A Sociocultural Approach to the Study of L2 Writing:

Activity System Analyses of the Writing Processes of ESL Learners

by

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ABSTRACT

Using a sociocultural framework, this dissertation investigated the writing processes of 31 ESL learners in an EAP context at a large North American university. The qualitative case study involved one of the four major writing assignments in a required first-year composition course for ESL students. Data were collected from four different sources: (a) A semi-structured interview with each participant, (b) process logs kept by participants for the entire duration of the writing assignment, (c) classroom observation notes, and (d) class materials.

Findings that emerged through analyses of activity systems, an analytical framework within Vygotskian activity theory, indicate that L2 writers used various context-specific, social, and cultural affordances to accomplish the writing tasks. The study arrived at these findings by creating taxonomies of the six activity system elements – *subject, tools, goals, division of labor, community, and rules* – as they were realized by L2 writers, and examining the influence that these elements had in the process of composing.

The analysis of data helped create categories of each of the six activity system elements. To illustrate with an example, the categories that emerged within the element *division of labor* were as follows: (a) Instructor, (b) friends and classmates, (c) writing center tutors, (d) family members, and (e) people in the world. The emergent categories for each of the six activity system elements were then examined to determine if their effects on L2 writing were positive or negative.

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Overall, the findings of the present study validate arguments related to the post-process views that an explanation of L2 writing processes solely based on cognitive perspectives provides but only a partial picture of how second language writing takes place. In order for a more comprehensive understanding of L2 writing one must also account for the various social and cultural factors that play critical roles in the production of L2 texts.

DEDICATION

For
My Parents

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ACRONYMS

APA-American Psychological Association

EAP-English for Academic Purposes

ESL- English as a Second Language

GPA-Grade Point Average

IRB-Institutional Review Board

L1-First Language

L2-Second Language

SAT-Scholastic Aptitude Test

SLA-Second Language Acquisition

SWSU-South West State University

TESOL-Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

TOEFL-Test of English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The focus of this dissertation is learners of English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and their writing processes[1] in an EAP context (James, 2003). The conceptualization of the project derives from: (a) The arguments that scholars (Atkinson, 2003a, 2003b; Casanave, 1995, 2003; Kubota, 2003; Russell, 1999; Trimbur, 1994) have recently made regarding the need of investigating the processes of L2 writing with a broader perspective, and (b) the current second language literature (Block, 2003; Lantolf, 2000a, 2000b; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Schinke-Llano, 1993) that has underscored the important roles that sociocultural factors play in L2 learning.

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[1] The current project, as I have conceptualized it, aligns with previous research that explored writing as a situated activity. Scholars have used various terms such as "sociohistoric accounts of academic literacy," (Prior, 1998); "disciplinary enculturation" (Prior, 1991, 1995, 1998, 2004; Russell, 1997; Russell & Yaňez, 2003); "chronotopic lamination of literate activities" (Prior, 1998; Prior & Shipka, 2003) "local interactions" (Casanave, 1995); "social-cognitive processes in disciplinary literacy" (Riazi, 1997), to essentially indicate the *writing processes* that are "both localized in the concrete acts, thoughts, and feelings…and sociohistorically dispersed across a far-flung chronotopic network" (Prior & Shipka, 2003, pp. 186-187) One common thread that runs through this stream of research is an investigation of the activity of writing as it occurs through the interactions among the writer, readers, tasks, texts, and contexts (e.g., Riazi, 1997). Taking leads from a roadmap of the L2 writing process research in the post-process era (Atkinson, 2003a; Kent, 1999; Russell, 1999), for the current project I have used the term *writing processes* in the sense outlined above. I have done so purposely, in an attempt to introduce a sociocultural framework to study L2 writing processes incorporating a more expansive and holistic approach.

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The terms "sociocultural[2] factors," following a neo-Vygotskian (e.g.,

Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson et al, 2007; Prior, 2006) tradition of mental

development, may include any socially- and culturally-situated and historically-

conditioned element that mediates human mind. While accomplishing an activity

in its social settings, a human mind is mediated by its surroundings, and in the

process, is encountered by both affordances and constraints. How mental

development occurs through these processes is the cornerstone of Vygotsky's

sociocultural theory. The meanings of the terms "sociocultural factors," as they

have been used in this project, are not necessarily limited to "social" and

"cultural" issues in their literal sense; they also include extended meanings (e.g.,

institutional practices in a given society, familial traditions in a particular culture,

see Atkinson, 1999 for different notions of culture).

Since the terms "social" and "cultural" are important for the current project,

instead of keeping them as generic as they may have sounded so far, I will explain

them with examples that are directly related to L2 writing. Atkinson (2003b)

maintains that our belief systems are culturally grounded and some of the

concepts in L2 writing such as "voice," "clarity," and "thesis statement" are based

on our own cultural orientations. He also shows that literacy is invariably

ideological and what teachers teach in L2 writing classrooms and expect students

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[2] The term "sociocultural" is debated, primarily owing to the difficulty scholars face in finding appropriate translations of Vygotsky's original writings from Russian into English. Some Vygotskian scholars (e.g., Michael Cole) prefer to use the terms Social-Historical-Cultural Theory or Social-Historical Theory while others (e.g., James Wertsch) prefer "sociocultural." In this dissertation, I used "sociocultural" to refer to the work of Vygotskian tradition (also see, Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Wertsch, 1991, 1998).

to learn, are not only based on institutionally prescribed curriculum but rather on personal beliefs and ideologies. Casanave (2003) provides examples of how writing involves "sociopolitical process" and emphasizes on the important social and political roles of the "local knowledge" and "local interactions" in the composing processes. She discusses how an L2 writer has to position or re-position himself/herself socially and politically appropriate ways to pass an exam, or to write an academic paper or to get published.

Considering that both SLA and L2 writing are related fields dealing with second language learners, my primary concern while undertaking the project has been to investigate the writing processes of ESL students, keeping in mind the various sociocultural factors that appear to affect L2 learning. While doing so, I have explored how L2 writers, who are L2 learners at the same time (e.g., Harklau, 2002), are affected in their writing processes by these factors that the traditional cognitive paradigm of process writing has not usually considered. In carrying out the project, I relied on the work of sociocultural tradition in SLA, composition studies, and L2 writing. In the following sections, first, I introduce "L2 writing process research" and then, discuss "a sociocultural approach"—two important concepts of this project. Followed by this discussion, I provide the justification of the current study before introducing the research questions.

L2 Writing Process Research

L2 writing research and theories have grown following the foot-steps of mainstream composition studies (e.g., Krapels, 1990; Silva, 1990, p. 11). A corollary of this has been that the research and theories within the field of L2

writing have traditionally been those that have kept scholars in mainstream

composition studies interested. Silva (1990), for instance, sketches the origin and

historical development of the field of L2 writing, which somewhat parallels the

research and pedagogy of mainstream composition studies. In his account, Silva

(1990) provides "four most influential approaches" (p. 12) to ESL composition, of

which the product (current traditional rhetoric) and process dichotomy has

engaged much of the pedagogical discussion within the field (e.g., Krapels, 1990,

p. 38). A product-focus approach to L2 writing gradually lost ground due to its

inefficiencies in developing effective writers. The opponents of this approach

maintain that the task of writing should not be identified with tasks that may be

accomplished by a single attempt. The main reasoning behind this is that no piece

of writing is perfect at first attempt and that writing involves recursive processes

(see Bizzell, 1992).

Interests in a process approach to writing grew exponentially after the

publication of their landmark article by Flower and Hayes (1981) (e.g., Hyland,

2003; although we must note that process research had existed before then, e.g.,

Emig, 1971). Flower and Hayes (1981) constructed a cognitive model of the

processes of composing and showed the recursive stages and hierarchical

activities that a piece of writing must undergo before its completion. They

maintained that writers made various attempts as they composed—i.e., composing

involved writing, feedback, and revisions or re-writing (Hyland, 2003). In short,

the underlying theory behind process writing would go like this: In order to help

writers improve their skills, instructors must focus on the processes that novice

writers must undertake, and having students emulate sophisticated writings, and thus, putting too much focus on the product (i.e., sophisticated texts and the style) is of no use in helping them improve their writing skills. Since writing involves processes, students must learn how to efficiently use them to produce effective texts. Composing process is important in order to design effective composition pedagogy as well.

Process writing has been one of the most dominant pedagogical approaches to L2 writing instruction. Scholars in composition studies have time and again emphasized its effectiveness in teaching writing. "Writing process," for instance, is one of the important constituents in WPA Outcomes Statement (*WPA Outcomes*). Research has found that going through various processes (e.g., planning, writing, revising, and so forth), second language learners can become more efficient writers (e.g., Zamel, 1983).

In spite of its novelty of foci and practices, a process approach to writing has received criticisms for its exclusive cognitive-centeredness. That is, it is maintained that process writing only looks into what happens inside a writer's head as s/he composes. Another shortcoming of this approach is the individualistic, asocial nature of writing (Atkinson, 2003a; Kent, 1999) perpetuated by its proponents. It is maintained that process writing fails to account for the social and collaborative nature of the task of writing. Besides, since a writer composes within various social and cultural milieu, it is hard to imagine how s/he can operate without getting affected by different context-specific factors (e.g., Pullman, 1999, pp. 26-27). Everything taken together,

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process writing, while still effective in providing critical insight into the complex phenomena of writing, cannot address everything that composing involves.

In the backdrop of this, L2 writing scholars (Atkinson, 2003a; Casanave, 2003) have pointed out the importance of broadening the scope of investigating the second language writing processes, encompassing various social and cultural factors, in addition to the cognitive ones. Termed as process research in the post-process era (Atkinson, 2003a; although see Matsuda, 2003 for an alternative viewpoint), the connotations of the terms "writing process" have changed in substantive ways at our time. The writing processes in the post-process era see both the writer and the task of writing differently, in an expanded and holistic way (Kent, 1999). A post-process writer is evolving, constantly bombarded by the "sights and sounds" of the twenty-first century, seeks help from others, hence, collaborates, co-thinks and co-constructs, and is frequently mediated by different symbolic as well as physical tools. Writing in the post-process era, too, is complex: It is collaborative, historically-conditioned as well as socially- and culturally-situated (Atkinson & Connor, 2008, p. 522). As I undertake the current project, I have in mind the post-process views of writers and writing.

A Sociocultural Approach

A sociocultural approach to mind assumes that all human actions are mediated and they cannot be separated from the milieu in which they take place (Wertsch, 1991). The primary concern of sociocultural theory is the relationship between the human mental processes in their historical, institutional and cultural setting (e.g., Wertsch, Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995, p. 3). The genesis of a

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sociocultural approach to mind is attributed to the work of Russian scholar L. S. Vygotsky. In its most basic sense, Vygotsky's work on the mental functioning can be divided into three thematic categories: (a) Developmental or genetic analysis, (b) the claim that mental functioning derives from social life, and (c) the claim that all human actions are mediated by tools and signs (Wertsch, 1991, p. 19). Unfortunately, Vygotsky lived a short life and could not provide concrete ways of exploring many topics that he alluded to in his writing. His work was eventually expanded by some of his colleagues and contemporaries in Russia, most notably A. N. Leont'ev, A. Luria, V. N. Voloshinov, and M. M. Bakhtin, and later on, a number of researchers (Y. Engeström, M. Cole, and J. Wertsch) in the West.

Vygotsky's developmental or genetic analysis relates to looking at human mental development over time. He argued that snapshots of mental functioning could not provide a true picture of our mental processes. In order to get a full understanding, one must look at it over time, in its historical context. His second contention that mental functioning derives from social life relates to his belief that "...in order to understand the individual it is necessary to understand the social relations in which the individual exists" (Wertsch, 1991, pp. 25-26). That is, human mental functioning occurs at both intramental and intermental (social) levels. Finally, Vygotsky believed that while carrying out actions human minds relied on tools—both physical and symbolic. Humans learn to use these tools and get mediated as they grow up in the social and cultural settings.

A fundamental concept on which much of the research and theories of Vygotskian tradition are built is the concept of mediation (Lantolf, 2000b).

Simply put, mediation is the influence of various signs and tools on everyday human actions. A classic Vygotskian (1978) example of mediation is tying a knot or marking a stick to remember something. Simple operations like this act as an external tool for mediating the psychological process of memory. Vygotsky's concept of cultural mediation centers on the tenet that an individual is mediated by concepts and cultural entities such as objects and symbols. This is a particularly important theory as Vygotskian scholar Y. Engeström (2001) notes, "objects ceased to be just raw materials for the formation of logical operations in the subjects as they were for Piaget. Objects became cultural entities and the object-orientedness of action became the key to understanding human psyche" (p. 134). Vygotsky extended the notion of mediation to the development of activity which in turn is mediated by signs and psychological tools. "Situated social interaction connected to concrete practical activity is the source of both individual and cultural development, and in turn cultural-societal structures provide affordances and constraints that cultivate the development of specific forms of consciousness" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 213). This dialectic relationship between the (mediated) subject and activity is the core of what later came to be known as activity theory (e.g., Lantolf & Genung, 2002), the theoretical framework for the current project. It is a useful framework for writing research because of its lineage to the context—encompassing social, cultural, and historical domains—of an activity. Since writing involves a complex phenomenon at various levels, e.g., personal, mental, social, cultural, historical, an activity theory

framework can account for these factors while exploring how a piece of writing is accomplished.

Why a Sociocultural Approach to L2 Writing?

Writing research within the framework of Vygotskian sociocultural theory has grown increasingly in recent times (Lei, 2008). One of the reasons behind this is that the cognitive paradigm of writing research is "too narrow in its understanding of context and was eclipsed by studies that attended to social, historical, and political contexts of writing" (Prior, 2006, p. 54). Indeed, an activity of writing can be seen as an interaction between a dynamic human mind and the equally dynamic context of writing. The interconnectedness of the mind and contexts ultimately has significant bearing on the production of texts (e.g., Matsuda, 1997). A sociocultural approach recognizes this evolving nature of mental functioning since it goes beyond the Cartesian dualism of mind and body (Lei, 2008) and seeks to explicate human activities more holistically, taking account of how mental processes play out when subjected to various social as well as cultural contingencies. For this reason, a sociocultural approach is suitable to explain the socially-, culturally-, and politically-situated activity of writing.

A sociocultural approach to L2 writing is important for the same reasons as above. Furthermore, since ESL writers constitute diverse group of people—after all, they come from different social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds—the dynamics of interactions between the mind and contexts applies aptly in their case (Matsuda, 1997). Second language scholars (Atkinson, 2003a; Atkinson &

Connor, 2008; Casanave, 1995, 2003) who called for broadening the scope of L2 writing research highlight this particular point.

Atkinson (2003a) in his introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (on the post-process era of L2 writing) maintains that the traditional process research of L2 writing looks almost exclusively at the cognitive aspects of the writing processes. It assumes writing to be an individualistic, asocial activity (Atkinson, 2003a, pp. 4-5). Such an approach is limiting because it sheds light on "the person" but not on "the person-in-the-world as member of a sociocultural community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Likewise, it cannot provide a comprehensive account of the L2 writing processes. The current project is an attempt to fill this gap. The study also parallels the growing body of work within this framework in second language research (e.g., SLA) and adds a new perspective to the existing body of process research in the field of L2 writing. Second language writing process research within the framework of sociocultural theory is well-timed too, for a growing number of L2 scholars (Block, 2003; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) have underlined the value of this framework in L2 research.

The Current Project and Research Questions

The current study investigates the processes of ESL writing in an EAP context at a large North American university. For its theoretical framework, the project is guided by a Vygotskian sociocultural approach to second language research (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). More specifically, this project used the activity system (Bazerman &

Russell, 2003; Engeström, 1999; Russell, 1999; Russell & Yaňez, 2003) as an analytical tool for examining the processes of L2 writing.

The concept of an activity system (Russell, 1999) is an extension of Vygotskian activity theory that was originally conceptualized to understand how human actions are performed through mediation (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Thorne, 2003). Engeström (1999) expanded activity theory by incorporating additional elements into its original framework and provided a more socially- and culturally-grounded perspective. Engeström's activity system consists of six elements: Subject, tools/artifacts, goals, division of labor, community, and rules. He maintained that in order to understand an activity in its sociocultural setting, we must analyze it from the perspective of these six elements. Engeström's model of activity system captures the sociohistoric (Prior, 1998) and heterogeneous nature of our actions. Sociohistoric accounts provide historical as well as developmental details of a given activity in its social setting, whereas the heterogeneity is part of an individual's "multiple, varied, more- or less-engaged and –inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.36). An activity system can also explain the inherent contradictions within an action (for more details and examples see, e.g., Engeström, 1993) that we, as humans, undertake. In short, an activity system is an analytical structure that explains the "multiple footings" (Prior, 1997, p. 277) that the actors hold while performing an activity in a sociocultural context.

Understanding the elements (i.e., six elements) of an activity system, then, provides us with the knowledge about the sociohistoric and heterogeneous

accounts of a given activity. An activity system analysis of an L2 writing task would elicit the "laminated" (Goffman, 1981) processes of the production of texts by second language writers. That is, it would help explain the sociohistoric, developmental, and heterogeneous processes involved in L2 writing. As I discussed above, one of the shortcomings of the traditional process writing (of cognitive paradigm) has been its almost exclusive cognitive-centeredness. An activity system analysis—creating taxonomies of the six elements of an activity system and how they influence the production of L2 texts—in contrast, can illustrate the L2 writing processes from an alternative perspective, incorporating various social, historical, developmental, personal, ideological, and cultural phenomena as they play out in the course of the completion of a writing task.

Based on the above theoretical and conceptual framework, through this project I will answer the following research questions:

- How are the elements of an activity system realized by L2 writers in an EAP context?

- How do these elements influence L2 writing for better or for worse?

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I have provided a general introduction to the project—its theoretical underpinnings, motivation behind and justification of the study, and the research questions. I also gave a brief overview of a process approach to L2 writing and sociocultural theory—two central concepts of the current dissertation. For the purpose of further contextualization, I discussed the usefulness of an activity-theoretical framework for conducting L2 writing process research.

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CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter I will review relevant research and theory. The review of literature is intended to provide a conceptual as well as theoretical foundation of the project. I have organized my discussion in this chapter as follows. First, in order to provide a general overview and historical background, I have discussed the process theory and research drawing on the mainstream composition studies. In the next section, I have reviewed literature that is specifically relevant to L2 writing process research. Then, in order to contextualize the current project, I have pointed out some of the existing caveats in L2 writing process research and the justification of the current study. Following this, I have discussed activity theory, the sociocultural-theoretical framework I used for this project, before concluding the chapter by recounting studies in process writing that used a sociocultural research tradition.

A Process Approach to Writing

Since second language writing as a field borrows bulk of its research and theory from mainstream composition studies (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Krapels, 1990; Silva, 1993), I will begin the review of literature by introducing a process approach to composition from its inception. Below I discuss the historical development and landmark work in process writing.

Disillusioned by the ineffectiveness of a product approach—the erstwhile dominant methodology of the teaching of writing—in 1970s composition scholars and teachers felt the need of focusing more on the processes of writing. The process approach was an offshoot of the philosophy that mere correction of errors

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upon submission of students' final, polished version of writing was not an effective way of teaching composition. As students kept producing writings that failed to meet the academic standards and were full of errors, this concern of composition scholars was firmly established.

Around late 1970s composition teaching in American colleges shifted its focus from having students work diligently on improving the final products (i.e., through correction of errors) to the processes of writing. It was maintained that in composition classes students would be better served if they were taught how to work on various aspects of writing such as planning or generating ideas, instead of investing all their attention to the production of error-free texts. In this connection Bizzell (1992) wrote:

> Attending closely to the problems students had in writing their papers, rather than merely to the problems that appeared in their finished products, writing teachers became convinced that students needed a better understanding of the whole process of working on a piece of writing, to give adequate time to the task and to make the time spent more productive (pp. 178-179).

We find the first traces of a process model of composition in the work of Rohman and Wlecke (1964) (e.g., Bizzell, 1992, p. 179; Faigley, 1986). Rohman and Wlecke (1964) maintained that composing consisted of three stages: Pre-writing, writing, and re-writing. Although the conceptualization of writing as consisting of different stages provided a shift of focus from all-important final product of writing to the task of writing carried out in steps, shortcomings of this

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theory arose since Rohman and Wlecke (1964), and later, Rohman (1965), had conceptualized the composing processes as linear. Subsequently, the recursiveness of the processes of writing was empirically confirmed.

Three of the most influential scholars in the field of composition – Berlin (1988), Bizzell (1992), and Faigley (1986) – divided process research into three main categories (although while doing so, they used slightly different terms). Faigley's (1986) categorization of "expressive," "cognitive," and "social" views of process writing roughly corresponded to similar classifications of "expressionistic rhetoric," "cognitive rhetoric," and "social-epistemic rhetoric" and "personal-style pedagogy," "cognitive process," and "social and cultural orientations" of process writing by Berlin (1988) and Bizzell (1992) respectively. Expressivism (which is also known as expressionistic writing or the personal-style pedagogy) (e.g., Berlin, 1988; Bizzell, 1992; Faigley, 1988) considers writing as a creative act and writing process as the process of self-discovery of one's true self. Proponents of expressivism (Elbow, 1973, 1981) argued that the process of self-discovery through writing was as important as the product itself. Expressivists also promoted "…the emergence of individual writers' personal voice, and empowerment of the individual's inner writer" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 5). Writers' voice and self-discovery were emphasized by both composition theorists and teachers. All this happened at a time when they felt that academic expository writing was too pedantic for students, so much so that they were unable to express themselves freely. Expressivism was an attempt to liberate students from such pedantic writing instruction. It was maintained that self-expressions were

necessary to accomplish good writing. However, as it turned out, an over-emphasis on writers made this particular process theory untenable to effective teaching of composition (as we will later find out writing is inherently a social activity).

A cognitivist approach (i.e., cognitive rhetoric or cognitive process) considers writing as a problem-solving activity. Unlike expressivism, cognitivism puts much emphasis "on high-order thinking and problem solving operations" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 6). Some examples of these operations are "planning, defining rhetorical problems, positioning problems in a larger context, elaborating definitions, proposing solutions, and generating grounding conclusions" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 6). A cognitivist approach to process writing, thus, became interested in essentially what happens inside individual writers' head and their intramental processes.

Early cognitive process research include that of Emig (1971) who studied the writing processes of the twelfth graders, and the work of Emig's (1971) contemporary Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod and Rosen (1975) who studied the writings of a group of 11-18-year olds. A cognitivist approach to process research received much currency with the publication of Flower and Hayes' (1981) work that examined writers' cognitive processes by means of protocol analyses—a new research methodology in composition at the time. Linda Flower, a composition scholar and John Hayes, a cognitive psychologist at Carnegie Mellon University designed their study such that writers would speak out their

thought processes when they wrote. The transcripts of what the writers said were then analyzed for identifying features of the composing processes.

Flower and Hayes' (1981) study provided a cognitive model of composing processes. Through protocol analyses they came up with different sub-processes of composition tasks. Two of the most important claims they made were: (a) Composing was recursive (note the difference between Flower & Hayes', 1981 model and that of Roman, 1965), and (b) the composing processes were hierarchical. What is noteworthy about Flower and Hayes' (1981) model is that although they outlined three distinct parts of composition, namely, the task environment, writing process, and writer's long-term memory, writing process seems to have received the most importance in research and teaching practices. In subsequent development we find that process research continued to flourish and composition teachers attested a lot of importance to students' learning of the processes of writing.

The cognitive paradigm of process writing saw composition scholars investigating the recursiveness of writing, focusing mainly on students' revisions. In her influential work, Sommers (1980) suggested that successful writing process consisted of effective revisions and that while revising good writers not only corrected the errors but also refined their ideas. Unsuccessful writers, in contrast, did not know how to revise effectively and generally did not attend to the revision tasks till the end, when they made some small-scale changes to their texts. Other notable research within the similar tradition includes Berkenkotter and Murray (1983), Graves (1975), and Schwartz (1983).

The cognitive paradigm of process writing is often criticized because it did not make students better academic writers. Another problem with this approach, especially with the one espoused by Flower and Hayes (1981), is its insistence on reducing the processes of writing to a generalizable formula. Research suggests that writing processes may vary from one individual to another and to provide a comprehensive writing process formula is untenable (e.g., Bizzell, 1992; Kent, 1999). A general perception along this line helped process research shift its focus from writers' mind to the context of writing.

The third category of process writing, the "social view" (i.e., "social-epistemic rhetoric" or "social and cultural orientations" of composition), occurred at a time when composition teachers in the U.S. were exasperatingly trying to teach academic writing to college students. The common observation that prevailed at the time, mostly owing to an influence of the expressivist and cognitive paradigms, was that "…differences in individual performance are due to differences in individual talent" (Bizzell, 1992, p. 188). However, another school of composition scholars and teachers, because of their conviction that there was a correlation between students' performance with their social groups, led many others to believe that individual talents alone could not determine the writing performance. They argued that the social and cultural backgrounds students came from had bearing on their writing performance. This approach to composition resulted in both composition scholars and teachers reaching out to help the students who needed it.

An increased interest in context made process writing start accounting for the settings in which writing took place. This shift in focus is often described as a "social turn" in process theory (e.g., Atkinson, 2003a; Trimbur, 1994). The social turn resulted in studying various contexts such as the academic disciplines, writing across curriculum, basic writing as well as collaborative writing as sites of writing research.

Working within the school of writing process research that emphasized on the importance of contexts, composition scholars maintained that "writing, as a form of literacy, is inherently social, transactional process that involves mediation between the writer his or her audience" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 8). Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) further believe that writing being a transactional activity involves awareness about the backgrounds of the audience in terms of their tastes, needs, interests, ideologies, and expectations. In other words, proficient writers must write according to their projected audience's needs and expectations (Gee, 1996, 1998). This particular approach is known as the "social constructionist" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 8) view of writing.

Shaughnessy (1977) arguing in line with a social constructionist view, maintains that writing process is essentially a socialization process. By socializing in certain academic communities writers learn about the discourses and conventions of those particular communities, which in turn help their thinking and writing processes (also see Russell, 1999). Her theory of writing process suggests that "…student writers are least successful when most ignorant of academic discourse conventions" (Bizzell, 1992, p. 190). Shaughnessy's work, unlike the

stance taken by the scholars in the cognitive paradigm, puts at least some burden of success in writing on academic institutions. Shaughnessy's view on the writing processes was later expanded by scholars such as Bazerman (1988), Maimon (1983), and Swales (1990) as they studied the writing processes of different academic disciplines and genres. Another area of writing research that received marked emphasis during this time is writing across curriculum. Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) advocated for this particular approach to composition, arguing that it would make students write more.

The reviews above show that process writing that started with a focus exclusively on an individualistic, cognitive approach, evolved over time. It expanded its scope and included the context of writing as additional foci. A focus on context has gradually yielded consideration of various social and cultural factors in composition research. An emphasis on these factors is often considered to be the beginning of the post-process era in writing studies. At a time when the post-modern, poststructuralist worldviews have greatly influenced inquiries in other fields, it is timely that composition scholars have also initiated a research paradigm that would incorporate such an approach.

Process Research in L2 Writing

L2 writing research within the process paradigm looks into issues that go behind the production of text—issues such as discovery of ideas and expression of meaning. Texts themselves are of secondary importance (Silva, 1990). A process approach to writing has been successful in causing a paradigm shift and a revolutionary change in writing instruction (Matsuda, 2003). L2 writing process

research and theories have followed the traditions of those in L1 composition for "guidance" (e.g., Krapels, 1990, p. 37). This has been so because at its inception L2 writing as a field had very little of its own for a reference point (Kroll, 1990), both for teaching and research. As a result, second language writing teachers and researchers would almost entirely depend on the mainstream composition theories (Krapels, 1990; Silva, 1993, p. 669), as Krapels (1990) writes, "… L2 composition teaching has generally not been based on theoretically derived insights gained from L2 composition research, because until the 1980s there was not much L2 research to draw upon in building theory or planning classes" (p. 37). Not surprisingly, therefore, early process research and instructions in L2 writing have been remarkably similar to those in mainstream composition studies. In the following sections, I will review the main theories and research findings in L2 writing process. In order to make these reviews roughly reflect the foci they received, I have divided them into four broad categories: The relationship between L1 and L2 process writing, feedback and revisions, cognitive processes in L2 writing, and an emphasis on context. Although elsewhere other scholars (Berlin, 1988; Bizzell, 1992; Casanave, 2004; Cumming, 2001; Faigley, 1986; Krapels, 1990; Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008; Roca de Larios, 2002; Silva & Brice, 2004) may have done the similar classification differently, for the purpose of the current project my categorization is intended to mirror how over the years L2 writing process research has traditionally been driven by a cognitively-oriented approach until recently (Atkinson, 2003a).

The relationship between L1 and L2 process writing

From review of important literature it appears that early L2 writing process studies were pre-occupied by investigations relating to a comparison between L1 and L2 writing processes. Much research, for instance, looked into the writing behaviors of skilled and unskilled writers in L1 and L2, using similar research framework to mainstream composition studies. Some of this early empirical research in L2 writing was conducted by Ann Raimes and Vivian Zamel. In their discussions on the importance of a process approach to L2 writing, both Zamel (1976) and Raimes (1979) stressed that only assisting students to deal with the surface errors would not help improve their writing skills. What was needed was teaching them the processes of composition, an approach that paralleled the one taken by scholars in mainstream composition studies at the time.

Studying eight proficient L2 writers, Zamel (1982) found that for second language writers, learning about composing processes was more important than obtaining linguistic competence. The writing processes of her participants were similar to those of L1 writers, an observation that led her to conclude that a process-oriented writing pedagogy for L2 writers would be suitable. She argued that successful L2 writing would result from an understanding of the composing processes. In a later study, Zamel (1983) investigated the writing processes of six advanced L2 writers. In this study she looked into the differences between the skilled and unskilled L2 writers. She found that the skilled L2 writers demonstrated similar writing processes to their L1 counterparts (e.g., Pianko, 1979; Sommers 1980)—they worked on organizing the ideas first, wrote

recursively and waited until the end for editing and proofreading their texts. Unskilled L2 writers, in contrast, were more concerned about editing from the very beginning. Besides, they spent less time than the skilled L2 writers for both revisions and writing. The patterns exhibited similar behaviors by the unskilled L1 writers studied by Sommers (1980). Zamel (1983) concluded that writing in a second language by itself was not an inhibiting factor to become successful writers, since skilled and unskilled writers in both L1 and L2 demonstrated similar composing processes. She added that what was important was making L2 writers aware about the importance of knowing the right processes at the time of writing.

In a similar kind of a study to Zamel (1983), investigating the composing processes of unskilled L2 writers, Raimes (1985) found that linguistic competence and writing competence were unrelated and that unskilled writers spent very little time on planning before and during composing. Raimes' study corroborated findings of earlier studies in both L1 and L2 about unskilled writers in which researchers (e.g., Peril, 1978 and Zamel, 1983 respectively) found that skilled and unskilled writers demonstrated distinctly different writing behaviors. The other important finding of Raimes (1985) was that her participants were not too concerned about the accuracy while writing. This was contrary to the earlier findings that maintained that unskilled writers paid much attention to editing. Raimes noticed that her participants re-read their texts more frequently to generate ideas.

Up to this point, L2 writing process research mostly validated the findings in L1 research, thereby suggesting that the writing behaviors (e.g., processes) of both L1 and L2 writers were similar, if not exactly the same. However, in a separate study Raimes (1987) pointed out an important difference between L1 and L2 writers (while also acknowledging various similarities in their composing behaviors). Raimes (1987) suggested that L2 writers did not appear inhibited by the correction tasks, a departure point from an important characteristic of L1 and L2 writing processes at the time. Upon analyzing the findings, Raimes (1987) recommended that L2 writing instructors not adopt L1 writing pedagogy unchanged, rather they adapt it.

Raimes' (1987) work marked the inception of a school of thought that maintained "…that the act of writing in a second language is somehow different from that of writing in a first language and that there may be a relationship between the two processes" (Krapels, 1990, p. 45). In what followed, L2 writing researchers (e.g., Cumming, 1989; Edelsky, 1982; Silva, 1992, 1993; Wang & Wen, 2002) studied the relationship between L1 and L2 in L2 writing composing processes. Some of the topics that were explored in this body of research were: L2 writers' perceptions about writing in L1 and L2 (Silva, 1992), the use of L1 in L2 writing processes (Wang & Wen, 2002), comparisons between the L1 and L2 writing processes (Silva, 1993), the role of proficiency in an L2 in composing processes (Cumming, 1989), and the influence of the first language on L2 writing processes (Friedlander, 1990).

In studying 13 graduate students' perceptions about writing in L1 and L2, Silva (1992) found that the writing processes in L1 and L2 varied. His participants mentioned that they had to plan differently to write in an L2, sometimes needing more time to understand the writing task itself or struggling to write for an unfamiliar audience. The writing itself was also different because of limited grammatical skills and vocabulary. Due to these limitations, they often struggled to write fluently and to produce sophisticated texts. Reviewing was also different while they wrote in an L2—they spent more time on grammar and vocabulary as opposed to style and the structure of texts, which they would have done if they were writing in their L1 (Silva, 1992, pp. 32-34).

In another study that investigated the role of L1 in L2 composing process, Wang and Wen (2002) examined the role of L1 (Chinese) in the composing processes of 16 Chinese learners of English. The results showed that L2 writers used their L1 more for such tasks as managing the writing processes and generating and organizing their ideas. On the other hand, there was more use of L2 in task-examining and text-generating activities during the composing process. The researchers reported that the use of L1 varied across L2 writing tasks—for instance, more L1 was used for narrative writing tasks than argumentative ones. They also found that the use of L1 decreased with writers' L2 development, although the extent of the decline varied across L2 writers.

Silva (1993) consulting 72 empirical studies that had compared L1 and L2 writing concluded that there were both similarities and differences in L1 and L2 writing processes. He categorized 3 different sub-processes namely, "planning,"

"transcribing," and "reviewing" that marked the major differences between L1 and L2 writing. Silva maintained that L2 writing involved, among other things, little planning, both at local and global levels; it was less successful because more time was spent on figuring out the topics; and it involved less useful materials. On the transcribing (i.e., producing written texts) and reviewing fronts, L2 writing demonstrated distinctness—e.g., writing was more laborious, it involved more pauses and difficulty in finding appropriate words for expressions, consumed more time, while it also involved less reviews and reflection on the texts produced, more revisions on grammar but less revisions on mechanics, especially the spellings (pp. 661-662). Silva (1993) concluded that "though general composing process patterns are similar in L1 and L2, it is clear that L2 composing is more constrained, more difficult, and less effective" (p. 668).

L2 writing process research on L1 and L2 relationship looked into the influence of the first language on L2 writing. Friedlander's (1990) investigation revealed that writing on a topic related to the L1 (Chinese) enabled L2 writers to produce more texts and write with fewer constraints. The results of the study helped make three important conclusions: (a) That allowing students to plan in the language of topic-area may assist their writing; (b) that translating from L1 (Chinese) into English helped rather than hindered writing; and (c) writers had more information at their disposal when working in their L1 on a first language-related topic—making the author argue that when L2 writers are expected to write in English as much as possible, it is better to provide them with English-related topics. In somewhat related studies about L1 and L2 relationships, Cumming

(1989) investigated the influence of L2 proficiency on L2 writing processes while Hirose and Sasaki (1994), Pennington and So (1993), and Sasaki and Hirose (1996) studied the influence of factors such as L2 proficiency, L1 writing abilities, writing strategies in both L1 and L2, past writing experiences, meta-knowledge of L2 expository writing and past instructional backgrounds on L2 writing. The findings of Cumming's (1989) study suggested that L2 proficiency might be related to the quality of texts but did not have any visible effect on the L2 writing processes (also see Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Pennington & So, 1993). Cumming maintained that writing expertise and L2 proficiency made different kinds of contribution to the product and processes of L2 writing and an enhanced proficiency in L2 did not necessarily lead to qualitative changes in the thinking processes or decision-making behaviors of L2 writers (p. 121). The finding of the study was particularly interesting because it implicitly corroborated some of the earlier assumptions that the writing processes in an L2 followed the similar patterns to those in the L1 (e.g., an examination of skilled vs. unskilled writers' writing processes in Zamel, 1983). What we see from the reviews above, then, is that in spite of some similarities of the writing processes between L1 and L2, later studies indicate that there are differences in these processes as well. The results of Sasaki and Hirose's (1996) study, for example, prove that L2 proficiency, writing abilities in L1, and L2 meta-knowledge—all influence L2 writing. The results also show that L2 proficiency influences the writing product in terms of its fluency (p. 160).

L2 writing process research, as it is evident from the reviews up to this point, mostly looked into issues that were related to writers as individuals and the way they accomplished the writing tasks in an individual capacity. One of the single most important topics that L2 writing scholars seemed to have been interested in was a comparison between the L1 and L2 writing processes. Considering that L2 writing as a field was at its beginning stages during this time (i.e., tentatively starting early 1980s through early 1990s; see Matsuda, 1998 for a general overview of the history of L2 writing), it is not surprising that much research focused on identifying the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 writing.

Feedback and revisions

Starting early 1990s, at a time when L2 writing as a field started to take a much firmer shape (especially after the publication of *Journal of Second Language Writing,* the first journal fully devoted to second language writing issues, from 1992), L2 writing scholars began to investigate topics outside a comparison between L1 and L2 writing processes. A lot of process studies encompassing the period from early 1990s till the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century looked into the feedback-revision processes (somewhat paralleling a similar emphasis of the process theory in L1 writing discussed earlier, e.g., Sommers, 1980, who maintained that writing process is nothing but a revision process). These studies resulted in adding valuable insight into our understanding about the intricacies in L2 writers' revisions. This body of research, examining various aspects of student revision and/or related issues (see below), is also important for another reason—it provided the much-needed

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"reference point(s)" (Kroll, 1990, p. 3) drawn from L2 writing data for both researchers and teachers. It provided the field of L2 writing with more self-reliance in terms of theories and practices. Feedback-revision is an important area of inquiry also because it gave rise to one of the most intensely-debated topics—the effectiveness of error correction in subsequent improvement of students' writing (Casanave, 2004; Ferris, 1999, 2004; Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2009; Truscott & Yi-ping Hsu, 2008)—in the field of second language writing. In spite of the considerable amount of research that has already been done the issue is still inconclusive, indicating the potential of future research (and more debate) surrounding the topic.

Studies in feedback-revision have been diverse and rich in terms of topics covered, subjects studied, and findings obtained. Some of the topics studied within this area are: Effects of teacher feedback on student writing (Polio, Fleck & Leder, 1998; Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986; Semke, 1984), effects and perceptions of peer feedback (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009), types of teacher feedback on student writing (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, Pezone & Tade, 1997; Kepner, 1991; Sheppard, 1992), whether or not error feedback is effective (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Fathman & Whalley, 1990), writers' receptivity of teachers' feedback (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994), students' revisions based on expert feedback (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1996), effects of teacher-student relationship on revision processes (Lee & Schallert, 2008), students' reactions to teacher feedback (Ferris, 1995; Lee, 2008a), teachers' feedback processes (Ashwell, 2000; Lee, 2008b), and

students' preferences for error feedback (Leki, 1991). The participants of these studies were diverse in their backgrounds, ranging in academic disciplines, experiences and levels of education, and age. The findings of these studies provided both points and counter-points regarding the efficacies of error feedback/correction.

At the heart of feedback-revision debate has been whether or not error correction helps improve student writing (e.g., Casanave, 2004, p. 86). Truscott (1996) in his review study argued that correction of grammar should be completely abandoned because the existing research did not conclusively prove that it helped improve students' grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, he maintained that grammar correction did not contribute to making better writers and it might actually prove de-motivational for students. The other side of the argument has been that identification of errors does help student writing in the short term and unless short term improvement is made, students cannot be expected to make long term improvement. Besides, research found that students did want feedback on errors, and if they were not provided with the feedback they expected, they might lose motivation in improving their writing and revision skills (Ferris, 1995, 1999, 2004). Although research on error feedback and revisions proliferated, the findings do not warrant a uniform directionality for classroom practices or formulation of a solid theory on this topic.

Is error feedback indeed effective? Fathman and Whalley (1990) examining the effects of teachers' feedback on content and grammar found that feedback on grammar helped students improve their papers, whereas students who received

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feedback on the content did not show significant improvement on subsequent writing. In a similar study, Ashwell (2000) investigated feedback on form and content separately as well as on form and content simultaneously. He found that different focuses on feedback did not yield significantly different improvement on papers. He also found that his participants (Japanese EFL writers) predominantly worked on forms rather than the content after they had received feedback. Ashwell (2000) made the following observations: (a) Although the process theories espouse feedback on content first, it may not be effective unless students are specifically told what they are supposed to be acting on; and (b) there exists a gap between students' and teachers' expectations (and interpretations) about the entire feedback-revision process (also see Ferris, Pezone, Tade & Tinti, 1997; Kepner, 1991); this gap needs to be filled to make feedback process more effective.

Assuming that feedback is effective, related questions concerning feedback-revision research have been what kinds of feedback are effective and how the students process the feedback they receive. At the same rate, it is also important to know what kind of feedback is generally clear to the writers it is intended for. A related consideration is striking a balance between feedback practices that the process theories recommend and the kind of feedback L2 writers themselves prefer. Empirical findings suggest that the nature of feedback (i.e., comprehensive vs. simplistic vs. implied) often has a lot to do with whether or not students would act on a particular aspect of the feedback provided (Ashwell, 2000, pp. 244-245; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010).

Studies have shown that students predominantly act on form-focused feedback and attempt to make the best use of it. Research related to different feedback types reported that form-focused feedback helped students make immediate corrections to their writing and students generally preferred this type of feedback (e.g., Leki, 1991). Scholars have attributed this trend to various reasons. One of them is the relative convenience when L2 writers need to work on grammatical errors that have been marked. Whether or not form-focused feedback helps writers become efficient writers in the end is still a debatable issue, as research has found that there is very little improvement in the quality of writing when students are provided with grammar-related feedback (Kepner, 1991).

Aside from the feedback type, students' overall attitude plays an important role in the way they act on the subsequent revisions (Lee & Schallert, 2008). For example, a favorable attitude helps create positive impact on subsequent revisions. Research shows that students desire feedback from their teachers (Leki, 1991; Lee, 2008a; Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006), although the kind of feedback they want may vary (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). Their expectations about feedback are determined by the instructional practices they are used to or the emphasis on a particular aspect of writing they have been familiar with. Students in FL contexts, for instance, are likely more concerned about grammatical accuracy because writing is a means for them to learn the language (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994, p. 157, 1996; Lee, 2008b). Students in the ESL contexts, in contrast, undertake writing to improve on their rhetorical knowledge for the writing tasks not only in their English composition courses but also other degree

courses that require them to accomplish writings of various kinds (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994).

Once students receive feedback it is curious to know whether or not they have a sustained improvement of writing. In fact, whether or not students can have a long-term writing improvement from grammar correction has been one of the perennial debatable issues regarding feedback-revision. Although research findings on this topic have not been able to conclusively provide a concrete directionality, more research on this topic is emerging. In a recent study, Bitchener (2008) provided preliminary findings in support of the grammar correction and its effectiveness over time. Bitchener's study demonstrates that participants were able to retain what they learned from feedback for a period of 2 months.

In addition to the expert feedback students receive from their instructors, scholars have also explored other feedback options, e.g., feedback provided by peers (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006). Researchers examined topics such as students' preferences regarding peer feedback and the effects of peer feedback on both the "givers" and the "takers" (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009) considering the importance the process theories of writing put on the peer reviews regarding the improvement of the writing processes.

Finally, an encouraging development that has emerged in recent time regarding the process research is studies concerning the feedback-revision in EFL contexts (Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2003; Lee, 2008a, 2008b; Miao, Badger & Zhen, 2006; Sengupta, 2000), in addition to those in ESL contexts. Studies in

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these diverse settings have helped us understand the intricacies surrounding feedback-revision and broadened our perspectives on the topic. Research in EFL contexts where practices of process writing is rather a rarity (e.g., Casanave, 2004) has been a welcome addition to the erstwhile research taking place mainly in the North American contexts, more specifically, in the U.S.

Research on feedback and revisions has predominantly investigated issues that can be described as essentially the mental processes of L2 writers when they work on the revisions of their texts. For instance, the kind of feedback students prefer, how they respond to teachers' feedback, or the receptivity of teachers' feedback are some examples of how L2 writing is viewed as it occurs in individuals' mind. However, one important aspect that generally misses out from this scheme of research is related to variables surrounding the writers that may shape their mental processes. Questions such as how writers' social or economic backgrounds impact the kind of feedback they prefer or how the academic backgrounds that L2 writers come from determine the way they respond to teachers' feedback, or to what extent the institutional backgrounds they belong to impact their receptivity of teachers' feedback are but some relevant questions that seem to be unaccounted for in the bulk of feedback-revision research. Moving forward, second language writing research may start finding answers to some of these questions, for L2 writers' socio-economic status, their social and/or institutional as well as academic backgrounds may play important roles in the way they accomplish various tasks related to writing.

Cognitive processes in L2 writing

Although the reviews on feedback-revision in L2 writing in the section above constitutes an essential part of the cognitive paradigm of process research, I chose to create a separate category for this aspect of the L2 writing considering: (a) The sheer volume of research done on this topic, (b) intensity of debate it has been able to stimulate and thus, the attention of scholars in the field it has drawn. As such, in this section, I will review studies that have been outside the spectrum of the feedback-revision but involve cognitive aspects of the writing processes. Typically these studies involved more complex research design (e.g., experimental, quasi-experimental) and investigated topics such as cognitive models for L2 writing, L2 writers' planning while writing, pausing behaviors, backtracking patterns, writing speed, temporal distribution of L2 writing tasks, writing strategies used, and so on.

L2 writing researchers have attempted to identify a cognitive model that would explain the L2 writing activities. To my knowledge, in one of the first studies of its kind, Devine, Railey and Roshoff (1993) attempted to provide cognitive models for L2 writers. Studying both L1 basic writers and L2 writers, they outlined such models for both groups based on their subjects' personal, task and strategy variables. The findings showed that L1 and L2 writers differed in terms of their cognitive models and their performances were contingent on the cognitive model they possessed.

Process research within cognitive paradigm has typically examined the planning and thinking processes of L2 writers. Bosher (1998) studying 3

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Southeast Asian students' writing processes found that even though L2 writers were invested in the writing processes, they demonstrated a great deal of differences in the way they accomplished their writing tasks. As her 3 participants wrote, they showed different pausing behaviors, problem-solving strategies, and meta-cognitive awareness. Bosher also found that L2 writers with similar language proficiency and placed in the same level of writing instruction, might have different strengths and weakness in writing due to more effective or less effective writing strategies. Bosher's (1998) study was significant because of the think aloud protocol analysis she used for her data source. It was one of the first studies in L2 writing process research that used think aloud protocol data.

Pausing behaviors are indicative of how writers process their thoughts in their minds and the time they take to translate them into words (i.e., actual writing). How often writers pause during composing is important because of the processes these pauses may involve. Sasaki (2000) studying the writing processes of three paired groups of L2 writers – expert vs. novices, more- vs. less-skilled, and novices before and after 6 months of writing instructions – found that expert L2 writers spent more time at the beginning of the writing tasks for global planning. The novice writers, on the other hand, spent less time planning at the start of the writing tasks. Once started, however, the expert writers stopped less frequently than the novice writers. The study also found that language proficiency did have bearing on L2 writers' strategy use while composing (similar to Cumming's, 1989 findings) and that after 6 months of training, novice L2 writers started to demonstrate some of the strategies used by their expert counterparts. Sasaki

(2000) asserted that L2 proficiency might have resulted in the difference in the strategy use of L2 writing. Although the study elicits interesting dynamics of L2 writing, one of its shortcomings was that it did not account for the various social/cultural factors that might have been responsible for the variability of the results among participants.

Studies (Kellogg, 1987, 1988; Wen & Wang, 2002) have found that throughout the entire process of composing, L2 writers spend most of their time searching for words appropriate for the meaning they want to convey in texts. Scholars within the cognitive paradigm of process research have studied the nature and temporal dimension (i.e., formulation process) of composing. Formulation task being one of the three components of the classic cognitive model of writing (i.e., Flower & Hayes, 1981), L2 writing researchers investigated this aspect of the cognitive processes in second language writing. In a series of studies, Julio Roca de Larios and his colleagues at the University of Murcia, Spain studied various aspects of this process. For example, in one of their early studies, Roca de Larios, Murphy and Manchón (1999) examined the restructuring strategies of L2 writers. The findings suggested that L2 writers employed these strategies when they struggled to express the intended meaning and when they wanted to "manage the complex and multi-level nature of composing in a foreign language" (p. 36). The researchers, however, contended that while using the restructuring strategies, the subjects had to face the constraints of their limited competency in L2.

In a similar study, Roca de Larios, Marín and Murphy (2001) investigated the temporal distribution of the formulation processes. They found that "…formulation processes seem to have a temporal structure in which the time invested in explicitly tackling lexical and morphosyntactic problems and activating search procedures to solve them is roughly half (in the L2 condition) or approximately five times less (in the L1 condition) than the time spent generating text fluently…" (p. 525). They attributed the control and management of this process to what they described as "the central executive" (a component of working memory) (p. 526), hypothesizing that the intervention of the central executive helped facilitate a given writing task by efficiently coordinating the task environment, the audience, and the time pressure (p. 526). In yet another study on a related topic, Roca de Larios, Manchón and Murphy (2006) found that the writing processes were more labor-intensive owing to more time that L2 writers took (i.e., twice as much time compared to their L1counterparts) for solving the formulation problems. Other important findings of their study included: Proficiency in L2 was not related to the time spent in solving formulation problem and L2 writers' solving of upgrading formulation problems (various semantic and pragmatic concerns as opposed to juxtaposition of grammatical sentences) depended on their language proficiency. That is, the higher proficiency they had the more upgrading problems they could solve (although they conceded that this pattern was non-linear).

The correlation between the processing time and a cognitive activity is an important area within cognitive process research. Scholars have attempted to

understand if writers with a superior L2 proficiency could accomplish the writing task faster. In one of their recent studies, Roca de Larios, Murphy, Manchón and Marín (2008) investigated the temporal dimension of L2 writing processes—whether or not proficiency had any bearing on how much time L2 writers allocated to different stages of the composing process and the differential distribution of time by different proficiency groups. They found that formulation process took the most time and proficiency did affect how much time they invested in formulation. The results of this study showed that compared to L1 formulation processes (which occupied about 50% of total composition time, e.g., Kellogg, 19987, 1988), L2 formulation (which occupied about 60% to 80% of total composition time, e.g., Wen & Wang, 2002) took more time, which in turn confirmed the findings that showed that L2 writers spent most of their time finding resources and producing appropriate words for composing. At another level, this study also confirmed that as L2 writers' proficiency level increased, they learned "…what attentional resources to allocate to which writing activities at which stages of the writing process"(Roca de Larios, Murphy, Manchón and Marín, 2008, p. 43), indicating that with an increased proficiency level, L2 writers would demonstrate more control over the writing processes.

Aside from the formulation processes, the recursiveness of the classic cognitive model of Flower and Hayes (1981) also involves backtracking behaviors during writing. Backtracking behaviors entail going back and forth in the process of the completion of writing tasks. Manchón, Roca de Larios and Murphy (2000) exploring backtracking behaviors found that while backtracking

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all L2 writers accessed both L1 and L2 and that individual differences in backtracking were related more to the individual approaches to writing tasks rather than to the production of a particular type of text (i.e., argumentative vs. narrative).

The cognitive paradigm of L2 writing process research, from what we have learned from the reviews of some of the most important studies to date, provides us with insights into L2 writers' cognitive activities during composing. Typically with its experimental research design and quantitative data, this body of process research is characterized by various statistical details about the activity of composing. However, writing being a social activity cannot be explained solely in terms of the statistical details. What is also needed is a descriptive, qualitative explanation of the processes that go behind the production of texts. These descriptive details generally escape the radar of statistical analysis of experimental research, although we must acknowledge that the cognitive paradigm of process research has helped us gain important perspectives about second language writing.

An emphasis on context

More recently, L2 writing process research has considered the contexts of writing, generally consisting of various social settings within which language learners write (e.g., Cumming, 2001). These social contexts include a consideration about the way L2 writers acquire different kinds of writing literacies such as their perceptions about the writing needs, how they learn to cope with various kinds of writing needed for college or graduate school, how they

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learn to write in a particular disciplinary context and the ways they (especially the international students coming to the U.S.) navigate through the rigors of academic writing and become successful.

Concerns about how L2 learners adapt to the contexts of the target language have constituted some of the intriguing topics in second language studies in general. Scholars (e.g., Connor, 2004) have underscored the importance of considering issues beyond texts and investigating the surroundings within which these texts are produced (Casanave, 2003). This school of scholars believes that a consideration about the surroundings within which L2 writers compose is as important as the cognitive explanations of the writing tasks. The different contextual demands that L2 writers may find themselves in may include adjusting with the new academic systems (i.e., different from what they were used to in their respective countries) when they go abroad (e.g., United States) for education, specific proficiency level in order to carry out the task, various discipline-specific writing skills, and understanding the writing tasks/prompts the instructors provide in these contexts. Scholars have maintained that research must look into these context-specific exigencies to provide more complete accounts of the writing processes.

L2 writing in EAP contexts involves considerable attention in American educational institutions because of the increasing number of international students coming here from across the world (Matsuda, 1998). Helping these students cope with the academic writing across disciplines is the primary goal of EAP courses. A common perception that runs through L2 writing courses in EAP contexts is

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that generally both students and instructors take these courses as sites for general language skills development. However, Leki and Carson (1994) in their study found that L2 writers did not necessarily perceive these courses as much of sites for language skills development as they did to become efficient users of the language, so that they could cut down on the workload and time to accomplish various writing tasks (p. 92). Additionally, these writers showed interest in learning intellectually stimulating writing skills as well as strategies (using libraries and citing the sources properly) through their writing assignments.

L2 writers' use of various strategies in compliance with the contexts of writing provides us with the perspectives of how the writing processes in many ways are dependent upon individuals' personal traits and backgrounds. While a given writing task may demand a particular approach to accomplish it in certain ways rather than others, individual writers may draw on their past writing experiences that they might have found effective (e.g., Leki, 1995). These strategies may include following their own personal goals and preferences (at times disregarding the requirements set by instructors), accommodating as well as resisting instructors' demands, interacting with both peers and instructors, looking for models to write their own essays, and referring to their own cultural or first language knowledge whenever they can (Casanave, 1995; Leki, 1995). A preference for any or all of these strategies may result in rejection of others, oftentimes expected by instructors. In fact, the incongruence between instructor and students' belief systems may make the entire teaching-learning process fall apart (e.g., Casanave, 1995; Leki, 2001; Losey, 1997). Casanave maintains that

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the "local interactions" among the factors arising out of the context of writing ultimately determines the course a particular piece of writing would take.

L2 writers' personal backgrounds, both academic and non-academic, may also shape the way they approach and accomplish the writing tasks. Personal backgrounds have bearing on how second language learners acquire academic literacy. A complex process in itself, the acquisition of academic literacy reflects largely on the writing processes. Spack (1997) shows how Yuko, a Japanese undergraduate student studying at an American academic institution, acquired college-level reading and writing literacy by tapping into her past educational as well as personal backgrounds. Struggling in her first year, Yuko matured immensely in terms of her reading and writing skill development as she spent more time at her school. Yuko attributed the development of her writing processes to a better understanding of American academic discourse style, the enhanced ability to transfer her comprehension of reading materials to which the writing assignments were related and seeking help from instructors outside of the class (Spack, 1997, p. 46). Yuko's story, then, validates the fact that L2 writers often look for help and support for their writing from sources outside the realms of classrooms. These sources may include (but are not limited to) writers' personal interests arising out of their various life experiences, both academic and non-academic, their emotional attachments, ethical and practical concerns related to the topics (i.e., especially for research-based writing), their past experiences about or exposures to discussions, reading or writing on similar issues (e.g., Prior, 1991, p. 295). In short, as Prior (1991) puts it, writers' "…own values, goals, and

knowledge to the writing tasks" are important components of an "expanded writing process" (p. 295).

At disciplinary level, L2 writers adopt strategies that help them write discipline-appropriate ways. For some, writing in a particular discipline and writing in general English courses (i.e., EAP) are "completely different worlds" (Leki & Carson, 1997, p. 55); it takes discipline-specific knowledge and expertise, not only about the content itself but also about the disciplinary genre of writing (e.g., Russell, 1997, 1999), to be successful in disciplinary writing. Research shows that writing using a source text (i.e., disciplinary writing) is not as flexible as it is in general writing courses (i.e., EAP courses) in terms of its content and format (Leki & Carson, 1997). However, disciplinary writing does have its own share of advantages. For example, it is easier to write for the audience specific to the discipline because both the author and audience share similar disciplinary information. Writing for a general audience, on the other hand, is much harder because writers have the extra burden of figuring out which information to include and which information to leave out. Besides, while writing within a disciplinary context L2 writers experience less inhibition in terms of grammar and other language-related issues, for content is of primary importance in such cases (Roberts & Cimasko, 2008). In addition, they have at their disposal different symbols such as arrows, diagrams as ways of expressing their ideas. Thus, for L2 writers, the writing processes in a discipline appear to be different from the general writing processes. Having gone through the disciplinary acclimatization (Russell, 1997) process, L2 writers seem to feel much more at

home. The implication is that immersion in disciplinary contexts may have positive impacts on the writing performance.

Implications for Research and Theory

From the reviews above, it may be clear that L2 writing process research is rich and has investigated many aspects of how L2 texts are produced. Although it initially began by following the traditions of mainstream composition studies, process research in L2 writing in the past couple of decades has grown in substantive ways, incorporating issues that are more relevant to second language studies.

In spite of the many important perspectives that L2 writing process research has provided us, from the reviews it may appear that the current trends of a clear predominance of the cognitive paradigm have created a somewhat limited, limiting, and biased view of L2 writing in general. This view is "limited" because the traditional cognitive paradigm considers L2 writers as "persons" and not necessarily "the person-in-the-world as member of a sociocultural community" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). It is "limiting" because the research findings with such an approach does not allow us to see a holistic view of the process of the production of L2 texts. Finally, it is "biased" because it generally attempts to investigate what happens in L2 writers' mind, although there appear to be issues related to L2 writing that exist outside writers' mind which might be equally, if not more, important in second language composing.

In what follows, I will first discuss the limitations of a cognitivist approach to process research from two different perspectives: Epistemological and

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methodological. Then, I will situate the current project in relation to the gaps that have been discussed as well as the theoretical framework of the current project.

As it may be clear from the review of literature (with the exception of the fourth category "an emphasis on context") above, L2 writing process research has mainly dealt with the cognitive processes that L2 writers go through. This claim is validated from scholars' concerns about the relationship between L1 and L2 writing processes, various aspects of the feedback and revisions, the issues related to the recursiveness of a writing activity and related tasks such as idea generation and planning. One underlying assumption in this body of research is that analyzing what happens in writers' heads/minds can provide information regarding writing principles and instructions. However, human minds do not operate in a vacuum (Kent, 1999). From an epistemological point of view, the information gathered from the cognitive paradigm process research is but partial, since it only accounts for the functions within writers' minds not the surroundings within which human minds exist, or the surroundings that help form and modify them. A process approach to L2 writing that is based exclusively on the cognitive perspectives fails to provide a full spectrum of analysis about what happens as a piece of writing takes place.

Atkinson (2002) in his conceptualization of a sociocognitive approach to SLA compares a human mind that is cut off from its surroundings with "…a single cactus in the middle of a lonely desert—the only thing except sand for miles around. The cactus sits there, waiting patiently for that rare cloud to pass overhead and for that shower of rain to come pouring down" (p. 525). Theories

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deriving out of a "lonely cactus" can but only bear fruits enough to let the cause

of hunger and destitution of a potentially thick and dense crowd of the L2 writing

processes remain at an alarming level. Hence, an alternative approach to the

investigation of L2 research is necessary. Such an approach to L2 writing process

research may resemble Atkinson's (2002) "tropical rainforest" which is

"…constantly wet with humidity and teeming with life, sounds, growth, and

decay—a lush ecology in which every organism operates in complex relationship

with every other organism. Each tree grows in and as a result of this

fundamentally integrated world, developing continuously and being sustained

through its involvement in the whole ecology" (p. 526). A "tropical rainforest"

view of process research would see L2 writers surrounded by their society,

culture, life, academic and non-academic history, other people that they grew up

and now spend time with and the list goes on. In short, the tropical rainforest view

would incorporate a more complete image of an L2 writer and his/her writing.

A tropical rainforest view of an L2 writer would see him/her not as a static

agent, but as an agent who would cause and be an object of changes (van Lier,

2008). As Atkinson (2002) notes, the relationships among various entities in the

world are complex. These relationships are bidirectional (Vygotsky, 1978),

meaning every object mediates and is mediated by others. L2 writers, being active

agents for changes, are entitled to challenging and negotiating the contexts in

which they would operate in the process of writing. These negotiations may result

in changing their world in some way (even within the short duration of writing a

particular piece). The negotiations of changes may reflect on, among other things,

selection of topics, generation of ideas, and organization of thoughts, based on experiences as well as challenges that L2 writers encounter. As active agents, they would take their everyday experiences in their stride and negotiate to change their world (within which they write) in certain way. The world in its turn would also provide affordances for them. These bidirectional and complex relationships between L2 writers and the world remain absent in the traditional process research in which writers are seen to be static and their cognitive processes as absolute.

Aside from agency, two other important constructs that are important to include within a tropical rainforest view of L2 writers are their ideologies and identities. Ideologies are important as humans often perform tasks making choices that can only be attributed to personal preferences or subjectivities rather than a coherent, objective set of rules. Scholars (Benesch, 1993) have advocated for a consideration of ideologies in second language education. Ideologies that are at work at the time of composing may help capture the subjectivities that go behind the production of L2 texts, thus providing process research a more dynamic view of L2 writers that a cognitive approach has not generally considered.

Identities have been proven to be an important variable in second language learning (e.g., Norton, 1997). As active agents L2 writers are expected to change their identities in the course of their writing. These identity formations should constitute important parts of L2 writing process research, for without them a comprehensive explanation of the task of writing would be incomplete. Recent research (Kim, Baba & Cumming, 2006) has shown how L2 writers' identities shift in relation to writing tasks. A tropical rainforest view of L2 writers, thus, can

make a useful alternative to a traditional view and provide a more holistic

perspective of L2 writing processes.

Similar to what I discussed above, a tropical rainforest view would see L2

writing being co-constructed and to be collaborative, which in turn would

underscore the social dimension of a given writing task. Atkinson (2003a) links

an overemphasis of the cognitivism in process research to "the austere asociality

of structuralism" (p. 4) that has been the prevalent epistemological tradition of the

humanities and social sciences until recently. However, the counter-approaches to

the cognitivism such as the interpretivist, the social constructionist,

ethnomethodological, sociolinguistic, and poststructuralist have emerged as

dominant knowledge-construction practices in the past half-a-century (e.g.,

Atkinson, 2003a) and they have shifted our perspective about research from a

closed, systematic, and materialistic to a more open-ended, flexible, and humane

one. For me, L2 writing seen through the lens of post-cognitivism (as discussed

above) is essentially social, and therefore, collaborative.

Methodologically, a structuralist view of research has always favored

concrete, quantifiable data. Ideologically it exists more toward the positivist end

of the spectrum of inquiry paradigm (e.g., Silva, 2005). The information that

constitutes theories and research in a positivist approach is static and inflexible.

Furthermore, because of its bias for an experimental research design, there is

hardly any room for descriptive analysis of data. It follows an inductive approach

to hypothesis development, and generally designs studies within controlled

environments. The cognitive paradigm of process research, owing to its strong

structuralist lineage, is generally devoid of the thick description of the processes of L2 writing (e.g., Prior, 1998).

So, what am I looking for in this project?

In light of the concerns regarding process writing discussed above, the concept of a post-process[3] approach to writing emerged in mainstream composition studies (Atkinson, 2003a; Kent, 1999) although we do not find serious discussions about a post-process approach to L2 writing until 2003, when *Journal of Second Language Writing* published a special issue on the topic. While there may be disagreement among scholars (Atkinson, 2003a; Casanave, 2003; Matsuda, 2003) regarding the use of the label "post-process" in L2 writing, they do agree with each other on the necessity of a more expanded notion of L2 writing process research encompassing various social, cultural and political issues (among others) that L2 writers have to deal with on an everyday basis.

Highlighting the importance of the "social turn," Atkinson (2003a) underscores the need to look at "social" aspects of second language writing in the post-process era which runs in contradiction with the erstwhile "*largely asocial*," highly "*individualist*," (p. 10) (italics in original) and somewhat "structuralist" (p. 4) approach to L2 writing (also see Atkinson & Connor, 2008, p. 527). Besides, Atkinson (2003a) maintains that the field of L2 writing has already begun its journey toward a more contextualized research tradition with the emergence of

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[3] For the current project, I do not necessarily use the term "post-process" in its literal sense, i.e., indicative of the end of a process era of L2 writing, and the start of a "post-process" era; rather, I use the term to imply an expanded notion of L2 writing process research; for details, see, e.g., Kent (1999); Prior (1991, 1997, 1998, 2006).

such topics as genre and discourse community, and writing in academic contexts to allude to "L2 writing as a socially-situated activity" (p. 5). Casanave (2003) in her outline of a post-process L2 writing notes the importance of exploring "…social and political aspects of local knowledge and local interactions of particular L2 writers in particular settings" (p. 86). She argues that post-process L2 writing must go beyond the "narrow textual and procedural focuses of the past" (p. 86).

At the core of a post-process approach to writing is a growing concern regarding the various social, political, and ideological fragmentations that have marked human life in our times. The world has moved away from the structuralist epistemologies that perceive knowledge in terms of the concrete, stable, and absolute truth. The post-structuralist/post-modern points of views of our time represent a hybrid and constantly-changing knowledge-base to account for an equally complex and evolving nature of human life. Leki (2001) favoring such an approach that warrants the "impossibility of telling the truth" (p. 18) prefers telling "stories" that are subject to interpretation. These stories are nothing but the descriptions of "human condition" (Leki, 2001, p. 19) that help make sense of what happens around us.

A research approach that would ensure uncovering the "hidden transcripts" (Leki, 2001, p.17, cited from Miller, 1998) of L2 writers through the interpretation of their stories needs to account for the milieu in which writing takes place. Writing, as it is viewed from such a perspective, is social, cultural,

and humane, as it is cognitive; and it is *not* merely "…a decontextualized set of skills or processes…" (Atkinson, 2003b, p.59), as it has been held for long.

In the pretext of the above, there have been calls for an increased consideration of contexts and various mediational factors in the research and pedagogy of second language writing. In recent time scholars (Atkinson, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Atkinson & Connor, 2008; Casanave, 2003; Connor, 2002, 2004; Kubota & Lehner, 2004) have stressed on the significant role that they play in L2 writing. Thus, it is important to explore how writing is accomplished in situ and how/whether what writers bring with them to the writing table has any bearing on their writing activities. An investigation of L2 writing from this particular approach is the single most important motivating factor in undertaking the current dissertation project. Roughly based on what I have discussed so far, below I provide a breakdown of the purpose of the current project.

The process approach to L2 writing has traditionally viewed writing from an individualistic, cognitive perspective (Yu, 2008). That is, this approach attempts to explain the composing process that goes through individuals' heads for the most part, ignoring various contextual variables that impact the writer and writing. As L2 writing scholars (Atkinson, 2002, 2004; Connor, 2004) in recent times called for a greater recognition of various context-specific issues, exploring a more "situated" account of the L2 writing tasks has become imperative.

And, recent developments in L2 research (especially those in SLA, e.g., Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf & Appel, 1994) relating to L2 learning points at the significance of various context-specific issues

and their meditational power in language learning. Second language scholars (e.g., Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, Thorne, 2003) in this connection have argued that human mind is influenced by various material as well as symbolic artifacts. Since writing involves mental processing, it is quite tenable to assume that the act of L2 writing is mediated by various meditational factors as well. Without an informed knowledge about these mediational artifacts and how they impact L2 writing at various stages of a writing task it is not possible to devise an effective model for L2 writing instruction (e.g., Cumming & Riazi, 2000). Further, because L2 writing involves not only learning about writing but also learning a second/foreign language (Harklau, 2002; Leki & Carson, 1994), having a parallel research agenda to SLA would shed further light on the complex phenomena of writing. With an expanded notion of the writing processes (Prior, 1997, 1998), we may be able to come up with a better understanding about how L2 writing occurs. In sum, this project is intended to address the need of a broad and comprehensive approach (outside of the cognitive realms) to L2 writing that came up in the discussions of a post-process era of L2 writing (Atkinson, 2003a, 2003b; Casanave, 2003; Kubota, 2003).

How will I accomplish what I am looking for: The sociocultural-theoretical framework?

As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, for the current project I used activity system (Russell, 1999) analysis – a sociocultural-theoretical framework of Vygotskian tradition – for investigating the writing processes of ESL learners. Activity theory (Bazerman & Russell, 2003; Y. Engeström, 1999; Russell &

Yaňez, 2003) is a robust analytical framework within Vygotskian sociocultural tradition. In its most basic sense, activity theory consists of three elements: Subject, object, and the mediational artifacts. The relationship between them is illustrated by a simple triangle. A. N. Leont'ev provided a firmer shape of activity theory after Vygotsky's death. Leont'ev's contention was that in order to understand human consciousness or mental processes one had to explain the "activity," which "describes transformational action 'a specific form of the societal existence of humans consisting of purposeful changing of natural and social reality'" (Davydov, 1999, p. 39, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 215). In order to enhance its analytical power, Leonte'v later provided three hierarchical levels of a human activity, namely, *activity*, *action*, and *operation* (see Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, pp. 216-220 for a detailed discussion). However, Leonte'v's theory drew criticisms because of the rigidity in its approach to the analysis of a given activity. For instance, it did not account for the creative aspects of human activity (creative writing, for instance, is a task that cannot be explained in terms of its specific goal-orientedness, or a similar bounded structure) and was unable to incorporate collective activity in societal or collaborative settings into its analytical framework (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Russell, 1999).

Addressing the shortcomings of the earlier version of activity theory, Y. Engeström (1999) extended Vygotsky and Leonte'v's work to a collective activity system. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) wrote:

> within a collective activity system, the actions of individuals occur at the
> nexus of three factors: the tools and artifacts available (for example,

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language, computers), the community and its understood rules (historical and institutional ones as well as those that arise from a local set of social-material conditions), and the division of labor in these community-settings (for example, identity and social role, expected interactional dynamics. (p. 222)

Y. Engeström's (1999) activity system, thus, consists of six elements: Subject, tools, goals, division of labor, community, and rules and is illustrated by the following triangle.

Tools

Subject   Goals

Rules   Division of
      Community   Labor
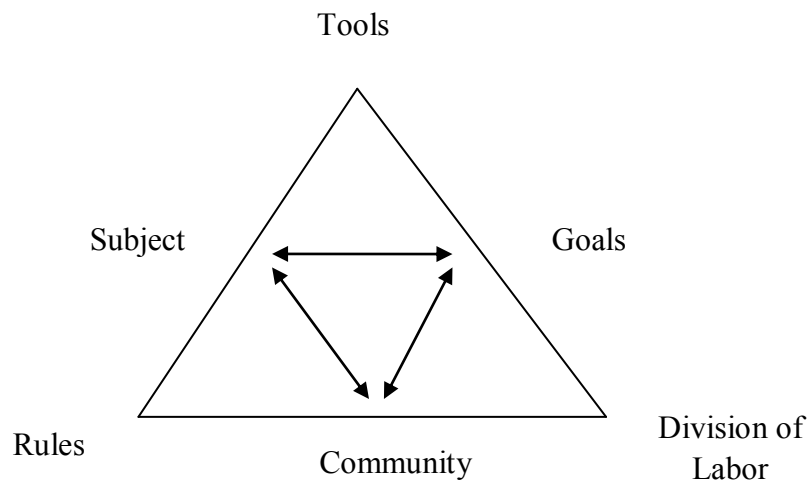
Figure. 2.1. An activity system

The most important thing about this system is that it provides a "...framework that brings together local human activity and larger social-cultural-historical structures" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 222), and as a result, it is an effective framework for exploring human activity in its sociocultural settings (e.g., Bazerman & Russell, 2003, p. 1; Lantolf & Genung, 2002). Y. Engeström's activity theory is more flexible in its approach and accounts for the multiplicities

that pervade everyday human tasks. We must remember, however, that the context of a single activity may be linked with multiple activity systems and a single activity system may be influenced by other exogenous activity system(s). Within an activity system it is not the individual elements that help account for the human functioning or the development but rather it is the relationships between these elements that form the analysis. These relationships can be contentious, unstable, and transformed (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 222).

Although activity system is an effective framework to analyze human activities in their sociocultural settings there are constraints in working with this framework (e.g., Cox, 2006). One of the problems relates to the difficulty in setting the boundaries of an activity system for analytical purposes (Prior, 1997). At times these boundaries may become blurred and messy. By definition an activity system exists, overlaps and contradicts with other activity systems. It is therefore tricky to draw a clear demarcation line for researching one particular activity system with a specific starting and an end point.

A related problem is that of the size of the activity system—how big or small an activity system should be. When researching in a particular context, should we look into one big, all-encompassing activity system, or should we look into the small, multiple ones? In a second language classroom context, for example, should we only look for the activity system of the classroom in question, or should we also consider activity systems of each individual student, the cultural activity systems that they come from, the (institutional) activity system that the classroom is part of, the activity system of the instructor, i.e., his/her methods and

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philosophy of teaching, and so on (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Russell & Yaňez, 2003)? Most recently activity theory scholars Y. Engeström, R. Engeström and Vähäaho (1999) attempted to capture this phenomenon by the metaphor "knotworking"—the "construction of constantly changing combinations of people and artifacts over lengthy trajectories of time and widely distributed in space" (p. 345). Other scholars attempted to capture the notion by different other metaphors. Goffman (1981), for instance, described an activity as "laminated," meaning, the actors may hold multiple footings simultaneously. Similarly, Goodwin and Duranti (1992) maintained that "context is always multiple and dynamic, relatively foregrounded and backgrounded frames rather than a static stage" (Prior, 1997, p. 277).

In light of the above, I have been careful in designing the project and framing the research questions. For example, for the current project I created taxonomies of the six activity system elements and their influence on L2 writing. Many scholars (e.g., Russell & Yaňez, 2003) have pointed out that the permutation and combination of each of the six elements within each activity system may result in innumerable web of activity systems, potentially too many for practical purposes. To avoid such a scenario, I have focused on the occurrences of the six individual elements and their influences on L2 writing processes.

A sociocultural framework in writing research: What has been done?

Before concluding the chapter, in this section I shall discuss some of the important studies that used a sociocultural framework. While there has already been a substantial body of research in SLA using some aspects of Vygotskian

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sociocultural theory, writing research using a similar framework has been rather sparse until recently. Scholars in the field of composition studies have pointed out the usefulness of writing research using a sociocultural approach for sometime now (Prior, 2006). More recently L2 writing scholars have also been using sociocultural frameworks in their research (Lei, 2008).

De Guerrero and Villamil's (1994) study is one of the earlier ones in L2 writing that used Vygotskian sociocultural framework, showing a link between L2 learners' cognitive regulations and social relationships. Investigating the dynamics of peer revisions among L2 writers, the results of the study showed that the interactions that took place between peers were varied, and that L2 writers demonstrated different kinds of cognitive regulations based on tasks modalities. What was more important from a sociocultural point of view, the findings confirmed that various social relationships (i.e., symmetrical and asymmetrical) occurring during the revision process were related to different kinds of cognitive regulations (i.e., object-, self-, and other-regulation) that learners went through at various stages of peer revision tasks. In another study of similar kind, Villamil and de Guerrero (1996) investigating peer revisions in L2 writing activities reported on: (a) The social-cognitive revision activities taking place during the revision, (b) strategies used by L2 writers for the revisions tasks, and (c) aspects of social behaviors demonstrated by L2 writers. Findings suggested that L2 writers took part in various social-cognitive activities such as reading, assessing, composing, and discussing; employed strategies such as use of symbols and resources such as dictionaries, use of L1, and use of private speech; and

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demonstrated different kinds of social behaviors such as management of authorial control, collaboration, and adopting reader/writer roles. These two studies, then, revealed interesting dynamics of peer revisions in L2 writing, but perhaps most importantly, demonstrated that there existed a link between what happened inside L2 writers' head and the surroundings in which they operated, a contention that marked the post-process L2 writing research agenda and something that had been absent in much of the cognitive paradigm of process research. Quite encouragingly, however, without explicitly referring to a sociocultural framework recent studies in second language writing (e.g., James, 2010) have corroborated the important roles writing "climates" play in composing.

Tracing the sociohistoric accounts and laminated activities behind the production of texts, Prior (1991, 1997, 1998) and colleagues, i.e., Prior and Shipka (2003), in a series of studies showed how writing was shaped/re-shaped within various personal, inter-personal, contextual, disciplinary, and institutional milieus, in addition to various social and cultural contingencies. Prior (1998) in his book-length work investigated how writing is approximated within different disciplinary contexts and how "disciplinarity" is formed and re-formed. His research provides classic examples of writing looked at from situated and developmental perspectives, much in line with the premises of Vygotskian sociocultural theory. With an ensemble of explanatory framework such as Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theories of psychology and discourse respectively, and the theories of situated learning (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991), Prior (1991, 1997, 1998) and Prior and Shipka (2003) showed that the activity of writing could

not be explained simply by interpreting the tasks related to writing as one saw them to occur on surface. Instead, as they showed, writing was embedded in the web of day-to-day happenings of life at various levels: Personal, inter-personal, social, cultural, developmental, to name a few. In order to provide a full spectrum of the writing processes, one must account for all these levels.

Success or failure in writing tasks can be explained in terms of the historicity of the task itself. In a study that somewhat aligns with Prior's (1997, 1998), Russell and Yaňez (2003) report on the problems that Irish history (a general education course at a North American university) students faced in dealing with the specialized discourses and the writing in the genre of professional academic history that they were expected to accomplish. The researchers argue that the problems derived from the specialist versus novice contradictions in the American general education system, which in turn was embedded in the historical practices in American universities. Russell and Yaňez (2003) argue that since students could not relate themselves/their future activities to the specialist writing requirements of the general education courses (Irish history course in this case), they could not go beyond the rote learning and often felt alienated in the process of their writing. They further maintain that students' alienation in these general education writing courses can only be overcome by leading them to find the usefulness of the specialist discourses in their respective "activity systems," in their respective field of interests. Russell and Yaňez's (2003) study, thus, confirms that writing processes, especially those in disciplinary contexts, cannot be explained solely from cognitive perspectives. Instead, explanations need to be

sought from various other levels, some of which include, contextual, historical, academic, disciplinary, and institutional. Elsewhere, Russell (1995, 1997) conducted activity theory analyses of the concept of genre. He showed how genre is created out of various social and cultural practices within disciplinary contexts and how classroom writing is mediated by these genre systems in specific disciplines.

Overcoming various difficulties during writing through mediation also sheds light on the efficacies of sociocultural explanations of the writing processes. In a recent study, Lei (2008) shows how her participants used four broad categories of meditational tools—artifact-mediated, rule-mediated, community-mediated, and role-mediated—as part of their writing-strategy-use. The researcher argues that L2 writers employed these strategies with respect to the contextual demands they faced while accomplishing the writing tasks.

While research using a sociocultural approach proliferated in SLA in the last couple of decades, the popularity of this approach is growing in writing research too, as it may become clear from some of the important studies reviewed here. Sociocultural explanations inform us about the situated, context-specific phenomena of L2 learning. L2 writing processes looked from these perspectives, therefore, can enrich us with alternative viewpoints regarding what happens as L2 writing takes place.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I have reviewed relevant literature; while the reviews mainly revolved around the process writing they also included a sociocultural approach to

second language research—two key concepts of the project. At the beginning of the chapter, I discussed the research and theories of a process approach to writing, its history and subsequent developments. Since L2 writing process research is grounded on the mainstream composition theories, the development of the process writing is relevant to L2 writing research. In the next section, I reviewed research and theories surrounding L2 writing process research. I divided this section into four different parts, showing that research in second language writing process has been traditionally cognitively-oriented and that a more socioculturally-oriented approach is necessary to obtain a more comprehensive understanding about L2 writing. The section that followed contextualizes the current project, from epistemological and methodological points of views. In this section, I introduced the activity system framework and reasons behind using an activity system analysis for the current project. I concluded the chapter by recounting important studies in writing that used a sociocultural framework.

Overall, the chapter provides accounts on L2 writing process theories and research as well as underscores the effectiveness of a sociocultural research framework. The discussions help situate the project from conceptual, theoretical, and methodological perspectives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter I discuss the methodology of the project. The discussions will revolve as follows. At the beginning of the chapter, I provide the context of the study; starting at a broad university level, and then covering the departmental, course, and classroom levels. This is followed by a discussion about the participants of the project. Next, I discuss the design of the study—a background of the approach and methodology I used and the reasons behind it. Following methodology, I present the data collection procedures, different data types, and the data analysis mechanisms. At the end of the chapter, I discuss issues related to the validity and reliability of the current project.

Before moving to the discussions on methodology, at this point it is necessary to clarify the general conventions I followed in reporting the interview transcripts and process logs in this chapter as well as the next chapter on findings. First, I used numbers to refer to each of the 31 participants (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 23, and so on). I did so in order to keep the participants' identity anonymous. I assigned each participant a number following the order in which the interviews between the respective participant and me took place. Second, I used pseudonyms to refer to any specific information related to the context—for instance, I used South West State University (SWSU), ENG008, and Mr. J, to refer to the names of the university in which the study took place, the course and the instructor respectively. Next, while I reported all interview transcripts and process logs per original, at some places I also used explanatory notes to provide more information for readers. I used my own texts within square brackets so that they can be

distinguished from original interview transcripts and process logs. Finally, I used periods (.) to indicate any pause during the interviews. Any overlaps during the interviews were marked by three periods at the end and beginning of two consecutive turns.

Context

The university and the department

The current study took place at South West State University (SWSU), a large North American university located in the south west region in the United States of America. Being one of the largest public schools in terms of in-coming freshman students, each year this university admits many international students from different parts of the world. SWSU has strong research traditions and offers degrees in liberal arts and humanities, sciences, business, engineering, arts, and music.

SWSU's English department is an independent unit within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. English at SWSU is a large department offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees, including MAs, MFAs, and PhDs. SWSU's English department is a dynamic unit offering degrees in a range of majors such as linguistics, applied linguistics, TESOL, rhetoric and composition, creative writing, and literature. Because it offers such a wide range of majors, the English department consists of a dynamic group of faculty members specializing in different sub-areas within the fields of applied linguistics, linguistics, rhetoric, composition, creative writing, and literature.

Major areas of English studies apart, what distinguishes SWSU's English department from others of its kind is its nationally recognized Writing Programs, which is housed within English department as one of its largest sub-units. Writing Programs at SWSU is one of the largest in the United States, offering a variety of first-year composition and writing certificate courses. SWSU's Writing Programs offers approximately 500 courses and teach approximately 11,000 students every year (*Writing Programs*). In addition to local American students, many of the Writing Programs students come from different countries around the globe, taking composition courses to fulfill their degree requirements.

Composition courses offered by the Writing Programs can be divided broadly into two categories—the compulsory first-year composition courses required for graduation for all undergraduate students and the selective courses that students may take to fulfill the general education requirements or for writing certificate programs. The compulsory first-year composition courses consist of a sequence of two courses, except for those in the Stretch Programs, where students have to take a sequence of three courses. In Stretch Programs, the first of the two required courses for a regular sequence is stretched over two consecutive semesters, with the same group of students enrolled in classes taught by the same instructor. Once they finish the stretch courses (over two semesters), however, they can enroll in the second of the two required first-year composition courses like students taking the regular sequence of courses (i.e., two-course sequence) would do.

As stated in its course descriptions, Writing Programs' two mandatory first-year composition course sequence aims, among other things, "…to increase

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students' ability to develop ideas, to express ideas effectively…" and "…to help students develop sophisticated, situation-sensitive reading and writing strategies" (*First-Year Composition*). The objectives of Stretch Programs are slightly different in that the freshman students coming with the lowest test (e.g., SAT) scores or having very little or no writing experiences prior to college, are put through these programs first-up so that they get enough exposure and practice in writing before moving to the second of the required course in the Writing Programs' regular two-course sequence.

International freshman students coming in at SWSU have the same sequence of mandatory first-year composition course options—the regular two-course sequence of required courses and the sequences of the Stretch Programs, depending on their test (e.g., SAT, TOEFL) scores. The only exception, however, is that the Writing Programs offers separate courses exclusively for international students with different course numbers (i.e., ENG007 and ENG008 as opposed to ENG001 and ENG002 for mainstream, American students). These courses have the same goals and objectives and target learning outcomes as the ones for mainstream American students. Although the concept of having separate sections exclusively for international students is debatable in both composition studies as well as writing program administration, the main philosophy behind having separate sections lies in the Writing Programs' efforts to address the distinctive needs of international students, who come from different social, cultural, and academic backgrounds, the best way they can. All participants of the current study

came from two sections of ENG008 taught by the same instructor during the spring semester in 2010.

The course: ENG008

As mentioned earlier, ENG008 is the second of the two-course sequence's and third of the Stretch Programs' required first-year composition course that all international students admitted to SWSU must take to fulfill their graduation requirements. Typically, students take ENG008 in their second or third semester as a freshman or a sophomore, although there can be exceptions to this (the current study, for example, had 1 junior and 2 seniors). International students may delay taking first-year composition courses fearing that they might do badly in English and that might lower their GPA, for many students as well as their families hold high expectations about their GPA.

ENG008 sections offered by the Writing Programs follow the same course goals and objectives outlined in Programs' "Mission Statement." To ensure uniformity among the courses, each year a sub-committee comprising all ESL instructors works under the guidance of the Director of the Writing Programs. Usually there is a meeting convened by the coordinator of the ESL sub-committee at the beginning of the academic year so that instructors can share problems and concerns about the courses they teach. The meeting provides an opportunity for instructors to share their course syllabi, assignments or the textbooks they adopt and for the Writing Programs administrators to brief teachers on any changes that may be taking place they should know about. The bottom line is, although each semester first-year composition sections for international students are taught by a

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number of instructors, uniformity in terms of the content, the course goals and objectives, the learning outcomes, assignment sequences, and adoption of textbooks and materials is attempted through constant dialogues among the instructors as well as between the instructors and the Writing Programs administration.

The classes for the current study

The data for the current project was gathered from two sections of ENG008 taught by the same instructor. Part of the reason why I chose to study sections of the same instructor was that it was helpful to maintain some degree of additional uniformity that way. For instance, the instructor used the same course syllabi and assignment sequences for both the classes. Also, he maintained identical daily schedules (e.g., class discussions, homework assignments etc.) for both the classes. Both classes met for 50 minutes three days a week—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The first one started from 11:50 am through 12:40 pm and the second one was scheduled to meet from 12:55 – 1:45 pm. That is, the two classes would meet back to back, with a mandatory 15-minute break in-between (i.e., following university-wide 50-minute class schedule). The site of both classes was the same too—a 28-people-capacity room having multimedia facilities. The classroom was conveniently located at the end of the hallway on the second floor of the language and literature building on the main campus of the university. The classroom itself was comfortable and spacious. Entering through the door, turning left and then going straight ahead was the instructor's dais. The instructor would stand facing the students with the classroom door on his right. The classroom was

well-lit inside with artificial light. There was no window looking outside. There were whiteboards on three sides of the room—behind and on either sides of the instructor while he is standing facing students. There was an automated multimedia screen right above the whiteboard behind the instructor. The students would sit in rows facing the instructor. There was enough space to walk around the classroom once all students were seated.

Broadly speaking, the course descriptions and goals stated that the main objective of the course was to teach students the writing skills needed for their success in college. More specifically, the course aimed to teach students, among other things, the invention strategies, research strategies, audience analysis, drafting, revisions, documentation, and editing. The writing task that I investigated asked students to write a "proposal paper." In short, it required students to identify a problem and provide a reasonable solution, arguing that his/her proposal would effectively solve the ongoing problem. The writing assignment also asked students to write an introduction letter (cover letter) that would introduce their proposal to the authority they would submit the proposal (this letter was in addition to and separate from the actual proposal essay they had to write) to, primary/secondary research to support their discussions, minimum 4-page of texts (excluding the introduction letter and the works cited page), a detailed discussion of the problem and breakdown of the solution, and production of error-free texts. After students finished their essay, they would have to give an oral presentation of their proposal as well.

The entire duration of the writing assignment was approximately 4 weeks—

from week 12 through 16 of the semester. Since it was the last of the four writing

assignments, it took place from around the first week of April and continued till

the first week of May. The classroom activities involving this particular writing

assignment included, among other things, homework readings from the textbook,

discussions based on readings, short homework activities such as responding to

questions given by the instructor, brainstorming related to invention activities

(e.g., selecting paper topic), instructor's PowerPoint presentation of a sample

proposal, and conferences between individual students and the instructor for

revisions after students had finished their first draft. When a student met with the

instructor in one-on-one conference sessions, the instructor had already had a look

at his/her first draft. At the conference, the instructor provided any specific

suggestions he might have; at the same time, students could also ask him about

any concerns or questions they might have on their part. Following the

conference, students submitted their polished final drafts. The date of submission

of the final draft was already mentioned on the daily schedule of the syllabus.

Although it was not part of the writing task, oral presentations of the proposal

papers students wrote took place after they had submitted their final, polished

papers.

Participants

There were a total of 31 participants in this study. They were enrolled in two

sections (out of eight sections of ENG008 offered in this particular semester) of

ENG008 during the spring semester of 2010. Both sections were taught by the same instructor.

In order to better contextualize the sub-section of ESL students the participants of the current study constituted, I will provide the enrollment scenarios of first-year composition courses for international students during the spring semester of 2010. In spring 2010, the Writing Programs offered a total of 8 ENG008 sections enrolling a total of 131 students, with the highest and lowest enrollment in a section being 21 and 6 respectively. All these students had to mandatorily complete either ENG007 or two "stretch" (as explained earlier) composition courses (if they were part of the Stretch Programs) with a minimum grade of C.

31 participants came from 12 different countries from across the world. They spoke 8 different first languages and were of an average age of 20 years. The participants comprised of 20 or 65% freshmen, 8 or 26% sophomores, 1 or 3% junior and 2 or 6% seniors. There were 18 or 58% male and 13 or 42% female participants and they had an average 8.66 years of experience of learning English prior to taking ENG008. A detailed representation of the participants is provided in the table below.

Table 3.1. Participants' demographics

Total Participants	Gender		Average Age	Nationalities	First Language
	M	*F*			
31	18	13	20	12	8

Research Design

To illustrate the research design of the current project, it is more convenient to point out the methodologies that it did not involve (e.g., Nunan, 1992). First of all, the current study was not a piece of experimental research having a controlled group or manipulation of the variables. Neither was it an ethnography, because the data collection and analysis did not involve any longitudinal co-existence on the part of the researcher with subjects so as to provide "cultural interpretation" (Wolcott, 1988; cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 75) of the observations. The current project was not an introspective study either, for it did not seek to draw on participants' think-aloud protocols. Although the project used classroom observations, they did not comprise the core data for the project. Also, the classroom observations did not include recordings of participants' interactions. Therefore, the methodology used for the project cannot be termed an interactions analysis.

The current project can be best described as "a qualitative case study." It can be considered as a "bounded case" (Nunan, 1992) of L2 writing processes in an EAP context. It resembles an investigation of a unique phenomenon in that the study investigates L2 writing processes of first-year composition students in an actual classroom context, as opposed to much of the earlier research within the same paradigm that either studied L2 writing processes in artificial settings (e.g., Lei, 2008), or L2 writing in other courses (as opposed to specifically for first-year composition courses) (e.g., Leki, 1995; Russell, 1997), or studied participants at different educational levels (e.g., Prior, 1998; Prior & Shipka, 2003) or looked

into cognitive aspects of L2 writing processes (e.g., Manchón, Roca de Larios & Murphy, 2000; Sasaki, 2000). Furthermore, while the core data of the study derived from interview transcripts, supplemental data came from process logs, classroom observations, and class materials—all qualitative data sources. Therefore, "a qualitative case study" (Merriam, 1998; cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 77) is an appropriate label to describe the approach and methodology of the current study.

Keeping up with the traditions of past process studies (Lei, 2008; Prior, 1998; Prior & Shipka, 2003; Russell & Yaňez, 2003), some of which used qualitative methodologies, the current project used a research framework that aligns with them. There are several reasons why such a design is appropriate, as I explain below.

One of the objectives of the current project was to look into the L2 writing processes from a sociocultural perspective – an approach that is different from traditional cognitive ones. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research design was an appropriate way to acquire data and perform the analysis. In contrast with a quantitative approach, a qualitative study allows researchers to provide descriptive interpretations of a particular phenomenon which is essential for identifying various sociocultural factors that play out in L2 writing processes. For the current study, a qualitative research design allowed me to identify various social and cultural factors embedded in the elements of an activity system.

A qualitative research design offers an effective methodology for L2 writing research. Atkinson (2005), for instance, advocates for "situated qualitative

research" (p. 50). For him, qualitative research "…focus[es] on the *particular quality of the phenomena being studied* rather than on their frequencies of occurrence…" (italics in original, p. 50). An investigation of the "particular quality" rather than that of the frequency of occurrences is relevant to the current project, since it sought to explore the sociocultural issues of L2 writing processes. "Sociocultural issues," in their literal sense, entail matters that are related to life in its social and cultural settings. For qualitative researchers, the "specific actors and scenes," (Atkinson, 2005, p. 50) in other words, people in their sociocultural settings, are particularly important to provide analyses of the intricacies of the lives and scenes of the actors. By taking a qualitative approach, the current study could elicit the writing processes in ways that a quantitative approach could not have made possible (e.g., by providing statistical nuances). A qualitative approach was better suited to look into the writing processes that were intricately related to L2 students' day-to-day experiences (Leki, 2001, p. 26).

Also, since my research questions precluded a deductive approach, a qualitative research design was more suitable to document the inventories of activity system elements. For example, because the focus of the study was exploratory rather than experimental or hypothesis testing, heuristic rather than deductive (e.g., Seliger & Shohamy, 1989), the flexibility at the time of data collection (such as asking follow-up questions for clarifications during interviews) allowed gathering of critical information to answer the research questions. Application of such flexibility would not have been possible in case of a rigid, laboratory-style research design. Unlike a quantitative approach, the

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qualitative approach adopted for the current project made it possible to draw from a plethora of descriptive data (as opposed to numeric data) and sift through it for the most relevant information to answer the research questions.

Choosing a qualitative approach to the current project also aligns with the conceptual foundation of the project as a whole. Since one of the purposes of the study was to adopt an alternative means to look into the L2 writing processes which have been predominantly researched from a cognitive perspective, a qualitative approach was more appropriate. For instance, the cognitive paradigm of language research, such as the kind in the field of psychological aspects of language learning, is quite heavy on numerical data as opposed to descriptive data. While analyses of a phenomenon involving numbers may provide crucial insights into the issue at hand, they have the potential of suffering from "statistical abstractions" (Atkinson & Connor, 2008, p. 517). For, sociocultural factors in language learning are immeasurable and can be better explained through descriptive means. Wilson (1977; cited in James, 2003) in this connection maintains that "human behavior often has more meaning than its observable 'facts'" (p. 253), and likewise, cannot be explained by countable numbers or frequencies alone.

Having explained the reasons for choosing a qualitative research method, I will now turn to the justification of a case study approach to the current project. A case study approach, like a qualitative method, was also feasible for the current project. For one, a case study is considered to be flexible in its methodology of data collection and analysis procedures (e.g., Nunan, 1992, p. 74). It may also use

a combination of research methods such as the ethnography (albeit with a limited scope), surveys, and both qualitative and quantitative data types. Second, the biggest advantage of a case study approach is an inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, as Yin (1984) writes, "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Also, unlike an experimental study which employs manipulation of variables to determine the effects of a particular treatment, a case study provides results of a phenomenon from its natural occurrences. Contrary to the ethnographic research in which a phenomenon is studied over a period of time, a case study typically spans for a much shorter period of time restricting the influence of different variables to change in course time. For this reason, case studies are more suitable for research purposes that are expected to provide practical implications (e.g., Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1976; cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 78).

Since the current study took place in actual classroom context and the core data of the study comprised of student interviews involving a writing assignment in the course, the findings were expected to have practical implications for similar kinds of context. A case study approach allowed me to collect different types of data without having to interfere with the context but with integrity of the processes that yielded reliable results. As a result, the data collection adopted a methodology that was "strong in reality" (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1976; cited in Nunan, 1992, p. 78) and appealing to the practitioners for whom the

findings might be relevant. Finally, a case study approach allowed for an uncomplicated research design that demanded very little or no background knowledge for readers to understand and interpret the findings. This enhanced the accessibility of the project to maximum number of audiences.

Having provided the outlines of the research design of the current project, I conclude this section by recounting Silva's (2005) contention that the design of a given study in social sciences, humanities or even physical sciences should never be static. It should be dynamic, depending on the type of inquiry being carried out and the information being gathered. Silva (2005) also believes that any kind of systematic inquiry that adds to the information and the knowledge base in second language writing should be welcomed and that any "prescribed" or "proscribed" research design, as is often practiced by many research journals in the field of social sciences and humanities, should be rejected on account of its limiting effects on the actual research being conducted (Silva, 2005, p. 12).

Data Collection

In this section I will provide the details of the data collection procedures. The instructor of the two sections of ENG008 course that I studied was a colleague of mine in the English department. I had discussed my project with him informally before I started collecting data; the benefits of which were twofold: (a) He was already aware about the various nuances of the project and knew what I was looking for, and (b) we got a chance to discuss the logistics of the data collection process which he could accommodate in his schedule and planning ahead of time, without having to interfere with his regular activities for the writing assignment

that I eventually investigated. He promised to help me and offered 5 extra points to the students that would volunteer to participate in my study. After securing the IRB approval, I solicited his help again; this time with more concrete plans and procedural information. He was forthcoming and extended help in all respect.

Since I had to study the last of the four assignments of the course, I arranged for a time to visit both the classes about one week prior to the scheduled start (as per the daily schedule on the syllabus) of the last writing assignment. Studying the last writing assignment was not pre-planned, neither did it constitute any significant research variable. I studied the last writing assignment entirely out of a practical consideration. To explain, by the time I received the IRB approval (see Appendix-G), it was too late in the semester for studying any other writing assignment than the fourth (last) one. If I decided to study, for example, the first or the second writing assignment, I would have to wait until the following fall semester (i.e., fall 2010). My Ph.D. timeline did not allow me to do that.

When I visited the classes, I read out the recruitment script (see Appendix – A) in the class, explained all technical terms that I thought students might not know, invited questions from students and answered them all. Before leaving, I handed them: (a) An information sheet (see Appendix – B) that had all information about the study, including a description of its purpose and objectives, and all tasks that the volunteer students were required to do as part of their participation in it; and (b) a sign-up sheet (see Appendix – C) to be returned to me from those who would agree to participate.

I had already prepared the materials such as the process log sheets (see Appendix – D), questionnaires (see Appendix – E) for background information, and questions (see Appendix – F) for semi-structured interviews before I formally solicited participation in my study. One conceptual hurdle that I had to overcome at this stage was that while it was relatively straight forward to write questions (for semi-structured interviews) for 5 of the 6 elements of the activity system, it was not so for the first element—subject. Considering that subject was an entity that related directly to the participants themselves, essentially I already had the information regarding their background from the questionnaire surveys. But participants' background information was not what I was looking for in this case; or rather, the background information alone was not enough to provide the developmental stages of "selves" (as Vygotskian sociocultural theory would call it) through the processes of writing of this particular writing assignment, for the primary objective of the study was to investigate the composing processes through a sociocultural lens. After extensive research, I found that second language literature with a lineage to sociocultural theory (e.g., Casanave, 1995; Lei, 2008; Prior, 1998; Russell & Yaňez, 2003) described the term "subject" mainly as a composite of three units: Agency, subjectivity/ideology, and identity. Thus, following the tradition of similar studies in the past (e.g., James, in press), it appeared appropriate to me to consider subject as the sum of participants' agency, subjectivity/ideology, and identity.

Having completed writing all materials, I spent a considerable amount of time revising and fine-tuning them, especially to ensure the clarity of the interview

questions. For this, I requested 3 of my colleagues to read and check the clarity of meanings of the instructions provided in the process log sheets as well as the semi-structured interview questions. I rephrased and revised the materials based on their suggestions. I also received valuable feedback from my dissertation committee members when I defended my proposal. One of the helpful comments regarding crafting interview questions that I received from one of my professors at proposal defense, for example, was to start the interviews with more general and open-ended questions before moving to the more specific ones. The advantage of starting with general questions rather than the specific ones (directly related to the research questions) was to lead participants to provide accounts without any preemption and thus gather more authentic information with regard to the actual occurrences of a given phenomenon. I also had several meetings with my dissertation committee members as I was working on the operationalization of the study. These meetings helped me look at various aspects of the project with a more critical eye and avoid subsequent difficulties. Another measure I took while writing questionnaire for obtaining background information was to consult similar kind of past studies and select the questions that were going to be most relevant to my study. For process log sheets, I provided detailed instructions and examples according to the advice of my colleagues and dissertation committee.

Having all materials ready, I visited both the classes once again just before the class period when the fourth or last assignment was to start to see how many students had decided to participate. In all, 33 students returned the sign-up sheets to me, indicating their agreement to participation. Thanking the volunteers, I

handed them the process log sheet for the following week and a sign-up sheet to schedule a one hour interview with me. Although most participants made it to the scheduled interview time over the next one and a half week or so, a few of them could not. Because I was visiting each of the class sessions for observations, I could reschedule the interviews for those who did not turn up at the initially-scheduled time, considering that it was end of the semester and all students were busy with the final examinations and other tasks. In spite of this, 2 students who had originally signed up for the study opted out citing various reasons. In the end, therefore, I had a total of 31 participants who completed all tasks: (a) Participated in about a one-hour-long interview with me, (b) kept process logs for the entire duration of the writing assignment, and (c) filled-in a background questionnaire and returned it to me.

For the two other types of data – the class materials and classroom observation notes – that I collected, the process was much simpler. I collected all class materials which included the course syllabus, the writing assignment descriptions, the PowerPoint presentation slides, and other materials and handouts, directly from the instructor. He provided me with the digital copies of all these materials. I visited all class sessions during the entire period of this writing assignment for classroom observations. I sat in a corner at the back of the classroom (with permission from both the instructor and students), at a place from where I thought I was not distracting the normal proceedings of the class and a place that was conveniently located for me to observe and listen to the classroom

proceedings as they would unfold every day. I took the observation notes in my personal laptop computer.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, I followed various steps to perform the analysis. I followed these steps in accordance with the qualitative data analysis guidelines discussed in Miles and Huberman (1994) as well as Tesch (1990).

After the completion of interviews and collection of all process log sheets, questionnaires, and class materials, I organized them and kept them in a secure place. After sorting, I placed the process log sheets, questionnaires, and class materials in separate files with labels for the materials they contained. As for the interviews, I transferred all digitally-recorded files to my personal laptop computer and created backups by copying them all in an external hard drive.

The first step in the qualitative data analysis was to prepare the data for analysis. To this end, the first thing I did was transcribe all interview sessions, totaling about 31 hours of interviews which made for around 310 pages (single space) of transcripts. For convenience, I also typed students' handwritten process logs in my personal laptop computer so that I had the digital copies of them. I already had digital copies of class materials as well as classroom observation notes. While interview transcripts and process logs comprised the core data that directly answered the research questions, class materials as well as classroom observation notes provided supplemental information both at the time of analysis and interpretations of findings.

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After getting the data ready for analysis, the next step I took was to develop an analytical procedure. For this, I had to do extensive research and figure out how I could come up with coding schemes (e.g., Brice, 2005) consistent with the research questions. To analyze the data and find answers to the first research question, I came up with the following coding schemes based on the definitions of the 6 elements of the activity system.

Table 3.2. Coding schemes for the first research question

Elements of activity system	Descriptions
Subject	Describes the agency, subjectivities/ideologies, and identities of writers
• Agency	• The determinant of an informed action by an individual in a particular context for the sake of successful completion of a given task
• Subjectivity/Ideology	• Describes writers' personal beliefs and preferences that were at work during the writing task
• Identity	• Describes the evolving self-portrayal of student writers as they finished the writing task
Tools	Describes all kinds of tools—both symbolic and material—writers used
Goals	Describes all kinds of goals and objectives writers had while writing
Division of Labor	Indicates the roles everyone involved in the writing process played, i.e., what writers and any other people that may be involved did as part of completing the writing task
Community	Describes the community that writers considered themselves part of while completing the writing task
Rules/norms	Describes official/unofficial (formal/informal) rules/norms that writers followed while completing the writing task

I found that subject – the first element of the activity system – was conceptualized in the literature as a composite of writers' "agency" (e.g., Casanave, 1995, 2003; Lei, 2008), and their "subjectivity/ideology" as well as "identity" (e.g., Russell & Yaňez, 2003). As mentioned earlier, based on the discussions in the literature, I considered "subject" as the sum of participants' agency, subjectivity/ideology and identity. Therefore, I had to come up with working definitions for these three terms separately.

Agency has been a major focus in second language research. According to Morita (2004) "...agency arises out of individuals' engagement in the social world" (p. 590). Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) maintain that "agency is never a 'property' of a particular individual" but rather "a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large" (p. 148). Van Lier (2008), on the other hand, suggests that agency includes awareness of the responsibility for one's own actions *vis-à-vis* the environment, including affected others" (p. 172). He says "agency can be related to issues such as volition, intentionality, initiative, intrinsic motivation and autonomy..." (p. 171). Based these definitions, I defined agency as "the determinant of an informed action by an individual in a particular context for the sake of successful completion of a given task."

I used the terms subjectivity and ideology interchangeably, since both of them relate to learners' personal preferences. Ideology is always at work in L2 education, as Benesch (1993) points out that second language pedagogy is never free from ideological underpinnings, but rather, is imbued by the ideological

positions taken by teachers, students, and administrators alike (pp. 706-707).

Olivo (2003) conceptualizes ideology "to refer to particular beliefs by held by

social groups" (p. 51). Based on these theoretical discussions of ideology (as they

relate to L2 education), for the present study, I defined participant's

subjectivity/ideology as "his/her personal beliefs and preferences that are at work

during the writing task." As for identities, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) maintain that

identity is a "relational and sociocultural phenomenon" and that it should not be

construed as a "stable structure...in the individual psyche or in fixed social

categories" (pp. 585-586). Kubota (2003) and Kubota and Lehner (2004) make a

similar line of argument, maintaining that identity is an evolving social category

and should not be considered as static. These authors emphasize on the role of

identity in the study of second language writing. Based on these definitions, the

working definition I developed for the coding of data assumed identity to be the

evolving self-portrayal of student writers as they accomplished the writing task.

Developing the coding schemes for the rest of the five elements of the activity

system was easier, as I followed the same strategy of consulting the literature

(e.g., Engeström, 1999; Lei, 2008; Russell, 1997; Russell & Yaňez, 2003) and

came up with working definitions for each of them (as listed in the table above).

The interview transcripts and the process logs were coded following these coding

schemes. Since the first research question of the project implied an inductive

approach to the analysis of data, the coding schemes helped me to come up with

different categories of the six elements of the activity system.

For the second research question, which asked for an investigation of a positive or negative influence of the 6 elements of activity system on L2 writing, I developed the following coding schemes. What is important to note is that, consistent with the research question asked, the coding schemes exclusively accommodated for either a positive or a negative influence of the 6 elements of the activity system on L2 writing.

Table 3.3. Coding schemes for the second research question

Influence	Descriptions
Positive	When the participants stated explicitly that an element influenced their writing positively
Negative	When the participants stated explicitly that an element influenced their writing negatively

In other words, data analysis related to the second research question accounted for the responses that explicitly stated either a positive or a negative influence on writing. If a response was, for instance, a mixed one, or one that was not clear on either the positive or the negative end of the spectrum, it was ignored and did not reflect on the reporting of the findings. To confirm, the follow-up questions during interviews provided the reasons behind the particular positive or negative influence of each activity system element on a given aspect of writing.

Having prepared a detailed coding scheme, I was ready to code the interview transcripts and the process logs. For this, I used the qualitative data analysis software Weft QDA, available online. The software made the data analysis more manageable and efficient by helping me make different categories as I coded the data. It was also convenient to be able to make quick references to the transcripts

after a while if I needed to revisit a particular category. In addition, the software made it easy to change or rename a particular category and transfer all coded transcripts under a new name.

In order to code the data, I first read through all interview transcripts and process logs. I also read the classroom observation notes and the materials used in the class before going over the reflective notes that I had taken throughout the entire time of data collection process. Reading all these materials together helped me get a bird's eye view of the project. Going over the interview transcripts and the process logs, in particular, helped me think ahead about the potential answers to the research questions.

Following the reading of the interview transcripts and process logs, I proceeded to coding. The first thing I had to do at this stage was to determine a unit of analysis for the coding purposes. The principle I used for this purpose was the definition provided in Tesch (1990) which maintains that a unit of analysis is "a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information" (p. 116).

Coding for the first research question

Keeping the definition of unit of analysis in mind, at first, I looked for the specific information that was going to answer the first research question. I coded the transcripts and process logs following the coding schemes in conjunction with the concept of the unit of analysis discussed earlier. The coding resulted in different categories of the activity system elements.

Each unit of analysis consisted of one or several turns of conversations between me and the participants during the interviews (although in case of coding the process logs it was different). The boundaries of these turns were determined based on the definition of the unit of analysis above. While performing the coding of data I had two principal questions in mind: (a) Is there a unit of analysis that can be part of answers to the research questions? (b) If so, how may this particular unit fit into the coding schemes and be categorized? Since the answer to the first research question was going to document the categories of activity system elements, some of the pre-determined interview questions – the ones that specifically asked about the individual elements of activity system – had already set the boundaries for the units of analysis. Once the units were assigned codes, I put them under appropriate categories. Once all units were assigned codes and put under the 6 broad categories (related to the 6 activity system elements), in order to make the findings more easily accessible and self-explanatory to readers, I created different sub-categories of each of these 6 big categories. For the transcripts related to the follow-up questions, I applied the same technique except that the boundaries for the units of analysis had to be determined more carefully such that they consisted of "one idea," an "episode," or a "piece of information" (Tesch, 1990, p. 116) that constituted part of the answer to the research question. The coding technique of the process logs was similar to the interview transcripts, although in this case there were no turns. I coded the logs written by participants verbatim. The examples below will further illustrate the coding process.

Researcher: Why do you have to wait for all the information to be passed [before you would start writing]?

Participant: Because it makes me think about the topic [the writing assignment] more. And may be, I do not write but I start thinking about the topic, for strong argument or whatever. So I need this time to think about [the assignment].

Researcher: Was it true for this assignment—that you waited for the professor to give you all the ideas and that it was not that you had exams but because of these reasons [that you mentioned] that you delayed the start of writing your paper?

Participant: Yeah. Even if I did not have exam, may be I would do the same. I would finish on other things and then work on [i.e., write] the paper.

(Participant 11)

In the excerpt above, the participant was answering a follow-up question as she was reflecting on her writing processes. At one point, she mentioned that she waited to start writing her paper until she knew the instructor had provided all the information and covered all steps that he expected students to follow to accomplish the paper. By "all information" I inferred the requirements that the instructor definitely wanted students to consider while writing and the issues that constituted important parts of the paper. While waiting for the instructor to finish providing all the information, the student allowed herself time to think about the assignment itself—such as selecting an appropriate topic, secondary sources she was going to use for her paper and so forth. This process, the participant confirmed, was something that she would always follow to write an English paper regardless of the circumstances; so it was a conscious decision on her part to be successful on her writing.

In light of the discussions about the unit of analysis and coding schemes, I determined that the excerpt above constituted one "piece of information" which

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was that the participant made a conscious decision regarding when she would start writing her essay and acted according to her decision to accomplish the task. This, as per the coding schemes, fell under the category of the writer's "agency" use; so I coded this unit as "agency." While determining the unit boundary, I read through the excerpts carefully and decided that this particular section of excerpt would provide a complete meaning while maintaining the integrity and completeness of the "piece of information."

The following excerpt represents coding of a pre-determined question. In this case, determining the unit boundary was rather straight forward, for the turns providing answer to the question were marked by: (a) The completeness of answer to the question asked, and (b) the shift to a different topic in the turns beyond the unit boundary. I coded this excerpt as "tool" as a broad category and it included examples of various tools this particular student (and others as well) had used. While reporting findings, I used the excerpt to illustrate the use of "Blackboard," a sub-category of "tool," since that was the primary focus within this excerpt.

> Researcher: What tools did you use for writing this paper?
> Participant: Computer, the Internet, the conference I had [with the instructor], pen, paper. I used the textbook for works cited page, I used the discussion board on the Blackboard to do the homework. I looked at what other people did compared to what I did [the homework was to select 3 paper topics and to respond to the sample essays they had read from the textbook]. I did not look at the power points or whatever he [the instructor] had. I also looked at the cover letter format that he wrote so that I could just look at it and edit it in my way because I never wrote a cover letter before. That's the only lecture note I used.
> (Participant 23)

I coded the process logs following the coding schemes discussed earlier. In the following log, for instance, the student wrote about her revisions based on the instructor's advice. According to the coding schemes (of the first research question), this log falls under the category "division of labor." So I coded it as "division of labor;" although later, when I created different sub-categories of division of labor, I put it under the "instructor," since the student specifically mentioned about the help she had received from the instructor.

> April 21— Conference day: Professor gave me advice and helped me to revise it [the first draft she had written]. There will be a lot of things to fix it. According to professor's advice, I need to change solutions to make it more specific, so I researched some examples that are related to my topic. (Participant 28)

It may be pertinent to mention that in order to obtain an idea about the frequency of occurrences of the elements of an activity system I ran a frequency check of them reported by participants. I did so in terms of how many times each of the elements was mentioned by participants in the study.

Coding for the second research question

I performed the coding related to the second research question the same way I did it for the first one. I used the coding schemes for the second research question coupled with the definition of unit of analysis for this purpose. In both interview transcripts and process logs I looked for information related to how each element of an activity system influenced students' writing. I looked specifically for either a "positive" or a "negative" influence. That is, if a student was unsure about the influence of an element, or provided a mixed response (i.e., a response that did not explicitly fall under either a positive or a negative influence), I excluded it

from the findings because the scope of the research question did not allow me to accommodate such responses (e. g., the research question specifically asked about the influence of the elements for "better" or "worse"). The following excerpt will further illustrate.

> Researcher: How do you think these tools that you have mentioned so far affected your writing—positively or negatively?
> Participant: They all work positively.
> Researcher: Even the pressure of writing?
> Participant: Yes.
> Researcher: Can you explain how?
> Participant: That helped me to think faster and get a good outline, and good ideas about how I was going to write and so I could write the essay pretty fast, otherwise it would take a lot of time.
> (Participant 19)

In this excerpt, the participant was asked how the tools that he had mentioned influenced his writing, to which he answered that all tools had positive influence. To be sure, he was further asked (i.e., a follow-up question) if the pressure of writing (which might have the potential of having a negative influence) also had a positive influence. The student's subsequent explanations confirmed his original claim. The turns in this excerpt provided a complete answer to the question that was originally asked and therefore was included as a single unit.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are important factors for any research design. Likewise, great care was taken to ensure the reliability and validity as I designed the study, collected data, and performed analysis.

Validity of a study relates to the consistency between what a particular piece of research claims to be doing and what it actually does. The current project is a

study of the second language writing processes using a sociocultural theoretical approach. While using a sociocultural framework to study L2 writing processes may be relatively new, it has been used in composition research before. Part of the reason why this framework was used was to study L2 writing processes with an alternative theoretical framework as well as to account for the social and cultural factors in L2 writing process research that post-process theorists have called for.

Performing an activity system analysis—asking such questions as how L2 writers used their agency, ideologies, and identities in accomplishing the writing tasks, what tools they used for writing, what rules they followed, what goals they set for themselves as they wrote, which communities they considered themselves part of as they composed—addressed the writing processes and shed light on the sociocultural processes that went behind the production of L2 texts. The focus of this project thus went beyond an investigation of the cognitive processes of L2 writing and looked into issues outside writers' head, as discussed in its goals and objectives statement, ensuring its construct validity (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

As discussed earlier, in order to maintain the content validity (e.g., Seliger & Shohamy, 1989), I took great care while writing the project instruments. For this purpose, I had my colleagues read the project materials such as the interview questions as well as the instructions for writing the process logs to ensure clarity of meanings. Having the project instruments examined by a second and third pair of eyes helped eliminate potential errors. It also helped improve the effectiveness of the items (e.g., interview questions).

I was equally alert at the time of design and operationalization of the project. First, the context of the study I chose was familiar to me. Prior to the study, I had been part of the university, the department, and the writing programs both as a graduate student and an instructor for 4 years, at least. Further, as an instructor I had taught similar kinds of courses to similar groups of students. This meant that I was familiar with both the course and the writing task that I was investigating. I was also familiar with the actual physical context of the classroom. Second, in order to enhance the truthfulness of the information I collected, I used different types of data from different sources. This ensured triangulation of data collection—while the core data of the study comprised of the interview transcripts and process logs, the classroom observation notes as well as class materials provided supplemental information. The information derived from the supplemental data was particularly helpful at the time of data analysis and the interpretation of findings, for if/when required, I could verify the information from interview and/or process log data by classroom observation notes as well as class materials. This process helped enhance both reliability and validity of the findings.

To further add validity to the information, at the time of interviews, whenever a participant provided an inaudible or incomprehensible answer to my questions (including follow-up questions), I either repeated the question so s/he would provide the answer more clearly or said the participant's answer verbatim myself and asked him/her to confirm that that was what s/he actually meant. This process ensured that the information I had was actually what was meant by participants.

At the time of analysis, I ran both inter- and intra-rater reliability tests for a portion of coding of data. For the inter-rater reliability test, upon my request, two of my colleagues volunteered to perform the coding. Both my colleagues had a background of teaching English in EFL contexts, making them familiar with various issues of second language writing. They were also familiar with qualitative data analysis.

I performed the reliability test at two different stages: Determining the units of analysis and coding of the six activity system elements (first research question) and their influence (second research question). In order to carry out these tasks, first, I discussed with my colleagues the context, background (including the theoretical framework), and the goals and objectives of the study. Then, I familiarized them with the units of analysis, coding schemes, and the data. When I felt confident that they were ready to perform the tasks, I provided both of them with the raw transcripts as well as the process logs of 3 participants (about 10% of total data).

At the beginning of the process, I requested them to determine the units of analysis following the definition of a unit of analysis (and 6 broad categories of activity system elements) I used for the study. After finishing the task, both of them returned the 3 subsets of transcripts and process logs to me. Using the formula provided in Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64) I figured out that the agreement between the two volunteers and I on determining the unit of analysis for the interview transcripts was about 89% and 93.1% respectively. For the process logs, this agreement was 87.2% and 84.3% respectively. This percentage

of inter-rater agreement suggests quite high reliability for determining the units of analysis.

At the second stage of inter-rater reliability check, after about 4 months since I conducted the reliability test for units of analysis, I requested the same volunteers to perform coding of the transcripts and process logs. This time, I provided them with the pre-determined units of analysis (which I had performed) of 3 subsets of participants (different from the ones I had used for units of analysis) and asked them to assign codes to the sub-categories of the 6 activity system elements following the coding schemes I used for this project (discussed earlier). Using the same formula by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64) for conducting reliability test, I found that the agreement of coding between the two volunteers and I was 85.2% and 89.34% for the interview transcripts and 93.2% and 90.1% for the process logs respectively. Again, this statistics shows a high degree of inter-rater reliability of coding.

To perform an intra-rater reliability test, I re-coded a portion of data (i.e., 4 participants' interview transcripts and process logs, which was about 13% of the total data) about 5 months since I had originally finished coding. The agreement between my first and second coding was a high 95.1% for the interview transcripts, and 96.3% for the process logs, indicating a satisfactory-level of intra-rater reliability.

In addition to the above, throughout the entire process of the operationalization of the project, I kept reflective notes in my laptop computer. These notes were short but helped me remember important ideas as the project

went along. They were particularly useful at the time data analysis and interpretation of results. These notes helped me maintain consistency among the design of research, collection of data, and the interpretation of findings, for from time to time I went back and read through the plans and objectives of the project to keep myself on track.

Limitations

In spite of great care, in the end, the current study did have some limitations. One of them was related to the duration of the study. Since it took place over a period of one writing assignment (approximately 4 weeks) only, some may wonder whether the findings would have been different if it was studied over a longer period of time encompassing a semester or even an academic year. However, considering that the study was related to L2 writing process research and the past studies with similar scopes and objectives used the similar kind of timeline, the duration of the current study could be considered at par with them. In fact, the writing tasks of some of the past studies (that used on-site writing tasks) took place over a period of several minutes only. Because the objective of the present study was to investigate L2 writing processes, an investigation of the writing task over one writing assignment made sense to me, because had I included more writing assignments, it could have resulted in a few additional variables (e.g., students' literacy development over time and its effects on their writing, influence of different instructors and/or instructional practices on students' writing) to deal with.

In order to compensate for the short duration, I solicited participation of as many students as possible. In the end, I had 31 participants, which is a good number for similar kind of earlier studies (e.g., Leki, 1995). Unlike some of the past studies on L2 writing process research that used less number of participants, the current study sought to use information from more subjects so that the findings were more reliable. However, I must point out that in order to help recruit as many participants as possible the course instructor graciously offered 5 bonus points. If or to what extent this might have skewed the finding was unknown to me. Using two sections of ENG008 taught by the same instructor with the same course policies and writing task helped limit such variables.

Another limitation of the study was related to data collection. Because the core data that provided answers to the research questions was collected from students, to what extent they provided true accounts of their actual writing processes can be subjected to scrutiny. Especially because the participants had unlimited time for composing, and they accomplished the writing tasks outside the classroom, I could not verify their writing processes that they shared with me during the interviews and in the process logs. That said, it is true that in almost all studies in social sciences and humanities, researchers ultimately have to rely on the accounts provided by the participants. Also, any possibility of skewed results could be reduced because the findings derived from a reasonable number of participants.

Finally, using a sociocultural framework—an activity system analysis—for L2 writing process research is somewhat new. Quite understandably, some readers

may wonder about its effectiveness for the purpose of studying L2 writing processes. To address this concern, we must note that using an activity system framework is not entirely new in composition studies. Furthermore, a sociocultural approach to second language research has become more prevalent in recent times, considering the valuable insight it provides regarding the roles that different social and cultural factors play in L2 learning.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I discussed the contexts and backgrounds of the study, the participants, research design, data collection instruments and procedures, and the analysis of data. I also discussed the reliability and validity of the study. The issues discussed here provided a comprehensive account regarding the backgrounds and operationalization of the project. The information in this chapter will help relate to the findings of the study discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter I will discuss the findings of the project. The chapter consists of two main sections – one each on the two research questions. I will present the findings related to the first research question first, before moving to the second research question. After discussing findings, I will also provide a summary of the chapter.

Findings Related to the First Research Question

The first research question was related to an investigation of the 6 elements of activity systems as they played out in L2 writing. That is, the findings of the first research question aimed to build an inventory of the 6 elements as they were realized by L2 writers. In line with the question asked—how are the elements of an activity system realized by L2 writers as they accomplish their writing task in an EAP context—data analysis elicited the following categories of the 6 elements of an activity system.

Subject. Subject was considered to be the sum of L2 writers' agency, subjectivity/ideology, and identity. Participants' use of agency was divided into four categories: (a) Strategy use, (b) use of lived experiences, (c) perception of difficulty, and (d) perception of easiness. L2 writers' strategy use was then further divided into three sub-categories, namely (a) invention-related strategy use, (b) composing and revising, and (c) time management. While the second component of subject, subjectivity/ideology, did not have any category, the third component, identity, was divided into four different categories: (a) Identity assumed in

relation to the writing assignment, (b) identity of a student, (c) identity based on past experience, and (d) identity of a writer.

Tools. To accomplish the writing task participants used different tools—both symbolic and material. I divided these tools into the following categories: (a) Tools derived from class sessions, (b) computer and the Internet, (c) blackboard, (d) outlines and notes, (e) stationery, (f) textbook, (g) dictionaries, (h) first language, and (i) supplies.

Goals. Participants reported that they had different goals as they finished their writing tasks. Based on the analysis of data goals were divided into the following categories: (a) Grade, (b) writing skills, (c) writing task, and (d) personal satisfaction.

Division of labor. Division of labor indicates the people other than the writer himself or herself that were involved in the process of completion of the writing task. Division of labor was divided into the following categories: (a) Instructor, (b) friends and classmates, (c) writing center tutors, (d) family members, and (e) people in the world.

Community. Participants mentioned about the following communities that played out as they finished their writing assignment: (a) Student community, (b) community related to backgrounds, (c) local community, and (d) community in relation to paper topics.

Rules. The rules L2 writers followed while completing the writing tasks were as follows: (a) Writing task related, (b) writing related, and (c) personal traits.

In the following sections I discuss the findings outlined above in greater details, with examples.

Subject

As discussed in Chapter 3, based on the definitions of subject as a sociocultural construct (e.g., Casanave, 2003, Lei, 2008, Russell and Yaňez, 2003), for the current study I considered it as the sum of three components: Agency, subjectivity/ideology, and identity. Below I discuss the findings related to each of these components.

Agency

Learners' agency has been a major focus in second language research. The working definition of agency I used for this particular study saw it as "the determinant of an informed action by an individual in a particular context for the sake of successful completion of a given task." Through the analysis of data I divided learners' agency into 4 different categories—strategy use, use of lived experiences, perception of difficulty, and perception of easiness.

Strategy use

Use of different strategies was the most robust demonstration of learners' agency. Participants reported different strategies they used while accomplishing their writing task; these strategies ranged from topic selection to research, from actual composing and revisions to management of their time. Based on the various strategies that came up during data analysis, I divided them into three sub-categories as follows: (a) Invention related, (b) composing and revising, and (c) time management.

Invention related. Students seemed to have used strategies as they worked on various invention-related activities such as topic selection, generating ideas, and preparing a work plan for the writing task. Some student writers attempted to prepare an outline in writing, others did not; while some others just had an outline in mind but not on paper. Additionally, some students just wanted to get started with the writing or to free-write before integrating any research they might needed. The following excerpts illustrate. In the first excerpt, the student mentioned how in order for him to finish the writing task, he needed to get started with writing in some way. He told me that once he started, it was easier for him to accomplish the writing task.

> Researcher: When you wrote this paper, what was your strategy?
> Participant: Just start writing...the only way to get me writing is to get to start writing.
> (Participant 21)

The second excerpt below illustrates writers' invention-related strategy use. Here the student mentioned about how he first wrote some messy notes to document his ideas before starting to write.

> Researcher: Tell me what you did after you got the assignment [the writing task].
> Participant: I just decided my topic, and 17th is a Saturday so I started writing right away. Of course first I wrote some notes, some messy notes [outline?], and then right away I started writing on my laptop.
> (Participant 28)

Finally, in the following excerpt the student explained that he needed to have some ideas in mind first to start writing the paper, but he didn't necessarily have to write down the ideas on paper.

Researcher: Give me a description of what you did as part of writing this
                 paper.
Participant: First of all I have to come up with some ideas. And then I will
                 start writing, I will structure the whole paper and start writing...
(Participant 29)

Composing and revising. Students' strategy use is manifested in the way they went about the actual composing. While they all followed the same assignment requirements that the instructor provided in class, they showed a great deal of differences in the way they composed and performed the revisions. However, one underlying factor that ran through all their activities is the conscious decision making while they were accomplishing these tasks. The following excerpts illustrate.

The first excerpt explains the participant's conscious effort of waiting till the professor provided all the information that she needed to get started with the writing. She mentioned that she would not start composing even if she was free from other tasks until she got what she needed. This indicates her strategy for creating a circumstance under which she was comfortable composing.

Researcher: Why do you have to wait for all the information to be passed
                 [before you would start writing]?
Participant: Because it makes me think about the topic [the writing
                 assignment?] more. And may be I do not write but I start thinking
                 about the topic, for strong argument or whatever. So I need this
                 time to think about [the assignment].
Researcher: Was it true for this assignment—that you waited for the professor
                 to give you all the ideas and that it was not that you had exams
                 but because of these reasons [that you mentioned] that you
                 delayed the start of writing your paper?
Participant: Yeah. Even if I did not have exam, may be I would do the same. I
                 would finish on other things and then work on [write] the paper.
(Participant 11)

The second excerpt contrasts with the excerpt above in that here the writer

was more comfortable starting early, as soon as the writing assignment was

provided in class, and spreading the task over several days, so he could avoid any

subsequent pressure.

> Researcher: So it seems to me that [you started quite early and] you spread it over several days and you wrote by bits and pieces?
> Participant: Yeah.
> Researcher: Why?
> Participant: Because I did not want to have the pressure, like the last day to write it all, because I do not like to work under pressure, especially something like this [writing]...I can't concentrate because you are already nervous and you got the pressure to meet the deadline. I can't even think right, so when I do it ahead of time, I can be more creative, I have more ideas because I have time.
>
> (Participant 24)

The following process log illustrates the participant's strategy use relating to

the secondary research for her paper. As the log reads, she wrote her works cited

page as she completed her research. She did so so that she did not miss any of the

information she had collected.

> April 17: I did the works cited page first to help myself keep on track of the information I found. (Participant 9)

With regard to revisions, students seemed to have used certain strategies as

well. For some, revisions were an important part of the whole composing process

which they performed as they composed their first draft itself; while for others, it

was something that they did separately, sometimes with assistance of the

instructor or the writing center tutor or based on friends' and peers' feedback.

Some others did not revise their draft at all.

> Researcher: You did not revise?

Participant: Like in four hours [that I wrote my essay] I had already revised...I think I did my best [as I wrote] after I submitted my first draft, there will be a conference, and the teacher will tell me about the bad place or the bad parts so I could change it according to the way the teacher asked me, so that I could find the bad parts.
(Participant 10)

The following excerpt, however, indicates how the student writer did not put any effort whatsoever in revisions:

Researcher: Tell me about your revisions.
Participant: No, I didn't revise.
Researcher: Does that mean when you wrote...you didn't have to reorganize [change] anything?
Participant: Yes.
(Participant 19)

Time management. At college students have to juggle their writing tasks among various other activities on a daily basis. College can be stressful unless students are judicious enough to manage their time well. From the analysis of data, it was evident that time was an important factor that determined much of how the writers went about the entire writing process. Students had their own way of handling the pressure by managing their time as they finished the writing task. They explained how they had to fit the writing task within their busy schedules when they had to take tests, attend other classes, and do homework. The excerpt below illustrates this.

Researcher: Why did you do it like that [start writing your English paper so early]?
Participant: Because...after coming to SWSU I realized how important the tests are, so I started doing it this way [starting to write early]. In high school, I would not do it this way...for other English essay I did it this way because when I have ideas I try to finish it and when I have no more ideas I go back and study for my tests [for other courses]. And then I read books and have new ideas, more ideas, I come back, do it, and put the new ideas in...because that's

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the only way you can do both [write the English paper and study for the tests], multiple things simultaneously, you know—doing the homework, studying for the tests, working on the presentations, writing the papers and so on...

(Participant 25)

Use of lived experiences

Use of lived experiences is different from strategy use in that while using strategies writers must use some degree of their intellect, their problem solving skills to come up with ideas that would help them resolve the problems at hand. Use of lived experiences, on the other hand, relates to the conscious efforts of utilizing everyday experiences based on involuntary memories (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998), observations, and so forth. Use of lived experiences is cognitively less demanding (see Vygotsky, 1978, for instance) than devising and using strategies for accomplishing tasks. While composing students drew from their various life experiences, from distant or immediate past as well as present. Lived experiences may derive from both academic and non-academic circumstances and may create "affordances" (Wertsch, 1998) for writers with regard to the various aspects of a writing task such as content, organization, or style as well as with regard to generating confidence and motivation. Because use of lived experiences is linked to writers' conscious effort of making use of the affordances made available by their life experiences, it is an important manifestation of their agency. The participants of the current study made references to various lived experiences they used for composing. The excerpts below illustrate.

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In the first excerpt, the student explained to me how she came up with her paper topic based on an experience during the topic selection week. In transcripts prior to the excerpt this participant described how one day she was stopped by a campaigner when she was rushing to her class. She was new to America at the time and the campaigner asked her a few questions; to all of which she simply answered "yes," without fully understanding the questions she was being asked. She did this partly because she could not entirely ignore the campaigner (she was new to America and in her culture ignoring someone is disrespectful) and partly because she just wanted to quickly finish with him so that she could go to class. The campaigner took her credit card information and later she figured out that she was charged for some donations. This particular experience made her annoyed about the whole campaign culture at her university campus (she told me she never experienced this in her home country), and during the topic selection week when the election campaigners approached her friends and her while they were eating lunch, she could quickly refer to this particular life experience.

> Researcher: So how did you come to this topic [select this topic for your paper]?
> Participant: You know about these guys—they want us to vote, the voting thing—I do not know what's that [she explained later that she had no idea about the student government voting at this university] and they are like recently, they came to us when we were sitting in the MU [the university student union] then they asked for something, they said vote for us tonight...
> Researcher: ...so you were sitting in MU and eating lunch when these guys came...and you were thinking about this assignment, and it just came to your mind [by referring to another similar experience she had on campus some days back that made her extremely annoyed] that OK I can write about this topic?
> Participant: Yeah.
> (Participant 5)

The excerpt below illustrates how lived experiences made writers feel confident about their writing task. One participant reported how he felt assured writing about the food problems in his dorm. He was confident writing about this topic because he utilized the knowledge he had gained by living in the dorm throughout the year.

> Researcher: How did you prepare [yourself] for drafting—what kind of research did you do before you started drafting your essay on the 17th?
> Participant: I didn't do much research...it was just the knowledge I gained throughout the year [that I used in my writing], that's why I didn't really need to do too much [research]...just because I *see* [emphasis added] it on a daily basis [I felt confident writing about it]...
> (Participant 23)

In addition to the above, lived experiences also helped student writers come up with a suitable title for the essay as well as provide important ideas, as one participant wrote in her process log:

> April 8: In the morning when I was in my way to school, I came up with a good title & introduction for my paper. I thought of "it's not a beach, it's a bus stop" as a title, because I saw a homeless setting [sitting] at the bus stop and [a] group of people standing at the flash light ["flash" is a bus service provided by the university transportation system; by flash light the student probably meant the place where the flash buses stop], waiting for the bus, & I remember a novel talking about homeless people. So, I thought to write about it in my introduction. (Participant 11)

Lived experiences like these seemed to have affected students' writing in many ways—by helping improve the content of their essay, follow a certain style and organization and so forth. Most importantly, as participant 23 noted, lived experiences helped them "see" things and seeing helped their thinking. Another thing to keep in mind about this aspect of writers' agency use is that writers relied

on not only the academic sources but also certain non-academic sources for the experiences that they might have integrated into their writing whenever they did.

Perception of difficulty

As they accomplished the writing task, students reported their perception of difficulty, reasons behind the difficulty, and ultimately how they overcame it. Students' perception of difficulty and the ways they overcame it are important aspects of learners' agency. Perception of difficulty is important for a number of reasons: It informs us what they really tried to accomplish as they wrote, it tells us where they struggled and what needed to be done. It also tells us about the mismatch, if any, between the teaching and learning objectives, and most importantly, students' conscious effort toward achieving a particular goal. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student explained his struggle in making his texts interesting with a view to grabbing audience's attention. This he tried to achieve through painstaking efforts; but interestingly, it was not necessarily the primary objective of the writing assignment provided by the instructor.

> Researcher: What difficulties did you face while writing this paper?
> Participant: Well, I was trying to get the attention of my audience, so I was trying to do it in an interesting way [and I found making my essay interesting difficult]
> (Participant 11)

In the second excerpt, the student reported a different kind of difficulty he had while writing the paper. He explained to me that he wanted to make his texts sound formal as he was aware that he tended to write the way he spoke English.

> Researcher: What were your difficulties for this paper?

Participant: Like I did not know how to write very formal[y].

Researcher: Why do you think it was difficult for you?

Participant: Because I speak the way I hear it from the peers, like all my friends are from here [USA] and they taught me how to speak [English]. So I write the same way I speak, so it gets really hard when I have to [find] more proper words [so my texts sound formal].

(Participant 22)

Perception of easiness

Like perception of difficulty, students reported what they found easy as they described the composing processes. The easy aspects of the composing processes are important in that they provide us with the information regarding what students are good at, what work well from teaching perspective and a comparison between the teaching goals and objectives and students' achievement. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student explained how her topic allowed referring to her past experiences with a foundation that both her parents were associated with back in Taiwan. This foundation, responsible for promoting recycling, helped her generate a lot of ideas and made her writing easy.

Researcher: What was easy for you in this assignment?

Participant: Because my parents are involved in this program, the G foundation, so I got lots of information about recycling. And I also found lots of solutions to this problem so that I could finish my essay because I had lots and lots of ideas.

(Participant 13)

In the second excerpt, the student explained a different aspect of the writing assignment—the flexibility of choosing his own topic—which made it easy for him.

Researcher: What did you find easy about writing [this assignment]?

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Participant: The topic [the writing assignment itself], it was a very open topic [assignment], it was something that was left to your choice.

Researcher: Any other thing?

Participant: The best part was that I could justify my problem [later he explained since he knew what the problem was because he had experienced it himself, it was much easier for him to justify his reasoning], so I knew it was a problem, I knew the proposal was going to be beneficial and I was confident about my ideas, so I could write a lot and explain.

Researcher: Can you categorize this easiness...?

Participant: I would go for flexibility.

(Participant 14)

Subjectivity/ideology

Subjectivities/ideologies were related to the writer's personal beliefs and preferences that were at work during the writing task. Participants seemed to employ their ideologies and personal preferences, in terms of the time, place, and the overall atmosphere in which they composed. It is important to note that on most occasions the "writing atmosphere" was created by participants themselves in accordance with their choice, rather than it being imposed upon them. Prior and Shipka (2003) describes this phenomenon as the "environment selecting and structuring practices" or "ESSP" (p. 219). Writers' subjectivities may inform us how they felt about the writing task and their approach to composing. The following excerpts illustrate.

Starting from selection of a paper topic to doing research for generating ideas learners used their subjectivities. Oftentimes they employed their personal beliefs in the process of writing. These beliefs were not necessarily grounded on concrete knowledge or course-related requirements or instructor's suggestions to this end, but rather were based on their own preferences as they went about the writing

tasks. The excerpt below explains this. In this excerpt the student was struggling

with her topic selection; apparently, due to her built-in ideology that America was

a developed society and that there really was no problem that she could write

about—after all, in America, they took care of students so well. One must notice

that her assertion was grounded entirely on her personal belief and not on

informed knowledge.

> Researcher: Why did it happen like this—like other people had ideas but you didn't?
> Participant: I really seriously tried to look around for a problem here and I *think* [emphasis added] they [here in America] care more about the students than they do in Taiwan. And they have improved so many problems in their way. So I just felt that I don't want to be someone else who is picky. Because there is nothing really like a problem...
> (Participant 13)

Writers' subjectivities were at display in the place and atmosphere (i.e., ESSP)

in which they preferred to compose. For some, environments played an important

role in helping them concentrate, relax, and be creative with useful ideas; whereas

for others, they did not have much importance. In the excerpt below the student

mentioned about his preference for a quiet atmosphere for him to be able to

concentrate:

> Researcher: Where did you write?
> Participant: At home, I closed the door because I wanted it to be quiet, may be some noise will distract me...I need to keep thinking about how to write, keep thinking, but if there is some noise that would interrupt me, and have some influence on my writing. Like I can't concentrate on my writing, don't know how to write, how to continue to write.
> (Participant 10)

In the next excerpt, however, the participant expressed a diametrically

opposite viewpoint about the place/environment in which she preferred to write:

> Researcher: How about the kind of environment in which you wrote?
> Participant: I wrote at the MU [the student union at the university]...I think I can concentrate better when I was at the MU...I think home is too quiet and I feel like doing something else. I did this essay with one of the girls from my class, who sits next to me in the English class. We went to the Union [MU] together, she was doing her homework and I was writing my essay. I think it helps me concentrate better when I am doing my homework with my friends instead of doing it all by myself. If I do it all by myself, I'll spend one minute to write something and then go back to check my email or play games or chat with my friends...if it's [the atmosphere] too quiet, I may fall asleep. I think MU has a friendly environment, they have sofa along the wall and they have plugs for the power...
> (Participant 9)

Aside from the place and writing environment, writers expressed their

personal ideologies that guided their overall approach to the writing task. The

following excerpts illustrate. In the first excerpt, the participant expressed his

realization about the value of utilizing the opportunities that came his way. In this

case, his ideology of working hard to be successful appeared to have driven him

as he finished writing his paper.

> Researcher: Was it a conscious effort that you went through all these steps [while composing], or was it just routine tasks that you generally do?
> Participant: Yeah, yes [I did it consciously].
> Researcher: OK, why did you do it consciously—followed all these steps that you did?
> Participant: Well, the concept of going to school is a lot different for me now, before I used to go to school just to go, but I got a purpose [now].
> Researcher: So tell me about the purpose.
> Participant: I am trying to do the best I can, I am putting in 100 percent into this paper because I want the highest possible grade. I don't want to feel like oh I wish I stayed up last night and write a little bit,

and may be I would have gotten an A instead of a B. I do not want to have regret like I wish I stayed up, I wish I did more research. (Participant 24)

In the following process log the participant explained the reasons behind his thinking and working hard for his paper. In this particular case, he noted that because it was the last writing assignment of the course, he wanted to finish it on a high.

> April 15: The rough draft for the writing assignment is due next Monday, and since this is the last writing assignment for this class, I want to do a good job on it. So I start writing the paper, and think very hard to put ideas together to write the paper. (Participant 25)

The data analysis also shows that student writers used their subjectivities while working on the revisions of their paper. For instance, some of them did not revise at all, while others put a lot of effort in the revision tasks.

In the excerpt below the student explained his own way of conducting the revisions of his essay after he had finished his first draft:

> Researcher: So you did not do anything between the day you finished your first draft and the day you had the conference [conference with the instructor]?
> Participant: I just marked some places that I needed to improve. I used some labels about how I had to improve [wrote some notes] and on Saturday I just did it [worked on improving those places that I had marked].
> (Participant 10)

Identity

As discussed in Chapter 3, the working definition of identity I developed for the current study is as follows: The evolving self-portrayal of student writers as they finished the writing task. Data analysis shows that writers assumed different identities while writing (see Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). I divided these

identities into the following 4 subcategories: (a) Identity assumed in relation to writing assignment requirements, (b) identity of a student, (c) identity based on past background, and (d) identity of a writer.

Identity assumed in relation to writing assignment requirements

Most student writers seemed to have assumed the identity in relation to the requirements specified in the writing assignment. For instance, writing persuasively was an assignment requirement which prompted students to assume the identity of a writer who should write so as to make his/her readers persuaded by his/her proposal. Another example was that the assignment required students to find a problem on campus or in the community that they lived in. Some students reported that they assumed the identities of someone frustrated with the campus parking system, for example, or someone annoyed with the meal plans offered in the dorm. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student explained that he assumed the identity of someone who wanted to convince his audience about the proposal he was writing, an identity derived directly from the writing assignment requirements.

> Researcher: How did you like to identify yourself as you wrote?
> Participant: My role was just to convince the audience, just to be passionate about it and convince the audience about it.
> (Participant 23)

In the second excerpt, the student explained that he was thinking himself as a member of the community that he was writing about. He also cared about the solution he was proposing, something that the writing assignment asked students to do.

Researcher: As you finished writing this paper, how would you like to identify yourself?
Participant: I was thinking that I'm part of this community; I care about having a solution to this problem.
Researcher: A member of the local community?
Participant: Yeah.
(Participant 11)

Identity of a student

Data analysis shows that identifying themselves as students, some participants pointed out characteristics such as aspirations for a good grade, time constraints, being busy, and following professor's instructions that we would normally associate with a college student. Student identity helped writers put themselves in the mode of finishing the writing task.

In the first excerpt, the participant emphasized on his student identity that made him write a good paper so that he could get a good grade.

Researcher: How about your student identity, can you explain?
Participant: I am a student so I have to hand in the assignment; student role is doing their job, doing the assignment, and getting a good grade.
(Participant 18)

Also, the following excerpt illustrates how the participant identified himself as a member of the English class that he was writing the paper for.

Researcher: How would you describe your identity as you wrote this paper?
Participant: My role as a student.
Researcher: What else?
Participant: The role of a member of my class and that's it.
Researcher: Can you explain this role?
Participant: My role as the member of the class was to follow the rules the professor gave us. That's basically it.
(Participant 22)

Identity based on past background

While writing the paper students seemed to have identified themselves with their past background—the cultural (here I use the received notion of "culture;" see Atkinson, 1999 for a detailed discussion on different usage of the concept "culture" in TESOL) or religious backgrounds that they originally came from. Their various backgrounds might have oriented them in certain ways, which in turn might have bearing on the way they developed their paper ideas or the way they perceived their paper topic. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student explained to me that being an Asian herself she could readily see the problems relating to the lack of involvement of Asian students in campus activities (her paper topic). Additionally, being someone who was interested in getting involved in on-campus activities made her look at her paper topic (and subsequently write the paper) in certain ways.

> Researcher: How did you see yourself as you wrote this paper?
> Participant: First of all, I am an Asian. So I just write from my own perspective. And also being an Asian I can see what the real problems are [this student was writing a proposal arguing for more on-campus activities involving international students], except for that and also a person who is trying to be engaged in on-campus activities with American students; likewise some of my roles were added within these two groups.
> (Participant 9)

In the second excerpt, the student told me that his religious background was the guiding force in the way he developed his argument in his essay. For instance, being a Muslim he did not drink alcohol—it was a habit he developed as he grew up in a Muslim family and culture. In his paper, he discussed how refraining from

alcohol helped him grow up as a good person and argued that it was a lifestyle

that all students in the dorm should follow.

> Researcher: What else [other identity you had]?
> Participant: As a Muslim [a Muslim identity] who wants people to know how
> Islam is really good by not taking alcohol which is not allowed in
> Islam [his paper topic was drinking alcohol in the dorms].
> (Participant 27)

Identity of a writer

Finally, some participants in the study reported that they assumed the identity

of that of a writer while writing. They maintained that having the identity of a

writer afforded them to be more responsible and "professional," and made them

work hard, so their essay was strong and persuasive. The following excerpt

illustrates.

> Researcher: What else [any other identity you can remember]?
> Participant: Professional writer, I guess.
> Researcher: Can you explain "who is a professional writer" in your mind?
> Participant: To make my paper strong enough and persuasive enough.
> (Participant 17)

Tools

In a sociocultural approach to mind, tools are important because they are used

as mediators for successful completion of an activity. Tools are of two types:

Material and symbolic. Material tools are tangible. In literal sense, they are made

of some kind of materials. Examples of material tools may include calculators that

we use for calculation purposes, or levers that people use to pull water from the

well, and so forth. One may notice that calculations or pulling water is possible

without a calculator or a lever respectively, but the job would be more

cumbersome and will involve more hardships. Unlike material tools, symbolic

tools—such as language that we use for everyday communication or a sign that we may use to remember things—are made of signs or symbols.

Humans use both of these kinds of tools to mediate themselves (their mind) while performing an activity. Tools help accomplish tasks more easily and efficiently. When used successfully, tools provide the actors with more control over the task they are performing, and hence, make their jobs easier. Humans experiment with the use of various tools—at times they modify or discard old tools to replace them with new ones, as they become more adept with their use.

In the writing task investigated students seemed to have used various tools— both material and symbolic. One particular tool might have been necessary for one student, but may not be of much use for others. Based on the use of various tools participants reported, I divided them into the following 9 categories: (a) Tools derived from class sessions, (b) computer and the Internet, (c) blackboard, (d) outlines and notes, (e) stationery, (f) textbook, (g) dictionaries, (h) first language, and (i) supplies.

Tools derived from class sessions

According to several students, the class sessions derived tools—both material and symbolic—that they found useful for writing. Classes involved lectures, activities, discussions, and the instructor's presentation which led students to write notes or reflective journals. These resources were useful in the process of their writing. For instance, class notes made them think about their writing task and provided them with ideas (symbolic tools). Also, they used the samples that the instructor provided during the class as models for their writing. Those who did

not take notes during class sessions reflected on class activities to help themselves

walk through the writing task.

In the following excerpt, for instance, the participant explained how class

discussions, including the professor's presentation, provided her with ideas for her

own writing.

> Researcher: You also mentioned that you learned from class lectures, from the class—how did the class help you in your writing?
> Participant: May be during the class, after the professor introduced the assignment, he gave us a lot of options, when everyone was putting their paper topic on the board [in one of the class sessions, as part of the homework, instructor asked everyone to write 3 possible topics they might be interested to write their essay on], it helped me actually.
> Researcher: Can you tell me how it helped you?
> Participant: It helped me to think about other ideas that I had not thought about, for example, the dining hall operation hours be extended or something like that that I had not thought about.
> (Participant 28)

Computer and the Internet

Computer was one of the most commonly used tools students reported they

had used. Because of the prevalence of its availability and the convenience it

offers for word processing, computer was a popular tool that students used for the

writing task. Students used it for various writing-related activities such as reading

documents downloaded from the World Wide Web, for editing and formatting

purposes, for taking notes and writing outlines and so forth. They mentioned that

computers made writing faster and more convenient. Others said that it helped

them correct grammar, spelling errors and typos (by its automatic grammar and

spelling check functions).

> Researcher: What tools did you use for writing the paper?

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Participant: I just used the computer to type my paper.
Researcher: How about if someone asks you to handwrite?
Participant: That's okay, but it will take more time I think, because typing is
faster than handwriting.
(Participant 2)

Also, in the following excerpt, the participant explained the usefulness of the

computer as it checked spelling/grammatical errors. Upon my asking if he

preferred typing his paper directly in the computer to handwriting, he provided an

explanation as follows (earlier in the conversation he mentioned that his laptop

computer was one of the tools he used for writing the paper).

Researcher: Did you draft your paper on computer directly or did you
handwrite your paper first?
Participant: I did not write down on paper, I directly typed in the computer,
because it's faster than handwriting. And also, if there's a typo, it
[computer] automatically corrects it for me. That's why I prefer to
use MS Word to handwriting.
(Participant 28)

Similar to the computer, the Internet is a powerful mediating tool in students'

academic life, particularly because of its easy accessibility these days (e.g., via

cell phone, I-pod, in addition to computer). The Internet makes various research

materials available to students easily. Several participants mentioned that they

used the Internet for different purposes; for instance, for doing quick research,

finding sample materials (e.g., sample proposal paper) for writing the paper, using

online dictionaries, using online translation tools, accessing the virtual class site,

and so on. The following excerpt illustrates:

Researcher: What tools did you use for finishing writing this paper?
Participant: Basically my computer. Everything was in my computer—I went
to a couple of web pages [for research], the Internet.
(Participant 22)

Blackboard

Blackboard (made available by the university) was the virtual class site that the instructor had created for opening online discussion forums, setting up online homework activities, and sharing electronic copies of class materials and lecture notes. Some participants mentioned that they used Blackboard for various purposes—to see what other students had selected for their paper topic (which, they said, provided them with ideas for their own writing), doing homework relating to the writing assignment (which made them think about their paper topic/generate paper ideas), looking at the comments that other classmates wrote, and reviewing lecture notes or presentation slides. Some students noted that they used these materials as samples when they wrote.

The following excerpt illustrates various tools the participant used, but it particularly shows how he used Blackboard. He mentioned that while he did the assigned homework on Blackboard, he compared his work with that of others (which, he later explained, gave him ideas for his writing). He used the sample materials as well for formatting his own paper.

> Researcher: What tools did you use for writing this paper?
> Participant: Computer, the Internet, the conference I had [with the instructor], pen, paper. I used the textbook for works cited page, I used the discussion board on the Blackboard to do the homework. I looked at what other people did compared to what I did [the homework was to select 3 paper topics and to respond to the sample essays they had read from the textbook]. I did not look at the power points or whatever he [the instructor] had. I also looked at the cover letter format that he wrote so that I could just look at it and edit it in my way because I never wrote a cover letter before. That's the only lecture note I used.
> (Participant 23)

Outlines and notes

Students used outlines and notes of different kinds for writing the paper. For outlines, they used different techniques, depending on their preferences. For instance, some students had detailed handwritten outlines with step-by-step plans. Others used simple bullet-point notes or a solitary sentence for each of the paragraphs they were going to write. They later expanded the bullet point notes or the solitary sentences to paragraphs. Some participants mentioned that they used flow-charts as a way for them to remember how they would develop the entire essay. A few others noted that although they did not have any written outline *per se*, they had one in mind which helped them remain on track.

Some participants explained how they did not always make outlines at the beginning of their writing; sometimes they did so in the middle of it, instead. For example, when they had to stop in the middle of their writing (voluntarily or for reasons beyond their control), they would write notes regarding where they were and what they would do next so they did not lose important ideas they originally had. This shows the mediating power of simple notes or outline in shaping students' writing. At times students took quick notes even when they were not actively involved in the writing task (e.g., in the middle of their lunch). These notes later helped them expand their essay by providing additional ideas. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student mentioned how he went about his writing by first writing an outline.

Researcher: Can you give me a description of writing your paper?

Participant: ...I wrote the outline, wrote the most important points about this
            problem [the topic], and then I wrote an outline...
(Participant 20)

In the second excerpt, the student noted that he wrote some ideas on the paper

so that he did not forget them; although according to him, it was not an organized

outline.

Researcher: So when you started writing did you have an outline?
Participant: No, not outline, it was just a paper [a piece of paper], just some
            ideas about the paper but not an outline written on paper, it was
            not an organized outline.
Researcher: You had the outline in mind or paper?
Participant: I wrote it on paper so that I do not forget.
(Participant 12)

In the following excerpt, the student explained that he had a graphic outline

(as opposed to more traditional notes or a bullet-point outline) for writing.

Researcher: What tools did you use for this paper?
Participant: As usual computer, pen and paper, notes—I used the pen [and
            paper?] to plan, to outline and stuff, like [a] graphic plan...
(Participant 27)

Stationery

Students used various items of stationery in the process of their writing—the

most common being pen, paper, pencil, highlighter, eraser, and printer. Even

though the computer was a common tool for word processing, some students

mentioned that they handwrote the paper first before typing it up in the computer.

For them, typing was too distracting while they were processing their thoughts

and ideas for writing. In this case, typing in the computer might have been a

negative mediating factor that did not allow them to perform up to their liking.

Some students also noted that they preferred to print their research materials as they did not feel comfortable reading them on a computer screen. They highlighted the important information while they were reading these materials from paper and integrated the information into their texts. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student told me that he preferred reading his research materials on paper and that he was not comfortable reading them on the computer screen.

> Researcher: Which tools did you use for this paper?
> Participant: I wrote the outline and then print[ed] my resources.
> (Participant 3)

The second excerpt further illustrates students' preference for particular tools and also the fact that different people may get mediated differently by these tools.

> Researcher: You printed all the materials you [had] researched?
> Participant: Yeah I printed out because I cannot write [read] on the computer, it's really distracting [for] me.
> Researcher: You printed and?
> Participant: I printed and highlighted [she told me she had read the materials and highlighted the important points relevant to her essay] and then made the outline, supporting ideas and then thesis and conclusion.
> Researcher: And the outline was on paper or in the computer?
> Participant: On paper. I work [write] on paper always.
> Researcher: And you write your essay on paper too?
> Participant: Yes, on paper first and then when I finish writing the paper I type it in the computer.
> Researcher: Why do you do that [why don't you directly type in the computer]?
> Participant: I don't know, on the computer I cannot focus on when I am writing.
> (Participant 18)

Textbook

Students mentioned that they used their textbook, albeit to various degrees. For example, some students mentioned that they read the sample essays from the book and it helped them understand the writing task better. It also helped them model their own writing on the sample essay and provided them with useful ideas. Some students referred to their textbook for doing the formatting (i.e., APA) correctly. The following excerpt illustrates:

> Researcher: What were you thinking [this participant told me that after the writing assignment was introduced in class he was thinking a lot, so I asked him what he was thinking at the time]?
> Participant: During the time [when I was thinking] I read some articles from textbook, and see [saw] the way they write. But I just did not decide what to write about the proposal of my own. I read many articles [sample essays] from the textbook.
> Researcher: Did those articles help you?
> Participant: Yes.
> Researcher: Can you tell me how they helped you?
> Participant: Like the structure, like the language they used. About the article on "Should someone born outside the U.S. become the president of the United States"—this one has a clear structure. The author like talked about story and compares it [with] things that happen in real life and finds some supporting materials in his stories in real life, and in real life he talks about why should this change. So I was thinking like I could do the similar things. So I can ask about my friends' experiences and write my paper.
> (Participant 31)

Dictionaries

Students used dictionaries for writing the paper. The dictionaries were of different kinds—bilingual (e.g., English to Chinese; English to Korean), thesaurus, synonym dictionary. A few of them mentioned that they also used an online tool similar to a dictionary—the Google translator. Some of them used digital dictionaries while others the printed ones or the ones available online.

Participants gave various reasons why they used dictionaries: The most common

being looking up the meaning of difficult words that they did not know in

English. Some students used dictionaries more creatively such that they didn't

have to use the same word again and again (so the texts were more impressive).

In the following excerpt the participant explained that she used her dictionary

so that she could avoid using the same word again and again.

> Researcher: How does the dictionary help you to not use the same word again and again, can you explain a little?
> Participant: The synonym dictionary or the thesaurus. If there is uniform[ity?] then I find the word uniform in the dictionary and they have synonyms of the word in the dictionary.
> (Participant 18)

In the second excerpt, the student noted various tools he used; among those,

he mentioned about an electronic translator he found quite useful.

> Researcher: What other tools did you use?
> Participant: The electronic translator—it's a [piece of] software in my computer and [MS] Word 2007.
> (Participant 29)

First language

A few students reported that they used their first language (e.g., Chinese or

Korean) as a tool for thinking and organizing their thoughts before translating

them into English. They maintained that they found it easier to organize their

ideas in their first language. For example, a student who wanted to use a Chinese

proverb in her essay, failed to make the instructor understand what she had

actually meant even after rephrasing it a few times. She had to revert to

translating it from her first language Chinese into English [i.e., translating the idea

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within the proverb as opposed to translating it word-for-word]. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, when I asked the student if she used her first language, she explained to me her experience. This student told me that in order to impress her readers (i.e., mainly the instructor), she decided to use a Chinese proverb. She translated it into English (word-for-word) but it did not make any sense to the instructor. Later, she rephrased it a number of times before paraphrasing it so the instructor could understand.

> Researcher: You used your first language?
> Participant: Yes, I remember there is an interesting one—I tried to say something [to] express a concept [she later told me it was a Chinese proverb] …[not clear] and it turned out to be something like this which professor J. did not get. So he did not understand it at all.
> Researcher: What did you do?
> Participant: I tried to write it again and again [rephrased it again and again]. And then I translated it into English [she meant that she paraphrased the proverb].
> (Participant 13)

In the second excerpt, the student mentioned that she used the L1 while writing and that she always did so for writing all English essays:

> Researcher: So did you use Korean [while writing this paper]?
> Participant: Yes, I always think about it in Korean, and then translate it in English.
> (Participant 18)

The excerpts above show even though students write in English, the use of their first language is quite prevalent. L1s act as a symbolic tool that appears to help second language writers generate ideas and/or organize their thoughts so as to let their composing flow.

Supplies

Students reported that they needed supplies of different kinds as they finished writing the paper. These supplies included snacks, fruits, drinks, magazines, movies, and novels. They mentioned how they needed to drink sodas or some kind of energy drink so they did not fall asleep while composing. Others mentioned that they would have some fruits such as grapes to refresh their body.

Aside from the food and drinks, some participants also mentioned about various other logistic supplies such as books or magazines to find certain information for the writing assignment they were doing. One student, for instance, mentioned that she bought the *Newsweek* magazine at the time of invention activities, although in it she did not find the information she was looking for. The following excerpt illustrates:

Researcher: What else did you do other than what you have already mentioned to get your topic?
Participant: I bought a *Newsweek* but it was talking about what are the bad things about I-pads, I didn't get anything that I wanted from the magazine.
Researcher: Did you buy the *Newsweek* magazine specifically for this assignment?
Participant: Yes [I did].
(Participant 13)

In the second excerpt, when I asked which tools he used for writing the paper, the student told me that in addition to his computer, dictionary, textbook, and the Google translator, he also ate some grapes while composing. He mentioned that grapes refreshed his body.

Researcher: Which tools did you use for this paper?
Participant: Computer, the dictionary, I think that was pretty much it...I used the Google translator, this is kind of similar to my dictionary...the

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textbook...grapes—I ate grapes while drafting the paper, may be it was helpful [for] refreshing my body.

(Participant 31)

Goals

Goals are important components of any activity within an activity system (e.g., Cumming, 2006). Research has proved that when second language learners become involved in an L2 learning activity, they take up certain goals and objectives that lead them to accomplish their tasks (Gillette, 1994). For the current project, student writers reported that they had several goals. Based on the analysis of data, I divided these goals into the following 4 categories: (a) Grade, (b) writing skills, (d) writing task, and (d) personal satisfaction.

Grade

As discussed before, the writing course investigated in the current study was the last of a sequence of 2 required courses that all undergraduate students had to take to fulfill their degree requirements. Likewise, while the participants were excited that they were going to be done with their required English composition course for college, many of them mentioned that they wanted to do a good job by getting a good grade in the course. Interestingly, while getting a good grade on a course appeared to be a general expectation of students, the follow up questions revealed that they held different reasons as to why they would want a good grade. For example, for some getting a good grade was necessary for maintaining a high GPA; for others, it was because their parents had high expectations of them. Also, students appeared to approach their writing differently based on their perceptions of what would best earn them a good grade. For instance, they were aware of

following the teacher's instructions carefully, trying to make their argument

persuasive, working on incorporating the research into their writing and so on.

They knew that doing these tasks well would ultimately earn them a good grade.

The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student was clear about his goal of getting an A on the

paper and this was precisely what he mentioned in the interview.

> Researcher: What were your goals as you wrote this paper?
> Participant: Of course I want an A on this paper.
> (Participant 31)

In the second excerpt, the student explained to me how she was trying to do as

best as she could on his paper, ultimately to get an A on it.

> Researcher: The first goal you mentioned is to do as best as you can do—can
> you explain a little more what you mean?
> Participant: To get an A, that's the final goal, in my case to do as best means
> to get an A.
> (Participant 28)

In the following excerpt the student told me that while getting an A in the

course was her personal goal, she also had the behind-the-scene pressure for

attaining this goal from her parents who would not be happy with anything less

than an A. It is important to note that the student foregrounded her parents'

expectations of her getting a good grade, even though she herself wanted it too.

This shows how students may often be mediated by the pressure of fulfilling the

expectations of the family.

> Researcher: Why is getting an A the most important goal [prior to this excerpt
> this student mentioned that getting an A was her most important
> goal]
> Participant: Because my parents care about the grade I get.
> Researcher: Your parents, not you?

Participant: Yeah, I do too.
(Participant 21)

Writing skills

The participants reported that while writing the paper they had set different writing skills as goals. Their target skills were diverse and apparently were based on their perceptions of the skills they lacked as well as the skills they thought might be useful for them in future, in their professional life. Business majors, for instance, might need to write proposals in their professional career and therefore they were keen to set learning how to write a good proposal as the goal. Some others, on the other hand, mentioned about learning how to write a cover letter (that was part of this writing assignment) as a goal, since cover letters were going to be useful when they would apply for jobs. In addition to the above, a number of students were inclined to set various linguistic as well as mechanical aspects of writing such as sentence structures, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, APA formatting and so on as their goals. They reasoned that this was going to be the last English course they were going to take in college and hence, it was important for them to try as hard as possible so that they could acquire these writing skills. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt the participant explained to me that she wanted to learn how to express idiomatically because she thought that that was one of her weaknesses. Prior to the transcript excerpt below, the student had told me about her primary goal—getting a good grade. When I asked what other goals she had,

she mentioned to me about the improvement of writing skills, which for her was

learning to make her phrases and vocabulary more idiomatic.

> Researcher: What else [what other goals did you have]?
> Participant: And improve the writing skills; making my phrases and
> vocabulary more idiomatic through writing; I think that's it.
> (Participant 8)

In the second excerpt, the student explained how learning the skill of writing

proposals might be useful for him in the future, by helping him find a job or

giving him a promotion. Likewise, he had this particular goal in mind.

> Researcher: What were your goals as you were writing this paper?
> Participant: Like the proposal paper, it will be useful in future, like if I have
> some plans and to give it to some big companies, it's useful to
> find the job.
> Researcher: I did not quite understand!
> Participant: You know like in the future I may write some proposals [as part
> of my job] and give it to my leader of my working company [the
> company where I work], so I may use this skill.
> Researcher: So basically you are saying that you may use the experience or
> knowledge of writing proposal in the future when you would be
> working for some company?
> Participant: Yeah.
> Researcher: You expect to write proposals in your future jobs?
> Participant: Yeah, may be I can give my leader [boss/supervisor] a new idea
> [through writing a proposal] and can get a promotion.
> (Participant 10)

Writing task

Because the particular piece of writing investigated was part of the course

requirement, students seemed to be careful about the writing task itself.

Participants mentioned about various aspects of the writing task as the goals they

had in mind. For a number of participants finishing the writing task with several

final examinations approaching was the most important goal. The following

excerpt illustrates:

Researcher: What else [what other goals did you have]?

Participant: To get this paper done as soon as possible. Because this is the last assignment in this class so if I could get over with this assignment, I could go over to other courses [that I am taking this semester]. It's a kind of goal.

(Participant 15)

A few students wanted to closely follow the writing assignment requirements provided by the instructor and had set those requirements as their goals. Some of these assignment requirements were writing minimum 4 pages, citing minimum 5 references, following APA style for formatting, and providing practical solutions in their proposal. Since this was a graded writing assignment, student writers wanted to have achieved these goals so that they could earn good points. The following excerpt illustrates:

Researcher: What goals did you have in mind as you wrote the paper?

Participant: To write enough pages [minimum 4 pages] because this assignment has to be of certain pages.

(Participant 29)

When I asked why writing 4 pages was important, students explained that because it was one of the assignment requirements specified by the instructor they had to write a minimum of 4 pages to earn good points. One student explained as follows:

Researcher: Why is the goal of writing 4 pages important for you?

Participant: Because writing 4 pages was the minimum, and if I don't keep the rule then the essay would be graded lower [downgraded] than I expected.

(Participant 16)

Personal satisfaction

In addition to the categories of goals above, some students talked about goals that can probably be best described as relating to their personal satisfaction. Quite

naturally, the categories above may overlap with the personal satisfaction in some way. But I created a separate category to discretely refer to students' satisfaction involved in accomplishing the writing task. As the analysis of data revealed, some student writers would derive satisfaction from doing the writing task in a particular way. This was different from the writing skill or the writing task, and was not related to the writing assignment requirements, so was irrelevant to grade. One student, for example, wanted to impress readers by her writing. The following excerpt illustrates:

> Researcher: What were your goals as you wrote?
> Participant: To make people agree with me [she later explained that she wanted to impress people by her writing].
> Researcher: Why do you think it was necessary, because wasn't it just an assignment in your English course?
> Participant: Because I already spent time on it so I wanted to make it good. Because some of the students in my class, they write the paper, although I did not read their paper, I did not agree with a lot of it. I want people to at least say "oh I agree."
> (Participant 17)

In the excerpt above, the student explained to me while she did not read everyone's paper in class, generally she felt unimpressed about what her peers were writing. She thought most of her classmates wrote as though they were performing some kind of rituals as they were finishing their writing task. Unlike them, she always wanted to impress others by her writing.

The second excerpt below provides an example of a different kind of satisfaction that the participant noted during the interview. The student explained that he always tried to select a topic that he was interested in and when he was interested in the topic, he enjoyed writing about it. For this particular writing

assignment, he had selected a topic he was interested in, and subsequently, he enjoyed writing the essay.

> Researcher: Can you tell me the goals you had in mind when you wrote the paper?
> Participant: During my writing I can feel happy [feeling happy while writing] because I am interested in my topic.
> (Participant 3)

Division of Labor

According to sociocultural theory, division of labor helps identify the actors involved in an activity. Since sociocultural theory recognizes the collaborative nature of any activity, identifying the division of labor is relevant. It is essential to know the actors involved in an activity so that we may learn about the processes of its accomplishment. Second, when an activity is actually collaboratively done, to ascribe it solely to an individual provides not only wrong manifestation of the activity itself but also contributes to masking the true nature and characteristics of it. Additionally, in the field of literacy/education where collaboration provides accessibility to construction and acquisition of knowledge, identifying the collaborative nature of a given task is particularly important, so teaching and learning can occur in most efficient ways.

In the current study I asked students to tell me about the people, other than themselves, who were involved in the writing process. The process of writing being non-linear, students' accounts suggest that they received help from different people at various stages (e.g., invention, feedback-revisions) of writing. Also, different people provided help in different capacities. Based on the analysis of data, I divided the people that participants mentioned playing out in their writing

processes into the following categories: (a) Instructor, (b) friends and classmates, (c) writing center tutors, (d) family members, and (e) people in the world.

Instructor

Since the writing task was a part of the course, students seemed to have sought mostly the instructor's help. Likewise, their writing to a great extent was influenced by the instructor. The most common reason for seeking instructor's help appeared to be the fact that he was responsible for grading students' paper. Hence, students wanted to ensure that they wrote the paper the way the instructor wanted it. Besides, all students had to attend a mandatory conference session after they had written their first draft. Most students invariably received some feedback on their first draft at the conference.

Students received instructor's help at various stages of writing and this help was on various aspects in the entire process of writing. Starting from invention activities students seemed to have consulted the instructor for input on topic selection and the resources they needed for writing. In fact, some participants reported that they had to change their topic or had to modify the one they had originally selected based on the instructor's comments. They mentioned that the instructor led them to different sources to be used as references for their paper.

During writing, students kept in mind what the instructor wanted from the assignment. They noted that they were influenced by his in-class discussions, presentation of a sample proposal as well as the step-by-step structure he had posted on Blackboard and various comments and analysis during class sessions.

As for revisions, almost all students were influenced by the instructor's input in some way or the other. Data analysis reveals that students' revisions were mostly consisted of different kinds of error corrections such as those related to grammar and spelling, and issues related to content such as narrowing down the focus of their discussions, or providing more explicit examples, adding appropriate citations and details. Student writers received ideas relating to the improvement of the content as well.

Some students' accounts suggest that not only did they receive direct help from the instructor, at times, their writing was indirectly shaped by him as well. For instance, they tried to work according to the instructor's expectations that acted as an invisible force in the way they wrote. Some of them also mentioned how they evaluated the instructor's personality—whether the instructor was easy going or strict, whether or not he was selective on something, whether or not he expected them to include a particular piece of information in their essay and so on. They mentioned that these considerations had bearing on the way they put their efforts and ultimately completed their writing. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant told me how the instructor helped her with the invention activities. She was struggling to settle with her paper topic when she went to the instructor. She told me that she was interested in recycling and environmental pollution and was considering writing about the Tokyo Protocol (TP), an environment protection protocol a number of countries had signed some years ago. As I asked her why she selected the Tokyo Protocol, she explained to

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me that she had selected her topic without doing much research and later based on

the instructor's feedback she changed it:

> Researcher: Why did you get to Tokyo Protocol?
> Participant: May be I just tried to guess [I had selected this topic just by guessing] because I did not do really much research. And then I talked to Mr. J about it and he tried to guide me how to complete this essay and after that I felt like may be there is nothing to do with the TP because if I wanted to write about it, it would be a long essay.
> (Participant 13)

In the second excerpt, the student told me about how the instructor's feedback

on his paper at the conference helped him add more details:

> Researcher: You also had a conference—did you show up on the conference day?
> Participant: Yes, I did.
> Researcher: What kind of feedback did you get?
> Participant: He [the instructor] said, he suggested me that I fix some grammar errors and suggested more details about the essay. For example, the advertisement thing [in a presentation on a sample proposal, the instructor provided a specific example of raising revenues from advertisement of the sponsors who would help install shades at bus stops] while designing the smoking areas; those kinds of details could help me so I could write more about.
> (Participant 16)

In the third excerpt, the student, who was very busy with his other exams

during the week his first draft was due, told me that he started drafting his essay

only the day before it was due. When I asked why he did so considering that most

students would feel stressed out starting so late, he told me that the instructor's

personality had something to do with it, and that he thought the instructor was

easy going.

> Researcher: What is the minimum time you need to draft your essay, because I heard that people start getting stressed out a couple of days before

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the paper is due whereas you are saying you started drafting in the afternoon of the day before the first draft was due?

Participant: To me that was not a huge deal, well there's something to do with the professor's style, like Mr. J is easy going.

(Participant 26)

In the following excerpt, the participant explained to me how the professor's discussions and presentation during class sessions provided him with more concrete memories while he was writing, although the same kind of information was available in the textbook.

Researcher: How did your professor influence your writing, if at all?

Participant: I haven't seen him yet [i.e., he had not had the scheduled conference yet at the time the interview took place], I will see him later today. But yes his presentation on the bus stop thing had a positive effect on my writing. I got to know about how the proposal should be persuasive, and there should be logic behind the proposal to persuade the readers. So yeah it did help.

Researcher: Any other ways your professor influenced your writing?

Participant: What he already said in class, like the presentation and he reviewed what all we should include in the presentations, although it's all on the textbook it helps.

Researcher: How was it different—the textbook versus the professor [his presentation/explanation]?

Participant: I think it's all the same but he went free [while presenting], so it gave me more concrete memories.

Researcher: So [after your professor's presentation] you got more concrete memories about the assignment when you were writing?

Participant: Yeah.

(Participant 31)

The excerpt above illustrates that teacher's explanations in classroom context can mediate students more positively and may have more lasting effects on them.

Friends and classmates

Friends and classmates seem to have been a major repository of influence for student writers for the particular writing task investigated. Students fell back on their friends and classmates for various helps they needed through the entire

process of writing. There appear to be a number of reasons why students chose to go up to their friends for help. Among them a few stand out: Being on the same campus they had easy access to their friends, some of whom might share the same room, or suite, or floor in the dorm, they might be taking the same composition class, or sometimes they made good friends from a different class (i.e., other than the English composition class) they were taking together or from the study group they worked in together. Also, at times students who had already taken the English composition course and written the same or similar kind of paper might become resource persons for current students.

Participants received help from their friends or classmates under different circumstances—sometimes out of serious, focused interactions aiming at a particular aspect of the writing process (e.g., invention-related such as topic ideas, research, and so forth), at other times, out of casual, inconsequential conversations; sometimes purposely, at other times coincidentally; sometimes during conversations over lunch, sometimes at study tables. Regardless of how the circumstance was, most of the times students seemed to have been benefited from the help they received from their friends.

Like it happened with the instructor, students received help from friends throughout the entire process of writing, for various purposes, including those related to invention activities, research, finding resources, and revisions. Students mentioned to me that they got paper ideas from friends or asked them for help with their research. Also, some had their friends read their draft for feedback on

errors. They also mentioned that having conversations with the friends provided them with ideas that they used for expanding the discussions in the paper.

Data analysis also reveals one interesting aspect in the way students acquired help from friends or classmates. A few participants explained how they traded help they themselves provided for a foreign language (e.g., Arabic, Korean, etc.) for the help they received on their English writing. This seems to be an interesting dynamic of L2 writing, especially in ESL settings, given that ESL students quickly learn how to utilize the context to good effect and that co-learning occurs not only among students from the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds but also between ESL and local English-speaking American students.

The following excerpts will illustrate the above points. In the first excerpt, the participant told me how he got ideas about his paper topic from his friend and followed his suggestions. He told me that his friend had taken the same course before and had ideas about the writing assignment. His friend suggested him the paper topic so he could find a lot of information about the topic and be creative with his ideas.

> Researcher: Please give me a description of everything you did as you wrote this paper.
> Participant: I wrote a proposal about the increase of tuition at South West State University. And what solution has to be done or has to be considered to solve this problem and what benefits will university get from doing this. I inspired my ideas [I was inspired in these ideas] from my friend. He told me that just write about, may be you are going to find a lot of information on the topic. But about parking about smoking you would not find a lot of information and you would not be creative.
> (Participant 12)

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In the second excerpt, the student told me how one of his friends, who lived on the same floor as he did, helped his research by providing information he was looking for.

> Researcher: How did you prepare yourself for drafting or what kind of research did you do before you started drafting your essay [on the 17th]?
> Participant: I didn't do much research before that because most of the research I wanted to do, I already had an idea. I knew what I was going to write about so I just looked it up online and just figured it out then. The main point was that I wanted to find out how much an employee makes over there at the dining halls. I have a friend who lives on the same floor as me, so I just asked her. I asked her after I submitted the rough draft and she told me how much she makes and how much regular people make and how many people work at a time and stuff. So that was pretty easy but before that I didn't do much research.
> (Participant 23)

In the third excerpt, the student told me how he got help with his revisions from one of his friends from an economics class they were taking together. His friend helped him revise his essay.

> Researcher: Tell me a little about the revision process—what you did for the revisions.
> Participant: Actually I did not go to the writing center for the rough draft [to revise the rough draft]. I just got some help from my friend who is from the economics class. I told him about the paper ideas.
> Researcher: Why did you choose him?
> Participant: Because we are working on some kind of study group together, so when we are taking a break in between I request him if he could go over my paper, he would say sure. So he would go over my paper for like 10 minutes and point out a few mistakes. We are in the same grade [age group?] so he is not older than me. He is born here [USA] and grew up here.
> (Participant 25)

Finally, in the following excerpt the student shared with me how she acquired help on her paper in exchange for the help she provided to her friend. She told me

that she knew one of her friends from her chemistry class where they worked together for the exams. She got to know another friend, whom she helped with her Korean language, through one of her acquaintances. After writing her first draft while she was working on the revisions, she sought her friends' help. In the following excerpt the student was giving me a description of her revision process.

Researcher: Tell me about the revisions.
Participant: I went over my paper with one of my friends.
Researcher: And who is this friend?
Participant: She is in my chemistry class, we kind of work together for exams, we study together. I asked her if she could check my grammar, she said sure, then we went over [the paper] and she checked my grammar wherever I messed up. I also on Monday sent my paper to a person who checks my paper a lot.
Researcher: Who is this person?
Participant: She's the teacher in our honors writing center and I get to meet with her with a connection with someone else, that's why I kind of show her my paper all this semester.
Researcher: How do you get to send your paper to her [for comments]—is she part of the writing center or are two of your friends? Or do you send her paper as an honors student?
Participant: No I am not. It's just a friend's connection. She's taking Korean language classes, so I can help her with Korean, and she's helping me with my English, that's it. Still hasn't sent me an email back [i.e., her comments], but she said she will email me tonight. That's the whole process so far.
(Participant 6)

Writing center tutors

Students used the campus writing centers for help with revisions. On-site writing tutoring was available on at least a couple of locations on campus. Also, there was online writing tutoring for students who wanted to avail the tutoring services online. Most students preferred on-site tutoring to the online one.

Participants seemed to look for help from the writing center tutors mostly for revisions with grammatical errors. They mentioned that they also received help on

expressions as well as the flow of their texts. Some students visited the writing center almost as soon as the writing assignment was handed to them in class. They mentioned that this way they could start early; and with the help of tutors, they could finish writing their paper with sufficient time in hand. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student told me that as soon as the writing assignment was handed to them in class she finished writing it and went to the writing center for revisions. She went to the writing center again afterwards to fix the grammatical errors and improve the flow of her texts.

> Researcher: Give me a description of how you wrote this paper?
> Participant: As I got the assignment, I started it and I finished it on the same day. And on that day I made an appointment with the writing center and I went there the next day and they revised my essay [helped me revise my essay]. And then I handed it to my professor.
> Researcher: How did you finish the essay without attending classes, without knowing what your professor wanted?
> Participant: On Monday and Wednesday [before she started writing] he [the instructor] explained enough things to do. So that was enough for me. So I just write [wrote], I just started. Then the writing center tutors helped me to revise that and [told me] what was the problem with the essay.
> Researcher: How many writing tutors [helped you]?
> Participant: Two of them—they did not give me ideas though, they just fixed my grammar.
> Researcher: Did that influence your writing [this paper]?
> Participant: Yeah, it enhances [enhanced] the fluency of my writing and it makes more sense [of my paper].
> (Participant 18)

In the following excerpt the student mentioned how he worked on the revisions with the help of the writing center tutors after he had the conference

with the instructor. He also explained how the writing tutors helped him correct

the mistakes.

> Researcher: What did you do from Friday when you had the conference [with the instructor] to Monday when your final paper was due?
> Participant: I did a research or reference on Saturday, may be Friday night.
> Researcher: What kind of research did you do?
> Participant: Just Google, internet research because it's faster. And I modified it again. And then Sunday I went to the resource center [the writing center] in Hassempa [pseudonym of the building where the writing center was located]. I went there to check my grammar. They corrected my mistakes. I was there for about half an hour. After coming home I just read it again and then that was it and printed it off and submitted to the professor.
> Researcher: As you finished this paper, who are the people that influenced your writing?
> Participant: Directly, may be the tutors at the writing resource center [the writing center]. My instructor also.
> (Participant 29)

Family members

Participants mentioned that their family members—some of whom lived far

away, in a different country—helped them in the process of their writing. They

comprised mostly students' immediate families such as parents, brother, sister,

wife, and grandmother.

The student writers mentioned oftentimes they would share their paper ideas

with their siblings or parents. These interactions might occur at a time when they

had called their parents or siblings at home for reasons mostly other than

discussing their writing. Sometimes they would discuss their paper ideas with

their parents, brother or sister to see if their ideas were good enough. They

received feedback that helped them write better. One student mentioned she

changed her topic after her mother, who lived in Taiwan, persuaded her to write

on a different topic. At other times they received feedback directly on what they

had written—on mechanics and content, for example. With the help of the

Internet they could have quick correspondences with their family (who were

living far away from them) regarding their papers.

In the following process log the participant noted how she used her brother's

feedback as she was finalizing her topic. At home while she was having a casual

chat with her brother (who was a graduate student himself), she told him about

her paper ideas. Her brother encouraged her to pursue the topic she had selected

which made her feel confident about her topic selection.

> April 15: At night I was talking to my brother about my assignment. I told him about my choice [about the topic], he noded [nodded?] that it's a real problem & I discussed taking the homeless to rehab with him. I feel more confident about my choice. (Participant 11)

In the following excerpt the student explained to me how after he had finished

his first draft he gave it to his mother to help him with his grammatical errors.

> Researcher: Anybody else [that helped you with your writing]?
> Participant: I have good ideas but my sentences do not flow well. So my mom kind of pointed that out—the grammar and the flow.
> Researcher: What did she do?
> Participant: I gave it to my mom to see and she gave me some comments on grammar.
> Researcher: For this paper?
> Participant: Yeah for the rough draft.
> (Participant 25)

People in the world

In addition to the categories above, some students also mentioned about the

help they received from people whom they met entirely coincidentally. I describe

them as "people in the world" to indicate that these people constitute part of our

everyday life (i.e., not necessarily related to us academically, professionally, or in

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the sense that our family members are related to us) and we are mediated by them

in some way in our writing. The role of them is important as they may contribute

to providing valuable ideas in the process of writing. A few participants in the

present study, for instance, reported how they were benefitted by such people as

workers at a bicycle repair store or election campaigners on campus. In the

following excerpt, the participant explained how she was led to the ideas related

to her topic by a group of campaigners (she had similar experience when she went

to a shopping mall) who came up to her when she was eating lunch at the

university student union. Although this particular incident was part of her

everyday life experience, coincidentally it contributed to her writing.

> Researcher: How about those guys who asked for votes?
> Participant: No, I did not talk to them.
> Researcher: But if you did not get annoyed with them, do you think you
> would have thought about this paper topic and ideas about your
> paper?
> Participant: Right. I wanted to write about these experiences, at the same time
> I was thinking about this when they came; so they made me think
> about it, and also those ladies from the shopping mall [She
> explained to me how she felt annoyed when she first came to the
> U.S. as strangers would approach her for votes or donations. She
> felt equally annoyed when she was approached by store attendants
> at shopping malls to inquire if she needed help. She reasoned that
> since she never had similar experiences in her home country
> Saudi Arabia, apparently harmless encounters with different
> people made her feel "strange."].
> (Participant 5)

Community

The concept of community in an activity system provides the activity in

question a more grounded profile with respect to its social and cultural

orientations. It is important to shed light on actors' sense of communal

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belongingness as s/he performs the acts so that we know the communal affiliations s/he holds. Engeström (1999) maintains that as actors, information regarding our communities is important in that it tells where we come from, the people we normally befriend with, and the common beliefs and cultures that pertain to us. Our communal orientation would normally have some bearing on the activities we perform.

For the current study, participants were asked to describe the communities they considered themselves aligned with as they accomplished their writing tasks. The findings illustrate students' associations with a number of communities. They affirm one of the important sociocultural-theoretical positions that the society that we are part of ultimately has significant bearing on the way we perform different activities. Based on the analysis of data, I divided the communities into the following 4 categories: (a) Student community, (b) community related to backgrounds, (c) the local community, and (d) community in relation to paper topics.

Student community

All being students, participants of the present study, while writing, experienced issues that one can associate with a typical student life. These issues included various aspects of student life in general, ranging from campus and dorm life to problems as well as prospects relating to them—from issues concerning meal options and restaurants to various aspects of academic life such as the selection of majors, different courses and course-related requirements, tuition and scholarships, and so forth. All of this made students feel that they belonged to the

student community and these experiences appeared to shape their writing in some ways.

Student writers maintained that their belonging to the student community helped them generate and expand ideas about their topics. At the time of writing they recollected their experiences as students and utilized them for invention activities. For instance, being members of the student community helped them identify a problem (for the topic) and look into it with an insider's eye. Later, they derived ideas as an insider within the group for invention activities. Similarly, while composing they could expand their discussions with greater details and clarity using the same ideas. A few students maintained that being a member of the student community helped them assimilate with the group and provided them with the motivation for the work (i.e., writing) they were doing. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant explained that being a student at the university made him realize about the particular campus problem that he was writing about. He figured out it was not only him but also others who were facing the problem of not having enough seats at the student union during lunch hours. He added that if he was not part of the community he would not have understood the nature of the problem.

> Researcher: While writing this paper which community/communities were you influenced by?
> Participant: SWSU student, and that's it. Because spending two or three minutes looking for a table is not just about me. Sometimes when I see people or a person is walking for three or four minutes around me looking for a table; so everyone faces this problem

here. So of course they had an influence on me indirectly. Yeah, I think SWSU student.

Researcher: So SWSU student community influenced your writing in some way?

Participant: Yes, because being a student of this community helped me realize this problem, something important not only for students but for people [on campus] in general, the faculty and the staff.

(Participant 7)

In the second excerpt, the participant mentioned that being a member of the student community he heard other students talk about the increase of tuition, his paper topic, and the difficulties it caused.

Researcher: Which community did you have in your head that was kind of affecting your writing this paper?

Participant: Student community.

Researcher: Can you tell me how this community influenced your writing?

Participant: Student community, it affected me with the tuition thing. All student communities and they are talking about it. Also, the international students are more affected with [by] this thing because it is more expensive.

(Participant 12)

Finally, in the following excerpt, the writer mentioned about the student community as an encouraging factor in his writing. Specifically, he pointed about the school environment in which students inquired about each other's work, which provided him with the inspiration for doing well.

Researcher: Any other community that you think might have influenced your writing?

Participant: I guess the student community. School environment [unclear]; there are a lot of people encouraging each other, like "hey, how's your paper?"

(Participant 24)

Community related to backgrounds

The analysis of data revealed that student writers continued to draw elements that were useful for the paper from their background-related communities. They

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appeared to have used their communal solidarity as they selected their paper topic. They also used the perspectives derived from the communities they belonged to for expanding the discussions and/or generating ideas. They mentioned about the communities relating to not only their home culture but also their academic backgrounds, i.e., their majors. Student writers mentioned to me how they used the conversations they had among themselves as a particular major and used the information for developing the discussions in the paper. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant explained how being a Chinese he was inclined to have a Chinese restaurant at the university student union (he later selected this as his paper topic). He elaborated that for writing he used the perspectives derived from Chinese community and his being a member of the community helped him include much more nuanced information in his essay.

Researcher: When you wrote this paper which community influenced your writing, directly or indirectly?
Participant: My Chinese background, so the Chinese community because I am proposing a Chinese restaurant on campus. And there are Chinese students at SWSU.
Researcher: Can you tell me how the Chinese community influenced your writing?
Participant: Because I like Chinese foods and I eat a lot, and that's why I want to have a Chinese restaurant in the MU [his paper topic—proposal for a Chinese restaurant in the university student union]. That's my background.
Researcher: But how did that [your likings for the Chinese foods] help or influence your writing?
Participant: Because I am more familiar with Chinese foods, so I can explain why Chinese foods are better than American fast foods, and healthier, and that sort of thing.
Researcher: Can you tell me how Chinese community affected your writing?
Participant: I used my Chinese perspectives, it may sound selfish because I know there are other international students, because I am a

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Chinese I want to eat Chinese foods, so I want a Chinese
restaurant on campus, that's it.

Researcher: But how does the [Chinese] community help?

Participant: Because I am a Chinese I am familiar with the Chinese foods.
May be Korean foods are also good, but I will need to do a lot of
research to write about Korean foods. As for Chinese foods, I ate
a lot, so I know how to cook them and I also can get some
research done from Chinese websites, it's very convenient for me
to write about Chinese foods.

(Participant 29)

In the following excerpt, the student mentioned how her belonging to the

design (major) community added credibility to her essay. Because she was a

design major, she knew the ins and outs about the design building, her paper

topic.

Researcher: As you wrote this paper, which community, you think, had some
influence on your writing in some way?

Participant: Just the student from design major. A design student community.

Researcher: How did that affect your writing?

Participant: By adding more credibility to my writing because I am a design
student and I actually stay in that building a lot.

(Participant 17)

The local community

Student writers reported that their writing was influenced by their immediate

local communities. By local community they referred to the community in which

they were residing at the time. From data analysis it appeared that students were

affected by the surroundings in which they were living and these surroundings

impacted writers mainly during the invention and/or composing stages. For

instance, they took cues from local communities to come up with a paper topic or

discuss issues that were relevant. The following excerpt illustrates.

In this excerpt, the participant explained that she chose to write about the problems relating to the homeless people loitering around because she faced this problem in the neighborhood she lived. She also mentioned that she thought that many people like her such as students, faculty and staff also faced the same problem.

> Researcher: As you finished your assignment, which community do you think influenced your writing?
> Participant: For this paper the community that influenced my writing is the community within which I'm living here because I'm dealing with a local problem.
> Researcher: Do you want to say it's the American community, or the Arizona community or the Tempe community, which community do you mean?
> Participant: I think I'm talking about the homeless people on the street, I'm talking about the people in this area. So it's the homeless people by whom we get bothered and those who live here. So whoever lives in this place [the city or the neighborhood?].
> Researcher: So does that mean you're saying that the local community that you live, like the city?
> Participant: Yeah. And because when I'm writing I try to think about who was waiting [homeless people] when I took the bus.
> (Participant 11)

Community in relation to paper topics

Some participants in the study mentioned that they thought they aligned with the communities related to the topic they were writing about. By aligning with these communities, they thought they were voicing the related concerns of other members as well. Thus, it helped create a sense of purpose of writing in their mind and perceive the issues related to the topic from a collective rather than individual point of view. The following excerpt illustrates.

> Researcher: But any other community that may worked [behind] your writing this paper?

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Participant: May be the community of students who do not like to eat on campus [his paper topic was related to the lack of microwaves for heating up foods at the student union], who like to bring foods and heat it somewhere on campus—this community.

Researcher: So the community of students who do not want to eat on campus.

Participant: Yeah, the community of students who prepare their own foods and want to heat their foods on campus.

Researcher: How did that community or sense of that community affect your writing this paper?

Participant: Well, they are not handful on SWSU campus, there are a lot of them. Me, myself, although I got used to eating foods at the restaurants but the reasons for that [eating at restaurants] or part of the reason is that it's hard for me to make my own foods [I do not have time to make my own foods these days because I hardly have any time for that, otherwise, I would have brought my foods to campus]. I mean...

Researcher: …did this sense of community affect your writing?

Participant: The reason for writing this particular paper is that my friends and others feel this way. I do have the motivation, from the problems and suffering—yourself [myself] and your [my] friends.

(Participant 31)

Rules

While doing an activity humans follow certain rules and norms. Russell and Yaňez (2003) maintain that rules are formal. They entail certain institutional or disciplinary regulations. When working under institutional or disciplinary settings, one has to follow the rules. Hence, they are considered to be more formal. In contrast, norms are informal. They entail various individually-based, preferential pathways for accomplishing activities. Norms are indicative of whatever informal rituals an actor may follow while doing something.

In the current project when asked about what rules they had followed, student writers mentioned about both formal as well as informal rules. Based on the analysis of data I divided them into the following 3 categories: (a) Writing task related, (b) writing related, and (c) personal traits.

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Writing task related

Students followed different writing-task-related rules as they finished their writing task. This included both formal and informal rules. Student writers mentioned about various requirements specified in the assignment description such as the length of the essay, formatting, persuasiveness of their writing, incorporating secondary research into their texts, considering multiple perspectives while developing their argument, and keeping the deadline, as some of the rules they followed. Since they were specific assignment requirements, they can be considered as formal.

Students also mentioned about some informal rules they kept in mind while finishing their paper. For instance, they mentioned about making their paper as interesting as possible while knowing that it was a formal paper and reviewing their paper according to the format the instructor had used in class so that they could stay on track. Data analysis shows that students emphasized on the formal rules rather than the informal ones—the norms. These findings may indicate that L2 writers (at least in similar contexts) experiment with very little creativity while writing a formal, academic paper and they mostly follow the guidelines handed to them. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student explained that he followed the requirements mentioned in the assignment description sheet provided by the instructor.

Researcher: Can you tell me what rules you followed while writing?
Participant: I was following the format [the guidelines] provided by the instructor.
Researcher: Do you mean the assignment guidelines?
Participant: Yes.

Researcher: What else?
Participant: That's it.
(Participant 19)

In the second excerpt, the student explained about the various assignment

requirements the instructor specified as the rules he had in mind. Among these

requirements, he mentioned about the length, including pictures for references,

the proposal in details such as incorporating calculations for budget, specifically.

Researcher: What rules did you have in mind as you wrote the paper?
Participant: My rules were basically the criteria of 4 pages for the thing [the
essay], 1 page for the cover letter; the format like he [the
instructor] showed us, adding pictures and stuff; doing works
cited and all the basic stuff; and putting the calculations in and
finding out the exact costs and stuff. That's about it.
(Participant 23)

Finally in the following excerpt, the student mentioned that she wanted to

make the paper as interesting as possible while she knew that it was a formal

paper. Making the paper interesting was not a requirement *per se* for the

assignment, yet the student writer wanted to make it so; apparently, with a view to

making it more readable.

Researcher: How about any guidelines, didn't you have any guidelines, rules,
to finish the writing assignment?
Participant: Yeah, may be as I said it's a formal paper, I had to write formally.
But I tried to make it as interesting as I can. And I think it worked
for me.
(Participant 11)

Writing related

While giving accounts of their writing processes student writers mentioned

about various rules relating to writing. These rules were related to various aspects

of writing, ranging from general sentence level issues to paragraph; from expressions to mechanics; from secondary research and citations to plagiarism.

While referring to the writing rules students mentioned about their awareness about the grammatical errors and typos, using objective language (as opposed to the subjective one), and combining simple and complex sentences. They also mentioned about the standard organizational rules for writing such as starting with a thesis statement that would give a forecasting, providing an introduction, breaking down the discussions into body paragraphs and including a conclusion. Some of them mentioned about doing secondary research and appropriate citations and the importance of avoiding plagiarism. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant indicated that she was careful about her grammar and typos. She emphasized that she did not want to have any ungrammatical sentences in her essay.

> Researcher: Can you tell me what rules you had in mind as you wrote the essay?
> Participant: Like I need to be accurate in grammar, I need to avoid the typos. But these were usually fixed after I went to the writing center. So I wasn't worried about these ones.
> Researcher: But you did follow these rules?
> Participant: Yeah, I care about the grammar or I need to correct these ones. I do not want to write any ungrammatical sentences.
> (Participant 28)

In the second excerpt, the student mentioned about the general rules he followed for organizing his essay. For him, these rules included writing the essay with an introduction, body, and conclusion.

> Researcher: What rules did you have in mind?

Participant: Like general strategies.
Researcher: What are they?
Participant: Like I kept in mind that the essay should contain the introduction, body, and the conclusion parts. And I think that's it.
(Participant 16)

Finally, in the following excerpt, the student mentioned that he wanted to avoid copying from his friend's paper. He explained that although he took a look at his friend's paper that he had written for a similar writing assignment, he was aware that he was not supposed to copy his friend's entire essay.

Researcher: As you wrote the paper what rules did you follow?
Participant: I do not want to copy my whole friend's paper [the entire paper of my friend] because I do not want to get caught [for plagiarism]. In that way, I could use his topic but I could not frame the way he did. That's all. When I was writing I was just thinking how I could use his paper but not like copy it.
(Participant 30)

Personal traits

In addition to the rules and norms discussed above, some student writers reported on certain norms that they generally followed when they wrote their papers. These norms might have been results of their habits they developed over a period of time and practiced whenever they wrote English papers. I categorized these norms as personal traits of participants for writing.

The participants mentioned about various norms they would follow for different aspects of writing. These norms included maintaining a personal deadline, starting early enough to give himself/herself enough time, visiting the writing center for revisions (although it was not required by the assignment), presenting himself/herself as a good student (i.e., following the norms of a good student) before the instructor by following up with the instructor regarding

different issues relating to the writing task, and trying to write differently from others.

While the writing assignment itself had a deadline, student writers seemed to have their own deadlines as well. These deadlines made them plan for various tasks relating to the writing assignment and remain on track with the writing task. Some students mentioned about visiting the writing center, sometimes several times, to ensure that they were revising and doing everything relating to the writing task right. They explained that even though visiting the writing center was not required by the assignment, they would still go there as part of the routine activity they performed to accomplish their writing assignment. Student writers also mentioned about how they wanted to present themselves as good students by following certain norms such as asking the instructor questions, visiting his office for a discussion, and so on. They explained that they would do so to impress the instructor and be in his good book. One student mentioned that he always attempted to write differently than others so that his paper stood out. He explained that by doing this he would set a challenge for himself which he would then pursue. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student mentioned about the importance of maintaining a deadline. She explained to me that if she did not have a deadline she would have difficulty finishing her writing.

> Researcher: What rules did you follow as you finished the writing
> assignment?
> Participant: I just tried to finish it. I tried to put a time period for myself, the
> time is really important to me because that helps me manage my

time. If I did not finish it within a time, if I did not set a time for
myself, I'd not know how to finish it.
(Participant 11)

In the second excerpt, the participant mentioned about visiting the writing

center before turning in the final draft. She explained that no matter what she

always tried to do this so that she would have fewer errors and feel more

confident about her essays.

Researcher: What rules did you have in mind?
Participant: My rule is before turning in my paper I should go to the writing
center, make less errors in my essay. That's all.
(Participant 18)

Finally in the following excerpt, the student explained how she attempted to

come up with something unique, putting herself into a more challenging situation

as she finished writing her paper.

Researcher: What rules did you follow while writing this paper?
Participant: I tried to come up with something unique [by this she meant that
she wanted to do something different, e.g., writing on a unique
topic, than others] than what I was thinking about before. That
kind of made it challenging for me.
(Participant 6)

Frequency of categories of activity system elements

Although in the section above I have discussed the categories within 6 activity

system elements in detail reflecting how these elements played out in L2 writing,

it is worth noting that the frequency of the categories varied. In the table below I

present the frequency of occurrences of these categories in terms of how many

participants mentioned each of them across the study. A frequency check may

illuminate for us the relative impact of each activity system element in the writing

process. For instance, while it is not unusual to see the instructor playing the most

important role in students' writing in classroom contexts, participants also seem to have mentioned about the equal amount of help they received from their friends and classmates. Similarly, though the use of agency, subjectivity/ideology, and identity seems to have been well-represented across all participants, except for grades, their goals for writing did not seem to be well-grounded in their mind. Analyses along these lines may suggest the need of a shift of focus of certain aspects of L2 writing instruction.

Table 4.1. Frequency of activity system elements

Categories of activity system elements	Frequency
Subject	
Agency	
o Strategy use	31 (100%)
o Use of lived experiences	22 (70.97%)
o Perception of difficulty	24 (77.42%)
o Perception of easiness	18 (58.06%)
Subjectivity	28 (90.32%)
Identity	
o Identity assumed in relation to the writing assignment	20 (64.52%)
o Identity of a student	15 (48.39%)
o Identity based on past experience	6 (19.35%)
o Identity of a writer	4 (12.90%)
Tools	
• Tools derived from class sessions	5 (16.13%)
• Computer and the Internet	29 (93.55%)
• Blackboard	9 (29.03%)
• Outlines and notes	8 (25.81%)
• Stationery	16 (51.61%)
• Textbook	13 (41.94%)
• Dictionaries	13 (41.94%)
• First language	5 (16.13%)
• Supplies	8 (25.81%)
Goals	
• Grade	24 (77.42%)

• Writing skills	16 (51.61%)
• Writing task	14 (45.16%)
• Personal satisfaction	11 (35.48%)
Division of labor	
• Instructor	25 (80.65%)
• Friends and classmates	24 (77.42%)
• Writing center tutors	8 (25.81%)
• Family members	12 (38.71%)
• People in the world	4 (12.90%)
Community	
• Student community	17 (54.84%)
• Community related to backgrounds	16 (51.61%)
• Local community	12 (38.71%)
• Community in relation to paper topics	2 (6.45%)
Rules	
• Writing task related	23 (74.19%)
• Writing related	20 (64.51%)
• Personal traits	17 (54.84%)

Note. The frequency is calculated based on how many students out of 31 (i.e., N=31) mentioned a particular category.

Findings Related to the Second Research Question

The second research question of the study related to an investigation of the effects of the elements of an activity system on L2 writing. In line with the research question asked—how do the elements of an activity system affect L2 writing for better or worse—data analysis elicited the "positive" and "negative" effects of the 6 elements of the activity system on L2 writing. Although the analysis of data showed the activity system elements having predominantly positive impacts on writing, some of them appeared to have negative effects as well. In the sections below, I discuss the findings relating to the positive followed by the negative effects of each of the 6 elements of an activity system on L2 writing. It may be relevant to point out that the follow up questions at the time of

interviews revealed various reasons behind students' perceptions about the positive and negative effects of the elements of activity system.

Subject

The participants mentioned that their agency, subjectivity, and identity affected their writing positively. Findings suggest that students utilized various aspects of their agency for accomplishing their writing task. Some student writers mentioned that they could not have completed their writing task successfully had they not used their agency properly. For example, they told me about the positive impacts of various life experiences they used while writing the paper. Others mentioned that they had selected their topic keeping in mind the topics that would allow them to write about their life experiences. They also talked about the various strategies they employed for the task at hand and how these strategies allowed them to deal with any difficulties they encountered in the process of writing. Writers' agency was also manifested in the way they used their past knowledge and experiences they had at different points in their life.

Subjectivity/ideology and identity, the two other components of subject, also appeared to affect students' writing positively. Subjectivity, for instance, led writers to choose an atmosphere in which their writing was most conducive or they felt most comfortable, and devising a work plan of various tasks in accordance with their preferences and styles. To be able to work according to their preferences, in turn, enabled them to perform better in completing the writing task. Student writers' identities impacted their writing positively as well. For example, some of them mentioned how being part of a particular cultural or

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social group (e.g., being an Arab or a Chinese) helped them look at their paper topic in certain ways and generate ideas for writing more easily. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student reported that his strategy to work for his paper within the work plan that he had developed overtime impacted his writing positively. He mentioned that he was used to following certain routine steps for accomplishing the writing tasks; and following them as he wrote his paper made the job easier for him. Since he had always been successful following these steps, he made no exception for this particular writing task.

> Researcher: Do you think any of the strategies you used for this paper was different from strategies you used for other essays [before]?
> Participant: I think they are the same.
> Researcher: In other words, did you use any particular strategy specific to this writing assignment?
> Participant: No.
> Researcher: Were you following these strategies consciously or unconsciously?
> Participant: I think unconsciously…
> Researcher: …Why?
> Participant: I do every paper like this…I think it has become like a habit…kind of like this for every paper…I would follow these [strategies].
> Researcher: How does that [following the same strategies for all papers] affect your writing?
> Participant: Positively.
> Researcher: How?
> Participant: Makes it easier.
> Researcher: Can you tell me how it makes it easier?
> Participant: Like finish it one by one, step by step.
> Researcher: This was a different writing assignment, so you did not do anything different, nothing different at all?
> Participant: No, I think I can follow the same strategies for writing all assignments, old strategies.
> Researcher: You write different papers and different papers have different requirements. Can you use the same set of strategies for different papers? If so, how does that work?

Participant: Yeah.
Researcher: Don't you think it's difficult to use the same strategies for different papers?
Participant: I think it's the same.
Researcher: How so?
Participant: Like in every paper I get an A or A-, so I think it's [following the same strategies] useful or I'm successful.
(Participant 10)

In the second excerpt, the student mentioned about how her student and an international student identities affected her writing positively. She explained that her identities as a student and an international student allowed her to see and feel the problems (topic) and provided her with valuable ideas.

Researcher: What was the student [identity]—how did it play out in your writing?
Participant: Because I as a student take experience, so I get ideas about this problem and I know I have thought about this service [microwave oven] and I know how to do this paper [i.e., the experience, by providing ideas, taught me how to do this paper].
Researcher: How about the international student?
Participant: As an international student [I feel] our tuition is increasing and the services are decreasing. So I can talk about these aspects and that's the kind of international student identity.
Researcher: How did these two identities affect your writing—positively or negatively?
Participant: Positively, because they gave me the ideas how to write the paper.
(Participant 15)

Finally, in the following excerpt, the participant mentioned about the subjectivity of always having an interesting topic. She explained that she always tried to have an interesting topic for her paper, and when she had one, she would feel more confident and it would affect her writing positively.

Researcher: What was the rule [earlier in the conversation she had mentioned that she followed certain personal preferences while writing]?
Participant: I always try to write about something interesting and it has both positive and negative effects on my writing. Because what if I can't find out an interesting topic [that would affect her writing

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negatively, although for this assignment she did find an interesting topic].

Researcher: How does it affect positively?

Participant: Because if I have an interesting topic, I feel more confident that way.

Researcher: How does it [make you] feel confident?

Participant: Because I can convince myself as a first reader [of my essay?].

Researcher: So what you follow is that the topic has to be interesting?

Participant: Yeah.

(Participant 13)

Student writers reported that some aspects of their agency had negative effects on their writing. For instance, when they used the strategy to write the conclusion differently (different from what they were used to, e.g., summarizing the key points of the discussions) finishing the writing task became more difficult. They described the entire process having a negative effect on their writing. They also mentioned about negative transfer of certain approaches, e.g., following the same writing strategies for a new essay and not making an outline at the start of writing, having affected their writing negatively. One student explained how following the strategies of other English essays she had written before did not allow her to make the best use of her research and resources for this particular assignment (a proposal argument). She recalled that had she not followed the strategies from her prior writing experience, she could have used the materials better and integrated the research information into her texts more creatively, instead of just summarizing it. The following excerpt illustrates.

Researcher: You said that you used the same strategy like writing introduction, body and conclusion. Now working with the same strategy—did it affect your writing this assignment in anyway?

Participant: Any essay will have an introduction, like these components.

Researcher: So all essays ask for this, but it's a new essay too. How did applying the same strategy affect your writing?

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Participant: May be negatively, because I just wrote the conclusion, may be summarized. But we have to have research, we have to have other people's solution or something like this so that was not really good—just having a regular conclusion, just summarizing everything.

(Participant 5)

As far as identity goes, students pointed out that their student identity constrained their writing approaches in certain ways. For example, being a student they believed that they had limited time, resources, and authority to accomplish a professional piece of writing. In addition, they mentioned that considering themselves as beginner writers they would be content even with an average grade. These student writers believed that these particular identities might have negative impacts on their writing. The following excerpt illustrates.

Researcher: How did your student identity affect your writing?
Participant: Negatively, or I cannot say negatively if my career was a writer and not a student. I think my writing was going to be better than a student if I am a writer and not a student and writing the same assignment. If I am a writer I am going to write more than it was for a student I think my student role gives me a limitation.
Researcher: Why/how?
Participant: I believe that with the tools the way the resources are available there are lots of limitations being a student.
Researcher: Can you clarify a little bit more?
Participant: So if you were a writer then you would have a lot of resources, a lot more time to write but when I am a student I have limited time I have three sections [classes?] a week. But being a writer if I consider from time perspective, I have lot of time, I have lot of resources, probably I have access to a lot of resources. Then interacting with the people in the community you can access to journals or organizations, it gives you a lot of feedback, you get feedback from your friends that are writers, it can help, it's going to give you a lot of facilities or resources to think.
Researcher: But you saw your role as a writer for this assignment?
Participant: No, I saw my role for this assignment as a student so that determined how much time I wanted to give, so that affected my writing negatively, sort of negatively.

(Participant 4)

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Tools

Students reported that they used different kinds of tools (explained in the previous section) as they finished their writing task. Mostly these tools impacted writing positively, while some of them having negative effects as well. The tools students used were computer, paper, pen, pencil, eraser, different websites, the Internet, Blackboard, L1s, class sessions, textbook, class notes, lecture materials, digital/online dictionaries and translators.

In a sociocultural approach to mind tools are regarded as mediators that help accomplish tasks more easily and efficiently. Findings suggest that participants used various tools for the purpose of making writing easier. Computers, for instance, made writing faster, revisions easier as they could easily delete or add new words and/or sentences more efficiently as well as run a spelling-check. The Internet helped them easily access the research materials. Some students mentioned that they even accessed free sample papers online which helped them with the structure and organization of their own essays. Others mentioned about the open discussion forums available on the World Wide Web that helped them get ideas about their respective paper topics. Some students used their textbook for reading the sample essays as well as other assignments given in class, which helped them better grasp the writing task. Class materials including lecture notes, PowerPoint slides helped students guide through the various steps of the essay in the way they were expected to write. In addition, a few relatively commonplace tools such as pen and paper also acted as important mediating factors in the process of writing. For instance, student writers mentioned that they would write

down certain ideas on paper for future references even though they were not actively involved in writing at the time. They also mentioned that they used different kinds of dictionaries (e.g., online/digital) as well as translators that helped them in many ways such as making their texts "professional" and helping them avoid repetitions of certain words.

As far as symbolic tools were concerned, L1s appeared to be the most common tool students used. They mentioned that use of their first languages allowed them to express their original ideas whenever they struggled to write them in English. Some students mentioned about the context of the classroom (the atmosphere or the general vibes it created around them made them "do" certain things which they would never do if they were not part of it) and how it prepared them for writing, while others talked about the pressure of college life (and having to prioritize many other tasks) acted as an invisible force that got them finish their writing. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant explained how the computer helped him by making his writing easier and more efficient. He felt more comfortable typing in the computer than writing by hand.

> Researcher: How about computer [this student had mentioned about different tools he used for writing; i.e., computer, dictionary, etc.]—how did it affect your writing? Suppose, if you did not have the computer, if you were asked to handwrite?
> Participant: Yeah, because if I want to change, and just change, or rewrite or revise my paper and it can be helpful [to use the computer]. I just need to type the word and not write the paper, not write the word, it's easy to…
> Researcher: …how is it easy?
> Participant: You can keep typing for 2-3 hours, but if you want to keep on writing for 2 or 3 hours, you would be tired in your hand. Because

you know if you copy something, just if there's something just copy the information, or something I'd like to write or if I study something I have to memorize these things I prefer to write [handwrite], but if I just write a paper I prefer to use computer.

Researcher: Why?

Participant: Because it is more comfortable than writing.

Researcher: So did this [computer] help your writing—positively or negatively?

Participant: Positively.

(Participant 3)

In the second excerpt, the participant mentioned how the dictionary helped him make his texts sound more professional, while the websites helped him with research, and the computer saved his time for composing.

Researcher: How did these tools affect your writing—positively or negatively?

Participant: Dictionary like gave me a chance for the hard vocabulary so that the proposal essay looks professional. And website gave me a lot of information about the need for the smoking areas and how SWSU actually helping doing for it; and the computer like I could save my time during using the computer.

Researcher: So would you say they affected your writing positively or negatively?

Participant: Positively.

(Participant 16)

In the final excerpt, the student mentioned alongside various material tools such as computer, dictionary, the PowerPoint slides that the instructor used in class, he found that the pressure, a symbolic tool, helping his writing positively. He explained that the pressure for writing helped him think faster and come up with ideas for finishing his paper.

Researcher: How do you think these tools that you have mentioned so far affected your writing—positively or negatively?

Participant: They all work positively.

Researcher: Even the pressure of writing?

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: Can you explain how?

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Participant: That helped me to think faster and get a good outline, and good ideas about how I was going to write and so I could write the essay pretty fast, otherwise it would take a lot of time.
(Participant 19)

Student writers' accounts suggested that a number of tools affected their writing negatively as well. These tools included the Internet, social networking sites such as the Facebook, word processing software Microsoft Word, computer, friend's essay and the stress due to the lack of time. With the Internet, students seemed to have encountered "the problems of plenty." That is, even though the Internet provided them with access to a lot of information, having read all materials they found out that very little information was actually useful for and relevant to their writing. They reported that oftentimes having gone through all materials, they found themselves lost, distracted and off-track. The following excerpt illustrates.

Researcher: Was there any tool that may have affected your writing negatively?
Participant: Internet, may be the Internet.
Researcher: How?
Participant: When you try to Google something, may be some topic will come up and you would get interested in it. And if you click on it you miss what you were actually working on. And I get deviated from my original path and feel distracted. May be sometimes I would try to check the Facebook [which is also distracting for me].
Researcher: That's what happened this time?
Participant: Yes, this is negatively [this affected my writing negatively].
(Participant 13)

Use of social networking site such as Facebook made students distracted at the time of writing. One participant (i.e., participant 29), for instance, reported that he was getting distracted as his girlfriend was buzzing him when he was trying to concentrate on his writing. In a somewhat similar fashion, word processing

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software MS Word seemed to have made revisions confusing for some with its automatic grammar-check functions. Student writers explained that although the software would mark sentences ungrammatical with green or red lines, upon careful reviews they would find some of these sentences perfectly grammatical, making them all the more confused about English grammar. Computer, a very common tool for word processing, was also considered to have negative impacts on writing. For instance, a couple of students concurred that typing in the computer and thinking simultaneously were difficult. They explained that typing in the computer was distracting and they would lose their ideas whenever they typed, indicating computer typing to have some degree of negative mediation in their thought processing. The following excerpt illustrates how MS Word made the student more confused at the time of revisions.

> Researcher: Any tools that affected you negatively?
> Participant: I think Microsoft Office Word—it just cracks you [not clear]. When I look over I do not understand why they put green under the sentences. I think it flows ok. When I click on it, it fixes and becomes white. So I do not understand why it underlines with green in the first place! So I think Microsoft Office Word affects me negatively.
> (Participant 25)

Separately, student writers who used their friends' essays explained that although their friends' papers acted as samples they also constrained their thinking. As they used these essays they did not put extra efforts and think outside of their friends' paper. They said that it acted as a limiting factor in their writing. Finally, the stress derived due to lack of time may be counted as a symbolic tool

that seemed to have affected all and sundry and impacted some of their writing negatively.

Goals

Having certain goals appeared to have affected most students positively. They reasoned that goals made them take certain paths and allowed them to be on track. Goals also made them put more efforts on various tasks relating to the writing assignment and spend more time on them, write more carefully, use language judiciously as opposed to arbitrarily, include better secondary sources and ideas, and ultimately improve their writing. To illustrate, one student mentioned how when he went to the writing center for help and the writing center tutors pointed out some problems such as lack of expressions and idiomatic language, he worked much harder to improve on these aspects of his writing. He added that he would not have worked as hard had he not kept these specific goals in mind.

Participants mentioned that having goals contributed to their doing better as they were forced to make the proposal persuasive. Also, some of them mentioned that they worked very hard since they wanted to get a good grade and were aware of the usefulness of persuasive writing in both academic and professional life. Students explained how having goals helped them sustain their concentration on various tasks relating to the writing assignment and finish writing enough number of pages specified in the assignment description. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant explained how having various goals had positive effects on her writing. She mentioned that having certain goals helped her

put more efforts on her writing, use better sources and include better ideas, and

ultimately helped improve her paper.

> Researcher: How do you think these goals [the student had mentioned about the various goals she had in mind] affected your writing—positively or negatively?
> Participant: Positively, because it actually helped me to put more effort on it, to use better sources and better ideas; it actually makes my paper better, so it's all positive.
> (Participant 6)

In the second excerpt, the student mentioned about how having certain goals

in mind helped him spend more time and write more carefully, as he was

conscious about the fact that learning to write effectively would help him in

future.

> Researcher: Did these goals affect your writing? If so, how?
> Participant: Yeah these goals affected my writing positively. These goals made me spend more time [on writing] and write more carefully. And that's good for my future because I have to write carefully. I think writing is important. So having the goals affected me positively.
> (Participant 7)

Finally, in the following excerpt, the student mentioned that because he had

certain goals in mind he did not write arbitrarily and that these goals had positive

effects on his writing.

> Researcher: Do you think having these goals affected your writing in some way? If so, how? Positively or negatively?
> Participant: Yeah [having these goals affected my writing]. I think they helped me positively because I did not just write arbitrarily, the language I used, etc.
> (Participant 31)

Some student writers mentioned that the goal of finishing the writing as soon

as possible might have impacted their writing negatively. They told that if they

had more time they could have read the assignment requirements more carefully, acted on those requirements more closely, and performed to their actual potential. Others explained that with a number of different courses to deal with, they found it quite challenging to concentrate on their writing. As a result, they were not able to set their mind to the writing task and its importance in building knowledge base for future.

In the following excerpt, the participant explained that because his primary goal was to finish his writing task as soon as possible, he was not thinking much. He also mentioned that if he did not have to rush, he could have performed better on his paper.

> Researcher: How did these goals affect your writing this paper—positively or negatively?
> Participant: May be negatively because I wasn't thinking, I wasn't thinking about how this [the writing] will help me. I didn't go that far as to think how this knowledge would help me. Because I rushed I do not think I did it all the way to my abilities, because I was multitasking different subjects.
> Researcher: So do you think both the goals affected you negatively?
> Participant: Yeah.
> (Participant 25)

Division of Labor

Participating students for the most part believed that the people who were involved in the process of their writing, in various capacities, directly or indirectly, affected their writing positively. Some of these effects were more direct when people such as the instructor or the writing center tutors provided them with more hands-on ideas and corrected their errors. Other kinds of effects were indirect, such that student writers were motivated or they slightly changed

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the course of actions in the process of writing. For instance, some participants mentioned how a word of encouragement by a friend helped them get going with their writing and finish it successfully. Others mentioned how talking to a friend while writing made her writing "bearable" and finish the task. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant mentioned how his sister had a positive effect on his writing as he changed his topic after his sister commented that his original topic was not interesting.

> Researcher: So whatever help you got from these people—your sister and the instructor—did it influence your writing positively or negatively?
> Participant: Positively. When I talked to my sister she told me your solutions don't make sense and your topic is not interesting. Although it's a bad comment I think it affected writing positively.
> Researcher: How?
> Participant: Because I got a second opinion about my topic and that's important. Also, my sister is in the other class of Mr. J, so she's like one of my classmates. So for me it's an important opinion from my classmate because I have to show the topic to them. So if my sister told me that my topic wasn't good, I think my other classmates would say the same that my topic wasn't good. So I think that affected my writing positively.
> (Participant 7)

In the following excerpt, the participant explained that although her friend was not able to help her directly with the specific information she was looking for, she still derived some positive effects by chatting with her via instant messaging. She said that she had a good time chatting with her friend and that made her writing bearable.

> Researcher: How would you describe the outcome of your chatting with your friend?
> Participant: Positive.

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Researcher: Even though you did not get any help from your friend and it was
distracting you, you still think the effect was positive?
Participant: Yeah. Because I was having good time chatting while writing.
Researcher: And if you did not chat what would happen?
Participant: I'd go crazy!
(Participant 21)

Data analysis indicated that help by people turned out to be counter-

productive as well. For example, while seeking help from writing center tutors

had predominantly positive effects on students' writing, some claimed that the

suggestions they received felt overwhelming at times. Also, when they visited the

writing center more than once, they received conflicting feedback from tutors

making their revision tasks difficult. Some students also mentioned that high

expectations from tutors and peers put pressure on them and affected their writing

performance negatively. Participants also mentioned that attempts to mimic their

peers' style of writing might have affected their writing negatively.

In the following excerpt, the student explained that he went to the writing

center twice and that it was not that helpful at all. In fact, prior to the excerpt, he

had mentioned that on his earlier visits to the writing center he figured out that

tutors only gave generic comments such as "be more specific" which left him

somewhat confused as to what exactly he needed to do. Even for this writing

assignment, he was asked to search for a particular piece of information using

Google which he did not try, as he was trying to avoid further confusion.

Researcher: So you went there [writing center] twice, was it helpful this time?
Participant: Not that much because they gave me some tips from the Google—
so I thought it's a lot…I do not want to give myself headache.
(Participant 12)

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Community

Student writers maintained that belonging to a particular community helped their writing positively. The positive impacts derived in various ways; for instance, being part of a particular community provided them with ideas and it helped them gain insights into various issues relating to their topics. Writing about an issue relating to the community they belonged to made their writing interesting and likewise, they were more motivated to accomplish the writing task. A few students mentioned that being part of their community provided them with first-hand experiences about their paper topics and writing about those issues made them feel confident about their essay. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the student had mentioned that the student community and SWSU community affected his writing most. He added that the impacts of these two communities on his writing were positive, and these positive effects derived from the fact that being part of these communities he knew exactly how people felt about the parking problem (his topic) and he could give many examples in his discussions (within the paper).

> Researcher: So how was the influence of these communities—positive or negative?
> Participant: It was definitely positive, because I know how people feel about it so I could give examples because…yeah it affected positively. (Participant 30)

In the following excerpt, the student noted that his essay on problems in the dorms was positively influenced by his being a member of the dorm community. He explained that as a member of the dorm community he faced various

problems. These real life experiences helped his writing as he was able to derive

good ideas from them.

> Researcher: And these problems [about dorm life]—did they influence your writing in some ways?
> Participant: Yes.
> Researcher: Positively or negatively?
> Participant: Positively.
> Researcher: Can you tell me how?
> Participant: I got more real life experiences, real life thoughts about the problems.
> Researcher: How/why were real life experiences/thoughts important for your writing?
> Participant: It was very important because I tend to write based on real life experiences as much as possible which helps me to get good ideas how to write and what to write to make it interesting for readers.
> (Participant 19)

Also, in the following excerpt the participant elaborated on how the campus

community provided her with the idea of building a separate smoking area. She

also mentioned that being part of the campus community helped her realize the

debate between the smokers and nonsmokers, something she utilized in

developing ideas for her writing.

> Researcher: Can you tell me how SWSU community affected your writing?
> Participant: Because I am thinking about building this [smoking structure] on the campus because I am the one who is part of them so I was thinking about something like this. So school community like this…because I am actually writing about it on campus, because I am part of them, so I see the argument between smokers and nonsmokers.
> Researcher: Any other community [that might have affected your writing] that comes to your mind?
> Participant: No.
> Researcher: How did the university/school campus community affect your writing—can you tell me if it was positive or negative?
> Participant: Because I am part of them and since also I do not like people smoking everywhere like they do, so that kind of makes me coming up with ideas and like since I look at them as they are

arguing with each other I just want to have solution that kind of makes both people [smokers and nonsmokers] happy.

Researcher: So your belonging to this particular school campus community kind of get some ideas, shaped your ideas?

Participant: I think it shaped my ideas.

(Participant 6)

Participants did not report any negative effects of community on their writing.

Rules

Following the rules that they did had positive impacts on students' writing. The various rules regarding the writing assignment, those related to writing in general (writing in English) and the ones that were related to personal traits helped student writers finish their writing task successfully. Participants mentioned that because they followed the writing assignment-related rules they were compelled to learn how to write academically, be careful about multiple perspectives which made them do extensive research and include multiple sources, and learn various writing conventions such as formatting and citations. They noted that these rules made their essays better and helped them earn a good grade. They also mentioned that whatever they had learned by going through the processes would be useful for them in future.

The rules related to writing in general and personal traits had positive impacts on their writing, overall. Following these rules made them feel confident about their writing and success, earn a good grade, finish their writing within the deadline, improve English language skills, and enhance critical thinking skills which helped them expand the content of their essays and fulfill the requirement of writing a certain number of pages. The following excerpts illustrate.

In the first excerpt, the participant explained that the rules of including

secondary sources in his texts, following proper citation rules, rules about

plagiarism affected his writing positively because he thought it improved his

writing. He added that in his home country he never followed these rules, so he

wasn't aware of them.

Researcher: How did these rules that you mentioned affect your writing?
Participant: Positively, because I know these rules are the rules for any paper in the U.S. Like here in the U.S., I realize that writing the sources is really important. Like in Chile, I did not write the sources and nobody said anything. But here I realize that sources are so important.
Researcher: But why do you care about here [the U.S.]?
Participant: Because I study here, my life is here. And I think…I know that in the following semesters I will have to write more papers, so I will have to follow all the rules, especially the rules about the sources. Like Mr. J told that someone not writing the sources may face legal problems, because it's like stealing something from someone.
Researcher: And do you think that it also affects your writing?
Participant: Yeah, of course, and positively; because I don't know but I feel like I am improving my writing in these two courses [the 2 mandatory first-year composition courses one must take].
Researcher: But how about following these rules? How does it improve your writing?
Participant: It improves my writing because I'm writing in a way that is accepted here, not just for the paper but also for the resume and stuff like that. So I think those rules affect me positively because those rules are part of the writing here in the U.S. And now I am living and studying in the U.S. So I have to follow that writing. I do not have a second option.
(Participant 7)

In the following excerpt, the participant mentioned that following the rules

that she did helped her in that she felt more comfortable. She was comfortable

because she had been successful following the same set of rules before.

Researcher: How did these rules affect your writing—positively or negatively?

Participant: Positively.
Researcher: Can you tell me positively, how?
Participant: Just it makes me comfortable. And I am pretty sure from the
past experience that it's a pretty accurate rule[s].
(Participant 28)

Participants did not report any negative effects of rules on their writing.

Distributions of influence of activity system elements on L2 writing

While in the section above I have discussed how the activity system elements

influenced the writing, the table below illustrates the distribution of this influence

by various sub-categories. It may be noted that participants reported most of the

categories of the activity system elements imparting a positive influence, as

opposed to a negative one. And, this is expectedly so, for students chose to use

categories of activity system elements that they thought would help them in the

process of their writing. That said, participants also reported a number of

categories that had negative influence on their writing.

Table 4.2. Influence of activity system elements on L2 writing

Categories of activity system elements	Influence	
	Positive	*Negative*
Subject		
Agency		
o Strategy use	√	√
o Use of lived experiences	√	-
o Perception of difficulty	-	-
o Perception of easiness	-	-
Subjectivity	√	-
Identity		
o Identity assumed in relation to the writing assignment	√	-
o Identity of a student	√	√
o Identity based on past experience	√	-

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o Identity of a writer	√	-
Tools		
• Tools derived from class sessions	√	√
• Computer and the Internet	√	√
• Blackboard	√	-
• Outlines and notes	√	-
• Stationery	√	-
• Textbook	√	-
• Dictionaries	√	-
• First language	√	-
• Supplies	√	√
Goals		
• Grade	√	-
• Writing skills	√	-
• Writing task	√	√
• Personal satisfaction	√	-
Division of labor		
• Instructor	√	
• Friends and classmates	√	√
• Writing center tutors	√	√
• Family members	√	-
• People in the world	√	-
Community		
• Student community	√	-
• Community related to backgrounds	-	-
• Local community	√	-
• Community in relation to paper topics	√	-
Rules		
• Writing task related	√	-
• Writing related	√	-
• Personal traits	√	-

Note. "√" mark indicates that participants mentioned these categories as having a positive or negative influence; "-" mark indicates either these categories did not have a positive or negative influence, or participants did not mention anything to this effect.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I presented the findings related to the two research questions of the current project. These findings indicate that the six elements of the activity system were realized by L2 writers in different ways. Based on participants' accounts, this chapter provided the sub-categories of the elements of activity system in L2 writing and thus accounts for the various social and cultural underpinnings of the activity of L2 writing.

The findings answered the first research question of the project by enlisting an inventory of the six elements of the activity system, which in turn, provided perspectives about the factors that appear to play out in the L2 writing processes. The findings also answered the second research question by analyzing students' perceptions about the positive or negative effects of each of the elements of the activity system on their writing.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I will first lay out the summary of the findings. Then, I will discuss these findings with reference to previous studies. This will be followed by a discussion about the implications of the current project from different perspectives: Implications for L2 writing instructions, implications for L2 writing theories, and implications for future research. I will conclude the chapter by recounting some of the limitations of the current project and how these limitations can be overcome in future.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the current study indicate that there are more than cognitive processes that go into the production of L2 texts. Although findings of this study represent one of the early empirical investigations about the L2 writing processes using a sociocultural framework in activity system analysis, the results are encouraging. In compliance with the theoretical approach I used for this project, I wish to call the processes that the findings of this project have revealed as the "sociocultural processes of L2 writing." The sociocultural processes of L2 writing appear to be diverse and multiple. They play significant roles in the way L2 writers accomplish their writing assignments in an EAP context.

Findings suggest that ESL writers use their agency, ideology/subjectivity, and identity actively. As dynamic agents, they use various strategies as they go through the writing processes. They appear to transfer some of these strategies from their past writing experiences, tracing as far back as their high school courses. Others improvise and adopt new strategies depending on their

perceptions about the writing task. They also use their agency in exploiting what I described as the "lived experiences" to their advantage for various aspects of writing such as invention activities, planning, translating, and revising. Participants also reported what they found easy and difficult in the process of their writing. Their perceptions about easiness and difficulty may be taken into consideration to get ideas about what works and what does not, which pedagogical practices may be appropriate and which may be subject to failure in second language writing, at least in similar contexts.

Writers' subjectivity/ideology seems to play significant roles in the overall approach to writing as well as the step-by-step decisions they make with regard to the writing task. An overwhelming number of participants (90.32%) were found to be employing some kind of subjectivity/ideology as they wrote. Findings indicate how having a favorable ideology toward the writing task may act as a motivating factor for accomplishing the writing successfully. Subjectivities may make writers choose suitable options that are most conducive for writing. These particular mediational artifacts may range from preferring to write in a specific atmosphere (quiet, personal room vs. crowded public space such as the student union on a university campus) to the time of composing (described as ESSP by Prior & Shipka, 2003), from preferring a particular approach to writing (free-writing vs. writing with outlines, in more organized ways) to approaching writing tasks in casual ways, from writing with a lot of planning to writing last minute, under pressure, and other exclusively personal choices (as opposed to, e.g., non-personal such as course-related or institutional) L2 writers make. In this

connection Prior and Shipka (2003) argue that the deployment of the ESSP helps "actors to shape, stabilize, and direct consciousness in service of the task at hand" (p. 219) while John-Steiner (1997) maintains that "the structuring of time and space according to one's needs and values is part of the invisible tools of creativity" (p. 74) and that "sustained, productive work requires more than mind for sheltering thought. It requires a well-organized and well-selected workspace" (pp. 73-74).

Identities, too, play important roles in L2 writing. Identities seem to shift in relation to the topics writers choose to write about. Assuming an identity *vis a vis* the topic of their essay helps L2 writers focus and write with an insider's perspective. It is interesting to notice that a relatively higher number of participants (48.39%) in the current study identified themselves as students, while only a few participants (12.90%) preferred to identify themselves as writers. This particular phenomenon may suggest the potential role contexts may play in second language writing and how a context may mediate the writing task. For example, because the study took place in an academic setting, it appears to have mediated the L2 writers in many ways—they were particularly conscious about the academic context within which they were writing and the requirements of such writing. It also shows how context determines the course of the writing processes. It would be curious to see how differently (or similarly, for that matter) L2 writers would assume their identities in a different context such in a non-academic, or a professional setting as well as in a different institutional setting such as in a community college, or a high school. As L2 writing instructors, we

may interpret participants' overtly conscious efforts for following the traditions of academic writing reassuringly, for it is a positive indication that L2 writers make genuine efforts to acquire academic literacy when put in such contexts. It tells at least two things about their writing in the particular context in which the present study took place: (a) That the instructor was successful in emphasizing the distinct nature of academic writing, and (b) that the context (e.g., academic, institutional, departmental) itself made students aware of the fact that they had to approach writing in certain ways. Whatever be the case, it is encouraging to see students striving to follow the distinctness of academic writing and attempting to master it.

What was surprising, though, was that only 12.90% of participants seemed to have constructed the identity of a writer. Considering that the participants were all in a writing class, this finding may be considered a little disheartening. What this suggests may include: L2 writers' (at least, at college level) apparent evasive tactic of seeing themselves as accomplished writers, and thus, taking some stress about the demands of writing off their mind at the time of writing; taking the writing tasks as means of fulfilling the class requirements rather than as ways of challenging themselves to reach greater heights and skills; lack of motivation; and self-depreciation.

Other identities that played out in the writing processes were writers' past backgrounds—e.g., social, cultural, and religious—that affected them in some way or the other. Some participants reported, for example, that they used their past backgrounds to build the content of their essays. Considering that writers of

the present study had diverse social and cultural experiences, this finding may not be surprising.

In line with what a sociocultural theory maintains, participants of the current study were found to have used different kinds of tools in the process of finishing the writing task. These tools ranged from everyday electronic gadgets such as the computer and dictionary to textbooks and various kinds of supplies essential for completion of their writing. Tools mediated writers in different ways. Sociocultural explanations suggest that tools provide affordances for completion of activities, although the opposite can also be true. Findings of this study confirmed this. For example, for some participants, typing in a computer while writing disrupted their thinking and planning processes. As a result, they preferred to handwrite their essay before typing it up in a computer. For others, however, computers acted as a tool that created favorable affordances by helping them revise and format more efficiently. Symbolic tools such as the first language were also useful for a number of participants. It helped them in developing the contents and regulating their expressions. These findings parallel earlier studies that looked into the use of tools (e.g., Lei, 2008) in L2 writing. The current study, although taking place in a different context, thus confirms the findings of earlier studies (Lei, 2008) on a similar topic.

The frequency count of various tools used by the participants suggests that a majority of them (93.55%) used computers and the Internet. Considering the wealth of information available through the Internet these days it is not surprising that writers chose to use it. Among other tools, it was a little surprising that only

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a few participants (16.13%) mentioned that they used tools derived from the classroom, indicating the need for further investigation of the nature of classroom instructions that is most effective in EAP contexts. Also interesting was that very few (16.13%) writers mentioned that they used their L1s while writing, an encouraging finding in that these writers might have preferred to think and write in the target language. Dictionaries, textbook, and various kinds of stationery were the other principal tools used by writers.

The goals of participants revolved around four categories: Grade, writing skills, writing task, and personal satisfaction. The majority of participants (77.42%) mentioned that getting a good grade was their goal, while others (51.61%) reported improving writing skills was the goal they pursued. Having the goals of getting a good grade or the improvement of various writing skills may be seen as natural expectations (considering that everybody would want to get a good grade and improve his/her writing skills at any given time) on the part of students. However, what is interesting to notice is the varied perceptions among participants about what getting a good grade or improving writing skills entailed. For example, some participants might have wanted to get a good grade to improve their GPA; for others, it was to make themselves and the family proud; for yet others, it could have been to maintain the minimum requisite GPA for the major they were enrolled in. As far as improvement of writing is concerned, for some it might have been to write without having to struggle for vocabulary; while for others, it might have been to write academically, with formal, academic tones and expressions. Similar to the finding related to how student identities may play a

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role in the acquisition of academic literacy, the goal of learning how to write academically can be interpreted as L2 writers' aim at acquiring academic literacy. In addition to grades and writing skills, the goals of successful completion of the writing task and gaining personal satisfaction were two other categories that emerged after the analysis of data. While working to meet the demands of college, these participants seemed to be overwhelmed by various tasks that they had to perform simultaneously. As such, finishing the writing task at hand became a priority for them. In spite of these demands, however, some mentioned that they derived satisfaction as they worked through their writing. This satisfaction emanated from, among other things, the topic they were writing about (e.g., they were generally interested in the topic, they had personal attachment to it, they wanted to give a vent about a campus problem, and so on), to be able to fulfill certain assignment requirements (e.g., providing a solution to the problem for the proposal argument or meeting the deadline), and to be able to express themselves through their writing (following the standards of academic writing).

In line with the sociocultural explanations of activities, the findings of the present study show that in almost every step toward the completion of a writing task L2 writers get mediated by various people. This confirms that writing is a social activity, and that it is co-accomplished by writers themselves along with people around them. The help that writers receive may be provided in the process of writing at various stages (during invention activities, revisions, and so forth). This finding also validates the argument of the proponents of post-process L2 writing who emphasized that looking into L2 writing exclusively from the

perspective of what happens inside an individual writer's head masks the entire complex of the activity of writing. L2 writing involves more than just the writers themselves. The results show that writers were mediated by different people, some of whom were closely-, others remotely-, and yet others entirely un-related to the writers. They helped in different capacities, in ways that were often unpredictable even to writers themselves. We find how a casual telephone conversation between the daughter (the writer, who was located in the U.S.) and mother (who was located in Taiwan) changed the course of the writing task, how an L2 writer sought approval of her paper topic out of a leisurely conversation between her brother and herself, and how another writer got her topic ideas while talking to her boss at her workplace. These findings underscore the laminated nature of the activity of L2 writing (Goffman, 1981; Prior, 1991, 1997, 1998; Prior & Shipka, 2003). Furthermore, they also suggest that boundaries of the activity of L2 writing are porous and the sites and sources of a piece of writing almost always go beyond the context in which it actually takes place. Attempting to explain writing solely from a cognitive perspective, therefore, does not warrant a full spectrum of the writing processes.

While the majority of the participants (80.65%) mentioned that they were influenced by the instructor, a significant number of participants (77.42%) also pointed out that their friends and classmates helped them with their writing. Some participants (38.71%) recognized the influence on writing they had from family members. The instructor's role as an important authority in a required first-year composition course appears to be inevitable, for most students try to write

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according to teachers' expectations so they can earn a good grade. Reliance on friends and classmates, on the other hand, indicate the socialization processes that take place among L2 writers and their peers when they write. What is more, because of the accessibility of various means of communication, ESL students seemed to be inclined to reach out to their families (who typically live far away from them) in the process of writing. These findings underline the value of various social relations and how they play out in L2 writing. One surprising element of the results relating to the division of labor indicates that only a few students (25.81%) cared to avail the services of the writing tutors. A possible interpretation of this could be the conflicting comments students received from tutors and difficulty to incorporate those comments into their writing (e.g., Participant 12). Another possible reason could be lack of time around the end of the semester for students to visit the writing center.

Findings suggest that L2 writers align with different communities in the process of writing. Participants of the present study reported that they aligned with student community, community related to their past backgrounds, local community, and community related to paper topics. From data analysis it appears that the perspectives associated with these communities were reflected in the content as well as various aspects of the writing processes (invention activities, research, sources, revisions, and so forth). While aligning with a student community, participants used their student perspectives to develop the content and include certain sources in their essays. Findings indicate that these perspectives acted as a both facilitating and constraining factor. Assuming

alignment with a community, participants could use the knowledge and insight related to that particular community, e.g., for invention-related ideas, finalizing a paper topic, expanding the contents based on the knowledge they already had or were familiar with about the community. Because they assumed alignment with the student community, participants might have selected topics related to some aspects of student life and used the knowledge they gained being part of the community. The constraining factors, on the other hand, derived from writers' perceptions about what a certain community entails. For example, some participants explained that they were satisfied with their limited research, considering that as members of the student community they were not expected to know everything about a given topic. As a result, they were happy to limit their effort and finish writing without worrying too much about superior performances.

From frequency counts it appears that the largest number of participants (54.84%) mentioned that they aligned with the student community. Almost an equal number of participants (51.61%) mentioned about the communities related to their past backgrounds having some influence on their writing. These trends suggest that academic contexts may have some bearing on writing in EAP courses, while L2 students' past backgrounds also play out almost with an equal significance. Of the two other categories, some participants (38.71%) mentioned that the local communities such as the place they live, campus life in general, and dorm life had influenced their writing.

Finally, L2 writers followed different rules and norms. I categorized them into three different types: Writing task related, writing related and writers' personal

traits. As the name of the categories may imply, writing task and writing related rules were linked with the writing assignment and writing in general. Although all participants followed the same assignment descriptions, they prioritized various aspects of the writing assignment (writing formally or academically, including sources in their texts, following standard documentation style) based on their perceptions about the importance of these rules. Also, various general writing related rules or norms (giving page numbers, keeping margins) that they followed varied across participants, depending on which ones they thought were important. Participants' personal traits also figured in the process of writing and determined the course of writing to some extent. For example, they reported that as part of the personal rule that they followed, they would do certain tasks. Some such personal rules were: They would go to the writing center before submission of the final draft or they would always try to find a "unique" topic (a topic that would be different from others, e.g., their peers). Efforts for following these rules were exclusively related to L2 writers' personal attributes and not part of the writing assignment requirements. It is interesting to notice that more than half of the participants (54.84%) conceded that personal traits of some sorts played out in their writing.

The findings related to the first research question discussed above, thus, provide us with the taxonomies of six activity system elements in L2 writing. The activity system elements realized by L2 writers in turn provide the situated, contextualized, sociocultural processes of L2 writing in an EAP context. Findings suggest that sociocultural process research helps us obtain insight into the

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processes of writing at various social, cultural, personal, and inter-personal levels. As a result, we get a more expanded picture of the L2 writing processes that go beyond the scope of what happens inside individual writer's mind.

Findings related to the second research question suggest that most activity system elements realized by L2 writers had positive impacts on their writing. However, a few of them had negative effects as well. Considering that most participants had some prior writing experience, it can be assumed that they adopted strategies that were most suitable for their writing. This was ultimately reflected on the positive impacts the activity system elements created in the writing process. At the same time, the negative effects of certain activity system elements were exceptions rather than norms, because the analysis of data revealed that participants attributed these negative effects to the creativities or new strategies they wanted to try out in their writing.

Findings of Current Study in Relation to Past Studies

In this section I shall discuss the findings of the present dissertation with respect to those of similar past studies. The current project provides some new insights into the writing processes, while it also validates results of earlier studies.

One of the most important findings of the study is L2 writers' use of agency. The findings suggest that writers actively used their agency and they should be encouraged to do so. Although research on the role of agency in second language learning has proliferated, it is still few and far between in the field of L2 writing. Earlier studies (e.g., Lei, 2008) that used a sociocultural framework underscored the need of further research on this topic. L2 writers' use of agency leads them to

proactively work on the writing task at hand. The findings show that writers' day-to-day experiences shape various aspects of their writing such as topic selection, inventions, content, and revisions. Also, they use their agency as they determine what they are good at and how they would overcome the difficulties that they encounter in the process of writing. Writers' use of different strategies (Leki, 1995; Sasaki, 2000) and tools (Lei, 2008) also reflects their conscious efforts for negotiating the best way of accomplishing the writing tasks. All these characteristics point to the fact that L2 writers do not perform writing mechanically, following a steadfast, concrete set of formula; but rather, modify their approaches in every writing situation by constantly shaping and re-shaping their writing behaviors.

The current study confirms several findings of past research on L2 writing literacy (Leki, 1995, 2001; Leki & Carson, 1994; Leki & Carson, 1997; Spack, 1997). For example, referring to previous writing experiences, finding model essays, using cultural/religious/social backgrounds (Leki, 1995, 2001), seeking help from instructors (Spack, 1997) have all been documented as means of survival techniques by second language learners as they acquire academic literacy. To add to these results, findings of the present study show that sites of L2 writing in EAP contexts go beyond the classroom and that L2 writers use everyday experiences to craft effective ideas for writing. What this means is that a given activity of writing cannot be confined within a designated time and space (Prior & Shipka, 2003). It also appears that there exists a bidirectional (both the writer and writing context influence and are influenced by each other) as well as

developmental (the bidirectional influence being dynamic rather than static, helps writers evolve in the course of a writing task) relationship between the writer and the surroundings in which the writers operate and the writing takes place.

In most cases these bidirectional effects are unpredictable and instantaneous. That is, L2 writers must improvise the context such that it would provide affordances for their writing. The context acts as a catalyst for them in the entire process. To explicate the point further with reference to specific example from the present study, we find that a participant (living in the U.S.) happens to discuss her writing with her mother (living in Taiwan) over the phone as a matter-of-factly, without slightest idea or expectation that her mother could provide the help she needed. As it turned out, the telephone conversation changed the entire course of her writing—she changed her topic and finished writing her paper with an entirely different set of ideas. The participant shared how her mother unexpectedly came up with the help. Another participant explained how her encounter with a campaigner on her way to class triggered ideas for her paper. As she explained, that *particular experience* at that *particular moment* helped her choose the topic and generate useful ideas (by tying the campus experience with other past experiences) she eventually wrote about. Examples like these illustrate that contexts coupled with learners' agency act hand in hand in shaping the writing processes – contexts provide affordances that L2 writers use by employing their agency. The engagement between the writer and the context is dynamic, it is unpredictable and non-formulaic. As illustrated above, *particular experiences* at

particular moments of life may lead to crucial pathways in the writing process (Prior & Shipka, 2003).

The findings suggest that L2 writers rely heavily on the instructor for feedback, although other people may also figure in their writing processes. In almost all major decision making processes (topic selection, content, formatting, and so forth), they depend on the instructor. Considering that the instructor is the most influential authority in a classroom context of writing, someone who would ultimately grade their work, this reliance appears to be natural and consistent with past studies relating to feedback. However, what is interesting to note is that L2 writers get mediated—sometimes in substantive ways, while at other times indirectly—by other people as well. They are not necessarily the people that one would normally associate with for providing feedback or ideas for writing, but are the ones that may happen to be collaborators by sheer accidents. Boss at a work place, family members (brother, sister, mother, wife, grandmother), friends and classmates at study groups, past instructors and colleagues, suite-mate at dorms are some such people that participants of the present study mentioned. This particular phenomenon is consistent with the sociocultural explanation of an activity—that humans get mediated at interpersonal level and the society around them forms part of the mediational artifact.

The current study also highlights the potential gaps between the instructor's and students' versions of interpretations of various aspects of the processes of a writing task (content, organization, revision, format, and so forth) (Leki, 2001; Losey, 1997). This gap may result from a variety of factors. Among them some of

the important ones that we may speculate are as follows: Lack of attention or inability to comprehend the significance of certain instructions (e.g., revision process) on the part of students; busy schedule and the demands of college education (especially during the first or second semester when students enroll in first-year ESL composition courses), resulting in a tendency of somehow finishing the writing tasks without trying to fully understand them; and the instructor not explicitly explaining various aspects of the writing assignment, possibly assuming that students would read them from the assignment descriptions anyway. The findings of the present project show that while some participants (Participant 10) worked on the revisions, others (Participant 19) did not, although revisions constituted an important aspect of the writing process. This result concurs with earlier study (Sengupta, 2000) indicating that explicit instructions are necessary to arouse students' awareness and enhance their performance in writing. These gaps need to be minimized if instructors want students to follow all the processes of writing.

Some goals for L2 writing that emerged through this study were similar to previous studies (Zhou et al, 2006). It was found that major goals of L2 students revolved around the immediate writing task (writing a proposal, writing a minimum number of pages, citing secondary sources to make texts persuasive, and so forth) and general improvement of writing in English, findings that concur with those of Zhou et al (2006, pp. 47-49). It also appears that L2 writers' goals are shaped to a great extent by the demands of the contexts in which they write. Another important finding of the current study regarding how L2 students'

writing goals (e.g., getting a good grade) are shaped by family members (Participant 21) or acquaintances supports Zhou et al's explanation with regard to the sociocultural principle that maintains that learning occurs in relation to people in the immediate social contexts (p. 48).

Interestingly, an overwhelming number of participants (77.42%) of the current study reported to have the goal of getting a good grade. What is more, some of them equated their success in writing with a good grade, a phenomenon that needs to be carefully considered when second language writing instructors prepare grading rubrics at this level.

Finally, the findings of the present study support earlier findings by Kim, Baba, and Cumming (2006) that L2 writers develop their identities, proximities to certain communities, and conformities with rules in relation to the writing task at hand. The relationship between L2 writers and various sociocultural factors (i.e., identities, communities, rules) evolves constantly, as writers use their agency to intervene and negotiate the possibilities of establishing themselves as writers of English until they are satisfied (Kim, Baba, & Cumming, 2006, pp. 140-141). The findings of the present study illustrate that L2 writers assumed that they were conforming to a variety of identities, communities, and rules. They also underscore that these writers were engaged in social relationships that were fluid, and that, assuming them as static agents for accomplishing writing tasks could potentially be a misnomer in writing process (which itself is an ongoing rather than a static activity) research.

Implications for L2 Writing Instructions

Since the current project is a study of the writing processes of ESL students in an actual classroom context, the results should have direct implications for understanding what processes ESL writers go through when they write in similar contexts. The study identifies sociocultural processes that play out as L2 writers write for a first-year composition course. The findings may have several implications for L2 writing instructions as I discuss below.

Some of the topics covered within a cognitive paradigm of L2 writing research are writing behaviors of successful and unsuccessful writers (Sasaki, 2000), pausing strategies, effective/ineffective error correction/revision strategies, backtracking strategies (Manchón, Roca de Larios & Murphy, 2000), and so on. Through an activity system analysis the current study, however, elicits the sociocultural processes of how ESL learners accomplish a writing task given in an actual first-year ESL composition course. It investigates what Prior (1998) calls the "writing trajectories" of L2 writers. The concept of trajectories of writing provides an expanded notion of how writing occurs, incorporating not only what happens inside writers' head but also how s/he accomplishes writing being a person in the real world, in the society, and in relationship with other people. It is important to take note of the "writing trajectories"—the expanded notion of the writing processes so that we know how the world around writers shape their writing as well as how the writers themselves also change the world (in whatever smallest possible ways they can) so that it fits within their scheme of writing. I

believe that to understand how these negotiations between the self and the world evolve is important for devising effective L2 writing pedagogy.

Because ESL students come from different social and cultural backgrounds, it is important to explore if and how their backgrounds play out in their writing. The findings of this study suggest that L2 writers consciously attempt to utilize various aspects of their background knowledge (religious backgrounds or beliefs, the experiences of growing up in a particular society, the experiences of living in student dormitories, and so forth) in their writing. Instructors may design writing tasks that would help L2 writers integrate their background knowledge at the time of writing. From the findings it also appears that L2 writers are generally adept at observing their surroundings closely and incorporating their everyday experiences into their thinking processes. While some instructors may already be using writing assignments that are related to real-life issues, it may be a good idea to design L2 writing courses that would consistently incorporate these kinds of writing tasks. Findings indicate that topics related to L2 writers' backgrounds and everyday experiences should generate more interests and focus when they write. The current study, for instance, shows how exploiting their agencies L2 writers went on to find topics that they had past experience in or topics that were related to some aspects of their backgrounds (academic, cultural, religious, and so forth).

It is worth noting that during writing L2 writers do not attest the same degree of emphasis to all aspects of the writing process (e.g., revisions). In fact, they may misconstrue the goal of a particular sub-process (recall a sociocultural distinction between "task" and "activity," e.g., Coughlan & Duff, 1994). For example,

instead of assuming revision as a process of self-discovery, expansion of knowledge, self-improvement (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005) with respect to their own writing, they may take the revision process as a routine task in the form of going to a one-on-one conference session with the instructor, or visiting the writing center for having their texts corrected. Therefore, it appears to me that instructors must provide L2 writers with detailed instructions (Sengupta, 2000) about the writing assignment. The instructions must include the goals and objectives as well as all steps that the writing assignment would involve. It is always a good idea for instructors to verbally explain the instructions so students would know exactly what they were doing, and reasons behind doing each of the tasks that the assignment involves.

Somewhat related to the above, L2 writers, at least in the context of the current study, seemed to have the pervasive goal of getting a good grade. One may assume that getting a good grade might be a natural expectation in an academic context. But what is important to note is that some participants in the present study equated previous successful writing to getting an A or A-. This entails that L2 writing instructors need to be careful while assigning grades to student writing. Although a general assumption could be that good grades reflect good writing, to what extent good grades uniformly reflect "successful" writing is a point of concern. L2 writing instructors must follow a grading rubric that clearly states what a certain grade means, and ensure that students understand the grading rubric completely. As the findings show, there is a potential of students misunderstanding the interpretation of a particular grade. L2 writing instructors

therefore have this added responsibility to clarify students about the interpretation of a grade that they assign.

Finally, unlike many L2 writing process studies before, the data of the current study were drawn from actual classroom contexts. Likewise, the findings reflect what may actually occur in L2 writing classrooms in similar contexts. By referring to the inventory of activity system elements documented in the current study L2 writing instructors may find it useful to know what goals L2 writers typically have, what tools they use, which communities they normally associate themselves with, the people that L2 writers normally fall back on for help, and so forth. Information regarding activity system elements could provide writing instructors with useful ideas regarding how they should utilize students' preferences as well as dislikes to maximize writing instruction. Instructors can also benefit from insights gained through the activity system analysis of L2 writing tasks by obtaining information about how teaching of L2 writing should be conducted keeping in mind second language writers' social, cultural, personal and inter-personal traits. This will ensure developing a model of L2 writing pedagogy that is socially- and culturally-sensitive to students who come from diverse backgrounds from around the world.

Implications for L2 Writing Theories

Just as the post-process discussions about L2 writing (Atkinson, 2003a, 2003b; Casanave, 2003; Kubota, 2003) have pointed out L2 writing needs to be seen beyond what happens inside writers' head, the current study confirms that while writers themselves are the single most important agents for composing

texts, when they write they are also mediated at various other levels: Personal, inter-personal, social, cultural, and institutional. The current study also confirms that an expanded notion of the process of L2 writing needs to be adopted that would incorporate what happens at all these levels—personal, inter-personal, social, cultural, institutional, political—when a piece of writing takes place. This also means that once a more consistent theory is developed relating to the L2 writing processes, it must also be reflected in subsequent research and L2 writing pedagogy. The findings of the current study concur with what Casanave (1995) pointed out some time ago that the "local interactions" among the contextual factors need to be accounted for, because they determine how writers accomplish their writing tasks.

Accounting for the sociocultural processes when studying L2 writing is important considering the central roles they play in the entire process of composing and they should be incorporated into both theories and practices of L2 writing. As the current study shows, in every step of their way L2 writers were mediated by factors that we can broadly associate with their social or cultural orientations.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

In this section of discussion I shall point out some of the caveats of the current project. These caveats would help provide roadmaps for future research. As I discussed earlier, one of the important requirements to understand how an activity system works is to know how the six elements within the system interact with each other (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). An investigation of these interactions is

important to understand the dynamics of a given activity. To understand how L2 writers perform the activity of writing more fully a research design that would allow the study of the interactions is necessary.

Also, related to the above, since the current project was limited to creating taxonomies of individual elements of the activity system, future research may further explore inventories of activity systems that may be at work in different contexts. Agreed that finding out all possible activity systems could potentially be an extremely arduous task, especially in terms of research design and explanations of findings, but further research on this topic may illuminate us with more interesting findings about various other processes that may play out in second language writing.

One of the other potential future research areas using a similar framework could be studying the frequency of six activity system elements. An in-depth study focusing exclusively on the frequency of the activity system elements can shed light on L2 writers' priorities and preferences during writing. Furthermore, a more comprehensive understanding of the activity system elements would broaden our perspectives about how various social and cultural backgrounds play out in L2 writing.

A sociocultural-theoretical framework such as activity theory can be used for exploring L2 writing but in a different context. For instance, studying professional or business writing in an L2 can provide us with new findings. For the purposes of building richer inventories of L2 writing processes in such contexts, it is essential to expand studies outside academic contexts.

Future research using similar framework is also necessary to study the L2 writing processes among the homogenous groups of L2 writers, such as those in EFL contexts. In fact, since EFL students constitute the largest group of L2 writing population (Bhowmik, 2009), an investigation of L2 writing processes would remain incomplete unless these groups of students are studied. This means that L2 writing process research has its plates full in terms of investigation and theory-building with insights from contexts outside the North American territories (more specifically the U.S.) that have typically been the most fertile ground of writing research (e.g., Atkinson & Connor, 2008).

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I have provided the summary of findings and discussed their implications for L2 writing instructions, theories, and future research. From the discussions it appears that while the findings of the current study confirmed some of those of past studies, they also shed light on the fact that the sociocultural processes are as important as the cognitive ones in the production of L2 texts. These processes are diverse and need to be accounted for to get a complete understanding of the activity of L2 writing and designing effective L2 writing pedagogy.

The study confirms the usefulness of a sociocultural framework for L2 writing process research. It also underlines how future research may use this framework to further investigate the sociocultural processes of L2 writing, to address the caveats of the present study.

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APPENDIX – A

RECRUITMENT VERBAL SCRIPT

I am graduate student under the direction of Professor Karen L. Adams of the Department of English under the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study as part of my doctoral dissertation project.

I am recruiting individuals for a research study that explores what processes L2 writers go through as they accomplish a particular writing assignment. I am inviting your participation which will involve the following: (a) I will interview you once around the end of the writing assignment you are about to start. For the interview we will meet at a place on campus and at a time convenient for you. I will record the interview session (upon your permission) so that I can analyze it later. The interview may take about 45 minutes to 1 hour. (b) You will fill out a questionnaire survey which should not take more than 30 minutes. (c) I will ask you to keep process logs of all your writing activities through the writing assignment that I will be studying. Detailed instructions and examples regarding the process logs will be provided. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time.

As part of the study I will also be conducting classroom observations from the beginning till the end of this writing assignment (approximately 4 to 5 weeks). That means, I will be making visits to each of the class meetings during this period. While doing classroom observations I will be sitting quietly at the corner or back of the classroom and will be taking notes in my laptop. I will not participate in class activities and will not do anything that may distract the normal proceedings of the class.

Briefly, in this study I will explore what processes L2 writers go through as they accomplish a particular writing assignment. The study will cover one particular assignment in this course (approximately 4 to 5 weeks), and may involve approximately 3.5-4 hours' (over several days) commitment on your part.

As a small token of appreciation for your participation in this study your instructor has kindly agreed to offer you 5 bonus points if you decide to participate in the study I described above. Those of you who are not willing to participate in the study will have the option to earn these 5 bonus points too. In that case I will assign you a 4-hour worth writing project which you must finish and submit to me by the end of my study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email at: Subrata.Bhowmik@asu.edu.

Thank you.
Subrata Kumar Bhowmik

APPENDIX – B

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Karen L. Adams of the Department of English under the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University.

I am inviting your participation in a research study which will involve the following: (a) I will interview you once. For the interview, we will meet at a place on campus and at a time convenient for you. I will record the interview session (upon your permission, please see below for more details) so I can analyze them later. The interview may take about 45 minutes to 1 hour. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. (b) You will fill out a questionnaire survey which should not take more than 30 minutes. (c) I will ask you to keep process logs of all your writing activities through the writing assignment that I will be studying. Detailed instructions and examples regarding the process logs will be provided.

As part of the study I will also be conducting classroom observations from the beginning till the end of this writing assignment (approximately 4 to 5 weeks). That means, I will be making visits to each of the class meetings during this period. While doing classroom observations, I will be sitting quietly at the corner or back of the classroom and will be taking notes in my laptop. I will not participate in class activities and will not do anything that may distract the normal proceedings of the class.

Briefly, in this study I will explore what processes L2 writers go through as they accomplish a particular writing assignment. The study will cover one particular assignment in this course (approximately 4 to 5 weeks), and may involve approximately 3.5-4 hours' (over several days) commitment on your part.

As a small token of appreciation your instructor has kindly agreed to offer you 5 bonus points if you decide to participate in the study I described above. Those of you who are not willing to participate in the study will also have an alternative option to earn these 5 bonus points. In that case I will assign you (approximately) 4-hour worth writing project which you must finish and submit to me by the end of my study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, and participation or non-participation in the study will not affect the status of your grade in this course in anyway.

The research study will help me understand the various mediating factors that interplay in the process of L2 writing. Since L2 writers constitute a large volume

of student population worldwide, an informed understanding about L2 writing processes will help researchers, educators, instructors, and administrators to design L2 writing courses and teaching materials that are most appropriate for them. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

The information that I will gather through this study will be used exclusively for research purposes and all this information will remain strictly confidential. I will use all my personal equipment (such as laptop, recorder, etc.) for the purposes of the study and my laptop is password protected. After I have collected data they will be preserved in a safe and secure place and only I and the PI will have access to them. Your responses will be anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known/used since I will use pseudonyms for all description and reporting of the results. Additionally, I will request you to provide the last four digits of your cell phone number as the "Study ID," so I could use these numbers to link all information that you will provide for this study without me having to identify your name.

As mentioned earlier, I would like to audiotape the entire duration of the interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do <u>not</u> want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. I will put the recorder on the desk in front of you and me for the entire duration. The recordings will be destroyed after the collection and analysis of data, and reporting of the results.

Please note that you must be 18 years or older to be able to participate in this study. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Professor Karen Adams or Subrata Bhowmik. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Yours sincerely,

Subrata Kumar Bhowmik

APPENDIX – C

SIGN-UP SHEET

I hereby declare that I have carefully read the information/invitation for participation letter and voluntarily agreed to participate in Subrata K. Bhowmik's dissertation project titled "**A sociocultural approach to the study of L2 writing: Activity system analyses of the writing processes of ESL learners.**" I understand the following pertaining to this research study:

(a) That I have the option to withdraw myself from this project at any point in time.

(b) That the study involves audio recordings of my interview and that the audio recordings will be kept until the data collection and analysis, and the reporting of the results are completed.

(c) That any information I share in this project will be used solely for the purposes of research and it will remain strictly confidential.

(d) That my participation or non-participation will not affect my grades or status in the course in any way.

Your name (please
print):_____

Your study ID (please provide the last 4 digits of your cell phone
number):_____

Your SWSU email address (I will use this address to schedule appointments with you for
interviews):_____

Your signature: _____

Date:_____

APPENDIX – D

PROCESS LOG SHEET

Your study ID (the last 4 digits of your cell phone number): _____

Please write a log <u>every time</u> you do something related to writing this assignment.

Today's date	What I did and why
Arpil 05, 2010	
April 06, 2010	
April 07, 2010	
April 08, 2010	
April 09, 2010	

Please attach extra sheet if you need more space.

APPENDIX – E

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions as elaborately as you can. Use the reverse side of this page or attach additional sheets in case you need more space.

1. Your study ID (the last 4 digits of your phone number):_____

2. Age: _____

3. Nationality: _____

4. Your country of residence (if you hold dual/multiple citizenships):
_____

5. How long have your been in the U.S.?_____

6. Gender: M_____   F_____

7. Your first language (L1):_____

8. How long have you been learning English? _____

9. Your TOEFL/IELTS score: _____

10. Your major at this university:_____

11. Year of study (i.e., freshman/sophomore/junior/senior):_____

12. Did you take any English writing course prior to this? If so, when

_____
13. How is this writing course different from any other English writing courses you may have taken earlier? How is it similar?

_____

APPENDIX – F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Give me a description of the entire process of your writing this paper from the beginning till the end?

2. What do you think worked for you as you wrote this paper? Why?

3. What do you did not work for you as you wrote this paper? Why?

4. Which tools did you use for writing this paper? How did these tools affect/influence your writing?

5. What goals did you have as you wrote this paper? How did these goals affect/influence your writing?

6. Who are the people that you think influenced you as you wrote? How did they affect/influence your writing?

7. As you wrote this paper, which communities do you think you were associated with? How did this association affect your writing?

8. As you wrote this paper what rules or norms did you follow? How did they affect/ influence your writing?

APPENDIX – G

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	Karen Adams
	LL
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair
	Soc Beh IRB
Date:	03/17/2010
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	03/17/2010
IRB Protocol #:	1003004943
Study Title:	A sociocultural approach to L2 writing: Exploring trajectories of writing processes of English as a second language (ESL) learners

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) (2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.   It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.