

# The Use of L1 as a Strategy in English Writing Pedagogy at the Postsecondary Level in Japan<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

The increased availability of web-based automated translation services has created the need to reassess the variables that have been used for research on second language (L2) writing pedagogy for non-native writers of English. With a sudden and significant improvement in Google Translate's output quality in late 2016 (Gally, 2018), the approach taken by many Japanese university students to their English writing tasks seems to have changed substantially, compared to what was the norm just a few years ago, when electronic dictionaries were the best writing aid available to them. The drastic change in the landscape of teaching L2 writing seems to have made some of the findings of past studies outdated, if not completely irrelevant, especially with regard to the position of the first language (L1) in L2 writing instruction in a non-English-speaking environment. This is mainly because the influences of machine translation (MT) were not taken into account.

The objective of this survey article is to re-establish the position of L1 in English writing education in relation to the variables that have been used to explore relevant questions in the context of English writing education at Japanese universities. These variables include students' L2 proficiency, L1 writing ability, L2 writing ability, L2 writing quality, writing fluency, and confidence in writing (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994, 1996). The findings of past research on the teaching of English writing in Japan were reexamined, along with their implications from the viewpoint of the use of L1—as the language used in the classroom, for feedback, peer review, tutorials, or other forms of instruction, or as

the language students think in. The present study explores the use of L1 in relation to transfer from L1 to L2. While second-language acquisition researchers generally use the term “transfer” to discuss undesirable effects of a learner’s first language on the second language they are acquiring, the present study uses this term in its broader sense to cover both positive and negative transfer. Multiple types of interlingual transfer will be considered to present a systematic view of the forms of transfer to be encouraged and those to be avoided.

Previous research findings were reassessed by exploring how relevant factors contribute to favorable conditions for learners’ L2 writing performance, on the widely accepted assumption that factors with significant contributions would constitute an effective strategy for English writing pedagogy. Cognitive load has turned out to be a useful notion to link up various factors of interest, including the advantages and disadvantages of L1-to-L2 translation in L2 writing instruction, in order to form a comprehensive picture. Through this reassessment of the bilingual aspects of English writing pedagogy, the present study argues for the use of L1 as a strategy in teaching English writing to Japanese university students. It also aims to provide guidance in the areas of instruction design and practice by presenting educators and course planners with a picture of the elements that should be promoted or suppressed by permitting, encouraging, tolerating, or prohibiting the use of the L1; the specific forms of L1-to-L2 transfer that should be encouraged or suppressed; the factors that should be taken into consideration to balance variables; and possibly the optimal L1-L2 balance for the teaching language in the L2 classroom. In practical terms, this means identifying the conditions under which teachers should encourage their students to think in English as much as possible, as well as those in which they should permit or encourage them to think in Japanese.

In Section 2, I will review previous key studies that have provided important insight into areas related to the L1 in English writing pedagogy with Japanese students. The review focuses on studies surrounding a range of issues, including the transfer of positive and negative elements from L1 to L2 on various levels. Section 3 will discuss the findings and the observations reviewed in the previous section to reassess the position of L1 in L2 writ-

ing education at Japanese universities. More specifically, it will argue for fostering interlinguistic channels through effective use of L1. Section 4 will present a conclusion with suggestions for instruction and empirical research.

## 2. Reexamining the Key Findings of Research on Teaching L2 Writing to Japanese Learners

This section will review the findings of previous key studies dealing with the use of L1 in English writing pedagogy with Japanese university students, with a focus on research evidence related to the use of Japanese in English writing instruction. In these studies, the learners' first language is Japanese; outside the classroom, few people speak English, and the students are constantly exposed to information in Japanese. Some of the studies reviewed emphasize the negative impact of L1; others stress its positive impact. The subjects in most of the studies reviewed are university students, though some studies conducted in other educational settings are also considered. It should be noted that few of the studies examined deal directly with the issue of L1 use; the present study will focus on relevant parts of their findings. Most of the following subsections will concern the transfer from L1 to L2: transfer of text features in 2.1; transfer of writing competence in 2.2; and transfer of subject knowledge in 2.3. This will be followed by a subsection on fluency and text complexity.

### 2.1 Transfer of Text Features from L1 to L2

This subsection explores the research findings on the transfer of various text features from L1 to L2, namely from Japanese to English. These features range from the sentence level to the stylistic and rhetorical aspects to the discourse level. Broadly speaking, this type of L1-to-L2 transfer can be characterized as being negative. Most research in this area views it as an undesirable influence of L1 that should be avoided in L2 writing instruction.

Many studies on L1-to-L2 transfer on a sentence level conducted with Japanese learners look at sentence-level correctness, including verb tenses. Bryant's (1984) study of errors made by Japanese learners found that most errors, including verb tense errors, were intralingual—that is, caused by faulty understanding of the target language. Interlingual errors—which can be

viewed as attributable to L1 transfer for the purposes of the present study—are less frequent, but more serious because they impede communication. Miyake’s (2007) study of 11 Japanese students in the U.S. found that lower-proficiency students had a greater tendency to be influenced by their L1 in preferring inanimate subjects, incorporating longer sentences, and omitting or simplifying ideas.

A fair amount of research on L1-to-L2 transfer of text features has focused on the phrase level. Okugiri, Ijuin, and Komori (2017) found the overuse of “for example” in English opinion essays written by Japanese learners compared to English speakers. The researchers attributed this difference to the L1 transfer on the part of the Japanese students. Japanese learners tend to use this phrase to mark hypotheticality, even though “for example” does not perform that function in English, because *tatoeba*—the equivalent Japanese phrase—does. Given that “for example” and *tatoeba* typically work as discourse markers, this L1-to-L2 transfer can also be viewed as L1-to-L2 transfer of a rhetorical feature.

## 2.2 Transfer of Writing Competence from L1 to L2

This subsection deals with the transfer of the writing competence acquired by learners in their L1 to the process of writing in L2. Most of the studies reviewed focus on how the competence acquired in Japanese is applied to writing in English. It has been widely agreed that writing competence in L1 is an important factor in determining the quality of L2 writing.

The product-oriented quantitative analysis included in Hirose and Sasaki’s (1994) study of Japanese students found that their L1 writing ability was highly correlated with their L2 writing ability. The researchers’ findings also revealed that there was a significant relationship between interlingual composing competence and L2 proficiency. Hirose and Sasaki note that this high correlation between L1 and L2 writing ability “is important because it suggests the existence of composing competence across L1 and L2 even for EFL students” (p. 203). (The qualitative analysis in the same study indicated that the students’ compositional competence was related to good strategies for writing, writing fluency, and confidence in writing, which will be discussed later.)

Indeed, the existence of writing competence across L1 and L2 has been well documented. Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013a) investigated how a Japanese multilingual writer developed her L1, L2, and L3 (third language) writing competence. They found that there had been “multi-directional interactions between languages, affected by such interrelated factors as proficiency level, the amount of writing knowledge acquired, and perceptions of writing in each language” (p. 25). Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013b) were convinced that L2 writing could not be separated from writing in L1 and L3; they observed that “[i]n essence, L1, L2, and L3 writing knowledge, in particular knowledge about common text features (e.g., discourse markers and counterargument), appear to form a merged system as writers’ knowledge increases, and the commonality of text features is reinforced when they are repeatedly used in multiple languages.” Students use the L1 knowledge they have acquired up to that point to confront a new L2 writing task. James (2007) called this phenomenon transfer of learning.

Other previous studies have identified resemblances between L1 and L2 writing processes that share “metacognitive writing models” (Göpferich & Nelezen, 2014, p. 120), which represent the way L1 compositional competence interacts with L2 compositional competence.

Additional evidence for the existence of writing competence across L1 and L2 is provided by Kobayashi and Rinnert’s (2007) research on reverse transfer of a specific type of writing competence. They investigated the transferability of argumentative writing competence from L2 to L1 with a focus on the effects of L2 instruction and experience in overseas settings on the development of Japanese learners’ argumentative writing in L1. While most other research on the transfer of writing competence between L1 and L2 investigated the transfer from L1 to L2, Kobayashi and Rinnert’s finding suggested that the transfer of writing competence is bidirectional. This and subsequent studies led Rinnert, Kobayashi, and Katayama (2015) to propose a dynamic view of this transfer, observing that there were no clear boundaries between the L1 and L2 domains of bilingual writers’ competence and viewing the transfer from one to the other as reuse of competence.

Hirose (2003), however, focused on what can be viewed as

the L1-to-L2 transfer of writing competence with respect to organizational patterns. These relate to the conventions of L1 writing, including the location of main ideas, rhetorical patterns, and summary statements. This study yielded results that did not conform to the hypothesis proposed by Rinnert, Kobayashi, and Katayama. Hirose found that “despite overall similarities between L1 and L2 organizational patterns, there was no significant correlation between L1 and L2 organization scores” (pp. 203–204). This seems to provide evidence against the transferability of writing knowledge on an organizational level. It should be noted, however, that the learners observed by Hirose had not been taught the standard conventions for English writing. A further study focusing on learners who have received explicit instruction on text organization might show a different result.

A study with non-Japanese learners yielded an interesting finding about a factor influencing the transfer of writing competence at an organizational level. Wei, Zhang, and Zhang (2020) identified a positive association between Chinese L2 writers’ perception of L2 writing difficulty and the transfer related to the organization of argument with respect to within-paragraph organization and consideration of a thesis. This suggests that learners’ L1 competence in argument organization may be transferred more effectively to their L2 writing if they perceive L2 writing tasks as being easier. Using L1 to aid writing instruction may be as an option to this end.

The relationship of the transfer of writing competence to writers’ L2 proficiency levels also needs to be taken into account. The same study by Wei, Zhang, and Zhang (2020) also found that L2 writing proficiency had a negative association with the transfer that did not reflect the active role of L1 rhetoric. This implies that monolingual L2 teaching of L2 writing may be adequate for high-proficiency learners.

### **2.3 Transfer of Subject Knowledge**

When students write in L2 about a subject they are already familiar with in L1, their knowledge of the subject is transferred from L1 to L2. To write about their own experiences, they often need to take information from Japanese sources. Translation is inevitably an essential part of the English writing process. This gives rise to the question of whether translation from L1 to L2 is

beneficial. It is widely agreed among researchers that translation from L1 occurs naturally in L2 writing (Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2001; Cumming, 1989; Liu, 2009; Qi, 1998; Sasaki, 2004). As has been well documented, such translation has both advantages and disadvantages.

Multiple studies that compared translations and direct L2 writings by the same learners have found translation from L1 to L2 to be advantageous under certain conditions. Some researchers reported advantages in terms of text quality. In Uzawa's (1996) study, 22 university students were asked to complete three writing tasks: writing a text in Japanese, writing a text in English, and translating the completed Japanese text into English. The researcher found that the linguistic quality of the translated texts was higher than that of the texts written directly in English. Uzawa posited that this was because the students were relieved of the intellectual load required for extensive planning. Being required to come up with ideas entirely in English can put an excessive cognitive load on students' minds. (This issue will be discussed in greater detail later.)

This agrees with one of the key findings of a study by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), which provides insight into the importance of translation from L1 to L2 for novice Japanese researchers writing research papers in English. Kobayashi and Rinnert investigated the English compositions produced by the same students through two different writing processes: one writing first in Japanese and then translating into English and the other writing directly in English. They found that the use of L1 enables the students to "explore ideas fully on their own intellectual and cognitive levels" (p. 204). According to Gosden (1996), who investigated novice researchers at a Japanese university, these learners said translation allowed them to "think more deeply and better express their thoughts" about their scientific fields. Gosden posits this as one of the reasons why Japanese researchers may continue to prefer translating from L1 to writing directly in L2—another reason being the presence of a significant local L1 audience.

Disadvantages of L1-to-L2 translation in L2 writing contexts include a variety of factors. In the same paper, Kobayashi and Rinnert noted the difficulties Japanese researchers encounter in "shift[ing] the reader-writer relationship from a Japanese to an



English context.” Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) state their findings support “the notion that too much dependency on the first language may inhibit second-language writing performance” (p. 204). In addition, translation can be a factor in reducing writing fluency, especially for novices. This is suggested by Sasaki’s (2000) finding that the novices in her study often paused while writing in English in order to translate ideas they had generated from Japanese into English (p. 282).

The transfer of subject-specific knowledge in L1 to writing in L2 should be further examined in terms of translation and the use of bilingual references, and ways should be identified to help students develop channels through which their experiences outside the classroom can be expressed in L2.

#### **2.4 Fluency and Text Complexity**

Some studies have found that giving students support with L1 helps them write more fluently and use more complex structures in their L2 writing. Evans and Rafieyan (2018) used L1 to see if it encouraged more complex and fluent production in L2 tasks by Japanese university students. They found that the students who were given support in their L1 when writing a story based on a series of pictures were able to write more fluently and used more complex structures than students who were given support in the L2.

Hirose and Sasaki’s (1994) study, referred to above in subsection 2.2, indicated that the students’ compositional competence was related to writing fluency, among other factors. The higher grammatical complexity attained by the students supported in their L1 in Evans and Rafieyan’s study suggests that the learners given support in the L2 had to make some compromises in terms of the complexity of the texts they were writing. This agrees with Devine, Railey, and Boshoff’s (1993) observation that the students writing in their L2 had to omit certain content from their writing when they felt it was beyond their linguistic capability. Given these examples, it is not hard to imagine that students who have the ability to write long sentences with complex structures in their L1 often have to settle for shorter sentences with more simple structures if they are told to think exclusively in English. Furthermore, Sasaki (2000), cited earlier, indicates that another factor related to the use of L1 and



writing fluency is lower-proficiency writers' need to pause while writing to translate their ideas from Japanese into English when coming up with English expressions directly is too demanding for them. The finding of Hirose's (2012) study, which examined the effects of written-plus-spoken peer feedback combined with teacher feedback in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing instruction at a Japanese university, can be seen as additional evidence for the usefulness of support given in the L1. Thus, for Japanese students, especially lower-proficiency students, support in their L1 can be an effective means of helping them write more complex sentences with higher fluency.

## 2.5 Summary

In this section, I have looked at the findings of research dealing either directly with, or with subjects relevant to, the use of L1, covering the L1-to-L2 transfer of text features (2.1), writing competence (2.2), and subject knowledge (2.3), as well as writing fluency (2.4). While the factors involved are interrelated and cannot always be isolated from one another, broadly speaking, the review in this section seems to point to the need for the formation of a channel conducive to inter-language transfer of knowledge and competence. Such a channel would help to improve the quality of the English texts students produce. This issue will be further explored in the following section.

## 3. Developing Interlingual Channels to Foster L2 Writing Skills

This section will further examine the findings and the observations reviewed in the previous section in an effort to reassess the role of L1 in L2 writing education at Japanese universities. I will do this by examining the correlations between variables that were not reviewed explicitly or sufficiently, if at all, in the previous studies referred to earlier, occasionally with the aid of non-Japanese research on the same and related subjects to place issues in a broader perspective. The goal is to reassess the use of L1 in English writing education at Japanese postsecondary institutions, hopefully gaining insight into ways to balance monolingual and bilingual teaching modes and determine appropriate use of L1 in English writing instruction. The focus will now be

placed on application to specific areas of practical concern. My argument is that the use of L1 in teaching English writing is desirable for most Japanese university students because the development of interlingual channels serves as an effective pedagogical tactic. Based on key elements, which are interrelated, the discussion will be broadly divided into five areas: cognitive load (3.1), compositional competence (3.2), translation (3.3), instruction language (3.4), and writing support (3.5). Cognitive load will be discussed mostly as an underlying notion to link up the other factors concerned.

### 3.1 Cognitive Load

One of the main issues addressed in previous research on the use of L1 in teaching L2 writing concerns the optimization of cognitive load and optimal use of cognitive capacity. An excessive cognitive load demotivates students, as does an insufficient cognitive load. The use of Japanese in English writing processes has been suggested as a way to reduce cognitive load. For most L2 learners, lower-order processes in L2 writing, including making word choices and ensuring grammatical accuracy, are demanding enough; the use of L1 for higher-order processes, such as planning and organization, facilitates the transfer of L1 writing competence, as will be discussed in the following subsection. Students can therefore direct more of their intellectual resources toward other processes, which helps to raise the overall quality of their L2 writing. The importance of allowing learners to have more of their cognitive capacity available is also supported by Schoonen et al. (2003):

The L2 writer may be so much involved in these kind [*sic*] of “lower-order” problems of word finding and grammatical structures that they may require too much conscious attention, leaving little or no working memory capacity free to attend to higher level or strategic aspects of writing, such as organizing the text properly or trying to convince the reader of the validity of a certain view. The discourse and metacognitive knowledge that L2 writers are able to exploit in their L1 writing may remain unused, or underused, in their L2 writing. (Schoonen et al., 2003, p. 171)

The use of L1 can thus be considered useful as a scaffolding that helps writing students unleash their potential. If the allocation of their intellectual capacity to higher-order processes increases, as it does when students do the planning in L2, the cognitive load may increase to such an extent as to prevent them from paying sufficient attention to their writing. If, on the other hand, the intellectual load required for planning can be offloaded to L1, more of the students' intellectual resources can be directed toward what they write and how they write it in L2. Thus, one of the measures for successful use of L1 in L2 writing instruction is the appropriateness of cognitive load for proper distribution of learners' intellectual resources. When determining appropriate cognitive load, a crucial criterion is whether language acquisition is taking place as it should.

### 3.2 Compositional Competence

This subsection aims to elaborate on the discussion of the transfer of writing competence from L1 to L2 in subsection 2.2 above. Let us first recall Kobayashi and Rinnert's study (2013a) of a single multilingual writer. The researchers observed that the writer had "developed a core pattern of discourse features applicable to both L1 and L2 writing" (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013b, p. 442). The studies discussed above in 2.1, and many others, investigated the L1-to-L2 transfer of text features on various levels with an explicit or tacit assumption that such transfer is undesirable. Previous research on Japanese students' L1 and L2 writing in terms of organization, however, did not consider whether the learners had been taught the standard conventions for English writing. While the findings of these studies were useful in revealing the influences of the L1 writing conventions on Japanese learners of English, their main focus seems to have been in exploring Japanese students' tendencies before they were taught the differences between L1 and L2 writing.

In fact, negative influences of L1-to-L2 transfer on these levels can be avoided simply by teaching the students that the standard organization for English expository writing differs from the *kishotenketsu* [introduction, development, denouement, and conclusion] pattern for Japanese writing that they would have been taught earlier in their school education. Instruction on the conventions concerning, for instance, the location of the main idea,

rhetorical pattern, and summary statement can be given just as easily in Japanese as in English. Developing a metacognitive capacity plays an important role in such compositional competence. This is illustrated by the fact that Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013b), cited earlier, observed their multilingual subject developing a “core pattern of discourse features applicable to both L1 and L2 writing” (p. 442) over the course of their study.

Along with such core competence, it is possible to assume that good writing strategies are transferrable between languages. The transferability of writing competence between the two languages is explained by Göpferich (2019) as the ability to use L1 to compensate for a lack of linguistic resources in L2. In addition, Cumming’s (1989) study suggested that “students’ levels of L2 proficiency do not make substantial differences to their processes of decision making while writing” (p. 125). Given that this is the case, essentially the same approach can be adopted for learners of all proficiency levels to help them improve the quality of their L2 writing. It is possible to make a case for instructors helping learners develop a channel whereby they can efficiently transfer their writing competence from L1 to L2, an issue we will revisit later in the subsection on instruction. The use of L1 is an effective strategy for pursuing such a transfer when teaching English writing at postsecondary institutions in Japan.

### 3.3 Translation

Having examined the roles L1 can play in higher-order processes in L2 writing—namely the optimization of cognitive load and the transfer of compositional competence—we now move on to explore the position of L1 in lower-order processes, with a focus on translation. Some of the studies reviewed earlier in this paper discuss the pedagogical significance of translation in L2 writing. As Gosden’s (1996) findings suggest, translation from L1 to L2 constitutes an important part of research-paper writing by novice researchers at Japanese universities in that it enables them to think more deeply and express their ideas better.

In a paper that revealed that the linguistic quality of Japanese university students’ translations was higher than that of the texts they had written directly in English (see 2.3), Uzawa (1996) observed that the superiority of translation to direct L2 writing in linguistic quality is attributable to the reduction in the cogni-

tive load required for extensive planning. This observation, which supports the point made in the preceding subsection on cognitive load, demonstrates the usefulness of translation as a means of empowering learners to allocate their intellectual resources so as to write well in L2.

That being the case, it may be worthwhile to explore the possibility that teaching students basic translation skills is effective as a way to promote transfer of writing competence, as well as subject knowledge, from L1 to L2, as the newly formed channel facilitates the retrieval of information from their L1 knowledge base. With the additional channel thus formed, it is also possible to shorten the time it takes learners to access expressions that are already part of their perceptive linguistic knowledge, which in turn leads to improved writing fluency.

One of the drawbacks of emphasizing translation in the L2 writing education context is the possible danger of becoming dependent on it, which in turn inhibits language acquisition from taking place. Another disadvantage is that the effectiveness of drawing learners' attention to translation depends on their L2 proficiency level. While bilingual knowledge is important for anyone who learns L2 writing in an environment in which few people speak L2 outside the classroom, students whose knowledge of English is insufficient may be unable to tell how easily, if at all, a particular idea in Japanese can be rendered in English.

To summarize, the value of L1-to-L2 translation in L2 writing pedagogy is that it allows students to think deeply and express thoughts better, relieves them of the extra cognitive load resulting from the need to plan directly in L2, and enables them to retrieve bilingual information more efficiently. It is important to train learners to foster a correct mindset to avoid permanent dependence on translation; that is, to encourage them to think in L2 as much as possible, viewing translation as a scaffolding they can occasionally turn to when the need arises.

### **3.4 Instruction**

As observed in 3.2, instruction on English writing conventions can be given as readily in Japanese as in English. If possible, basic translation skills should be taught, but only as a scaffolding to help them reach the next level, while ensuring lasting dependency is avoided. In this subsection, I will apply the observa-

tions presented above to describe conditions under which L1 is preferable to L2 as the teaching language, as well as the considerations that should go into decisions about the language used to teach L2 writing to students living in an L1-dominated environment.

The first variable that needs to be considered is the L2 proficiency of the target students. For lower-proficiency students, L1 is preferable for reasons discussed above concerning cognitive load, the L1-to-L2 transfer of writing competence, and translation. For high-proficiency learners, however, teaching English writing in English is desirable. For these students, the transfer of compositional competence from L1 to L2 can reasonably be expected to occur spontaneously, and the cognitive load from higher-order processes in writing does not overwhelm them. Even if Japanese is completely barred from the classroom, the intellectual capacity they can deploy to work on their writing assignments will not be limited very much. As the transfer of writing experience from L1 to L2 occurs spontaneously in individual students, instructors have little need to intervene in the students' L1. For such students, maximum exposure to English is probably the best option, as advocates of monolingual teaching claim. Furthermore, if there are no logistical constraints to be addressed, especially concerning classroom hours and the availability of teaching personnel, these advanced students would benefit even more from a teaching approach that would, by taking advantage of their L1, help them produce more refined, sophisticated output capturing connotations and other subtleties and using a range of rhetorical features. As an aside, such a program would involve providing advanced students with bilingual knowledge and translation literacy.<sup>2</sup> It may be possible to view this as fuller exploitation of interlingual writing competency as discussed in subsection 2.2.

All in all, L2 writing instruction should be planned so as to encourage more of the desirable L1-to-L2 transfer while attempting to minimize undesirable L1-to-L2 transfer, especially when it hampers communication. For most Japanese university students, the use of L1 is an effective strategy in fulfilling this objective.

### 3.5 Writing Support

Feedback and peer review provide learners of all proficiency lev-

els with opportunities to examine their own L2 writing. While it is not unusual for instructors who are native speakers of English to give their students feedback in English, it seems that the use of L1 for feedback in most other circumstances is taken for granted. None of the studies explored herein has investigated differences in the effects of feedback given in Japanese and in English. Given the implications of the findings of Evans and Rafieyan's (2018) study, which found that Japanese students given support in Japanese wrote more complex sentences more fluently than those supported with English, it is fairly easy to imagine that feedback given in L2 is unlikely to be as effective as feedback given in L1, even for high-proficiency learners (except for those who are equally comfortable in English and Japanese). The finding of Hirose's (2012) study, cited above in subsection 2.4, which examined the effects of written-plus-spoken peer feedback combined with teacher feedback in EFL writing instruction at a Japanese university, can also be viewed as evidence for the usefulness of feedback given in L1. It would be safe to assume that the same goes for peer review and tutorials at writing centers. Given the discussions in the preceding subsections, writing support should be designed to optimize the cognitive load and facilitate the development of channels for desirable interlingual transfer. Writing support should thus be provided in L1 for most university students.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has explored the use of L1 in English writing education at postsecondary institutions in Japan. Over the past several years, considerable progress in online automated translation services has driven an unprecedented change in the way L2 writing is taught in the world. By reexamining the findings of key L2 writing pedagogy studies in related areas from multiple perspectives, including interlingual transfer of writing competence, the present study concludes that:

(1) Current English writing pedagogy at Japanese universities underrates the development of students' multilingual writing competency. Compositional competence related to higher-order processes of writing, such as organization, can be developed effectively through instruction in L1, perhaps more so than



through instruction in L2.

(2) The use of L1 in L2 writing instruction should be evaluated in terms of cognitive load, as well as the degree to which it promotes the transfer of writing competence from L1 to L2.

(3) L1-to-L2 translation can have pedagogical value as a means of reducing cognitive load and ensuring better allocation of students' intellectual resources, enabling them to think more deeply and express their thoughts better. Care must be taken, however, that translation be used only as a scaffolding and ongoing effort is called for to avoid permanent dependence on it.

(4) Teachers should help students with the formation and reinforcement not just of L2 writing competency but also of bilingual channels. L2 writing instruction, aiming to empower learners to grow as L2 writers, should be planned so as to promote L1-to-L2 transfer of a desirable nature while suppressing undesirable factors, especially those that hamper communication.

(5) Writing support, including feedback and peer review, should be designed to help students with the formation and reinforcement of channels for desirable interlingual transfer with an optimized cognitive load. The use of L1 is beneficial for this purpose.

The findings of this study are expected to help teachers make decisions related to the use of L1 in teaching L2 writing in classrooms. Admittedly, the present study has fallen short of identifying the direction to be pursued for educators to take appropriate measures concerning machine translation.<sup>3</sup> Further empirical research needs to be conducted on the effects of machine translation on L2 learners' behavior and learning.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Tom Gally for his insightful course on English writing pedagogy and Professor Emeritus Shiro Yamamoto for his enlightening course on English pedagogy, as well as for the valuable comments they gave me as I prepared this study. I would also like to express my appreciation to Professor Yuki Hirose, Professor Yuko Itatsu, and Professor Masami Nakao for their engaging UTEEP courses and to Professor Emeritus Katsuya Sugawara and Professor Shuichi Yatabe for training me

as a teaching assistant in their classes. My sincere thanks also go to Professor Akiko Katayama for guiding me as an English writing tutor at Komaba Writers' Studio, to Professor Yoshifumi Saito for sharing his theoretical and practical expertise through his English education courses, to my colleagues at Komazawa University, Musashino University, and Tokyo Healthcare University for their support and encouragement, and to my supervisor Professor Masaaki Takeda, who through his English literature classes has shown me what it means to adapt teaching to individual students.

## Notes

- 1 This paper builds on the presentation given by the author at the International Symposium on Academic Writing and Critical Thinking at Nagoya University on February 8, 2019, entitled "Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Machine Translation in L2 Writing Classes." Some arguments have been taken from two presentations by the author at the University of Tokyo's Komaba campus: one on automated translation and second-language writing education at Translation Research and Network (TRaN) [*honyaku kenkyukai*] on January 26, 2019 and one on English writing pedagogy using foundational expertise in Japanese-to-English translation at the Komaba Language Association's 23rd KLA presentation session on December 14, 2019.
- 2 Bilingual knowledge suitable for advanced learners include knowledge about L1-L2 mappings, translation loss, and equivalence. An understanding of similarities and differences between their L1 and L2 is essential for Japanese learners of English who need to know when to look up a word in a Japanese-English dictionary to find a rendering that is likely to work, as well as when to seek an alternative pattern of expression they are unlikely to be able to find by consulting a dictionary. Universities can teach this to students by engaging them in discussion of translation-related issues. (At present, few Japanese universities teach Japanese-to-English translation skills outside specialized courses.) This agrees with Cook's (2010) observation that "[f]or students, understanding and discussion of translation problems gives a unique insight into how the new language works and how it resembles or differs from their own" (p. 55). Keeping learners conscious of the differences and similarities between English and Japanese would lead to healthy development of interlingual compositional competence. The expected outcome is that learners would be able to choose the best strategy from the diverse mix to obtain the information they need for their writing, drawing on references in both languages. The advanced students should preferably be taught the notion of equivalence; i.e., that syntactically different expressions can convey essentially the same idea.

Translation literacy includes an understanding of the notion of

equivalence, or an awareness of equivalence not just on a word, phrase, or sentence level, but on a higher level. An understanding of this concept can be fostered through the practice of translation with differing levels of equivalence in mind. For novices, it may involve understanding that looking up words in Japanese-to-English dictionaries is often not sufficient. For advanced students, it may include recognizing that a paragraph or passage in Japanese sometimes needs to be completely overhauled to form a coherent paragraph in English, with the need to add or remove certain pieces of information and create footnotes to ensure paragraph- or passage-level equivalence. The ultimate goal, which probably goes beyond the scope of university education, except for aspiring language professionals, is for learners to develop an awareness of the broad range of considerations that go into a piece of translation work. An additional benefit is that, with this knowledge acquired, students would be able to more effectively decide what writing aids are suitable for what purposes, choosing the best means from among bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, glossaries, corpora, search engines, and technology resources they can exploit. Going back and forth between the two languages can thus be reasonably expected to give a depth to students' writing.

- 3 It may be possible to view machine translation (MT) as just another writing aid, like dictionaries and corpora. However, from the viewpoint of cognitive load, it is too powerful to be called a mere aid. MT certainly reduces the cognitive load on a syntactical level. It enables users to retrieve a word or phrase much more quickly than with a dictionary, leaving more of the L2 writer's intellectual resources available for higher-order processes. In spite of the recent surge in the accuracy of MT software, however, it is still necessary to be able to identify incorrect output. The potential danger of MT in the area of L2 teaching is that it reduces the cognitive load so greatly as to hamper language acquisition. It is not likely, at least for now, for MT to lighten the cognitive load in any significant way on matters of style, rhetoric, and organization, which still require decisions to be made by the learner. Nonetheless, the wider availability of MT services has changed the nature of English writing education. This is an area where more empirical research is needed.

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