Marina Oštarić, prof., senior lecturer[1]

FOCUS ON THE PROCESS IN SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SCAFFOLDING

This article describes the nature of second language writing as process-oriented and discusses the possibility of using the concept of scaffolding in addressing difficulties of mastering such an important communicative aspect of a second language. Development of different approaches to second language learning and writing is described in the context of communicative competence. Next, the process approach to second language writing is described and discussed as a beneficial approach while considering the complexity of second language writing instruction. Finally, the concept of scaffolding is presented as a pedagogical tool in addressing the need for assistance and support in the process, but also as a factor in teacher-learner interaction that might be worth of further research.

Keywords: *second language writing, communicative competence, the process approach, scaffolding.*

1. Introduction

Writing in a second/foreign language is an important component of successful communication in a modern, globalised world that increasingly relies on social contacts of various forms. It is expected that competent communication in a second language will include written forms, and this invites the work of educational institutions that provide courses in second languages through which this competence can be best achieved. Second language writing as a skill to be learned and improved appears to be more complex than the remaining language skills of speaking, reading and listening and this is for at least two reasons: the second language writer is not a native speaker of the target language and is, thus, at a disadvantage to start with; in addition, the composing of a written text is subject to different rules of purpose, form and context so that it must be taught as part of formal second language courses. The complexity and the potential difficulty that arise in tackling this specific facet of communicative competence are traditionally solved through instruction by teachers.

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[1] Centre for Foreign Languages, University of Zadar, Mihovila Pavlinovića 1, 23000 Zadar, The Republic of Croatia; e-mail: mostaric@unizd.hr

A competent teacher might be able to provide sufficient support in the process of writing so that the learner's ability is improved and gradually directed toward independence.

The text that follows attempts to describe some important characteristics of second language writing, its orientation to process and ways of assisting the learner of second language writing in the writing process to reach higher levels of ability.

2. Second language writing: its development and research findings

Second language writing is best defined as writing in a language that is not the writer's native language. It is universally accepted that this aspect of second language learning presents a significant challenge considering the fact that effective writing generally is a complex undertaking even for native speakers of a language (Hyland, 2003). Writing as one of the four language skills, together with listening, reading, and speaking, has become an important process skill in a modern world that increasingly relies on texts and printing. Furthermore, writing has always had an important place in the context of education, and it is most crucial for achieving a standard of competence in communication in scholarly environments. The place of second language writing in communicative competence has seldom been questioned although it can be said that its importance has gradually grown, and its position has become more firmly established as second language research and practice by scientists and teachers advanced worldwide. Starting with a premise that the language is studied so that it can be used, both written and oral forms of language constitute a person's ability to communicate and take part in social interaction (Savignon, 2018). As it frequently happens, the rising need in a population to communicate effectively in a second language invites educators and their institutions to provide teaching context and methodology through which this is possible.

2.1. Development of communicative competence and writing in second language

Writing as part of communicative competence in a second language has been a part of an eventful historical process that has resulted in the adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT) as a preferred approach in language teaching today. The early steps in institutionalised teaching of English as a foreign/second language can be traced to 1940s when the first materials were developed for international students in the U.S. (Savignon, 2018:1; Silva, 1994). The next big impetus in organised teaching of English in the United States was seen in the following decades as part of the country's political and military strategy while competing with the Soviet Union: the audio-lingual method became the preferred pedagogy based on memorization and drills to teach the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Developments in cognitive science and sociolinguistics around that period further reshaped and redirected the goals and path of second language learning with the introduction of concepts such as linguistic competence and communicative competence. It became obvious that language cannot be separated from the social context in which it is used, and this steered the development of methodology toward the concept of second language functionality. Lessons based on drilling dialogues gave poor results when learners had to use their knowledge in spontaneous interaction. Finally, as Europe witnessed a growing demand for standards in language use due to big numbers of immigrants and guest workers in 1970s, a

programme was adopted for European languages which described levels of language ability (Savignon, 2018:3). This was the advent of language for specific purposes (LSP). What this meant for second language pedagogy is that new, more comprehensive theories for both written and oral communication were adopted together with the idea of *meaning* as an important construct in both written and spoken communication (Savignon, 2018).

If we look at the history of developments in second language writing specifically, a similar succession of approaches is present that typically represent established pedagogical preferences of the periods in question. The earliest approach to second language writing relied heavily on structural linguistics and behaviourist psychology and was based on the oral method: writing itself was secondary, a service provided to other language skills. The writer basically manipulated the acquired language structures and units to produce a collection of sentences that the teacher edited with the exclusive focus on formal language elements (Silva, 1994). Also, writing in this period was rather controlled and guided: learners worked with short texts in a series of gap-filling and sentence completion exercises with the purpose of avoiding errors and being grammatically accurate (Hyland, 2003:4). However, soon it became obvious that writing had to be more than constructing grammatical sentences and a writing form was needed that rose above the sentence level. The paragraph, its elements and development became the next preference which further extended into essay writing with the focus on its structure (Silva, 1994:14). This also represents the aim of the so-called "functional approach" where students were taught communicative functions that are needed so that a certain writing goal can be achieved. Although a step forward when compared to the structural model, paragraphs, too, can be seen as units of syntax, very similar to the role of sentences in a text, so that writing becomes a composition that is equally structured (Introduction-Body-Conclusion) (Hyland, 2003). The next significant shift in conceptualising second language writing happened when the need for writer's expression and creation could no longer be denied. Linearity and prescriptivism gave way to learner's exploration of ideas and generation of meaning in what was to become known as the "process approach". From this perspective second language writing took place in a positive and encouraging environment with strategic help from the teacher for planning, drafting, and editing. Now, the writer becomes the centre of attention and he or she can concentrate on the content, not form, of writing, and is given enough time to produce as many drafts as needed (Silva, 1994). The fundamental concept in this approach is the awareness of the basic cognitive processes that make writing activities possible so that the planning-writing-reviewing model is not linear but interactive and sometimes even simultaneous (Hyland, 2003:11). Finally, the reader's contribution needed consideration too, so, out of this concern, the orientation to the genre of writing was born. An acceptable reader was a member of an academic institution and was well versed in actual writing tasks that students were required to complete. This orientation is best known as English for academic purposes (EAP) as it relies on the socio-cultural context and academic discourse that is acceptable in such community (Silva, 1994).

Today, teachers in second language writing classes tend to use perspectives and approaches that best fit a particular teaching situation so we can witness a diverse range of methodologies being used in tackling this complex language learning goal. However, teachers usually prefer one approach that they find most suitable for teaching their students

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how to write, and there is evidence that a significant number of education professionals today work along the guidelines of the process approach (Hyland, 2003:12). By avoiding focus on form and encouraging student reflection throughout, these teachers aim to guide their students through the process of writing by using intervention strategically and by providing response to writing.

3. The process of second language writing

The reasoning behind the idea that the words *writing* and *process* could be brought together may well have originated from the very nature of writing as an act of composing a text in a written form. A common sense understanding here is that the written text in question will not appear all of a sudden on its own, on paper or in digital form – it must be created by a writer and creation is usually understood as a process in itself. Furthermore, if we think strictly in terms of word definitions in bibliography of works that deal with writing instruction, we find that "writing, the writing process and composing are synonyms" (Susser, 1994:32) further confirming our suspicion that all these words might play an important part in tackling the complexity of any suitable pedagogy that might help with teaching second language learners how to write.

When thinking about writing as part of education curriculum in second language communicative competence a general idea is that the need for an approach, a new way of looking at something, is the first step toward conceptualizing suitable teaching methodologies. As opposed to second language writing methodologies that are product-oriented and perceive students writing through static criteria (Myles, 2002) and seem to be concerned with what happens after the writing took place, the process approach methodology is more concerned with what happens while the writing is taking place. Within the process approach to second language writing and especially regarding the process writing pedagogy there is active participation in the writing process on both the student's and the teacher's side and there are certain typical features and ideas that determine this specific teaching orientation.

A good place to start might be to say something about the main participants in the writing process, the student/writer, and the teacher/reader. As already mentioned, the process approach places the writer as creator of written texts at the centre of attention, but it also stresses the role of the teacher whose help is indispensable in completing this task (Hyland, 2003:10). Views and experiences on both sides need to be taken into account in a conscious effort to improve both teaching and learning of second language writing. Starting from the understanding of what exactly the process approach to second language writing is, Caudery (1995) reported on teachers distinctly differing views on the matter. Some teachers practise the process approach by allowing their students time to work on successive texts before they mark the final version. Others see not one but many different processes because some students need to revise extensively while others do well by just outlining. Finally, some teachers go as far as defining the process approach to writing as an opportunity to see development and change in students` work.

Also, teachers of second language writing have been concerned with slow, if any, progress that students make in writing which ultimately leads to preoccupation with the most

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suitable method and type of response to use. In one early account of these types of concerns, Barnett (1989) finds that teachers themselves have difficulties reconciling their expectations and concrete reactions to student writing. In reacting to students' writing, usually in form of either written comment or error correction, teachers seem to lack consistency in deciding between the unfortunate opposition - are comments intended to address the student text as a final product or as just one of successive drafts to be improved after the comment or correction has been acknowledged. Next, in a well-meaning attempt to correct everything teachers may expose students to task overload, and this usually occurs on multiple levels: students may feel unsure about what to say, how to say it, all while striving to use grammatically accurate language. This attention to both content and form at the same time and on the same piece of text can result with some claims for revision being pointless – if the structure of a student's paragraph needs to be changed, then new sentences, and new language errors, will appear in the new draft (Barnett, 1989:3).

On the other hand, students' experiences are also very important here. The type of response given to their writing, either comment or correction, has immediate impact on any future writing they do or intend to do. According to Hyland (2006), students generally appreciate teacher response to their writing, especially written feedback that addresses both their grammatical errors and ideas or content of their writing. However, if they are asked to produce a number of successive drafts the students seem to prefer comments on ideas in early versions, while grammar correction is most welcome in later drafts. Also, the students find indirect feedback most effective because it motivates them to become more active in their revisions, but also, they value the possibility of student-teacher conferences on their writing. Finally, it is interesting to notice that different students have different needs and expectations in terms of teacher response to their writing which is best solved in individual dialogues with them (Hyland, 2003:180). This implies that a possible and most suitable second language writing methodology should also consider the notion of a student as an individual with specific social and cognitive framework that plays an important part in a language production task such as writing or composing a text in a second language.

Lastly, and in terms of essential characteristics that define a pedagogy suitable for the process approach to writing, our attention turns to the concepts of awareness and intervention or response to writing (Susser, 1994; Hyland, 2003) that seem to be distinctive and rather typical of this approach. The elementary goal of the process approach to writing is to raise awareness in students that writing is essentially a way of discovering and generating ideas, instead of just writing down words as copying or transcribing (Susser, 1994:35). This implies that the act of writing can lead to creating something new instead of perceiving the composing process as simply having clear ideas in our minds poured into the right words (Barnard and Campbell, 2005), which is closer to product-based approaches to writing. Next, an essential element within the process orientation to second language writing is the possibility of teacher intervention into the writing process. By doing this, the teacher can "intervene at a point in the writing process that could do writers most good" (Flower & Hayes, 1981:55) and "at the point at which is […] most crucial" (Hyland, 2003:12) and in this way help the student to write. Furthermore, this type of teacher's involvement in student writing creates a relationship which is dynamic and allows more space for writers to express their thoughts (Susser,

1994:35) and move from one stage of writing to the other (Hyland, 2003:12). Ultimately and ideally, this ends with the students becoming more independent and more skilled in writing as they incorporate the effects of teacher intervention into their writing.

4. The concept of scaffolding in second language writing pedagogy

Considering the specific and rather complex nature of second language writing as part of communicative competence and while evaluating the requirements for a suitable pedagogy that could enable teachers to become more successful in helping second language learners to write well, we are invited to consider concepts and pedagogies that take into account interaction, intervention and development.

The concept of scaffolding has been frequently mentioned and has been widely studied in the past decades as it offers a comprehensive view of learning and teaching that implies the notion of support or assistance in the process. The scaffolding idea originated from the article by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) where the nature of tutoring is illustrated in an experiment showing an expert or adult assisting a child in completing a task which is beyond the child's current skill level. The term itself echoes the practical world of building and physical support for structures – the scaffolding is only needed while a new, emerging building is being erected and needs a temporary support. Once the building process is finished the scaffolding support can be removed.

A similar situation is found in pedagogy – a teacher, acting as a skilled tutor, helps a student become more proficient and more independent while mastering a task. Scaffolding is often mentioned in relation to the socio-cultural theory of L. S. Vygotsky (1978) which states that learning occurs in social interaction between people, which is of course typical of instructional situations. Vygotsky also referred to the space in which learning occurs as the Zone of proximal development (ZPD) – the distance between what a learner can achieve when unassisted and that which a learner can do with guidance from a tutor or more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978:86). This interaction is seen as a dynamic activity that results in learning through common understanding (Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2010:272) while the assistance provided to the learner should always depend on the learner's progress in the activity at hand (Panahi, Birjandi, & Azabdaftari, 2013). More precisely, according to Van de Pol, Volman, and Beishuizen (2010) there are three distinct characteristics of scaffolding: contingency, fading and transfer of responsibility. Contingency refers to the nature of support that is tailored and adjusted to the student's current skill level, fading is the gradual removal of scaffolding, while transfer of responsibility means that the learner gradually gains more control and independence over the task. This implies that scaffolding, as a form of teacher support and help in the process of second language writing, is provided as immediate response and in close collaboration with student's current skill level which is continuously diagnosed through interaction.

Scaffolding second language writing in everyday teaching practice is mostly done by providing some form of response or feedback to student's writing in an attempt to help students improve their writing skills. According to Panahi, Birjandi, and Azabdaftari (2013) provision of teacher feedback in second language writing is seen as a dynamic activity and a form of social interaction which responds to the student's current ability. In line with

Vygotsky's theory (1978) learning occurs and is mutually constructed in performance itself as part of social interaction and it therefore best shows the learner's potential and development. Consequently, the feedback that is given should always align with what a particular student can or cannot understand and use to improve their performance – weaker students might need more support than students who are more proficient. Scaffolded feedback is therefore understood as teacher response that can motivate the learner, that makes a task simple enough so that it can be achieved, gives some direction, reduces frustration, and provides a model of what is expected in the activity (Panahi, Birjandi, & Azabdaftari, 2013:6). All this is done so that the teacher manages to adapt the instruction process to further the development of the learner's competence.

A number of studies in the context of second language writing development have been conducted using the concept of scaffolding. For example, Schwieter (2010) investigated the development of second language writing over time and over several zones of proximal development for each participant in an authentic writing workshop. Here, scaffolding was done through peer editing followed by feedback with the intention to lift the learners to levels of performance where they show improvement compared to present ability. The results of this study report on linear writing development in learners' performance both within a task and across all four tasks in the semester. Next, in the study conducted by Cotterall and Cohen (2003) scaffolding was used to help learners write their first academic compositions in English. Several features were used to promote learners` independence in writing among which flexible assistance, writing about familiar topics and gradual instruction in stages, modelling of the writing process and feedback from both peers and tutors seem to have been the key to success. However, the authors of this study report the learners' excitement and engagement in the process and task of writing as the most positive and interesting finding. Finally, in the study conducted by Hasan and Rezaul Karim (2019) we see the impact of scaffolding on motivation of learners to acquire writing skills – the need for professional development of teachers who use scaffolding is suggested as an important factor in the teaching process.

5. Conclusion

Offering adequate support to learners in the process of second language writing appears to be an indispensable factor and a prerequisite for successful mastering of a rather demanding skill of writing. Because the learner of second language writing is also a learner of the second language itself, it seems that a lot of learning is done in the process of writing. Providing support in the form of scaffolding for second language writing might be a viable option for a number of reasons. First, it is a kind of support that is calibrated and gradual – because of its operating within the learner's ability zone it is likely that the assisted ability of today turns into unassisted competence of tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978). Second, provision of feedback to writing that is not beyond the learner's current understanding might be both demanding for teachers but also very useful for learners. Finally, the prospect and promise of development as part of scaffolding second language writing might hold most potential for struggling learners – a modest ability now could, in time, become a display of competence. It remains to be seen in future research but there is indication that scaffolding pedagogy has a lot of potential in both teaching and learning of second language writing.

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Sažetak

NAGLASAK NA PROCESU U INOJEZIČNOM PISANJU I VAŽNOST PRUŽANJA PODRŠKE

Ovaj rad opisuje prirodu orijentiranosti na proces kod inojezičnog pisanja i raspravlja o mogućnosti korištenja koncepta pružanja podrške prilikom ovladavanja jednim tako važnim komunikacijskim aspektom inog jezika. Opisuje se razvoj različitih pristupa učenju inog jezika u kontekstu komunikacijske kompetencije. Nadalje, opisan je procesni pristup inojezičnom pisanju i o njemu se raspravlja kao o korisnom pristupu imajući na umu složenost poučavanja inojezičnog pisanja. Naposljetku, koncept pružanja podrške je predstavljen kao pedagoški alat za pomoć i potporu tijekom spomenutog procesa ali također i kao faktor u interakciji između učitelja i učenika koji može biti vrijedan daljnjeg istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: *inojezično pisanje, komunikacijska kompetencija, procesni pristup, pružanje podrške.*