Exploratory Study: Effects of 1st Language on 2nd Language Writing

Translation vs. Direct Composition[1]

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In an EFL context such as Japan, the use of translation is so common a practice that English composition (*"eisakubun"* in Japanese) is often understood as "translation from Japanese into English" by many high school and college students. Yanai, reviewing the merits of this practice in English writing instruction, summarizes them into three (1985:112). First, it is quite a practical means for teachers (i.e., a manageable technique for teaching and evaluating students' work); secondly, through systematic comparison, it helps students develop better understanding of both English and Japanese culture and language; and thirdly, it can have social application since there is a realistic need for letters and reports to be translated into English in a business context. Perhaps because these merits are taken seriously, many English composition textbooks published in Japan are usually form-oriented with an abundant amount of drill, in which students are asked to translate isolated Japanese sentences into English (see, for example, *Essentials of College Practical English Composition*).

This concern with form is usually extended from sentence to discourse level. Yanatori, in attaching importance to "invention", states that difficulties which Japanese students encounter in writing in English lie clearly in style and organization (1988:11). The content of a composition, according to him, is not likely to be a problem because Japanese students can utilize their native language fully in expressing ideas. As this view reveals, content and form are usually considered as resulting from two distinct writing processes and the dichotomy between them seems clear in the teaching of English writing in Japan.

   In spite of its popularity, however, some criticism has been raised against
the use of translation. Hadori (1982) for example, points out that transla-
tion brings unnaturalness to English sentences created by students, who
usually stick to word-to-word translation. Okumura (1983) warns that
students, once becoming accustomed to translation, will find it difficult to
write directly in English unless they express ideas first in the native
language. Further, American language teaching theorists, Rivers and
Temperly (1979, Rivers; 1981), while recognizing the place of translation
in language learning, consider it as a specialized skill, which requires train-
ing on the part of students, and they suggest that its use should be judi-
cious at even the advanced level.

   It is no doubt that much of this criticism is shared by many ESL
teachers in the United States. Yet, their rejection of the use of translation
came primarily from the notion of first language interference; that is, stu-
dents' grammatical and organizational errors in English writing are due to
the negative transfer of their first language. While this notion was sup-
ported by the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1975), which viewed
second language acquisition as overcoming L1 and L2 differences, it was
weakened by the view of second language acquisition as being developmen-
tal (Bailey, et al., 1974; Dulay, et al., 1982). With the latter view, Ka-
plan's claim (1966), for example, that the organizational pattern of writing
is culture-specific and the subsequent assumption that ESL students trans-
fer their L1 language patterns into second language writing, has been much
criticized (see Mohan and Lo, 1985). Recently, in addition to a transfer
factor, a developmental factor such as studentns' native literacy and past
educational experience are also taken into account in explaining students'
problems with the organization of written English discourse.

   While cross-linguistic influence has been observed in L2 text through
contrastive rhetoric, almost no studies have ever looked at the effects of
first language on the overall quality of second/foreign language writing.
The present study was undertaken to explore such effects through the com-
parison of the two writing processes, translation and direct composition.
The effects were examined qualitatively (content, organization and style)

and quantitatively (three types of errors, T-unit length and sentence-nodes per T-unit). Further the study aimed to investigate the relationship between the two types of writing processes and language proficiency (grammar knowledge and oral skills combined). The questions posed in the present study are as follows: 1) Are there any qualitative and quantitative differences between the two writing processes, one translating Japanese written compositions into English and the other composing directly in English? and 2) Is there any relationship between these two writing processes and students' language proficiency?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The subjects were 20 college students enrolled in the course of English Composition I at Hiroshima University. They are a mixture of freshmen(6), sophomores(9), juniors(4) and one senior, including 6 males and 14 females. The subjects' majors were mostly foreign language and area studies, except the freshmen, whose majors were undecided. These subjects were grouped into two language proficiency levels on the basis of the combined scores of CELT Form B (a test for grammar knowledge) and an oral interview[2]. The ten highest scoring students were identified as a group of high proficiency level, and the other ten with lower scores as a group of low level. As Table 1 shows, the two groups of students differed significantly in their grammar knowledge and oral skills.

TABLE 1
Means and Ranges of Language Proficiency Test

Level	Grammar Means*	Ranges	Oral Means*	Ranges	Total Means*	Ranges
High(n=10)	81.5	92-67	63.5	90-50	145	174-129
Low (n=10)	67.0	73-52	43.5	50-30	110.5	121- 97

*t=6.85, for grammar; t=7.49, for oral; t=12.18, for total
p<.001 (df=9)

Design

The study adopted a $2 \times 2 \times 3$ factorial design with repeated measures

on two factors.   The first factor was proficiency level (high and low); the second was composing process (translation and direct composition).   The third factor was concerned with the components of writing (content, organization and style) for qualitative analysis and also with error type (lexical choice, awkward form, and transitional problems) for quantitative analysis.   While these factors operated as independent variables, holistic rating with regard to each component of writing as well as frequency-count concerning error type were treated as dependent variables.   For the length of T-units and the number of S-nodes per T-unit, which are also part of the quantitative analysis, a 2×2 design with repeated measures on the factor of writing process was figured separately.

Data collection

Forty writing samples were collected during regular class hours over three weeks in June, 1989.

On day one, half of the students (10), chosen at random were assigned to a direct English writing task and the other half (10) were given a Japanese writing task.   Before the actual writing, written instructions were given concerning topics, allocation of time, the use of dictionaries, and further, in these instructions, students were requested to choose a topic from among the four options and complete a composition about it.   The topics chosen for this study all involve a "comparison" rhetorical pattern; they are: 1) Compare movies and videos, 2) Compare life in the city and life in the country, 3) Compare cars and bicycles (or motorcycles) and 4) Compare high school and college life.

On day two, the same procedures were followed, except that the writing assignments were alternated between the two groups.

On day three, all the Japanese versions of written composition were returned to the students, who were subsequently asked to translate them into English.

Since chosen topics are often considered as an intervening factor on students' writing performance, it is worth mentioning the distribution of the topics.   The distribution by the two differing proficiency levels is exactly

equal (Topic 1, 4; Topic 2, 5; Topic 3, 4; Topic 4, 7), and that of the two types of writing shows similar tendency (Topic 1, 4:4; Topic 2, 6:4; Topic 3, 4:4; Topic 4, 6:8, for translation and direct composition, respectively). This distribution indicates no basis to assume that there are obvious effects of the topics on the students' writing performance.

Data analysis

Holistic rating, which is used for "qualitative" analysis, is a common technique for the evaluation of writing based on readers' impression. This technique is usually applied to three kinds of scoring, "holistic" (overall), "analytical", and "primary trait", depending upon the purpose of evaluation. Of these three, the present study adopts "analytical scoring", which "breaks performance down into component (e.g., organization, wording and ideas) for rating on multiple scales" (Stiggins and Bridgeford, 1983:26). This is because it seems best fit for the purpose of the present study, which is to compare the characteristics of students' compositions written through the two writing processes.

The study utilizes a 5-point scale scoring and applies it for rating on the three major components of writing: content, organization and style. Each component is further broken down into subcomponents. Content, for example, is constituted of 5 subcomponents (specifics, development, overall clarity, interest and thesis statement), while organization consists of 4 (introduction, logical sequence of ideas, conclusion and units), and style includes two subcomponents (vocabulary and variety of form). In all, a total of 11 subcomponents was subjected to scoring by three raters (two native speakers of English and this researcher). The set criteria for these raters to follow in scoring are presented in Table 2.

For quantitative analysis, the study employs frequency-count to investigate three types of error which are likely to interfere with the communication of the writer's intended meaning. Recent studies on error analysis indicate that problems with lexical choice and word order are judged to be least or less acceptable by native speakers of English, namely, professors reading ESL students' pieces of writing (Van, Meyer and

TABLE 2
Criteria for 11 Subcomponents of Writing

Categories	Criteria
Content	
1. Specifics	vivid examples/ supporting details
2. Developed ideas	explanation or elaboration of the main idea/ ideas relevant to the given topic
3. Overall clarity	not confusing/easy to understand
4. Interest	capture the reader's attention/imaginative/ insightful/unusual perspective
5. Thesis statement	to what extent a thesis presents the text or the writer's position or view
Organization	
6. Introduction[3]	focus or point to what the writer is going to talk about appeal to the reader or prepare the reader for what is coming
7. Logical Sequence	mostly within a paragraph
8. Conclusion	synthesize the entire essay by summarizing the text or by making suggestion or prediction based on what is said strong finish preferred
9. Unity	to what extent ideas expressed in paragraphs are related to the writer's main point
Style	
10. Vocabulary	sophisticated range/ variety/ appropriate register
11. Variety of form	the use of a variety of sentence beginnings, participal phrases, subordiante clauses and discourse markers

Lorenz, 1984; Santos, 1988). Based on this finding, the present study looks into wrong lexical choice, awkward form (phrases and sentences) and transitional problems. The definition of each of the errors and its examples are as follows:

Wrong lexical choice: Inappropriate or improper use of a word which leads to obscurity or misunderstanding of the writer's intended meaning.

(1) I'm very surprised by *prosperity* of videos.

(2) First of all, the distance of my house to university is not long enough to think of *transporting* by car.

Awkward from: Grammatically and/or semantically deviant phrases or sentences which either interfere with naturalness of the writer's expression or obscure the writer's intended meaning. Grammatical deviation includes wrong word order, double negatives, unspecified pronoun, fragment, etc., and semantic deviation often results from the literal translation of Japanese ideas. Examples of these are shown below:

(1) College life *needs to become independent myself* (word order).

(2) ... *few* men who were from countryside *couldn't* adapt to life in the city without a sense of incongruity (double negative).

(3) We can go *wherever easily* (fragment)

(4) It is often that sitting for long time in narrow seat *makes my hip feel a pain* (semantic deviation)

(5) A big sound of buzzer that *tell visitors to raise a cortain......* (semantic deviation).

Transitional problems: Inappropriate or improper use of transitions either on a sentential or a discoursal level, which often disrupts the logical sequences of the writer's ideas. Some examples are as follows:

(1) It's said that people won't go to the movie lately. *On the other hand*, the demand of rental videos is upper and upper.

(2) But it is expensive. *Though* I got a ticket sold in advance, I must select movies which I really want to see.

Apart from error frequency count, this study also looks into the composition of students' T-units, particularly in the mean length of the T-unit and the mean number of sentence-nodes (S-nodes) per unit. These measures are both considered as indexes of syntactic complexity; yet, there are differences. The T-unit, which is defined by Hunt as "a single main clause (or independent clause) plus whatever other subordiante clauses or non-clauses are attached to, or embedded within, that one main clause" (1977: 93), has been empirically proved to be an objective instrument to measure

students' writing proficiency (Kameen, 1979; Parkins, 1980; Flahive and Snow, 1980). S-nodes, on the other hand, have not been used as much as T-units for writing, but rather for speaking (Brock, 1985; Duff, 1986). Nevertheless, this measure is also included as part of the qualitative analysis because it focuses on verbal constructions such as tensed verbs, gerund, and infinitives of any defined unit. These two measures, while tallying different elements, are expected to attain high correlation in measuring syntactic complexity.

Interrater reliability

Three experienced writing instructors (two native speakers of English and this researcher) served as raters. Prior to the actual blind coding of 40 essays, they were trained in the use of the 5-point scale on the three measures: content, organization and style. Subsequently, the raters blindly coded the essays individually. Then Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to test the interrater reliability. The results, before discussion, attained satisfactory levels of agreememt between each of the three pairs of raters, respectively ($r = .082, 0.89, 0.89$ for content; $r = 0.75, 0.79, 0.82$ for organization; $r = 0.96, 0.97, 0.96$, for style).

For objective measures, two judges (one native speaker and this researcher) counted all the three types of errors, T-units and S-nodes. When some differences occurred between the two, they were resolved through discussion. Since their overall frequency count tallied quite well, an interrater reliability check was not conducted on these objective measures.

RESULT

Qualitive Analysis

The means and standard deviations of the three dependent measures (content, organization and style) and the F values for the three major factors (proficiency, writing process and component) are presented in Table 3 and 4, respectively. The results indicate that the two major factors, pro-

ficiency and writing process, have significant effects on students' writing performance ($F = 4.42$, p<.05, $F = 7.32$, p<.05), while the component factor does not have such effects. However, the two interaction factors (proficiency $\times$ process and process $\times$ component) are also significant ($F = 6.37$, p<.05, and $F = 4.54$, p<.05, respectively). Since the interaction factors override the main effects when they are significant, it is important to consider those interaction effects in interpreting the data.

The above statistical results are interpreted as follows: while the two groups of students performed better in the translation versions as a whole, this holds true only with the lower level group because the interaction factor (proficiency $\times$ process) had significant effects. As Table 3 shows, the low level students consistently gained high scores in the three measures, content, organization and style in the translation versions; however, the high level students did not have the same tendency. On the contrary, they gained higher scores regarding content and organization in the direct composition versions than those of translation (62.49, 64.50 for DC; 60.67, 61.33 for T, Table 3). Consequently, this result led to no significant difference between the two groups in the translation versions, while large differences were observed in those of the direct composition (see Figure 1). In short, the writing by the low proficiency level students was greatly influenced by the kind of writing process they employed, while that of the high level students was less influenced.

The significant effects of another interaction factor (process $\times$ component) was also observed in the students' overall performance. That is, the students generally gained higher scores in the translation versions, but the scores differed according to components. Of the three writing components, they made the smallest gain in organization. This result suggests that organization is less influenced than content and style by writing process; yet, attention should be given to the high level students' better performance in the organization of the direct composition versions.

Lastly, since this study found that writing process produced significant effects on the students' overall writing it further examined what subcomponents of their writing were influenced by this factor. According to Table

TABLE 3
Means and SDs of Dependent Measures (Content, Organjzatjona & Style)

| Proficiency | *Direct Composition* | | | *Tanslation* | | |
	Content	Organization	Style	Content	Organization	Style
High	62.49 *	64.50	59.33	60.67	61.33	65.67
	(13.31)**	(.9.10)	(18.97)	(18.61)	(15.53)	(15.48)
Low	43.87	48.33	43.33	59.87	58.06	59.67
	(.9.03)	(10.80)	(10.18)	(11.29)	(13.00)	(.9.88)

* Figures show converted raw scores in percentages.
**Standard deviation

TABLE 4
Three-Way ANOVA Dependent Meaures (Content, Organization & Style)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	
Proficiency(A)	3083.33	1	697.60	4.42*	
Process(B)	1572.46	1	1572.46	7.30*	
A × B	1371.67	1	1371.67	6.37*	
Component(C)	39.69	2	36.69	0.46	
A × C	11.16	2	5.58	0.13	
B × C	326.80	2	163.40	4.54*	
A × B ×C	76.51	2	38.25	1.06	

*p<.05

Figure   1
Proficiency x Process
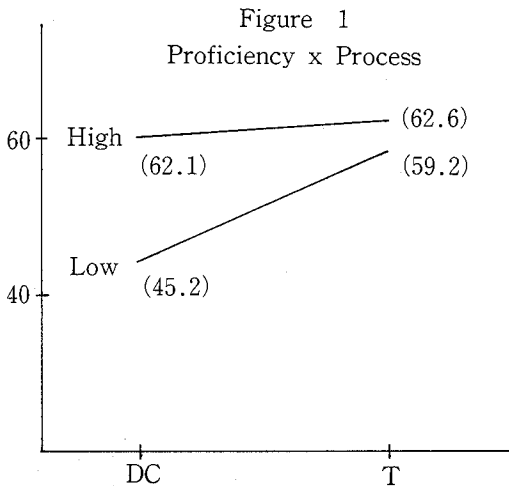
5, which indicates the summary of the results of *t*-tests performed on each component, the low level students performed significantly better in almost all subcomponents (specifics, developed ideas, clarity, interest) of the content in the translation versions, while the high level students showed no significant difference between the two kinds of versions. However, concerning organization, the high level students performed significantly better in two of its subcomponents, logical sequence and unity, in the direct composition versions, while the low level students showed better logical sequence in the translation. Nevertheless, both groups of students did similarily better in the style of the translation; the high level students used more variety of form (i. e., sentence beginnings, participal phrases), whereas the low level students did so, too, in addition to making more sophisticated choice of vocabulary. These results correspond to the overall findings discussed earlier.

Quantitative analysis

Table 6 indicates the means and standard deviations of the three dependent measures (lexical choice, awkward form and transitional problems), and Table 7 shows the F-values for the three factors used in the quantitative analysis (proficiency, writing process and error type). The results indicate that of the three major factors, only the error factor is statistically significant (19.70, $p < .01$), along with the three-way interaction factor (3.84, $p < .05$). That is, the occurrence of error differed according to type; lexical errors occurred most frequently in the students' writing, followed by awkward form and then by transitional errors. Yet, more importantly, the three-way interaction factor indicates that awkward form significantly appeared in the translation versions of the high level students (1.39 per 100 words for T; 0.37 for DC, Table 6). On the contrary, the occurrence of the three types of error by the low level students changed very little according to writing process.

Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations of the two measures, length of T-units and S-nodes per unit, and also the (F-values for the two factors (proficiency and writing process). Regarding these two measures,

TABLE 5   Summary of Results (Paired *t*-Test)

Measure	High DC	T	Low DC	T
Content				
Specifics				*
Developed ideas				* *
Clarity				*
Interest				*
Thesis statement				
Organization				
Introduction				
Logical Sequence	*			*
Conclusion				
Unity	* *			
Style				
Vocabulary				* *
Variety of form		*		*

*p<.05   **p<.01

TABLE 6
Means and *SD*s of Dependent Measures (Three Types of Errors)*

Proficiency	Direct Composition Lexical Choice	Awkward Form	Transition	Translation Lexical Choice	Awkward Form	Transition
High	1.22 * (0.47)**	0.37 (0.39)	0.22 (0.32)	1.11 (0.63)	1.39 (0.61)	0.46 (0.43)
Low	0.91 (0.67)	0.87 (1.13)	0.22 (0.43)	1.03 (0.46)	0.76 (0.56)	0.25 (0.34)

*   Figures show the number of occurrence per 100 words.
**Standard deviation

TABLE 7
Three-Way ANOVA Dependent Measures (3 Types of Errors)

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Proficiency(A)	0.36	1	0.36	0.76
Process(B)	1.04	1	1.04	3.47
A × B	1.22	1	1.22	4.08
Error(C)	13.44	2	6.72	19.70**
A × C	0.04	2	0.02	0.06
B × C	1.21	2	0.61	2.18
A × B × C	2.13	2	1.06	3.84 *

*p<.05<, **p<.01

which are both concerned with syntactic complexity, the table indicates that the interaction factor is equally significant in its respective measure (8.44 for T-length p<.01; 5.55 for S-nodes/T-unit, p<.05). This means that the high level students produced significantly longer T-units, each of which includes more S-nodes, in the translation versions than the direct composition. On the other hand, the low level students did not show such tendency in the two different versions.

TABLE 8   Means and F-ratios for Two Measures

| | Means | | | | F-ratios ($df=1,18$) | | |
| | High | | Low | | | | |
	DC	T	DC	T	Proficiency	Process	Interaction
T-unit length	11.33	13.64	12.55	12.43	0.00	6.84*	8.44**
S-nodes/ T-unit	1.82	2.24	2.15	2.06	0.25	2.37	5.55*

*p<.05, **p<.01

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study suggest that there are qualitative and quantitative differences between the two writing processes, one translating Japanese-written compositions into English and the other composing directly in English. These differences are clearly related to the level of students' language proficiency (grammar knowledge and oral skills combined in this study). Qualitative analysis indicates that low level students seem to benefit a great deal by translation; their writing improved in the three major components, particularly, in content and style. In the translation versions, these students developed more ideas with explanations and examples, which subsequently captured the reader's attention, and they also used more sophisticated vocabulary and a greater variety of form, with assistance of dictionaries. This result suggests that composing in the first language allows students, especially those of low language proficiency level, easier and freer expression, by not putting them under language constraints.

High level students, on the other hand, do not seem to benefit by trans-

lation as much as their counterparts. While their style, like that of the low level students, improved in the translation versions, the quality of content did not become any better. On the contrary, the organization of their writing suffered in the translation, particularly in the logical sequences of ideas on an intra- and inter-paragraph level. Furthermore, quantitative analysis suggests that in the translation versions, those of high language ability more frequently tend to use awkward form that is likely to impede the communication of the writer's intended meaning. This tendency correlates with increased syntactic complexity in the translation versions. That is, as syntactic complexity increased in the translation, more frequent use of awkward form appeared.

In a way, such a tendency should be expected to occur in the translation versions of low level students, on the assumption that their limited language ability makes them more susceptible to word-to-word translation. Contrary to this expectation, they were less influenced in their form by writing process. That is because, as they themselves reported in questionnaires, the students tend to operate with the same writing process for both translation and direct-composition; similar to translation, even in direct composition, they first create meaning in the first language, and then mentally translate it into English. As a result, they showed little difference between the two writing processes in their use of the target language.

One major finding of the study implies that the use of first language is important for low level students; this use enables them to express ideas fully on their own intellectual and cognitive levels. Yet, this implication should be taken cautiously because another major finding suggests that once students reach a higher language proficiency level, the use of first language bears not much positive effect, but rather reverse offect on the organization of ideas and the production of intelligible discourse.

Then, what is the most judicious use of the first language in writing? As it is found to be useful for low level students to generate ideas, it is recommended for them to use it at an earlier stage of composing; they can use the first language in exploring or inventing ideas. However, after this stage, they should be encouraged to express in English only the main flow

of ideas generated in Japanese, without becoming bogged down in word-to word translation. In the meantime, they should also be encouraged to develop an ability to express themselves directly in English in various ways, for example, through journal writing.

If the ultimate goal of writing instruction is for the development of an ability to create English-like discouse, students should be encouraged to express themselves in English as much as they can. The extensive use of translation delays the development of an "English" audience as well as fluency in writing on the part of student writers. Word-to-word translation, for instance, makes it difficult for them to shift reader-writer relationship from the Japanese to the English language (see, Kobayashi, 1984, 1988). In writing English essays, it is advisable that they have an "English" audience in mind. This awareness helps the students realize what they are expected in English discourse, for example, to demonstrate logical progression of ideas and earlier statement of a main idea. Secondly, the constant use of translation obstructs students from developing fluency in English writing. As most students in the study experienced, direct composition does create some frustration on the part of students, particularly those who are under language constraints. Yet, if they rely on translation, fluency hardly develops; they can develop it only by using the target language in writing.

Lastly, the limitation of this study should be mentioned. The study involved only twenty students and analyzed forty writing samples. Being based on such a relatively small sample size, the findings of the study cannot be generalized extensively. A larger sample size is needed to bring more definite results and implications. In this sense, the present study is considered to be of an exploratory nature for a forthcoming study on a larger scale.

Notes

1. This study was conducted as a preliminary study for the one which Kobayashi and Ms. Carol Rinnert plan to work on collaboratively. She participated in designing the study and also served as a rater. Many thanks go to her and also to

Ms. Dianna Allan, who served as the third rater. I' d also would like to thank
Mr. Jun Yamada for helping me with statistical concepts.

2. Students were first asked to describe a series of pictures and then asked for
their opinion on college students' part time jobs. Their speech was evaluated on
the following 4 aspects: accuracy, form, fluency, and production.

3. The raters discussed at length the problem of how an introduction should be
scored. Consensus reached the point that as long as the introduction met some of
the set criteria, rhetorical differences would be less emphasized.

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