Students' Perceived Problems in an EAP Writing Course

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This longitudinal qualitative study investigated the kinds of problems identified by students while they completed their writing assignments as well as the ways in which they handled the problems in the writing component of an EAP program at a Japanese university. It also attempted to analyze the sources of the problems in order to find optimal ways to initiate the students into the new discourse community and give guidance along their writing process.

本研究は、ある日本の大学におけるEAPのライティングコースを受講する学生がライティング過程において何を問題視し、どのようにその問題を解決しているかについて質的リサーチ方法を用い、縦断的に観察した。又、学生の提示する問題の根源を分析し、今後どのように学生を新しいディスコースコミュニティーに導入し、ライティング過程でどのような指導をしていくことが適切か検討した。

Introduction

The first year in a university is the beginning of a new life for most students. Not only are they fresh in college, but they are also expected to join an academic community. As most of us are aware, joining a new community is by no means easy. It requires the learning of the conventions of the new community and adjustment on our part. In order to facilitate students' needs, an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) program is provided at some universities. It is designed so as to initiate the students into the conventions of the English academic world. What

does participation in an EAP writing program entail for Japanese students in an EFL setting?

First of all, a typical first year Japanese student has studied at least six years of English, yearning for the best results in entrance examinations. This means that most of their English writing training has been at sentence level or at best paragraph level. Even in their L1, the writing training in Japanese at school is usually limited to personal writing such as diaries (Matsuda, 2001) or book reports mostly on novels (Sasaki, 2001; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002), and *shoronbun* (a short essay) at cram schools in preparation for their college entrance examinations (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002). A good EAP program generally analyzes the requirements of the academic discourse community outside the program and introduces them to the students as class activities (McCagg, Chenoweth, Era, Hays, & Stein, 1991; Raimes, 1985). As a result, the students are often expected to produce academic essays or research papers using academic discourse and not personal writings or paragraph/sentence-level writings alone. Academic writing requires highly cognitively demanding tasks such as evaluation and interpretation of texts and synthesis of various ideas. The definition of a good piece of writing is based on the "social practice" of the given community context (Hyland, 2003, p. 25). Thus, writers face much pressure to respond to what they believe will be valued and rewarded within the context they are writing (Ivanič, 1994). That is, "academic contexts have a powerful influence on how students define and approach writing tasks" (Riazi, 1997, p. 106).

As Bereiter and Scardamalia stated, students are naturally expected to go beyond "'knowledge-telling' forms of writing to 'knowledge-transforming'" (cited in Leki & Carson, 1994, p. 96). Ultimately, "writing is a tool for assessing and promoting student understanding and independent thinking on specific matter" (Shih, 1986, p. 641). Moreover, students should write in the "voice, register, tone, and diction" (Elbow, 1991, p.149) appropriate to academic discourse (Horowitz, 1986; Silva, 1990), while, at the same time, if writing in EFL, they must orient themselves to the English ways of constructing voice, which is different from those of Japanese (Matsuda, 2001). Consequently, they sometimes feel "restrained from expressing [their] authentic voice (Kubota, 2001, p. 106). Thus, it can be easily predicted how writing in an academic discourse can be difficult for novice writers (Gosden, 1996).

In addition, the academic community expects students to "write to learn" (Shih, 1986, p. 641). Here, writing is seen as a process of discovering and making meaning: a process of problem solving (Zamel, 1983). Thus,

many EAP writing courses have adopted a process approach to writing, in which the emphasis is no longer placed on the product alone (e.g., Arndt, 1993; Pennington, Brock & Yue, 1996). In brief, an EAP program requires EFL students not only to acquire academic conventions but also to produce new types of assignments or new learning styles in a second language. Students are most likely to experience writing in a completely different way from what they were used to in high school.

Overall, "unskilled writers" have been characterized as those who are more concerned with surface-level errors and less flexible in using metacognitive skills such as planning and revising (Uzawa, 1996). On the other hand, "skilled writers" have been found to explore and discover ideas (Zamel, 1983) while at the same time they are capable of using metacognitive skills effectively (Raimes, 1985). Developing these skills would reduce writers' cognitive burden and maximize their writing performance (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991). Thus, it is vital for teachers to provide the means by which learners can solve the problem as they go along—such as writing strategies (cognitive and metacognitive) appropriate for each stage of the writing process.

This, however, cannot be achieved without the teachers' accurate understanding of their students. That is, this issue cannot be discussed without considering what writing experiences and knowledge students bring into the classroom, not to mention what stages of the writing process or aspects of writing students find problematic and why certain points are encountered as problems. At the same time, it is essential that students become aware of their own problems. As Reid (1993) states the use of reflective journals gives learners opportunities to reflect on their own decision-making and problem solving processes while learning. By examining their own problems, they begin to monitor their writing, and to take responsibility for finding their own solutions. This kind of continuous effort eventually leads them to become autonomous learners, which is the ideal long-term goal of any language learner (Oxford, 1990).

This study looked at what students perceive as problems while they fulfill requirements in the writing component of an EAP program at a Japanese university. In addition, it attempted to analyze what the sources of the problems are and how the problems are handled in order to find appropriate ways to familiarize the students with the new discourse and guide them through their writing process smoothly.

Method

The Site

The study took place at a four-year college in Japan that requires all first-year students regardless of their majors to go through an intensive English program for academic purposes. In this program, students develop their writing and thinking abilities in English for university level work as they go through a content-based and process-oriented curriculum (McCagg et al., 1991; Moriya, 1999b; see Appendix A for an overview of the curriculum). An average student takes eight seventy-minute English classes and some tutorial sessions, along with a minimum of two three-credit general education courses outside the program during each nine-week trimester. This study followed the same students over the course of the entire 1999-2000 academic year.

Participants

Ten students were selected from among the first-year students in the researchers' classes[1] on the basis of their willingness to participate fully in the study: seven female students (Mari, Mami, Remi, Kyoko, Maho, Hiro, and Saya) and three male students (Sho, Yota, and Shige). A pseudonym has been assigned to each participant by the researchers in order to protect their privacy. All students were enrolled in this program for the first time in the spring term of the 1999-2000 academic year. Their average TOEFL score in April 1999 was 506. None of them had had any experience living or studying in an English-speaking country at the beginning of this study. However, four of the participants (Hiro, Sho, Mami and Mari) joined a six-week intensive English program in North America in the summer of 1999. The training in L1 writing was diverse, with all of them given some experience in writing a research paper. However, the majority had never received any formal training. In contrast, their training in English writing was limited to personal writing except for Saya and Remi, who had written a few research papers in English in high school (see Appendix B and C for details).

Data Collection

In this qualitative research study, multiple data collection methods, a combination of three different sources for assessing learners' writing problems, was used: journals, oral interviews and a questionnaire

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990)**.** The participants were asked to keep a journal and reflect upon their composing processes. This provided them with opportunities for investigating their writing styles and analyzing their strengths and weaknesses in writing. To begin with, they were called in for an orientation, at which both oral and written instructions were given. Since this was not part of a required class assignment but rather based on voluntary participation, students were not specifically instructed on the frequency or quantity of the journal entries. They were instead encouraged to write as often and as much as they could or wanted to write. As a result, a wide range of patterns was observed from those who wrote after almost every class to those who wrote once right before submitting their journals.

The participants were asked to submit their diaries five times over a year, each time followed by a 15 to 20 minute individual oral interview with the researchers. The purpose of the oral interviews was to provide the participants with opportunities to amend and make further comments on their various written works to avoid inaccurate interpretation and false assumptions on the researchers' part. All the journal entries were copied for the record. In addition, the interviews were audio-taped as well as documented in note form. The language choice for both the journals and the interviews was based on the participants' preference: English or Japanese or both. The questionnaire was used to gather background information from the students such as their L1 and L2 writing experience prior to the start of the program.

Results

The researchers looked at the data for recurring patterns, then classified and labeled them into categories as the students reported different problems. Each researcher looked at the data and contrasted the results for analysis. The kinds of problems the participants seemed to have had trouble with while going through the processes of completing an essay assignment could be roughly divided into three areas: surface-level problems, macro-level problems, and external factors (see Table 1). Surface-level concerns included discrete points such as grammatical accuracy or choice of appropriate/suitable expressions. On the other hand, among the macro-level concerns were topic, focus, use of sources, coherence, or conclusion, issues related with the process and the organization of an essay. Finally, external factors were those constraints bound by the requirements of the assignment: the deadline,

word count requirements, and the availability of appropriate sources. Other factors such as their perception of teachers' expectations, lack of positive reinforcement, and their attitudes toward L1 use were also categorized as external factors.

Table 1: Kinds of Problems

Surface-level	Macro-level	External Factors
Grammar	Planning	Time (deadline)
Mechanics	Topic	Word count requirements
Expressions	Focus/ Support	Availability of appropriate sources
	Use of sources	Teacher's expectation
	Coherence	Positive reinforcement
	Conclusion	Use of L1

The reported problems were originally identified either by the students themselves or pointed out by a third person such as a teacher or peer. The self-detected problems were those identified while trying to accomplish an assigned task or triggered by a class lecture. On the other hand, some problems were identified as a result of teacher or peer feedback.

Analysis and Discussion

In the following sections, each of the three areas of problems, surface- and macro-level problems, and external demands is discussed in detail. Students' voices presented hereafter are directly quoted from their journals and interviews including Japanese entries, which were translated into English by the researchers.

Surface-Level Problems

Surface-level problems include grammatical accuracy, mechanics such as the format for writing a reference list, and expressions including word choice, L1 transfer, and features of academic discourse.

Grammatical Accuracy

Very few participants reported grammatical accuracy as a problem. Mari, for instance, showed uncertainty in her use of tense in the spring term but macro-level issues completely took over during the succeeding terms. Yota too wrote about grammar in one case in the fall term; however, he did not seem to be much concerned with it.

> Yota: The first essay was returned.... It seems that there were quite a few grammatical mistakes. [Oct. 25, 1999, translation]

Following this entry, he explained the reasons for such feedback and said;

> Yota**:** Well, I only finished writing my essay the day before the deadline, so I had time to neither proofread it myself nor ask a friend or a teacher to proofread it for me. [Oct. 25, 1999, translation]

In the interview following the submission of the journal, he explained that he had spent too much time on deciding a thesis statement and supporting details and that he had no time for proofreading. He added that he was well aware of its importance. To complete the assignment and submit it to his teacher in time was more significant for Yota. This is not surprising when the program focuses on organization of ideas in writing, as opposed to discrete language features such as grammar.

Mechanics: Reference List or Work-Cited Page

Two students, Hiro and Maho, claimed difficulty in making a reference list. For example, Hiro said she first did not know how to make a work-cited page properly.

> Hiro: This was my first time to make work cited. I didn't know how to do it. [Oct. 16, 1999]

Then what she did was to turn to her textbook. She commented in the interview that she found the right page in her textbook and found it very helpful. Maho, on the other hand, had left her textbook at school and did not have it available at the time she did her assignment at home. She then called her classmate and got the necessary information. However, she got her essay back covered with corrections on the work-cited page.

> Maho: When I read the last essay of last term I found several gram-
> matical mistakes, and mistakes on works cited. I didn't refer to
> LBH², so I still do not know how to write it. When I wrote it, I
> didn't have LBH (it was in my locker at school, and I was at home).
> [Jan. 5, 2000]

In this manner, writing a reference list properly could be one surface-level problem EAP students may encounter, although students do often have course textbooks or reference books (e.g., Fowler & Aaron, 1998) to turn to for detailed information.

Expressions

Another surface issue repeatedly reported as a problem concerned expressions. Problems related to expressions can be subdivided into roughly three domains: redundancy, effect of L1 (Japanese), and objectivity often expected in academic writing. First of all, redundant expressions seem to trouble some students. For example, Mari wrote in her journal that her weakness in writing was lack of vocabulary and thus she had to repeat the same expressions too many times, which led to redundancy.

> Mari: I'm disappointed at lack of my vocabulary. For conjunctions,
> I can only think of *and, but, or, as, however,* and for intensifiers, I
> can only think of *only* and *just*. [June 13, 1999, translation]

Another student, Maho, also faced a problem of redundancy at sentence level. Interestingly, Maho tried to link what she did in English and what she would do in writing in Japanese and found it redundant in both cases.

> Maho: In the essay I mentioned the same things many times; "too
> many people around the world believe the clearness of race, be-
> cause..." but it is also "*kudoi*"³ in Japanese. [Nov. 14, 1999]

She noticed the problem, but she could not avoid it because of her lack of vocabulary.

Another concern students showed in relation to expressions was the effect of L1 (Japanese) on their English expressions. For instance:

> Shige**:** I was told not to use *but* at the beginning of a sentence. I can't
> help but think that unless I'm making an important statement, *how-
> ever* sounds too formal. Is it because I am translating from "*shikashi-
> nagara*"⁴? *Though* sounds too casual. [Oct. 3, 1999, translation]

In this case, Shige was concerned about the effects of translating directly from Japanese to English. Shige wanted to use the Japanese conjunctive postpositional particle *ga*, which in his mind translated into the English conjunction *but*. However, he was instructed to use *however*, which in his mind only translated into a rather formal Japanese conjunction *shikashinagara*. Here, Shige is in conflict between the Japanese and the English ways of expressing voice (Kubota, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Ivanič, 1994).

Academic writing requires the writers to "create a distance between the writer and the text to give the appearance of objectivity" (Johns, 1997). This use of objective language was a third domain that students seemed to find troublesome. Both Yota and Mari, for example, had trouble avoiding subjective expressions such as "I."

> Yota: I have used a subjective expression such as "I don't mean..." I was instructed to make a more general statement. [May 11, 1999, translation]

> Mari: I tried as best as I could to avoid using "I" or "you" but there are cases where I can't help using these terms. What should I do? [Sep. 29, 1999, translation]

Mari had previously received similar feedback from the same teacher; therefore, she paid careful attention not to use too many subjective expressions when she rewrote her draft. In this case, she asked her teacher about this point during a tutorial in order to solve the problem (in the interview on Nov. 20, 1999). "Subject-positioning" is so important that failure to do so may result in writers' block when writers feel "uncomfortable with the self which they are projecting as they write" (Ivanič, 1994, p. 6).

In a process approach writing program, surface-level instructions are typically postponed until much later in the process. Thus, it is quite natural that the participants in this study did not write much about such problems. However, the reported problems in the area of expression—redundancy, effects of L1, and objectivity should not be marginalized as unimportant problems because they are not simple mechanical problems of writing but rather fundamental problems caused by the differences in the nature of expressing one's voice in L1 and L2 (Matsuda, 2001; Kubota, 2001; Gosden, 1996; Ivanič, 1994).

Macro-level Problems

Many of the participants reported that they encountered problems in the earlier stages of the composing process. The first hurdle was planning for a task, especially making sense of directions and feedback. Next, students often failed to choose an appropriate topic, which led to another problem: that of coming up with a strong thesis statement. A third problem was the inability to hold a decisive opinion about the topic of one's choice, which reflected on the difficulties of their making a thesis, taking a position, and choosing the expected three supporting points[5]. Another persistent problem concerned the use of sources, including finding enough effective evidence and integrating the supporting evidence found with one's opinions. Furthermore, use of appropriate metadiscourse was a challenge for them. Finally, writing a conclusion also emerged as a problematic area.

In a process-oriented writing course, students need to plan for tasks throughout the composing process. Planning takes place recurrently; therefore, students encounter problems recursively. For example, they may identify problems while reading a prompt before writing a draft or while reading and analyzing teachers' feedback before revising a draft. Like Ferris' students (1995), our students seemed to have faced various problems in understanding directions or teachers' comments. The examples below illustrate how students interpret directions and teachers' comments.

Planning: Interpreting Directions and Teachers' Feedback

Understanding directions promptly and accurately in a second language as well as in an area that is new is a constant struggle for the students (Sasaki, 2001; Currie, 1998; Riazi, 1997).

> Mari: I just couldn't figure out what to write even after I read the directions. [Sept. 12, 1999, translation]

> Mami: However, there was a problem. I had to use key concepts from ALL three RD[6] [reading and discussion] classes, but in my outline I didn't think about the third reading. I had misinterpreted the directions. [Oct. 8,1999]

Mari could not begin her summer assignment because she could not get a clear sense of what the assignment was asking her to do. Mami, too, failed to complete the assignment properly, for she had also misunder-

stood the directions. Furthermore, in the spring term, it was commonly observed that students struggled with teachers' written feedback.

> Mami: I didn't understand well what my teacher meant in his comments. [May, 31, 1999, translation]

> Mari: When I submitted my essay during the previous class, the teacher told me, "This looks OK. Please work more and bring it to tutorial." However, I didn't quite understand what I could improve. So, I ended up not making any changes, and told the teacher about it. [June 4, 1999, translation]

Both Mami and Mari had intended to revise their essays; however, they failed to do so because of their difficulty in understanding the teachers' comments. In writing courses, where students' second language, in this case English, is the sole language of instruction, giving clear directions is an area that teachers should pay attention to.

Choosing a Topic

One of the major problems students encountered at the beginning stages of the writing process was choosing an appropriate topic. This seemed to be mainly due to the lack of sufficient knowledge of the topic of their choice. Students tended to choose their topics based on their interests and willingness to learn more about the topics. That is, some students saw this as a learning opportunity in a new intellectual realm (Riazi, 1997). Moreover, in many instances, the students were only vaguely familiar with the topics and felt ambivalent or lacked strong opinions about the topics. Consequently, students faced problems when writing the thesis statements.

> Kyoko: The tropical forests are disappearing for different reasons. The diversity of the tropical forests cannot be ignored. I was afraid that my teacher would tell me that my topic is too broad. However, I decided that I would discuss this issue as a whole instead of narrowing it down to a specific region. That is because I found it interesting that tropical forests exist across the globe. Since I didn't have much knowledge about the topic before I started to write the essay, I had a hard time determining the thesis statement and the aspects. [Feb. 25, 2000, translation]

> Mari: I decided to write about "hospices" because I'm interested in

them. However, once I started to map for ideas, I got stuck. That's because I had to work with a thesis statement and supporting points so that I came up with very little knowledge on the topic. I should have read more deeply before I decided on the thesis. [Jan. 14, 2000, translation]

Both Kyoko and Mari chose their topics based solely on their interest and their willingness to learn more about the topic. However, in both cases, they seemed to have had too little knowledge of the topic to construct a strong thesis statement. Without successfully choosing an appropriate topic, it is extremely difficult to have a clear focus in the paper or write a strong thesis statement.

What did the students do when they realized they had chosen an inappropriate topic for one reason or another? The following are two contrasting examples, one which resulted in a relative failure and the other in success.

Remi: I chose "C-code" [7] as a topic, and it wasn't successful. Evidence was hard to gather. When we go to the library, we only can see opinion for C-code. Then I wrote a draft without enough evidence and since I couldn't gather enough evidence, I wrote irresponsibly... I started to gather evidence from professors. I went to talk about C-code with several professors. But it wasn't successful, either... Unfortunately I didn't have enough time to change my topic so, I wrote an essay with the topic C-code and the position of against it.... So I really regret that I chose the topic of C-code. That was too difficult and delicate. [June 24, 1999]

Sho: The topic I chose was not appropriate. Yesterday, I changed my topic into Nepal with Japan. This was more appropriate. [Sept. 20, 1999]

Sho: Previous topic is too unfamiliar to me. I changed my topic again into cosmopolitan. [Sept. 25, 1999]

Both Remi and Sho struggled with the choice of topics, but there was a clear difference in the way the problem was handled. When Remi initially encountered the problem of not being able to gather enough evidence to support her point, she tried to find other ways to collect evidence instead of changing the topic. In the meantime, she ran out of time, and reluctantly, she had to stick with the topic. On the other hand, Sho took a different approach. When he first realized that the topic of

his choice was not appropriate, he quickly moved on to different topics until he found the right one. In a span of approximately two weeks, he changed the topic twice, but successfully. In fact, he was persistent with this strategy, and went through the same process when he decided on a topic for the next two assignments that followed.

Constructing One's Opinion

The academic discourse community expects writers to pre-reveal the topic and argument in the introduction (Johns, 1997). In such a context, writing a strong thesis statement is an important stage of the writing process. The Japanese education system does not typically emphasize training students to have their own opinions or to state their opinions to others. For many students who have just come through such an education system, deciding what exactly they want to say in their essays appears to be an immense hurdle, leading to other essential problems such as making a thesis.

> Remi: Now I'm writing the second draft, because my first draft's thesis was bad, teacher suggest to change it. Then I have to rewrite entire essay. To change the thesis is a big change. Making thesis of research paper is difficult. Thesis depends on the result of research, but thesis should be my opinion. [Nov. 4, 1999]

As Remi says, "...thesis should be my opinion," writing the thesis statement is not easy for many students because it requires them to take strong positions.

> Saya:[8] It was a tough job. My teacher said my thesis was too general, and my essay was too long... I needed to make my thesis statement more specific. I was told to use phrases like "it is necessary" or "should" and make my statement stronger.

> Mari: Every time I reread my essay I notice the inadequacy of my essay (e.g., the points I want to make are not clear). [May 31, 1999, translation]

> Yota: It seems that my position was not clear. To think about it, it seems that my position has been weak since my first essay[9]. I'm not exactly sure why, but perhaps because I'm not good at expressing my opinion. I can report on things well, but writing an essay, especially an argumentative one is just beyond my

capabilities. [Oct. 25, 1999, translation]

It is clear here that the argumentative writing style, which requires a rather strong statement of one's opinions, is especially challenging for the students. Furthermore, in coming up with three supporting points (i.e., one point for each of the three body paragraphs) as instructed in their writing classes is yet another hurdle to overcome.

> Shige: Each chapter has three big themes that are perfect to make three body paragraphs, but it's difficult to tie the three together into a thesis statement. [Sep. 26, 1999, translation]

> Mari: While writing the body, I realized that the three [supporting] points I chose are in fact very similar points. I could manage to finish the first two points but I kind of gave up on the third point; therefore, I find it very difficult to put them together in writing a conclusion. [June 3, 1999, translation]

Both Shige and Mari struggled to integrate the three aspects together. In other words, they had chosen the three points not because they needed the three to support their thesis statement but to fulfill the three-aspect or the three-body-paragraph requirement. This type of requirement also seemed to constrain the students from freely writing what they wanted to express in their essays.

Choosing and Integrating Sources

The next hurdle seemed to be rooted in the difficulty students had finding effective supporting details or examples and integrating them with their opinions.

> Shige: I ended up turning in an essay that was simply a compilation of excerpts from different sources. My opinion was hardly reflected. [Nov. 14, 1999, translation]

> Kyoko: Perhaps I should have consulted with the teacher more about how I could write a solid essay. Perhaps I should have written the essay without any citations first. When I try to use citations from the beginning, I'm influenced by the citations. [Feb. 25, 2000, translation]

> Mari: The points that my teacher suggested to explain or add more

details to support are the ones that I myself wondered what they meant, so I need to reread my essay carefully. [Feb. 17, 2000, translation]

Both Shige and Kyoko claim that their opinions were lost amidst the citations. Shige ended up with a patchwork of different experts' opinions, and Kyoko's opinion was transformed to suit the supporting evidence she had found. Mari's entry shows how she used citations without fully understanding the original authors' claims. In all three cases, it is apparent that the sources exerted control over the essays instead of students having control over the sources. Like Currie's EAP students (1998), our students also worried that what they wrote may have been just "little more than a string of quotation marks and parentheses" (p. 13).

Coherence

In academic writing, "[w]riters should provide 'maps' or 'signposts' for the readers throughout the texts, telling the readers where they have been in the text and where they are going" (Johns, 1997, p. 59). That is, writers are expected to clearly mark transition to show the relationship among the topics and arguments.

> Hiro: My teacher claimed that I change the topic too quickly. I need transition. And, the relations between my bodies and race (topic) are not clear. I had to make them clear... I didn't think about the connection between bodies and the topic. So I appreciated him to mention that. [Nov. 10, 1999]

> Mami: I received the teacher's feedback. The problem seems to be the connection between paragraphs. I was told that I made rough transitions. [May 20, 1999, translation]

As represented in Hiro and Mami's voices, our students also showed certain difficulties in using transitional markers effectively and appropriately.

Conclusion

Another area students expressed difficulty with was the conclusion. What seemed to be most problematic in writing the conclusion was in deciding what should and should not be included in the conclusion.

Students were instructed to summarize the content of the body paragraphs and to avoid adding new information in the conclusion.

> Mami: I'm worried about one thing. The teacher had said in the lecture that the "final statement" in the conclusion should talk about the future. Because it is about the future and I don't discuss it in my three aspects, now I'm wondering whether what I wrote as the final statement is "new information". [Feb. 22, 2000]

> Shige: My comments in the conclusion resemble those of Mr. Kinjo[10]. I wanted to refer to the disapproval of the diagnosis of fertilized eggs at Kagoshima University, which was on the news the other day, but the teacher said that I should avoid new information in the conclusion, so I couldn't write a satisfactory conclusion. [Feb. 24, 2000, translation]

Neither Mami nor Shige were sure what could be included in a conclusion. If they were asked to give a definition of a conclusion or explain the structure of a good conclusion, they would successfully do so. Their difficulty lay, however, in evaluating what is considered "new" information and what can be accepted as part of an effective conclusion.

As the examples of students' journal entries in this section show, our students seemed to encounter problems at the macro level not just at the beginning stage but recursively throughout their writing processes. This should come as no surprise since this EAP program takes a process-oriented approach which emphasizes planning and revising throughout the process.

External Factors

There are many external factors contributing to the problems encountered by the students. Meeting the demands of assignments is essential in academic life. The participants in this study very frequently reported that they had faced problems in meeting external demands: requirements of assignments including word count, sources, and time. Other outside factors such as their perception of teachers' expectations, lack of positive reinforcement, and their beliefs in terms of the roles of L1 use seemed to contribute to their problems as well.

Time

As Leki (1995) asserts, students often need to manage competing demands, mainly due to time constraints. Although some students successfully employed various strategies to manage their responsibilities within the given time, this was still one of the greatest concerns that many of the participants expressed in their journals or interviews. This is often reflected in unfinished assignments, rushed work, or accumulated frustration at not being able to pursue quality research. Some students like Yota may not be able to finish their assignments or have enough time for proofreading because of the deadlines.

> Yota: I started to write an outline but, since I didn't have time, without completing it, I started to write a draft. [Sept. 2, 1999, interview]

In addition, some may have to give up looking for, reading, and analyzing sources, as Shige did, before they are satisfied with the results of the research.

> Shige**:** The topic for the new essay is race. Various ideas such as issues in Yugoslavia or issues in Japanese society came to my mind, but they all look difficult to deal with within a limited amount of time. [Oct. 29, 1999, translation]

In this way, time is a factor related to various aspects of their writing processes and to both the surface and macro problems they encounter.

Word Count Requirements

Meeting a specific requirement in terms of word count was another factor which seemed to create a dilemma for the participants. For some, it was a problem because they fell short of the minimum requirement; conversely, for others like Maho and Saya, it was because they had exceeded the limit.

> Maho:[11] What made me in trouble the most is the number of words, my main teacher stated maximum word; 800 words. However, at first my essay contained more than 1200 words. Then I tried to cut some words, sentences and parts that are not so necessary. But still it has 990 words at final draft. It can't be helped.

> Saya:[12] It was a tough job. My teacher said my thesis was too general, and my essay was too long. We assigned 500 words but I

wrote over 1,000 words... I tried to cover the suggestions, however
my essay became longer and longer.

In both cases, the students did not know how to handle the problem.
In fact, "resisting teachers' demands" (Leki, 1995, p. 250), consciously
ignoring a part of the given criteria or not doing an assignment at all was
the only way some coped with the problem as represented in Maho's
and Saya's journal entries.

Sources: Quality and Quantity

Meeting the quality and quantity of sources required was a challenge
to many of the participants. The students were required to look for
sources published in English. This requirement made the task more
cognitively demanding, for they had to do much reading in their
second language. In addition, they had to cope with the scarcity of
English resources at their English proficiency level. This was particularly
challenging when over 500 students were working on a similar content
topic at the same given time.

> Shige: There are not many sources in English available on Darwin
> or eugenics in the school library. It is difficult to find appropriate
> sources. [Nov. 6, 1999, translation]

> Sho: I decided to write something about gene. This topic area is
> developing day by day, so I like and chose this topic. I used OPAC,
> and read several books about this area. They were not helpful
> because they were too academic, and there were many unknown
> technical terms. [Jan. 11, 2000]

As these examples show, the participants often found the availability
of English sources as well as the levels and contents of these books
particularly problematic.

Teachers' Expectations

While the participants tried to understand the requirements and
meet the demands, they were also concerned about what teachers
might think of their products. Even when they were not satisfied with
teachers' suggestions or did not understand the purpose of the teachers'
demands, some tried to "accommodate teachers' demands" (Leki, 1995,
p. 250) as best they could. For example:

> Mari: My teacher suggested to me to change the word "foreigner" to "person who comes from another country." Every time I found the word I changed it into the phrase suggested by the teacher but I felt it was too wordy. I'm not satisfied but what a teacher says must be correct so I followed the teacher's advice and changed all of them. [Sept. 29, 1999, translation]

As Mari commented, replacing every instance of "foreigner" with the long paraphrase resulted in wordiness. Mari's problem here, though, is that she blindly adhered to the teacher's suggestion without thinking that using the exact same expression again and again probably was not the teacher's intention. Like Mari's case, some of our students used a strategy of "staying out of trouble" (Currie, 1998, p. 7) and of adjusting their opinions and behaviors to please their teachers (Ivanič, 1994) in order to survive within a new academic system.

Positive Reinforcement

Not only are students conscious about teachers' comments and evaluation but they are also conscious about the amount of positive reinforcement by the teachers. Some students appear to need encouragement in order to move on.

> Mari: I asked my teacher whether my recent draft had become better than my first draft. I was told that it had improved greatly and was asked whether I had gone through special training. I'm very pleased with his comments. [June 11, 1999, translation]

> Kyoko: Unless somebody gives me positive feedback, I have no confidence at all. I asked one of my section mates to look over my draft before I started to write a final one. [Feb. 25, 2000, translation]

These examples clearly illustrate that either teachers' or peers' encouragement could help students overcome their undue concern over a problem.

Use of L1

The students in this study seem to be bound by the belief that they should think and write as completely as possible in English when producing work in English. This is not surprising when the program adopts a near English-only policy[13]: all classes in the program are taught

in English, use of a monolingual English-English dictionary[14] is highly encouraged, and students are expected to use English during class time (Moriya, 1999a).

> Mari: I've decided to take notes in Japanese because it's tough to look up words [in the dictionary] and think about organization at the same time. It's ideal to take notes in English, but I don't have enough vocabulary or time. [Jan. 21, 2000, translation]

> Mami: It's an ideal not to rely on (Japanese-English) dictionaries, but it's difficult not to. [May 20, 1999, translation]

However, we cannot dismiss the fact that this belief is inhibiting the students' performance or improvement, especially when research has indicated there are positive results when students use their first language in certain writing situations (e.g., Friedlander, 1990; Wang and Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002). The following example also shows how the use of the first language has assisted the learner.

> Yota: I read "The Joy Luck Club" but I didn't understand it at all. Is my English ability getting lower? Maybe I cannot write an essay assignment. [Aug. 29, 1999, translation]

In the interview, when asked whether he had sought any sort of help, Yota explained that he read the English version of the book several times and then read the Japanese translation which he found very helpful. He also referred to a review of the novel on the internet, which was too academic and thus not so helpful. As for these external factors, our students in this study tried various solutions. Some found ways to cope with problems such as using survival strategies, while others had to give up without successfully meeting the demands of the academic conventions.

Implications and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore Japanese students' perceptions of the processes and problems they encounter when producing academic writing in English. In this particular study, all 10 participants seemed to encounter various problems throughout their composing processes. Although the seriousness of the impact of the problems varied, problems existed at almost every stage of the process. What stood out was that in a process approach writing program, students were more conscious about macro-level issues concerning writing than

surface-level issues. The surface-level problems such as grammatical accuracy, writing a reference list, or choosing a suitable expression had relatively little effect on the overall writing process, perhaps because they are things that can be dealt with at the proofreading stage as Yota recognized in his journal entry. This is not surprising when there is not much room for instruction in grammar or punctuation in the writing classes at this university; in other words, priority is given to issues surrounding organization (Usui & Asaoka, 1998). However, it seems that students express concerns over organization because they truly found it challenging, not simply because they sensed that it was the most important area. This view is supported by Shi and Fujioka's study (1998) concerning College of Liberal Arts[15] professors' perception of students' writing at this university, which revealed that non-language teachers too found organization was the most problematic area of their students writing. The implication here is that organization is regarded as important and that it is also a challenging area in which students' repeated practice is demanded since "declarative knowledge" does not readily transfer to "procedural knowledge" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 24). Macro problems could even prevent the students from moving along with the writing process, causing a writer's block.

This study also revealed that students were stumbling at the planning stage, long before they reached the organization stage. The failure to choose the right topic served as a block to constructing an opinion, resulting in an unorganized essay that readers found difficult to understand. This was further complicated when the students had to integrate experts' opinions and data to support their views. Students may need more intervention by teachers at an early stage of their writing when they are choosing their topics and constructing their opinions.

In addition, this study revealed that at the root of their problems was not necessarily in their inability to understand the essence of good writing. Remi knew that a thesis should include her opinion but found it difficult to actually write one, and Shige is aware that he needed to have three supporting body paragraphs but found it difficult to tie them together into a thesis statement. In other words, their metaknowledge about L2 writing did not necessarily contribute to their L2 writing performance (Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Hirose & Sasaki, 2000).

Furthermore, while students go through the process presented in an EAP writing class, they are exposed to various demands of academic discourse. They are expected to formulate the cognitive framework of an academic discourse with the expectation of transferring it to writing

tasks in other disciplines. This expectation seems to lead to writer's block. This is not surprising when students face the demand to take on two new intellectual tasks simultaneously: writing critically and writing in an academic discourse (Elbow, 1991).

> Mari: I understand that the first sentence of each paragraph has to indicate the most important idea of that paragraph but I did not follow this rule at all. All I could do was just write and write and write. I couldn't put it in one sentence since I myself didn't understand what the most important idea was in that paragraph. [Sept. 12, 1999, translation]

This case seems to be similar to novice researchers in Gosden's study (1996, p. 121) where they struggled with the "dual constraints," writing about their scientific results and using appropriate L2 mechanics in academic writing. As Gosden pointed out, these "dual constraints" may lead to "frustrating difficulties" particularly when writers are inexperienced both in the content areas and in L2 academic writing skills. However, "[t]he constraints of the form are meant to benefit, not hamper, the students' writing" (Spack, 1988, p. 46). It is a very challenging task for teachers to alleviate intellectual demands as well as bridge the gap between "declarative knowledge" and "procedural knowledge."

Perhaps the most difficult challenge confronting the participants in the study was the extent of the teachers' power. The findings of this study suggest the importance for language teachers to be conscious of the extent of the power their comments and directions may have on the students. Some students may try to meet teachers' expectations even when they are not happy with what they write or how they write. Since writing is a process of discovering and negotiating meaning (Zamel, 1983), students need to plan throughout their composing process and at every stage opportunities should be given to negotiate meaning with a teacher who is their first reader as well as an evaluator. Perhaps at an initial stage of the writing program, the importance of thinking critically about teachers' comments and opinions should be emphasized, especially in a cultural context where students are not used to the idea of challenging their instructors (Anderson, 1993, p.102).

Language teachers should be supportive and open towards students' ideas, plans and concerns through individual meetings or reflective journals especially when students are at an early stage of the writing process. Also one of the external factors, time, seems to be adding to this complication. It is true that students will never have enough time, but it

is important to remind ourselves as teachers that each student works at a different pace. A process approach class often requires students to go through the process at the same time, as does this program. It would be useful to allow students' more flexibility in their writing schedule. What is more, students' undue concern over a problem might simply be solved with teachers' or peers' encouragement. Quality writing may be best encouraged if a balance between criticism and praise is sought (Cardelle & Corno, 1981). Teachers also need to encourage their students to be flexible and to alter their plans as the occasion may demand. Besides, moving towards a more genre-based approach (Swales & Feak, 1994) as suggested by Shi & Fujioka (1998) can offer students an excellent opportunity to learn how to *read to write*. This strategy of analyzing a text and adapting it to their own writing can help students accommodate to the variety of discourse found in different disciplines (Spack, 1988; Johns, 1997). Exposure to various genres should be deemed important and their diversity should be brought to students' awareness as they analyze the text because "there is no one definable discourse, even within one discipline" (Raimes, 1991, p. 245).

In this way, language teachers can coach students through the path to becoming independent learners, "with the competence to analyze, to question, to criticize, to evaluate," as expected of college students, at least in some institutions (Ballard & Clanchy, 1993). As some learner-centered theorists and practitioners believe, "literacies are acquired through individual motivation and meaning-making or through processing and revising texts" (Johns, 1997, p. 13). With our help, the students can go a long way towards becoming autonomous academic writers who are aware of their writing processes and critical of what they read and write.

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Notes

1. The participants were in the researchers' classes for one trimester only. Each term, students had a different teacher for every component of the program.

2. LBH is one of the reference textbooks used in class. *The Little, Brown Handbook*. (Fowler, H.R. & Aaron, J.E.,1998, Longman).

3. *Kudoi* is a Japanese counterpart of 'redundant'.

4. *Shikashinagara* is a formal expression for 'but' in Japanese.

5. The three aspects here refer to the three paragraphs in a typical five-paragraph essay, consisting of an introductory paragraph, three supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Although the in-house textbook states that, "the body may consist of any number of paragraphs," the examples given in it all consisted of three paragraphs (p. 18 and p. 20). Besides, some teachers in the program tended to instruct their students to write at least three supporting details. *The Student Guide to Writing in the ELP*. (English Language Program, 1999, International Christian University).

6. RD stands for Reading and Discussion, which is one of the reading components of the program.

7. C-code stands for Christianity code, which requires the faculty to be Christians.

8. Saya did not write the dates for her journal entries. This entry was taken from page 6 of her journal in the fall term.

9. At this point, he had finished working on his third essay.

10. Mr. Kinjo is a Japanese writer.

11. Maho did not write the date for this journal entry. This was taken from page 6 of her journal in the winter term.

12. Saya did not write the dates for her journal entries. This entry was taken from page 6 of her journal in the fall term.

13. The student handbook states that Japanese will be used occasionally when the goals of the program are more effectively accomplished through the use of Japanese. However, it dictates that in other circumstances, all classes should be conducted in English.

14. All students purchase the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Diction-ary* upon matriculation. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.* (edited by S. Wehmeier, 1995, Oxford).

15. CLA stands for College of Liberal Arts, CLA professors referring to professors who teach outside the EAP program.

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Appendix A

1999-2000 Content-Based Writing Assignments

Topic (weeks)	Assignments
Spring: Educational Values (~6 weeks) • The Difference Between High School and College • Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing • Reading and Writing About Arguments	**Paragraph** (Descriptive)
	Essay (Comparison and Contrast) Program B – (300 words)
	Essay (Analysis) Program B – (500 words)
Literature (~3 weeks)	**In-Class Essay Test**
Summer Reading	**Book Report** (with quotations)
Fall: Culture, Perception, & Communication (~4 weeks)	**Argumentative Essay** Program B – (500 words with quotations)
Issues of Race (~5 weeks)	**Argumentative Essay** (Analysis, comparison/contrast, cause and effect, division and classification, etc.) Program B – (600 words, 2 given sources, 1 found)
	In-Class "Analysis" Essay Test
Winter: Winter Project (~2 weeks)	
Bioethics (~3 weeks)	**Research-based Essay** Program B – (800 words – 4 sources)
	In-Class Short Answer Test
Visions (~4 weeks)	**Essay** Program B (600 ~ words)

Note.∴This chart is taken from *ELP staff handbook 1999-2000.* (Ed. by Moriya, Y., 1999, p. 33).

Appendix B

Questionnaire on the Participants' L1 and L2 Writing Experiences

Directions: Please tell us about your writing experience before coming to this school. If YES, please choose the frequency from

1=hardly,   2, 3=sometimes,   4, 5=always.

For questions 13 and 14, if the answer is yes, please tell us approximately how many class hours per week you had a writing class.

1. Have you written a letter in English?

2. Have you written a journal in English?

3. Have you written a diary in English?

4. Have you written an essay in English?

5. Have you written a book report in English?

6. Have you written a research paper in English?

7. Have you written a letter in Japanese?

8. Have you written a journal in Japanese?

9. Have you written a diary in Japanese?

10. Have you written an essay in Japanese?

11. Have you written a book report in Japanese?

12. Have you written a research paper in Japanese?

13. Did you take Japanese writing classes in junior high school?

14. Did you take Japanese writing classes in high school?

Appendix C

Results of the Questionnaire

	Shige	Yota	Sho	Remi	Saya	Mami	Maho	Kyoko	Mari	Hiro
1	3	3	1	3	1	2	no	yes	3	3
2	no	no	1	2	3	NA	no	no	no	no
3	no	no	1	no	4	no	no	yes	no	no
4	no	no	3	3	3	no	no	yes	no	2
5	no	no	1	3	3	no	no	yes	no	no
6	no	no	1	3	2	no	no	no	no	1
7	3	3	5	1	5	yes	5	yes	5	4
8	no	no	3	3	no	yes	2	yes	4	no
9	3	3	4	no	no	yes	1	yes	5	5
10	no	no	3	3	3	yes	2	yes	3	4
11	no	3	3	3	no	NA	2	yes	2	4
12	3	2	2	3	3	yes	1	yes	3	4
13	no	no	no	NA	no	1 hr.	no	no	no	3 hrs.
14	no	no	1 hr.	NA	no	3 hrs.	1 hr.	no	no	3 hrs.