

**University of Texas at El Paso**

---

**From the Selected Works of Kate Mangelsdorf**

---

1989

## Parallels Between Speaking and Writing in Second Language Acquisition"

Kate Mangelsdorf, *University of Texas at El Paso*

Richness in writing:  
Empowering ESL students.  
Edo. Johnson & Reen, Longman, 1989

## CHAPTER 8

# Parallels between Speaking and Writing in Second Language Acquisition

Kate Mangelsdorf  
*University of Arizona*

A few years ago I couldn't get one of my ESL composition classes to stop taking. The students were university freshmen; their major writing assignment was a response to Orwell's (1949/1982) novel *1984*. Big Brother intrigued them. Some hated him; a few admired him; still others were fascinated by the machinations of his society. Some class days I'd plan for a 20-minute discussion of part of the book, and after 45-minutes the students would still be at it, debating and explaining, pointing to parts of the book for evidence, relating Big Brother to governments they had experienced. I was worried that I hadn't spent enough time on organizational strategies or transitions; I expected their drafts to be rambling, possibly even incoherent. But these papers turned out to be the best I'd ever received in that course. They were rich with ideas developed in the class discussions; they had a strong sense of audience and voice far removed from the careful textbookish language I was used to reading. The rest of the semester I covered writing techniques briefly in class or in individual conferences. In the classroom I wanted to hear more of the students' voices.

What I discovered that semester was that despite differences between speaking and writing—for example, between the informal give and take of my students' class discussions and the more formal explication in their papers—the two ways of communicating could enrich each other: The voices that speak in the classroom can empower the voices struggling to be heard in the papers. In this chapter I describe the parallels between speaking and writing that explain why teaching these modes of language

use together can strengthen second language acquisition. I also suggest ways to combine speaking and writing in second language (L2) classrooms and curricula.

## SEPARATION OF SPEAKING AND WRITING

The tradition of separating speaking and writing in L2 curricula is rooted in the historical development of second language instruction. One major influence on teaching in the 1940s and 1950s was structural linguistics, which focused on describing the recurring surface forms of spoken rather than written language (Diller, 1978, p. 10). "Because through the ages written language in many cultures has been (or is) nonexistent, the spoken language was regarded by the structuralists as of primary importance, writing being considered 'merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks'" (Rivers, 1983, p. 3). Other recent influences on L2 instruction have their basis in ideas about child language acquisition. Versions of the direct method, such as the natural approach, stress oral language acquisition because of theories about the way children acquire their first language (L1) and the fact that children learn to speak before they learn to write (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). In fact, Krashen's theory of L2 acquisition (1982) is based on the idea that L2 learners acquire the target language through subconscious processes similar to those involved in L1 acquisition. Speech act theory has also influenced the discipline, resulting in new emphases on oral language use (Spolsky, 1980). The teaching of common speech acts, such as greetings or disagreements, is an important goal in courses based on functional syllabi (McKay, 1979).

Because of these influences, writing is often introduced in the early stages of instruction not as a meaningful way of communicating ideas, but as a way of reinforcing what was taught in the speaking classroom. Writing instruction is generally left for the later stages of development, much as my university level L2 writing classroom when, it is hoped, most students are fluent speakers of English.

Partly because of this separation between spoken and written language, the process of speaking can appear very different from the process of writing. For instance, when my students talked with each other in class, they, just as all people do, used nonverbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions; as writers, however, they expressed themselves only through the words they put upon the page. In class discussions, the participants in the conversation were immediately present and interrupted, disagreed, questioned, affirmed, or otherwise told them how their message was being received. When they sat down to write their papers, though, they had to imagine audience response; no reader was looking

over their shoulder. Finally, when my students explained themselves to their classmates, they could make mistakes in syntax, diction, and usage; however, mistakes such as these in their papers lowered my evaluation of their writing ability.

Applying speaking processes directly to writing processes can indeed interfere with writing development. For example, because they are used to the immediate feedback of their listeners, inexperienced writers can overestimate the reader's ability to understand their ideas (Flower, 1979; Perl, 1979). Additionally, inexperienced writers often transfer conventions of speech, such as register, diction, or tone, to their writing, where it may be inappropriate (Halpern, 1984). Differences between oral and literate cultures can also affect writing development. Oral cultures often use thought processes different from the kinds of analytical thought processes found in literate cultures (Ong, 1978). Students whose dominant culture is orally based might have difficulty adjusting to modes of expression common to other cultures.

These differences between speaking and writing, however, do not have to result in the segregation of these ways of using language—listening and reading as well as speaking and writing—in the curricula. After all, students can learn to be aware of differences between language modes. Segregation of language skills into different courses, moreover, can prevent teachers from drawing on the important similarities between speaking and writing in order to enhance L2 acquisition.

## SPEAKING AND WRITING AS COMMUNICATION

When I listened to my students argue about Big Brother in the classroom, and when I read their essays on the same topic, the same process was going on: communication through the construction and negotiation of meaning. Before my students had reached my classroom, they had developed some fluency in speech, including grammatical competence, or mastery of the linguistic code (Canale & Swain, 1981). In addition to being grammatically competent, many of my students were competent in other areas of oral language use, for communicative competence involves not only control of the phonology, grammar, and semantics of a language, but also the conventions concerning language use in various settings aimed at different audiences in order to convey a variety of messages (Spolsky, 1980). Additionally, in order to successfully convey and understand messages, my students had mastered not only discourse structures and sociolinguistic rules, but also strategies for changing their discourses when communication breaks down (Tarone, 1980).

My students had to learn communicative competence in their writing

as well as in their speech. Writers need to do more than simply produce correct language forms. Taylor (1981) notes that "the emphasis in [a writing program] must be on communicating meaning. Simply put, the writer must have something to say" (p. 8). He suggests encouraging student-generated material in the early stages of writing instruction in order to draw on the students' originality and motivation. Similarly, Raimes (1980, 1987) has developed techniques for allowing students to develop their own responses to material while at the same time selecting from a range of language forms. In other words, students select the language forms that will best communicate their message, instead of choosing a message—any message—that will fit the particular form that is being taught that day in class.

In addition to communicative intent, the concept of communicative competence in writing includes appropriate language use. Just as my students had learned how to politely debate each other in an academic setting, they had to learn how to argue their point in an academic paper. Achieving appropriate language use involves audience awareness, or moving from writer-based prose (in which writers are mainly addressing themselves) to reader-based prose (in which writers have altered their text to adapt to the needs and expectations of readers). Reader-based prose "creates a shared language and shared context between writer and reader," while writer-based prose often simply reveals the process of the writer's thinking (Flower, 1979, p. 20). Zamel's (1983) case study of advanced ESL writers indicates the importance of audience awareness; she found that many of the skilled writers tried, while revising, to reread their papers from the point of view of a reader so that they could anticipate and meet their reader's responses and informational needs.

In my lesson on 1984, I encouraged audience awareness by asking the students to write drafts of their papers, which were then read by one or more of their peers. I tried to pair students who disagreed with each other's theses to help the writers see how well their arguments were anticipating and responding to the reader's objections. Only after the students had generated their drafts did I attempt to teach the more formal aspects of academic writing, such as the use of cohesive devices and appropriate tone. I found, however, that most students were able to at least identify problems in these areas according to the responses of their peers. (For a discussion of peer reviews, see Mittan, this volume.)

## SPEAKING AND WRITING AS INTERACTION

The importance of audience awareness during composing indicates that communication, whether oral or written, does not consist of a message

being delivered, in a single coherent piece, to a receiver. Instead, communication is interactive; meaning is constructed, predicted, and negotiated by communicators. In my class discussions, for instance, a student would begin a sentence, falter, begin again, be interrupted by a student with another idea, respond to that idea, try again to finish the original idea, be assisted by another student, and so on. Other conversational "adjustments" include confirmation checks, comprehension checks, clarifications, requests, repetitions, expansions, and questions (Porter, 1986). Because negotiation of meaning is believed to be a crucial factor in L2 acquisition, conversational negotiation can aid language acquisition when the focus of the message is on content (Ellis, 1984). These content-based messages provide learners with comprehensible input that is contextually meaningful and "embedded in other language [the learners can] understand" (Long & Porter, 1985, p. 214). Authentic classroom communication, such as our discussions on 1984, forces students to develop strategies for talking and listening when they make mistakes, just as they would in "real" communication (Johnson & Morrow, 1981). "No, this is what I mean," my students would tell each other—and me—as we struggled to communicate our ideas.

This frustrating but important struggle also occurred when the students and I read drafts of essays. Frequently when they read each other's papers, the students would stop to ask each other what a certain phrase meant. They also filled their peers' papers with question marks and comments such as, "I don't understand." In my conferences with students and in my written comments, I would do the same. Just as often, however, a reader would guess the meaning of a phrase or would simply continue to read, satisfied with understanding the general idea of the text. Any interaction between reader and writer is filled with such guesses and confusion as "readers . . . use their own knowledge about language and their experiences to predict and construct meaning as they read" (Goodman, Goodman, & Flores, 1979, p. 27).

Teaching students about the interactive nature of reading and writing, and its similarities with listening and speaking, can help them read their texts as readers rather than as writers. For instance, demonstrating reading processes with students by asking them to predict parts of a text can show the importance of textual redundancies (Troyka, 1987). Writers also need to develop strategies to anticipate their readers' informational needs (Roen & Willey, 1988). However, even experienced writers have difficulties anticipating their readers' reactions, for as Ong (1975) has claimed, "the writer's audience is always a fiction" (p. 9). The peer reviews and multiple drafts in my unit on 1984 helped students come closer to this "fiction" by allowing them to test and change their writing according to their readers' responses—just as they tested and changed what they said in class according to their listener's reactions.

## HYPOTHESIS TESTING IN SPEAKING AND WRITING

The process of testing and revising language according to audience feedback in the context of interaction is an important element in both L1 and L2 acquisition (Brown, 1987; Falk, 1979; Wells, 1986). This hypothesis testing can range from the phonemic level (as when learners modify sounds according to feedback) to the discourse level (as when writers develop culturally appropriate rhetorical strategies). In my classroom discussions, for instance, hypothesis testing occurred when students corrected their classmates' pronunciation or word choice. Another kind of hypothesis testing happened when students tried out their ideas—not just their language forms—on each other. For instance, a heated debate broke out when a student defended the use of censorship in Big Brother's society, a debate which ended when the student clarified his idea by saying that in instances of societal instability or crisis, censorship can be justified. In this case, the student changed his original hypothesis when he hears alternative ideas which made him rethink his position.

In writing, hypothesis testing can be seen in errors that result from experimenting with language forms based on the learners' internalized system of language forms (Bartholomae, 1980; Brown, 1987; Shaughnessy, 1977). For example, students recently introduced to rules governing the use of commas might begin to make more errors with commas as they try to apply the rule to their own writing (Hornig, 1987). Just as my students corrected each other's language in class discussions, they also tried to correct each other in their peer reviews, and I did the same. Furthermore, their responses to each other's ideas (such as the thesis on censorship mentioned above) in their peer reviews also allowed them to test hypotheses about their topics.

In a sense, my students also tested hypotheses with themselves as they explored and refined their ideas. This sometimes happened in the class discussions, when students thought about what they wanted to say before they said it—and also changed what they were saying as they said it. It also happened in the generative writing the students did as they were reading 1984 for the first time and as they returned to the book for evidence to support their ideas. For example, I assigned free-writing exercises after the students had finished a section in the novel so that they could write about their reactions to the text so far. I also focused some of the free-writing on important quotations from the book so that the students would examine closely textual elements, such as the use of words or symbols. In this free writing the students would often begin with one idea but end up writing on a completely different one as the act of writing itself engendered more thoughts, more writing. This kind of hypothesis testing

indicates that the process of writing is a way to learn about ideas as well as a way to demonstrate learning; that it is not simply "a matter of making and correcting errors or recapitulating what everyone already knows," but also a way "of finding and conveying meanings" (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983, p. 466). L2 acquisition, oral as well as written, can be as much a matter of cognitive growth as it is a matter of structural accuracy.

## SPEAKING AND WRITING AS DIALOGUES

When language learners test hypotheses, they adjust their language and ideas according to feedback from their respondents—correction or affirmation, for example. The back-and-forth nature of this kind of language use is similar to a dialogue in which communicators engage in social as well as cognitive interaction. According to Berthoff (1981), "all speakers and writers have listeners and readers" (p. 119). Even language that is seen primarily as monologue, such as the thinking described by Vygotsky (1934/1986) as inner speech or the egocentric speech Piaget observed in young children (Ginsburg & Oppen, 1969), can be seen as having dialogic qualities in that, as Schafer (1981) points out, "questions are asked and then answered, problems are posed and then solved, opposing views are presented and then refuted" (pp. 25–26).

When I started to teach 1984, I was prepared for dialogues in the form of free writing, drafts, peer reviews, and final drafts; students dialoguing with themselves, their peers, and me as they discovered and expressed their ideas. I had not, however, considered how oral classroom interaction parallels and contributes to the written dialogues and how, in fact, the oral and written language together produce interaction in which we—students and teacher—work together to find and express ideas in English. By integrating our focus on speaking and writing (as well as listening and reading) in the L2 classroom, we can provide students with opportunities to engage in dialogues which can enrich the development of all aspects of language learning.

## INTEGRATING SPEAKING AND WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM

The same semester I taught this unit on 1984 to my talkative class, I taught another composition class with the opposite problem: The students didn't like to talk at all. After I had realized the importance of using speech in the writing classroom, I began to devise methods for combining speaking with writing in classroom interaction. One activity that addressed critical read-

ing as well as other aspects of language use involved asking a small group of students to read a particular text—short story, poem, essay, a graph—and then to produce an analysis of the text. Each student in the group was assigned an aspect of the analysis; for instance, to describe the purpose of a symbol or to explain an element on the graph. The students shared their writing with each other, pooled their ideas, and worked together to produce a comprehensive analysis.

This activity is an example of the kind of group work that can provide students with practice in using the target language to solve problems or make decisions (Doughy & Pica, 1986). Tasks such as this one which require an exchange of information can lead students to adjust their interactions in a way that can promote their language acquisition (Long & Porter, 1985). Another group work task, giving students scenarios to respond to, integrates spoken and written language use, presents students with problems to solve, and is also appropriate for all levels of instruction. For instance, a teacher of a beginning language class can give groups of students scenarios concerning visitors to their campus. In the scenarios, the visitors need directions to find a certain building. The groups first discuss how to give directions, and every member of the group writes down the directions. The group then selects the best set of directions and reads the directions to the class, which decides if a visitor would be able to understand the directions.

Another group (or pair) activity that combines speaking and writing is the peer review, in which students read drafts of each other's essays and make suggestions for revisions. I have already discussed how peer reviews played an important role in my unit on 1984. Peer reviews can also be used successfully with lower levels of instruction and with children (Kitagawa, this volume; Roen & Willey, 1988). Responses to drafts, both oral and written, help to extend the dialogic nature of communication as readers/listeners ask for clarifications and extensions and add their own ideas. Teachers who make dialogic responses (rather than only correcting structural errors and evaluating the final product) also help students communicate their ideas rather than simply try to produce correct language forms (Gere & Stevens, 1985; Sommers, 1982; Zamel, 1985). Furthermore, the conversational interactions which take place in peer response groups and student-teacher conferences aid oral acquisition by giving students opportunities to engage in simple conversations on topics with which they are concerned.

Instructors can also integrate speaking and writing by asking students to make oral presentations on subjects they care about. In a writing classroom, these presentations can be about the topic of an essay students are planning to write or are in the process of writing. Students can receive feedback from their peers and their instructor about their ideas so that



two-way interaction occurs. (In my 1984 class, some of the most involved and wide-ranging discussions came out of this activity.) More formal speeches can also be given in a variety of content areas and levels. Groups of students can practice and revise their speeches, as they would their writing in a response group; the resulting interaction helps them understand their own ideas as well as their classmates'. Asking students to give a variety of oral presentations helps them become more aware of their audience and gives them practice in both formal and informal language use.

One forum which allows students to express opinions and feelings in written, informal language is dialogue journals, in which students write back and forth with another person, often another student and/or the teacher. This kind of dialoguing, which can occur not only in journals but also on computer networks, has been used from beginning to advanced levels of language and content instruction (Heath, 1984; Kreeft Peyton & Mackinson-Smyth, this volume; Sayers, this volume; Spack & Sadow, 1983). Because these journals usually supplement classroom work, they give students the chance to write about matters, in and outside of the classroom, that are not typically addressed in formal instructional settings. Since the writers correspond directly with each other, their awareness of their readers increases. Also, these journals enable students to write informally, usually in conversational structures, which is not often the case in classroom settings. In these informal, conversational journals, students can practice, in writing, the kinds of interaction they use in speech. Teachers can also use dialogue journals as a bridge from speaking to writing with students who have already achieved some oral proficiency.

In my 1984 class, I did not have to devise activities such as those discussed above to stimulate discussion which would enrich the students' writing; the students did this for me, despite my initial misguided efforts to silence them. The students spoke up because they were interested in the content of the class, not because they wanted to practice expository and argumentative strategies, which was my curricular agenda. Because of this emphasis on content, the students naturally used target language forms to express their ideas. Using content- or thematic-based curricula can avoid what Widowson (1978) has called "language put on display" (p. 53), or artificial classroom language where the focus is more on structure than meaning. Teaching language through content integrates all aspects of communication in order "to use language . . . the way language is normally used" (p. 158). Moreover, content-based academic writing instruction can aid understanding of content material (Shih, 1986). The students who read and wrote about 1984 learned not only about analyzing a text critically and expressing that analysis in an essay; they also learned about their own reactions and views to the issues in the novel.

My unit on 1984 certainly did not produce overall excellent work; the process of developing written (and spoken) proficiency in an additional language is more complicated than that. But because I could not silence my students' voices, I unknowingly gave them more ways to discover and explore ideas, to find the right words to express these ideas, and to negotiate with their audience about these ideas—all of which are critical in second language acquisition and cognitive growth.

## REFERENCES

- Bartholomae, D. (1980). The study of error. *College Composition and Communication*, 31, 253-269.
- Berthoff, A. E. (1981). *The making of meaning*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.
- Brown, H. D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1981). A theoretical framework for communicative competence. In A. S. Palmer, P. J. M. Groot, & G. A. Trosper (Eds.), *The construct validation of tests of communicative competence* (pp. 31-36). Washington, DC: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Diller, K. C. (1978). *The language teaching controversy*. Rowley, MA.: Newbury House.
- Doughy, C., & Pica, T. (1986). "Information gap" tasks: Do they facilitate second language acquisition? *TESOL Quarterly*, 20, 305-325.
- Ellis, R. (1984). *Classroom second language development*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Falk, J. S. (1979). Language acquisition and the teaching and learning of writing. *College English*, 41, 436-447.
- Flower, L. (1979). Writer-based prose: A cognitive basis for problems in writing. *College English*, 41, 19-46.
- Gere, A. R., & Stevens, R. S. (1985). The language of writing groups: How oral response shapes revision. In S. W. Freeman (Ed.), *The acquisition of written language* (pp. 85-105). Norwood NJ: Ablex.
- Ginsburg, H., & Oppert, S. (1969). *Piaget's theory of intellectual development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Goodman, K. S., Goodman, Y., & Flores, B. (1979). *Reading in the bilingual classroom: Literacy and biliteracy*. Rosslyn, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Halpern, J. (1984). Differences between speaking and writing and their implications for teaching. *College Composition and Communication*, 35, 345-357.
- Heath, S. B. (1984). Literacy or literacy skills? Considerations for ESL/EFL learners. In D. Larson (Ed.), *On TESOL '84* (pp. 15-28). Washington, DC: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Horning, A. S. (1987). *Teaching writing as a second language*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Johnson, K., & Morrow, K. (Eds.). (1981). *Communication in the classroom*. Essex, England: Longman Group, Ltd.
- Knoblauch, C. H., & Brannon, L. (1983). Writing as learning through the curriculum. *College English*, 45, 465-474.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. D., & Terrell, T. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Long, M. H., & Porter, P. A. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, 207-228.
- McKay, S. (1979). Towards an integrated syllabus. In K. Croft (Ed.), *Readings on English as a second language* (pp. 72-84). Boston: Little, Brown.
- Ong, W. J. (1975). The writer's audience is always a fiction. *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 90, 9-21.
- Ong, W. J. (1978). Literacy and orality in our times. In T. Enos (Ed.), *A sourcebook for basic writing teachers* (pp. 45-55). New York: Random House.
- Orwell, G. (1982). 1984. In I. Howe (Ed.), *Orwell's 1984: Text, sources, criticism* (2nd ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. (Original work published 1949).
- Pert, S. (1979). The composing processes of unskilled college writers. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 13, 317-333.
- Porter, P. (1986). How learners talk to each other: Input and interaction in task-centered discussions. In R. R. Day (Ed.), *Talking to learn: Conversation in second language acquisition* (pp. 200-222). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Raines, A. (1980). Composition: Controlled by the teacher, free for the student. In K. Croft (Ed.), *Readings on English as a second language* (pp. 386-398). Boston: Little, Brown.
- Raines, A. (1983). Tradition and revolution in ESL teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 535-552.
- Raines, A. (1987). *Exploring through writing: A process approach to ESL composition*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rivers, W. (1983). *Communicating naturally in a second language: Theory and practice in language teaching*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press.
- Roen, D. H., & Willey, R. J. (1988). The effects of audience awareness on drafting and revising. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 22, 75-88.
- Schaffer, J. (1981). The linguistic analysis of spoken and written texts. In B. M. Kroll & R. J. Vann (Eds.), *Exploring speaking-writing relationships* (pp. 1-31). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Shughnessy, M. (1977). *Errors and expectations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shih, M. (1986). Content-based approaches to teaching academic writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20, 617-648.
- Sommers, N. (1982). Responding to student writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 33, 148-158.
- Spack, R., & Sadow, C. (1983). Student-teacher working journals in ESL freshman composition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 575-593.

- Spolsky, B. (1980). What does it mean to know a language? In K. Croft (Ed.), *Readings on English as a second language* (pp. 26-42). Boston: Little, Brown.
- Tarone, E. (1980). Communication strategies, foreigner talk, and repair in interlanguage. *Language Learning*, 30, 417-431.
- Taylor, B. (1981). Content and written form: A two-way street. In S. McKay (Ed.), *Composing in a second language* (pp. 3-15). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Troyka, L. Q. (1987). The writer as conscious reader. In T. Enos (Ed.), *A sourcebook for basic writing teachers* (pp. 307-317). New York: Random House.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Ed. and Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Original work published 1934).
- Wells, G. (1986). *The meaning makers: Children learning language and using language to learn*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1978). *Teaching language as communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zamel, V. (1983). The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 165-187.
- Zamel, V. (1985). Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, 79-99.