

Dealing with Teaching Academic Writing in English in Japanese Higher Education From an Approach for Autobiographical Narrative

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Introduction

Autobiographical narratives have gained popularity as a research tool among researchers and scholars. In the area of second language (L2) education and applied linguistics, much work has been done using this narrative approach, indicating the importance of examining the writer's as well as the learner's inner feelings, processes, practices, experiences, and identities in-depth (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Blanton, Kroll, Cumming, Erickson, Johns, Leki, Reid, & Silva, 2002; Casanave & Vandrick, 2003; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Nunan & Choi, 2010). For instance, Belcher and Connor (2001) present accounts of literacy (reading and writing) development by multilingual scholars in which their vivid descriptions of literacy development in multiple languages reveal the way the writers negotiated their identities within their sociocultural contexts. Moreover, Blanton et al. (2002) and Johnson and Golombek (2002) provide teachers' actual episodes of their teaching in diverse contexts in narrative as a way to revisit teachers' beliefs, values, and philosophies and to strengthen their teaching expertise. Johnson and Golombek (2002) indicate that employing real stories contributes to bringing "new meaning and significance to the work of teachers within their own professional landscapes" (p. 3).

However, studies of describing the experiences of language learning as well as teaching focus more on learners and teachers themselves (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Fox, 1994). It seems that there is a lack of statements to consider an application of their reflective accounts into promoting some teaching implications for language classes. It is necessary to review the current teaching in the class underlying the writer's own experiences.

In this paper, I emphasize my own experiences of academic writing in English during my graduate years in the M.A. (Master of Arts) and doctoral program in the U.S. The purpose of this study is to look back on my experiences of academic writing in English in a different cultural context and to offer some suggestions for the teaching of

writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings.

This paper begins with a brief review of the literature on autobiographical narratives, then goes to illustrate my personal scenes of academic writing in English while I was taking classes in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs, and to show the contrast of my perspectives on academic writing during my M.A. and doctoral years. Finally, I propose several implications for teaching English academic writing in Japanese higher education.

1. Review of the Literature

Autobiographical narratives have become one of the plausible ways in qualitative methods to deepen understanding of human experiences in applied linguistics and L2 acquisition (Bailey, 1983; Pavlenko, 2007; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2001; Stake, 2010). To unpack one's multiple realities, experiences, and senses, autobiographical narratives encourage researchers to explore the phenomenon by giving thick descriptions of one's insider view as perceived through his/her contextual as well as personal framework. Thus, autobiographies in narrative serve as a ground for promoting epistemological research in various disciplinary fields, as Pavlenko (2007) argues that autobiographical narratives "offer insights into people's private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide the insider's view of the processes of language learning, attrition, and use" (p. 164-165).

In L2 acquisition scholarship, some studies employed an autobiographical narrative to conduct the language learning processes. For instance, Bailey (1983) utilized a diary approach to examine what factors had an effect on L2 learners' learning process. Then, using narratives received favorable recognition among scholars in L2 studies. For a decade or so, many studies have been done with an autobiographical stance, illustrating learners' experiences of linguistic as well as literacy in multimodal languages (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Braine, 1999; Fox, 1994), teaching in diverse settings (Blanton et al. 2002; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Nunan & Choi, 2010), and professional writing among researchers (Casanave & Vandrick, 2003). To elucidate the actual experiences and journeys of language learning and teaching shown by learners, teachers, and even researchers, the use of autobiographical writing plays a significant role of providing a window on metalanguage awareness (Belcher & Connor, 2001) and of heightening awareness of teacher identity (Park, 2011).

2. Approaching This Present Study

In this study, I employed an autobiographical narrative approach. I tried to reflect

on my own experiences of academic writing in English at a graduate school in the United States when I started to pursue the degree of Master of Arts (TESOL) in 1999-2001, and while I was taking classes in the doctoral program in 2010-2011. Specifically, in the narratives, I emphasized my insider's view of writing in English: processes, practices, difficulties, and tensions of writing in English during my M.A. years. Besides, I tried to describe the differences of academic writing between the M.A. and Ph.D. years.

3. Academic Writing in English in the U.S.

3-1. Experiences of Professional Writing in English: The M.A. Years

Academic writing was a formidable challenge when I was an M.A. graduate student in the United States. Since I had no experience and practice of academic writing in English in my college years in Japan, research papers could not be achieved in an effortless way. I spent immense amounts of time on reading references, mapping ideas, making drafts, and editing papers. Looking back on my academic writing in English in my M.A. graduate years, I mimicked academic written discourse patterns first and attempted to negotiate various English academic written discourse patterns compared to those of Japanese through reading the resources.

I had a lot of work to write academic papers such as journal entries, response papers, and research papers. Every time I received some conventional views from professors and tutors in the writing center: "This sentence is not clear," "This part is awkward," or "This part is incoherent." Sometimes, professors made trenchant points about terms of my writing, indicating an absence of English writing styles and rhetorical manners. Even though I tried to carefully express myself in order to have a specific and clear picture of a topic, the feedback that represented the weakness of my written discourse was frustrating for me. I was relieved when I eliminated the problems of writing; however, I had nothing left except to accept the comments made by teachers and tutors when I had no idea what to do.

Reexamining my academic writing in the first graduate year, I just followed the objective or the traditional writing structures in English. I had no recourse except to cover the English rhetorical modes because I had a strong idea that "academic writing requires the "scientific styles" such as using the third person singular rather than the first person, "I," and avoiding the passive form. Furthermore, when I read several English research articles written by Japanese professors or researchers in Japanese professional journals, all of the papers utilized the conventional ways of academic writing in English. Thus, I believed that adhering to the traditional and rhetorical

structures of writing was a prudent way to survive in the academic community.

However, I was confronted with the complexities as well as clashes of identity while I was writing my M.A. thesis (Fujieda, 2010). I became confused in how to emphasize my thesis in the initial stage. Then, my thesis advisor suggested that I should produce my literacy autobiography in Japanese and English as a critical language approach. In fact, in 2001 when I was writing my thesis, some autobiographical articles were published in journals and books. Especially, Belcher and Connor (2001) timely provided an autobiographical resource, *Reflections on Multiliterate Lives*, illustrating various episodes of learning literacy in multiple languages by distinguished scholars. It was quite interesting and impressive to have a great deal of empathy for difficulties in developing other languages as well as to negotiate their identities. During my reading of Belcher and Connor's book, sometimes I could not hide my shock at the "behind the scenes" struggling with the literacy development by big-name persons. Even though it was insightful to explore my biliteracy stories with a critical eye, I felt somehow uncomfortable performing my autobiographical writing as an M.A. thesis. As an autobiographical or a narrative account is subjective, it seemed to be undesirable to write up my stories of biliteracy as a professional language study.

To tell the truth, I had a strong bias towards academic research papers; they require the objective data measured in numbers to prove authenticity of the study. We should objectify the results obtained from the data sources maintaining statistics in quantitative methods. When I read many research articles published in the professional communities of English education in Japan, almost all of them employed the statistical analyses using surveys, the questionnaires, and generation of a hypothesis: quantitative methods. I felt that I should cite statistics in order to produce and publish professional research papers in academia. That is why there was a great deal of hesitance to demonstrate my personal accounts in an autobiographical approach in my M.A. thesis, whether or not my thesis was scholastic, and my ability for writing was proficient enough to complete the academic work.

However, my thesis advisor pushed me to explore my own literacy experiences in Japanese and English critically as an emerging topic of L2 writing. I jotted down various words on a notebook looking back on my past literacy events inside as well as outside the classroom. It seems easy to illustrate personal accounts in autobiographical writing, but it was difficult for me to describe.

After completing my M.A. thesis, I had ambiguous feelings about my thesis even though it was quite successful to achieve the goal of finishing the big written production. However, I became confident that autobiographical writing is a significant approach for

teaching writing and provides a critical impact on L2 writing and education. I found several impressive professional references of narrative or autobiographical writing during as well as after writing my thesis (e.g., Casavane & Vandrick, 2003). Such scholastic resources offered an incentive for a critical analysis of teaching and language learning as well.

3-2. Academic Writing in the Ph.D. program

In the fall of 2010, I entered the Ph.D. graduate program, Composition and TESOL, in the English Department of a state university in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. I had a great opportunity to take a sabbatical for one year, so it was so valuable for me to strengthen my expertise of teaching English.

During the coursework in the program, I had lots of writing tasks including a comprehensive portfolio exam called “qualifying portfolio”. Even though I wrote some articles in my college, I felt a little uneasy; whether or not I could manifest my aptitude for academic writing in English because I spent more time on writing with drafting, revising, and editing. Such painstaking work reminded me of my M.A. student years. However, I realized the differences of academic writing during the Ph.D. coursework, compared to writing while I was an M.A. student.

When I was an M.A. graduate student, I really gave much attention to following the academic written discourse in English, but I was only secondarily concerned with the conventional ways of academic writing in English during my coursework in the doctoral program. It is probably because the concept of multiple discourses made by multilingual learners has spread to the TESOL community in my Ph.D. program. Yet, unfortunately, little progress has been made in rhetorical diversity according to Belcher’s (2009) analysis of major journals in the past ten years. The problem is that rigid conventions of writing are still expected when one wants to publish. Professional academics have coped with the high-stakes academic writing styles with their non-traditional discourse approaches. Despite the enormous endurance for demonstrating diverse rhetorical patterns, diversity of discourse has been improved rather than largely accepted as Belcher indicates. Thus, discourses composed by non-native English speakers have not yet gained ground in many disciplinary fields. But, discourse patterns which L2 learners establish have attracted controversy in composition studies in English-speaking countries, especially the U.S (Horner, Lu, & Matsuda, 2010; Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Matsuda, 2006). As multicultural learners interact with English speakers, they demonstrate diverse English usage. Such multiplicity of discourses necessitates greater learner awareness that extends beyond the

widely recognized dominant English discourse patterns.

Of course, a certain level of the style of academic written discourse in English has been maintained, but not all professors compelled us to strictly follow the rigid rhetorical structures of English. I felt relieved to express myself while I was working on my writing tasks, even if there were some parts of my papers, which were influenced by my culture.

Moreover, my identity did not often clash with the expectations of written discourse. I attempted to exclude my identity as a Japanese writer or an English learner of Japanese as an M.A. student. As mentioned above, my writing was always corrected to comply with the way of academic writing in English, especially when I was an M.A. graduate learner. In addition, I had a warped view of professional writing in English: more scientific as well as objective in a statistical method. Such a “one-sided” idea suppressed my identity to immerse myself in the specific discourse community. As there is an old saying, “When in Rome do as the Romans do,” I managed to abide by the prescribed structure of writing in English. Thus, I tried to build up a new identity as a disciplinary learner with the abandonment of my cultural identity. However, I felt that I comparatively maintained my host cultural identity, keeping my positionality as a specialized Japanese learner of English while I was doing my coursework in the doctoral program. Due to the spreading of the concept of multimodal discourses (see Canagarajah, 2006), discussions on academic discourses have remained. In a similar vein, the concept of academic discourse has undergone a significant variation because many English language learners (ELLs) achieve the status of their use of English or Englishes as diversities and uniqueness of English in the current globalized society.

Implications for Teaching English Writing in Japanese Higher Education

Looking back on my experiences of academic writing in English in both my M.A. and Ph.D. programs, I am convinced that the processes, practices, and difficulties of writing in a different language have encouraged me to promote a better understanding of negotiating academic discourses between my native language and English as well as to shed light on the questions of teaching English writing in EFL (English as a foreign language) settings as a graduate learner, an EFL college teacher, and a researcher. In this section, I discuss two points of implications for teaching writing in English in EFL contexts.

The first point is EFL writing comprises various contextual factors, not solely due to linguistic issues (Leki, 2001; Reichelt, 2001, 2011). Leki (2001) points out several problems related to the teaching of writing in EFL settings: local policies of instruction,

class sizes, deficiency of teaching EFL writing, and a lack of students' practice of writing in their native language. Thus, as Reichelt (2011) cites, "[I]n every context, linguistic, historical, political, economic, and educational factors exert their influences on the daily realities of teaching L2 writing" (p. 17-18). Besides, the degree of demand for writing in EFL situations is limited, compared to that of writing in ESL (English as a second language) settings. From the educational perspectives, instruction of EFL writing itself is not necessary to develop teaching skills of writing among teachers (Lee, 2010, 2011). Even though there are some limitations of teaching EFL writing, the teachers of EFL writing should give proper guidance according to the teaching environments they have. If teachers want to emphasize the accuracy of writing, they can try to incorporate grammar instruction into making some texts or paragraphs, avoiding the focus on a few single sentences. If teachers would like to apply a wide variety of writing genres, they should set up the specific purpose of writing and goal to achieve, having students complete the work of the genre. If teachers try to apply the theory of L2 writing into practice, they need to consider and implement some effective strategies for writing. In this case, teacher's beliefs make a strong contribution to teaching in the EFL writing classroom. EFL writing teachers should realize that L2 writing including foreign language writing needs to be understood inclusively rather than exclusively. They should promote approaches for writing with a broader scope in order to bridge L2 writing theory to EFL writing, given the fact that EFL writing possesses contextual uniqueness.

Another issue is that writing teachers in EFL settings need to sharpen their recognition of multimodal discourses that students show as a value (see Canagarajah, 2006). The discourses that ELLs demonstrate have a powerful presence in their situated learning context. However, as the traditional rhetorical conventions of discourse patterns have been dominant, discourses produced by ELLs are devalued. Thus, writing teachers in EFL contexts should encourage diverse writing styles of students because these unique writing structures promote the creation of new knowledge development (Casanave, 2010). Furthermore, the teaching of writing in EFL needs to fulfill the expectations of learners. As Matsuda and Matsuda (2010) suggest, if learners prefer to understand the dominant forms of English writing, teachers prepare for the references which set a target for following the conventional structures of writing. Moreover, teachers have to evaluate learners' diversities of language use in writing rather than regard them as errors in order to enhance the legitimacy of diversification of written English.

Breaking into the traditional or conventional written discourse is challenging for

writers of ELLs because most resources for writing require learners to clarify writing as well as facilitate the proficiency of writing (Leki, 2001; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010). As improving academic writing skills are inextricably associated with proficiency in the dominant discourse, most learners are confronted with challenges of their discourses (Kapp & Bangeni, 2009). In fact, when ELLs need to make written products, they have managed the academic discourses clashing with students' host discourses. In a study by Kapp and Bangeni, (2009), ESL learners both accepted and hesitated to absorb the disciplinary discourses. The research findings also reveal that ESL writers go through the process of writing in an academic field, managing their identities as they attempt to negotiate their home discourse values.

Incorporating multiple discourses into classrooms is a critical approach for teaching writing for writing teachers in EFL. However, these issues contribute greatly to raising further awareness of how to deal with learners' writing structures as multicultural discourses.

Coda

Teaching writing in English in EFL contexts has been in the midst of the transformation, even though writing instruction in EFL classrooms includes political and ideological aspects (Cimasko & Reichelt, 2011). Thinking about my case of writing instruction, the teaching of English writing in Japanese higher education needs to reinvent various approaches for teaching writing to suit present social as well as educational circumstances. In Japanese English education, communicative language teaching is still a mainstream method of teaching English, especially in secondary school (junior high and senior high school). Although writing is also a communication tool, it seems to be marginalized as an unnecessary skill for communication or a bottleneck which prevents learners from developing their oral proficiencies (Fujieda, 2012). In addition, writing class is virtually a grammar class, answering the grammar questions for entrance exams and emphasizing an understanding of grammatical structures in secondary school. Such concepts of writing in English education widen the gap of teaching writing between the level of secondary school and higher education. Bridging the gap of writing instruction between the two levels is significant to spark discussions on approaches for writing.

I would like to say that we English language teachers in EFL settings need to provide students with more chances to write English freely to raise awareness of multiple discourses as uniqueness rather than mistakes (see Canagarajah, 2006). Writing skills serve as the backbone for communicative knowledge. Finally, writing teachers

should raise their voices to reaffirm the matters in question in their teaching environment, share similar and different problems, and to cultivate their expertise. The actual voices of learners as well as teachers, using autobiographies, journals, or diaries, are the potential of narratives as a research tool to generate valuable insights into teaching in specific contexts.

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要旨

高等教育における学術的英語ライティング指導を考える

自叙伝的アプローチの視点から

藤枝 豊

本研究は自叙伝的アプローチを用いて、筆者自身の学術的英語ライティング経験を振り返り、高等教育における学術的英語ライティングの教育的示唆を与えることを目的としている。自叙伝的アプローチを用いた研究は、応用言語学、第二言語習得論、そして第二言語教育において主流となりつつある。学習者の言語学習過程や経験、または教師自身の教育経験の内側を垣間みるために、ナラティブ（語り）を用いた研究が行われている。

しかしながら、こうした学習者や教師の語りを実際の教育指導にどう活かすべきかという議論はほとんどない。特に筆者（書き手）の実際の経験から、現状の言語教育指導をどう改善すべきかなどの教育的示唆を与える研究も皆無である。

本研究は、筆者自身の米国大学人時代に経験した学術的ライティングを振り返り、日本高等教育における学術的英語ライティングの教育的示唆を与える。また、EFL環境（英語を外国語とする教育環境）における学術的英語ライティングは、書き手が作り出す談話を「多重談話」として尊重し、指導することの必要性を示している。