, aunque no es diariamente trato de aprender la manera correcta, de acuerdo al lugar, tiempo y momento. (WCS no.15 RAG)

From this first table it is seen that there is some type of difference between Spanish and English at the level of paragraph structure or organization and there may be some issue concerning sentence length. With the intention of trying to strengthen the argument for these possible differences, the same process was applied to the written observations of the classroom observers.

In the case of the observers, I had two people performing the classroom descriptions during the process, filling out pre-designed formats while they observed the classroom process. One was a native English speaker and the other a native Spanish speaker. From

them, results similar to the students' compositions were obtained. The descriptions that each person wrote were also analysed by the same programme. It is interesting that the differences are much more marked in this case. The only difference here is that the individuals who are producing the texts are monolingual writers. This opens up the possibility that the students in the exploration group who have been exposed to learning English and have had previous experience of writing in English have begun to apparently acquire an unconscious ability to recognise a textual or rhetorical difference between the two languages and they were able to apply it in some fashion when producing their written texts. The rhetorical structure is something that probably the observers were unaware of as they were dedicating their time to producing written texts in their native language and had no background in second language writing to compare it with. Then, too, it is possible that these individuals simply have had no experience in writing in the other language and do not know what is expected. Either way, Table 4-3 is the same type of summary as Table 4-2, but in this case the descriptive comments that were written by the observers are being used as the data for this analysis.

Table 4-3 Wordsmith Analysis of Descriptions[10]
Classroom descriptions

	Spanish	English
Sentences	15	55
Sentence length	30.47	16.02
Standard sentence length	33.62	8.49
Paragraphs	199	183
Paragraph length in words	15.54	11.61
Standard paragraph length	19.82	11.87

However this information needs to be considered with some reserve due to the format of the observation sheets (see sample observation sheets in Spanish and in English below) that the two classroom observers were using for the exploration group. By looking

at the structure of the observation sheet and the format that was used for its design the

reasons for caution become apparent.

Exploration Group Description

UCEA

Date: 4th of April, 2003   **Time: 6 hours**

Room:_____   **No. of Students: 16**

Description of physical installations:
(include a plan of the seating, details of equipment used and any other significant features)
seating is in lines at the beginning of the class.
overhead projector
whiteboard

Preparation for writing activities (include the following):

Teacher-student interaction
T uses acetates to explain differences in writing in English and Spanish (T uses Spanish for explanation). T gives ss handouts to practice grammar and punctuation practice. These instructions are given in English. T explains sentence structures on board using ss names as examples. T uses subject + verb + compliment sentence structure.

Student-teacher interaction

  -student responding
ss give examples of sentences when t asks for them. ss give answers to correct or incorrect sentence structure. (WCD no.1 English speaker)

Descripción del Grupo de Exploración
UCEA

Fecha: __Abril 4 de 2003__ Hora:___15:00_____

Salón:_____B4_____ No. de Alumnos:_____17_____
Descripción de las instalaciones físicas:
(incluir un plano de las butacas, detalles del equipo empleado, y cualquier aspecto significante)

Salón iluminado y ventilado, con mobiliario suficiente para el número de participar el pizarron (frente del salón) está en la misma dirección de la puerta.
(en las ventanas)
las sillas y mesas quedaron dispuestas en 3 filas con 7 sillas y mesa cada una las cuales quedaron ocupadas no en su totalidad.

Preparación para actividades de redacción (incluir lo siguiente):
Interacción maestro-alumno
El maestro se dirige con seguridad (y decisión) a los alumnos. Incluyendo algunas bromas, lo cual hace que la atención del alumno se fije en él.
-El maestro no solo habla y expone, sino que utiliza todos los elementos posibles, movimiento de manos, diferentes tonos de voz, etc.
-Cuando el maestro lee del material fotocopiado todos lo siguen en sus copias

Interacción alumno-maestro
- no siempre comprenden lo que el maestro dice, es decir, ponen mucha atención para captar lo que el maestro dice.
- los alumnos responden a los cuestionamientos del maestro de forma concreta.
- cuando el maestro expone ellos están muy atentos, algunos toman notas.

  -alumno respondiendo al maestro
- los alumnos responden de forma concreta
- fundamentan sus preguntas y aportaciones.
- no todos los alumnos participan respondiendo, la mayoría sólo se ríe. o asiste con la cabeza.

  -alumno iniciando la interacción

- en la participación del alumno hay nerviosismo

- se tienen algunas imprecisiones en la participación que requieren de preguntar para que quede clara su participación.

Interacción alumno-alumno
-entre ellos hablan en español, y se apoyan.
-entre ellos se corrigen y preguntan dudas.
- algunos no alcanzan a comprender lo que lee el maestro y se apoyan entre ellos.

Alumno trabajando en forma individual

- se refieren únicamente a la actividad que están realizando.
- no se ve que tengan problemas al leer, pues rápido contestan lo que se pide.
- se pone nervioso cuando llega el maestro. (WCD no.8 Spanish speaker)

These are extracts from the observation sheet that was used for the classroom descriptions by the two observers. Obviously the Spanish speaker wrote far more information than the English speaker in terms of volume. However, the part that needs to be taken with some reserve is the statistical results that relate to the paragraphs. The format was designed in such a way that the Wordsmith programme recognises each new heading as a paragraph. So, while it is not a true representation of paragraph structure, it is a representation of the volume of text that was produced by each writer. Also, it gives an indication of the sentence length. Yet, as the texts were not produced in a composition format, but in a pre-determined observation sheet that event needs to be taken into account when considering the statistical information that was produced. In particular the issue that the English speaker used many accepted abbreviations in 'second language classroom' observation was most likely due to her experience as a second language instructor. The Spanish speaker did not have any previous training in language teaching and; as such, was not aware of the type of abbreviations that were used by the other observer and this may be a partial explanation for some of the differences in length that were present in the texts.

Nevertheless, the information that was produced in the analysis by the Wordsmith programme shows the same type of sentence patterns that have been found in previous studies that compare American English and Mexican Spanish (e.g., Simpson 2000, Thatcher 2000, Montaño-Harmon 1991, Santana-Seda 1975, and Santiago 1971). Also, the conclusion can be drawn that while a difference has been detected, there is no explanation as to why the difference exists. More importantly, why do the members of the exploration group make a distinction between languages in the sense of trying to respect the structural conventions of the written language? These are just some of the possible doubts that are present. When this is considered in more depth, the issue arises that there are differences between the languages; but the explanation for their existence and the impact that they have on language writing cannot be discovered through quantitative statistical or comparative analysis comparing the variations that came out. To discover the why, it is necessary to seek an alterative research route as proposed by Péry-Woodley (1990) because the 'contrastive analysis' model does not go far enough in offering explanations. So, to look for a possible underlying explanation in an alternative route, it was necessary to go beyond the texts that were produced and discuss them with the participants of the exploration group, in order to find out some of the reasons why these texts were different. The reasons that the members of the exploration group gave as to the differences in writing in their written compositions, post interviews, and the follow up interviews are the elements which need to be discussed in much more depth.

As will be seen in Chapter Seven and reiterated here, there have been many quantitative or statistical based studies on language. It is clear that Mexican Spanish and American English are different in terms of sentence length and paragraph length. It is possible that the participants in the exploration group recognise some type of difference because there were changes in their paragraph and sentence length when changing from Spanish to English. The aspects that continue to remain unclear are: Why are these two

languages different at the sentence and paragraph level? How do students learn to recognise these differences? Are they taught in class? Do they require practice? The simple notion that they are different does not leave us with any concrete answers or indication of directions to take in the 'second language classroom'. It is necessary to look deeper into the process.

4.6. Thematic data analysis

The alternative route to data interpretation is to approach the task of discovering the activity of writing from a more flexible direction by creating a space for the data to develop its own voice and express what is has to say for itself. In order to attempt to achieve this, the data was processed into themes based on the content generated by the participants of the exploration group.

The content of the compositions that students wrote during the course of this exploration were about how they learned to write in Spanish and in English. These were written at the beginning of the course and at the end. At the beginning of the course students were asked to write in Spanish and in English about how they had learned to write in each language. At the end of the course, they were asked to write one composition in Spanish with the question 'Has your perception of writing in English or Spanish changed in any way?'

These compositions were then cut up into individual sentences and grouped together under thematic headings that were based on the content of the sentences themselves. At the same time the material from the post interviews that were conducted was transcribed and put through a similar process. In the case of the interviews, some of the information from the compositions was used as a starting point in the interviews. However, the concept of there possibly being a change in their perception of writing in Spanish or English was a general starting point for the open ended interviews. The idea of using previous data as a

starting point was to try and get deeper into what the students thought about the process of writing. This also includes the information from the follow up interviews that occurred after the completion of the MBA programme. The idea of this is to look for other aspects that could influence the writing process. In general I think that the post and follow up interview processes were extremely important as they are what created a large portion of the sub themes that are directly related to the teaching process. The sub themes came out of the conversations with the students and overlapped with the written compositions that were produced months earlier. As such I feel that this makes it possible to directly relate them to larger or more general concepts that the students had already expressed in the written texts. Also, the issue that the written texts were collected in two different time frames, and that the interviews span from the beginning to the end of the MBA programme, I think this only adds to the data as it allowed both the participants and the researcher to have the opportunity to reflect on what was occurring over a two and a half year period where writing was a central activity.

The themes and sub themes were extracted from the students' texts and interviews and classified as stated on page 91.

Nevertheless, the basic assumption of the classification of themes was to allow the data to speak for itself and group itself around the patterns that it formed (Aronson 1994 and Taylor and Bogdan 1989). Later this same structure that emerged is used to classify the data connected from the second language writing experience of the researcher so as to be able to compare the second language writing experience. As such these become the themes to classify the issues that are discussed in chapters five and six concerning the struggle to understand second language writing.

4.7. Summary

In this Chapter I have sought to provide a description of how the data collection process was shaped by the data itself. In this and the preceding Chapter I have attempted to

provide an outline that shows the rationale for how the data was collected and considered; some of the implications of the approach in terms of the type of research and finally how it was organized for interpretation. What is needed now is a point of entry into the data for its analysis and interpretation. In the next chapter the themes that emerged from the data gathered will be discussed, along with the inherent differences between written Mexican Spanish and written American English that emerged in the process.

Chapter Five

5. Education and professional practice in 'second language writing'

> Like Derrida, they have missed the true import of "discourse", which is "the other as us", for the point of discourse is not how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation. In their textualization of pseudo-discourse that have accomplished a terrorist alienation more complete than that of the positivists. It may be that all textualization is alienation, but it is certainly true that non-participatory textualization is alienation –"not us"—and there is no therapy in alienation. (Tyler 1986, p.128).

> To explain and understand any human social behavior…we need to know the meaning attached to it by the participants themselves. (Nielsen 1990, p.39)

5.1. Introduction

In the introduction of the thesis I discussed the (auto)biographical aspect of this present work and the three aspects of me which are intertwined with the research process: personally, professionally and academically. Next in Chapter Two I gave an analysis of second language writing in Mexico considering: classroom approaches, genre theory, contrastive rhetoric, and feedback and placed it in an 'imaginary discourse community' where writing is 'fixed' and 'stable'. This was done to critique some of the current literature related to second language writing that emphasizes the cross-linguistic aspects and suggest that the 'second language classroom' has fostered a reduced and simplified social place that does not reflect the realities of second language writing due to academic, professional, and institutional polarization. In Chapter Three, I presented and discussed the investigation I have undertaken as part of the thesis and its methodological approach. In that chapter, I described the ethnographically based methodological approach I have taken to this study, suggesting that a dialogue as in figure 3-1 is well suited to an examination of a complex social activity. In Chapter Four I set out to show how a social space was selected by listening to the data and allowing it to help build the boundaries where the data was collected, as well as how it was collected. Then the data was

considered from a quantitative aspect to show that I could find similar results and open the argument that possibly some of the comparative studies of second language may have not gone far enough to describe what is happening.

The quotes at the beginning of this chapter are there to bring what I think seems to be present throughout all of the data; that as a second language writer there is a deeper conflict occurring that has not yet been explained. As such, acceptance becomes a struggle for students in trying to understand how to use 'second language writing' both inside and outside the classroom and as a result the initial data in this chapter does not present any 'new' findings, but reaffirms 'existing' knowledge.

In this chapter and the following, the focus will be directly upon the data collected and its analysis, in order to consider precisely this struggle. The issues raised so far serve to underline the issue that the teaching of second language writing, like all forms of education and training, is a complex process, inasmuch as it is a social and socialising activity, which must make choices about selection and omission of material and ideas, and adopt certain modes of instruction. I would like to suggest at the outset that it is also difficult to question at face value the effectiveness of the teaching of second language writing *per se.* What follows here, although it may be perceived on the surface as very critical of the teaching of second language writing in the University of Guanajuato, does not disavow the fact that the participants have used English in academic writing successfully to some extent.

This chapter will begin the process of examining the data I collected and presenting my analysis of how the 'second language classroom' has become a site of rhetorical struggle for the participants to determine what is expected of them when using English to write. In doing so, I will be allowing the participants to present their own argument and I will try to enter into a dialogue with them to show what is occurring in the second language writing process.

In considering the data I have collected and analysed I am presenting and discussing principally extracts from the written compositions and distinct interviews with the exploration group in this chapter.

The analysis is presented in the headings mentioned in section 4.6 as they were created by the data. This is to maintain the concept of a dialogue with the data and to try not to interfere with its development. Parallel to this development will be my researcher's overall conclusion[11] to each section. The objective is to create a separate meta-voice in the narrative that will follow through the text and help build on the concept of a dialogue with the data.

5.2. The general data presentation

5.2.1. Formal education

The participants expressed in the compositions and in the interviews their perception that the formal education system was the basis for learning how to write. The general reference was to the basic educational system (WCE 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 and WCS 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27 and 28). This can be seen in the following examples:

CRB

Considero que desde el momento que nací en México y estoy en escuelas de habla hispana o Mexicanas el español es la lengua nata, por lo que durante de toda mi vida hasta el día de hoy, el escribir éste ha sido un proyecto diario y definitivamente el uso frecuente en la escuela de la gramática española durante años ha prevalecido en las escuelas dan el conocimiento de aprender a escribir el español. (WCS 23)

I consider that from the moment that I was born in Mexico and I am in Spanish speaking or Mexican schools, Spanish is the native language, through which all my

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[11] Researcher is used because in this research I am a participant/observer. In this chapter and Chapter Seven my insights fall under the category of researcher or observer. In the Chapter Six they will become the researcher's conclusion as a second language writer. This is where I stand back from the data to offer my personal reflexions on the data discussion.

life writing has been a daily project and definitely the frequent use in school of Spanish grammar for years gives the knowledge to write in Spanish[12]

JLC

Fundamentalmente ha sido producto de mi trayectoria de estudiante en las materias específicas como lo fueron las primeras clases de "Español" durante la primarias y secundaria y posteriormente las clases de "Lectura y Redacción" en preparatoria. (WCS 19)

Fundamentally it has been the result of my experience as a student in the specific courses like the first courses in Spanish during the primary and secondary school and later in the "Reading and Writing" courses in High school.

This establishes a link to the formal educational system for writing in the first language. It also suggests that writing is a long-term project that evolves throughout one's life. It brings up the issue of frequency of use of the language as an important element concerning writing, too. It might be said that the formal education system appears to be the foundation of learning to write.

However the education topic opened up other issues, in the post interviews and follow up interviews. It was commented upon that their own formal education had not really prepared them for 'professional writing' or 'writing' outside the academic setting. (PCI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and FUI 1 and 2). This is seen in the following comment:

CDP: Si aprendí algunas cosas de esas en la escuela y bueno otras… muchas en la práctica profesional. (PCI 4)

Yes I learned some things in school and well others…many others in professional practice.

Continuing with the issue of their formal education, in the second language classroom there seems to be a similar problem of non-preparation for writing outside the academic setting. The students did not seem to consider that their second language classes had been a factor in learning how to write in English; if anything the 'second language

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[12] A note of clarification, this is to aid the reader in interpreting the meaning of the text. All the text in Spanish is translated literally word for word into English. This is to help highlight the underlying differences between the two languages and help maintain the original voice.

classroom' in Guanajuato seemed only to consider the writing of a basic sentence (PCI 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and FUI 1 and 2).

> TC: Ahora cuando empezaste a aprender el idiomas inglés, ¿en algún momento te prepararon o te ayudaron en como de debe de redactar o cuales son las expectativas de redactar en inglés?
>
> RAG: No, no la verdad no. Yo tome ingles desde la secundaria parte de prepa toda la universidad y vamos dos idiomas inglés y francés y ninguno de los dos, eh ninguno de esos todos esos procesos no se aprendió. Era lo básico redacta una oración. (PCI 1)

> TC: Now, when you began to learn English, at some point were you taught or helped with how to write in English or about the expectations in written English?
>
> RAG: No, the truth, no. I took classes… secondary school, high school and through out my BA and two languages English and French and in neither of the two, none of them, no writing processes were taught. It was just how to write a basic sentence.

At this point it appears that both writing processes were lacking. In both the case of learning to write in Spanish and in English, the students were not ready to perform the activity of writing outside the walls of the classroom (this is more clearly drawn out in 5.2.6.). Basically, the participants have suggested that the formal education system is the foundation for writing, but it does not seem to be enough. There appear to be gaps between being inside and outside the classroom. Possibly during the classroom experience there was not enough information to articulate any missing elements; however, once outside the classroom it became apparent that more was needed.

From this it is possible to infer that the students are confirming much of what was discussed in Chapter Two that writing is closely associated to genre and rhetoric and can change within a culture. Also, they have expressed the need for guidance in the transition period of learning what the new community expects from them. Most importantly there is a general message that the classroom in the University of Guanajuato had not given them the necessary tools to function well in first or second language writing.

Also, the aforementioned highlights the lack of focus that is given to writing in general as the native culture does not prepare one for transition from an academic community to a professional writing community and the 'second language classroom' does not prepare the students for the transition of learning to write in another culture's writing communities. This is best expressed by CDP who second language writing experience included:

> …the teacher did not teach you to write…you just repeated words over and over like a parrot with a pencil until you were bored (FUI 2).

When considering the issue of how writing is taught, first the classroom in the University of Guanajuato needs consideration. Writing is not a central element. Writing is mostly an afterthought. What I mean is that the writing is only presented as a means to obtain a sample of text from the student in order to assign a grade. This is apparent in the exam format at the Language School of the University of Guanajuato. Students are required to produce three texts per semester and their evaluation is based on: language structure 40%, grammar 20%, vocabulary 20%, and sentence mechanics 20%. These texts have nothing to do with the course syllabus. They are opened ended questions thought up a few day in advance 'to get a clean writing sample' (I sincerely do not know what is meant by 'clean sample' even after twenty years or working in the University). There seems to be no real interest in what students write or whom they might write for. It is like the students are given the instructor's purpose to write. This was stated directly by CDP, her statement seems to summarize the 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato concerning writing:

> Bueno, cuando estuve en la Escuela de Idiomas, pero fue en los últimos semestres, y eran cosas simples como cartas, y…describir las vacaciones, y ensayos de alguna cosa que teníamos que leer. Pero eran cosas muy, muy simples. Realmente cuando empecé a escribir algo más en inglés fue ahora que Empecé en la maestría. (PCI 4)
>
> Well, when I was in the Language School, but only in the last semesters, and it was simple things like letters, and…describing vacations, and essays about things we read.

> But they were very very simple. I did not start to write anything in English until I began the Masters degree.

The principal aim apparently is to have some type of written sample, which can be used for evaluation. This is what I think the participants meant when they said that they did not learn to write in their second language classes. They were referring to the possibility that writing in the classroom was not about communicating, but more about performing simple acts to give a sample to the instructor.

This particular responsibility cannot be placed solely on the classroom instructor. The classroom material or textbook, along with the institution is part of the teaching – learning process. Instructors, as is the case of the University of Guanajuato, often follow pre-designed plans or institutional norms in their classrooms. Nevertheless, formal education is a part of the learning experience of most people around the world. Mexico is another country that requires formal public education. I consider at this point it should be noted that at the moment only primary and secondary school is required by Federal Law. The members of the exploration group spoke about two types of formal language education, where writing was involved the National English Education Programme and the second language programme often overlap. As RAG stated

> Writing? In school...basic education...high school...research methodology and subjects focused on how to write well. (PCI 1)

This is probably not unlike what many people around Mexico experience when learning to write in their first and second language. This is similar to the United States where specific classes in writing are taken by students (PD 02/08/2004). This process is stated much more explicitly by GDP who *expresses*:

> TC-¿Cómo aprendiste a escribir en español?, ¿dónde lo aprendiste?

> GDP- En la escuela y parte en mi casa… pues no sé primero aprendí… desde el kinder cuáles eran las letras, cuáles eran las silabas...cómo se construía una palabra... y bueno

ya después empiezas un poco a, a leer y a escribir, a conocer como se escriben los sonidos de cada una… de las de las letras…cómo se como se combinan y cómo suenan este de acuerdo a como se colocan.

TC- En la secundaria o la preparatoria hubo algo donde que te ayudo respecto a escribir en español… ¿en esa etapa de la vida?

GDP - Pues creo que en la preparatoria. Sobre todo este yo tenia muchos, bueno sigo teniendo algunos problemas de ortografía (risas)…y si de repente había algunos talleres que ya ve que algunas materias que fueron importantes para sobre todo, para aprender a… a redactar, y a tener una ortografía mejor. (PCI 2)

TC- How did you learn to write in Spanish?, Where did you learn?

GDP- In school and at home…well, I don't know, first I learned… since kindergarden the letters, what were syllables… how to construct a word… and well little by little to read and write, to learn how to write the sounds of each one… of the letters… how they are combined and how they sound according to how you put them together.

TC- In junior high school o high school was there anything that helped you to write in Spanish… in this stage of your life?

GDP- Well I guess in high school. Overall, well, I had well I still have problems with spelling (laughter) … and yes there were suddenly some workshops you know some courses that were important especially for learning to…to write and to improve spelling.

In the final analysis it seems evident that the formal educational institutions play a powerful role in the process of learning the activity of writing in both a first and second languages. As mentioned earlier, in the follow up interviews, RAG and CDP both made the point that the MBA programme that they just completed helped, but did not directly prepare them to write in English in their profession or in academics. As the exploration indicated, neither did the ESL classes prepare them for writing in English. This raises questions about the effectiveness of classroom instruction on writing as brought in the literature review in section 2.5, but at the same time it opens up other areas of questioning that were

mentioned: feedback (feedback was considered in 2.8) and practice. Both of these concepts were brought up in the post interviews in the context of the focus that is given to the activity of writing and will be discussed later in this chapter. What continues to be important is the activity of second language writing.

Researcher's overall conclusion: Within the system of formal education is where most people appear to learn to write. Mexico and the Untied States are not an exception to this social practice. What should draw our attention here is that the participants commented that 1) Formal education did not seem to prepare them for professional writing needs; 2) The students' second language classes did not seem to prepare them for writing in English; 3) The comment on learning Spanish in Mexico and being Mexican. This opens up three important considerations. First, formal education does not seem to offer the individual preparation for all their writing needs. It appears to be necessary to learn different aspects of writing after exiting the institution. Second, time or available time to practice writing may be a critical issue. Formal education involves many years, a wide range of subjects, and many potential opportunities to practice writing. Second language education is not able offer that same opportunity in terms of variation and practice. Thirdly, writing involves strong issues of identity and definition of who a person is. The way individuals write is tied to a much wider social context outside the classroom that helps to give them a definition of whom they are and where they belong in this world. Although it is not discussed here in this research, as the focus is the 'second language classroom', the issue of identity and writing seem to be profoundly linked and need to be addressed in the process of showing people how to express themselves in writing in a second language. This is highlighted in the opening statement by CRB that being in Mexico, being Mexican and learning Spanish is a daily lifetime project.

5.2.2. Practicing reading

Some students felt that reading was an important aspect of learning to write in Spanish and in some cases in English. Better said, the idea was put forward that reading and writing are connected processes from a learning perspective (WCE 12 and WCS 15, 18, 22 and 40). However, only five participants mentioned this aspect, as being a factor in their development as writers, in fact it was only the two students whose comments are below who emphasized this idea explicitly.

RVG

El factor fundamental es la lectura; la acción de leer libros, artículos, ensayos, revistas amplia nuestro vocabulario y adicionalmente vamos descubriendo algunos estilos para expresar nuestras ideas, conceptos y sentimientos por medio de la *escritura.* (WCS 40)

The essential event that helped me learn to write in English is reading; the only way to improve writing skills is reading several books, articles, magazines, etc. and study grammar so we begin to perceive styles to express ideas, concepts and feelings using the writing.

RAG

Lectura – En lo personal, la lectura diaria de algún texto, revista o periódico, ha ayudado a mejorar mi escritura y gramática así como la ortografía. (WCS 15)

Reading – Personally, reading a text each day, magazine or newspaper, has helped to improve my writing and grammar, as well as my spelling.

Furthermore these same students made no reference to reading in the post course interviews. This may be important because there is a debate in second language education in Mexico that links reading and writing and I think it is interesting that only a couple of these students who are participating in a learning process at a graduate level, do seem to partially share the same concern.

I think that the fact that only five students mention reading is interesting. RAG reaffirmed the reading issue in her follow up interview and CDP mentioned it for the first time in hers.

CDP: sí yo creo que falta practica. y, y yo creo que también falta debes seguir leyendo. (FUI 2)

Yes, I think I need more practice and I think you need to keep reading.

Both of them expressed that reading was helpful in the process of working through their MBA because their professors did not give them enough feedback on their writing.

CDP: No, nos orientaban respecto a redacción. Te decían por ejemplo: el trabajo va a ser de este tema. (FUI 2)

No, they did not give orientation concerning writing. They said for example: the paper is on this topic.

I personally feel that reading helped me to write in both Spanish and in English. The act of reading was something that I learned at home, not at school. This makes me think that possibly this is an area where family may play a stronger role in the development of writing abilities than they are credited for. Also, this could simply be linked to the local University of Guanajuato debate that associates reading and writing and, as I am a part of the community myself I may be just projecting my own thoughts of the issue. I think that this topic needs to be left at this point. In discussing it more, I would be opening up an area of discussion that is based more on my 20 years of professional experience in Mexico and not on the information that the data is generating in this particular study.

Researcher's overall conclusion: It is interesting that there was so little comment on the topic of the relationship between reading and writing. The fact that both RAG and CDP brought this up in their follow up interviews and related it to the MBA programme makes me consider that reading is employed when there is a lack of other options. They said it was helpful because their professor did not give them enough writing guidelines to follow. This I think brings us back to the literature review on Mexican discourse and the questions of orality, discussions of how a text works or its purpose (Thatcher 1999 and 2000). The dominance of orality is common in Mexico and I have experienced it often in my 20 years of professional practice in the University of Guanajuato. I have spent many hours the last fifteen years in administrative meetings discussing what to

do concerning the application of written by-laws and each meeting seems to produce a different result on the same article of law. This leads me to the possible conclusion that Mexico, which is more oral based in its literary tradition, may look towards oral debate more than reading when it comes to writing; which is exactly opposite of the Untied States where there is a more literary based tradition and gives more value to written discourse than spoken. This in turn may have an impact on the overall value that is placed on writing.

5.2.3. Workplace writing

The participants indicated that they had to learn new formats and styles of writing, when they began to practice their profession (WCE 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14, WCS 19, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 and PCI 3 and 4). The following participant expressed this idea well:

CDP: Fue con lo de la…mmm…bueno, en el trabajo donde estaba, estaba este…había una persona..eh… que era el doctor Armando Sandoval, y él era mi jefe directo, y él era la persona que siempre hacía lo que eran este…artículos, y análisis de documentos. Entonces él tenía una forma de redactar muy especial, y obviamente no le gustaba como redactábamos los demás, entonces teníamos que escribir muchas veces cosas que él tenía que checar y eso…bueno, al principio lo tachaba todo. No nada más a mí, a otros compañeros que estaban ahí. Entonces este…poco a poco, empezamos a ver cuales eran los errores, pero después de escribir y escribir y escribir y escribir, este…y de que nos tachaban y nos tachaban documentos y nos los regresaban, pues fuimos corrigiendo cada quien nuestro estilo, y cada quien después se fue haciendo de un estilo propio, pero a la vez influenciado por, por el jefe. (PCI 4)

CDP: It was in …mmm…well, where I worked, this…there was a person…eh…it was Dr. Armando Sandoval, and he was my boss, and he was the person that always wrote these …articles and document analysis. So, he had a form of writing that was very special and obviously he did not like the way everyone else wrote, so everything we wrote he had to check it and that…well, in the beginning he crossed out everything. Not just me, everyone that worked there. So, this… little by little, we began to see our errors, but only after writing and writing and writing and writing, this… and he crossed out and crossed out documents and gave them back to us, well we began each one of us to correct our style, and finally each of us developed our own style, but influenced by the boss.

This, in a way, is linked to the educational process as in section number 5.2.1. where all the participants expressed a lack of preparation for professional writing in their educational system (WCE 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 12, 13, 14 ; WSC 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, and 43). In the written compositions and the post interviews the major comment was a lack of relevant practice writing. The need for practice in writing in English was expressed again and again by all the participants in the sense that it was professional practice that opened up the types of writing that were needed. The principal means appears to be e-mail communication.

JLC
In my professional life it is not necessary to write in English because all our documents are for the same organization in Mexico. Just when it is necessary to send an e-mail to US with 2 clients that I have.(WCE 6)

Posteriormente durante mi vida profesional y laboral, es necesaria la comunicación escrita entre dependencias de Gobierno (Oficios, Memorandums, etc.) así como durante mi labor en organizaciones privadas a través de cartas y cualquier tipo de correspondencia escrita en papel o vía electrónica (WCS 19)

Later during my professional work life, it is necessary to use written communication between governmental agencies (Official letters, memorandums, etc.) Likewise in my work in private organisations through letters and any type of written correspondence on paper or electronically.

IE
In my professional life:
I use writing English specially at work in documents, like memos, emails, manuals (just to describe events, process or issues) (WCE 4)

The members of the exploration group expressed that they had to learn new ways of writing once they left the educational system. This process of adaptation can be linked to the concept of 'social controls' and 'socialization' that were placed as 'fixed' and 'stable' in the 'imaginary discourse community' in Chapter Two for the purpose of analysis. As can

be seen here in the real world they take on a new light where you have to deal with organizations and individuals that have different expectations. If you bring a second language into the process, the issue of 'social controls' and 'socialization' becomes much more complex and harder to untangle as they are not 'fixed or 'stable' in the real world. Apparently this issue of crossing linguistic borders expressed in Chapter One is a continuous part of learning to write in a different way or style.

This idea of a certain style can be carried to a much more complex extreme in Mexico as indicated by CDP where one person basically formed the writing 'social controls' of one group or by a group as indicated by RI:

TC: Aprendiste algo o algún cambio en tu forma de escribir cuando empezaste a trabajar?

RI: Si, porque se topa uno con gente que le gusta cierto estilo o que uno presente los resultados de determinada forma entonces si hubo un proceso de cambio de adaptación más que nada de adaptación de lo que uno aprende a lo que se lleva hecho en la empresa por años que así lo quieren hacer o así lo quieren presentar o así quieren verlo. (PCI 1)

TC: Did you learn anything or was there any change in your writing when you began working?

RI: Yes, because you come across people that like a certain style or like results presented a certain way so there is a process of change or adaptation mostly adaptation of what you learn to the organization has done for years and that's the way they do it or that's the way they present it or that's the way they want to see it.

What is happening here is a demonstration that within organisations there are implicit 'social controls' that govern how people should write. These 'social controls', at least here in Guanajuato, seem to be directly related to who has the most powerful position in the organisation. The only two comments portray domination by the person with the most power in the organisation. This coincides with much of the research that has been done on discourse communities and power relationships in language (e.g., Henry 2000, Howarth 2000, Pennycook 1998, Mills 1997, Johns 1997, and Fairclough 1995).

This issue of 'social controls' may be stronger in Mexico than in the United States. If this were true, this could mean because of the high social status that instructors are given

in Mexico that the 'socialization' process in the classroom could have more impact than in other contexts. In the sense that the students might be more willing to have foreign 'social controls' implicitly forced on them.

This opens up another aspect of the workplace environment that needs to be considered. The process of writing in the University of Guanajuato as described by MF is that each committee works as a group and the work session is recorded. His responsibility is to summarize and shape the discussion into the acceptable University format for written text that was already addressed in Chapter Three. In his words

> MF: The Secretary General's office has to receive all documentation and revise it to see if the structure and form is convenient and in some cases documents are returned for revision (ICW 1 09/05/02).

This is identical to the process described by Spilka (1990and 1993, pp.75-81) in that she says workplace writing is centred on collaborative efforts and requires constant feedback. While Henry (2000, pp.29-34) indicates that the issue of authorship or retaining ownership of words is a question of importance in the United States. Both concepts were analyzed earlier, MF says

> We are a support team, in what we are doing, the dedication, the effort, the motivational disposition to do it is a product of the functions and attributions that we have, we recognise the role that we are playing. (ICW 1 09/05/02).

I think this demonstrates one of the principal traits that possibly differ between Mexican Spanish and American English writing. Ownership of written documents is an important issue in the United States (Henry 2000, p.45), while in Mexico it appears that there may be a different point of view towards ownership of written documents. Added to this I also consider the comment made by GRJ of "writing like an American" (PD extract 28/02/02), that she explained as "The idea of subject + verb in present tense is very American and sounds simple in Spanish. This should not be used in formal writing" (PD extract 06/03/02)

this adds weight to the concept of a recognisable form of writing that can be attributed to a specific nationality or writing community.

I think that here are recognisable differences between two cultures and communities. What is interesting here is that you do not need to be a member of the community or know how to write for it in order to be able to detect it, but you do need to go through a learning process to belong to one and to work within it. The aforementioned are aspects of writing that appear to not be explicitly acquired in the formal educational process, yet they are a part of the activity of writing within a given community. Added to this is the suggestion that, according to the participants in their second language classes, sufficient and relevant writing was not present.

By placing the second language classes in Guanajuato alongside the Mexican educational process, I think a similar pattern can be found. The second language course tends to prepare the students to produce texts for evaluation purposes of the course and not for actual communication with people. The Educational system trains students to write academic papers that are useful within the system, but that do not have much relationship to everyday workplace writing as seen in previous studies (e.i. Spilka 1993). As a result, neither of these processes seems to have a strong relationship to future professional practice of students. At the end of the educational process or the second language course, the student does not seem to be ready to function in a new discourse community; even one that is within the native culture.

As a result, I think here it is necessary to open the debate around the idea of discourse communities. What these students are suggesting here is directly related to research in discourse communities and its association with writing, as presented in Chapter Two with the 'imaginary discourse community' In the workplace, the creation of writing communities is part of our social structure. In the classroom educational institutions create discourse communities. In the language classroom discourse communities need to be built, in the

same way as any other social space where the writing norms of a given culture can be found, this was discussed in the explanation of 'social controls' and 'socialization' norms in Chapter Two. The problem here is that the genres that are created for the second language classroom have no use beyond the classroom's door.

I think CDP was the most explicit here in explaining the process of adapting to workplace writing. However, I think this idea of workplace writing can be expanded on. Consider the arguments that Henry (2000, pp.172-184) and Spilka (1993, pp.75-81) use in explaining how organisational writing functions. According to these authors power and tradition are strong elements in maintaining organisational norms for writing. I think this brings up an important issue for the 'second language classroom'. Second language instructors have much power in their classroom. Language schools are organisations. How much of the 'writing' those students receive is academically focused and how much of it is altered by the instructor and school's beliefs about writing? I think these are valid questions to think about when considering the process of teaching and learning to write. Basically, I think these are valid questions because there does not seem to be any particular standard for 'second language writing' that is used in the Language School of the University of Guanajuato. This leads to the assumption that individual teachers may strongly influence what happens in the classroom. This could be problematic in Mexico because of the view on the ownership of writing that was mentioned in Chapter Three. The lack of importance given to ownership of writing from an American viewpoint by Mexican students could be the foundation for possible misunderstandings in the 'second language classroom'. Students could be possibly attempting to adapt themselves to each instructor assuming that there is no actual standard and the only need is to accommodate the instructor that is currently in the classroom.

> *Researcher's overall conclusion: I think this is where a direction begins to emerge. Writing in school and in the workplace is different. This lends support*

to the question of discourse communities and that each has its established set of 'social controls' and process of 'socialization'. It is probably that Mexicans and Americans view the issue of ownership of writing differently and I think strengthened by the theme of reading, writing seems to be considered of less value or of weaker value in Mexico than the United States. You have here elements that are similar and identifiable in both countries, but they are given a different value or interpretation in practice.

The suggestion that they are interpreted differently gives rise to the idea of the 'second language classroom' as another place for writing. Just as formal education writing and workplace writing have their 'social control' and 'socialization' norms, so does writing in the 'second language classroom'. Just like the others, it probably has little relevance as an activity to practice outside the boundaries of its own domain. Also, just as the formal educational process did not prepare these participants for their professional writing roles, it seems logical to consider that second language instruction does not prepare its participants for the role of writing in English.

This then leads to the idea that it is probably necessary to place more focus on the underlying concepts that are distinct in each discourse community and draw them to the surface so that they can be dealt with openly in the classroom and allow the possibility of creating more meaningful practice for the students. This would imply having more of a focus on awareness-raising activities, focused on discourse communities and finding more time to practice writing.

5.2.4. Change in perception of writing

The exploration group participants expressed that after the course that they had taken with me, they had experienced some type of modification in how they view the activity of writing in both Spanish and English. This change in perception appears to be linked directly to the rhetorical structure and text organization patterns of each language (WCS 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39 and 41). This was one of the most predominant issues throughout all of the final compositions. The following is a sample:

CO

Este curso me ha hecho consciente y crítico en los siguientes aspectos:
Primero en presentar información organizada.
Segundo presentar información anterior (vieja) y nueva información.
(WCS 37)

"This course has made aware and critical of the following aspects:
First present in formation in an organised form.
Second present old information and new information. (Student is referring to the given/new principle of cohesion)

All the students either in the compositions or in the post interviews (Appendices E, F and O) brought up the two following two ideas: knowing the differences in the rhetorical structure and text organizational patterns of English. However, they did not view this, as I would have expected. Their focus was on English and having the opportunity for more practice as developed in section 5.2.5.1., while I had been expecting them to show more interest in the rhetorical structure of Mexican Spanish. This result, I think is a direct reflection of what is happening in the second language learning process. I was keenly aware and interested in the Mexican Spanish part of this research. This I think is natural because this research has improved my personal writing in Spanish. I was looking to improve my writing and trying to deal with 'social controls' that were not explicit for me. These students were interested in the American English part, because that is what they were concerned about learning for their academic purposes. Finally, in both our situations, the participants already know how to write in their native language. The aim of a class is to learn how to do this in another language. It was the information on how to write in English that the exploration group found interesting because it was addressing a specific problem that they were dealing with in the course of their MBA studies in English.

This concept of change in perception, when linked to the issue of cultural differences brings up a rather simple solution to 'second language writing'. These students seem to be saying; tell me how to do it and then give me real world practice with some type of

feedback. This is a little different than the classic classroom activity of 'write a postcard about your last vacation'.

I think that if you look closely at the comments that were made by the students, there is a basic request that is being made: "tell me how you want me to present the written word for you". The participants expressed specifically that they no longer see writing as a translating process, that writing is more than grammar, that writing in a second language is a new experience, and finally that they did not learn how to deal with this situation in their second language learning process nor in the completion of their MBA programme. This change in the perception of the learning of second language writing is well described CDP when asked if she had been taught to write:

> No, nos orientaban. Te decían por ejemplo: el trabajo va a ser de este tema y ya. (FUI 2)
> No, they did not orient us. They said the paper is on this topic and that is it.

Then when asked if they received any feedback or information on how to write the papers for the different courses they were taking she said:

> CDP: No todos los maestros, pero sí hubo uno (Ken Kerned) él los imprimía ya y venía todas las anotaciones allí en rojo en párrafos en los que a veces te decía, "No entendí que quisiste decir." Otras cosas te decía, "Muy bien." O otra gente le decía, "Escribes excelente y le ponían obviamente diez y todo, ¿no?" Dependiendo el caso, pero sí habrá retroalimentación y había cosas en las que también no era tanto por escritura. (FUI 2)

> CDP: No not all the teachers, but there was one (Ken Kerned) he printed them and they came with notes in red in the paragraphs that sometimes said "I did not understand you" or maybe "very good", to some "you write excellent and they got an 'A'". It depended on each case, but there was feedback and other things that did not really have much to do with writing.

The importance in this case is that they were able to express the aspects that seemed to be missing in the writing process for them. If they could indicate the aspects that were missing from their second language learning process, then it should be possible to place these missing elements in to the classroom. The placing of these elements would improve

the teaching – learning process of writing in the second language classroom in the University of Guanajuato.

In the case of the group of students that participated in the exploration group, there was a change in how they perceived writing in both Spanish and in English after they had taken the course and this occurred in the classroom as seen in the extract below. The differences that became more apparent to the students have to do with the rhetorical structure, sentence construction and organisation of the text. However, the overall perception of what writing is and how it works was not different. I think what has happened here is that finally the students found a way to express what they already understood at an implicit level.

I think CG gives a good starting point for this discussion above when he says,

> I understand now better how cultural differences affect written communication between English speaking people and Latinos. It is clear again to me that knowing who we are communicating to and how they are educated to perceiving information is what allows us to write and be understood. You can know English grammar but the logic and the appropriate way to communicate is something we are not taught in courses and in my opinion should be taken into consideration. (WCS 31)

What CG has expressed here is something that many students in Guanajuato experience when learning to write in a second language. When I consider my own experience in learning to write in Spanish, it did not make sense until someone else explained what was happening to me. This suggests that there appear to be gaps in second language writing instruction process in the Language School at the University of Guanajuato.

This is what the students in the exploration group pointed out. First CDL, who said

> My perception of written English has completely changed because I learned that writing is not just translating. English structures are very different from Spanish. I think that written ideas in English are more concise and direct. The writing style of English is not as 'ornamental' as Spanish. (WCS 32)

Then CR writes:

> Now I know that when I write in English I have to be clearer and simpler. At the same time I now understand that punctuation will give style to my sentences. Before this class I did not understand the basic essentials of writing in English (WCS 39).

Finally, it is CDP who sums up the idea with

> Yo creo que eso es lo principal en cuanto que hace diferente el inglés al español en escribir y lo demás puede ser, bueno es ya el problema de cada quien de que no estudió una lengua materna y ya, bueno, ya allí vienen otras cosas, pero realmente la diferencia que yo le veo es esa. En español siempre te piden más explicaciones, más de todo y en inglés te dicen, "No, nada más quiero que me digas concretamente lo que me quieres decir. Es más si me puedes decir una frase, mejor y ya acabamos." Y en español, no. En español dices cien veces para llegar a una cosa. Yo creo que es lo principal. (FUI 1)

> I think the main difference between Spanish and English in writing and maybe in other things, well the problem is people don't study their native language and well then there other things, but that is the real difference. In Spanish they always ask for explanations, more of everything and in English they say just say exactly what you want to say. What's more, if you can say it in one sentence that is better and its over with. And in Spanish, no. In Spanish you say a hundred times to get to one thing. I think that is the basics.

Here I think, is one of the principal elements that seem to cause difficulties in second language writing. The underlying concepts that make written texts acceptable in a given culture are implicit and not explained nor taught in Guanajuato, nor in other parts of Mexico apparently (see data quote below). These are elements that both teachers and students are aware of on some level, but apparently do not know exactly how to communicate them to each other. Hence the student is left in an inferior position where he is generally labelled as being deficient or not able to understand the basics of writing (this is clarified in Chapter Seven). This lack of knowledge or awareness upon the part of the teacher can lead to some strong affirmations like the one made by an American teacher in a MEXTESOL convention (National Affiliate of TESOL International) in Oaxtepec, Morelos 2003 who said,

> My children were educated in Mexico, so they never learned to write correctly in Spanish, so I know that I have to teach my EFL students how to write (RD 14/10/03).

This type of ignorance mentioned above that one culture may write differently than another (as in turns out the woman in question did not even speak Spanish even though she claimed to have lived in Mexico for almost twenty years), when taken into the classroom can become a dangerous element and even an element of imposition or as some authors' like to call it linguistic imperialism at the classroom level (e.g., Pennycook 1994 and 1998 and Phillipson 1992). However, this ignorance may be sustained by the relative temporal power position that the teacher has while in the classroom (e.g., Fairclough 1995, 2000). All of this directs itself back to my observation in Chapter Two on how the members of the teaching staff of the Language School at the University of Guanajuato hold this unspoken belief that students in Mexico do not know how to write and that the educational system in Mexico does not prepare students for the activity of writing: a concept that the participants expressed in this Chapter in 5.2.1. as being an incorrect observation. All of this suggests to me that there may be a direct need for explicit instruction on how discourse communities are developed, along with the explicit instruction of the elements that the audience is looking for when reading a text. This is something that goes far beyond the classic second language textbook that likes to do simple activities as those mentioned later by CDP on page 169 like: describe a vacation, describe the family, write a postcard, or describe your city (e.g., Evans and Dooley1999, Richards 1991, Doff and Jones1991 and Harmer and Surguine 1987).

> *Researcher's overall conclusion: The possibility that the participants modified their view on writing and became more interested in it in a brief period of time is encouraging. It suggests that with a focus of attention on awareness-activities in the areas of text structure and paragraph organisation, the process of dealing with second language writing can apparently be more useful for them. On the other hand, I was personally discouraged that the participants did not show much interest in the question of Mexican rhetoric. They were concerned with English rhetoric because they already knew how to use the Mexican. After*

reflection, this seems logical; they are interested in entering a new community of writing, not in understanding the one they already use.

This does, though, clarify that there are definite differences between the two languages that may affect the process of learning to write and that there seems to be a need to look closer at the underlying elements. This is highlighted by the fact that an instructor from a prestigious private Mexican university claims that Mexicans cannot write in a TESOL conference indicates just how deeply embedded the stereotypes between Mexico and the United States may be. Also, it opens up the issue that maybe these stereotypes are transmitted professionally in the 'second language world', since this same idea is debated in the workplace in the University of Guanajuato, as seen in Chapter Two.

5.2.5. Some deficiencies in second language classes at the University of Guanajuato

Many references were made to deficiencies in the second language classes that the group members had taken in the past. These comments were specific in nature. "Lack of relevant writing practice", "feedback on text structure" and "explicit instruction on how to write in English" were the common complaints found across twelve texts, five post interviews, and two follow up interviews (WCE 1, 3, 9, 10 ; WCS 15, 25, 26, 30, 33, 40, 42 and 43; PCI 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; and FUI 1 and 2). Previous writing experience was summarised as a process of thinking in Spanish and then attempting the process of translating it into English in a written format. The participants summarized the 'second language classroom' learning experience in Guanajuato as: "repeating things like a parrot" or "very very simple things".

This focus on the 'second language classroom' seems to be logical. The exploration group had already indicated that they considered the idea of learning to write to be a process that is basically accomplished within the educational system, or at least begun there. These same people had already indicated that in the educational process they were not prepared for professional writing. It seems logical that the majority of deficiencies in

writing in English would be found in the 'second language classroom', where the participants expressed that they did not learn to write in English. By refocusing the direction of the analysis and moving more to the inside of the classroom, new issues emerge and the issue of cultural differences takes on a new perspective when seen as a classroom deficiency.

Apparently these perceived deficiencies are in the classroom because of how writing is approached in terms of instruction. The members of the exploration group made a simple and straightforward request. 'Show me how Americans write and then let me practice with something real'. This would take us back to the idea of 'social controls' and 'socialization norms' in a given community. So, if the 'second language classroom' is considered to be a recognisable social institution with identifiable characteristics, it is possible to readdress and to deepen the original comments that emerged. This is to see how the perspective of a second language classroom alters what comes out.

From the comments within the above-mentioned appendices there is sufficient data available to produce the following sub headings that when linked to the initial comments create a focus on previous classroom instruction in 'second language writing'.

5.2.5.1. Relevant writing practice

The participants stated that in their second language classes they did not receive sufficient or relevant practice in writing in English, or at least they were not yet prepared to go into the world and write in English (PCI 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 ; FUI 1 and 2; WCE 1 and 3 and WCS 15, 25, 26 and 33).

RAG:

Practicing is important to learn to write in but now today I need to learn the right way to write in English (WCE 1)

Práctica – El realizar tareas, proyectos, ensayos e incluso cartas ayuda a mantener un cierto estilo para estructurar y redactar.

> <u>Practice</u> – Homework, projects, essays and even letters help to maintain a certain style for structuring and writing. (WCS 15)

> RVG:

> La acción de <u>escribir</u> y <u>escribir</u> reportes, informes y algunas veces ensayos y que sean corregidos y pulidos y ser reescritos una o varias veces. (WCS 26)
>
> The action of writing and writing reports, presentations and sometimes essays and then having them corrected and edited and then rewritten once again or more.

> RG: No, suficiente práctica, Bueno, no practica. Más bien era obligación. Yo cuando estudié práctica a cuestiones de que, okay vamos hacer este ejercicio por el simple hecho de hacerlo y de que aprendan a redactar y se los vamos a calificar y se lo vamos a dar ya con una retroalimentación para vean sus errores y cómo pueden mejorar. Eso es lo que pedía yo… Eso sí me parece muy importante (FUI 2).

> RG: No, sufficient practice, well not practice. More like an obligation. When I studied, I practiced questions that, ok, lets do this exercise just to do it and learn to write and then we grade it and we are going to have some feedback to see your errors and how to get better. That is what I asked for... that is important to me.

This lack of relevant practice in writing was reaffirmed in the post-course interviews where sadly the description of our University's Second Language programme's writing content is concisely and directly summarised in this previously mentioned comment below:

> CDP: Well, when I was in the Language School, only in the last semesters and it was simple things like letters, and…describing vacations and short compositions about texts we had to read. But there were very, very simple things. (PCI 4)

This was reconfirmed in the follow up interviews at the end of the programme where the exploration group participants indicated that the completion of their MBA programme had improved their writing in English, but that they did not feel ready to participate in an English writing community, even in their chosen profession. RAG stated in the follow up interview that the MBA did not prepare her to learn how to write in English as seen in section 5.2.1.

This issue of lack of practice is probably directly linked to the issue of formal education. This is natural. Individuals learn to write in our native language over a long period of time that can span fourteen to eighteen years of formal education in order to a obtain a BA degree. Obviously, instructors do not have that amount of time to deal with writing in a language classroom, but instructors can at least look for ways to explicitly address the situation. The first aspect that should come to mind is the professional perception of writing. Second language education places little or no interest in the academic development of future second language instructors (Canagarajah 2002) and course books place little emphasis on developing second language writing.

There is reference here to lack of practice when mentioning the type of documents that were written in class:

because there never was a formal way...of how to write in English (PCI 5)

The lack of practice seems to be directed at formal writing. In this case it could be possible to assume that these students were concerned about their lack of preparation in academic writing, since that was their immediate concern. This does, I think, highlight the lack of real world practice in writing. This seems to be what these students were asking for in the classroom. This assumption is made by the participants because of the limited, simplistic, and superficial types of writing they were exposed to in most of the second language course work they had taken. The language programme in the University that I am using for comparison in this study basically follows the course book and that is it. This is where all the probable deficiencies can be found in the classroom process of learning to write that the students are referring to here. Think back to section 5.2.1. and how the students are confronted with writing exams in the Language School.

There seems to be little relevant practice in writing based on the aforementioned and this coincides with my twenty years of professional experience in the University. This

appears to be an acceptable pattern inside the 'second language classroom' of the Language School at the University of Guanajuato. Students do not receive the opportunity to write texts that will be useful for them in their future professional or academic life in English. Of course, they will know how to describe their last vacation or to write a postcard. This seems to be what students think writing in English is designed for: writing simple things in the classroom.

Researcher's overall conclusion: There are two issues that are present in the question of practice. One is relevance and the other is time availability. The participants indicated that the activities that they performed in their second language learning experience in writing was simplistic and not relevant to real world issues in terms of written discourse. Second, there is not probably enough time available for the type of practice that the students seem to want or need. Second language programmes are not structured to offer the same amount of time that is present in the first language writing experience. This implies that the focus might need to be more in training students in how to confront the issue of writing rather than the actual teaching of it.

5.2.5.2. Feedback on textual structure

Two of the participants indicated that written feedback on their writing was not a part of their second language classes. This lack of feedback appeared again more specifically in the follow up interviews. Here is an example from the participants second language experience where it is openly stated that their professors did not tell them how they wanted documents written, nor did they give them any indication as to how to write the texts; neither before nor after taking each individual course in the MBA programme.

RAG: Es lo que me pasó cuando estaba aprendiendo inglés. Siento que lo que me ayudó más in la redacción y la conversación es que tuve una maestra aquí en la escuela y ella ha sido la única maestra en toda mi vida en los 10 años que llevo aprendiendo inglés, que me decía mis errores y así uno va aprendiendo de los

errores como cualquier cosa.......entonces para mi se hace falta una retroalimentación. (PCI 3)

> RAG: That's what I experienced when I learned English. I feel that what helped me more in writing and speaking is that I had a teacher here in the school, she has been the only teacher in my whole life, in the ten years I have been learning English who told me my mistakes. In that way you can learn from your mistakes…., having feedback is essential to me.

Again, this is somewhat obvious given the case of the University of Guanajuato, what kind of feedback do you give on a postcard or a description of your family. 'Second language writing' is focused on structures and grammar, not how to write acceptably in the English language (Canagarajah 2002 and PCI 4 and 5). Also, in fairness to most second language teachers in Mexico that I have seen in 20 years in 15 different universities, it must be added that based on my twenty years in the University of Guanajuato, language classes are structured in a way that teachers do not have much time available to focus on the individual students. Finally, English is not even classified as an academic area within the University of Guanajuato. It is labelled as a work skill (Compendio Normativo de la Universidad de Guanajuato 1998).

Feedback that refers to mistakes seems to be more concerned with linguistic errors rather than actually how to write. This is because for a period of ten years, the idea of constant error correction was the foundation of the Language School's programme in the University of Guanajuato, The concept of feedback reappears, but it reappears as something that it is unusual. I think that any person who works in the area of writing would say that feedback and/or discussion of written material is a fundamental part of learning to write in any language. Let us consider what was discussed in the exploration group.

The participants indicated that written feedback on their writing was not a part of their second language classes in the post-course interviews and the follow up interviews. I think it is easy enough to deduce why there is this lack of relevant feedback. Most language

154

teachers in the University of Guanajuato are teaching four classes per day, with an average of 25 students per class and are only paid to teach class. When do they have time for feedback? Also, what type of feedback do you give short basic and simple descriptions?

GDP gives a very clear example of the type of feedback that is being sought, when she says

> TC: ¿Qué es lo que crees que te hace falta o sea que tipo de práctica, que tipo de apoyo necesitas para llegar a sentir cómoda?
>
> GDP: Pues tal vez…. Eh… el practicar, el tener una retroalimentación sobre los escritos no en cuestión de ortografía, si a veces lo que hago es que bueno le pido a alguien que me apoye también a ver la si la redacción que yo tengo es más o menos pues…(PCI 2)
>
> TC: What do you think you need or what kind of practice, or type of support to feel comfortable?
>
> GDP: Well, maybe…eh…practice, to have feedback on the writing, not about spelling or punctuation, sometimes what I do is ask someone to help me to see if the writing that I have is more or less…

Essential, it may be; however, how does one expect the student to develop, when the type of language that they are using for writing is not associated with any professional or academic genre as seen in 2.6. Added to this is the suggestion that there seems to be no consistent or relevant feedback as part of the process that may have little significant value as seen in 2.8.

I think there is a paradox here. I think that all involved in language education would consider feedback on written texts important. However, in order to have the opportunity for feedback, a certain type of text is necessary that allows the teachers to go beyond linguistic aspects and show a real interest in what students write. Also, this implies that students are looking for some type of orientation that relates to their academic or professional life. I think this is present because the majority of students here in the University of Guanajuato are in professional academic programmes.

I think it all comes back to the comment that Spanish speakers write differently than Americans. There are differences between the two that mean that students require explicit feedback and orientation on how to structure their written texts. Unfortunately the students do not receive this opportunity in the classroom here in the University of Guanajuato, nor do they receive it in the MBA courses from Southern Oregon University. This implies that for the issue of second language writing, something else is missing from the process that students apparently need.

> *Researcher's overall conclusion: This seems to be another issue that may be misinterpreted. In second language classes feedback is present in the sense of linguistic accuracy, grammar, and punctuation. I think the participants are referring to a need for feedback on issues of text organisation and/or presentation, sentence structure, or 'social controls' writing in American English. This is made even clearer by the idea that the issue of lack of feedback came up as one part of the deficiencies that were present in the MBA programme that participants took.*

> *Feedback, I think does exist in the classroom. I think that it is the type of feedback the students want is what is missing. Therefore, what is happening is an ineffective application in the 'socialization' process of the classroom.*

5.2.5.3.   Audience/Reader

Four students considered the audience or reader to be an important element. This was linked directly to understanding differences in cultural expectations and can be attributed directly to the awareness raising activities in the course they took (WCS 29, 31, 36 and 37).

CG

1.- Antes de iniciar con la escritura en sí, es decir en tomar la pluma y escribir, me ha hecho mas conciencia el llevar a cabo un análisis o reflexión sobre a quien me voy a dirigir en el texto, cual sería su nivel de conocimiento y entonces buscar la manera mas apropiada de escribir para ser entendido. (WCS 31)

> Before beginning to write, taking the pen and paper, I am now more aware of analysing or reflecting on to whom I am directing the text, what is his educational level and then looking for the most appropriate way of being understood.

> JMG
> Otro punto importante es analizar el tipo de audiencia al que nos estamos dirigiendo, para adaptar adecuadamente nuestro mensaje. (WCS 36)

> Another important point is to analyse the type of audience that we are addressing in order to adequately adapt our message.

This could be considered as a change in perception related to how the course was taught, as apparently audience was not considered a factor before the course began because it was not mentioned in any of the pre-course written compositions.

This is, in a way, ironic because this apparent lack of consideration given to the audience seems to be what happens in the 'second language classroom'. Second language instructors seem to forget that their students come from different backgrounds, with different concepts of writing. The part that is ironic is that this group of students found that the American obsession with audience analysis in writing to be important and have said they now apply it when writing in English.

Why these three students considered the audience or reader to be an important element goes beyond a simple observation. This particular issue goes also beyond just a simple change in perception by the participants.

I think this consideration given to audience comes from the type of cultures that are involved. As pointed out in Chapter Two by (Diamond 1997, p.215) the 'west' is comprised of "...peoples who pride themselves on being civilized have always viewed writing as the sharpest distinction raising them above 'barbarians' or 'savages'". Mexico is a culture with a background in an oral tradition and the writing stills contains what Walter Ong (1982) refers to as "psycho-dynamics orality" in the way it is used. As a result the text that is written in American English is a standard or set of rules that is to be followed, while a

document written in Mexican Spanish is more like an outline that needs to be discussed and analysed before it can be used to make decisions (Thatcher 1999 and 2000). As a result, the concept of audience may lose importance in written texts in Mexican Spanish, when compared to American English, since the final goal or aim of the document is slightly different than a document written in English. This could be a far more important issue than the ideas expressed by the members of the exploration group. The role of audience is important in written American English (Henry 2000 and Spilka 1993) and as the students have only their teacher as a reduced audience and limited genres which are only used for the purpose of obtaining a grade (Canagarajah 2002), the impact may be missing or underestimated by the students in a second language class due to a missing benchmark to make a real comparison of how an audience could react.

In conclusion, I think based on my professional experience in the University of Guanajuato that there may be much more here than what was expressed. On the one hand the students are not normally made aware of issues of audience in a second language class. On the other, the teacher is the only audience in the classroom so the student has no exposure to different English speaking audiences. Finally, the purpose of the writing in the second language class is to obtain a grade or to fulfil syllabus requirements. The end result is that the elements of purpose and audience are removed from the writing process. I think that this is apparent, as audience is a major element of writing in English (Clark and Ivanič 1997) and the students' recognition of audience seems to be directly related to the awareness raising aspect of the course.

> *Researcher's overall conclusion: The students were used to a situation where the second language instructor did not give them feedback on writing, so there was no reason to consider the issue of audience. The issue of audience became more relevant after it had been brought up in the actual exploration group. I say this because the issue of audience received more attention in the follow up interviews than in the written texts or post interviews. This coincides*

with the question of a different foundation of a culture that is based more on the "psycho-dynamics orality."

Clearly, there is an issue here that requires more attention, but for the moment goes beyond the scope of this study.

5.2.5.4. Difficulties in writing

At the beginning of the exploration group process two of the students indicated that they felt that their lack of knowledge of the rules, structure, and vocabulary in English was the cause of their difficulties for writing in English.

CDP

In English I don't write good, because my vocabulary is short and my orthography is not good. In my professional life, I don't write but I need to write more. (WCE 3)

JLC

At this moment is very difficult for me to write in English. I feel that I have not enough tools and knowledge about the principal rules to write in the correct way in English. (WCE 6)

At the end of the process two students said in the follow up interviews that the difficulties in writing were linked to the overall process of the MBA programme in the sense that they did not obtain any orientation as to how to write the texts for the courses that they were taking in the MBA. The entire process was defined as an experience of writing through trial and error with knowledge of the expectations. As a result they felt that they had not learned anything about writing.

RAG

No, no, el documento no lo revisaron. Simplemente lo que pedían ellos era una presentación en power point y como una síntesis de toda la tesis. (FUI 2)

No, no the document was not checked. They only asked for a power point presentation.

> Lo que pasa es que como sí nos hicieron mucho hincapié en que debería de estar bien escrita, bien escrita para no sé para el criterio de no sé quien. (FUI 2)

> We were told that it had to be well written, well written for what criteria, I don't know, and according to whom?

Here is expressed basically the same that was expressed in section 5.2.5. concerning the deficiencies in the second language class. As in the second language class, here in the MBA course they were not being informed of the expectations on how to write, only that it be written well according to someone. This seems to be similar to the standard structure of the writing component of a second language class.

Researcher's overall conclusion: At first I thought that these two participants brought up this issue because of their lack of basic knowledge of English and it was confirmed. In Chapter Four where the issue of access is explained, I pointed out that there were basic language requirements to enter the programme and that not all the members met the supposed criteria. These two students fall in this category. They did not really fulfil the requirements that were specified to enter the MBA programme. In fact JLC apparently did complete the MBA programme. This brings up a different issue that is not related to this current research. However, in FUI 2 where RAG is commenting on the difficulties of trying to write the thesis, similar comments are being made. This opens up the door to the possibility that it is not necessarily a lack of English, but possibly a lack of knowledge of 'social controls'.

5.3. Summary

From this data presentation it appears that something is possibly missing from the 'second language classroom' in the state of Guanajuato (I have to open this comment up to cover the state of Guanajuato as these students came from eleven different cities and regions within the state). The issues that came up start in the context of general education,

then in the workplace and then later work their way into the 'second language classroom'. These issues can be grouped into three principal concepts:

1) Awareness-raising activities: By this term I am referring to issues of discourse communities in the following sense. The elements that compose the 'social controls' and 'socialization' norms of the target language's community need to be confronted or compared with the first language's community. This goes back to the imaginary community where the students are dealing with the 'social controls' and 'socialization norms' of an American discourse community without receiving explicit instruction in it. This implies awareness at a deeper level than linguistic accuracy.

2) Relevant feedback: Here I am classifying as 'relevant' information related to the 'social controls' of the target language's discourse community. This implies a move away from linguistic accuracy and a move towards feedback about language in actual use in society.

3) Relevant practice: The term 'relevant' here moves to the other side of the equation that is to 'socialization' norms of the discourse community. The participants wanted to practice writing the same types of texts that the members of the target community write in order to become part of the discourse community.

These three elements need to be placed in a particular perspective. The participants of the exploration group made many references to feedback and practice. They were not expressing necessarily a lack of these two elements, but a possible misuse of them. Second is the issue of awareness-raising that can be related to teaching method; but in this case I think it appears to move towards the issue of course content.

From this it can be concluded that the participants are making a call for a change in content that offers an explanation about how to use writing in real social contexts, where they would have the opportunity to produce relevant texts. Next, they have made a subtle

request to be not taught how to write, but to be shown how to approach functioning in the American discourse community.

This suggests that the 'second language classroom' may have created a context reduced concept of writing that is functioning in an 'imaginary discourse community'. This would imply a need to open the classroom space up and allow for writing activities that are focused more on the processes of learning to deal with the realities of new discourse communities. Moreover, I think this chapter shows just how fuzzy and complex the issues are that surround second language writing. Because the information gathered does not offer anything exceptionally new, when compared to past studies on second language writing (e.g., Kroll 1990 and 2003). However, it does seem to open up the door to the possibility that a deeper explanation is required.

Up to this point I have presented the data and allowed it to develop and interpret itself as it emerged from the research process using the information that was gathered from the exploration group. In the following chapter the data will be readdressed, but with emphasis on the point of view of the researcher as the second language writing experience of the researcher will be considered. The (auto)biographical data that was collected through the personal and self analysis journals will be considered in the same format as the data form the exploration group. This is a look at how my own second language writing experience compares with that of the exploration group.

Chapter Six

6. A researcher/ instructor's 'second language writing' experience

Language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have a 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated with intentions…Language is not neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated, overpopulated — with the intention of others. (Bakhtin 1981, pp.273-274)

Yolland: Poteen – poteen – poteen. Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be…hermetic, won't it?

Owen: You can learn to decode us. (Friel 1981, p.48)

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter Five, I began the discussion of the data I collected and attempted to establish a general picture of the concerns of the participants of the exploration group in terms of educational and institutional practices. The cumulative impact of the issues presented by the members of the exploration group shows a struggle to try and understand how to deal with the social issue of trying to write in English and fulfil the expectations of those that place a value judgement on it in the classroom. I gave examples from the data, which illustrate the difficulties experienced by the participants to find their voice in written English. I suggested from the point of view of the 'imaginary discourse community' that the 'social controls' and 'socialization' processes are what make this learning experience difficult for the participants and tend to create a reduced view of writing in the second language classroom.

In this Chapter the data comes from my self-analysis writing diary and is contrasted with the issues raised from the exploration group to help clarify what is going on with

'second language writing' in the University of Guanajuato. The mixing of the data and the reinterpretation are done with the intention of showing the social aspect of the data that includes all the participants in the study; including myself in order to show the participant side of the participant/observer. This is valid as writing is a process of identification where the author needs to find *her*[13] voice and learn how to express it in a first or second language (e.g., Rolling 2004, Louwerse and Kuiken 2004, Seyhan 2001, and Ivanič 1998). At the same time the data is being funnelled again to help enhance the descriptions. Here in this chapter the intention is to show how the process of struggling to understand how to write in a second language can have a powerful impact on the recipient and that it is much more complicated in the real world. In this real world the researcher came to discover that *she* had experienced a similar struggle of learning second language writing.

6.2. A Participant/observer's second language writing experience

In order to show the complexity of entering into a discourse community, the discussion and interpretation of the data that was gathered during the research process begins with a brief story from *her* self analysis writing journal. This helps to understand the global argument of the intrusion of English into an understandable social perspective. Returning to the dialogue model in Chapter Three of this research, I consider here in depth how I learned to write in Spanish in Mexico so that the complexities of *She* can be understood.

Through my education in the United States I learned a basic process for dealing with writing. It was a mechanical process where all the information was focused on the structure and the mechanics of the writing process and content was of little concern. This

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[13] A reminder to the reader that She refers to me discussing my own experience as a second language learner, when I was in the process of learning to write in Spanish in Mexico. The process of learning to write in Spanish was long and complex and forms part of this research process. This voice is also taken when referring to current activities that I perform in the University in relation to producing written texts. This refers directly to the self-analysis diary that is abbreviated SD. I reiterate that the use of she is simply a distancing device that I use to help step back from myself for the purpose of analysis.

is how I came to be a not so competent writer according to the perception of my writing instructors.

> This led me to the belief that writing was defined by a mechanical process that was imprinted upon me through out the US educational process that I experienced. I was well trained in the process of brainstorming, organising, outlining, writing, and rewriting (PD 02/08/2004).

I brought this linear process approach with me to Mexico where I began to apply it in my writing in Spanish and obtained questionable results. Also, I applied this same process in the classes that I taught in the University and I was not really very concerned with the results. Why do I think I was not concerned with the results? Because it was a professional issue that I was dealing with and all my colleagues seemed happy with the results. It was not something that directly affected me like my writing in Spanish that was being questioned by the same people that were paying me. Aside from that, I was the teacher and in the power position, so who was going to question me in the classroom if I was doing the same thing as everyone else in the school? Furthermore, my fellow teachers encouraged me to continue. I was questioned when I made the change to the administrative area. Now *She* comes back into the dialogue.

Her initial experience in the world of second language writing in Mexico was a painful one related to an organizational manual that *she* had written in one of *her* MBA courses at the University for the Language School where *she* was working. *She* had managed to present the document to the Planning Department, and the Director of the school where *she* worked had been helpful in getting the Planning Department to look at the text. However, it seemed as though it were taking a long time to get such a small and internal type of text published.

> …After six months the manual was published in the University. However, there were some changes. First, instead of one there were now three authors (Director of the Language School and the Director of the Planning Department). Also, the document had been altered. The spelling and grammar corrections did not bother me. However, I became angry to find countless changes in wording, but no change in the basic content

because the changes in wording were the explanation for the addition of the two new authors. To further complicate matters neither of the two new authors, nor any of me Mexican co-workers seemed to understand or care about me inconformity. This was a very painful experience that opened the door to understanding how Mexicans view workplace writing… (SD 03/07/02)

This event was difficult to assimilate and caused much stress at work for a brief period of time. All of *her* preparation in writing, along with cultural expectations as to work behaviour was being directly challenged. However, it slowly transformed into a rather strange working relationship that is difficult to explain. The transformation was probably due to the fact that *her* in-laws did not seem to understand what all the commotion was about and as a result made *her* feel as if *she* was doing something inexplicably wrong that needed to be corrected.

> …That particular moment back in 1986 was a starting point for me. That is where I first began to understand that the norms for writing in Mexico are different. All the training I had received in me education in the United States had been rendered almost useless. It was now time to learn a different approach to writing. I quickly discovered that any document I planned to send should be read by the Director (it should be noted the director was a 57 year old Mexican male) first so he could change some words. This oddly created a more comfortable atmosphere at work and increased the level of trust between the two. (SD 03/07/02)

This may seem, at first, like an odd situation, but it must be considered that there was also pressure from the in-laws family to get over this unimportant and trivial incident and get on with work. It is almost as if writing appears to bind social relationships at work when the members accept their relative power relationship and accept the existence of these boundaries. At least in this case, when *she* was able to adjust *herself* to the power relationships of this new environment a quite new situation emerged that was unlike anything *she* had ever experienced in the United States. I think you could classify it as learning how to belong to a discourse community under a Mexican 'socialization' process.

166

After this stressful incident, I began a rather strange learning process. The Director of the school had me copy old internal documents for a week. Then I started stage two. In stage two I had to write internal correspondence for the school, take it to the Director for modifications and then retype it. This was a rather long process as it occurred before computers were available in the University. Stage three was being required to memorize the regulations handbook and report every Friday for oral exams on fictional academic events that could occur in the school. This went on for about three months. After this I was finally allowed to write and send internal documentation, which was and is the Academic Secretary's basic function in a school. I became Academic Secretary after a year of this peculiar job training process. (SD 05/07/02)

Firstly, what stands out is the process of oral exams that accompany the process of learning to write. This is probably linked to the question of orality and the foundation of a cultural tradition that is strongly connected to the spoken word. This also ties in with the studies that Thatcher (1999 and 2000) did in South America and the need of South American employees to maintain a constant discussion of written texts and how to interpret them inside the workplace. This is what was occurring here: learning to write for the organization, but doing so by having a dialogue on interpretation of the text of the regulation handbook in order to understand how to write documents for the institution.

As strange as this may seem it is actually quite similar to how individuals learn to write in their native language; with the exception of the dialogue about the text. This process includes lots of copying and lots of feedback on the actual text, even though this may be in a less formal context. Oddly this is similar to how writing was taught in grammar school not that far back in the past for *her*. In any event *she* finally became Academic Secretary of the school in practice. In reality *her* new found ability to write in Spanish was going to bring *her* more problems that would bring new awareness in a different way, but at the same time

167

bring a new learning experience into the area of workplace writing. With this *she* finally

began the reflection process that helped *her* to begin to understand writing a little better.

Over the course of 10 years an interesting process occurred for me. During the time I first worked as Academic Secretary from 1985 to 1988, then from 1988 to 1991 as Director and from 1992 to 1996 as Academic Secretary again, my writing continued to develop. During this 10-year period different members of the school revised and adapted most of the documents that I wrote. The interesting variation was that when I was Director, most of the observations I received were in the form of suggestions. As most of those offering suggestions were secretaries, it was clearly difficult for them to try and explain to their boss that there were problems in the things that I wrote. As I was beginning to feel confident at times, I began to ignore the advice of my secretaries. This brought about another interesting change in the daily work events. Most internal documentation in the school went to the Human Resources Department. Suddenly, something new began to happen. The Human Resources Department began to return documents stating that they were too aggressive and lacked the basic politeness of an official document. Naturally, I did not agree and made no changes in the way I was writing in Spanish. After a few months I was called into the Human Resources Department and told that I either should make my texts more polite or I could lose my position. Rather than make any changes in my writing, I put the two secretaries in charge of all internal correspondence and dedicated my time to reading and signing. This is how I managed my writing responsibilities until 1991. From 1992 to 1996 I returned to the position of Academic Secretary, but now after having worked for ten years in Mexico, and having completed my MBA in Mexico, not forgetting all the previous documents that I had written and received feedback on. The position of Academic Secretary now represented a new challenge and this time I wanted to control what I wrote. Why did I decide to do this? It is difficult to determine. It may have been due to my accumulated experience; it may have been that I was now more confident, or maybe just arrogant in how well I could use Spanish. Honestly, it may have just been a way to show all the others around me that I could use Spanish as well as any Mexican who worked there. This is quite

possible because I sincerely felt that I knew more about Spanish writing than most of the Mexicans who worked there. (SD 08/07/02)

This new event of writing *her* own correspondence that occurred was largely ignored in the beginning, but it did finally have an impact. At first *she* maintained *her* belief that *she* did know more than Mexicans about the use of their language, especially in a written format. *She* only began to reconsider this position after *she* had been removed as Academic Secretary in 1996. If nothing else, by losing *her* position in the school, *she* at least came to the realization that things had to be done differently here in Mexico, even if *she* did not know exactly why.

This was a clear example of the 'social controls' of a discourse community being put into action to chastise a potential member. *She* was not complying with the 'social controls', so *she* was removed from *her* position. With this a clear message was being sent: to be an independent member of the community you will have to perform your writing within these boundaries. The act of being removed also allowed for time to reflect on what had happened. This opportunity to have a period of time to assimilate may also be an important part of learning the 'social controls' of writing of a discourse community.

My second tenure in the administrative area proved to be more fulfilling. This time I was able to handle internal and even external documentation without complications. I still continued to consult other Mexican co-workers, but it was on more equal ground than before. The most unusual part of this experience was that now on occasions Mexican co-workers asked me for advice on documents that they were writing for internal University use. I became the permanent writer for all foreigners who needed documents in Spanish in the University. At this time a subconscious idea began to evolve that there are differences between Spanish and English, but it was rather this is how to do it without being able to put it into words. I was never completely aware of what was happening until I studied my MA TESOL. This is when, through my class in Discourse Analysis, many of the difficulties that I had experienced in learning to write

in Mexico began to take on a conscience aspect and started to make sense to me in a different way. This combination of experience and studies is what made it possible to begin to understand and analyze at a conscious level what was going on with the process of writing in two languages. (SD 09/07/02)

At this point *she* was much like any other person, living and writing within a culture. *She* now knew what to do but it was not something that could be consciously explained. However, like many people in many cultures, *she* could look at a written document see what needed to be changed and then make the changes, usually accompanied with a comment like, "it sounds better in Spanish this way". This started to become conscious during *her* MA, but in the end it required some serious reflection. This is because it was still not possible for *her* to verbalise the differences. It was an implicit ability to recognise what would be acceptable and not be acceptable for each community.

Parallel to this process, something else occurred to me that was difficult to explain. While I was going through this process of on the job training, I was also studying my MBA in the University. At the moment I did not think about this other writing feedback process that was occurring. It was not until after I had finished my MBA and was back in my second tenure as Academic Secretary that I began to make the connection. I had always received high grades in the US with negative comments on my writing and I received high grades in Mexico, but there were never any negative comments on my writing. There were never any comments on my use of grammar, spelling, and really not any type of feedback. The only comments that were made were "you write well, but it does not sound Mexican". The only part that registered in my mind was, "you write well" the other part about sounding like a Mexican did not seem to be important. After all, I wasn't a Mexican and sounding like a Mexican just sounded like some strange custom and was not important. This idea that I was a good writer in Spanish was important and I continued with this belief for many years. It was not until I was studying my second masters' degree in the University of Guanajuato that I discovered that a large percentage of the teachers did not actually read the written work of their students. Interestingly, this did not reduce my concept of myself as a

good Spanish writer; this was just another custom or tradition that I now understood. (SD 03/08/02)

Even though during this stage there was not much direct feedback, there was a lot of practice. The act of working through writing and drafting documents was probably a partial aid in the overall process of learning to adapt. If nothing else, *she* was doing the same thing that *her* classmates were doing inside the academic community of the University of Guanajuato.

Returning to the term as Academic Secretary and the period of study with the MA TESOL; second this was clearly one of the most important periods as far as understanding better the process of writing. It was during this time that I began to understand that there are differences in the way that people write in different languages. Also, it made my past experiences more meaningful. One in particular was when I was studying my BA is Spanish in the United States. There was a Spanish writing class in particular that I remembered where I had to read short essays in Spanish written by different Latin-American authors and then I had to write a similar essay copying the style of the author to the point of using the same specific sequence of words. I had never understood why I had had to do that, but now it was beginning to make sense. It was to show that Spanish speakers write using a different text structure than Americans. (SD 03/08/02)

This finally made it possible to understand the reason for all the repetition. In the Spanish class there was lots of repetition, in the workplace in Guanajuato there was lots of repetition, and finally the linear process of writing from the United States included lots of repetition. It all comes down to practice. This is the exact issue that the students in the exploration group had stated.

In many ways, the MA TESOL experience was what opened the door for me to begin to understand better the process of writing and the things that I had directly experienced in learning to write in Spanish. I was able to realize that writing in

another language in much more complex than just learning different words. This is what I had thought of learning Spanish, you learned another set of words and you did the same thing with them as in English. I had never really imagined a more complex process until I took my class in discourse analysis. (SD 03/08/02)

For *her* at this stage the concept of writing in a second language was finally beginning to take shape in *her* mind. The understanding of the complexity of the process was beginning to take shape and it was becoming possible to express it in words. In essence this is a definition of *she:* a person who has come into being by having to learn English as a native language, Spanish as a second language, and finally to learn professional written discourse in a foreign environment. This makes for a complex individual, yet it is a person who is able to look at the complexities of writing in a second language from multiple points of view and *she* is an important element in the research process of trying to untangle what is happening when people write in a second language.

As *she* is an important part of this process and *her* experience helps to explain what is happening in the classroom in second language learning, it is time to confront or compare what happened to *her* with what the exploration group reported in the data collection process. In order to do this each of the categories that were generated will be visited again and compared to *her* experience of learning writing in Spanish as a second language.

6.2.1. Formal education

The exploration group suggested that their formal education prepared them for the general process of writing. *She* experienced the same formal education process and learned to write in *her* native language. *She* stated

…well trained in the process of brainstorming, organising, outlining, writing, and rewriting (PD 02/08/2004).

similar to the members of the exploration group, *she* suffered when *she* tried to write in a second language.

She was confronted with a similar situation in the sense that *she* did not know how to write in Spanish when *she* arrived here in Guanajuato and began working in the University. The deficiencies that *she* had can be traced back to *her* educational process, just as in the exploration group.

From this it can be deduced that most people seem to feel comfortable in writing in their native language and this comes from the formal education system. At the same time it is saying that the writing process is dependent upon the community that is doing the teaching. This brings us back to the beginning of Chapter Two and the issue of 'social controls'. Since these elements are different in each community of origin for the participants being discussed here it is a possible conclusion that there is not a direct transfer of norms from one community to the other. However, the same or similar types of learning events seem to be occurring inside both of the communities. We are teaching with similar patterns, but unconsciously teaching different things.

This brings up an issue that was present in the exploration group and may help to clarify this issue of formal education. During the exploration group the following was noted:

> I have the impression that the group becomes more active and interested in what we are doing in writing when it is focused on what they work in professionally. I compared what the general intensity was like between the artificial activities they filled in along with the workplace description they did. They were more relaxed and seemed to integrate, when they began to describe the place where they work. This can be clearly seen in the video. I think that this is one of the keys to writing. Maybe this is one of the reasons for the weakness of ESL writing is its separation from the reality of real life. (PO 11/04/2003, 18:00hrs.)

This implies that when the participants were working on an activity that contained professional relevance for them that there was more interest in the writing activity. This in turn makes me think of the analysis in Chapter Five concerning the lack of relevance of formal education writing practice and the workplace. The 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato is devoid of student's purpose, as well as other coursework apparently. Much the same as my personal experience was devoid of my purpose, when practicing writing in the formal education system. This I think is one of the principal strengths and weaknesses of the educational system. On the one hand the system works from the teacher's purpose, but on the other it has created its own purpose that does not necessarily always coincide with the purpose of the participant. The result is that the participant completes the process having learned an activity that may not be suited to their future professional activity.

A second language writer's conclusion[14]: formal education is the foundation for the writing process, but it does not prepare the participant to completely deal with writing outside the educational structure. This leads to the conclusion that a given institution may create and maintain its own 'social controls' and 'socialization' norms for writing. This affirms the possibility that second language education has created its own genre that is not applicable outside of the 'second language classroom' construct. More importantly, this leads to the possible conclusion that academic writing may be devoid of students' purpose. If writing has no purpose or the purpose is that of an instructor looking for a sample for evaluation, then it seems to be clearer why writing can be labelled as a boring or mindless activity.

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[14] Second language writer is used because in this research I am a participant/observer. In this chapter my insights fall under the category of a participant. In the preceding chapter they were the researcher's conclusions.

Also, 'Social controls' are present in both writing experiences, but they are different. What I mean is the patterns for creating and organizing texts. This may be the foundation of misunderstandings in the 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato.

6.2.2. Workplace writing

Interestingly, what the exploration group expressed in Chapter Five is similar to what *she* went through when learning to write in Spanish as a second language. As *she* mentioned, the strange process *she* went through of having to copy documents over and over in reality is just real world practice and the members of the exploration group asked for exactly the same thing in the data collection process in order to be able to practice their writing.

I can see a parallel to this in my own workplace writing. Whenever she is writing that writing is also in a constant state of revision and feedback; however, often *she* is involved in arguments with other foreign co-workers over questions of responsibility and credit. This issue does not come up when the documents in question are directed towards other departments. This is only present when the effort is internal and the various nationalities present need to come to an agreement on the format or structure of the presentation of written material.

This coincides with current research in writing. Henry (2000) indicates that the issue of authorship or retaining ownership of words is a question of importance in the United States. However, it clashes directly with what MF stated previously in Chapter Three about opinions on ownership of writing in Mexico. What happens in the US is in direct opposition with what is occurring in Mexico. As an individual learning to write here in Mexico *she* was placed in the position of being forced to adapt to something that was alien to *her* cultural background. However, this process is something that *she* required almost ten years to

assimilate, which suggests how deeply ingrained into us our writing habits are. *She* was placed in the position of learning to write in Spanish over a ten-year period of time.

This opens up the door to the discussion that centres on the participants in the exploration group. As second language students they have been required to assimilate and belong to an English writing community in a much shorter period of time than a native speaker. This also suggests that the writing processes in the United States and in Mexico are different. As such, by being different it would be necessary to learn how to write in each system. So theoretically these students would need someone to show them how to write for an English speaking community. However, as with what happened to *her*, these students, had learned something about a foreign language, but they had not learned how to write. The discovery of second language writing seems to be a long journey that involves formal education, professional practice, and considerable time to acquire, along with the ability to recognise implicit rhetorical conventions embedded in written language.

By placing elements of data together from the exploration group and *she*, a slightly clearer picture starts to emerge. What is here, is a person who was attempting to adapt to a new writing community by applying what *she* had learned in the native language context. On the one hand there is the concept of collaboration that is expressed in the interviews and confirmed by Spilka (1990 and 1993), in that workplace writing is centred on collaborative efforts and requires constant feedback. However, in contrast ownership of text is considered to be important and is respected in the collaborative writing community in the United States (Henry 2000), while in Mexico it is not. Here there are opposing ideas that are meeting each other and the one with the strongest social support prevails. In this situation *she* had to learn to accept a new set of criteria for workplace collaborative writing in the Mexican social context. The acceptance of this new criterion was based on a variety of factors. First, *she* had to assimilate what was occurring in *her* workplace. After this,

the next step came, which was a period of reflection where *she* remembered as mentioned earlier:

> There was a Spanish writing class in particular that *she* remembered where *she* had to read short essays in Spanish written by different Spanish speaking authors and then *she* had to write a similar essay copying the style of the author to the point of using the same specific sequence of words. *She* had never understood why *she* had to do that, but now it was beginning to make sense. It was to show that Spanish speakers write differently than Americans. (SD 03/08/02)

If all the elements that happened to *her* are considered, a process emerges. In order to learn to write in Spanish *she* passed through a series of events. Following the process that was stated in the opening of the Chapter; first, *she* learned the language or as stated above *she* learned the available grammar and words. Then when *she* arrived in Mexico *she* attempted to take those words and grammar and apply them in the process of writing and discovered that *she* had learned the passwords, but that the language of the tribe still eluded *her*. Finally, through practice, feedback, and awareness-raising *she* was finally able to decode the rules of writing in Mexico and participate in the discourse community of *her* workplace. The whole process of understanding this discourse community was achieved over a long period of interaction.

It took ten years of interaction to understand the context of the discourse community that *she* is working in. What was the context of this situation?

> the place, the time and the people involved: what they know, their unique configurations of interests and beliefs, their sense of self worth and control over their lives, the social relationships between them. When applied to written language, it concerns the immediate environment of both the act of writing and the act of reading (Clark and Ivanič 1997, p.60).

This context is in constant movement as individuals move through discourse communities in their lives. Each context will have few or many variations of 'social controls' compared to the first language. Furthermore, in each context the 'socialization' process may vary a little or a lot. This just demonstrates how 'unfixed' and 'unstable' a discourse community is in real life.

> *A second language writer's conclusion: The workplace experience was the same for all in the sense of having to learn again. It is interesting that both CDP and She experienced similar processes in adapting to the organization. However, the most interesting detail here again goes back to the 'localness' of 'socialization' norms and 'social controls'. This leads to the idea that any given institution or context only prepares you for the type of writing that it requires for its own purposes. The 'second language classroom' is just another place with its own norms and not a real place of learning. It also brings to the surface the issue that there is not enough time available in a second language setting to realistically consider the possibility of completely attending to all the aspects involved in learning writing. It also reveals that the process of learning to write in Spanish appears to be different from learning to write in English, in terms of the 'socialization' process.*

6.2.3. Cultural differences

The differences that were detected during the research are principally based on cultural variations of rhetoric that appear in written texts. The two areas that were mentioned the most by the exploration group have to do with: text structure and allowable sentence length. In the case of *she*, it was a slightly different situation. Clearly what *she* was writing was not working because it was classified as being aggressive or too direct. In either case it comes down to the idea that *her* writing was not being accepted by the community that *she* was working in. Since it was not being accepted, it can be deduced that something was missing from the text that formal members of the community were able to detect it and *she* was not.

A second language writer's conclusion: The statement that leads to the conclusion is the issue of politeness. She was doing something culturally not acceptable and she did not know what it was. The missing element was awareness of the 'social controls' that exist in the University of Guanajuato for writing acceptable documents. This brings the issue back to the 'localness' of writing norms inside a given community. It was over time that the actual problem came to light, it was being too direct in the written text that was causing the issue of politeness to be discussed.

What she did not know then was that she needed to include 'rollo'[15] in her writing. Also, she did not know the multiple uses of 'rollo' and the decorating of the text are the principal foundations of creating cohesion in a Mexican Spanish text. This concept will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

6.2.4. Change in perception of writing

The idea of writing in two languages is a complex issue and *she* had been told of this, but had not paid attention to it. What stands out here is the fact that at the moment when *she* was learning to write in Spanish, *she* was not really aware of the differences. It was only something that occurred years later when there was relevant real life practice occurring that it began to make sense.

It was not the practice in the School under the Director, nor was it the feedback from many different places. It was not even the MA TESOL programme in a direct sense. It was a combination of all of these factors that allowed for a change in the perception of writing between languages to occur. It was the same for the exploration group. It was seen in their initial writing samples that they were aware that something was missing in the writing processes they had learned. It was not until the end of the process of their MBA studies that they began to verbalise with more ease, the missing components.

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[15] Rollo: This is a Spanish word that I cannot find an acceptable corresponding English term for it. It means adding lots of words to text, describing a context before explaining a problem, using lots of metaphors or synonyms in both spoken and written language. It seems to be a fundamental part of why texts in Spanish are lengthier than in English, according to the members of the exploration group.

A second language writer's conclusion: I think that by combining the experiences here with those of Chapter Five, the result is that time, information, and relevant professional practice are required to become aware of the differences that separate writing communities in different languages. Here in particular she required the experience of actually using Spanish in her work life and confronting it with her MA TESOL learning experience in order that concepts of 'social controls' and 'socialization' norms could make sense for her. It was not until she began her PhD studies that it became easier to verbalise these issues.

This indicates the complexity of the activity of writing. It may be that writing is something too complex to be dealt with in the classroom. Writing might be more of a real life type activity that cannot be directly taught in a given place, but requires a diversity of input and locations to make sense.

6.2.5. Second language classroom deficiencies

The information that was collected from the students in the exploration group generated a series of issues that are all related to deficiencies in 'second language classroom' practice. The issues that were mentioned by the students were presented in the preceding chapter and are: Text structure, allowable sentence length in English, lack of relevant writing practice, feedback on text structure, explicit instruction in text organisation, and audience/reader.

The same process seems to be occurring elsewhere where writing is concerned. As I stated from my own language learning experience: "All the training I had received in my education in the United States had been rendered almost useless. It was now a time to learn a different approach to writing" (SD 03/07/02).

6.2.5.1. Text structure and presentation

While not openly specified in the self-analysis data collection process, it is safe to say that something was not correct in the text structure and/or presentation as her co-workers were constantly correcting these. Also, the documents *she* wrote were being rejected by

the Human Resources Department in the University of Guanajuato; which indicates that either something was missing or there was some type of excess in the texts. This is probably more true to learning writing: you often do not receive explanations as to why something is not correct. You are only given a global observation, as in this case of these texts not being polite enough for use in the University community.

A second language writer's conclusion: She received comments similar to how she had taught English. These were comments like: "too short", "wrong word order", "simple sentences", "where's the description of the main topic". "Not polite enough", "what does that mean?" Without the necessary accompanying explanation of the 'social control' that the community requires, these comments by themselves are useless. I think on this issue that what had happened here was that she was receiving for the first time her 'socialization' process on how to correctly use 'rollo' in Mexican Spanish. 'Rollo' is what was missing and would have eliminated the comments she had received.

6.2.5.2. Relevant writing practice

The participants in the exploration group said they needed more relevant practice in writing in English in Chapter Five in section 5.2.6.3. Consider how the exploration group and *she* coincide on this issue of classroom practice.

What is normally done in the 'second language writing' classroom here in Mexico? As CDP said,

> very, very simple things." Such as, "describing vacations and short compositions about texts we had read. (PCI 4)

On the other hand, *she* was dealing with something similar, yet different. Here s*he* was placed in a situation where what *She* had learned was not helping *her* to function in a

Spanish speaking organisation. This is directly related again to an educational process that lacked context in writing; consider the last part of this data extract:

> I had to write a similar essay copying the style of the author to the point of using the same specific sequence of words. I had never understood why I had to do that, but now it was beginning to make sense. It was to show that Spanish speakers write differently than Americans (SD 03/08/02).

She was given the opportunity to practice to some extent, but as there was no information given on why this was happening, it became a meaningless repetitive practice without any apparent application. There was no sense of purpose in the writing activities that *she* had done.

> *A second language writer's conclusion: A strong link is found here in which elements of awareness and practice become the major issues. The exploration group members focused their comments on a lack of practice. She was in a situation where in her learning experience she had received much practice, but it turned out to be of low impact in practical application. I think this brings to the surface the possibility that both awareness-raising and practice are elements that cannot be separated from each other. There seems to be an argument towards them being combined to be effective in the question of learning to write in a second language.*

> *In this case the 'social controls' were being practiced over and over. However, in the classroom there was not an accompanying explanation that would have created a useful 'socialization' process.*

6.2.6. Concluding interpretation

Up to this point I think it can be considered possible that both Americans and Mexicans, and most likely other groups of people, go through a similar process in that writing is learned in the formal education structure and then new learning takes place when

professional practice begins. This may even be the foundation as to why there are some deficiencies in the 'second language classroom' and that students appear to need to look elsewhere to learn to write.

All of these students had begun their professional practice and had used English in a professional environment and they were clear on one particular thing, nobody had told them what Americans expected in written texts. This I think, along with personal experience, is what made them think of differences. This can be suggested as all the students made reference to change in perception and it always centred on the idea that they now could explain the differences; revealing that the problem already existed before the course. As the students spoke of not being able to explain what was happening in writing before the course, the result is the assumption that all they required was a bit more information to be able to articulate about what was previously occurring in their second language writing. Also, this reinforces the issue that relevant writing practice along with awareness-raising is necessary to start the process of untangling what is happening when individuals learn to write in another language.

Also, before the course there existed a set of other factors that possibly could not be articulated before the course, the deficiencies in the second language classes in the University of Guanajuato. Students clearly expressed doubt about their ability to write in English in the written compositions at the beginning of the course, but specifically blamed their previous second language courses afterwards. This, I think, happened because of the awareness raising activities that allowed the students to discuss more clearly what they felt they were missing in order to be competent writers in English. This in essence seems logical as writing is given a secondary or tertiary status in the 'second language classroom' in the University of Guanajuato. This reduced status implies reduced knowledge, time and practice. As a result it is not strange that the students coming out of the 'second language

classroom' in the University of Guanajuato have difficulties in dealing with the activity of writing.

> *A second language writer's conclusion: What are the fundamental missing elements that seem to be causing the complications in writing after experiencing the second language learning process? It appears to be the lack of three major elements: awareness, practice, and feedback which have been reduced and/or altered in the social context of the classroom in the University of Guanajuato where they are supposedly learning to write in a second language. This seems to be the common situation in both of the learning contexts and is not new. These are issues that have been dealt with for many years in research and in classroom practice, yet they are still surfacing in current research as obstacles in the teaching of second language writing.*

6.3. Summary

The participant's conclusions in this chapter are the starting point for the implications that can be drawn from the data comparison. It is that awareness-raising, practice and feedback are elements in both experiences and appear to be the foundation of learning to write in both a first and second language. In the following chapter the rhetorical differences will be drawn out both through data and literature to show that there is more than a simple difference between the two languages, but that there is a rhetorical confrontation in the University of Guanajuato's 'second language classroom'. This confrontation becomes clear when considering the previous classroom experience of all the second language writers involved in the research.

Chapter Seven

7. The rhetorical clash of Mexican Spanish and American English

> …the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power. …The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment. Narrative and the cultural politics of difference become the closed circle of interpretation. The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. However impeccably the content of an 'other' culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its location as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytical terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination and is the most serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory. (Bhabha 1994, pp.45-46)

> Every narrative, moreover, every encounter offers the possibility of ratifying the narrative of the Other or refusing to do so, acts, it can be argued, akin to affirming the Other or disaffirming the Other. (Cottle 2002, p.535)

Introduction

In Chapter Five, I began the discussion of the data I collected and attempted to establish a general picture of the struggles of the participants of the exploration group in terms of institutional practices. This was then compared to the researcher's second language writing experience in Mexico in Chapter Six. These practices led back to issues related to the concepts of feedback, practice and awareness-raising in the classroom. These are not new concepts for writing in English as a second language and have been previously researched (e.g., Canagarajah 2002a, Casanave 2004, Connor 1996, Dias and Pare 2000, Ferris 2002, Hyland 2003a and 2004, Kroll 1990 and 2003). Nevertheless, as seen in Chapter Two there are concerns about the value of feedback, there are still doubts around issues of the type of practice in second language writing that would be most effective, and what exactly do students and instructors need in terms of awareness raising are still in doubt. Also, there is another element that is often overlooked in this process and

that is the student's native language (Dong 1998, pp.89-94, Dong 1999, pp.277-283 and Smitherman and Villanueva 2003).

In order to clarify these doubts in the case of the practice of second language writing in the University of Guanajuato it is necessary to return to a new brief literature review. In the course of the data collection I was constantly trying to make sense of a particular word – 'rollo'. This word led me to re-enter the process of a literature research to find an answer. The answer was clear evidence that rhetoric is fundamentally a cultural issue and can definitely create a complex conflict in the classroom in Mexico and this clarified what the participants wanted to communicate when they spoke of issues of practice and feedback.

Before it is possible to analyse the data it is necessary to first consider the historical development of written Mexican Spanish, so it can be placed in a current social context that will make the recent research concerning Spanish more understandable in terms of the impact at the rhetorical level of text construction.

Written Mexican Spanish

Historical origin

To understand what is considered today to be socially acceptable writing in Mexico, it becomes necessary to turn back to the initial encounter between Spain and Mexico in 1521, and the Spanish attempt to Christianise the newfound colony. The contact between Spanish and Náhuatl is perhaps the richest source of interlinguistic influence because of the unique historical factors and the length of Spanish domination of Mexico (Francis and Navarrete Gómez 2003). Regardless, the Spanish conquerors arrived to Mexico with what was to become a well-designed weapon of empire: Language.

In 1492 Antonio de Nebrija published the first grammar of a modern European language, *Gramática de la lengua castellana*. In the preface, he made a statement that turned out to be far more powerful than he could have imagined: "language has always been the companion of empire" (Nebrija published in 1980, p.97, Rajagopalan 2004, p.80

and Crawford 2007, p.81) and the Catholic Church appears to have taken this to heart. This can be inferred from the fact that Luis de Granada the author of *Ecclesiasticae rhetoricae*, (material designed specifically from the response of the Council of Trent 1545-63, to revitalise Catholicism now confronted with the Protestant Reform). Also, it attempted to arm the Catholic Church for the New World with another work: the *Breve tratado* (Abbott 1996).

The *Breve tratado* is unique in several aspects. Firstly, it is possibly the first written work to be directed at an unknown audience and it attempts to take this situation into account. Secondly, it establishes that the New World audience has distinct expectations that will in some way differ from Europe. Finally, it assumes a universal human language rationality (Abbott 1996). Here the Spanish Clergy demonstrates a clear, rational and organized preparation of using rhetoric as a means to persuade distinct audiences. More importantly, it shows a clear insight into the need to adapt language use to different perceived social necessities. However, there is one major flaw in the work,

> Granada, like theorists before him, conceives of an audience as an assemblage of people linked to the speaker by nationality and language. Granada shows little concern with the possibility of encountering an audience truly alien to the speaker (Abbott, p.17).

Nevertheless, Granada opened the door to the most important historical event that offers an understanding on written Mexican Spanish, and was the precursor to the most important historical event in this area of study.

The event was the arrival in 1529 of Bernardino de Sahagún to New Spain. Sahagún wrote extensively on his experiences in Mexico, producing texts in Spanish, Latin, and Náhuatl exploring theology, philosophy, history and anthropology (Crawford 2007, Sahagún 1999, Abbott 1996 and Díaz Cíntora 1995).

> Sahagún proved to be not only an evangelist but a most accomplished ethnographer as well. He was a serious and sensitive observer of the

life of the Mexica people and, more importantly, a thorough and indefatigable recorder of what he observed. Indeed, historians are deeply indebted to Sahagún as an essential source of knowledge about Mexica life prior to and immediately after the conquest. So extraordinary was Sahagún's work, claims Jorge Klor de Alva, that it 'led to the first examples on modern ethnographic fieldwork and narrative, thereby making him the first modern anthropologist' (Abbott 1996, p.24).

One of his fantastic ethnographic accomplishments in language is of paramount importance to understand the development of written Mexican Spanish of today.

Sahagún's book 6 of the *General History* collected in 1547, entitled "Of the Rhetorical and Moral Philosophy of the Mexican People" contains a study of what Europe called rhetoric and the Mexica called 'Huehuetlatolli' or 'Huehuehtlahtolli'[16] which variously translates to English as 'ancient word', 'speeches of the ancients' or 'speeches of the elders' (Abbott 1996, Díaz Cíntora 1995, and Sahagún 1999). The Huehuehtlahtolli are an accurate collection of the formal speeches that accompanied major events in the lives of the Mexica. Sahagún recognised them as rhetoric and pointed out that they clearly differed thematically, structurally and stylistically from European oratory (Abbott 1996, Alonso 1998, Díaz Cíntora 1995, Sahagún 1999 and Crawford 2007).

The oratory of the Mexica is typically brief, aphoristic and repetitive. Indeed, the dominant form of the ancient word might be described as constant repetition made palatable by metaphoric variety (Abbott 1996, p.35).

Basically the Huehuehtlahtolli contains many of the characteristics that Walter Ong (1982) refers to as 'psycho-dynamics of orality'.

In particular, Mexica oratory is structurally additive rather than subordinative, stylistically copious and redundant and thematically conservative (Abbott 1996, p.35).

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[16] The difference in spelling is probably due to the Fact that in Spanish the 'H' is silent and this frequently caused the Spaniards to misspell words in Náhuatl.

While unfortunately the Huehuehtlahtolli gives us the last words of the Mexica people, fortunately it helps us lay the foundation to understanding the current structure of written Mexican Spanish.

The Huehuehtlahtolli combined with Valadés (1579) *Rhetorica Christiana,* illustrate two different, and often incompatible, conceptions of rhetoric that emerged from the new world in the seventeenth century (Abbott 1996). Rhetoric was divided into "two different theories of persuasion – a complete and complex one for the Europeans and another, compressed and simple, for Amerindians" (Abbott 1996, p.112). Valadés makes an attempt to modify European rhetoric for American needs in the *Rhetorica Christiana*. He incorporates the narration of native life into the framework of

> Ciceronian rhetoric that demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the peoples around him and the need to incorporate them into the new emerging social structure. Moreover, his elevation of *memoria* and visual imagery, while derived from Renaissance sources, is also a product of his experience among the Mexica (Abbott 1996, p.113).

Standardisation of Mexican Spanish

This concept of Mexica rhetoric was quickly challenged. In 1557 the edict was issued to teach Spanish, Christian doctrine and good manners to the Indians (Zavala 1996). This finally made possible the extension of the post primary schools which taught Latin, poetry, rhetoric, mythology, and ancient history. Language teaching intensified when Archbishop Rubio Salinas insisted on creating schools (1753) to teach Spanish with the goal of extinguishing the indigenous languages (De la Mora Ochoa 2003 pp.99-101). This was later brought to the level of a requirement by the Archbishop Francisco Antonio Lorenzana in 1769, when he made learning Spanish obligatory (Zavala 1996 p.25).

> For three centuries Spanish was the dominant language and every possible combination was employed with no success in learning, but only success in ideology that tended to destroy the Indians. The only

norm that was taught was ideology; language did not really matter (Barriga Villanueva 2003, p.121).

This 300-year process did not really produce the intended results. The renowned Mexican historian Justo Sierra said in an address on December 16, 1946

> …the nationalization of the Spanish language began through persuasion and because of need: much was accomplished, it was a long term project; today it is still not finished, because the governments seem to no longer care and the clergy have become lazy (Zavala 1996, p.27).

This situation continued in the National Seminar on Bilingual and Bicultural Education in 1979. The conclusion on writing was that there is still a long way to go to achieve the goal. The written language presents difficulties as indigenous languages are too embedded with orality (Barriga Villanueva 2003, pp.119-123). As a result,

> Spanish is taught with out taking into account diversity, variations, or changes. When Spanish is taught, it is through political will power of domination and assimilation of the indigenous population, protected by a prototype of Spanish created by the current historical intellectual class; with a total submission of the cultured dialect (Barriga Villanueva 2003, p. 123).

In conclusion, Mexico has developed its current national language from a somewhat unusual pattern starting from a native rhetoric dominated by Spanish and leading to an often non-functional national language programme. Nevertheless, two conceptions of Mexican Spanish rhetoric emerge, and this is the starting point when considering where written Mexican Spanish stands today as compared to written American English.

Current structure of Mexican Spanish

While the internal structure of written English has been extensively studied, written Mexican Spanish has not enjoyed the same treatment. Even though Mexico has the largest Spanish speaking population in the world, there have apparently only been six major studies comparing its rhetorical structure or organisational structure of paragraphs to

English (Abbot 1996, Alonso 1998, Montaño-Harmon 1988 and 1991, Simpson 2000 and Crawford 2007). As strange as this may seem, there is still much insight to be gained from what little literature is available on the subject.

Santiago (1971) and Santana-Seda (1975) produced studies, which highlight the marked differences between the organisation of written discourse in texts written in Puerto Rican Spanish and English. These studies illustrate that compositions in Puerto Rican Spanish contain much higher proportions of coordinate structures, non-sequential sentences, additive constructions, and one- and two-sentence paragraphs. Similar results were found showing differences between English and South American language patterns in studies by Thatcher (1999 and 2000, pp.54-62) and topical structure differences in academic paragraphs by Simpson (2000, pp.303-305).

Montaño-Harmon (1991) conducted what seems to be only one of five large-scale studies comparing the internal structure of written Mexican Spanish and American English from the perspective of contrastive rhetoric or textual organization. Montaño-Harmon analysed twenty-five secondary school textbooks for teaching writing in Mexico. Also, secondary school compositions were collected from two school districts in the US and two in Mexico. From a pool of six hundred texts, fifty for each group was used for comparison in a statistical analysis program using ANOVA and t-test procedures. The results open a window to the fact that something different is occurring in Mexican Spanish in writing when compared to American English.

The data from the study were classified into types of sentences, lexical cohesion, syntactic cohesion, and coherence. While many of the results suggested certain similarities, the results that differ start to clarify a precise image of written Mexican Spanish and how much it differs from American English. First, consider the general information about the texts in Table 7-1 on the following page:

Table 7-1: Basic Information About the Texts

	Means	
Discourse Feature	Mexican Spanish	Anglo-American English
Average length of text	184.86 words	155.70 words
Average number of sentences	5.38	9.90
Average length of sentences	41.10 words	17.10 words

(Montaño-Harmon 1991, p.420)

From this point on the data becomes even more interesting. The most striking features of written Mexican Spanish are: 1) prolific use of run-on sentences, 2) constant reiteration for lexical cohesion, 3) dominance of additive and causal conjunctions and 4) very frequent conscious deviations from the topic (Simpson 2000, pp.303-305 and Montaño-Harmon 1991, pp.418-420). This is even more interesting considering that the flexible word order possible in a sentence in Spanish carries over to the paragraph level (Vásquez-Ayora 1977). This in turn produces longer sentences that cannot be translated into English without breaking them into separate ideas (Vásquez-Ayora 1977). The creation of these longer sentences is explicitly taught at the secondary school level as is shown in the analysis of the textbooks for the secondary school level.

> The textbooks all emphasize effective communication based on eloquence achieved through work in: 1) Vocabulary building by using synonyms, antonyms, paraphrasing, and derivations; 2) Writing practice focusing on tone, style, and vocabulary based on written models from literary figures; 3) Practice in elaborating a given idea in writing in various ways as one attempts to develop the theme in greater depth; and 4) Work on correct grammar and mechanics at the sentence level" (Montaño-Harmon 1991, p.418).

192

This style is further developed in the family context where children are taught to play with formal and ornate language incorporated into their social skills. To play with the flexibility of language, where meanings are hidden between lines, in repetitions for emphasis, and in pauses is a daily part of children's' lives (Riding 1986). According to Riding (1986, p. 19) "in these endless linguistic contortions, the Mexican's fascination with detail and obsession with nuance are constantly satisfied". However, these repetitions are not based on key words as they are in English for explicitly showing relationship between ideas, but on the variation of multiple topics within one paragraph. Mexican Spanish is a language where rhetorical structure has a preference for a more elaborate style than English in written composition (Valero-Garcés 1996, Kail and Sanchez y Lopez 1997, Schleppegrell and Colombi 1997 and Simpson 2000). This is becoming even more apparent in the current studies that are being done on the rhetorical structure of the indigenous languages of Mexico as compared to standard American English (e.g., Crawford 2007, Johansson 2004, Lastra 2005, and León-Portilla 2005). The above-mentioned elements were present in the texts written by the Mexican students in the research carried out by Montaño-Harmon. This led to the conclusion that native Mexican Spanish speakers do not perform well in written evaluations in the United States because of the need to apply criteria, which imposes a linear, deductive discourse pattern deemed logical and organized in American English (Montaño-Harmon 1991, pp.420-422). The above is evidence that rhetoric is the social basis for the creation of text by a given community and that it varies from community to community (Haller 2000, pp.375-381). This in turn creates the need to see writing as a community project that originates from its cultural roots. To show an example of this community project over time, consider the development from Náhuatl to Spanish with an English translation at the end. On the following page is a verse from the Huehuehtlahtolli. Look carefully at how the sentences have been constructed and the use of punctuation.

Maca huelic cochiztli xicchiuhto; xizatehua, ximocuitihuetzi in yohuallixelihui; momolicpi, motetepon ic xitlacza, ximeuhtiquiza, motolol momalcoch xicchihua, xicnotza, **xictzatzili in tlacatl in totecuyo, in yehuatzin in Yohualli in Ehecatl, ca maahuiltitzinoa in yohualtica mitzcaquiz; auh uncan mitzicnoittaz, uncan mitzmacaz in tlein molhuil momacehual** (Díaz Cíntora 1995, p. 37 original Náhuatl verse).

No le tomes sabor al sueño; despierta, incorpórate, levántate de pronto a la media noche, ve postrada sobre los codos y las rodillas, luego párate, haz tu inclinación y reverencia, invoca, **llama a voces al señor, nuestro señor, al que es Noche y Viento, pues él gusta de oírte por la noche; entonces tendrá piedad de ti, entonces te dará lo que mereces** (Díaz Cíntora 1995, p. 43, His translation to Spanish of the same verse).

No not fall in love with sleeping; awake, gather yourself, arise in the middle of the night. Go humble on elbows and knees, then stand up, incline yourself and honor. **Call in voices to the lord, our lord, He who is Night and Wind. He likes to hear you at night. He will have mercy on you. He will give you what you deserve.** (My translation of the Spanish verse)

In Náhuatl the original author of the book that was consulted added the punctuation (Náhuatl did not use any type of punctuation in its writings). However, it can be seen from the Náhuatl to the Spanish translation the author made changes in the structuring of the sentences. In the translation from Spanish to English there were additional changes required, principally the last three lines of the text that I have highlighted for emphasis.

Considering that written Mexican Spanish is based on Náhuatl rhetoric and extremely long sentences of this type are still common in current Mexican Spanish writing, it becomes apparent the added difficulties a Mexican Spanish speaker could have when

194

learning to write in American English. Since American English is founded on a Greek/Latin

rhetorical traditional (Hauser 1991, pp.71-85) that is fundamental difference than the

rhetoric used in Mexican Spanish. While this idea is possible and even defended

theoretically in some research (e.g., Canagarajah 1993, 1999, and 2002b, Pennycook

1994, 1996, and 1998) the evidence remains at the theoretical level and there is little

empirical evidence to support these claims. Therefore a closer look at the classroom

perceptions of the second language learners is needed to see if there is a connection

between the theoretical and the practical in terms of a possible rhetorical conflict.

The exploration group brought to light the possibility of differences based on their

perception in Chapter Five. These possibilities are now looked at more in depth within the

framework of the aforementioned literature.

7.3 Perceived cultural differences between English and Spanish

Ten of the participants in the exploration group expressed that there are cultural

differences between writing in English and writing in Spanish in the final compositions

(WCS 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 39 and 40). The reference to the cultural differences

was reaffirmed more intensely in the post course interviews. The comments were basically

centred on two specific areas: Text structure and text organisation. In the following data

extracts this can be seen.

> CDP: sí, si la cambió. Primero, eh…por ejemplo, a la hora de escribir en español, lo que
> vimos en clase, de que escribimos con mucho rollo, igual que como hablamos, con mucho
> rollo, y como en inglés no necesitamos escribir con tantas palabras, nada más ser
> concretos y dar la idea, eso sí me ayudó, porque nací mexicana, entonces adoptas un
> rollo antes de llegar a la solución. (PCI 4)

> CDP: Yes, yes it changed. First, eh…for example, when writing in Spanish, what we
> saw in class, writing with a lot of 'rollo', just like we talk, with a lot of 'rollo' and in
> English we do not need to use as many words, just be more concrete and state the
> idea, that helped a lot, because I was born Mexican, so you give out a 'rollo' before
> getting to the solution.

RV: Entonces sí también tuve que empezar a…aprender un…ese…ese estilo de redactar ese tipo de oficios, no? Que es muy…en México es muy este…especial la manera de…de escribir… (PCI 5)

RV: Well, yes I had to start to…learn a…that…that writing style of official documents. In Mexico…it is…it is very…well…special the form of…of writing.

MR: En ingles cambia toda mi percepción, no solo hay que escribir por escribir hay que usar oraciones cortas y concretas, no usar un leguaje… El escribir en ingles es muy diferente al escribir en español. (WCS 24)

In English all my perception has changed, you can't just write for writing sake, you have to use short concrete sentences, not manipulate the language…Writing in English is very different than writing in Spanish.

What the participants mean by text structure refers to the overall organization of a paragraph. The reference being made has to do with the topical structure of paragraphs in English and the idea that topic deviations are considered undesirable in English (Simpson 2000) and encouraged in Spanish (Vásquez-Ayora 1977). The allowable sentence length that the participants refer to deals with the issue of the seven basic sentences types in the English language that are often used in the United States for teaching writing and to show the correct use of punctuation in first and second language writing classes. The types are:

Type I: Subject + VINTRANSITIVE

Type II: Subject + be + AdvP/PP

Type III: Subject + be/VLINKING + Adj

Type IV: Subject1 + be/VLINKING + NP1

Type V: $Subject_1 + V_{TRANSITIVE} + NP_{2; Type}$

VI: $Subject_1 + V_{TRANSITIVE} + NP_2 + NP_3$

Type VII: $Subject_1 \ V_{TRANSITIVE} \ NP_2 \ XP_2$. (Stageberg 1993 and Kolln 1994)

When these sentence types were presented in the format in figure 7-1 on page 192 to the students in the exploration group, they did not seem to cause any significant reaction or

comment. It was not until the end of the course, when the students wrote the final compositions and participated in the interviews that they became relevant. They seemed to answer for them many of their past experiences. Consider again these comments focusing on the Spanish word 'rollo':

RG:......¿De donde saco yo cinco paginas? O sea, yo en español le saco hasta seis, pero en inglés, ¿cómo le voy a sacar cinco? No o sea, no puede ser. Ni ves esta yo si te la voy a poner y sacaba tres, máximo siete, ya exprimiéndole todo y en español yo sabía que yo podía sacarle más. Más rollo pues, como dicen.

TC: ¿Más rollo? ¿Y que es rollo?

RG: Por decir, darle mas vueltas a un asunto, tratar de explicar otro, el estar hablando de Japón, frases muy comunes que se usan mucho, la situación geográfica de la bella ciudad de Japón, Tokio o algo así. Como más, adornar más el texto.

TC: ¿Y eso no lo puedes usar en inglés?

RG: No.

TC: Okay

RG: En inglés sería, En la ciudad de Tokio Japón. (FUI 2)

RG: Where can I find five pages? What, in Spanish I can write six, but in English, How will I get five? No way, it can't be. Not possible, I tried to do it and got three, maximum seven, that was squeezing everything possible and in Spanish I knew I could write so much more. More 'rollo', as they say.

TC: More 'rollo'? What is 'rollo'?

RG: To say, add perspectives to a topic, try to explain it with something else, talking about Japan, common phrases that you use a lot, the geographical situation of the beautiful city of Japan, Tokyo or something like that. Like more, decorating the text more.

TC: And you can't do that in English?
RG: No

TC: Okay?

RG: In English it would be, in the city of Tokyo, Japan.

RG: Sí, sí, porque talvez yo pueda este decir algo en español en una forma muy sencilla y al tratar de que me entendieran, hacía un rollote[17] en inglés. Es por eso y así estaba la idea de lo que realmente quería decir. O sea, volvía al punto, no me entendían (FUI 2).

RG: Yes, yes, because maybe I could say something in Spanish in a simple way and when I tried to make myself understood, I made a 'rollote in English. It's because and well the idea I wanted to say was really there. Well, you know, back to the point, they didn't understand me.

This is what opened the door to the discussion on 'rollo' and seemed to allow the participants to express a long repressed frustration of trying to write in English. This is expressed as a previous situation by RAG and CRB when they said:

…en general hacer trabajos desde que estamos en la primaria nos enseñan a echar rollo, entonces uno se queda acostumbrado y uno trata de hacer lo mismo en inglés. (PCI 3)

…in general, starting in the primary school we are taught to use 'rollo' in written assignments, as such you get used to it and you try to do the same in English.

CRB: Honestly, this class has helped my writing in English to become easier, without the sentence taboo or long structures like in Spanish that we call 'rollo'. (WSC 23)

The word 'rollo' was contrasted against the sentence types and seemed to offer an explanation to what was happening. In the participants view, 'rollo' vs. 'sentence types' seemed to be the explanation for the differences between the two languages (this topic is expanded in 7.3.1. and 7.3.2.). This would seem to suggest that the students could not find a solution in the past for these issues of language play, decorating the sentences, using metaphors to show alternate ways of describing a theme. Apparently as seen in section 7.2.3 the students having lost these options decided at one point to simply apply the Mexican written 'social controls' to the texts they were writing in English. This would naturally create sentences structures that are not acceptable in English. This in turn would lead to misunderstandings for both the students and the teachers involved. This would suggest that there had been missing explanations of 'social controls' in the 'socialization'

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[17] 'Rollote' is the way to say a very big 'rollo' in Spanish.

process of second language writing that was not allowing the students to assimilate this shift to the English language rhetorical structure.
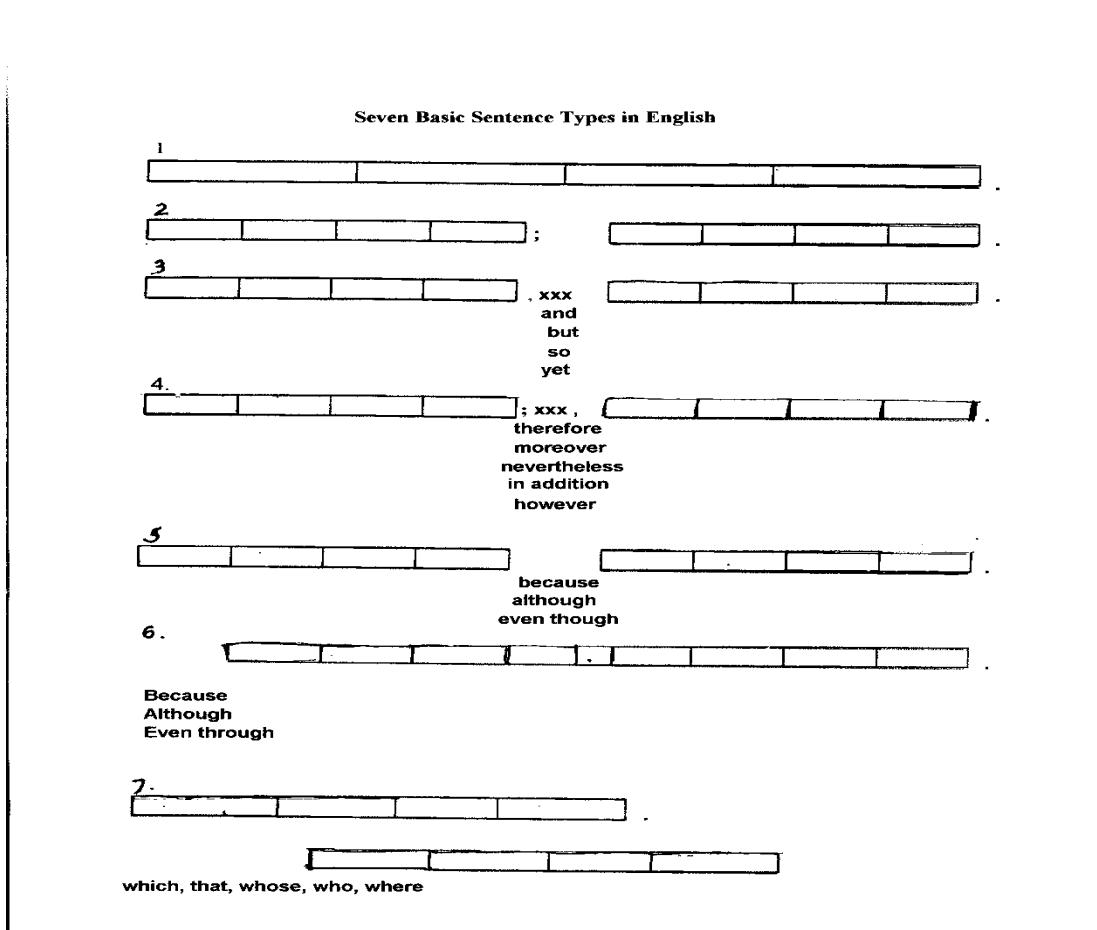
Figure 7-1 Seven Basic Sentences Types in English

Based on the above format that was adapted from the one used in the English Composition course taught in the BA in ELT in the Language School, the students in the exploration group began the process of structuring sentences in English, towards the end of the course. At first glance it could be thought that this would affect the way in which they view the structuring of written language; however, it must be noted that for the participants of the exploration group this format was associated more with how to use English punctuation rather than how to structure the language and differences were cited before and after the course. Furthermore, deviation from these types of English language

sentence structures is encouraged in written Spanish (Abbot 1996, Alonso 1998, Montaño-Harmon 1988 and 1991, Simpson 2000, Thatcher 1999 and 2000). These ten participants in the exploration group could see differences between the two languages in a written format, but the overall objective of writing is seen to be the same between the two cultures. The differences that the participants see are not in the overall concept of writing, but in the process of how it is carried out. This tends to be expressed as text structure and sentence length. What appears in the following comment is the clarity of the function of writing and how it can change from culture to culture.

> Both languages have their own objectives, the way in which each objective is done, is what changes, but for me all languages have a similar basis. (PCI 3)

This is fundamental. English writing is recognized as different, but with a common basis to Spanish. The critical aspect here is, to what extent do second language instructors, standardised exams, and commercial material take these differences into consideration? These students showed an understanding of attempting to adapt to a distinct writing process in order to express themselves in written in English. This sensitivity and awareness is what should be looked for in the 'Second language classroom', but in my 20 years of professional experience I have rarely seen it. Instead, in 'second language writing', as Canagarajah (2002a, p.24) states, "even teacher-training programs in TESOL are influenced by these assumptions (that any ESOL professional can teach writing), providing little or no place for courses in writing pedagogy". This is reflected in the classroom by instructors at the University of Guanajuato who have nothing to fall back on, except the way in which they learned to write in their native language; assuming that the instructors did learn to write in their mother tongue.

However, this concept of the writing being different does not carry over to the global intention of writing. When considering the concept of writing as a social process that can

be performed in many different cultures, the view changes slightly. This change in view was nicely explained by RAG who comments

> Well, I couldn't say it is different because the objective is the same to express the idea, some knowledge; it is simply to say something. (PCI 3)

This practical observation strengthens the argument of much research in the area of discourse analysis (e.g., Howarth 2000 and Mills 1997) and in particular research on the cultural identity of writers (e.g., Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Seyhan 2001, Henry 2000, and Johns 1997).

This opens up more the issue of 'social controls' and 'socialization'. I think the last comment brings some clarity to the aforementioned. It would seem that as individuals who write there is at least a sub-conscious awareness of 'social controls' in another language. It would seem the students are looking for them. This would then imply that they hope to find them in the classroom where they are learning to write in a second language. If they are not finding the answers from the instructor, this would suggest a failure in the process of 'socialization' of second language writing. These students were trying to find out how to put 'rollo' in their English texts under American terms and they were not receiving the answer.

Basically what these students can see here (on the function of discourse communities and the activity of writing) is an explanation from the point of view of practical experience or 'socialization'. What needs to be thought about is how it is that these students can detect and recognise this process. But often second language teachers and course books seem to not be able to do the same; or at least, not enough attention is paid to these differences in the target language and the native language. This could produce misunderstandings. These misunderstandings lead later to poor results on standardised tests like the TOEFL or FCE that are used to validate the students' knowledge, as seen in section 7.2.3.

Researcher's overall conclusion: There are differences in Spanish and in English. These differences are directly related to cultural issues. These issues are: 1) how Spanish is taught to children in school in Mexico; 2) the fact that Mexico comes from an oral literary tradition and 3) Mexican Spanish uses a different rhetorical structure. Here, the issue of the sentence types seems to have given the students a means to express what they were struggling against when trying to write in English. These are basic concepts that need to be dealt with because it could bring about serious consequences for the Mexican students learning to write in English.

The first argument is that the material and instructor are taking for granted that the students are using the same 'social controls' and 'socialization' norms as they are for the activity of learning to write. I suggest that students are taking their Mexican 'social controls' and trying to apply them to English apparently without guidance in this activity, while the instructor tends to follow American 'social controls'. Secondly, the international exams that are used to validate English could be making the same assumptions. This was already seen as well in this Chapter where these assumptions are used to classify Mexican students as poor writers because they do not conform to the American 'social controls' for writing. Finally, this potentially places both the instructor and students in the unfair position of having to deal with issues that are not dealt with openly in the classroom in the University of Guanajuato, but are used for evaluation purposes in the language programme. Thirdly, this brings to light this idea of an imaginary discourse community is not possible in the classroom where the 'social controls' become tangled and partially hidden from the participants.

7.3.1. Classroom awareness on text structure

Referring to the correct or acceptable patterns for organising paragraphs in English at the beginning and the end of the course (WCE 9 and 10 and WCS 30, 40, 42 and 43) is the beginning of the cultural difference issue. At the beginning of the course MCR writes:

> When I write in English I try to be the most short possible (writing), I mean just focusing the subject on the main idea, and avoiding fillers or explaining a lot. (WCE 10)

He is indicating that a difference can be seen in English that requires reducing the amount of language used. The comment of 'avoiding fillers' or 'explaining a lot' seem to tie in with the concept of 'rollo' that was expressed in an earlier section in the Chapter. I think that there was a general awareness before the course as expressed here. However, during the course the participants were given the means to verbalise better what they already knew. This idea of a shorter sentence if you will is more complicated. It appears to be linked with topic structure.

This seems to be related to the question of being able to deviate from the topic in Spanish and not being able to in English. Basically the students were saying that they did not know what is considered acceptable writing by American English speakers' standards. Furthermore on this point some of the participants' indicated that they did not receive explicit instruction in the 'Second language classroom' in sentence structure until they participated in courses outside of second language or in foreign countries (WCS 30, 32, 33, 40 and, PCI 1 and 4 and FUI 1 and 2).

> RAG: Si y ha cambiado bueno enfocándome en donde yo puedo marcar el cambió pues seria en ingles si ha cambiado radicalmente porque como le digo yo nunca había tomado clases de redacción en ingles, ha cambiado porque ya me enseñe mas o menos a estructurar un poquito más las ideas a ir por pasos de ideas principales sobre ideas principales desarrollar eh… tomar en cuenta pues le digo los las cuestiones… técnicas de los formatos, los estilos de que debe ir un párrafo, separado de este otro párrafo, comas, puntos, las reglas de puntuación si han mejorado para dar, esas simples reglas de puntuación han dado realce para que se dé mayor entendimiento a mis escritos. (PCI 1)

> RAG: Yes and it has changed focusing in a way that I can see the change. Well en English it has changed radically because as I have told you I never had taken writing classes in English, it has changed because I have learned more or less how to structure my ideas and how to go from main ideas to those that I want to develop eh…take into consideration the things…techniques of formats, paragraph styles, separating paragraphs, commas, periods, punctuation rules have improved, those simple punctuation rules have made my papers more understandable.

The above comments bring out again the need for explicit instruction in writing. What RAG states is a very basic element of written language.

> It has changed because I have learned more or less how to structure my ideas in English. (PCI 1)

How does a person go through a series of language classes and not learn how to structure ideas in written text? RAG makes a direct comment on how this can occur in the Mexican Educational system in the area of second language learning, when she answers the question.

> No, the truth, no. I took classes… secondary school, high school and through out my BA and two languages English and French and in neither of the two, none of them, no writing processes were taught. It was just how to write a basic sentence. (PCI 1)

It is rather straightforward. At least in this case, there was limited instruction in the second language classes on how to write from the participant's view. This is something that I think can be found in many institutions in Mexico. It is part of the system of the University of Guanajuato, where many of the members of the exploration group did their undergraduate studies. This is an area that appears to require attention within the 'Second language classroom'. Consider the story told by GDP.

GDP opens the debate on structure by explaining that she had to leave Mexico to learn about the issues of text organisation and acceptable text presentation in English. She had to discover outside of Mexico that English has as a more rigid text structure than Spanish. She learned this in courses on writing that she took outside of Mexico:

> GDP: siento que yo esto lo aprendido con otros cursos que he tomado inclusive en el extranjero este en donde se basan mucho y se enfocan mucho en como sobre todo en la manera en que se entregan trabajos este no se los trabajos que tienes que desarrollar algunos trabajos de investigación… este… algunos trabajos este también educativos como los entregas como los debes de estructurar cual es el pensamiento que tienen por ejemplo los norteamericanos es muy diferente al de nosotros, nosotros podemos empezar a redactar y no siempre del primer párrafo tienes que hacer este como el objetivo general sino que puedes ir lo redactándolo de diferentes maneras y llegar a una conclusión pero la estructura no es tan rígida. (PCI 2)

GDP: I feel that I have learned in other courses that I have taken in other countries, where the foundation and focus is on how you have to develop different types of research documents… these… some educational documents, how you present them and structure for example North American thought that is very different from us. We can start writing and the first paragraph does have to have the general objective, you can bring it in, in many different ways and arrive to a conclusion, but the structure is not as rigid.

Why is it that a language student at the University of Guanajuato would have to wait until she is in another course outside of Mexico to learn how to present written material? For what reason did she have to wait to discover that English is more rigid than Spanish in the written format? RAG offered an explanation about what you learn to write in a second language class in Guanajuato. She said the basics; how to write a sentence or better the comment about being a parrot.

For these students the 'second language classroom' here in Mexico seemed to be missing elements in textual organisational patterns. As stated earlier in the Chapter, writing was like repeating over and over as a parrot. However, writing is more complex than just a sentence and requires much attention. Maybe it is true that second language faculty are mistreated and marginalised and considered second-class citizens in all English departments in Mexico in the same way as they are here in the University of Guanajuato (see Chapter Two); nevertheless, that is not reason enough to exclude the teaching of text structure and simplify or reduce the academic scope of the second language classes.

Researcher's overall conclusion: Here the participants are referring to overall discourse strategies on how to present language in a written format in English. This is about how to present a text in English, how to develop ideas, and how to organise them in writing in English. It is in essence the delivery system of written text. The students are requesting this in an explicit form. They want to see examples and to have the time to practice with them and then receive feedback on what they have done. This is not an issue of what to write, to spell, to

punctuate; it is about how to write something that will be accepted by American readers. They want to be openly told what the 'social controls' are that specify what is considered to be acceptable or unacceptable written texts in an American writing community.

The participants express themselves on the issue in the sense that they say there was no classroom instruction on text organisational patterns. This lack could be interpreted as a teaching approach, but the issue I think is more in the direction of correctly delivering the content to an intended audience. The participants were interested in how this was done; they wanted the available information in order to be able to do it themselves. This implies that there are possible failures in the classroom 'socialization process' in the sense that the 'social controls' were not clearly defined for these learners.

7.3.2. Classroom awareness of allowable sentence length

The participants refer specifically to the idea that Spanish uses long and complex sentences based on dependent clauses in the following extracts. This type of structure is not common in English and on occasions it is not possible (WCE 9 and 10 and WCS 24, 35, 39 and 42).

> RV: Pero cuando lo tengo que hacer en inglés, ese ensayo de…diez páginas, se me convierte en cinco páginas. (risas) (PCI 5)

> RV: But when I have to write in English, that essay…ten pages, becomes five pages. (laughter)

It implies learning a different way to structure a sentence, which means a different way of structuring or working with ideas. This is something that requires explicit instruction and lots of practice. Also, it requires that time be spent with the student giving them feedback, so that it is possible to make adjustments in organization and structure. This refers back to the rhetorical patterns that were mentioned earlier.

The statistical data from the exploration group indicates that a standard sentence in Spanish is about 31.09 words and a standard sentence in English is about 17.82 words or

considering Montaño-Harmon's study (1991) the figure would be Spanish 41.10 words and English 17.10 words. RV's comment about reducing the text by 50 percent is interesting, as it is close to the average in length reported in the studies mentioned earlier in the Chapter.

This helps to begin to make sense of the original idea of sentence length. To help clarify this issue of sentence length between Mexican Spanish and American English, consider an example from the written data collected from the exploration group who carried out for the first time a simple process of comparative discourse analysis to highlight what happens at a rhetorical level between the two languages. RV wrote the following sentence in Spanish:

> Cuando inicie el curso de escritura mis conocimientos e ideas de cómo redactar un ensayo eran como un rompecabezas pues era muy complicado vincular las oraciones para formar párrafos y redactar de una manera clara, precisa y coherente. (WCS 40)

In English, a direct translation of this sentence without taking into consideration the common cultural considerations in the United States of America for the use of punctuation in writing would result as follows:

> When I began the writing course my knowledge and ideas on how to write an essay were like a jigsaw puzzle well it was very complicated to relate the sentences to form paragraphs and write in a clear, precise, and coherent form.

Obviously this is not a well-formed sentence in English, or at least not readily accepted. In English, the most likely way this sentence in Mexican Spanish would be rendered is by dividing it into two sentences and creating the following combination that coincides with common punctuation practice in American English:

> When I began the writing course my knowledge and ideas on how to write an essay were like a jigsaw puzzle. It was very complicated to relate the sentences to form paragraphs and write in a clear, precise, and coherent form.

What has happened in the previous example may seem to be rather simplistic at first. However, you need to consider that a person who is in the process of learning Spanish or English is most likely not aware of this simple difference. More importantly is the issue of whether the instructor of a given language class is aware of this difference, as discussed earlier. For the moment the question of basic differences in sentence length has been exemplified. As such, consider the issue of sentence length differences from a theoretical view.

The two languages function with completely different rhetorical structures. When you are translating from Spanish to English there is always a basic complication: longer sentences that cannot be translated into English without breaking them into separate ideas (Vásquez-Ayora 1977). From the literature review in this chapter add to this the argument that Spanish is a language in which rhetoric has a preference for a more elaborate style than English in written composition (Simpson 2000). This was seen in the example from the exploration group written data used earlier in the initial issues and then demonstrated where the result would be a run-on sentence on the previous page in the translation structure of the two languages.

Besides all that has been mentioned so far, there are more factors along this line of thought to consider. In Spanish, certain conjunctions and relative pronouns function as commas, most frequently the use of 'and' (y) or 'what' (que) often replace formal punctuation. Add this to the concept of multiple themes that can operate within a paragraph and the entire teaching – learning scenario becomes more complex. Finally it must be taken into consideration that Mexican students are taught in school to conform to

the following 'social controls' in the educational system as seen earlier in this Chapter on page 184 where Harmon stated:

> 1) Vocabulary building by using synonyms, antonyms, paraphrasing, and derivations; 2) Writing practice focusing on tone, style, and vocabulary based on written models from literary figures; 3) Practice in elaborating a given idea through writing in various ways as the student attempts to develop the theme in greater depth; 4) Work on correct grammar and mechanics at the sentence level (1991, p.418).

This school training can lead to what would be considered poor sentence structure in English. To illustrate this in more depth, here is another example from the exploration group data that is even further varied from American English than the previous example. CR in her initial composition on how she learned to write in Spanish wrote in an acceptable Mexican format:

> *Considero que desde el momento que nací en México y estoy en escuelas de habla hispana o Mexicanas el español es la lengua nata, por lo que durante de toda mi vida hasta el día de hoy, el escribir éste ha sido un proyecto diario y definitivamente el uso frecuente en la escuela de la gramática española durante años en las escuelas dan el conocimiento de aprender a escribir el español (WCS 23).*

Once again, this sentence would not be acceptable in English. It needs to at least be modified into two sentences in order to be considered acceptable. However, on this occasion there is a difference. Here is an example of the conjunction '*and*' functioning as punctuation, which is common in written Mexican Spanish, along with the emphasizing of the word 'Spanish' occurring on four occasions to create sentence cohesion (in italics). In this case the word 'Spanish' along with the use of 'and' help to create one sentence.

> *I consider that from the moment that I was born in Mexico and I am in Spanish speaking or Mexican schools, Spanish is the native language, through which all my life writing has been a daily project **and** definitely the frequent use in school of Spanish grammar for years gives the knowledge to write in Spanish.*

In this case it is recommendable the elimination of the second use of the conjunction *and* in order to make the concepts fall into an acceptable American English punctuation format. Then the aforementioned sentence would become the following two sentences:

> I consider that from the moment that I was born in Mexico and I am in Spanish speaking or Mexican schools, Spanish is the native language, through which all my life writing has been a daily project. Definitely the frequent use in school of Spanish grammar for years gives the knowledge to write in Spanish.

By making those simple changes the American audience would now be more content with the structure of the sentence(s).

Consider how Mexico has worked with the concept of multiple topics or themes in written language. By turning back the clock to the Mexica Empire and looking at the Códice Boturini Slide 21 in figure 7-2:
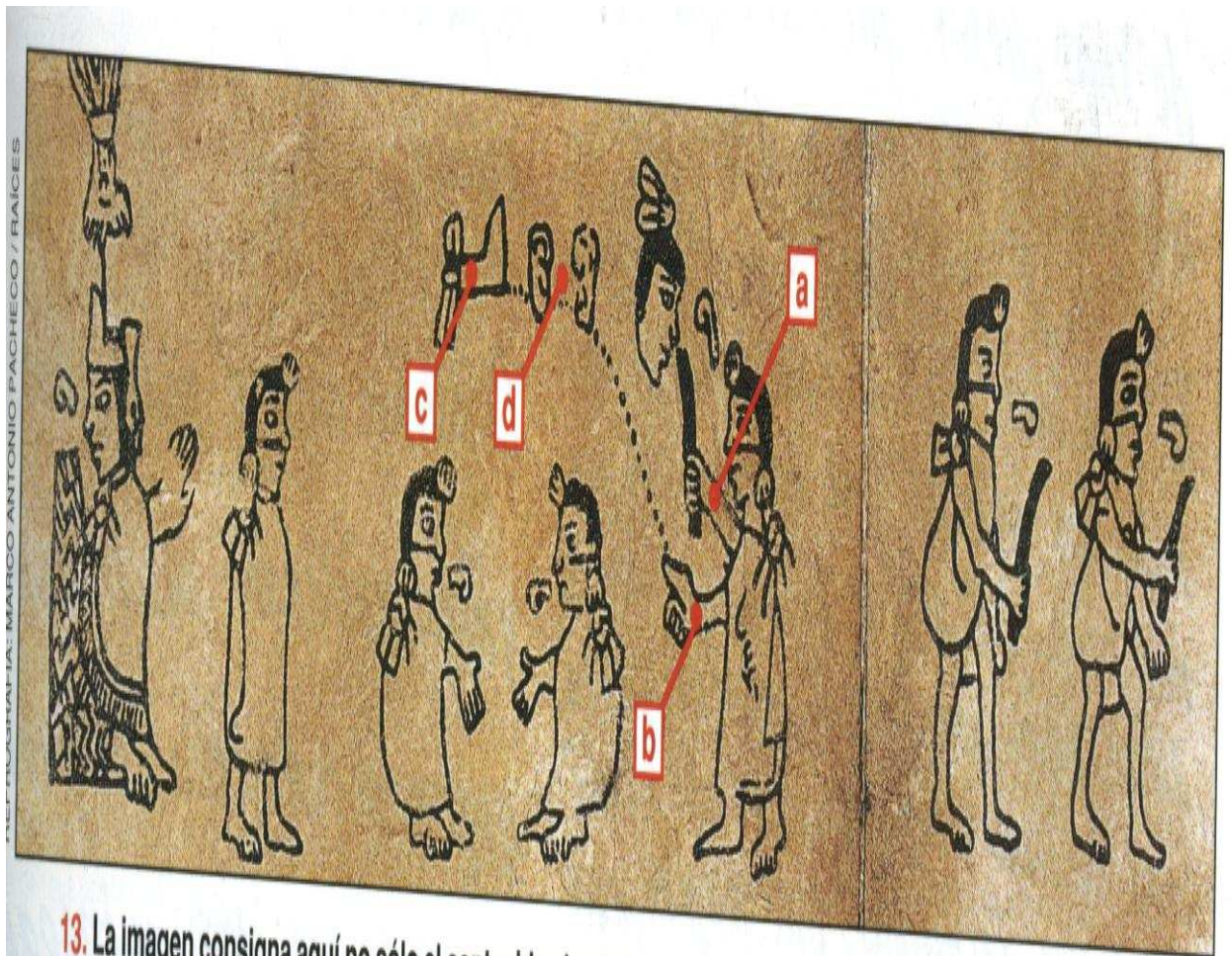
Figure 7-2 Códice Boturini Slide 21

The image here shows not only the content, but the verbal form that the spoken declaration may have had. The right hand (a) indicates what the Mexica are going to do:

cut off their prisoners' noses. Meanwhile, the fore finger of the left hand (b), extended by the dotted line, explains what the Tlahtoani (c) from Colhuacan could possibly be thinking: that they will fool him by cutting off both their ears (d), instead of one, capturing four thousand prisoners, instead of the eight thousand that Coxcoxtli had asked for. (Johansson 2004, p.49)

How long and complex should the sentence be? This is something that has to be dealt with explicitly and clearly for the student in Mexico to have a clear understanding of what American audiences expect in written language. It is so different that it needs to be dealt with explicitly in the classroom.

However, the participants said that they did not receive any instruction or concrete information on how to structure writing in English until they participated in the exploration group. Second language instructors seem to approach writing with limited tools and with the assumption that writing in English is a universal phenomenon (Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Canagarajah 2002a and Purves 1988). This phenomenon is related directly to the concept of allowable sentence length.

The structure of the text starts at the sentence level and then moves to the paragraph level. In both cases students are not receiving what they need in order to function with writing in the English language. RI in her interview said, "It has changed because I have learned more or less how to structure my ideas" (PCI 1). Here, she is referring directly to the exploration group and what was learned there; when asked for clarification about what she had learned about writing in English before this experience, she said

> No, the truth, no. I took classes… secondary school, high school and throughout my BA and two languages: English and French, and in neither of the two, none of them, no writing processes were taught. It was just how to write a basic sentence (PCI 1).

I think that to teach students how to write in a second language, it would be necessary to go beyond a basic sentence.

Researcher's overall conclusion: This is a complex cultural issue. Mexican students have been taught to write and join sentences in a format that is considered incorrect by American standards. What is considered to be elegant, academic, and acceptable in Mexico, is deemed a run-on sentence in the Untied States; and is hence, unacceptable. This is at the foundation of all the issues that have been brought up so far in this research. The standards that apply to learning, teaching, and evaluating writing in English as a second language are based in large part on this concept of sentence length or structure. Much care needs to be given to this point as it is a major element of ignorance of many educators and is possibly a cause for much misunderstanding.

Beyond the obvious structural difference, sentence length is directly linked to what is considered to be acceptable and unacceptable in written texts in these two different cultures. These two cultures have a close geographical and political relationship, but an unequal economic and social power relationship (Condon 1997). This makes the area of language awareness in written discourse between Spanish and English very critical as the majority of Mexico's second language instructors are American. Interestingly, this does mean that instructors necessarily need more knowledge of Spanish as the participants in the exploration group did not show much interest in the issues of Spanish discourse features. They wanted to know about the 'social controls' of American discourse.

There are two sets of 'social controls' clashing in the University of Guanajuato second language classroom. On the one hand the students are bringing into the classroom how they have learned to structure a sentence in Spanish and on the other the instructor is bringing in a different viewpoint learned outside of Mexico. The result is that the classroom becomes a site of struggle for the students.

7.4. Summary

In the case of this study, Mexican students at the University of Guanajuato are the focus of the research. As can be deduced from the aforementioned literature review, they are placed in a complex situation. When asked to write in English, students are being subjected to a process where they are asked to produce written work in a second language that is placing expectations on them that are not present in written texts in their

native language. They are expected to conform to social restrictions of writing that are unknown conceptually to them as argued by Simpson (2000), Montaño-Harmon (1991), Angelova and Riazantseva (1999), Roca de Lario, Murphy, and Manchon (1999), and Reppen and Grabe (1993). Basically, instructors are confronted with a situation where students are required to learn a foreign language and in the case of Mexico, also a foreign rhetorical structure without guidance from their instructors. The learning of a foreign rhetorical structure leads us to a more complex issue. Michel Foucault, (1972) in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* asserts that discourses are not simply groupings of utterances, grouped around a theme or an issue, nor are they simply sets of utterances which emanate from a particular institutional setting, but that discourses are highly regulated groupings of utterances or statements with internal rules which are specific to discourse itself. This means that there are possibly two events occurring in the classroom in the University of Guanajuato: one being the socio-cultural aspect of writing that seems to be treated superficially, and the other being the internal rhetorical structure that is not being dealt with at all apparently due to teacher and textbook ignorance. The implication is that considerations need to be made as to how the process of writing is carried out in the 'Second language classroom*'* (Smitherman and Villanueva 2003, Simpson 2000, pp.204-307, Winer 1992, pp.60-74, Spack 1988, pp.41-44, and Zamel 1983, pp.22-25).

Caution is needed, when the attention that is directed to the 'second language classroom*'* is considering that the process of teaching the social activity of writing is a twofold process. On the one hand there are studies such as those done by Simpson (2000) and Montaño-Harmon (1991) that direct teachers towards the possibility of considering the idea of raising awareness in the classroom.

> The most important implication of this analysis is the understanding of how paragraphs in English and Spanish are similar and different so that language teachers can help students learn to write. First of all,

understanding the simple physical differences between the two languages, in terms of words per sentence and sentences per paragraph, can help the instructor guide his or her students in compositions classes. Also, by knowing that English demands more internal coherence in the form of parallel and sequential progression, the teacher of English to Spanish speakers can focus on this difference between the two languages (Simpson 2000, p.306).

On the other hand they are specified as errors, which need to be dealt with directly as indicated by Roca de Larios, Murphy, and Manchon (1999, p.25). They indicate in their study that "struggling writers need to seek out and express their intended meaning." One of the suggested ways is through the correct manipulation of coherence and cohesion. Coherence and cohesion are concepts that are presented in a study by Zamel (1983, pp.22-25) to be difficult for students to master when learning English as a second language. A concept that is possibly even more difficult for Mexican Spanish speakers since they are trying to learn a concept that is not present in their native language in the same form (Simpson 2000, pp. 305-307, Abbott 1996 and Montaño-Harmon 1991, pp. 423-424).

Finally, as Abbott (1996, p.17) stated earlier in the chapter that "Granada shows little concern with the possibility of encountering an audience truly alien to the speaker", so too has the 'second language classroom' taken on little concern with the possibility of encountering a rhetorical structure truly alien to English. As a result the Mexican students end up receiving deficient preparation to use English in writing in their future professions.

Chapter Eight

8. Conclusions and implications for second language writing

…But this pushing beyond the limits of one's habitual usages, this breaking down and reshaping on one's own language through the process of translation, is never an easy business, in part because (if I may be allowed a hypostatization) it depends on the willingness of the translator's language to subject itself to this transforming power. I attribute, somewhat fictitiously, volition to the language because I want to emphasize that the matter is largely something the translator cannot determine by individual activity (any more than the individual speaker can affect the evolution of his or her language)—that it is governed by institutionally defined power relations between the languages/modes of life concerned. To put it crudely: because the languages of Third World societies—including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied—are "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English). They are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries, western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages produce and deploy "desired" knowledge more readily than Third World languages do. (The knowledge that Third World languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in quite the same way or for the same reasons). (Asad 1986, pp.157-158.)

8.1 Introduction

This thesis began as an investigation of second language writing. It has arrived at a final point that perhaps says more about the ways in which individual perceptions of writing clash in the second language classroom when trying to form a discourse community. What this investigation has generated is a perspective on a complex and complicated set of practices that have significant 'socialization' effects through the application of 'social controls'. In this Chapter the issues from the Chapters Five, Six, and Seven are combined to offer the final conclusions of this research, but not to the second language writing struggle, as writing is an on going life project. The struggles are separated into what is considered to be current struggles that are occurring in the 'second language classroom' in this research and into what appears to be possible sites of more global and future second language clashes in the process of entering into a second language discourse community.

First it is necessary to put writing back into the real world and take it out of the 'imaginary discourse community' mentioned in Chapter Two where it was temporarily located. Then the struggles of this research will be stated as suggestions and finally the sites of other possible struggles in 'second language writing' that can be derived from this present research will be presented as broader implications for ''second language writing'' that may be occurring in other places.

8.2 A social context for ''second language writing''

As stated here by Hugh in Brian Friel's play *Translations*,

> But don't expect too much. I will provide you with the available words
> and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between
> privacies? I have no idea. But it's all we have. (Friel 1981, pp.89-90).

Friel was writing on the issues of spoken language in Ireland, but it does seem to carry over to second language writing. This is apparently, at the moment, what instructors have in the second language classroom, when teaching the activity of 'second language writing'. Just as in Friel's play, the characters are concerned with being able to understand each other, so too are the characters that play the roles of teachers and students in the second language writing process. Unfortunately it appears to not have been possible to accomplish this on a consistent basis in the teaching of second language writing in the University of Guanajuato, in this decoding of privacies. This is not because instructors do not try to; they simply may have not taken the time to sit down and to try to understand their privacies and others privacies in relation to the process of second language writing at a rhetorical level.

This implies a clash at the social and pedagogical level. Taking Allwright's (1996) concept of the pedagogical and social frames in a broad sense, it is possible to start to interpret what is happening. By frame, I am referring to a set of expectations that can be social (rhetorical constraints that govern writing in a given discourse community) or pedagogical (the professional training on how to teach writing in the second language

classroom). Students and instructors are bringing different social frames into the classroom concerning writing and only the instructor is able to incorporate into the pedagogical frame the social frame of writing based on a particular view that is then used as a benchmark.

So, now in this frame of mind, this process of understanding second language writing at a rhetorical level allows me to begin to answer the research questions that were raised in Chapter One. The first question: **What is happening when students learn 'second language writing' at the University of Guanajuato?** There is a rhetorical clash. Students and teachers are confronted with trying to conciliate two rhetorical systems in the classroom without directly addressing them in the pedagogical frame. The focus of the second language writing process remains fixed on more surface aspects of writing like mechanics, punctuation and linguistic accuracy in the classroom. Apparently students are subjected to this process until they acquire through repetition sufficient ability to pass the evaluations that are required of them. Below in figure 8-1 is a representation of what is occurring in when students learn to write in a second language in the University of Guanajuato.
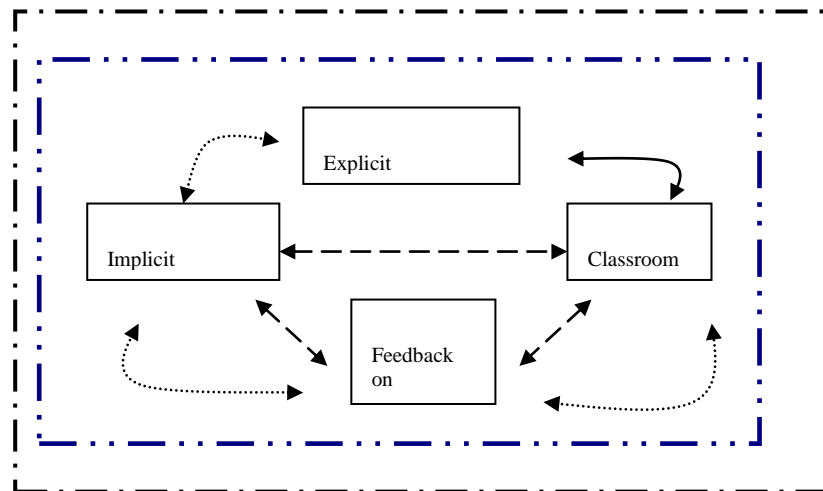

Figure 8-1 The Activity of Learning 'second language writing' in the University of Guanajuato

If this were a nice static model with no movement or flexibility as in the 'imaginary discourse community', the process of the activity of writing would be rather simple and straightforward, as was assumed in Chapter Two. Yet it is not, because the above elements are placed within social contexts and operated by humans. These contexts are sufficiently volatile as to vary from organization to organization within a given cultural group (e.g., Chapter Five, Chapter Six, Henry 2000, Spilka 1993, and Spilka 1990), yet they are stable enough to be recognised by both members and non-members of given discourse communities as seen in Chapter Six and Seven as well as in other research (e.g., Simpson 2000, Mills 1997, Johns 1995, Swales 1990, Kroll 1990 and Kaplan 1967). What can be seen occurring is that a way of writing is not being taught or learned here, but that the individual is being oriented on how to belong to the discourse community in question. However, this done without guidance at the rhetorical level, since it only surrounds the process and is not explicitly addressed. What happens when this process that has both stable and unstable elements is taken into the second language classroom and instructors try to *teach* students how to write? There is a strong focus on the learning of mechanics and surface level considerations for accuracy and grammar based on the instructor's native language that tend to clash with the students previous knowledge that is brought into the classroom.

Now it is possible to answer research question number two: **what may be the socio-cultural expectations of second language learners when they are dealing with the activity of writing in English?** Consider again the issues from the exploration group and look again at what was brought out about the second language classroom process that they had experienced in the classroom:

1) Explicit instruction in text structure, organization and presentation

2) Allowable sentence length in English

3) Relevant practice writing

4) Feedback on text structure

5) Audience/reader

These are the elements that the participants of the exploration group felt were lacking in some way when they went through the process of learning the activity of writing in English as a Second Language. These are the elements that the students were looking for and could not find in the second language classroom. Just as for *her,* when *she* was learning to write in Spanish as a Second Language, the process of writing began in the formal education system. When considering the social context of workplace writing, there can be certain variations as to what is considered acceptable or unacceptable. In workplace writing in the United States it is considered quite normal that you will learn the requirements and expectations of the organisation where you are working that are different to the ones that the individual brings with her/him to the organisation (Henry 2000 and Spilka 1993). A similar event can be said to occur here in Mexico as CDP pointed out in her post interview where she explained her experience with workplace writing in Chapter Five.

What CDP talks about here is very similar to the experience that *She* went through when *She* was learning to perform workplace writing in Mexico in the University of Guanajuato as was seen in Chapter Six. Also, it coincides with what studies indicate about the type of writing that is taught in American schools:

> The kind of writing most widely taught and most highly prized in schools – such as essays, narratives, poetry – is engaged in by very many members indeed of any society. It is quite clear, and reasonably obvious, that exclusion from the consumption of messages – being unable to read – carries with it heavy penalties in terms of exclusion from a wide range of knowledge, activities and hence power, in a society (Kress 1994, pp.9-10)

However, it is not enough to stop here and simply state or imply that many people all went through the same process of not learning to write what they needed. It is necessary to look deeper.

As seen in the preceding Chapter, the process of developing text in Mexico is quite different from the American model of brainstorming, organising, outlining, writing, and rewriting to create the three and five paragraph compositions that seems to be the standard of teaching students how to write that I experienced in the US. This suggests that there are basic differences in how the teaching of writing is approached in two countries. However, added to this it is necessary to consider an important point about the language that was brought up in Chapters Five and Seven.

The concepts that the exploration group participants considered important were directly related to understanding how Americans write. These three concepts coincide quite well with the experience of *she* in her writing, as *she* was trying to work out how Mexicans write; and the previous studies that were done by Simpson (2000) and Montaño-Harmon (1991) that were analyzed in Chapter Seven. These students, although they are not full members of an American English writing discourse community, seemed to recognise that it existed and that it is different from their native writing discourse community. The elements they were concerned with were the same ones that emerged in language studies comparing written American English and written Mexican Spanish as seen in Chapters Two, Five, Six and Seven (Abbott 1996, Alonso 1998, Montaño-Harmon 1988 and 1991, Simpson 2000, Thatcher 1999 and 2000), along with *she*.

I think that what is being suggested here with the exploration group is part of the life experience of learning to write. These students finally were beginning to receive some of the information that was missing. They had a mixture of unconscious ideas that became more relevant and explicit to them, when they had the opportunity to discuss them. The

missing information in this case is the structural elements that are governed by the use of a particular rhetorical system.

I think that all of these participants in this research were attempting to do the same thing. They were in the process of trying to learn how to decode the other language and become a part of the new writing community at the rhetorical level. These people all seem to have the available words and grammar ready to be used, but there was something else missing. I think that by the concepts suggested in figure 8-1 and making the assumption that there is no more need for words and grammar, the missing element becomes possibly clearer. The missing part does not have to do so much with the mechanics of writing or as might be said "learning to write", but it has to do with understanding the rules or expectations of a discourse community at the rhetorical level. These students were not asking for someone to teach them to write, or to give them more grammar and vocabulary, they were asking for understanding of how Americans construct text. As such there is a deficiency in the University of Guanajuato in terms of how second language writing is taught.

From all of this information, I think the process of learning to write has many similarities in both cultures. After the process of formal education, I think that students experience a process of adaptation when they enter their professional life and learn how to adapt to the norms of the organization where they are working. This could imply that Newstetter (2000, p.178) was on target when she wrote:

> …the traditional curriculum fostered teacher-dependent, non-reflective student behaviour. Students did not have to think about the kinds of writing they would need once they left the institution; I was doing that for them. Like a manufacturer, I was assembling these students like cars on an assembly line. All they had to do was wait for the next part to be added, for the next fixed assignment to appear on the board.

It seems that the social context for second language writing may have been lost, altered or reduced somewhere along the way but it can be relocated in Mexico by giving consideration to the rhetorical differences that exist between Mexican Spanish and American English.

8.3. Research conclusions: an outline for building a second language discourse community in the University of Guanajuato

The classroom is often the first place where students have the opportunity to begin to negotiate the rules of writing between two languages. In some instances it may be the only exposure they have before entering into a new writing community. "After all, we ESOL, teachers, too represent the academic community. Often we are the unacknowledged mentors who initiate our students into the disciplinary discourses." (Canagarajah 2002, p.194) If instructors are to introduce students into the world of learning to write for a second community, there seem to be some considerations that could to be made based on the information gathered from the exploration group. The exploration group suggested some elements that seemed to be missing in some form from their previous language learning experience in writing that can be included within the framework of applying rhetorical knowledge to the classroom process.

8.3.1. Awareness-raising

What is being referred to here as awareness-raising is focused on the rhetorical structure of the language in the written format. The comments made by the students in the exploration group appear to have a dual meaning. There were comments made in reference to sentence length and text organisation in relation to Mexican Spanish. What I mean is that the students were able to better understand and begin the adjustment to English by having a better understanding of their own language in terms of rhetorical structure. This was by no means a major issue to be dealt with; it was the door that opened up the discussion on the 'social controls' that govern English sentence length and text organisation. This is what was carefully discussed in Chapters Two, Four, Five, Six and Seven was viewed from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

What this implies is that a stronger understanding of how one's native language functions on a rhetorical level could be helpful to creating the discussion of learning the

structure of another language. At least in the case of Mexican Spanish it seemed to be more helpful this rhetorical understanding rather than traditional classroom instruction on writing. This may be a universal issue or it may be more local due to the lack of similarities between Mexican Spanish and American English at a rhetorical level.

Nevertheless, it is possible to consider that the issue of rhetoric may be the driving force behind the issue of the feedback type preference that students have manifested in other studies (e.g., Johns 1997, Kroll 1990, and Zamel 1985). In essence the information that students usually request in feedback are aspects of writing that are related to the rhetorical process. Issues of text organisation, sentence structure, and audience are directly related to rhetoric and have little to do with the grammar and mechanics that are usually emphasized in classroom work (e.g., Canagarajah 2002 and Kroll 1990). This is what was seen in Chapters Five and Six. The focus that students gave was directed to receiving clear and explicit instructions on the expectations of English speakers. However, it appears that second language instructors focus on mechanics rather than the rhetorical structure that the students are looking for.

This study suggests that students would benefit from rhetorical knowledge about their native language and the English language. Knowledge about the social rules that govern the expectations of the audience that read texts written in English would be helpful. Students should have the opportunity to uncover the norms that govern their native language and see how much they can find through guided discovery what is the same is, similar, or different to English. I think it will be discovered that here in Mexico, Mexicans write for exactly the same reasons, with the same purpose as in English speaking countries. It appears to be the type of practice, process or system that changes. Secondly, explicit instruction in the expectations of English speaking countries in terms of sentence construction, text organisation, and presentation conventions is needed. This may be a

way to make the students a part of the feedback process and to make the practice relevant for them.

8.3.2. Feedback on text structure

Feedback in writing is an issue that has been considered in past studies (e.g., Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990, Fathman and Whalley, and Leki 1990). However, the focus of feedback seems to be the issue that requires more analysis. The first aspect of the issue of feedback that comes out is that it is apparently associated with a lack of impact on the process of learning the activity of writing (e.g., Butler 1980, Knoblauch and Brannon 1981, Zamel 1981, Zamel 1985, Robb, T., Ross, S. and Shortreed, I. 1986, Leki 1990, Fathman and Whalley 1990, Conner and Asenavage 1994, Ferris 1997, Ashwell 2000, Hyland 2000, Canagarajah 2002, Ferris 2002, and Hyland 2003a). In studies feedback generally suggests that response practices are unsystematic, meaningless, and unproductive. Zamel (1985) is much more specific in outlining the impact of teacher response in writing:

> ESL writing teachers misread students texts, are inconsistent in their reactions, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to texts as fixed and final products, and rarely make content specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising texts. (p.86)

This is probably why students have a tendency to feel that the feedback that they are receiving is not sufficient or of the right type (e.g., Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990 and Di Puma and Maslekoff 2001). Also, this is a probable explanation for the insistence from the exploration group that feedback was missing from their past learning experiences in writing in English as a second language. However, it would be helpful to try and clarify what the students were referring to with the concept of feedback.

To start looking more closely at feedback, consider the study done by Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990, pp.164-170). In this study the results suggested that the teachers

tended to focus on mechanics and grammar, while the students were looking for more information on content and organisation of the writing. This is the same type of request that was found in the information gathered from the exploration group. These students were looking for information related to 1) explicit instruction on text structure, organization, and presentation, and 2) allowable sentence length in English.

For the instructor this leaves the suggestion that there should be a modification in the type of feedback that is often given to the second language student in writing. Instructors need to move away from the second language prescription of focusing on mechanics, grammar, and vocabulary. These aspects have been frequently used to place large social judgements on the students due to the assumed correctness or incorrectness of their nature (Clark and Ivanič 1997). Focus needs to be placed on the macro social aspects of sentence structure, text organisation, and content at the rhetorical level.

The focus of comments should be on content, organisation, structure, and presentation. The focus should be on the text, not on the mechanics and grammar. In the beginning of learning a language, I do not deny that it is probably necessary to give some consideration to these latter aspects, but they can be treated as an element of learning discourse norms and not a process for penalising the student's when they are evaluated. The focus of feedback should be to reinforce the concepts mentioned in awareness raising and on searching for other opportunities for practice. Here in the twenty-first century Microsoft has given us a thing called spell check. Consider letting it deal with the mechanics and grammar. The students are looking for information that will guide them through social norms that govern expectations concerning how to prepare and present written texts in English.

8.3.3. Relevant practice of writing

Next, the issue of practice that was expressed by the exploration group requires consideration. What the students are seeking after is, I think, fairly straightforward. It is

relatively easy to link together the aspect of practice and feedback. These two items are only possible through some type of writing practice that is linked to a social function within an English-speaking discourse community that the students are trying to enter.

This issue of practice brings to light what the participants are referring to when they made comments referring to the simple aspect of the texts that were generated in their English classes (e.g., Chapters Five and Seven). Also, relating to this are the open and direct comments that were made by the students that nothing relating to writing had occurred in their previous English course work (e.g., Chapters Five and Seven). By allowing the possibility of writing events with social purpose in the classroom the circle is closed.

The issue of practice is closely related to the issue of audience. The fact that written texts are the result of interaction between the writer and the reader is well established, and underlies much of the training that beginning academic writers need (Thompson 2001). As the teacher is the audience that the student has, a more tightly constructed process of feedback seems to be required to make the practice purposeful.

This research implies that the students need the opportunity to practice writing that has a social purpose for them. Instructors should do as much as possible to move away from the recipes that are hiding inside the course books. Writing is for a purpose in any social context. Find out what the reasons for writing are in the community where you are and let that be part of the foundation for practice. The idea should be to practice writing processes in the classroom, not the learning of a *second language genre*. Finally, do not focus on writing for evaluation; focus on writing for a social reason. Standardised testing, when it is necessary, can be dealt with separately. The whole point of practicing a social activity like writing in a second language is to help the student prepare for the target discourse community and its expectations. Show them that English speakers write for the same

reasons and remember that the target discourse community is not the second language classroom as argued in Chapters Two and Seven.

8.3.4. Significance of the missing rhetorical links

By returning to figure 8-1 the meaning behind the data analysis takes on a social significance and as result becomes more connected to the process of learning to write in a second language. On one side of the classroom experience the students seem to be confronted with an instructor who is maybe not properly prepared, employing material that may not be not appropriately designed, in a profession that tends to move towards simplification of its classroom process. On the other side of the classroom experience the students are trying to assimilate a process that they usually are only familiar with at an implicit level. As a result of the equation, difficulties are found and our unfortunate students are added to the statistics of those who have generated the poor results on writing in standardised testing in the United States (Montaño-Harmon 1991, pp.420-422), after experiencing the rhetorical clash in the classroom.

This research suggests limitations as a profession and second language instructors share a part of the responsibility for the results that students have obtained in Mexico. The responsibility of feedback falls directly to the second language instructor. The issue of practice is dependent upon factors outside the control of the instructor. Issues of class size, type of material, and course programme, are not always factors a teacher can alter. However, what is said and written to the students is the responsibility of the teacher. As a result of awareness and acceptance, a move towards modifying the future should occur so that in the future the results in our classrooms are more beneficial and more purposeful to students and less frustrating. The process of awareness raising, practice and feedback can be directed back towards the complex social process that it is, rather than the simplified process that has been presented here from the data analysis process and which has been shown to yield such unsatisfactory results.

The second language writing experience occurs within a classroom discourse community that governs itself by the 'social controls' of English, using at times a foreign 'socialization' process with insufficient time to perform the sought after elements of: awareness-raising, practice and feedback to the satisfaction of the students. This is what in turn creates the 'decontextualization' of writing and turns it into what could be considered a weak classroom practice.

8.4. Research implications: sites of struggle in second language writing in the future

The only way to change the system is to change practice (since that is the only system there is), but you can change the values and hierarchies of the system by not allowing them to become habits, to become embodied, in the first place, by using the techniques of linguistic and poststructuralist analysis to critique rather than support the system, and help you dialogue with and recognise the difference that is already there to be developed as resistance to it…And you can do this most effectively from a position which acknowledges your embodied and subjective investments in what you are doing. Only then do you have any chance of beginning to understand the difference between your conscious goals and their often unpredictable outcomes. (Threadgold 1992 cited in Kramer-Dahl 1997, p. 259.)

The implications of this research may go beyond the local context of the Language School of the University of Guanajuato. Clearly, there is much more to find out about how the processes and strategies employed by universities serve to prepare an individual to teach writing and how a student learns the same. The process of 'socialization' into cultural practices of writing is a complex one. In this thesis I have given a great deal of attention to what occurs inside the second language classroom, and in my view there is much more to be gained from a more detailed focus upon how participants of the second language writing construct their written world and their identity. I have given relatively little

attention to this, focusing instead upon the practices themselves inside the second language classroom. I have seen this as a necessary first analysis, and yet studying the ways in which participants learn to write in a second language in the second language classroom would provide insight into the extent of the disciplinary power of the discursive practices of second language education, and provide a link between the processes and structures and the individuals within them. However this research leaves open many sites of struggle that require more attention from second language researchers with the three major classroom elements encountered in this research that are altered by rhetorical interference in the classroom.

These sites of struggle concern the roles of students, teachers and finally content. The following ideas are adapted from Reither (1993, pp.201-206), who designed them with the idea of workplace writing in mind, hoping to bridge the gap between first language writing classes and the workplace. With some modifications, his three principles coincide well with the second language classroom and aid in attending to the deficiencies that the exploration group expressed; which is what has been traditionally done in second language, borrow from the field of composition theory for second language writing (Henry 2000 and Johns 1997). In that tradition, I am borrowing to propose the following areas as current and future sites of struggle in second language writing beyond the boundaries of the University of Guanajuato.

8.4.1. Changing the type of writing project

Students would benefit from an environment where they can ask questions and be the ones responsible for driving the development of a writing project. It should be, in so much as possible, student centred in its concept and execution. The students' learning goals in writing must be linked to other course work or the students' real life. It cannot be for the sole purpose of a grade. They should be the same ones that the teacher would be likely to get involved in, or projects directly from the field of study that the students are in. The key

to this is that the students should actually do the type of writing that will be expected from them after leaving school and not just superficially study it. A set of classroom constructed activities from a second language textbook should not be used for the foundation of writing with the hope that students will be able to then transfer the simplified practice to the real world when they are asked to actually write a text with a real purpose in an English speaking discourse community.

It seems that this will be a challenge in a globalised world. How will ELT publishers change the type of writing tasks?

8.4.2. Redefining the teachers' role in the classroom

As suggested from the data from the exploration group, the instructor should change the type of feedback. This coincides well with the findings of Reither (1993, pp.201-206) in workplace writing. The instructor should reconsider the traditional role of knowledge deliverer, to becoming a fellow participant in the body of written knowledge inside the classroom. Teaching writing is not merely a process of imparting skills and competencies. It is a place of social dynamics where the instructor needs to become more like a project manager, rather than a gatherer, organiser, and deliverer of knowledge. By becoming a participant in the classroom process, such aspects as mechanics and grammar should begin to take a secondary role. The principal focus of awareness-raising should centre on the social norms that govern writing in the target language and the feedback should be oriented towards the content and development of written concepts. Feedback is about developing ideas in a written text. It is not about finding all the mechanical errors in it; it is about the joint task of creating a written text.

Another challenge for second language education; the type of instructor that enters the second language classroom requires a more in-depth education in the area of writing. Writing can no longer be treated as a secondary activity. The amount of training and the

quality of the same will need to be addressed in the near future. How will second language training programmes adjust their focus?

8.4.3. Redefining the students' role in the classroom

This is the result of the first actions. If students are asked to take on the responsibility of writing real life projects connected to their field of expertise and instructors to assume the role of managers in the classroom, the students would modify their roles. Instructors would need to help students stop being people who come to class to listen to the teacher, to follow instructions, to read the textbook, and to wait to fulfil the instructor's expectations. Students would need to learn how to research outside of class, to pool their knowledge with those of others, and to learn to identify gaps that need to be filled. Students would need to be ready to produce knowledge through texts and share the outcomes with others. I think this is an extremely sensitive issue. Training our students to learn in the classroom is often discussed in second language eduction. What is forgotten is that if the student's role is radically modified, then the teacher's role will be, too. This is very important here because the suggestions that are being considered for the students are functions that are normally accorded to the classroom instructor. This third redefinition involves a redefinition of the social roles assigned to the participants in a classroom. This redefinition takes us towards a classroom that would function in a way more like real life writing, rather than the 'imaginary discourse community' presented in Chapter Two.

This implies others challenges for the future. The type of curriculum or the educational model for second language writing may require redefinition. Will students be ready?

8.4.4. The second language Instructor and training programmes

Writing is a social activity that was invented by humans and is used for specific social purposes. When this process moves into the classroom, the only element that can maintain the social aspect of writing and give it purpose is the second language instructor.

The commercial classroom material could support or help to maintain this aspect if it were oriented towards each individual student's cultural expectations, or focused on the writing tasks that the students plan to perform later in life, or if it assumed a much higher level of training in writing of the second language instructor. The reality is that it appears to be hard to find any of this in mainstream commercial second language material. This in turn leads to the deficiencies pointed out in training in second language programmes where writing is concerned and as a result there is almost in a catch-22 paradox that would make one think that there is little hope to improve the process of teaching the activity of second language writing in the classrooms at the University of Guanajuato.

The institutions that are responsible for the training and preparation of future teachers should reconsider aspects of the second language writing curriculum. The notion of certificates or short programmes that train instructors to repeat pre-conceived models needs to be re-evaluated, at least from the point of view of courses where second language writing instruction is involved. The expectation of taking a course or entering a programme is that you will learn how to perform a socially acceptable skill, not an artificial classroom function.

This is a difficult scenario because it implies that academic institutions may be part of the social structure that is helping to maintain the low quality of training in writing that second language learners receive. I think that it does not require much argument to accept that academic institutions should be a part of our society which develops and enriches knowledge, not simplifies and reduces it. I think that it is the place of both those who wish to enter into a training programme and those who employ graduates of said programmes. Both need to Increase the level of knowledge that is required to effectively deal with understanding that second language writing processes are possible forms of creating some positive pressure on the current system.

A challenge for universities, how will universities adjust their second language degree programmes to meet the demands of a world that crosses rhetorical boundaries?

8.5. Summary

The findings and recommendations I have summarised here suggest that the second language writing system currently pervasive in the second language classroom operates within a view of English as the rhetorical benchmark for acceptable writing, which in turn promotes a simplified view of the practice of second language writing based upon strategies and practices which assume the status of 'normal', 'common sense' classroom activities. In this system, there are institutionalised dominant 'social controls' that the instructor exercises through 'socialization' of the students. This positions the students in the second language classroom as receivers of knowledge about practice, without knowing the underlying rhetorical system that sustains it.

I have identified particular aspects of the 'social controls' that help to achieve this positioning of the students. These 'social controls' vary between Spanish and English as seen in this research; and could be affected by the type of 'socialization' processes applied by the instructor in the second language classroom to determine 'correct' writing. Students begin the journey of writing with no preconceived notions; however, once having learned the first language certain expectations in writing are constructed. Students tend to expect to see similar processes in relation to writing in a second language. Unfortunately the key to becoming 'accepted' in the second language writing world means complying with the 'social controls' of the English language as interpreted by a select group of instructors. This means that the students are positioned from the very beginning of their second language writing experience. There is not a sense that they are 'receivers' of existing knowledge, but of being adapted to the instructor's view of what is considered 'acceptable' knowledge. There is a sense of expected production of a certain type of text and if this text is not produced the students are marginalised from the system or punished by it.

This issue of learning to write in a second language is complex and involves many factors; however, students are presented with a classroom process that tends to simplify and reduce the activity of writing in English as a Second Language. I have said that through a process of involuntary co-construction instructors, students, material, and institutions create a classroom genre that is used for the purpose of obtaining an evaluation and not for learning to write. By doing this, the classroom writing experience becomes devoid of real purpose and loses touch with real life. This in turns creates students that are unprepared to deal with the complexities of a foreign discourse community when attempting to write as seen in Chapters Five Six and Seven. I have suggested that this unequal relationship between instructor and student places the latter in an unfair position such that rather than creating an environment of learning, an environment for confusion is being constructed inside the second language classroom. Even so, on a basic level students do acquire elements of writing through this process.

It may be that writing in English as a second language is in a position that makes this unequal balance of rhetorical use ever present due to the nature of second language education and the use of English as an international language. The political pressures that are around the English language may make an equal balance impossible. The students and their first language are just two simple factors in a global equation, rather than dynamic participants in the learning process.

I started this investigation into the socio-cultural practices that surround the teaching and learning of writing in a second language, and their relationship to the individual inside the classroom to try to see what was happening. I have stated in this thesis some of the issues that are occurring inside and outside the second language classroom. Second language education claims to be concerned with the issue of second language writing, but I think this claim is limited. What this thesis has suggested is that this may be true, but it is not the whole story. I have explored what occurs with second language writing in a

particular context and at present it is one in which there is a pressing need to consider how writing is being operated in the classroom. There is a need to understand more about how these issues of formal education, classroom awareness of text structure, classroom awareness of allowable sentence length, relevant writing practice, feedback on textual structure, and audience/reader impact upon the identity of the students during the learning process. Perhaps, fundamentally, second language education has grown to such an extent that the idea that the English language can be the benchmark for all writing purposes is seriously problematic. What is needed is a point of departure based not upon assumptions about other languages, students, and their social practices concerning writing, but upon empirical investigation that analyzes different rhetorical systems.

Chapter Nine
9. Epilogue to the 'second language writing' struggle

What I always felt from learning English and my language acquisition experience was that unintelligibility is absolute bedrock component of language. I always felt intimately, I was always comfortable with it – that there was always going to be a part of language that I wouldn't understand. You always get these fucking critics talking about it, but I always felt it, I always knew there was a part of language I would never understand. And there was going to be a part of my speech act that someone wasn't going to understand. There was never this myth of perfect communication. – (Ch'ien 2004, p.201 citing Junot Díaz)

9.1.   Introduction

This epilogue is here to offer a brief reflection of how this text was written. In some

ways the issues around this text may actually be more interesting to many people than the

text itself. In an attempt to show another voice in this text, I am taking a moment to

consider where this research began, the politics between Mexico and the United States,

the unusual personal role of an American-Mexican, and finally a person such as myself

writing for a British audience. All of these elements have played an important role in

helping me better understand this process I have come to call the activity of second

language writing, which has been at the end of the process, the learning of how to

construct part of my own identity as a teacher and a researcher (Watson-Gegeo 2005).

9.2.   The research

This journey to try and write a thesis on second language writing has been a unique

adventure into different areas of knowledge. I began with a simple idea to explore the

differences between business letters in Spanish and in English. I remember quite clearly

the introduction to my original research proposals five years ago that started with the

questions about business correspondence, where I had planned to compare commercial

bank letters and look for structural differences in the language.

The issues became much more complex as the research process began. I discovered that I was also very much a part of this research process. I saw that I was bringing many of my own frustrations of writing into the research process. This is what opened up the research paradigm and the questions became much more open and allowed the freedom to explore second language writing.

By opening up the research questions and incorporating myself into the research process three fundamental underlying issues were brought into the creation of this text that make it unique in some ways: 1) the politics of language between the United States and Mexico; 2) the issue of being an American-Mexican researching learning English; and 3) writing this thesis for a foreign audience in my native language.

9.3. The politics of language between the United States and Mexico

As I already explained in Chapter Two there is a strong political tie between Mexico and the US that is not completely stable. It is reflected in the way in which people interact with one another.

> Too little has been done to encourage Americans and Mexicans to come to grips with the fact that in a number of critical ways their views of the world differ radically and that these differences raise important barriers to effective communication and mutually satisfactory working relationships. They assume that what they know about the other is enough. (Condon 1997, p.VXI)

However, we do not really know enough about each other as can be seen in the following event. I mentioned earlier in the thesis one event concerning a professor that interrupted my paper by screaming at me in a TESOL conference when I said that Mexicans wrote well in Spanish. I had a similar negative reaction in Canterbury in my second year, when I spoke about power relations in discourse communities. A middle aged British student could not conceal her anger, when I dared state that Canterbury Christ Church University was not really preparing students to write their theses, that we did it on our own because we did not

completely understand the British writing system, nor its 'social controls'. I dare not enter into my own workplace where the discussions have been harsh during these years. Events like these in presentations have been many over the last five years and I think that it only reinforces the need for more research in issues that relate to second language writing.

This research for me has been an attempt to try and offer more to several communities that have given me many professional opportunities, including fully funding this PhD programme for me.

9.4. An American-Mexican researching learning English

The writing of this text by me is in some ways ironic. I am an American by birth and grew up in a conservative family in a community that receives many migrant workers from Mexico. I moved to Mexico where I studied, married and established my professional life as a second language instructor in the University of Guanajuato where I have been mostly trained by British institutions. As a result both my personal and professional background are a part of this text.

Interestingly, I think that on one side the issue of Mexico and the United States is what initially opened the door to this research. There is no doubt in this text that I am clearly in favour of Mexico. I think, though, at the same time the fact that my graduate work in language has been in British institutions has made this process in many ways more objective because the British audience is similar, but foreign to me. As a result, I have experienced in many ways writing in a second language for the second time.

I have spent the last twenty-two years of my life trying to learn Spanish to the fullest extent possible. This has included learning to write both academically and professionally in Mexico. This has made, for me, an interesting situation. Most of the academic work that I have completed has been for British Institutions. Yet I have never actually taken a course in writing in the UK. I have never been trained in writing by a British professor. My contact with feedback on writing for a British audience has been during my studies in Canterbury

Christ Church University and through written reports that came with my grades from my MA TESOL at the University of London. Therefore, the writing of this text has been unusual because I have experienced much the same issues that the students expressed in the exploration group. There have been times when it has been difficult to determine if I am writing about them or me, or who is who at times. This text has been a struggle to produce.

9.5. Writing a thesis for a foreign audience

This text that is dealing with complex issues of personal and professional identity has been placed into a complex circumstance. This text about the complexities of Spanish and English in second language writing, written by an American naturalised Mexican, is for a British audience. Furthermore, the study has tried to remain within the confines of the 'second language classroom'. Added to all this, the guiding institution is also British. Where are the 'social controls'? And what are they?

Well, I thought I knew what they were, but I did not. The writing of this text created a parallel journey of learning how to write for a British audience at this level. This was a new experience for me and I think for my supervisors it was a new experience as well. Why? I am confident to assume that they had no prior knowledge of the 'social controls' and 'socialization' for written Mexican Spanish. I think that the process of trying to help me to submit to the British norms may have been at times a difficult experience. My original brilliant idea to write in English using the rhetorical structure of Náhuatl never really blossomed into anything of coherence and was finally abandoned, much to the relief of my supervisors and eventually, even to me.

This trying experience has been interesting, in that this thesis, the content, the research process, the supervisors, the researcher, the participants of the exploration group are all shards of this rather large social dig that is called second language writing. For me, while this text is in English, I have written it for a community that is foreign to me. Interestingly, I

240

think it has been this process of having to actually write this thesis while researching that has made me much more sensitive to the writing process.

Like the students that participated in the exploration group, I do not think that I am completely part of a British academic discourse community. I have received much support throughout this process to help me arrive to this stage with 'my text' in hand. I think that where this is a difference between me and the research participants is that I know now how to better face the difficulties of a foreign discourse community and they still do not. Writing is a very complex activity that cannot pretend to be dealt with through a series of courses of a few hours a week. It requires more time and more attention than it now receives.

To exemplify this outside the boundaries of the thesis, at the end of my second year in the PhD programme, I gave a brief presentation in Canterbury. This presentation was about the issues of writing for a foreign audience and I brought up the following concepts: 1) The discursive fields of the advisors and their impact on the definition of text; 2) The role of the researcher and the application of the graduate handbook; 3) The concept of the activity of writing and how it is treated in the area of qualitative research. During this presentation I focused mainly on the issues of different cultures being involved in the writing process. The delivery of the talk was curious.

During this presentation I saw many confused faces from my British colleagues and a look of disbelief from my non-British fellow students. After this presentation three events remain clear in my mind. One is the British woman that presented after me and spent much time glaring at me and made a few not so polite comments about my presentation. The other was the fact that several non-British students approached me and said they had identified with what I had said, but was I not concerned about daring to question my supervisors, the handbook, and the institution. Finally, a Hungarian student studying

geography that I saw a year later told me that my presentation had helped him greatly in understanding how to get through writing his own thesis.

9.6. The outcome on the research and the researcher

All of these events helped to get me through my own struggle and learn to come to terms with the process that I have lived as a PhD student trying to write a text, but I have been on the other side on many occasions as the instructor of many students, wanting to learn to write texts. This simply makes me more aware of how complex the activity of writing is and just how much more complex it becomes when we have to do it in a second language; not to mention the arrogance of claiming to teach a member of another discourse community how to write. This brings me to two quotes that shaped much of this research. "autobiography, the genre of choice of many writers of diaspora, is an out-of-bounds genre that captures the fluid character of memory, migration, and transition in an appropriately nuanced fashion" (Seyhan 2001, p.96).This shows exactly what this process has been for me, an out-of-bounds thesis trying to express my life experience. At the same time a confession, as I experienced what I have criticised in this text and also did much of what I have criticised throughout this text in classroom as a second language instructor. As such I have considered this research to be both an (auto)biographical and (auto)ethnographical look at writing, while at the same time exploring writing with a group of students. I think that in many ways I have been observing myself in all the participants and at the same time learning about myself from them as the process has developed, bringing out and confessing my own 'second language classroom' errors of the past. This brings me to the second quote:

> We were asked to explore the archives of our memory, to deal with the "excuse" of forgetfulness and on occasion with pain, in order to understand better our professional selves as teachers and mentors…the main question that arose was, what makes it possible for one person to write and give

expression to her voice and what prevents another person from doing so? (Elbaz-Luwisch 2002, p.403))

This expresses much of what I feel in having had the opportunity to write this text and it holds close to what a member of the exploration group said to me after the final follow-up interview. She said, "Professor, please do something to fix our language classes, it is just not fair what they did to us". Unfortunately, the 'they' refers to second language instructors. She probably will not write a text about teaching the activity of second language writing, but I have. So this text is for her who suffered and for me to help make amends as one of the instructors that did damage in the past.

9.7. Summary

The process of second language writing is very complex. It requires us to deal with issues of: language, nationality, community, organisations, and identity. All of these are then required to be funnelled into a piece of written language that is then validated or rejected by others; sometimes in our own domain and sometimes outside our domain. We are in a constant struggle to try and maintain our identity as a person; but at the same time looking for acceptance through writing by complying to the collective conscience of the communities where we wish to belong.

Some of those places where some of us want to belong require learning another language to a very high level of complexity. This is a place that involves second language writing and as such it is a social institution that has developed its own norms for belonging. This is where I think we have gone astray. Second language writing is not about the student becoming a member of something that we the second language instructors validate, but it is a transition context where we should be helping the students prepare for their future journey of belonging to the community of their choice. Writing is not something that teachers do to the students; it should be a window where students learn how to express themselves to others. Finally, second language instructors do not teach students

how to write. They should be preparing them to learn how to work in a new community under a new set of rules.

Second language education is not an isolated phenomenon that exists by itself. It is part of a larger community that deals with broader issues of education and learning. Its foundation is strongly based on diversity and dealing with multicultural issues. These contrasts that are found inside a multicultural environment is what makes the second language world an interesting place to work in and it is necessary to maintain and bring this diversity into the process of exploring second language writing. Writing is a social phenomenon that was created by humans to aid us in understanding one another better through written communication, as such we cannot claim that the 'social controls' of the United States are the only ones available in the globalised world of written communication. We must all start to look beyond ourselves and truly try to understand and use written language as a tool of communication and not as a barrier to knowledge.

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