

## PRACTICAL CONCERNS IN SL WRITING: WORKING COLLABORATIVELY ACROSS INSTRUCTED SETTINGS USING NEW TECHNOLOGY TOOLS<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

The development of the four language skills in a given second/foreign language (SL/FL) is one of the major goals of language teachers. To reach to that end, language teachers need to develop learners' communicative competence as it might enable them to use language appropriately in different contexts. Over the years, research has focused on this particular issue and it has emphasised the necessity of integrating the different components of the communicative model to better assist language learners (Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2006, 8-15). It is the aim of this chapter to contribute to the ongoing research related to the four language skills by focusing on the skill of writing. The rationale behind this selection is based on the following aspects: (1) writing involves a complex cognitive process of learning which requires effort, time, practise, cultural knowledge, and of course, formal instruction; and (2) writing is not appropriately tackled in the instructed setting as in many cases it is performed individually and its major focus is the final product rather than the whole process of writing. Building on these assumptions, this chapter first reviews both the notion of communicative competence and the nature of writing. Then, it discusses the pedagogical value of different non-traditional

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materials for developing the language skill of writing. Finally, it presents an instructional approach for the teaching of the skill of writing from a communicative and collaborative perspective and fostering the use of new technology.

## 2. The communicative model: An overview

As reported by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 8-15), the term *communicative competence* is first introduced by Hymes (1972 cited in Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2006, 10) as a reaction against Chomsky's theory of language (1965 cited in Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2006, 10). Following Hymes (1972 cited in Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2006, 10), several authors have advanced different communicative competence models in order to explain how SL/FL-teaching and learning works (see Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2006 for a review). The role of the four language skills is mainly discussed in the models put forward by Bachman (1990 cited in Jordan 2004, 7-9) and Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 15-18). Bachman (1990 cited in Jordan 2004, 7-9) advances some of the basic functions of the four language skills (i.e. psychological mechanisms), and the communicative model presented by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 15-18) focuses explicitly on the role of the four language skills and emphasises the idea that they should be developed in the instructed setting in order to increase learners' communicative competence successfully.

Bachman (1990 cited in Jordan 2004, 7-9) provides a communicative competence model which consists of three main components: *language competence*, *strategic competence*, and *psychological mechanisms*. The first competence, language competence, is divided into two main components, more specifically *organisational* and *pragmatic competence*. The organisational competence refers to *grammatical competence* and *textual competence*, whereas the pragmatic competence involves *illocutionary competence* (i.e. speech acts and language functions) and *sociolinguistic competence* (i.e. ability to use language appropriately in a particular context). The strategic competence encapsulates three more components, namely those of *assessment*, *planning* and *execution*, and it refers to the ability to use the *language competence* appropriately considering the pragmatic and sociolinguistic parameters. Finally, the psychological mechanisms deal with the psychological and neurological aspects that are needed to execute language. Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 15-18) provide a model of communicative competence which focuses mainly on the integration of the four skills. It consists of five components, namely, *discourse competence*, *linguistic competence*, *strategic competence*, *pragmatic competence* and *intercultural competence*. The discourse competence involves the choice and the sequencing of the sentences in order to provide a cohesive and coherent message. The linguistic competence refers to both grammatical competence, which is also included in the models advanced by Canale and Swain (1980, 27-31) and Bachman (1990 cited in Jordan 2004, 7-9), and the linguistic system components, also considered by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell

(1995, 9-29), and Celce-Murcia (2007, 45-54). The strategic competence deals with the communicative strategies that are needed to interact successfully and avoid breakdowns. The pragmatic competence entails illocutionary and sociolinguistic features, as in Bachman (1990 cited in Jordan 2004, 7-9) and in the actional competence and the socio-cultural competence suggested by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995, 9-29). Finally, the intercultural competence is seen as the knowledge that is needed to interpret and produce written and spoken discourse in a given sociocultural context. Moreover, it has to do with the verbal and non-verbal communication, knowledge of the behaviour of the target community, cross-cultural communication and cultural awareness.

Despite the fact that several communicative models have been presented over the years, only the models proposed by Bachman (1990) and Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006) focused on the four language skills. It is, however, the model advanced by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006) which explicitly centralises its attention to the four language skills. Hence, taking this specific communicative model into account, in what follows, I provide first a review of the nature of the skill of writing, and then, an instructional approach for the teaching of writing.

### **3. Writing in the instructed setting**

#### **3.1. *SL/FL Writing***

Writing in a SL/FL implies a complex process of learning which requires effort, time, practise, cultural knowledge, and of course, formal instruction. As a matter of fact, writing is not a natural ability since writers need to undertake a process of learning in order to produce communicative output in the written mode. Moreover, writing involves not only the writers who produce the text, but also the audience of such piece of writing. The production of the text could be somehow affected, among others, by writers' first, individual differences, cultural knowledge, the context in which the text is created and the instructional setting. Moreover, writing in a SL/FL involves not only using a different language, but also the fact of following specific conventions of the target language. Finally, concerning the potential audience, writers should take into account that their production should be, to some extent, adapted to the potential audience considering their linguistic, cultural, social and psychological background.

In addition to this, writing entails not only creating a final product, but also a long process that encapsulates a set of stages such as "setting goals, generating ideas, organising information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing" (Hedge 2000, 302). In line with this, Seow (2002, 315) states that writing in the instructed setting involves at least the following four stages, planning, drafting, revising and editing. Consequently, the skill of writing comprehends a process of generating and expressing ideas from a process-oriented focus in which different stages

need to be followed so as to create the final draft of a given piece of writing. Unfortunately, this particular process is not always taken into account as in many cases writing involves merely a task in which the major goal is the final product. Nevertheless, if the aim is to focus on the whole process of writing and developing communicative competence appropriately, several stages will need to be followed (Hedge 2000, 302-307; Seow 2002, 315-319).

To start with, writers need to work on different planning or pre-writing activities which enables them to focus on the text, the purpose of writing and the organisation of the ideas to reach a communicative goal. To do so, writers can be engaged in specific activities such as those brainstorming, clustering or rapid free writing, among others. The second stage, drafting, involves the first actual writing. In this case, learners are expected to integrate the information and ideas generated in the previous stage in order to elaborate the first draft. Then, writers should organise their ideas into sentences and paragraphs, add relevant information and link ideas properly. Moreover, it is important to highlight that writers should also take into account the potential audience of the piece of writing. In the third stage, that of revising, writers should review their piece of writing taking into account the feedback provided on performance. Therefore, at this stage, writers should critically examine whether ideas are properly organised and if they are meaningful, as well as whether their objectives are met. Moreover, writers should, if necessary, make changes in order to express ideas in an appropriate manner, add further information and delete irrelevant information. Working collaboratively or with peers can increase the critical assessment of the first draft, which consequently could affect its quality. After that, writers can be engaged in the editing stage in which they should edit their piece of writing focusing on language accuracy.

In short, a focus on process might imply that writers should focus not only on the final product, but also on the whole process of writing which is required in order to elaborate a text appropriately. In following this approach, writers can be provided with opportunities to explore how texts should be elaborated and which aspects should be taken into account when writing. Therefore, as reported, learners can be engaged in a process of writing which involves focusing on several aspects such as coherence and cohesion, as well as on linguistic, pragmatic and discourse features. As a result, language teachers can provide learners with further opportunities to increase their communicative competence in the skill of writing. This particular skill is then an active language skill which does not only involve a final product but a complex work which should be undertaken by learners of SL/FL language so as to increase their communicative competence.

### ***3.2. Language teaching materials***

Language textbooks are widely employed in most language instructed settings, in fact, they are seen as the “visible heart of any ELT programme” (Sheldon 1988, 237). Language textbooks, ideally, should be used in the

instructed setting as a guide to help teachers to promote learners' development of the four language skills, among other aspects, from a communicative perspective. Nonetheless, recent research indicates that language textbooks do not always follow appropriately a communicative perspective, and consequently, there is a need to design specific communicative tasks which better assist language learners (Beltrán-Palanques 2012, 47-48). Apart from language textbooks, other materials can be employed in the instructed setting such as internet resources. Using internet resources, however, might not be seen as an easy task since teachers should select and design appropriately the materials in order to better accommodate learners' learning process. Furthermore, learners should be provided with opportunities to use language in the written mode for authentic purposes (Hedge 2000, 311-312) as well as with feedback on performance.

It is clear cut that the emergence of new technologies have revolutionised the language teaching tradition because they have brought about a different perspective on SL/FL teaching and learning. In fact, this advance has had effects on language learning since learners can be given with further opportunities to use language and receive authentic input, and teachers can offer richer variety of tasks to work in virtual environments (Mak and Coniam 2008; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2008; Elola and Oskoz 2010; Kessler and Bikowski 2010; Warschauer 2010; Beltrán-Palanques 2011; 2014; Hadjerrouit 2011). Mak and Coniam (2008, 452-453) value the use of wikis as a potential writing tool to increase learners' writing skill. Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008, 167) propose the use of email to promote online interaction among language learners and speakers of the target language in order to develop intercultural competence through the skill of writing. Elola and Oskoz (2010, 65) also praise the use of new technology tools such as wikis to foster the skill of writing. The authors argue that new technology offers the opportunity to create spaces in which learners can be somehow less teacher-dependent, and at the same time, they can work on further topics. In the same line, Kessler and Bikowski (2010, 55-56) also value the use new technology tools such as wikis, which also provide learners with opportunities for collaborative and autonomous work. Similarly, Warschauer (2010, 3-6) recommends the use of blogs, wikis, automated essay scoring and open-source netbooks to promote writing in the instructed setting. Similarly, Hadjerrouit (2011, 433) indicates that wikis allow learners to work on the skill of writing from a collaborative perspective. Using a different tool, specifically blogging, Beltrán-Palanques (2011, 525) proposes the elaboration of a magazine from a collaborative perspective to boost learners' writing skill and motivation towards writing. Finally, Beltrán-Palanques (2014, 467) suggests the use of asynchronous and synchronous platforms to promote online writing interaction.

As reported above, there are different types of materials other than language textbooks, such as new technology resources that can be used in the

instructed setting to foster the skill of writing. The use of new technologies and in particular wikis can be of paramount interest to work from a collaborative perspective and in a more autonomous manner. Hence, it seems that by exploiting new technology tools from a pedagogical approach, teachers can promote the skill of writing from a communicative perspective. With that in mind, the following section presents an instructional approach for the integration of the language skill of writing in the instructed setting.

#### **4. The proposed instructional approach**

The aim of the instructional approach that I present in this section is that of increasing learners' communicative competence through the language skill of writing. To reach to that end, it is necessary to integrate the different components of the communicative model and follow a process-based approach. In this case, I will follow the model advanced by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 15-18) since it focused on the development and integration of the four language skills. As previously explained, the components of this model are those of discourse, linguistic, strategic, pragmatic, intercultural and strategic. Furthermore, the writing skill will be tackled from the perspective of process-based which emphasises the necessity of focusing on the whole process of writing rather than exclusively on the final product (Hedge 2000, 302; Seow 2002, 315) and following a collaborative perspective. It is also worth pointing out that new technology tools will be employed in this instructional approach (Mak and Coniam 2008; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2008; Elola and Oskoz 2010; Kessler and Bikowski 2010; Warschauer 2010; Beltrán-Palanques 2011; 2014; Hadjerrouit 2011). In this particular instructional approach, wikis, chats and Skype will be used. The use of those tools is of paramount interest for the development of SL/FL since they might be exploited from different perspectives and its use can be extremely motivating for language learners.

In this instructional approach, however, despite the fact that special emphasis is placed on the development of the writing skill, the other language skills are also reinforced since learners need to work in a collaborative manner through new technology tools interacting not only in the written mode but also in the oral one, search information and read various texts to create their own piece of writing. Furthermore, it is important to note that this instructional approach can be used to integrate the writing skill in different instructional settings (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary) since teachers can adapt the task to the real needs and language proficiency of the target group. Thus, this is not only an instructional task which can be employed with adult language learners, but also with adolescents and children, provided that it is appropriately adapted to their proficiency level, cultural background and cognitive development.

With that in mind, in what follows, I present an instructional approach which follows the aforementioned features. This instructional approach involves four different phases, namely those of (1) *getting started*; (2) *drafting*; (3) *teacher's*



*feedback and authors' revision*; (4) *authors' final edition*. Before starting, the teacher should provide learners with appropriate guidelines concerning the use of wikis, chats and Skype. The teacher should also explain learners that they should keep record of their written and spoken interactions. The written and spoken data gathered from such interactions is extremely significant since it can be used to examine learners' cognitive processes undertaken when completing the task, the difficulties identified, how they work collaboratively as well as which aspects should be improved in future instructional approaches. Moreover, that data can be also instrumental in obtaining useful information that might be employed to provide learners with feedback on performance. In this case, learners can be encouraged to use the target language, albeit in some cases they would feel more comfortable using their first language. In addition to this, learners should be given with opportunities to select the topic of the written task. In so doing, they can take an active role from the beginning of the instructional approach. Furthermore, this may be more motivating for them since they can write about topics which are of their interest.

The first phase, *getting started*, is designed to provide learners with opportunities to discuss the topic of the written task, generate ideas and organise the forthcoming piece of writing. During this phase, learners should use the chat to talk in the written mode and, simultaneously, Skype to capture their spoken interactions. They should work on some planning or pre-writing activities which can help them to establish the basis of their writing task. It would be also interesting to encourage them to read authentic texts related to the topic and genre that is being worked on. In so doing, learners can start thinking about the main ideas that will be presented in their task, the perspective that they will take, the potential audience as well as the different aspects that should be covered. Importantly, their written and spoken interventions should be kept in the wiki space, chat and Skype.

Once learners have completed this phase, they can start working on the second phase (i.e. *drafting*). In the second phase, learners should write their initial draft. Thus, they should transform the information and the ideas generated in the previous phase into sentences and paragraphs which convey meaning and meet the purpose of the piece of writing. Therefore, all the different ideas should be properly organised and linked so that the text can reach a communicative goal. Furthermore, when drafting, learners should take into account the perspective of the potential readers. This is extremely important since learners need to understand the importance of writing for a real audience and the impact that it might have on a given audience. Moreover, as in the previous phase, learners should be also encouraged to discuss the elaboration of the draft through the chat and Skype as well as to provide their written contribution in the wiki space.

The third phase, that of *teacher's feedback and authors' revision*, involves learners' revision of the draft considering the feedback provided. The teacher

and/or peers could be responsible for the provision of feedback. In this particular instructional approach, I propose teacher's feedback. To do so appropriately, the teacher should take part actively in written and spoken interactions in order to better assist learners' process of learning. Moreover, learners can also see that the teacher also takes an active role in the new technology tools with them, and whose aim is that of monitoring and guiding them to reach communicative purposes. After the receiving feedback, learners, should critically examine the written task and improve it. Since this is a collaborative task, learners should work together, and they should also keep record of their interactions and discussions related to this phase. The data gathered from this phase can be extremely useful when providing final feedback since the teacher can get to know all the different aspects discussed when revising the text after providing feedback.

Finally, in the fourth phase, *authors' final edition*, learners should revise the task with the given feedback, edit the written task and produce the final version. The teacher should provide learners with further feedback on performance taking into account not only the final product, but also the whole process of writing. Moreover, since the teacher can have access to learners' written and spoken contributions (i.e. wiki, chat and Skype), feedback can be provided in a more effective and personalised manner.

The above described instructional approach is designed taking into account the communicative model presented by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 15-18) and a process-based approach (Hedge 2000, 302-307; Seow 2002, 315-319). The aim is to increase learners' communicative competence in the writing skill as well as to engage them in a whole process of writing which involves working on different phases to create their writing task. Moreover, it aims at fostering collaborative work among language learners by means of new technology tools such as wikis, chats and Skype. In implementing this instructional approach, the teacher can provide learners with opportunities to improve their writing skill, help them to elaborate complex texts and encourage them to work collaboratively in virtual environments, which additionally might also promote autonomous learning especially in the case of adult language learners. Finally, meaningful interaction both in the written and spoken mode is also fostered since learners are boosted to discuss aspects related to the content and the construction of the text through new technology tools.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this chapter was to present an instructional approach for the teaching of the language skill of writing from a communicative approach, following a collaborative perspective and using new technology tools. This particular instructional approach was designed taking into account the importance of integrating the different components of the communicative model advanced by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006, 15-18), following four different



stages, namely those of planning, drafting, revising and editing (Hedge 2000, 302; Seow 2002, 315), and working from a collaborative perspective. Furthermore, the chapter also emphasised the role of language materials, more specifically, it argued for the use of new technology resources in the instructed setting. Hence, the instructional approach advanced aimed at increasing learners' communicative competence focusing specifically on the language skill of writing from a collaborative perspective and using new technology resources such as wikis, chats and Skype.

For further research, it would be of paramount interest to explore the effects of this particular instructional approach across proficiency levels and in different instructional settings (primary, secondary and tertiary education). Moreover, this pedagogical intervention should be done administrating also a needs analysis questionnaire to analyse learners' real needs, a proficiency test to know learners' proficiency level, a questionnaire aiming at examining learners' attitudes towards writing in the SL/FL and verbal reports in order to explore learners' performance. In so doing, teachers might increase the quality of the teaching of writing, the provision of feedback and the assessment of the skill of writing.

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