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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether written language in general and dialog journal writing in particular is the preferred vehicle for syntactic acquisition of some adult learners. Subjects were five adult English-as-second-language (ESL) students, all literate in their first language, which was Spanish. Subjects were observed over a period of 16 weeks. Interviews, questionnaires, and a variety of paired oral and written tasks were used to elicit language data. The samples were analyzed for a variety of English morpho-syntactic features in an attempt to determine which of three production modalities (speech, academic writing, or dialog journal writing) served as the primary medium for syntactic innovation and the development of syntactic accuracy. Results indicated that individual subjects demonstrated notable differences in their patterns of syntactic development across writing and speech. Findings suggest that writing in general, especially dialog journal writing, is the modality favored by most of the subjects for both syntactic innovation and accuracy. (Contains 4 tables of data and 15 references.) (Author/CR)

ON THE INTERFACE OF WRITING AND SPEECH: ACQUIRING ENGLISH SYNTAX THROUGH DIALOG JOURNAL WRITING[1]

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Abstract

Second language acquisition studies often treat spontaneous oral language as primary data. This paper reports on the results of a case study indicating that written language in general and dialog journal writing in particular may in fact be the preferred vehicle for syntactic acquisition of some adult learners.

Five adult ESL learners, all literate in their first language, took part in the study. Interviews, questionnaires, and a variety of paired oral and written tasks were used to elicit language data. The samples were analyzed for a variety of English morpho-syntactic features in an attempt to determine which of three production modalities (speech, academic writing or dialog journal writing) served as the primary medium for syntactic innovation and the development of syntactic accuracy. The individual subjects demonstrated notable differences in their patterns of syntactic development across writing and speech. However writing in general, and especially dialog journal writing, appeared to be the modality favored by most of these learners for both syntactic innovation and accuracy.

The range of journal entry types produced by these learners is discussed from the point of view of topic and rhetorical features which may serve as precursors to the development of academic writing skills. Finally, the findings are reviewed in light of (a) the privileged status in the research of oral-driven models of second language acquisition, and (b) the pedagogical value of informal, personal writing in a second language writing instruction.

Some Claims for Dialog Journal Writing

Since the first report appeared from the landmark project conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics in a Los Angeles elementary school (Kreeft et al., 1984), dialog journal writing (hereafter, DJW) has gradually come to occupy a central place in L2 writing pedagogy and research into the acquisition of L2 writing proficiency (see numerous cited articles and conference papers in Tannacito, 1995). Growing out of this body of work, a number of claims have been made for the efficacy of DJW as a teaching tool in non-native speaker writing classes.

[1]This article is an earlier version of a paper presented at the College Conference on Composition and Communication in Phoenix, March, 1997.

The basis for these claims appears to stem principally from the notion that DJW helps learners to recreate in their acquisition of L2 writing the natural process of learning to speak (Shuy, 1988). Shuy claims that a similar sequence of developmental stages occurs in ESL students' early DJW and in their oral language acquisition. Kreeft (1988) documented a similar morpheme acquisition order in the ESL students' journal writing as in their speech and found similar individual differences in acquisition rates in both modalities. She notes that DJW fulfills one of Krashen's (1984) conditions for L2 acquisition to occur: it takes place in a non-threatening, supportive social environment.

Discourse features of DJW also help to make it a medium conducive to L2 writing acquisition. First, it comes close to the spoken register (Shuy, 1987), featuring a high degree of personal involvement and topic selection by the learner. When carried out in true dialog fashion between student and teacher, DJW recreates discourse features similar to face-to-face conversation, such as equal turn distribution, similar turn lengths for both interlocutors and topic maintenance (Staton, 1993). Ullanoff (1993) claims that the mentoring environment created between teacher-expert and student-novice in DJW allows for linguistic scaffolding, in which the teacher sets discourse tasks for students within their zones of proximal development. Additionally DJW appears to elicit some of the same input features from the teacher-correspondent as are found in oral foreigner-talk: lexical and syntactic simplification, a high proportion of direct questions, and overt topic marking. These features were found to vary with the proficiency of the student-correspondent (Kreeft et al., 1984).

There are other cognitive and academic advantages for L2 students engaged DJW. A number of researchers have claimed that, when handled by a skillful teacher, DJW provides a bridge from expressive to academic writing (Kreeft, 1988; Nemoianu, 1992; Blanton, 1995). Through their written queries, teachers can nudge students' responses away from the here-and-now toward more extended, abstract topics, facilitating the movement from dialog to autonomous, self-generated monologue that Moffet (1968) and others have viewed as an essential step in the development of academic writing skills.

Shuy (1987) argues that through this type of deliberate querying, teachers scaffold intellectual problems for their students that promote higher-order

thinking, such as constructing logical arguments and providing extended elaboration on a topic. Gutstein (1987) found that certain discourse features of DJW related well to academic writing and were predictive of students' GPAs in college coursework.

Dialog Journal Writing & Second Language Acquisition

DJW replicates for learners many of the benefits of conversational exchange, while at the same time preserving the non-threatening privacy of writing. It thus serves as a kind of linguistic borderland, on the interface of writing and speech, which provides learners with the best of both modalities. It would therefore appear to be an ideal environment for L2 acquisition to occur. Indeed, in the area of ESL syntactic acquisition, Kreeft (1990) cites numerous studies indicating that the syntactic processes documented in speech development also occur in ESL learners' writing, and she further suggests that the changes in morphology found in learners' DJW over time reflects their general growth in English proficiency (Kreeft, 1990).

However, since no study known to the author involves direct, within-subject comparisons of L2 writing and speech development, it is difficult to say whether the syntactic development seen in L2 learners' DJW merely echoes a parallel process in their speech development, or whether it reflects a more powerful, underlying acquisition process that eventually affects both modalities. In other words, is it possible that L2 learners might acquire syntax at least in part through their journal writing? The present study seeks to address this question through a direct comparison of morhpo-syntactic development in L2 learners' DJW, classroom academic writing and their speech. It will show that writing in general and DJW in particular serve as important tools for L2 learners' syntactic development and for some learners may even overshadow speech as the preferred modality for L2 syntactic acquisition. Evidence will also be presented suggesting that DJW is an ideal medium not only for L2 learners' syntactic growth, but also for the development of their academic writing skills.

A Cross-modality Comparison

The study reported here sought to determine whether a selected group of adult ESL learners would prefer DJW to other language production modes as a medium for experimentation and innovation in their uptake of English

syntactic structures and morphological elements. To accomplish this, a cross-modality analysis of five adult learners' syntactic development was carried out over the first four months of their enrollment in a university intensive English program (IEP). The three modalities studied were:

a. the students' dialog journal entries, written at home, on self-selected personal topics;

b. their in-class writing from the composition component of the IEP, where topics were selected by the writing teacher and were academic in nature; and

c. their careful as well as casual speech.

The syntactic analysis carried out across all these modalities focused on two acquisition variables: *innovation* (i.e., the first correct appearance of a given structure or morpheme in a learner's L2 production), and *overall syntactic accuracy* (measured as the proportion of error-free T-units in a learner's speech or writing sample).

Method. Case-study methodology was adopted in order to provide an in-depth look at the learners' syntactic development across writing and speech. Five students were selected from an IEP in a mid-sized state university in the southwestern U.S. and observed over a period of 16 weeks while they were enrolled in the low-intermediate level of the IEP. The language data collected consisted of routine classroom assignments as well as speech and writing elicited through tasks specially designed for the study. The routine tasks included pre-, mid- and post-semester interviews and written essays, essay tests and practice tests written in the composition class, weekly speed-writing exercises and at-home entries written in a dialog journal notebook.

The additional language tasks consisted of a weekly series of paired oral and written language activities matched for content and elicited through a variety of means: field trips to the campus museum, short videos and still photos, and academically-oriented prompts (e.g., an important national figure from the student's country, foreign students' adaptation problems at American universities, a proposal for a pre-departure seminar to prepare foreign students for future study in the U.S, etc.).

The tasks were designed to elicit samples of both casual and planned language. For example, spontaneous speech samples were obtained through instructor-student interviews and conversations between two students about a video one had just seen. On the other hand, taped monologues produced samples in which the students had time to plan and monitor their speech. For writing, the DJ entries and speed-writing exercises done in class accounted for the casual samples, while in the academic essays students had time explicitly allotted for pre-writing and revision, and they were instructed to check their writing for mechanical accuracy.

The samples were analyzed for a variety of morpho-syntactic features typically of interest in adult L2 acquisition research. A feature of interest was broadly defined as any morphological or syntactic element appearing for the first time in a subject's writing or speech, or any element that appeared to be evolving toward a mature native speaker form. Features included verb tenses and aspects, regular and irregular plurals, third-person singular -s, regular and irregular past, copula, existential "there," non-referential "it" subject, negatives, passives, articles and demonstratives. Clause introducers and clausal word order were also considered.

These morpho-syntactic categories were developed independently for each subject by establishing an initial set of features based on the students' pre-semester intake samples. The categories were then adjusted as data from the subsequent samples indicated that new forms were entering the students' interlanguages, or that earlier features were undergoing change.

To track morphological innovations, the week of the study in which each feature of interest first appeared in its correct form was recorded, as well as the modality in which the feature occurred. To account for the learners' development of syntactic accuracy, the percentage of error-free T-units was computed for each sample, and gains in accuracy rates were tracked for each subject in each modality over the course of the study.

Subjects The five learners selected for the study were all native speakers of Spanish, and all were preparing to be degree-seeking students at the university (either graduate or undergraduate). They had all completed at least a high-school diploma (and in most cases an undergraduate degree) in their home countries.

They each brought to the study different L1 literacy backgrounds and differing initial skill balances in their written and spoken English.

However none had more than a low-intermediate knowledge of English at the beginning of the study (Table 1). This was indicated by their initial scores on the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, ranging from 36 to 58 points (out of 100). Oral English proficiencies clustered at the bottom of the National Association of Foreign Students' Affairs' 6-point scale (NAFSA, 1981). Similarly, their proficiency in written English clustered around the high-beginning level on the Educational Testing Service's 6-point Test of Written English scale (ETS, 1991). On both these scales a score of 4 indicates minimal academic competence.

Table 1. Initial English proficiency scores of five subjects.

Subject	Age	MTELP	ORAL*	WRITING**
Francisco	19	41	2	2
Rosa	21	48	2	2
Oscar	33	56	2	3
Hector	34	38	1	1
Manuel	35	41	2	2

* based on NAFSA speaking proficiency scale

** based on Test of Written English scoring guide

At 19, Francisco was the youngest of the five subjects. He was a recent graduate of a private preparatory school in northern Mexico and had visited the U.S.-Mexico border area several times for treatment of a medical condition. During these visits he had stayed with English speaking relatives and had thus already picked up survival-level oral English by the time he entered the ESL program. His regular reading in Spanish was restricted to the daily newspaper, and he had done no reading in English outside his high school EFL classes. He had no previous experience with written English. Initially, there were no great lexical or syntactic distinctions between his written and spoken English; his writing was characterized by many of the same chatty, conversational features found in his speech.

Rosa was a 21-year old transfer student from Panama, intending to major in Hospitality and Tourism. She had a strong literacy background in Spanish and came from a family of avid readers. She had already taken a short, pre-

departure ESL training program in the Canal Zone. When she arrived the IEP her written English was somewhat more developed than her speech. Her writing was careful though simplistic, and contained none of the speech-like idiomatic features of Francisco's writing. In her Canal Zone course she had received instruction in sentence and paragraph structure , but her lexical usage was very limited and thoroughly non-idiomatic. Like Francisco, her grammatical control was rudimentary. There was clear evidence of Spanish interference in Rosa's early written English, a feature not as obvious in Francisco's writing.

Oscar presented a strikingly different profile as an L2 learner. He was older (32) Mexican, married, with a small daughter. His family accompanied him to the U.S.. He had already earned a master's degree in electrical engineering in Mexico, and had had considerable teaching and research experience before arriving in the U.S. By self-report he was an experienced writer in Spanish, having published technical articles in engineering journals, along with some newspaper pieces on Mexican history and sociology. As part of his graduate studies in Mexico he had received instruction in written English, which focused mainly on technical report writing. He read widely in both Spanish and English. His initial writing showed a higher level of expression and grammatical control than the two younger subjects. However, Oscar's initial level in oral English was comparatively low. His control of basic clause structure was undeveloped, with subject elements often missing, verbs unmarked for tense, and pronouns inaccurately marked for number and gender. His utterances were short and dysfluent, almost as though conversation were physically difficult for him.

The two remaining subjects were also Mexican graduate students. *Hector*, the oldest of the subjects at 34, had already earned a master's degree in agronomy in Mexico and worked as a university researcher in horticulture. He was married with three children and like Oscar lived with his family on-campus in married student housing. An extremely quiet individual, he rarely participated in class discussions. He reported that even in his native language he was quiet and in social situations preferred to remain outside the circle of conversation. His initial oral and written English were the lowest of the group, both scored as Level 1 on their respective scales. His oral language was extremely dysfluent and inaccurate. He had no experience with written

English, and his writing on the intake sample was barely comprehensible, with much Spanish interference and some unusual lexical substitutions.

Manuel, 33, had come to the U.S. to complete a doctorate in agricultural economics. After finishing his master's in Mexico in environmental studies, he held a number of jobs, one as an environmental impact analyst at an American firm's Mexican branch office. He had been teaching agricultural economics to undergraduates just prior to his arrival. Manuel's initial English proficiency level was higher than Hector's in both modalities, but considerably lower than the other three subjects. His early writing was more developed than his speech, but marked by extensive word substitutions, deletions and inappropriate usage. Manuel's early speech was fluent but often incomprehensible because interpolated sounds, substituted nouns for verbs and inverted word order. During his initial interview he frequently indicated comprehension but was unable to respond appropriately to many questions. He reported having had a stuttering problem as an adolescent, which he later overcame with the help of one of his high school teachers.

Results

Overall improvement . All five subjects showed substantial increases in writing proficiency, regardless of how much, or how little (in the case of Hector and Oscar), interaction they had with native speakers. Gains in speech appeared to vary with the amount of daily contact each subject made with native speakers.

Living in the university dormitory for single students, *Francisco* had ample opportunity to talk with monolingual English peers. By self-report he was a gregarious person who took deliberate advantage of his living situation to develop his oral skills. Both his final oral and written samples showed a one-point increase on their respective scales. During the study period he began to make register distinctions between his dialog journal and the academic writing he did in class. The latter no longer showed the speech-based expressions that were noted initially. In his DJW, Francisco typically wrote simple narrative descriptions of his daily activities (see examples in the following section). Only in his last entry did he go beyong a perfunctory laudary list of daily activitiesengage in any introspection on his experiences as a foreign student on campus.

Rosa had also gained one point on both the oral and written proficiency scales by the end of the four-month period. She lived in on-campus during the period of the study and, like Francisco, was gregarious and sociable. She made friends quickly and eventually began dating an American monolingual English speaker. According to her ESL writing teacher, Rosa was a serious student who quickly developed her writing skills. Her later writing showed a great increase in fluency and accuracy, and she began to incorporate long stretches of reported conversations with friends and roommates. Like Francisco, she used her dialog journal to describe her daily activities, but she usually added comments on her general emotional state and affective responses to specific events of the day.

Oscar's development of syntactic structures and grammatical accuracy was far more apparent in his writing than in his speech. By his own report he felt intimidated by face-to-face interaction with native English speakers and made no great effort to approach them. In contrast, his written English grew steadily during the study period in both accuracy and expressiveness. The growth was most striking in his dialog journal writing. In his entries he experimented with a variety of narrative and expository styles, revealing himself to be a well practiced creative writer. He also used his entries to introduce advanced syntactic structures such as past conditionals, perfect modals and the passive voice in a variety of tenses.

Progress in both writing and speech came far more slowly for *Hector*. By the fourth month of the study his proficiency levels in both modalities were only marginally higher than they had been at the beginning. He introduced fewer new grammatical items in either modality than any of the other subjects, and he had a difficult time shaking the Spanish interference errors and idiosyncratic substitutions that marked his English initially. He was painfully aware of his slow acquisition rate, constantly referring to "my English problem." He did little to improve his situation, maintaining an isolated existence with his family and making little contact with native speakers, other than the tutoring he received as part of the ESL program.

More than the subjects previously described, Hector used his DJW as an outlet to vent his frustrations with the process of learning English and with his personal and family difficulties living in a new country. He described as well as he could his problems in obtaining his promised scholarship, his

difficulties with class tests and assignments, and most especially the problems his wife and children were experiencing adjusting to life in the U.S.

Unlike the other subjects,*Manuel* was described by his composition instructor as a difficult student who often refused to follow directions on homework assignments and who sometimes was unwilling to take part in class activities involving group work. Nevertheless, he made considerable progress in his written English during the study period, and the great majority of his grammatical innovations and accuracy gains were in that modality. As with Oscar, many of the syntactic phonological inaccuracies that marked Manuel's early speech persisted to the end of the semester. When syntactic changes in his speech did occur, they had often appeared in his writing already. This developmental lag in Manuel's oral skills was particularly curious since, unlike Oscar and Hector, he was a gregarious individual who actively sought out opportunities to socialize with native English speakers, including serving as coach for a local boys' soccer team.

In his DJW, Manuel typically isolated one striking event of the day and expanded on it, first giving a factual description, then an extended personal reaction to the event. These often took the form of cross-cultural comparisons between Mexico and the U.S., and criticisms of what he perceived as unfair or even unprofessional conduct on the part of his classmates and professors.

Syntactic innovations. Although the English syntactic repertoires of all five subjects increased over the course of the study period, there were considerable individual differences among the group. The most notable difference among these learners was in their rates of syntactic growth. Francisco and Rosa continued to add new syntactic features to their language at a steady pace over the entire course of the semester. Oscar and Manuel made rapid early gains, and then began tp level off in the third month of the study. Hector made much slower progress, adding relatively few new forms during the entire period.

The most interesting commonality among the learners was the production mode chosen for syntactic innovation. In four of the five cases (the exception being Francisco), writing was preferred over speech as the venue for the introduction of new morpho-syntactic forms (Table 2). When

TABLE 2. Total syntactic innovations by production modality for five ESL learners.

PRODUCTION MODALITY	TOTAL INNOVATIONS
Oral	42 (20%)
Simultaneous*	36 (17%)
In-class writing	90 (43%)
Dialog journal writing	42 (20%)
TOTAL	210

*Simultaneous: A given morpheme appeared in both writing and speech during the same two-week period.

the frequencies for in-class writing and at-home DJW are combined for all five learners, they account for well over half (63%) of all syntactic innovations made by the group. By itself, DJW was used as frequently as speech for syntactic innovation, though not as frequently as in-class writing (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Syntactic innovations for individual subjects by production modality.

Modality	Rosa	Fernando	Oscar	Manuel	Hector
ORAL	7 (15%)	13 (37%)	7 (16%)	8 (17.4%)	7 (18%)
SIMULT	11 (24%)	7 (20%)	7 (16%)	4 (8.7%)	7 (18%)
IN-CLASS	17 (37%)	12 (34%)	22 (50%)	22 (48%)	17 (43.5%)
JOURNAL	11 (24%)	3 (8.6%)	8 (18%)	12 (26%)	8 (20.5%)

Accuracy. The largest overall gain in grammatical accuracy was seen in the subjects' in-class writing. However, the group accuracy rates averaged for each month of the study period showed DJW to have the highest level of grammaticality for almost all the subjects at each point during the study (Table 4). Evidently, the relaxed yet focused nature of the journal writing task

TABLE 4. Average grammatical accuracy for all five ESL learners in three production modalities (in percent error-free T-units), by month.

MODALITY	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
Oral	23.2	24.6	28.8
In-class writing	22.6	27.4	34.2
Journal writing	36.0	41.8	43.4

was singularly well suited to the consolidation and refinement of grammatical knowledge.

Communicative Functions of Journal Entries

Various communicative functions of DJ entries have been identified in the writing of ESL children (Ullanof , 1993; Staton, 1981). The adult ESL writers in this study also used their journals for well-defined communicative purposes, but with the added sophistication that reflected their previously attained L1 literacy levels, and their attempts as foreigners to deal with the American university, a recognizable yet still culturally distinct institution. Four types of entries were clearly identifiable.

Daily log The daily log was at its simplest a laundry list of the day's activities. This was the type of entry preferred by Francisco and exemplified by the example below.

(1) *How are you? I'm fine, the last week I talked with my girlfriend and we resolved all the problems or discussions that we had, she told me that she had an accident but how she is OK. The last weekend I talked with my father too, I went to El Paso because he was in that city. We went to Sunland Park and bought some clothes for me...*

Over the course of the semester Francisco never varied from this type of entry. Perhaps because of this static and rather perfunctory style, the repertoire of syntactic structures in his DJW remained fairly stable over the course of the semester with few innovations.

Reflective response: Reflective response entries were written by all of the subjects except Francisco. They consisted of anecdotes from the day's

activities accompanied by statements of personal interpretation or reaction. This might take the form of simple "how this made me feel" statements, as in this excerpt from Rosa's journal:

(2) *Today is my brother's birthday. I hope that he has a beautiful day and he receives a lot of gifts. I received a call from my friend Archie. He lives in Ohama and he is a good person. We talked for a long time. I liked to talk with him. Today is hot, but I can feel the fresh wind. At night is very cool for me and my friends laugh me because they said that in the winter (it will be) terrible for me.. Well, I hope (I) can to see snow for first time this year....*

More extended versions of the reflective narrative were written by the older men, as this entry from Manuel's journal, recounting his meeting with a new woman friend:

(3) *Yesterday in the evening I had a very pleasant surprise, I knew a beautiful woman, she was starting to do her exercise when I arrived (at the track). Since the first moment she began to communicate with me. ...During one hour we were running and speaking but I was very nervous because I didn't know the habits or customs here. However, I treated her like a lady. At night I couldn't study because I was thinking about that woman and I decided that today I'm going to look for her (at) the track and practice more English.*

Near the end of the third month, Hector produced the following extended anecdote recounting a kitchen fire in his on-campus house. Although he revealed no overt emotional reaction to the incident, the laconic, bemused tone of the entry does not hide his amazement at the spectacle taking place around his house:

(4) *... I went to my home and in the way it was raining and I came back in my house very moist of my clothes and my wife told me you change of your clothes and this time my wife put on in the (stove) one frying pan with oil and she told me about her score in 4 exams that she present last monday and in this moment the frying pan it is hot and it is fire and all house has smoke and me neighbor called to (firemen) and in little time the firemen, and policeman and their vehicles and was very spectacular this move(ment) of people. By fortune only burn one credenza, stove and the frying pan. My little son was the first person that cry and ask (for help).*

In the case of these two men, their highly charged reflective journal entries contain an uncharacteristically high degree of grammatical accuracy, especially in their handling of verb forms and clausal word order. Perhaps the hightened feelings surrounding the recounted events, or the self-imposed need to convey the event clearly to their instructor, prompted a greater-than-usual attention to grammatical form. In Rosa's case, the reflective responses were shorter, less developed and did not differ linguistically from daily logs.

Introspectives. Again except for Francisco (the youngest of the five), all the adult ESL writers in this study produced extended introspectives at some point during their three-and-a-half months of DJW. These differed from reflective narratives in that the writers focused entirely on their internal states, often feelings of frustration or anger after an unpleasant experience. Introspective entries sometime evolved into more abstract think-pieces. For example, Rosa used her feelings of homesickness as a springboard to discuss her views on cultural differences:

(5) *...In three day(s) more, I have two month(s) that I stayed here. Sometime(s) I think of that are two years in place of only two months. In a little time that I stay, I learned many things that...I didn't understand. For example: that each cultures are not good or bad, only each one is different, (and) each person has is own personality, and other things more...*

Manuel, having received a low score on a test in another class, took the opportunity to reflect in his journal on the quality of higher education in the U.S.:

(6) *In the present time, I don't understand to the teachers (that teach mathematics), because they (seem) to know much but they forget that the pedagogy is very important for to get good results in the students. Last Friday I was studying some thing on statistics, and I feel that I learn a lot (by) myself than with the explain of the teacher. What's happening with the teaching in the University? Or what happened with the mathematic scientists? The quality or quantity of education is the most important (thing), or what is the most important in this moment?*

In some moments I feel that I'm in other world different to my teachers and that I need to stop and reflection about this new step of (schooling) for me, however I believe that... I'm not unique, because all my classmates told me their changes, (fears) or (psychological) impacts...

Oscar used his wife and daughter's sudden return to Mexico as the occasion for a bit of nostalgic, even poetic, introspection.

(7) *I can (fill) everywhere of this page with a phrase: I miss them. I miss their eyes, their voices, they sweetness and their kisses. I'm searching (for) a lost laugh in every corner. I need to find their scent in the pillows. I can fill every part of this page with...my sourest tears. I miss every game with them in the evening when I (come) back from college. Just now I'm playing alone with their blue plastic ball like in (those) happy days. Two weeks have passed since they (left) me here, along in middle of (desert), because without them this place is the worst desert in all the world...*

These extended pieces tended to bring out greater syntactic complexity in the students' writing than was seen either in their other DJW entries or their in-class compositions. Frequencies of subordination, coordination were higher, clause and sentence length were greater, and lexical usage was more varied.

<u>Creative writing.</u> Truly literary pieces were produced on occasion by Oscar, alone of the five students. The most interesting of these took the form of vignettes, unusual events which Oscar cast either as subjective character studies or as highly charged anecdotes. One of these entries, in which he draws a portrait of his first-grade teacher:

(8) *She was a fat woman, with a red face in red hair and a loud and deep voice. I couldn't avoid to see her every morning during a year and many times in the following years. I trmbled every morning when she pronounced my name in front of other persons. I felt that I was half-dead with fright when I know that I had to see her... At this time she was to me like a great priestess.*

She is responsible for all (that) you can see right now. The form of the "a", the waves of the "m" and all the periods above the "i"s. My bold draw(ing) of the capital "I" is fully her blame...She was my first teacher, the person who (took) a boy and transform(ed) him in(to) a reader...

Her name is Julia, and sometimes I see her again. she always remembers my name in spite of almost thiry years since (those) days. Her voice is loud and deep still, but her hair isn't (as red as) I could remember.

The most notable linguistic feature of these vignettes was their lexical richness. The degree to which Oscar engaged in dictionary word-searching in order to produce these entries in not known. In any case, they stretched his

vocabulary range to a greater degree than any of the other kinds of writing he did during the semester.

It is clear from these examples that some types of journal entries lent themselves more than others to L2 experimentation and growth. How L2 writing instructors might prompt their students to attempt the more linguistically adventurous types of DJW entries is addressed later.

Dialog Journaling Writing in the Academic Writing Classroom

As noted earlier, it has been claimed that personal writing can provide a cognitive bridge to more academic forms of expression (see particularly Blanton, 1995). The present study did not attempt to find direct evidence of positive transfer from DJW to the students' development of cognitive-academic writing skills. However, several instances of precursors to, or emergent forms of, academic writing can be found among their entries.

First, *reader awareness* , essential to successful transactional writing, is easily developed within the context of DJW, where the audience is a clearly identified individual who takes active part in the information exchange. The realization that a known, flesh-and-blood reader is involved helps the student writer become conscious of the audience's information needs, as these excerpts show.

(9) (a) *Now I'm listening music from Panama, specailly of my town...excuse me that I change my topic here but I don't have many important things to talk (about)...*

(b) *Excuse me (for) no write about my activities of the day but is equal to all days...*

(c) *Today I'm going to write my last journal, for this reason I'm going to write it different from the other times. First of all I'm going to tell you about my experience with the other class that I take this semester..*

Another characteristic of academic writing, and one sometimes difficult for novice writers, is *topic elaboration* , i.e. the extended development of a description, analysis, or argument. Beginning academic writers are often stymied by the inability of finding "something else to say" about a given topic. However, the conversational nature of DJW, combined with the delay between student's comment and instructor's response provides student

writers with both the motivation and the time for more extended invention than they might be able to accomplish in speech or in formal essays. In the following excerpt, Manuel used his attendance at a talk given by a guest lecturer on campus as the springboard into a discussion of world affairs:

(10) *Carlos Fuentes is a writer of the acutality in the world. He have written different books on the plitical change in the world...the last Tuesday (he) stayed in this university in the music Center building and explain a topic very important for everybody, "Sharing the Hemisphere."*
He spoke about the heritage, mistakes and (successes) that his world (has) had for example he (stated) that it's not possible continue with same actitude of power, (isolation) and exploitation; it's necessary to understand that everybody should integrate and not exclusion, becasue the future is (for) everybody.
For example, Mexico and United States can learn a lot together, U.S. can teach to Mexico how to (be) successful and Mexico can teach to U.S. how (to survive).

Rosa used her recounting of a Christmas shopping trip to incorporate some physical description:

(11) *Today (we) went to buy some things for our little Christmas trees. We went to the Mall and we returned very late...I never had a Chrismas tree in my house in Panama. This is very sad for me but now I have one. I took a lot of pictures of my little Christmas tree. It is beautiful with its many color lights, beautiful star, silver bells, red balls, red ribbons and other things. My little tree is like the eight (wonder)in the world.*

The extrapolation of topics to *higher levels of abstraction* , away from the here-and-now of daily events and personal experience is another hallmark of academic writing. Hector's remarks about his previous studies in Mexico included this description of a horticultural experiment:

(12) *...This study has as objective make one basic study about the (location) of where it is the root of pecan in the soil and (in this way) to can make better the work and...to take of the soil nutrients that need and with more efficiency and also to control the root sickness. This work is very important because is the basic (for) other work that need to know the conduct (of) the root in soil so much in vertical and horizontal form. In this work I need much time and money and support of the university...*

Academic writing requires the use of *formal organizational structures* . From the beginning of the study, four of the five students were casting their

DJW entries in series of topically-related blocks; later, as the semester progressed, the blocks evolved into indented paragraphs with flush right margins, initiated by explicit statements of topic.

It is not being claimed that the students' use of paragraph structure first emerged in their DJW and then transfered to their academic writing; in fact, there, may have been a spill-over effect in the opposite direction, since paragraph-essay structure was the central instructional point in the composition class during the semester. At the very least, however, their DJW entries provided an additional arena in which to apply the formal structures of school writing. (The students were given no formal rules or protocols to follow in composing their DJW entries.)

The Other Half of the Conversation

The four older students in this study used a wide range of communication categories in their dialog journal entries, while Francisco's production was more limited. Thus it would appear that the more adventurous older writers got greater L2 linguistic and rhetorical mileage from their DJW than did Francisco. Their longer histories as writers may have provided them with ready-made genres that they could transfer to their English writing--this was most certainly the case with Oscar. Francisco on the other hand, as a less experienced writer, may not have had ready access to these modes of expression. How might less experienced writers such as he be helped to realize the full potential of dialog journal writing?

The answer lies in the *teacher's half of the conversation.* The instructor in this study wrote extremely short responses to the students' entries, often no more than a phrase of encouragement. Thus, his half of the dialog was more perfunctory than truly conversational. Had his responses been more elaborate, they might have stimulated Francisco to branch out earlier into more ambitious forms of DJW, possibly accelerating his development as a writer of English. Three potential features of instructors' journal responses are explored in this section, along with their benefits for L2 student writers.

Expanding linguistic repertoires. Just as teachers and parents use carefully calibrated talk as a scaffolding to help learners extend their oral proficiencies, so L2 compostion instructors can use their half of the conversation in DJW as a stimulus for their students' language expansion. After reading a few initial entries from the student, the instructor will be able to gauge the level of his

or her L2 writing proficiency ; at that point the instructor can deliberately begin to incorporate new grammatical structures (e.g., verb tenses, complex clause structures) to model a slightly higher syntactic level than the learner is currently producing. New vocabulary and idiomatic expressions can be introduced into teacher responses in the same way. Since adult learners differ greatly in their acquisition rates, syntactic and lexical calibration of must be set individually .

Deliberate syntactic inclusion is best done in the context of authentically communicative teacher responses, those that present "genuinely new and interesting information" (Staton, 1981, p. 4), so that the learner-reader is fully engaged and responsive to the instructor's input. Similarly, to maintain a truly communicative, non-didactic tone, the instructor should avoid calling attention directly to grammatical or lexical errors in the students' entries. If corrective input is used, the correct forms should be embedded within the teacher's own responses.

Expanding communicative functions . The instructor can also guide student writers to use expressive functions they might otherwise ignore or avoid in their DJW. This can be done through *direct conversational questioning* . For example, when Francisco reported that he and his girlfriend and worked through their problems, the instructor might have asked, "How did you feel before you talked with her?" or "How were your problems with your girlfriend affecting you?" While Rosa was more of a risk-taker in her expressive reactions to events, her comments rarely extended more that two or three sentences beyond the actual narrative account. The instructor might have led her to produce more extended comments by asking her to introspect and analyze. For example, when she commented that "one culture is not better than another, but only different," the instructor might have asked "Why do you say this?" or "What specific difference are you referring to?" Depending on the closeness of the student-teacher relationship, the student may or may not choose to follow these leads in a subsequent entry, but the questions create an opening for new DJW styles that the learner may otherwise not attempt.

Other types of teacher prompts are suggested by the *procedural facilitators* used in studies by Scardamalia and Bereiter (1985) to encourage young L1 learners to become autonomous writers. In their experiments, they responded to their subjects' writing with cue cards containing comments

ranging from the simple "Go on, tell me more about this," to more specific urgings like "Give me an example/another example of that," "Develop that last idea a little bit more," "Tell me a possible reason for that," "Give me an argument against that," etc. L2 writing instructors can incorporate such cues into their dialog journal responses to prompt student writers to go beyond simple narratives. Unlike the use of direct questions, the goal of procedural facilitators is not to provide student writers with specific content to write about, but to help them develop and practice a set of heuristics which can be transfered to their academic writing for purposes of invention and planning.

Cognitive expansion. Instructors may also use their DJW responses to lead students from personal, here-and-now topics to discussion of more abstract knowledge. A preliminary step might be to inquire about a favorite movie or television program. Later, the instructor might ask about books or magazine articles the student has recently read. To tap academic content, the instructor might bring up another class the student is currently taking, asking about the topics discussed in a recent class session.

Using the dialog journal to discuss academic topics may be viewed as a misapplication of this uniquely personal form of writing. Indeed, if the student writer doesn't follow the instructor's lead in responding to these queries, it may be well to abandon the attempt. However, to the extent that students are willing to write about a variety of topics, the journal entries can serve as a non-threatening gateway to academic writing.

Expanding language-learning awareness.

Instructors can also use DJW as a means to develop students' awareness of their own L2 learning processes. McNamara and Deane (1995) suggest that L2 students write a letter to the instructor at the beginning of the course, describing their strengths and weaknesses as English users, and informing the teacher of the areas they wish to work on during the course. In a second letter written at the end of the course, students are asked to reflect on the progress they have made and what plans they have for developing their language skills in the future. Along the way, the instructors may use their journal entries to ask students about their problems and successes in language learning throughout the course.

As students become more conscious of their language learning processes, instructors can use their side of the conversation to help learners develop more effective L2 strategies. For example, in their entries treachers might ask

their students about out-of-class encounters using the L2, or to analyze successful and unsuccessful exchanges they have had with native speakers. Through such guided self-assessment, learners can begin to identify specific language learning strategies that work for them.

Conclusion

After more than fifteen years of research and classroom practice, dialog journal writing continues to offer L2 writing teachers new possibilities for stimulating their students' language growth. This study has suggested that the advantages of DJW extend beyond writing itself. Through their dialog journals, these adult ESL students experimented with new language structures that had yet to occur in their speech or in their more formal writing. Thus, DJW appears to have served as an accelerator of the students' general proficiency English.

By combining the immediacy of speech and the privacy of writing, DJW creates a unique opportunity for second language students to experiment with new syntactic forms and new styles of self-expression. We have seen that it also provides a staging ground for the acquisition and practice of communicative functions that may later transfer to school writing. Finally, we have examined how L2 writing instructors can deliberately construct their own written responses to help their students realize these benefits.

A fruitful area for additional research in DJW would be to examine the extent to which instructors' journal responses directly influence the linguistic and textual features of their students' subsequent entries. It would also be interesting to track more precisely how students' DJW influences their school writing. Whether or not such direct effects can be demonstrated, there is already ample evidence for the efficacy of using dialog journal writing in the second language classroom. Teachers can expect that the time spent conversing with students' through their dialog journals is more than re-paid in the language development their students experience, and in the insights it gives teachers into their students as individual language learners.

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