

LANGUAGE SWITCHING AMONG MALAY UNDERGRADUATES IN AN  
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Teaching English as a Second Language)

Faculty of Education  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

NOVEMBER 2014

**To my beloved husband Mohd. Nasir Harun**

**To my much-loved children Muhammad Adam Izzuddin and Nur Sarah  
Nabilah**

**To my dear friend, Dr. Tina Abdullah**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank Allah Almighty for giving me the strength and patience to complete this study.

Secondly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my two supervisors, Associate Professor Dr. Wan Fara Adlina Wan Mansor and Professor Dr. Masputeriah Hamzah for their valuable guidance and assistance throughout the completion of this work. Their valuable comments and suggestions as well as words of encouragement are deeply appreciated.

I also would like to thank Professor Marilyn Martin-Jones for her feedbacks and comments at the early stage of my writing.

A note of appreciation is also due to my friends and colleagues, especially to Associate Professor Dr. Masdinah Alauyah Mohd Yusof for believing that I can finish this. A very special thanks goes to my dear friend Dr Tina Abdullah for her countless helps during the last phase of my writing.

I am also indebted to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia for granting me the study leave and the Ministry of Higher Education for funding my PhD study.

Many thanks also go to the respondents who spent a considerable amount of time participating in this study.

Lastly, many thanks to my husband Mohd. Nasir, my children Adam and Sarah for their endless love, support and encouragement.

## ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the influence of language switching on the second language writing performance of Malay engineering undergraduates. Specifically, this research addresses the use of Bahasa Melayu by these undergraduates while undertaking an English writing task and the function of Bahasa Melayu in the completion of the English writing task. This research also seeks to find out the undergraduates' perceptions on the use of Bahasa Melayu in writing English compositions. This research is of mixed-method: utilizing questionnaire for quantitative method and interview, observation and text analysis for the qualitative part. The respondents of this study were 620 Malay engineering undergraduates selected through simple random sampling. Twenty-four (out of 620) undergraduates were selected using purposive sampling for the qualitative study and they represented different levels of proficiency based on the respondents' Malaysia University English Test (MUET) scores. Research findings revealed that majority of the participants in this study agrees that they use Bahasa Melayu as they were completing the writing task in English. This research showed that Bahasa Melayu was used to serve different purposes at different stages of the writing process. Three most significant functions of Bahasa Melayu identified were: 1) generating ideas in Bahasa Melayu and later translate them into English; 2) looking up in the bilingual dictionary for the appropriate English words to use; and 3) making notes (e.g. mind maps) in Bahasa Melayu and later translate them into English. Bahasa Melayu was used extensively during the pre-writing stage compared to the other stages of writing, followed by the writing stage and the post-writing stage. Bahasa Melayu was also utilized to serve these purposes: 1) to enable them to think of what to write; 2) to clarify ideas; and 3) to enable them to find suitable English words to be used when writing. Majority of the undergraduates agree that Bahasa Melayu has helped them in producing quality written texts in English. This research indicates that using Bahasa Melayu significantly contributes to producing good and quality essays. Based on these findings, a framework for the teaching of writing to Malay students was developed.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memfokus kepada pengaruh pertukaran bahasa ke atas kemahiran menulis dalam bahasa kedua dalam kalangan pelajar Melayu ijazah pertama bidang kejuruteraan. Khususnya, kajian ini mengetengahkan penggunaan Bahasa Melayu oleh pelajar-pelajar terbabit semasa menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris dan fungsi Bahasa Melayu dalam persiapan tugas penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti persepsi pelajar mengenai penggunaan Bahasa Melayu dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah gabungan: penggunaan soal selidik untuk mengutip data kuantitatif, dan temubual, pengamatan dan analisa teks untuk mengumpul data kualitatif. Responden bagi kajian ini ialah 620 pelajar Melayu ijazah pertama bidang kejuruteraan yang dipilih menggunakan kaedah persampelan rawak mudah. 24 orang (daripada 620) dipilih menggunakan persampelan bertujuan untuk mengumpul data kualitatif dan mereka mewakili tahap kemahiran Bahasa Inggeris yang berbeza berdasarkan markah Malaysia University English Test (MUET). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan majoriti responden dalam kajian ini bersetuju bahawa mereka menggunakan Bahasa Melayu semasa menyiapkan tugas penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini mendapati Bahasa Melayu telah digunakan untuk pelbagai tujuan pada tahap-tahap berlainan dalam proses penulisan Bahasa Inggeris. Tiga fungsi Bahasa Melayu yang paling penting dikenal pasti ialah: 1) menjana idea dalam Bahasa Melayu dan kemudian diterjemahkan ke dalam Bahasa Inggeris; 2) menggunakan kamus dwi-bahasa untuk mencari perkataan Bahasa Inggeris yang sesuai; dan 3) membuat nota ( seperti peta minda) dalam Bahasa Melayu dan kemudian diterjemahkan ke dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Bahasa Melayu juga digunakan secara meluas pada peringkat pra-penulisan berbanding peringkat yang lain, diikuti dengan peringkat penulisan dan peringkat selepas penulisan. Bahasa Melayu digunakan untuk tujuan-tujuan berikut: 1) memikirkan apa yang perlu ditulis, 2) menjelaskan idea, dan 3) mencari perkataan Bahasa Inggeris yang sesuai semasa menulis. Majoriti pelajar juga bersetuju akan penggunaan Bahasa Melayu membantu mereka menulis teks Bahasa Inggeris yang berkualiti. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan penggunaan Bahasa Melayu menyumbang secara signifikan ke arah penulisan Bahasa Inggeris yang bagus dan berkualiti. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, satu rangka kerja pengajaran penulisan untuk pelajar-pelajar Melayu telah dicadangkan.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ESL	-	English as a Second Language
L1	-	Bahasa Melayu
L2	-	English
SPM	-	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
MUET	-	Malaysian University English Test
TESL	-	Teaching of English as a Second Language
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

The development of writing skills has received considerable attention from English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioners especially when it is found that second language (L2) writing skills are different from first language (L1) writing skills. One distinctive difference is that almost all L2 writers are blessed with the capability of acquiring more than one language, their native language or first language (L1) as well as a second language, more often than not, the English language.

As teachers, we must realize that for those engaged in learning to write in a second language, the complexity of mastering writing skills is compounded both by the difficulties inherent in learning a second language and by the way in which the first language literacy skills may transfer to or detract from the acquisition of second language skills (Kroll, 1990:2). Therefore, by acknowledging this fact, we are thus recognizing the role of L1 in L2 writing.

In relation to the above, Hyland (2003) stated that while the impact of the first language on second language ability will obviously vary, it is a crucial feature distinguishing L1 and L2 writing. And for those engaged in the teaching of second language writing, an understanding of the theoretical issues related to first and second language writing would definitely help in the process of teaching L2 writing. As highlighted by Silva (1990) viable approaches to the teaching of ESL composition need to be based on a broader, more comprehensive conception of what L2 writing involves.

In addition, research into the composing process has revealed that there is not much difference between L1 and L2 writers where the composing process is concerned, in that L1 and L2 writers use the same strategies while composing. Zamel (1985) found that experienced L2 writers, regardless of their linguistic proficiency, use composing processes similar to that of experienced L1 writers. This shows that where composing is concerned, L1 and L2 writers are not as different as they were once thought to be.

This new development has prompted the idea that L2 writing classes need to become less focused on language and more on composing (Leki, 1996:27). It is undeniable that language is important but it should not be regarded as the only factor that determines composing competence. ESL students should be exposed to the composing skills from the beginning and not after the students have acquired the appropriate linguistic forms. The form and the composing process should be taught concurrently in such a way that form should not be dealt with in isolation but in meaningful contexts, so that the students can associate the link between linguistic form and meaning making.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Writing in a second language (L2) is a challenging process (Wolfersberger, 2003:1). He continues to explain that this is because while the first language (L1) writing process includes producing content, drafting ideas, revising writing, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and editing texts, writing in L2 involves all of these elements combined with second language processing issues. In addition to that, L2 writers are also faced with other challenges that can affect their composing competence. Factors such as linguistic competence, cognitive ability as well as social aspects also need to be addressed by ESL practitioners in order to understand L2 writing better. Because of the constraints imposed by limited second-language knowledge, writing in a second language may be hampered because of the need to focus on language rather than content (Weigle, 2002: 35).

It is true that language form does play an important role in L2 writing but it should not be the only element that needs attention. Writing in a second language classroom should not be impeded by putting too much focus on the language. As such, a shift in paradigm is needed so as to address other important elements that underlie L2 writing such as background knowledge, writing strategies, writing processes, the role of L1, and others.

The role of writing processes in L2 writing, for example, needs to be addressed since the focus on L2 writing research is no longer on the written products but more on the processes involved in producing the written products. Zamel (1982) mentioned that rather than investigating what students write, teachers and researchers are beginning to study the composing process itself. In short, the focus of the writing process is on how a text is produced rather than the text itself. Therefore, this study also tries to integrate process-oriented research with product-oriented research to determine, among other things, if the writing processes have some kind of influence on the written products. Much research on writing processes have yet to embrace this process-product relationship and determine how these two approaches can benefit one another, especially in promoting pedagogical outcomes such as fostering writing competence among ESL learners.



In relation to the role of L1 in language learning, the research literature in language switching is vast. Most research has focused on language switching (or code switching) in spoken language, that is, face-to-face interaction. The key contributors to this area of knowledge-building have been sociolinguists (e.g. Gumperz, 1982; Aver, 1984, 1995; and Galaranga, 2005). However, the sociolinguistic research literature in language switching in writing is relatively slim, with the notable exception of Sebba (2000) and Sebba (2012). The main contributors to research in language switching in writing has come from those engaged in research in second language writing, on the writing strategies of individuals and on the cognitive processes involved in language tasks.

With reference to the role of L1 in L2 writing, numerous studies have revealed that L2 learners use their L1 and L2 interactively for various strategic purposes while composing in L2 (Wang, 2003; Friedlander, 1990; Qi, 1998; Uzawa, 1996; Boshier, 1998; Kubota 1998; Woodall, 2000, 2002; and Wang, 2003). This means to say that L2 writers, either “skilled” or “unskilled”, switch back and forth between their L1 and L2 in order to work through a particular problem that they are struggling with while composing in the L2 (Wang, 2003: 348).

Thus, it can be inferred here that L1 does play a significant role where L2 writing is concerned; that is L2 writers do interactively switch from L1 to L2 and vice-versa when writing in L2. And, without a doubt, this language-switching is a salient feature in L2 writing. In order to recognize the importance of language switching in L2 writing, it is thus imperative for us to understand the phenomenon of language switching.

According to Qi (1998), language switching is the act of switching from L2 to L1 as the language of thinking by a bilingual person engaged in an L2 composing task. Wang (2003) defines language switching as mental operations that went from L2 to L1 as cognitive processes of problem-solving and decision-making while writers were engaging in their L2 writing.

In relation to the above, a research conducted by Qi (1998) implies that language-switching in addition to the use of L2 makes it possible for a thought to be

developed cross-linguistically without slowing down the pace of thinking. In other words, language-switching enables an initiated thought to continue to develop and helps generate content which the participant sometimes feels less competent to produce when she/he uses L1 only (Qi, 1998:428). Similarly, Cumming (1990) in Wang and Wen (2002) found that student writers use their L1 to search and to assess appropriate wordings, to compare cross-linguistic equivalents, and, sometimes, to reason about linguistic choices in the L2.

So, there appears to be some evidence that L2 learners continuously use their L1 for various purposes while writing in L2. L2 learners have more than one language at their disposal and they actively use them. They may use both L1 and L2 for cognitive operations when they are composing in the L2 (Wang and Wen, 2002:225). This is further supported by Qi (1998) who argues that language switching as a cognitive behaviour is frequently found in the mental activities of almost all bilingual people engaged in an L2 task.

However, traditional ESL teachers have emphasized the need for ESL writers to think and write as completely as possible in English (Friedlander, 1990:109). The belief is that if ESL writers do any of their work in their first language, this will inhibit acquisition of the second language (L2). Furthermore, it is argued that it will also interfere with the generation of L2 structures, due to transfer of structures and vocabulary from their first language in an incorrect way (Friedlander, 1990:109).

Nevertheless, the view adapted in this thesis is that restricting L2 learners from using their L1 while composing is not appropriate. This pedagogic approach contradicts earlier findings of the research cited earlier which emphasize the importance of L1 in helping L2 learners become better L2 writers. Hence, this study is trying to highlight the fact that these students know of what to write content-wise but somewhat struggling with their L2 proficiency. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed where ESL teachers and practitioners should be enlightened on the significant role that L1 plays in L2 writing. In view of this, this research was undertaken to determine whether language-switching has a potential role where L2 composing among Malay bilingual writers is concerned. Ultimately, this research aims to find ways to help ESL writers become better writers.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is found that much of L2 writing research has been strongly influenced by research in L1 writing (Sasaki 2000). Therefore, there should be studies conducted in the area of L2 writing especially on the use of L1 in L2 writing of Malay writers writing in an academic setting. Studies on composing processes conducted by researchers such as Perl (1979), Pianko (1979), Zamel (1982, 1983), and Wolfersberger (2003) were mainly on L1 composing processes in a native English speaking environment (L1). Studies on writing among non-native speakers of English conducted by Boshier (1998), Wang (2003), Friedlander (1990), Qi (1998), Woodall (2000, 2002), Uzawa (1996), Wang and Wen (2002) and Kubota (1998), were also administered in an L1 setting. Furthermore, all these research did not include participants whose first language is Bahasa Melayu; the group of ESL learners that this study is addressing.

Furthermore, second language writing research focusing on language-switching is very much needed so as to help teachers and students gain a better understanding of whether or not language-switching in the course of L2 composing should be encouraged, and, if so, in what specific situations (Qi, 1998:416). This is further supported by Wang and Wen (2002) who claim that one important difference between L1 and L2 writing processes is that L2 writers have more than one language at their disposal; that is, they may use both L1 and L2 for cognitive operations when they are composing in the L2.

In relation to the above, language-switching as a cognitive behaviour is frequently found in the mental activities of almost all bilinguals engaged in an L2 task (Qi, 1998:415). Therefore, for the purpose of teaching and learning of an L2, it is thus useful to carry out more studies that investigate this matter further. This is important so as to determine how L1 can actually assist L2 learners to become competent L2 users, especially where L2 writing is concerned.

Nevertheless, according to them, this difference has received limited attention from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers, resulting in little understanding of the unique features of L2 writing and a lack of a coherent, comprehensive L2 writing theory. This research is therefore undertaken in an effort to address this issue by providing evidence of the role of language-switching in second language writing, in particular among Malay L2 writers.

Apart from that, L2 writing researchers should not rely on the research findings of their L1 counterparts in order to address the issues related to composing competence of L2 learners. Krapels (1990) commented that the first language writing process research has informed second language research, but L2 researchers must be careful not to let L1 studies guide and determine their investigations of second language writing process because the research contexts are not the same. The same view is shared by others such as Silva (1993) and Myles (2003). Silva (1993) suggested that ESL writing practitioners need to have a clear understanding of the unique nature of L2 writing, which, obviously, is different from L1 writing. In addition to that, Myles (2003) commented that much of the research on L2 writing has been closely dependent on L1 research. As such, a research on composing processes of L2 learners in a L2 environment is very much needed.

In relation to that, ESL writers are usually more fluent in their native language (L1) while struggling somewhat to achieve varying degrees of success when writing in L2. This could be due to the fact that apart from having problems with the generation of ideas and thoughts during the composing phase, these writers are also having problems with their command of the second language (L2). Numerous researches on second language writing have been carried out to seek answers to queries related to developing writing competence among ESL writers. Among the issues being addressed is the role that L1 plays in the L2 composing process so as to find out specifically how knowledge of L1 influences L2 writing competence.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this research are:

1. to determine if Malay university students with different levels of English proficiency switch to Bahasa Melayu (L1) when writing in English.
2. to ascertain how and when do Malay university students use L1 when writing English compositions.
3. to establish what functions does the language switching serve.
4. to find out in what ways do the students see the use of L1 as helpful in carrying out a writing task in English.
5. to propose a framework for the teaching of writing to the Malay engineering students

### **1.5 Research Questions**

Building on the above objectives, the main questions that this research attempts to answer are:

1. To what extent do Malay university students with different levels of English language proficiency switch to Bahasa Melayu (L1) when writing in English?
2. How and when do Malay university students use L1 when writing English compositions?
3. What functions does the use of L1 serve?
4. In what ways do the students perceive the use of L1 as helpful in carrying out a writing task in English?
5. What would be an appropriate framework to be used for the teaching of writing to Malay engineering students?

The answers to the above questions will provide important insights especially in determining the role of L1 in L2 writing in a Malaysian higher education context in an effort to promote ESL writing competence.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

As indicated earlier, not much work has been done on the role of L1 in the composing in a Malaysian higher education context. In this study, the focus is on a sample of undergraduates enrolled in engineering classes of a public university in Malaysia and on their use of Bahasa Melayu while undertaking a writing task in English. All students in this sample are bilingual in Bahasa Melayu and English. However, this is a context where the use of English is restricted to classroom learning.

In particular, a study on the conditions in which L2 learners switch language as well as on the reasons why they language-switch will be useful both to teachers as well as the learners themselves. It is believed that research of this nature will help teachers and students gain a better understanding of whether or not language-switching in the course of L2 composing should be encouraged, and, if so, in what specific situation or circumstance (Qi, 1998:416). To sum up, Qi (1998) clearly argues that it is important to inquire into the issue of the role of L1 in an L2 composing task since the use of L1 seems to be a natural and frequent cognitive behaviour in a bilingual mind engaging in an L2 task.

It is also noted that language switching is a subject that is largely ignored by related studies on L2 writing. Nevertheless, this field is undoubtedly of fundamental importance to the field of bilingualism as a whole (Qi, 1998: 432). Based on findings of his study, Qi (1998) feels that further inquiry into the factors that influence language switching will likely be a promising area of research. This is because such

investigations could have extensive implications not only for the field of bilingual studies but for the cognitive sciences in general (Qi, 1998: 432). Based on these arguments and rationales, it is timely that a study to investigate this matter further should be undertaken.

In addition, previous research on language-switching and L2 writing has been conducted with other L1 users (i.e. Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese) and as far as I am aware, none has been done on Malay users thus far. Studies with other language groups have significantly highlighted how the use of L1 during the composing process can actually help L2 learners become better L2 writers. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to conduct a study on language-switching during the composing process among bilingual Malay student writers so as to investigate the specific influence of language-switching on L2 writing. This is imperative so as to gain better insights into the understanding of L2 writing processes among the Malay student writers.

To the very best of my knowledge, much of the previous research on language-switching among L2 learners has been conducted with L2 learners in a native English speaking environment. For these learners, the use of English is not restricted to the classroom but it is also widely used beyond the classroom. This is very different from the experience of Malay L2 learners in a second language environment where the use of English is very much restricted to classroom learning. A study such as this which is conducted in a non-native environment is much needed to provide a better understanding of the relationship between language-switching and L2 writing in a university setting where students have little exposure in English outside class. Furthermore, a study of this nature would provide different outcomes than those conducted in a native English speaking environment. The outcomes would be much more relevant in addressing issues pertaining to improving L2 writing competence.

This study also aims at charting out alternative approaches to the teaching of writing, especially to ESL learners. The approach is based on the assumption that sound L1 can eventually lead to L2 writing competence. Students should thus be encouraged to rely upon their L1 when encountering problems with their L2 writing

especially during the composing process. The idea is that this will minimize L2 composing challenges such as idea generation, lexical meaning verification and cross-linguistic thought development. If composing processes proceed smoothly, this in turn can contribute to quality L2 writing. Therefore, our students should not be prevented from using their L1 altogether when attempting writing tasks in L2. Instead, they should be exposed to the proper techniques for using their L1 to promote L2 writing performance.

Concurrently, findings from this study would provide valuable insights for language practitioners and enable them to actually reflect on their present teaching approaches and techniques where the teaching of L2 writing is concerned. Teachers of L2 writing would need to acknowledge their learners' cognitive abilities and language switching practices during the composing process and match these capabilities with their teaching. By doing this, they would be actually matching their students' innate capabilities with their teaching methodologies and techniques to maximize the students' L2 writing competence.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

This study focuses mainly on the use of Bahasa Melayu by ESL Malay engineering undergraduates while undertaking a writing task in English. Engineering undergraduates are the focus of this study simply because majority of the students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia are from the engineering faculties. Specifically, this study emphasizes on the language switching (L1 to L2 and vice-versa) utilized by these students while completing an L2 written task. The written task here means academic essays written by these students as part of their classroom activities during the process of L2 teaching and learning. Basically, the focus is to identify ways in which these undergraduates draw upon their bilingual resources in undertaking a written work in English. In addition to that, the emphasis of this research is on the



writing processes that these Malay engineering undergraduates have to go through in order to produce the essays required of them.

## **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

The discussion on the theoretical framework concerns the theories of both L1 and L2 writing that will ultimately shape the framework of this research. A great deal of the empirical research on second language (L2) writing has taken the position that the process of writing in one's native language (L1) is largely the same as that of writing in the L2 (Woodall, 2000:1). In addition, the general purpose of L2 writing has been viewed as the same as writing in one's mother tongue: regardless of the language medium, writers still generate ideas related to a given topic, organize those ideas according to some plan, translate those ideas into words, sentences, and paragraphs, and revise and/or edit the text according to the plan.

Nevertheless, it is unjustified to claim that there are no differences between writing in L1 and writing in L2. Woodall (2000) claims that if there is to be a theory of a second language writing, it will have to be based on the differences between L1 and L2 writing. This is due to the fact that, unlike L1 writers, L2 writers have two or more languages at their disposal. This unique feature will somehow interact interchangeably especially during the writing process. This is especially true when, according to Woodall (2000), second language writers sometimes switch languages during the writing process, something the monolingual writer does not do.

Language switching in L2 writing could then be defined as any use of the first language during the L2 writing process (Woodall, 2000: 2). Cumming (1990), cited in Woodall (2000) claims that the language switching of the L2 writer, unlike the bilingual speaker, is usually done privately to compensate for difficulties encountered in using the second language. In addition to that, Qi (1998) argues that language switching as a cognitive behaviour is frequently found in the mental

activities of almost all bilingual people engaged in an L2 task. Therefore, it is prudent to take into account this distinctive feature that is salient in almost all L2 writers when discussion on L2 writing is concerned.

In addition to that, any discussion of L2 students' writing needs must first take into account the wide diversity among L2 learners as distinct groups with their own uses of, and needs for, writing (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 23). The diversity of these learners has led to a more complex L2 writing theory and practice. Issues such as language proficiency, social as well as cultural influence as well as the effects of the learners' L1 have contributed significantly towards the understanding of the nature of L2 writing. Significantly, in a much recent publication, Grabe (2001) puts forward six supporting theories that will influence the construct of writing and they are:

1. A theory of language
2. A theory of conceptual knowledge
3. A theory of language processing (writing processes)
4. A theory of motivation and affective variables
5. A theory of social context influences
6. A theory of learning

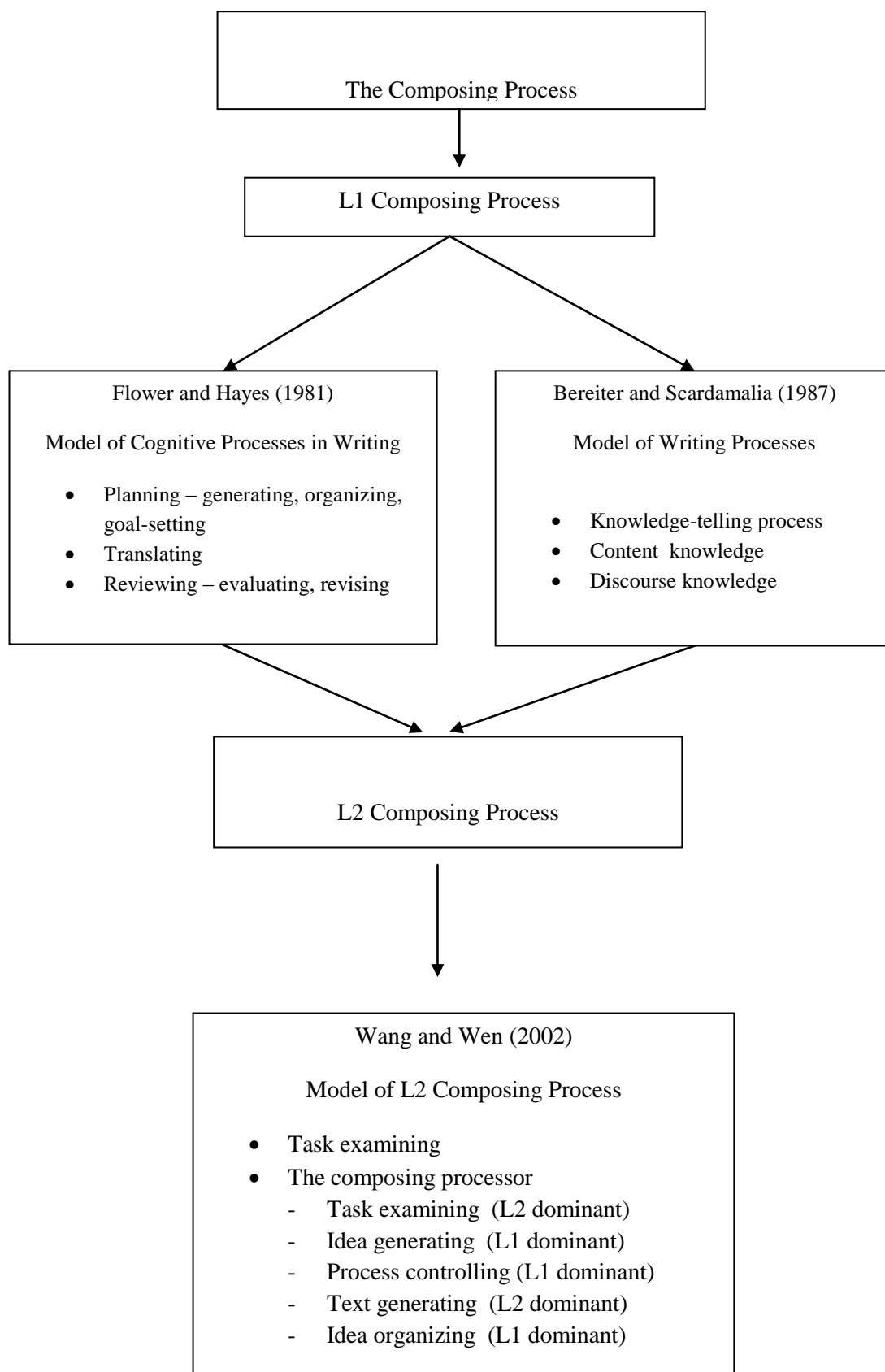
(Grabe, 2001:42)

Clearly, language processing or writing processes is seen as an important construct when discussion on theories of L2 writing is concerned.

With reference to research in second language writing, it is noted that applied linguistics has been the academic discipline giving most attention to the writing needs and problems of students (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996: 27). Specifically, according to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), applied linguists have drawn on the work of cognitive psychologists and linguists on the one hand to study the organization of discourse and text construction processes, and on the work of sociolinguists and ethnomethodologists on the other to study the social context in which learners learn to write.

In addition to theories of L1 and L2 writing, this research is also shaped by the models that emerged in the field of writing processes. Two prominent models of writing processes namely Flower and Hayes (1981) model of cognitive processes in writing (cited in Swarts et. al, 1984) and Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) model of writing processes (cited in Grabe and Kaplan, 1996:117) have formed the theoretical foundation to this research.

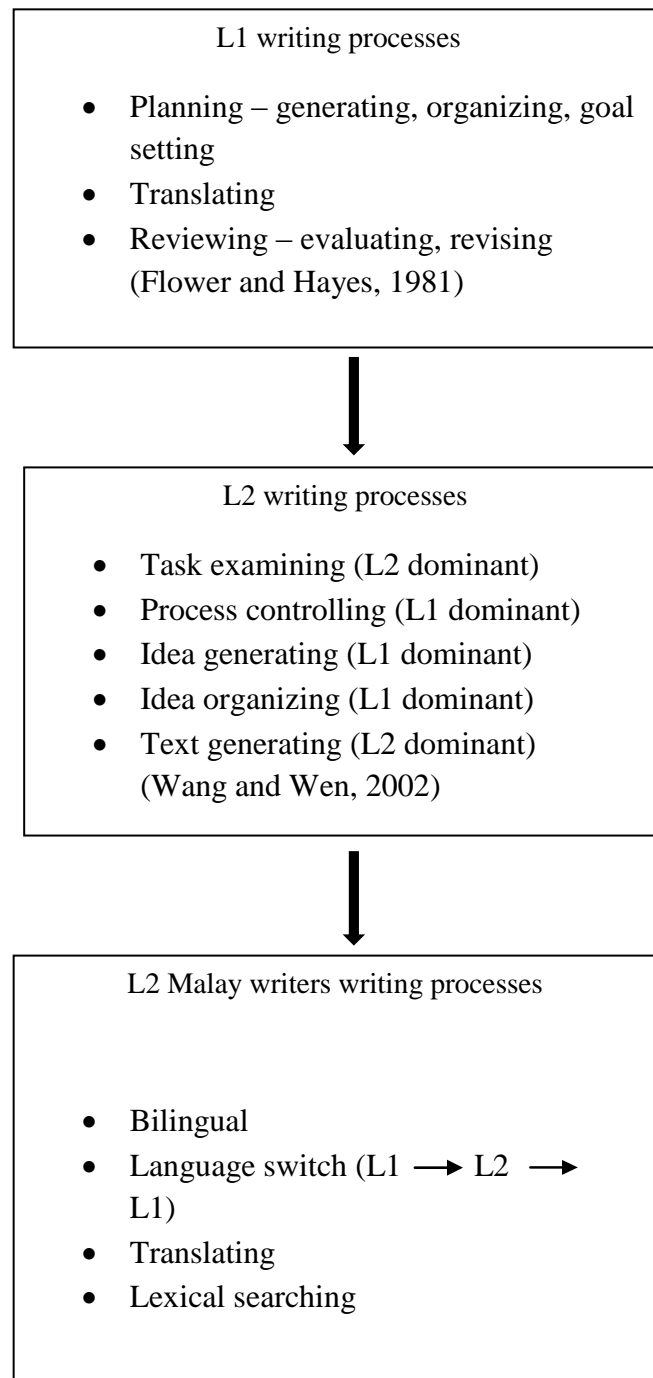
These two models have been influential in both L1 and L2 writing research and have some way form a foundation for the development of L2 writing models. One such model is that of Wang and Wen (2002). This model specifically acknowledges the importance of cross-linguistic influence in writing especially those of L2 writers. We have established thus far the fact that L2 writers will eventually switch back to their L1 and vice-versa during the writing process. This concern needs to be addressed as it has become a central issue in L2 writing research; the issue that this present research is trying to address. With this in mind, the following diagram will best illustrate the theoretical framework of this study.



**Figure 1.1 : Theoretical Framework**

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework of this study in an attempt to highlight the relationship of the related concepts underlying this study, as indicated in the following diagram.



**Figure 1.2 : Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework designed for this study is derived from the theoretical framework discussed in the previous section. Significantly, this conceptual framework seeks to find the relationships between the different concepts under investigation as well as to be clear of the outcomes to be expected at the end of the study.

The first key concept underlying the framework is derived from the understanding of L1 writing processes as put forward by Flower and Hays (1981). L1 writing processes explain the different key processes involved in the completion of a writing task, such as planning (generating, organizing and goal setting), translating and reviewing (evaluating and revising).

Nevertheless, the above key concepts fail to address one crucial concept, which is the role of language in the writing processes. On the other hand, it is expected since the key concepts mentioned here are mainly formulated to explain the writing processes of L1 writers where language proficiency is not an issue for them. The different processes mentioned significantly forms the initial conceptual framework of this study.

The discussion on the conceptual framework continues with L2 writing processes. The discussion centers mainly on the concepts of L2 writing processes as developed by Wang and Wen (2002). The writing processes are similar to L1 writing processes except for the inclusion of the language dominantly used (either L1 or L2) at the different levels of the writing processes. This conforms to the fact that L1 and L2 are used interchangeably by most L2 writers. This significantly indicates that L1 is used considerably at three different levels, which are process controlling, idea generating as well as idea organizing. Meanwhile, task examining and text generating are best executed using L2. This concept further supports the fact that both languages (L1 and L2) are of equal importance to second language writers.

Consequently, based on the understanding of the interchangeability of L1 and L2 for L2 processes, an almost parallel concept was developed for Malay L2 writers. Few additional substantial characteristics of Malay writers can thus

be added, such as bilinguals, with majority of them being dominant bilinguals. Dominant bilingual is a person who is more proficient in one language compared with the other language. Closely related to the notion of bilingual is the concept of language switch. Language switching is an act of switching from L1 to L2 and vice versa, as and when the need arises. In other words, the decision to language switch depends on the appropriateness of it, in relation to the writing task at hand. Hence, the different writing processes described by Wang and Wen (2002) are very much related to the concept of language switching in the sense that the L2 writers do switch from L1 to L2 and vice versa.

Another characteristic unique of second language users, the Malays included, is translating. As stated earlier, idea generating and idea organizing are done mainly using L1. Therefore, in order to reach the text generating phase, which is done mainly in L2, the ideas generated and organized earlier in L1 need to be translated into L2 so that the output of the writing task will be entirely in L2. Hence, translation is another concept worth investigating in the study of L2 Malay writers. It is interesting to see the product of ideas initially thought in L1 being translated into L2 at the text generating phase.

In relation to translating, another concept worth mentioning is lexical searching. Lexical searching can take the form of examining and exploring possible English words to replace words initially thought in L1. Lexical searching can be a unique writing process as the Malay L2 writers try to negotiate equivalent L2 words to replace L1 words to form a complete text that should entirely be in L2. Therefore, translating and lexical searching are very much inter-related in this context.

In short, the discussion on the conceptual framework of this study centered around two central views; the L1 writing processes as well as the L2 writing processes. These then formed a basis for the study of Malay L2 writers, with some additional characteristics exclusive of L2 Malay writers.

## **1.9 Definition of terms**

There are several terms used in this study. The definition of the terms discussed here is based on the context as used in this study.

### **1.9.1 Language switching**

Language switching is the act of switching from L2 to L1 as the language of thinking by a bilingual person engaged in an L2 composing task (Qi, 1998). In this study, L1 is Bahasa Melayu, while L2 is English. Therefore, language switching in this context refers to the act of switching from Bahasa Melayu to English and vice versa.

Wang (2003) defines language switching as mental operations that went from L2 to L1 as cognitive processes of problem-solving and decision-making while writers were engaging in their L2 writing. In the context of this study, the use of L1 is seen as part of a cognitive process taken place during the completion of an L2 writing task.

### **1.9.2 Tertiary Malay writers**

In this context, tertiary Malay writers refer to the undergraduates of a public university and they are of Malay origins. According to the Malaysian constitution, a Malay is a person who was born locally, habitually speaks Malay, follows Malay customs, and profess Islam (Mohammed Suffian, 1976 in Hirschman, 1987).



### **1.9.3 Academic context**

In this study, academic context refers to a setting where the process of teaching and learning takes place. Therefore, the writing activities done in an academic context are mainly for teaching and learning purposes and the ultimate goal would be to evaluate students' writing performance.

### **1.9.4 First language (L1)**

First language in this study refers to the language a person is most comfortable with in communication (Nor Azmi, 2004). In this study, the first language refers to Bahasa Melayu.

### **1.9.5 Second language (L2)**

The language other than the first language that is used for variety of purposes, such as education, political, trades as well as social. In Malaysia, Bahasa Melayu is the national language while English is regarded as the second language. Hence, in this study, second language refers to English.

### **1.9.6 Lexical borrowing**

*Lexical borrowing* typically is the adoption of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect (Daulton, 2012). In this study, lexical borrowing means the use of Bahasa Melayu words to replace unknown English words, such as 'jerebu' (to replace haze) and 'kilang' (to replace factory).

### **1.9.7 Language mixing**

Language mixing in this study refers to the use of both Bahasa Melayu and English to complete a written work, especially at the idea generating phase. In this study, language mixing is most evident in the pre-writing notes as both languages were used interchangeably.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter deliberated on the overview of the study by giving the background of the study as well as the research questions that the study tries to answer. The scope of this study is also discussed at length to indicate the direction of the study as well as to limit the boundary as to what this study is going to cover. . This chapter ends with a discussion on the related theories that form and shape the study as well as the conceptual framework that this study embraces.

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