Book review
Writing and language learning: Advancing research agendas

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Introduction

Writing and language learning: Advancing research agendas is a collection of papers edited by Rosa M. Manchón that brings together a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives on writing as a site for language learning. As recently as a decade ago, the field of writing research was largely disconnected from that of second language acquisition; however, the last few years have witnessed a build-up of synergy between the two fields. Through 17 chapters, the contributing authors aspire to accomplish two primary goals: to consolidate past and current progress at the intersection of these two domains, and to foster future developments in writing and language learning research.

The introduction (Chapter 1) and the coda (Chapter 17), both written by the editor, establish the conceptual framing for fifteen contributed chapters that are divided into three thematic sections. Manchón did an excellent job not only at selecting and arranging the chapters for the volume, but also at providing this robust framing that guides the reader through the multifaceted landscape of theoretical and empirical inquiries at the intersection of writing and second language acquisition. Not surprisingly, many of the ideas presented in the book are grounded in Cumming's (1990) and Harklau's (2002) seminal works that emphasize how writing, due to its unique properties, can help learners consolidate their second language knowledge and skills differently than other domains (such as speaking or reading).

Thus, this volume primarily appeals to researchers interested in both second language acquisition and writing research, but it will also be of value for those who work primarily in one of these fields and seek to widen their scholarly horizons.

Contents

Part I, titled *Advances in theoretical perspectives*, consists of Chapters 2–5 in which multiple dimensions of the connection between writing and language learning are explored. First, the "global" perspective is presented in Chapter 2 through a review of four general theories of learning (behaviorist, cognitive, sociocultural, and complexity theories), in the context of which prior research is synthesized into a list of ten claims about second language (L2) learning that happens *through, by, for* or *with* writing. Chapter 3 proceeds to take the "writing perspective" by proposing a dual-process model of writing which is designed to consider writers' implicit knowledge in addition to the explicit problem-solving activity that is the typical focus of writing research. Chapter 4 embodies the "educational perspective" by identifying potential future research agendas for investigating the long-term development of L2 writing and language proficiency in educational contexts. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the "instructed second language acquisition" (ISLA) perspective by describing the curricular context of writing-to-learn. It reviews theoretical underpinnings for cognitive processes employed while addressing written corrective feedback (WCF), and it suggests future directions for curricular approaches to investigating the writing process and L2 development.

Part II, *Advances in empirical research*, comprises Chapters 6–13, each of which adopts a different approach to investigating the potential of learning through writing. Individual, educational, and task-related variables are considered in varied environments, conditions, and instructional settings. To begin, Chapters 6–8 address task-related features such as task repetition, task modality, and task complexity. Written and oral modalities are compared with regard to complexity, accuracy, and fluency measures as well as communicative adequacy. Chapters 9–11 investigate writing processes, including investigations of noticing of target forms, target form incorporation, perceptions of task-induced demands during writing, processing and strategic orientation during language-related episodes, and processing during collaborative writing. Finally, Chapters 12–13 focus on writing as a meaning-making activity, drawing from Systemic Functional Linguistics to frame grammar as a meaning-making resource.

Part III, *Advances in future research agendas*, consists of Chapters 14–16 in which the authors explore both ISLA-oriented research agendas (Chapter 14) and directions for writing and grammar/vocabulary learning (Chapters 15 and 16). Chapter 14 synthesizes past work on writing processes and proposes future

directions for a process-oriented and ISLA-oriented agenda in L2 writing research. Chapter 15 reviews how vocabulary acquisition has been studied in previous research and addressed in writing instruction. It ultimately calls for future work to investigate vocabulary development at the word level rather than the text level, while also closely linking writing tasks to the curriculum and focusing learning goals on word knowledge and fluency. Similarly, Chapter 16 outlines recommendations for future research corresponding to research questions in the area of grammatical development.

The book concludes with a coda chapter by Manchón which brings together the main ideas and perspectives of this book by situating them within the "global framework" laid out Chapter 2. A strong argument is made on how the book contributes to the dimensions of task modality, complexity, and repetition; process-oriented studies; collaborative and individual writing; noticing of target forms; meaning-making; longitudinal development; and directions for future research agendas.

Final remarks

As a whole, this book offers a comprehensive and engaging overview of the intersection between writing research and second language studies, while contributing meaningfully to both the empirical and the theoretical literature within the two fields. Manchón grounds the entire book in previous research effectively in the first and final chapters and adopts a clear organizational structure to allow readers to smoothly progress through the chapters' unique takes on the connection between writing and language learning.

One particular strength of this book is the way in which it makes a cohesive and persuasive argument for the need to consolidate and advance research in this direction. Immediately in Chapter 1, Manchón points out that writing and reading were previously overlooked for language learning purposes in applied linguistics research, but she aims to bring together recent advancements in this area from the past decade and to point to directions in which future research could continue. Building from seminal works in the field such as Cumming (1990), Harklau (2002), and Manchón and Roca de Larios (2007), the book then provides a multitude of theories and methodological approaches to support the interface between second language acquisition and second language writing. Importantly, the book also addresses the concern put forth by Cumming in Chapter 2 that, although theories and various perspectives have pointed to ways to relate L2 writing to L2 learning, causality has not been proven. The empirical studies in this book directly address this lacuna in a multitude of ways.

This volume also stands out due to the breadth and quality of its methodological approaches. Part II boasts qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies; within- and between-group analyses; direct interventions and a corpus analysis; and short-term and longitudinal observations. Each chapter

provides detailed explanations of and justifications for their distinct methodological choices, with only a few exceptions that will be noted below. For example, the empirical study in Chapter 7 asked participants to identify and write their errors in a table, attempt to explain the reason for their errors, and then participate in 30-minute tutorials to discuss how to solve problems with the teacher. This procedure directly addresses a problem previously identified in Chapter 6: namely, that WCF studies rarely provide insight into whether or how students actually process their feedback. Many chapters provide clear explanations of the methods used for data collection and analysis, and Chapter 8 clearly discusses statistical assumptions, setting a good example for aspiring and novice researchers in the field.

Despite the overwhelming strength of the contributing authors' methodological approaches, there are, as always, some limitations, many of which are noted by the authors themselves. Several chapters could have been strengthened by incorporating larger sample sizes that might have allowed for more robust statistical analyses. Chapter 6, for example, includes only six to eight participants in each treatment group; Chapter 13 relies on data from 16 total participants; and Chapter 10 describes differences between three proficiency levels of L2 learners, basing all claims solely on think-aloud protocols from a small number of participants in only one task. As the authors of this latter chapter acknowledge, the study also would have benefitted from incorporating and triangulating more advanced methods such as eye tracking, keystroke logging, and screen capture in addition to think-aloud protocols.

This type of data triangulation is adopted successfully in Chapter 11, in which text mining, interaction analyses, eye tracking, and stimulated recall data are analyzed in parallel. However, one limitation of this chapter is that written products are not analyzed for quality, which prevents the authors from determining how the observed patterns of contribution, engagement, and learning actually influenced students' written products. A valuable next step for this type of research might be to analyze the quality of students' writing to determine how it may be impacted by different collaborative processes.

Finally, we can note several instances throughout the empirical studies in which the reported methodology could have been clearer to facilitate replicability. In Chapter 8, for example, it is unclear how the reliability of communicative adequacy was assessed; it is simply stated that each instance of output was scored by two raters. Similarly, Chapter 12 describes a survey administered to participants that included words like "more cohesive" and "more coherent," but it is unclear to what extent these terms were defined or explained for participants. In the absence of such explanations, participants' perceptions of cohesive and coherent writing may differ, potentially impacting the interpretations of the findings.

Despite these limitations, *Writing and language learning: Advancing research agendas* positions itself as a valuable contribution to the areas of second language acquisition and writing studies. The book effectively synthesizes past work, presents cutting-edge research on task-related issues, writing conditions, writing processes, and written corrective feedback for language learning purposes, and offers myriad implications for future research agendas in the field. Any researcher wishing to further investigate the intersection between writing and language learning would benefit from a close examination of this book and its proposed research agendas.

References

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