

Articles

Different Activities in the Same Task: An Activity Theory Approach to ESL Students' Writing Process

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This study offers some insights into the writing process of ESL students in a natural academic context. The theoretical framework used in this investigation is activity theory, which emphasizes the sociocultural and historical nature of the learning environment in determining the way students interpret the task requirements and the way they behave. Two major data sources were utilized: all the drafts students had written until they completed the final version, and retrospective interviews on students' perception of their revision behaviors. While the analyses of drafts produced at different stages focus on how students go about writing, their previous writing experiences compiled through interviews, help explain why students act the way they do. The results showed that different activities were underway even though all of the participants were engaged in the same task. They also illustrated that students' beliefs about academic writing, which were shaped through their previous writing experiences, determined the nature of their activities during the writing process.

本研究の目的は、日本人学習者による英語での文章作成過程を検証することである。分析のための理論的枠組として活動理論を使用し、同じ作文課題(task)に取り組む学習者が文章作成過程において、どの程度異なる活動(activity)に従事しているかを明らかにする。文章作成過程を知るために学習者が作成した複数の原稿をすべて回収し、一度書いたものを学習者がどのように推敲したかを分析した。その直後にインタビューを行い、推敲の際に何を考えたか、文章のどのような要素を改善しようとしたかについて質問した。分析の結果、分かったことは以下の2点である。(1) 学習者はそれぞれ異なる点に推敲の焦点を当てており、それに従って異なる推敲の方法を採用していた。(2) 学習者による文章作成過程の違いには、学習者の過去の作文経験と、作文経験を通して形成された学習者の作文に対するビリーフ(belief)が大きく関与していた。つまり、学習者は自身のビリーフに基づいて課題の目標を設定し、その目標に向かってそれぞれに異なる作文活動を展開したのである。この結果は、教室内で同じ「課題」に取り組む学習者は必ずしも同じ「活動」に従事しているとはいえないことを示唆している。

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Background

In the past two decades, research on L2 writing has investigated the processes underlying the production of L2 students' written discourse. This research has revealed several variables that help explain L2 writing ability: (a) the L1 writing skills already developed in the student's L1 contexts are transferred to L2 writing (Cumming, 1989; Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Uzawa, 1996; Whalen & Menard, 1995), and thus L2 proficiency level and L2 writing skills are not mutually interdependent (Bosher, 1998; Hall, 1990; Raimes, 1985, 1987; Zamel, 1983); (b) however, the capacity to use effective writing strategies relies on a sufficient level of L2 proficiency (Pennington & So, 1993), which implies that in order to write well in the L2, a certain threshold or level of L2 proficiency must first be achieved if L1 skills are to be transferred (Cummins, 1980); (c) L2 proficiency, L1 writing ability, and metaknowledge of L2 writing that accompanies continuous writing activities all significantly influence students' L2 writing ability (Hirose & Sasaki, 2000; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996); and (d) students' metacognitive growth affects their L2 writing performance: that is, performance improves as students develop the ability to describe what they know and what they do not know about writing, as well as to plan and regulate how they go about learning (Devine, Railey, & Boshoff, 1993; Kasper, 2004). These studies have provided a wealth of information on how L2 students go about writing, and the influential variables have been incorporated into L2 writing instruction.

However, the emergence of activity theory developed within the Vygotskian school of sociocultural theory in the 1980s has raised questions about whether the same instruction can always elicit a "single discourse type" from students (Crookes, 1991), and whether what is often conceived to be a fixed "task" is really quite variable not only across students but within the same student at different times (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). In second language research, it is often deemed necessary, for the purposes of the experiment, to assume that subjects are homogeneous individuals engaged in the same activity (i.e. doing the same thing) in compliance with the wishes of the researchers (Roebuck, 2000). However, investigation pursued within the framework of activity theory has provided evidence that this is not the case. No two learners are the same, and their different learning backgrounds influence how quickly and how well they learn to write in the L2 (Hyland, 2003). Learners, in other words, act as individual "agents" who are involved in shaping their activity based on their own intentions. Rather than treating an individual as

a nonentity within a group who lacks agency, the present study utilizes activity theory to understand the differences in the writing processes of individual learners.

Activity Theory

Activity theory, along with other sociocultural approaches, traces its origins to Vygotsky who asserted that learning can change individual identity and that individual knowledge is sociohistorically mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). A basic principle of activity theory is the claim that purposeful human activity is based on motives; that is, socially and historically defined beliefs about a particular activity setting (Wertsch, 1979). In other words, what appear to be the same actions can be linked to different motives and thus constitute different activities (Lantolf, 2000). The properties of any given activity are hence determined by the sociohistorical setting and by the goals and sociocultural history of the learners (Leontiev, 1981). To put it simply, the initial motives of an activity determine the character of that activity. Activity, then, necessarily differs between, and even within, individuals.

In addition, it is important to make a distinction between “task” and “activity” in order to gain a clearer understanding of activity theory since these terms are often used interchangeably in second language acquisition research. A task is a kind of “behavioral blueprint” provided to subjects in order to elicit linguistic data. An activity, in contrast, comprises the behavior that actually takes place when an individual performs a task (Coughlan & Duff, 1994, p. 175). Thus, even though students are all engaged in the same task, their behaviors can be linked to different motives and can thereby constitute different activities. For instance, if two students are asked to write an essay in a second language class, but one student’s motive for being in the class is simply to fulfill a requirement, whereas the other desires to learn the language as well as the rhetoric peculiar to the L2 context, they are not engaged in the same activity. The resulting essays may appear similar on the surface, but different learning outcomes can be expected when learners have such divergent orientations to the task (Gillette, 1994, p.196).

In a pedagogical context, students’ writing skills are usually assessed by test scores and overt performance. As a result, they are identified as successful and unsuccessful writers. However, from an activity theory perspective, these scores might not explain motives underlying their performance nor consider that student writers may all have divergent

reasons and divergent goals for engaging in the task. Activity Theorists suggest that teachers look at this underlying motivation as it is bound to affect learners' strategic approaches to the task and thus their learning outcomes.

The Present Study

The aim of the present study was to examine the nature of L2 writing activities engaged by three Japanese postgraduate students enrolled in an Australian university. As noted above, writing teachers usually look at students' overt performance represented by their test scores and do not analyze what happens in students' minds in the process of completing the end product. Under such circumstances, the teaching of L2 writing is likely to focus on the features of an L2 written text orthography, sentence-level structure, and discourse-level structure—and the way L2 student texts deviate from the norm (Matsuda, 2003). This product-centered approach seems to ignore the fact that students act as they do for several reasons. It was hoped that looking into students' motives could help explain the way they perceive task demands and consequently how they engage in the task, and that the information gained could provide immediate pedagogical implications for the teaching of L2 writing.

Research Questions

The present study explored three research questions:

1. How do students interpret and perceive an L2 academic writing task?
2. How do students engage in an L2 academic writing task until its completion?
3. Why do students interpret the task as they do, and perform the way they do?

In order to answer the second question, focus was placed on how students revise what they have already written in the L2. They were requested to submit at least five drafts produced at different stages, and these drafts were analyzed to learn how students go about writing.

Method

Participants

The present study employed a small but in-depth case study approach. In order to gather qualitatively rich data on the nature of an individual writer's activity, the study focused on only three Japanese ESL students. All of them were enrolled in a postgraduate TESOL course in the Faculty of Education at an Australian university in September 2002, which was the first semester of the one-and-a-half-year course. At the time of this study, the students were in the fifth week of the semester and were working on descriptive/analytical essays assigned in their class. To recruit participants, the researcher visited the class and asked for volunteers to take part in the project. Responses were received from eight students in total, and then the three were selected for the following reasons: (a) the three students had the same English proficiency level measured by the IELTS test (see Appendix A); (b) they were novice writers with only limited academic writing experience in English; and (c) they had the same professional background (all of them had been school teachers), but brought different motivations and expectations to postgraduate study in Australia.

The students, all females with an average age of 27, had studied English for six years at the secondary level and four years at the tertiary level, mainly through controlled formal English education in Japan. However, they had neither been formally taught how to write in English nor taught what academic writing conventions are, aside from the intensive training for the IELTS test, which was an entry requirement for the postgraduate course at the Australian university. Although the three students had not received formal instruction in English writing, they had had different types of writing experiences such as short essay-writing, letter-writing, and translation prior to entering the postgraduate course. Their overall English proficiency level was established by using the IELTS test, which assesses the four basic skill components of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. On a scale of 1-9, the three students each had a score of 6.5 in the total band with writing being 6.0.

The first student was Kana, who had been in Australia for three months at the time of this study. She completed her undergraduate course at a Japanese university in 1998, and then taught English at a secondary school in Japan for four years thereafter. She decided to pursue a master's degree in Australia with the aim of improving her English teaching skills. Kana had a substantial amount of writing experience both in Japanese

and English before coming to Australia, although this was not based on formal instruction but resulted from an intensive writing course taken outside her regular classes as well as self-initiated practice. For instance, Kana stated that essay writing (*sakubun*) and letter writing in Japanese and the short essay for the IELTS test had been helpful in improving her overall writing skills.

The second student, Maki, had also resided in Australia for three months at the time of this study. She graduated from a Japanese university in 1995 and had then taught English at a secondary school for six years. Her previous writing experience in English was limited to translation of Japanese business documents into English for an international economics class she had taken, and she had not been exposed to academic writing tasks such as those common at an Australian university. Her statements from the interviews clearly showed that she was keen on translation and held the belief that skills in translation would lead to the improvement of her overall English proficiency. Maki was on a two-year sabbatical to go to an English-speaking country and brush up her English skills.

The third student, Yuka, had been in Australia for six months at the time of this study. She graduated from a Japanese university in 1996 and then taught Japanese as a foreign language to business trainees at a private company. She had come to Australia to obtain a qualification in teaching Japanese and get a teaching job in Australia. Yuka attended a three-month intensive ESL course after arriving in Australia to improve her general English proficiency as well as her IELTS score in order to enter graduate school. She was then successfully accepted into a post-graduate course at another institution, but she dropped out in the middle of the first semester. According to Yuka, what she learned in the ESL writing classroom did not help her to complete the academic writing tasks in the mainstream course where what was required in writing was different from what she had been taught in the ESL writing class. She was confused by the new set of academic writing conventions in the mainstream discipline course, and consequently failed early on to meet the course requirements. At the time of this study, Yuka had transferred to the university where the present study was conducted.

Tasks

Unlike much L2 writing research conducted in experimental settings, the present study sought to shed light on academic writing tasks

undertaken in naturally occurring situations. The data obtained from a natural academic environment will differ from data obtained from artificial research settings, and can thus provide a more detailed reflection of students' writing processes in real time. Hence, in the present study, the written essay assignments for the subject in which the three students were enrolled were utilized as materials for the investigation. For this "curriculum design and evaluation" class no writing instruction was included, and the students did not have any writing activities before they engaged in the assignments. For investigation, two types of essays (descriptive and analytical) were submitted to the researcher. The descriptive essay required the students to simply write about personal experiences, feelings, and opinions about English language education in Japan. The analytical essay required the students to analyze and discuss English language education in terms of its background and policies.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to gather naturally occurring data without interfering in the writing process, a combination of two data collection procedures was employed: retrospective interviews with the students and the collection of students' multiple drafts of the students' essays including the final version. For all the drafts the students had written until the completion of the end product, they were asked to record on a floppy disk the changes they had made in their essay and to save each draft under a new file name every time they made a different draft. All drafts were collected on a regular basis and were then carefully analyzed to identify how they revised what they had already written.

Retrospective interviews were undertaken twice a week with each student in order to identify how she interpreted the task, how she went about writing, and why she acted the way they did in completing the task. The interviews were conducted in Japanese, the native language shared by the students and the researcher. Permitting the students to use their native language in retrospection was expected to increase the quality of the data. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed for analysis, and then translated into English by the researcher. Two major questions were asked in the interviews: (a) Why did you make that change in that sentence/paragraph, and (b) What were you thinking about when you made that change? (See Appendix B.)

Data Analysis

In order to identify how different students do the same writing task, the researcher analyzed their revision behavior during the writing processes, focusing primarily on two aspects: their revision operations and their attention patterns underlying their actual revision operations. The revision operations were classified into five categories on the basis of the Faigley and Witte (1981) model: addition, deletion, substitution, consolidation, and movement. The students' attention patterns, that is, the aspects they were mainly concerned with during their revision operations, were analyzed on the basis of a modified form of Roca de Larios, Murphy, and Manchon's (1999) restructuring behavior model. According to this model, revision is undertaken in the entire writing process at three different discourse levels: ideational, textual, and linguistic. The modified revision behavior model applicable to the current study is depicted in Figure 1.

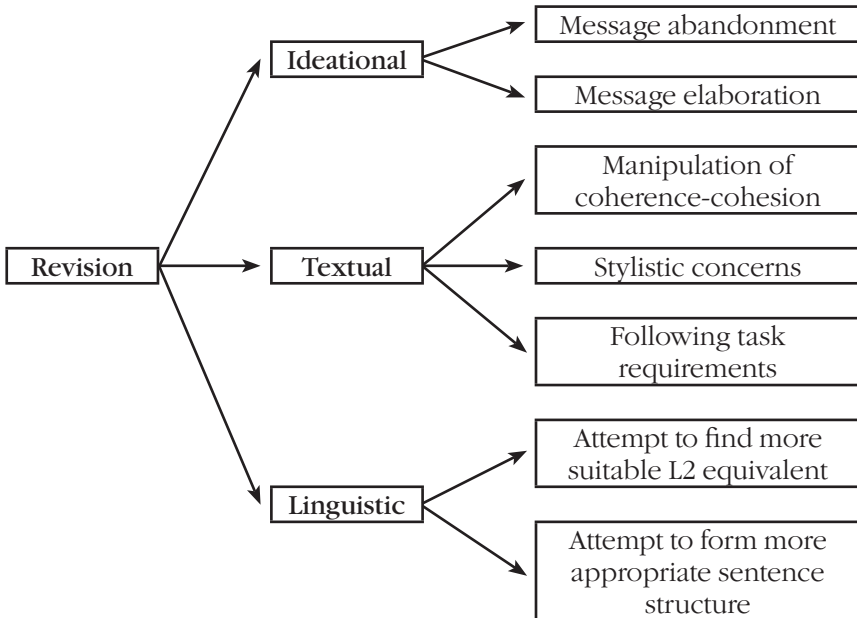


Figure 1. Major types of revision behaviour in L2 composition (based on Roca de Larios et al. [1999])

According to Roca de Larios et al. (1999), ideational-level revisions consist of two different forms: (a) message abandonment: writers find the first attempted formulation unnecessary and abandon it, and (b) message elaboration: writers try to make their intended meaning more specific and try to refine their viewpoint. These revisions at the ideational level are usually undertaken within sentences or at clause levels. Writers' attempts to control the structure of written discourse beyond the clause level are referred to as textual revisions. These are composed of three aspects: (a) manipulation of coherence/cohesion: writers control coherence/cohesion of the discourse by manipulating logical connectors that link propositions or clauses/sentences; (b) stylistic concerns: writers control the written discourse by deploying stylistic devices such as avoiding repetition or using emphatic forms; and (c) following task requirements: writers need to adjust their text to meet the task demands and the teacher's expectations.

Whereas these ideational- and textual-level revisions help writers to improve globally, writers are also concerned about such local aspects as word choice and sentence structure. Accordingly, linguistic-level revisions are undertaken to solve: (a) lexical problems: L2 writers sometimes have difficulty in finding a suitable L2 equivalent for their intended meaning in the L1, and (b) syntactic problems: L2 writers find it challenging to produce grammatically/pragmatically appropriate sentences to express their ideas in the L1.

Based on the combination of these three frameworks, the nature of students' activities during the L2 writing process was investigated and categorized. The data from the students' activities were then carefully analyzed in conjunction with their interview protocols to discern the relationship between overt performance and underlying belief. To help ensure reliability of the data analysis, another experienced teacher who was an English native speaker also analyzed each student's revisions. The two analyses were then compared, and only a few areas of disagreement were found. These were discussed, and some amendments were made to the categorization, so that over 90% agreement was reached.

Results

Students' Revision Behaviors

Tables 1, 2, and 3 below indicate the types of revision operations undertaken by the students and the purposes of those operations. These

tables show that addition and substitution were the operations most frequently employed by all the students, and that consolidation and movement were rarely undertaken. However, closer examination of the tables indicate that there are some differences with regard to the students' concerns during a particular revision act. Across the two tasks, Kana mostly did addition and substitution, mainly for the purpose of elaborating on the message and manipulating coherence/cohesion. Meanwhile, Maki's revision operations overwhelmingly concentrated on substitution with the aim of improving the linguistic level, and on addition for message elaboration and improvement of style. Yuka's attention pattern was similar to Kana's, although it was remarkable that Yuka's concerns were oriented not only toward elaborating on the message but also toward following the task requirements. Examples of students' original and revised essays appear in Appendix C.

**Table 1. Kana's revision operations
Essay 1 (total revisions: 106)**

	Message elaboration	Coherence- Cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Linguistic Improvement
Addition	15	16	2	3	4
Deletion	7		1		
Substitution	20	6	4	1	19
Consolidation	1		2	1	
Movement		4			

Essay 2 (total revisions: 108)

	Message elaboration	Coherence- Cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Linguistic Improvement
Addition	20	17	4		1
Deletion	5	7	1		
Substitution	15	4	6		20
Consolidation	1				
Movement		7			

Note : Message elaboration includes the category of message abandonment.

**Table 2. Maki's revision operations
Essay 1 (total revisions: 92)**

	Message elaboration	Coherence- Cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Linguistic Improvement
Addition	12	6	14	8	
Deletion			6		
Substitution	2		2		42
Consolidation					
Movement					

Essay 2 (total revisions: 72)

	Message elaboration	Coherence- Cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Linguistic Improvement
Addition		8	12		
Deletion					
Substitution			4		48
Consolidation					
Movement					

Note : Message elaboration includes the category of message abandonment.

**Table 3. Yuka's revision operations
Essay 1 (total revisions: 87)**

	Message elaboration	Coherence- Cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Linguistic Improvement
Addition	8	5		7	
Deletion	1	4	1		
Substitution	15		9	12	23
Consolidation					
Movement		2			

Essay 2 (total revisions: 80)

	Message elaboration	Coherence- Cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Linguistic Improvement
Addition	9	3		9	9
Deletion	2		4		
Substitution	13	5	5	8	11
Consolidation					
Movement		2			

Note : Message elaboration includes the category of message abandonment.

These differences become more remarkably apparent in Table 4, which provides a whole picture of which discourse levels (ideational/textual/linguistic) the students were mainly concerned about while they revised their own texts. Kana's drafts showed that more than 60% of the total revisions were undertaken mainly for elaborating on the message and improving coherence/cohesion. Maki paid a great deal of attention to stylistic concerns and linguistic issues. Yuka's revision concerns focused primarily on message elaboration and task requirements, which accounted for nearly half of the total revisions.

The data shows that the three students' writing processes constitute different activities although they were engaged in the same task. Kana was a writer who attended more to global issues such as idea elaboration, coherence, and unity than to other aspects. Yuka's primary concern was to follow what she felt was required by a particular assignment prompt and to fulfill the teacher's expectations. In contrast to Kana and Yuka, Maki devoted more attention to lexicon and syntax. To seek possible reasons as to why these differences emerged among the three students, the next section will discuss how the individual students conceived the task and how they shaped their ideas about academic writing itself.

Table 4. Main revision concerns at different discourse levels

	Ideational		Textual			Linguistic		Total revisions
	Message abandonment	Message elaboration	Coherence-cohesion	Stylistic concerns	Task requirements	Lexical changes	Syntactic changes	
Kana								
Essay 1	7 (6.6%)	36 (34.0%)	26 (24.5%)	9 (8.5%)	5 (4.7%)	18 (17.0%)	5 (4.7%)	106
Essay 2	5 (4.6%)	36 (33.3%)	35 (32.4%)	11 (10.2%)	0 (0%)	17 (15.7%)	4 (3.7%)	108
Maki								
Essay 1	2 (2.2%)	12 (13.0%)	6 (6.5%)	22 (23.9%)	8 (8.7%)	32 (34.7%)	10 (10.9%)	92
Essay 2	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (11.1%)	16 (22.2%)	0 (0%)	32 (44.5%)	16 (22.2%)	72
Yuka								
Essay 1	1 (1.15%)	23 (26.5%)	11 (12.7%)	10 (11.5%)	19 (21.9%)	16 (18.4%)	7 (8.1%)	87
Essay 2	2 (2.5%)	22 (27.5%)	10 (12.5%)	9 (11.3%)	17 (21.3%)	14 (17.5%)	6 (7.5%)	80

Students' Perception of the Task

The students' statements in the interviews highlighted the fact that they interpreted academic writing in the L2 in very different ways, which in turn shaped their dominant activity in the writing process. Consequently, their main concerns during revision acts also varied. For instance, Kana, who tended to pay attention to ideational and textual aspects, conceptualized revision as something central to the writing process and as the thing most relevant to the improvement of the whole text's quality. Her interview protocol showed that her management of these global aspects seemed to result from her strong reader awareness:

As I revise my drafts, I'm always conscious of potential readers of my essay. I always consider what kind of information would be appropriate or necessary for the readers. I say mentally, "the reader must know this, so I'll add it," or "I'll insert this information because this will make that clearer to the reader." (Kana, retrospective interview)

Kana then continued to say that revision always helps her to expand her points. While writing, she turns to her long-term memory for ideas. However, every time she revises her texts, she notices that what she has already written needs a greater elaboration of ideas in order to meet the needs and expectations of potential readers. Thus, she realized that revision is an indispensable process for idea elaboration, and therefore that writing is rewriting. Kana also stressed that in order to rewrite effectively, it is crucial to leave a substantial amount of time between text generation and revision.

Another notable feature of Kana's revision behavior was that she distinguished between revising and editing. Kana realized that revision is crucial for improving the logic and organization of the text and that editing plays a role in changing surface level aspects:

I cannot reread what I wrote for multiple purposes at the same time, so I try to look at different aspects at different stages. I tend to postpone grammatical and lexical concerns until the final stage, because the content and the way I present my ideas are more important in academic writing than the English itself. (Kana, retrospective interview)

The above statements indicate that Kana is a writer who understands the importance of taking into account audience expectations and who seems to be able to pay attention to such global issues as content and discourse organization. Interestingly, Kana stated that she learned the concepts of "reader awareness" and "global concern" in L1 writing (*sakubun*) intensive classes at a Japanese secondary school. Those classes were provided outside regular classes to help individual students prepare for essay writing in university entrance exams. Kana applied some important writing concepts she learned in those L1 writing classes to L2 writing. She also had a number of writing experiences in the L1, mainly through short essay and letter writing, which were self-initiated practices. She acknowledged that previous writing experience had greatly helped her to improve her literacy skills:

I learned in *sakubun* class how significant “reader awareness” is when I write. To communicate with others, writing is a more important tool for me than speaking, because writing allows me to convey an appropriate message. Through my experience, I have found the first draft is always undeveloped with insufficient information, and thus I have come to realize that writing is rewriting. (Kana, retrospective interview)

This protocol shows that her previous writing experiences shaped the way Kana conceived writing and the way she behaved in the writing process. For Kana, writing is an important means of getting her message across to others, and also to keep them informed and entertained. It thus seems that she acted according to these objectives, that is, she turned her interest toward global aspects during revision acts.

Analysis of her interview protocols revealed that the second student, Maki, interpreted academic writing differently from Kana. Whereas Kana was a writer who utilized higher-order processing with the readers’ needs in mind, Maki seemed to be a writer whose main concern was on linguistic form. Accordingly, although Kana regarded revision as something central to the writing process in terms of idea development, Maki defined revision as a rereading activity for the purpose of checking grammar and lexicon. According to Maki, her writing strategy is usually to write everything that comes to mind without considering the appropriateness of grammar or word choices. Maki stated that she was concerned primarily with progressing from one sentence to the next so that the overall flow of her ideas made sense:

Usually I don’t plan before I write or while I am writing. I just write down my ideas as I hit upon them. I want to address my ideas as I want to communicate first without thinking about grammar and word choices. If I pause to think about language use, I will lose the stream of my thoughts. (Maki, retrospective interview)

This explains why Maki rarely paused while writing, believing that she would have difficulties generating the next sentence if she stopped. This strategy employed at the drafting stage appears to move her concerns toward the appropriateness of surface features at the revising stage. She stated that it is crucial for her to concentrate on lexical and syntactic searches during revision acts with an emphasis on how important it is to use sophisticated English in academic writing:

When I revise my draft, I try to search for more academic and more sophisticated expressions. I always consider, "if a native English writer writes this, how does he/she say it?" I concentrate on these cosmetic operations usually in the final stage of writing. (Maki, retrospective interview)

According to her statement, Maki's primary interest in surface-level features stemmed from her prior experience of Japanese-to-English translation. When she was enrolled in an international economics course at a Japanese university, she translated business documents on a regular basis, and since then she has been interested in translating Japanese sentences into sophisticated English:

I enjoyed translation class when I was an undergraduate student. Since then, I have always liked expressing something in a foreign language. For me, the number one priority in academic writing is the English itself rather than the content. International students don't have an intuitive ability to handle English and they have disadvantages in terms of fluency, accuracy, and quality compared with native English speakers. So, I think I should work hard to catch up with their English or get the better of them. (Maki, retrospective interview)

Maki's protocol shows that her writing processes also seem to be influenced by her previous experiences, like those of Kana's. Through her prior experience with translation, Maki appears to have developed the idea that a good writer is one who can create a good English sentence with accuracy, fluency, and quality. Although the academic writing tasks she was involved in for the present study did not include translation, the focus on linguistic forms inherent in translation was evident in her approach.

The revision behavior of Yuka, the third student, more closely resembled that of Kana than that of Maki. Yuka attended primarily to textual discourse with potential readers in mind in the same way as Kana did. However, the nature of their reader awareness did not seem to be the same, in that Yuka was afraid of deviating from the norms of academic writing and tried to follow the assignment prompts carefully. Her interview protocol clearly showed her concern about achieving the goal of a specific assignment task:

When I revise my draft, I try to see if it follows a set topic and direction in an appropriate manner. I have to write differently according to the genre. For example, if the required task is a de-

scriptive one, I have to explain it in a detailed manner. If the task is an analytical one, I have to analyze and present my arguments in a logical way. I realized that understanding these task requirements is really important in Western universities. I failed to pass the course requirement before because my written assignments deviated from the norm. Since then, my revision focus has been to see if my text would meet the requirements of the assignment. (Yuka, retrospective interview)

Yuka's concerns about following task requirements seem to stem from her perceived difficulties with academic writing conventions. As noted in her statement above, the assignment questions were sometimes difficult to understand, and thus she could not identify what she was expected to do in the assigned task. In particular, the verbs of instruction such as "analyze," "describe," and "evaluate" were unfamiliar to Yuka. She understood that the different instructive verbs such as "analyze" and "describe" required her to take a different approach, but she had no idea about how to do it. Due to an insufficient understanding of academic writing norms, Yuka failed to pass her first course requirements. This may be why her concerns moved toward following task requirements during revision acts.

It appears that for Yuka, as with Kana and Maki, her revision behaviors are also influenced by her past experiences. Yuka stated that she had failed in her previous course because she did not fulfill the task requirements. Since then, Yuka seems to have developed her awareness of revision as an important tool for adjusting her texts to the teacher's expectations and set requirements. All in all, the three students seem to have undertaken different writing processes for reasons which are based on their past learning and writing experiences.

Concluding Discussion

The preceding analysis provides evidence in support of a key premise of activity theory: while ostensibly the same task or blueprint may be assigned to multiple doers, the activity it generates will be unique to each individual. It also highlights the importance of students' previous experience, that is, their learning history, in the formation of their present attitudes and behaviors. The learning history of each of the three participants prior to the actual task determined the way they interpreted it and the way they thought during the writing process. As explained by Gillette (1994), learners' social environment determines their attitudes

toward foreign language study, and they are likely to act and think in accordance with their particular beliefs and goals. Their life circumstances, therefore, cannot be excluded from investigation of L2 success (Gillete, 1994, p. 198).

Although the result of this small-scale case study might not be extrapolated to a larger population of L2 students, the finding characterized by “same task, different activities” in the writing processes raises some immediate pedagogical implications. First, L2 writing teachers need to consider what L2 students bring to their classroom in terms of their learning histories, beliefs and goals. Teachers usually look at students’ final product and tend not to see how their learning histories and motives influence their writing processes. Students are then placed in different classes according to their L2 proficiency and their writing skills measured by the test scores. However, the results of this study imply that L2 students at the same stage of development might have very different motives and routes to their goals. Thus, it is highly advisable for teachers to assess students’ performance in light of their learning histories, self-knowledge, and expectations, even at the beginning of a course in order to know why they act as they do.

Second, teachers would do well to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses by analyzing the individual students’ learning history. The present data shows that the students interpreted academic writing very differently and hence they wrote differently according to their different beliefs. Although the present study did not aim to identify which beliefs are correct or incorrect in terms of L2 learning, it appears that there is room for improvement in these students’ revision behaviors. Kana, who showed global concerns during the writing process most frequently among the three students, was evaluated as the most successful writer by her teacher. The two essays (descriptive and analytical ones) that Kana produced were both graded as HD, High Distinction, which corresponds to over 80 points out of 100 (Appendix D). Maki and Yuka reported that their essays were evaluated as D, Distinction, which means 70-79 out of 100 points (Appendix D). These results seem to indicate that Kana’s beliefs about reader awareness and her revising strategies to achieve her set goals might have led to successful writing. These beliefs about writing concepts had been acquired through her previous L1 writing experience, and were transferred to her L2 writing. Such behavior appears to be a manifestation of writing expertise that cannot be acquired over a short period of time. Meanwhile, compared to Kana, Maki and Yuka had received less formal instruction in these

writing concepts in either L1 or L2 contexts, and this influenced the way they looked at academic writing. Their scant writing experience, which included no formal instruction, formed their particular beliefs about how they should revise and what aspects they should pay attention to in the writing process. Considering their insufficient knowledge base on writing, metaknowledge instruction, namely, an attempt to train inexperienced writers to adopt specific strategies about how to write and how to revise, might be helpful for Maki and Yuka in changing the way they interpret a task and engage in a written assignment, and thereby help them become better writers.

Teachers need to develop an awareness of students as individual agents involved in shaping their activities based on their own particular goals and previous learning histories. The individual's beliefs and motives largely determine which actions will be maximized and selected and how they will be undertaken in a particular setting. This indicates that different learning outcomes might be accomplished even though learners apparently engage in the same task under the same instruction in the same classroom. Hence, researchers must be careful not to presume that an experimental group performed better than a control group solely because of a particular set of instructions and a particular task. There might be differences even among members within the same group in terms of their task interpretation and their strategies for completing the task. Examining the processes whereby individual learners undertake a task would be more informative than looking merely at a subject group's product because just because students undertake the same task does not mean that they are engaged in the same activity.

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Appendix A

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) tests the complete range of English language skills that is commonly encountered by students when studying or training in the medium of English. IELTS is accepted by most Australian, British, Canadian, and New Zealand academic institutions.

Candidates receive scores for each language subskill (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) and an Overall Band Score on a Band Scale from 1 to 9. Candidates are assessed on a scale from NonUser (1) to Expert User (9). Band Scores are allocated a Band Descriptor profiling the language competence of the candidate. For example, *Band 6 Descriptor - Competent User: Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriate uses, and misunderstandings. Can use and*

understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations (International English Language Testing System [IELTS], 2004).

Appendix B

Selected Questions

A sample of selected questions asked in the Japanese interview regarding the students' writing process (translated by the author from Japanese into English)

- (1) ドラフト1と2を見比べた時、単語・センテンス・パラグラフレベルでいくつかの修正が見られます。なぜ、この修正をしたのですか。その時、何を考えましたか。

When your two different drafts were observed, it was found that you made some lexical/semantic/paragraph level-revisions. Why did you make those changes? What did you think when you made these revisions?

- (2) このアサインメントで何が求められているのか（教員の期待）理解していましたか。

Did you understand what you were expected to write or what your teacher's expectations were in this writing assignment?

- (3) このアサインメントに関して、あなたはどのように準備を始めたのですか。あなたのライティング・プロセスについて教えてください。

How did you begin preparations for this writing assignment? Please tell me about your writing processes.

- (4) 書く過程で難しかった点は何ですか。

What problems/concerns did you have in the process of completing your final piece of essay?

- (5) これまでに英語アカデミックライティングについて学んだことがありますか。あなたのライティング経験について教えてください。

Have you been formally taught English academic writing? Please tell me about your prior writing experience.

Appendix C

Examples of students' original and revised essays

Excerpt (1): Kana's drafts: "Analysis of English language teaching in Japan"

Draft 1

English education system in Japanese senior high school

In the Year 11, students engage in grammar and reading lessons. In the Year 11, writing and reading lessons are imposed on them. In the Year 12, they prepare for university entrance examinations. Oral communication is supposed to be held once or twice a week, but it is sometimes omitted because of its uselessness in university entrance examinations.

Draft 2

English education system in Japanese senior high school

In the Year 11, students engage in grammar and reading lessons. In the Year 11, writing and reading lessons are imposed on them. In the Year 12, they prepare for university entrance examinations. **Grammar, reading, writing lessons are taught by Japanese teachers of English, while oral communication is conducted in team-teaching. In the team-teaching classroom, students and teachers are engaged in communicative activities.**^(a) Oral communication is supposed to be held once or twice a week, but it is sometimes omitted because of its uselessness in university entrance examinations.

(a) addition for message elaboration

Draft 3

English education system in Japanese senior high school

In the Year 11, students engage in grammar and reading lessons. In the Year 11, writing and reading lessons are imposed on them. In the Year 12, they prepare for university entrance examinations. Grammar, reading, writing lessons are taught by Japanese teachers of English, while oral communication is conducted in team-teaching. In the team-teach-

ing classroom, students and teachers are engaged in communicative activities. **Oral communication lesson in team-teaching emerged as one of the most important issues in English language education in Japan.**^(b) Oral communication is supposed to be held once or twice a week, but it is sometimes omitted because of its uselessness in university entrance examinations.

(b) addition for message elaboration

Draft 4

English education system in Japanese senior high school

In the Year 11, students engage in grammar and reading lessons. In the Year 11, writing and reading lessons are imposed on them. In the Year 12, they prepare for university entrance examinations. Grammar, reading, writing lessons are taught by Japanese teachers of English, while oral communication is conducted in team-teaching. In the team-teaching classroom, students and teachers are engaged in communicative activities. Oral communication lesson in team-teaching emerged as one of the most important **goals**^(c) in English language education in Japan, **since the communicative competence has been increasing its significance these days.**^(d) **Nevertheless,**^(e) oral communication is supposed to be held once or twice a week, **and also**^(f) it is sometimes omitted because of its uselessness in university entrance examinations.

(c) substitution for linguistic improvement; (d) addition for improving coherence; (e) addition for improving coherence; (f) substitution for improving coherence

Draft 5

English education system in Japanese senior high school

In the Year 11, students engage in grammar and reading lessons. In the Year 11, writing and reading lessons are imposed on them. In the Year 12, they prepare for university entrance examinations. **In addition to these activities, oral communication classes are also undertaken.**^(g) Grammar, reading, writing lessons are taught by Japanese teachers of English, while oral communication is conducted in team-teaching. In the team-teaching classroom, students and teachers are engaged in

communicative activities. Oral communication lesson in team-teaching emerged as one of the most important goals in English language education in Japan, since the communicative competence has been increasing its significance these days. Nevertheless, oral communication is supposed to be held once or twice a week, and also it is sometimes omitted **because an oral test is not included in university entrance examinations.**^(h) **Thus, the three skills such as grammar, reading, and writing are more emphasized than oral communication skills in English education in Japanese schools.**⁽ⁱ⁾

(g) addition for improving coherence; (h) substitution for message elaboration; (i) addition for message elaboration

Excerpt (2): Maki's drafts: "Analysis of English language teaching in Japan"

Draft 1

In my experience as an English teacher in Japan, I felt the big cultural difference with a native speaker of English. Some of English teachers in Japanese schools are supposed to teach with native speaking teachers, and I was in charge of that. When we were teaching how to ask jobs in the oral communication class, using the expression "what is your job?", my teaching partner corrected my expression, saying "we seldom use this way but use the expression 'what do you do?' instead. It's much better." I blushed at the time, because my English was corrected in front of my students. Japanese do not tend to say something honestly while English speaking people normally do.

Draft 2

In my experience as an English teacher in Japan, **I had some occasions where I felt cultural differences to my coworker who is a native speaker of English.**^(a) **I was in charge of team-teaching with a native speaker at my school.**^(b) When we were teaching how to ask jobs in the oral communication class, using the expression "what is your job?", my teaching partner corrected my expression, saying "we seldom use this way but use the expression 'what do you do?' instead. It's much better." I blushed at the time, because my English was corrected in front of my students. Japanese do not tend to say something honestly while English speaking people normally do.

(a) substitution for linguistic improvement; (b) substitution for linguistic improvement

Draft 3

In my experience as an English teacher in Japan, I had some occasions where I felt cultural differences to my coworker who is a native speaker of English. I was in charge of team-teaching with a native speaker at my school. **In the oral communication class, when I used the expression “what is your job?”, my teaching partner corrected it** ^(c), saying “we don’t say that way but use the expression ‘what do you do?’ instead. It’s much better.” I blushed at the time, because my English was corrected in front of my students. Japanese do not tend to say something honestly while English speaking people normally do.

(c) substitution for linguistic improvement

Draft 4

In my experience as an English teacher in Japan, I had some occasions where I felt cultural differences to my coworker who is a native speaker of English. I was in charge of team-teaching with a native speaker at my school. In the oral communication class, when I used the expression “what is your job?”, my teaching partner corrected it, saying “we don’t say that way but use the expression ‘what do you do?’ instead. It’s much more natural and much better.” **I was embarrassed that my English was corrected in front of my students.** ^(d) **I felt that this event comes from cultural differences between Japanese and Western people.** ^(e) Japanese do not tend to say something honestly while English speaking people normally do.

(d) substitution for linguistic improvement; (e) addition for message elaboration

Excerpt (3): Yuka’s drafts: “Analysis of the curriculum of Japanese language teaching”

Draft 1

The sewing company in Hiroshima has accepted sewing trainees from Vietnam since 1996. The number of trainees who has come to Ja-

pan sums up more than 300. The trainees stay in Hiroshima for their first two weeks in order to take Japanese language class, and then they start working at factories for next three years. Once they get to the factory, everything is done in Japanese, and therefore, the trainees are expected to acquire high Japanese language proficiency in a short term. In this sense, the curriculum of the Japanese language class at the sewing company is different from that of other schools. In spite of its originality, there has been little study on the curriculum of the language courses for professional purposes. This paper will analyze the curriculum of Japanese intensive course for Vietnamese trainees at the sewing company in Hiroshima.

Draft 2

The sewing company in Hiroshima has accepted sewing trainees from Vietnam since 1996. The number of trainees who has come to Japan sums up more than 300. The trainees stay in Hiroshima for their first two weeks in order to take Japanese language class, and then they start working at factories for next three years. Once they get to the factory, everything is done in Japanese, and therefore, the trainees are expected to acquire high Japanese language proficiency in a short term. In this sense, the curriculum of the Japanese language class at the sewing company is different from that of other schools. In spite of its originality, there has been little study on **evaluating**^(a) the curriculum of the language courses for professional purposes. **Arima (1982) introduced curriculum and teaching method in conversation class for trainees. Inaba (1986) also introduced language program for trainees focusing on methodology**^(b). This paper will analyze the curriculum of Japanese intensive course for Vietnamese trainees at the sewing company in Hiroshima, **in terms of language teaching and learning, learners' needs and the context in the class**^(c).

(a) addition for meeting task requirements; (b) addition for meeting task requirements; (c) addition for meeting task requirements

Draft 3

The sewing company in Hiroshima has accepted sewing trainees from Vietnam since 1996. The number of trainees who has come to Japan sums up more than 300. The trainees stay in Hiroshima for their first two weeks in order to take Japanese language class, and then they start

working at factories for next three years. Once they get to the factory, everything is done in Japanese, and therefore, the trainees are expected to acquire high Japanese language proficiency in a short term. In this sense, the curriculum of the Japanese language class at the sewing company is different from that of other schools. In spite of its originality, there has been little study on evaluating the curriculum of the language courses for professional purposes. Arima (1982) introduced curriculum and teaching method in conversation class for trainees. Inaba (1986) also introduced language program for trainees focusing on methodology. **These studies focused on relatively short-term program, and there has been no study dealing with long-term trainee program.** (d) This paper will analyze the curriculum of Japanese intensive course for Vietnamese trainees at the sewing company in Hiroshima, in terms of language teaching and learning, learners' needs and the context in the class. **In addition, comments and suggestions for improving aspects of the curriculum will be given** (e).

(d) addition for improving coherence; (e) addition for meeting task requirements

Draft 4

The sewing company in Hiroshima has accepted sewing trainees from Vietnam since 1996. The number of trainees who has come to Japan sums up more than 300. The trainees stay in Hiroshima for their first two weeks in order to take Japanese language class, and then they start working at factories for next three years. Once they get to the factory, everything is done in Japanese, and therefore, the trainees are expected to acquire high Japanese language proficiency in a short term. In this sense, the curriculum of the Japanese language class at the sewing company is different from that of other schools. In spite of its originality, there has been little study on evaluating the curriculum of the language courses for professional purposes. Arima (1982) introduced curriculum and teaching method in conversation class for trainees. Inaba (1986) also introduced language program for trainees focusing on methodology. These studies focused on relatively short-term program, and there has been no study dealing with **the curriculum of** (f) long-term trainee program. This paper will analyze the curriculum of Japanese intensive course for Vietnamese trainees at the sewing company in Hiroshima, in terms of language teaching and learning, learners' needs and the con-

text in the class. In addition, **critical** (g) comments and suggestions for improving aspects of the curriculum will be **provided** (h).

(f) addition for meeting task requirements; (g) addition for meeting task requirements; (h) substitution for linguistic improvement

Draft 5

~~The sewing company in Hiroshima has accepted sewing trainees from Vietnam since 1996~~ (i). **The number of foreigners who come to Japan to learn innovative technology, so called trainees, is increasing in the last several decades** (j). ~~The trainees stay in Hiroshima for their first two weeks in order to take Japanese language class, and then they start working at factories for next three years. Once they get to the factory, everything is done in Japanese, and therefore, the trainees are expected to acquire high Japanese language proficiency in a short term~~ (k). **In general, their stay in Japan is temporary and they engage in some specific work. Therefore, their needs of learning Japanese are also specific in order to suit their different objectives** (l). ~~In this sense, the curriculum of the Japanese language class at the sewing company is different from that of other schools~~ (m). **In spite of this situation, there has been little study on trainee programs in Japan** (n). Arima (1982) introduced curriculum and teaching method in conversation class for trainees. Inaba (1986) also introduced language program for trainees focusing on methodology. These studies focused on relatively short-term program, and there has been no study dealing with the curriculum of long-term trainee program. This paper will analyze the curriculum of Japanese intensive course for Vietnamese trainees at the sewing company in Hiroshima, in terms of **course designers' beliefs about** (o) language teaching and learning, **their assumptions about** (p) learners' needs and the context in the class. In addition, critical comments and suggestions for improving aspects of the curriculum will be provided.

(i) deletion for improving coherence; (j) substitution for message elaboration; (k) deletion for improving coherence; (l) addition for message elaboration; (m) deletion for improving coherence; (n) substitution for improving coherence; (o) addition for meeting task requirements; (p) addition for meeting task requirements

Appendix D

*Grading Scale Policy for Postgraduate Students
at an Australian University*

The following grading scale applies:

Coursework Units		
High Distinction	(HD)	80+
Distinction	(D)	70-79
Credit	(C)	60-69
Pass	(P)	50-59
Fail	(N)	Less than 50