Articles

Studies of Second-Language Writing in Canada: Three Generations[1]

Alister Cumming

Canada's social and educational policies have always involved immigrant settlement and English/French bilingualism. Research on writing in second languages emerged in the 1980s from graduate programs of education and applied linguistics at major universities in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver, particularly done by scholars investigating cognitive and learning processes and rhetorical characteristics of writing in English as a mother tongue. In the 1990s, several Canadian scholars established systematic programs of research focused on L2 composing processes, writing for academic purposes, assessment, and innovative educational programs—spawning, in turn, in the 2000s a third generation of L2 writing researchers who have now established themselves across Canada and around the world.

Les politiques sociales et éducatives du Canada ont toujours impliqué l'accueil d'immigrants et le bilinguisme anglais-français. La recherche sur l'écriture en langue seconde (L2) a émergé dans les années 1980 dans le cadre de programmes de cycles supérieurs en éducation et en linguistique appliquée dans de grandes universités à Toronto, Montréal, Ottawa et Vancouver, et plus particulièrement dans les travaux de chercheurs qui étudiaient les processus cognitifs et d'apprentissage ainsi que les caractéristiques rhétoriques de l'écriture en anglais langue maternelle. Dans les années 1990, plusieurs chercheurs canadiens ont mis en place des programmes de recherche systématiques axés sur les processus de composition et sur l'écriture académique, l'évaluation et les programmes éducatifs novateurs en L2, donnant naissance, dans

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[1] Editors' note: This article originally appeared in 2016 in the collection edited by Tony Silva and Joshua M. Paiz, *L2 Writing in the Global Context: Represented, Underrepresented, and Unrepresented Voices* (《全球视野下的二语写作研究：已知与待知》), published by Foreign Language Research & Teaching Press (FLTRP) in Beijing. FLTRP generally does not distribute its books outside of China, and this paper has been difficult to access for many. It should be noted that due to its provenance, Cumming's timeline of L2 writing research in Canada advanced in this article does not touch on developments since approximately 2014.

VOLUME 40, ISSUE 1, 2023 pp. 1–9
https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v40i1/1382

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les années 2000, à une troisième génération de chercheurs en écriture en L2 qui se sont maintenant établis partout au Canada et autour du monde.

Keywords: Canada, L2 writing, writing research

Canadians often joke with Americans that most of the best and funniest comedians in movies and television in the United States are really Canadians. Examples include actors such as Martin Short, Andrea Martin, John Candy, Catherine O'Hara, and Eugene Levy, who all started their careers in Canada in the 1970s on a comedy program called Second City Television. In China, too, there is the famous comedian, Dashan, who similarly grew up and resides in Ontario as Mark Rowswell. Admittedly, researchers of second language (L2) writing in Canada do not tend to be particularly funny, but like their comedian counterparts, they have been exceptionally well represented, illustrious, and influential internationally. The reputations of the few hundred or so people who have researched L2 writing in Canada certainly exceed expectations proportional to the size of Canada's population (currently just over 35 million people).

Education in Canada has always involved immigrant settlement, policies of English/French bilingualism, and cities with cultural and linguistic diversity (Burnaby, 1997; Cumming, 1997). These three issues have been prominent in the earliest (e.g., Anderson, 1918) to the most recent (e.g., Vaillancourt et al., 2012) analyses of educational policies and practices in Canada. Indeed, Canada was formed as a nation in 1867 on the premises of, and its government policies continue to emphasize, two official languages (English and French, with equal status federally since 1969 but varying status in each of the 10 provinces and three territories) and continuing immigration, initially from Europe mostly but in recent decades increasingly from Asia and diverse other parts of the world. Census data indicate that English or French are the mother tongues of, respectively, 57% or 21% of the Canadian population, and the 6.5 million people with mother tongues other than English or French (who are not Indigenous peoples) have settled in or around just a few of the largest cities: Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Given these societal, policy, and historical factors, analyses of language education, learning, and policies have long featured in Canadian scholarship, research, and curricula in schools as well as in higher and non-formal education. This focus has been most evident in research and graduate programs at the larger universities in the major Canadian cities where most recent immigrants have settled and been educated. A focus specifically on writing in second languages, however, developed only over the past few decades. The remainder of this article describes this development, observing foundations established by scholars of educational psychology, rhetoric, and applied linguistics in the 1980s, the emergence of a second generation of researchers in the 1980s and 1990s focused specifically on L2 writing, and then the establishment of a third generation of L2 writing researchers in the 2000s at universities across Canada and around the world. The article closes by describing six trends and concepts prominent in studies of L2 writing in Canada in recent years.

Foundations in the 1980s

Research on writing emerged and flourished across all English-dominant countries in the 1980s as cognitive psychologists put forward new models to explain the processes of composing and its development (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1984), educators articulated inspiring principles for teaching composition (e.g., Graves, 1983), and scholars surveyed educational practices internationally (e.g., Gorman et al., 1988) and synthesized the available research (e.g., Hillocks, 1986). Numerous researchers at universities across

Canada participated actively in the movement to analyze, explain, and improve the learning and teaching of writing. Their studies of, ideas about, and graduate-level courses on writing in English as a first language (L1) established the intellectual foundations and research orientations for a subsequent generation of scholars to focus later on parallel studies of L2 writing.

A vibrant strand of research about English L1 writing in Canada emerged from the field of applied cognitive science in the 1980s. Theories and the extensive program of research by Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, are still commonly cited as models of inquiry and explanations of the psychological dimensions of writing processes and development (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Other researchers active in cognitive science and studies of English L1 literacy at OISE included David Olson (e.g., 1994), Suzanne Hidi, and Val Anderson (e.g., Hidi & Anderson,1986). Related programs of research based on cognitive science, but focused on a comprehensive scheme for discourse analysis, were developed in the 1980s at McGill University in Montreal by Carl Frederiksen and Janet Donin (e.g., Frederiksen et al., 1992) as well as Robert Bracewell (e.g., Bracewell & Witte, 2003). The ideas and approaches to research instantiated by these scholars and their counterparts in the United States and Europe are well represented in the journal *Cognition and Instruction*, now in its 31st year of publication.

Inquiry about English L1 writing from scholars of rhetoric and applied linguistics emerged around the same time at McGill University and at Carleton University in nearby Ottawa. Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle conducted linguistic analyses of students' compositions to study their writing development (e.g., Freedman & Pringle, 1980b) and edited several influential collections of articles from conferences (e.g., Freedman & Pringle, 1980a). Freedman later analyzed writing development through genre and activity theories, working in parallel to studies of workplace writing in English by Patrick Dias and Anthony Paré at McGill University (e.g., Dias et al., 1999). Their and others' research in the 1980s was promoted through the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (which later added the term *Language Arts* to its name), particularly by its journal, *English Quarterly*.

In Vancouver, Bernie Mohan promoted Halliday's theories of systemic-functional linguistics as a basis for analyzing students' writing development and organizing teachers' curricula for language programs (e.g., Mohan, 1986). Other applied linguists who studied English L1 writing at the University of British Columbia included Marion Crowhurst (e.g., 1983) and Joe Belanger (e.g., Yau & Belanger, 1984). Gordon Wells, at OISE in Toronto from the early 1980s, also adopted theories of systemic-functional linguistics (e.g., Wells, 1980) but reoriented his subsequent research toward elaborating Vygotskian sociocultural theories to explain and foster English L1 writing development (e.g., Wells, 1999).

Studies of L2 Writing in the 1980s and 1990s

These English L1 writing researchers soon spawned, through their teaching as university professors and thesis supervisions, a subsequent generation of students and colleagues who applied their foundational theoretical orientations and research methods to illuminate the multiple complexities and processes of L2 writing development. That so many of these English L1 writing researchers worked and published in pairs (e.g., Bereiter and Scardamalia, Frederiksen and Donin, Freedman and Pringle, Mohan and Early) makes me think of them fondly as "grandparents" for the next generation of L2 writing researchers. The intellectual foundations for studies of L2 writing were also created in Canada by the many scholars whose research focused on second language acquisition and bilingualism in the 1980s. Notably, Jim Cummins's (1984) interdependence hypothesis provided a principled basis for investigating how complex cognitive abilities and orientations associated with literacy transfer across first and second languages. Numerous large-scale projects, following from educational reforms to promote the learning and teaching of both official languages (e.g., Lambert & Tucker, 1972), were examining the development of bilingual proficiency

from comprehensive perspectives while elaborating theories of communicative competence to include both spoken and written language abilities (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980; Harley et al., 1990). Several journals provided national forums for such research while also attracting international attention, including the *Canadian Modern Language Review*, established almost 70 years ago; the *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, established in 1998 (but preceded by the *Bulletin of the CAAL* from 1978 to 1991 and then appearing as the *Journal of the CAAL* from 1992 to 1997); and the newer *TESL Canada Journal*, established in 1984.

This confluence of factors prompted Canadians to produce some of the first systematic studies of L2 writing. Certain researchers applied methods, established by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), of process-tracing through think-aloud protocols or video-recordings of text inscription to document and analyze unique characteristics of L2 composing processes (e.g., Cumming, 1989; Jones & Tetroe, 1987). Others employed text analyses and interviews to reveal educational and developmental factors that challenged the then-dominant premises of contrastive rhetoric (e.g., Mohan & Lo, 1985; Yau & Belanger, 1984). An initial focus on psychological issues and task analyses in the 1980s shifted to socio-cognitive perspectives during the 1990s, involving naturalistic, multi-method, longitudinal studies of L2 writing in real educational or workplace settings rather than in experimental or laboratory conditions. Notable in this regard, among the publications about L2 writing that proliferated in the 1990s, were analyses illuminating factors in the development of L2 writing abilities in schools (Early, 1992), pre-university ESL programs (Cumming, 1992), or settlement programs (Cumming & Gill, 1991) in Vancouver; universities in Ottawa (Currie, 1993) or Toronto (Riazi, 1997; Shi, 1998), and workplaces in Montreal (Parks & Maguire, 1999). A focus of inquiry that seems almost uniquely (but not exclusively) Canadian has been analyses of bilinguals' switching strategically between their two languages to make decisions, particularly to select words or phrases, while they compose. Interest in this phenomenon may be related to the relatively large populations in Canada of either English/French bilinguals (e.g., Cumming, 1990, 2013) or English/Chinese bilinguals (e.g., Qi, 1998; Wang, 2003). Whereas the publications cited above, and much of the research on L2 writing familiar to readers of English, have focused on the learning and teaching of English, a continuing, parallel body of inquiry in Canada has focused on the writing of French as a second language in schools and higher education. Much of this inquiry has focused on analyses of students' development of language features in their written texts (e.g., Bournot-Trites, 2007; Lapkin & Swain, 2000; Le Bouthillier & Dicks, 2013) along with studies of writing processes (Hall, 1993) and of innovative computer software for writing development (Hamel, 2005).

A Third Generation of L2 Writing Researchers in the 2000s

In the 2000s, students of the initial generation of Canadian L2 writing researchers established themselves in positions at universities, each developing unique programs of inquiry into L2 writing as well as distinguished international reputations for their research and teaching. Most have been immigrants to Canada themselves, and so they capitalized on their multilingual, multicultural abilities and perspectives. Most studied in the large PhD programs at the University of Toronto, McGill University, or the University of British Columbia (UBC). At UBC, Ling Shi, originally from China, has conducted a programmatic series of studies into textual borrowing in L2 writing (Shi, 2004, 2010). Ryuko Kubota recently joined Ling Shi as a colleague in Vancouver after many years in the United States following from her PhD in Toronto in the 1990s, from which she developed ideas about a critical contrastive rhetoric (Kubota, 1997; Kubota & Lehner, 2004). At Carleton University, Guilliame Gentil, originally from France, is notable for his research into individuals' development of biliteracy and their relations to larger issues of language and educational policies (Gentil, 2005, 2011). At the University of Ottawa, Jérémie Séror has researched the socially constructed nature of academic literacy and multiliteracies education (Séror, 2009, 2011). At York

University, Khaled Barkaoui, originally from Tunisia, has established a specialized expertise in the assessment of L2 writing (Barkaoui, 2010a, 2010b). His colleague at York University, Brian Morgan, focuses his research on critical community-based ESL writing (Morgan 1998, 2002), following a path of combining the teaching and studying of L2 writing with other interests in language learning and teaching established by numerous predecessors in a previous generation at York University such as Nick Elson, Neil Naiman, and David Mendelsohn. At Concordia University in Montreal, Heiki Neumann is establishing a program of research on teachers' attention to grammatical issues in L2 writing (Neumann, 2014).

Numerous others have, after completing doctoral studies in Canada, gone on to establish programs of research on L2 writing in other parts of the world. Notable among these scholars are Kyoko Baba at Kinjo College in Nagoya, Japan (Baba, 2009); Mari Haneda, now at Pennsylvania State University after several years at Florida State University and Ohio State University in the United States (Haneda, 2004); Mark James at Arizona State University (James, 2009); Mehdi Riazi, now at Macquarie University in Australia after many years at Shiraz University in Iran (Riazi, 1997); Manami Suzuki at Dokkyo University, Japan (M. Suzuki, 2008); Jennifer Shade Wilson at Rice University (Wilson, 2013); Luxin Yang at Beijing Foreign Studies University, China (Yang, 2010); and Ally Zhou at Oklahoma City University (Zhou et al., 2014). Various other educators have resided and taught in Canada for a time before establishing careers focused on L2 writing elsewhere, such as Icy Lee, now at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (e.g., Lee, 1998).

Trends in L2 Writing Research in Canada in the 2010s

Research on L2 writing is firmly established and now even thriving in Canada. Several trends currently prominent are certain to propel this inquiry well into the 2010s and beyond. Merrill Swain has articulated theories of "languaging" from her initial formulations about "comprehensible output" (e.g., Swain, 2010), and many of her students are applying these concepts in innovative ways to studies of L2 writing (e.g., W. Suzuki, 2012). Other researchers have likewise adopted Vygotskian socio-cultural theories of learning to investigate adolescent students' and teachers' development of zones of proximal development focused on writing abilities over a full year of schooling (Cumming, 2012; Parks et al., 2005). Addressing young students with multilingual literacies, Jim Cummins, Margaret Early, and many collaborating teachers have developed the practice of students writing and reading about "identity texts" as a means to assert, share, and discuss their unique biliterate abilities and cultural heritages in culturally diverse schools in Toronto and Vancouver (Cummins & Early, 2011) as well as Calgary (Naqvi et al., 2013).

Systematic syntheses of prior research on specific aspects of L2 writing are another current trend among Canadian scholars, for example, evaluating and providing new insights into longstanding as well as innovative educational practices such as literacy tutoring (Jun et al., 2010) and concordancing tools for L2 writing (Yoon, 2011) (and, I suppose, including the review of issues in the present article, too). Also notable are recent examples of design-based research, which try out and refine, through iterative cycles and formative evaluations with real students and teachers, such pedagogical innovations as individual diagnostic profiles of language abilities (Jang et al., 2015) and personalized approaches to computer referencing tools (Yoon, 2013). Equally promising for the improvement of pedagogical practices have been the organization and analyses of learning communities among groups of teachers focused on writing among, for example, teachers of French as a second language (Kristmanson et al., 2009) and of multiliteracies in English in culturally diverse schools (Simon, 2013).

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