4

SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

This chapter discusses:

- Some reasons for the neglect of language in the teaching of writing
- The baseline in L2 reading, writing, and vocabulary
- Studies of L2 academic writing and text: issues of language quality
- L2 academic writing and areas of difficulty
- Error gravity studies
- Learning to organize ideas and the language needed to structure discourse (L1-based top-down approach)

Introduction: Some Reasons for Neglect of Language Quality

In the U.S. and some other English-speaking countries, one of the prominent characteristics of pedagogy and methods for teaching L2 composition to nonnative speakers of English is that much of it has little to do with the learning needs of L2 students specifically. In the 1970s and 1980s, the teaching of composition to native speakers was becoming established as a discipline separate from the teaching of literature in English departments.

Since that time and to this day, L2 writers have largely received instruction in the same range of writing skills and composition as have "basic" native speaker writers. Typically, L1 composition courses focus on such ubiquitous aspects of composing as planning, drafting, developing an argument, organizing ideas and discourse, as well as the uses of sentence transitions, precision in word choices, and documenting published sources. Ordinarily, composition curricula do not make

an attempt to develop L2 learners' incremental and essential language skills (see, for example, Zamel [1987] and ICAS [2002], for a discussion of the absent—but essential—teaching of language to L2 writers). In addition to the self-evident fact that L2 learners need to learn the language before they can write in it, ideological windstorms have swept composition studies away from the mainstream academic disciplines and their time-honored and somewhat rigid way of teaching students and evaluating student writing (Blau, 2006; Hinkel, 2011; Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008; Sullivan & Tinberg, 2006; Weigle, 2002; see also chapter 3).

Since the time when rhetoric and composition studies first set out to separate from and philosophically distinguish themselves from practically all other disciplinary mindsets on any campus in North America, their goals have been effectively accomplished. Today, the objectives and methods for teaching English Language Arts (ELA) at school and undergraduate composition have effectively become an area of instruction fundamentally and functionally different from any other such area (e.g., Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Bazerman, 1988; McCarthy, 1987; North, 1986; Rosenfeld, Courtney, & Fowels, 2004). For example, Lester Faigley (1992) one of the key figures in composition teaching, refers to "the peculiarly North American discipline of composition studies" (p. 13) and comments that "scholarship in composition studies . . . is chaotic like the weather—a phenomenon difficult to predict, but one that follows certain regularities at particular sites" (p. 16).

Until very recently, ELA and composition pedagogy for native and nonnative speakers alike followed its own particular fashions and highly politicized trends that have for decades predominated in many English departments in North American education. In 1970s and 1980s, and to this day, the somewhat extreme politization of rhetoric and composition studies has fragmented their pedagogical focus. The political bandwagons and fragmentation have also led to a wide disparity in what is taught, how, and for what purpose (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988; Herrington, 1985; Langer, 1992). In the past several decades, disparate and often haphazard political agendas in ELA and composition teaching have also subsumed the what, the how, and the why in the teaching of ESL writing.

At present, occasional L2 writers can be found in practically any ELA and composition classroom in the U.S. and Canada, for example. As an outcome, practically all composition teachers have encountered L2 writers among their students (see, for example, NCTE slogans, such as "Every writing teacher is a second language writing teacher" or "Every teacher is a teacher of English language learners"). Such incidental experiences have also been powerfully validated by a number of case studies published between the late 1980s and early 2000s on the real or imagined parallels between the writing skills of undergraduate L1 and L2 students. Although published cases discuss the writing and learning processes of only one to half a dozen students, these works proved to be highly influential during the heyday of the "paradigm shift" in the teaching of composition. These publications, combined with teachers' occasional encounters with L2 writers, have

persuaded most—if not all—L1 composition teachers that they are fully qualified to teach L2 writing without much background in L2 learning processes or L2 instruction (e.g., Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993; Nelson, 1991; Zamel, 1995; for a particularly poignant discussion of the issue, see Silva, 1990).

Because the discipline of composition studies deals with L1 writers almost exclusively, virtually all methods and practices for teaching L2 writing have been simply "borrowed" or derived from those developed for native speakers.

> There is little doubt that L2 writers need to attain an extensive range of writing skills, which L1 novice writers also have to acquire in the process of schooling. However, a crucial distinction between the L1 and L2 writers is that native speakers already have highly developed (native) language proficiencies.

The writing skills that both L1 and L2 writers have to learn may apply to organizing ideas into coherent discourse or structuring their writing in some sort of principled way. In addition, however, developed and relatively advanced language skills are fundamental and mandatory to enable L2 writers to produce competent (or at least passable) discourse and text in L2. To allude to an old saying, just as it is impossible to bake a cake without the necessary ingredients and knowing how to use them, it is not likely that L2 writers can cook up an academic paper without the requisite essential language skills or knowing how to be able to produce academic prose.

This chapter takes a look at studies of learner language in writing. By and large, these consist of research into the persistent and difficult issues in L2 writing and its language quality, including that at the college and university levels (i.e., the written academic prose produced by schooled L2 writers). A number of extensive and detailed research reports have been published that shed light on L2 writers' productive language skills. These investigations typically analyze an array of L2 writing features, including L2 uses of grammar, vocabulary, rhetorical markers, errors, or the conventions for organizing ideas, which have greatly influenced L2 writing instruction.

The research into the integral elements of L2 writing quality has traditionally concentrated on the three main characteristics of L2 academic prose:

- The language features employed (or not employed) in L2 academic writing (e.g., academic language, vocabulary, or complex sentences)
- The types of prevalent and damaging L2 errors and their hierarchies of importance (e.g., subject-verb agreement or verb tense shifts)
- Discourse organization and idea structuring

Taken together, the findings of these investigations lay the foundation for developing instruction and curricula with an ultimate goal of improving students' language range and quality.

The objective of this chapter is to identify curricular domains of L2 language and writing (i.e., the systematic studies of the learner), as was noted in chapter 1. While chapters 2 and 3 examine socially valued features of school and academic writing, this chapter identifies the language and discourse properties of L2 writing, including the de-valued characteristics of L2 prose, such as errors, that must be addressed in curriculum design and instruction.

Along these lines, the next chapter zeros in on the indispensable elements of L2 language base required to produce at least passable academic writing (i.e., the recommendations of the specialists).

Action Point

In practically all colleges and universities, composition courses for first- or second-year undergraduate students are offered every term. In many cases, course syllabi or course descriptions are available online or can be easily obtained, on request, from the English department, where such courses are typically offered. Collect 4 or 5 syllabi for various composition classes and identify specifically what writing skills represent the foci of teaching. How much instruction and attention is devoted to the development of academic language and writing? What priorities can be identified in the teaching of writing at your institution (or some other college or university)?

Analyze the information you glean from these syllabi and course descriptions and determine what undergraduate writing skills can be improved as a result of taking these composition courses and what cannot be.

The Baseline: L2 Reading, Writing, and Vocabulary

At present, research has clearly and unambiguously demonstrated that L2 writers' skill level in vocabulary and grammar disadvantage the quality of their formal prose. A large number of studies report that, even after several years of language learning, L2 writers' text continues to differ significantly from that of novice L1 writers in regard to a broad range of vocabulary and grammar properties. The results of dozens of analyses indicate that even advanced and highly educated L2 writers, such as doctoral students enrolled in universities in English-speaking countries and professionals, have a severely limited lexical and syntactic repertoire compared to their native speaker (NS) peers. In many cases of undergraduate L2 writers, for example, a restricted access to advanced language features results in simple texts that rely on the most common language features that occur

predominantly in conversational discourse (e.g., Carson, 2001; Hedgcock, 2005; Hinkel, 2009, 2011; Jenkins & Hinds, 1987; North, 1986). Currently, in light of a large body of research findings obtained after about a half a century of comparative L1 and L2 text analyses, this conclusion seems rather obvious and clear-cut.

In regard to the lexical range required to produce competent written prose, a great deal of disagreement accompanies the amount of vocabulary necessary for or known by university-educated native and nonnative speakers. One of the key issues in the debate is whether the amount of vocabulary should be measured in terms of individual words or word families. The difference between the two types of measurements is substantial: counting words is crucially different than counting word families, which consists of base words and their derived forms (e.g., *child*, *children*, *childhood*, *childish*).

Although the vocabulary counts undertaken by researchers in the 1970s and 1980s relied on individual words, in the past three decades, practically all measurements of vocabulary have largely dealt with word families. Nonetheless, since much of the research into L2 reading and writing deals with the counts of words and word families, both types of studies are briefly discussed here.

Practically all researchers of L2 reading and vocabulary agree that high frequency words are easy to learn, and they allow learners to do a great deal in a second language. These are required in all forms of language usage: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. High frequency lists consist mostly of function words (e.g., articles; prepositions; pronouns; and common content words, such as *make, time, state, year*, or *new*). West's (1953) General Service List includes about 2,000 words, and 80% of these are function words.[1] These essential and most common words are easy to learn simply because they are so common.

On the other hand, even common academic words (e.g., *authority, democracy*, or *random*) do not occur nearly as often, and these need to be actively taught—and learned (Nation, 2005, 2011, 2013). For example, when, over the course of a week-long vacation, tourists repeatedly ask for directions in an unfamiliar city where a new language is spoken, the words required, such as *straight, left*, or *right*, are easy to learn even in just two or three interactions with the locals. However, the words that are even slightly less common, such as *a traffic light* or *intersection*, may take a little more exposure. Of course, listening, like reading, is a receptive skill, and, asking for directions requires a lot more vocabulary and language control than being able to get a bit of an idea what the locals are saying in response. Writing a request for street directions in another language, for example, is another story entirely (see the discussion below).

> Early vocabulary learning is easy because early learning includes highly frequent words, but less frequent words, such as those in basic academic vocabulary, are harder to learn, and they need to be taught.

Given that the most common 500 high frequency words on West's (1953) list, for example, consist of *a, the, and, by, but, in, out, we, you, I, do, this,* and the like, the scale in Table 4.1 seems to be readily understandable. For instance, to use an earlier example, a tourist who can ask for and understand basic street directions in a foreign country may not be able to read a newspaper or even a newspaper advertisement. That is, a vocabulary range of 500 words, pictures, illustrations, or street signs (as in letters or letter strings) are essential for most basic comprehension. On the other hand, a vocabulary of 500 to 1,000 words can allow learners to "pick out" a few familiar words in newspaper headlines.

TABLE 4.1 Reading Skill Levels and L2 Vocabulary Size

0–500 word families

- Pictures and illustrations are required for comprehension.
- Only a few content words recognized in unsimplified (native-level) L2 text.
- Only extremely simplified texts (such as those for very young children) can be understood.
- Identifying letters or letter strings (words and phrases) immediately can be difficult.
- Reading takes place letter by letter or word by word.
- The beginnings of the sentences are often forgotten when the end is reached.

500–1,000 word families

- Native speaker texts can be completely incomprehensible.
- Dictionary use represents the main reading strategy.
- Reading is word by word, followed by re-reading when meaning continuity is lost.
- Making text-based inferences is not possible.
- The meaning of the message is difficult to retain, and the content of reading is soon forgotten.
- Slow and predictable plots in graded readers can be comprehensible.
- Overall, reading is slow, laborious, and exhausting.

1,000–2,000 word families

- Dictionary usage is the main reading strategy, with the exception of highly predictable texts.
- Unsimplified texts remain so complex that they are soon abandoned.
- Content words can be occasionally identified in stretches of text.
- Humor and textual irony are inaccessible.
- Most texts are processed at the sentence level, and complex story plots can be difficult to follow.

2,000–5,000 word families

- Most words in text are understood but not immediately.
- Dictionary use is frequently required.
- Text structure can become accessible at the discourse level.

5,000 +

- Most unsimplified L2 text at the level of general interest can be understood, but not when the topic is specialized.
- Introductory academic texts may require occasional use of a dictionary.

(Adapted from Waring, 2002)

Researchers use a variety of tests to measure students' vocabulary sizes. Some of these are rough and approximate instruments, but some are normed and standardized with a relatively high degree of accuracy (see Nation, 1990, for a thorough discussion of such tests). However, as a general rule of thumb, when L2 readers and writers display language skills such as those in outlined Tables 4.1 and 4.3, their vocabulary size is probably in the range indicated.

Scanning a newspaper page and deriving bits of basic news reports can be possible with a vocabulary range of 1,000 to 2,000 words, even though the details of news stories will not be understood. To read a newspaper and to be able to understand at least some of the news stories, learners would require familiarity with 2,000 to 3,000 or 4,000 words, and attaining this much vocabulary takes a bit of work. Along these lines, most L2 students who aspire to academic studies in a country where another language represents the medium of instruction—and is required for all academic writing tasks—need to have a vocabulary of over 5,000 words, which includes academic words that have to be systematically and persistently learned.

A vocabulary size of approximately 5,000 word families is requisite for relatively fluent L2 reading, even though a dictionary is still necessary at this level (e.g., Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Hu & Nation, 2000).

Talking Shop

Have you studied or learned another language? For how many years? Can you scan newspaper headlines and understand—at least approximately—what they say? Are you able to read a newspaper article closely and understand its contents in detail?

Do you have a sufficient language base to write a summary of a newspaper article and formulate your position on the topic discussed in it? And how about an academic paper on a topic addressed in several journal articles?

In your estimation, how many more years would attaining academic language proficiency take, compared to an ability to engage in a conversation?

Table 4.2 demonstrates the vocabulary size and the number of words required to read in English at school and illustrates the difficulty of being able to understand L2 text without knowing many content words. The term *text coverage* is the percentage of text words known by the reader or the number of words needed to cover the text.

TABLE 4.2 Vocabulary Size and Text Coverage

Number of Words	*% Text Coverage*
86,741	100.0
43,831	99.0
12,448	95.0
5,000	89.4
4,000	87.6
3,000	85.2
2,000	81.3
1,000	74.1
100	49.0
10	23.7

(Carroll, Davis, & Richman, 1971)

According to Hu and Nation (2000), with text coverage of 80% (20 out of every 100 words unknown to the readers, at a vocabulary range of slightly over 1,000 words), reading and comprehending text may be difficult. Typical non-academic or general interest L2 texts—for instance, a newspaper article—cannot be understood adequately enough for learners to answer comprehension questions.

In general, 98% text coverage (1 unknown word in 50) is needed for most L2 learners to understand what they are reading. Based on the results of several experiments, Hu and Nation (2000) conclude that it is possible for some learners in the 90% and a few more in the 95% group to have adequate or close to adequate comprehension, but for a majority of learners this accessible vocabulary is too small to understand the text well enough to account for its contents.

L2 Vocabulary and Writing

The data in Table 4.3 below highlight the types of written text that nonnative speakers can produce, depending on their accessible vocabulary range. As has been mentioned, knowing 500 or 1,000 of the most frequent English words does not allow L2 learners to produce a piece of writing, however simple, because these common words consist of articles, prepositions, pronouns, and basic nouns and adjectives (e.g., *now, study, away, start, room, enough, best, some*). As is apparent from the outline of the writing skills at various vocabulary levels in Table 4.3, clearly, L2 learners with vocabulary sizes of 500 or 1,000 words cannot be expected to produce much text.

In fact, basic written prose can begin to emerge only when the learner's vocabulary range exceeds 2,000 words. Typically, the descriptions of student writing found at the level of over 5,000 words seem to be pretty typical of what is considered to be relatively advanced in advanced ESL classes or many community

TABLE 4.3 L2 Vocabulary Size and Writing Skill Levels

0–500 words
- Only very basic sentences with extremely poor choice of words.
- Series of correct or incorrect phrases without sentences.
- Translated phrases and sentences.

500–1,000 word families
- A small number of compound sentences (e.g., *Bob left, and Mike went home.*).
- The use of only basic phrase and sentence conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, then*).
- Translated sentences that consist of largely translated phrases.

1,000–2,000 word families
- Complete dependence on a bilingual dictionary when writing longer texts.
- Poor word choice.
- Occasional collocations (words that often co-occur together in discourse as in *strong wind* or *big wind*, but not *large wind*), but many awkward and strange phrases.
- Disjointed ideas/incoherent in spots.

2,000–5,000 word families
- Highly pre-patterned and predictable texts can be produced without a dictionary (e.g., *This is a big problem in my country*).
- Spontaneous writing and writing on new topics are almost completely dependent on bilingual dictionary use.

5,000 +
- A bilingual dictionary is used only rarely in routine types of writing, mostly for the purpose of identifying subtle differences in word meanings or looking up specific terms.
- Extensive reliance on a bilingual dictionary in writing specialized texts, such as homework assignments.
- Consistent and repeated errors and misused words.
- Un-idiomatic text, short on collocations.

(Adapted from Waring, 2002)

colleges. At this juncture, it is important to note that the text produced by L2 writers with such a high level of vocabulary (i.e., around 5,000 words) seems to be far from impressive, as many L2 teachers know from experience.

Analyses of L2 Academic Text and Writing: Identifying Curricular Domains

> Academic vocabulary must be taught simply because it does not occur in daily interactions and conversational exchanges.

Hu and Nation (2000, p. 406) point out that "the relationship between text coverage and vocabulary size is strongly affected by the kind of text that is looked at." That is, knowing high frequency English words does not enable the readers to understand academic text well.

TABLE 4.4 Vocabulary Size and Text Types

Text Type	*First 1000 Most Frequent Words*	*Second 1000 Most Frequent Words*	*Academic Vocabulary (Coxhead, 2000)*
Conversation	84%	6%	2%
Juvenile fiction	85%	6%	—
Academic texts	71%	5%	10%

(Adapted from Hu & Nation, 2000)

On the other hand, the first 1,000 most frequent words can enable learners to get a handle on portions of conversations. The most rare of the first 1,000 include, for example, *ideal, warm, miss, familiar, guest, everyone, duty, perfect, flow, kitchen, dust,* or *admit*, which occur more frequently in conversations than any other types of discourse. Notably, however, as Table 4.4 shows, only 6% of the second 1,000 most common words have a bit of substance to add to the learner's ability to comprehend conversational exchanges, with content words, such as *flood, distant, decrease, complicate, consumer*, or *harvest*, all of which would seem rather basic to most native speakers.

It is easy to conclude from these data in Table 4.4 that conversational vocabulary does not occur in academic texts, and academic vocabulary cannot be learned by means of attaining conversational fluency.

The fundamental distinctions between conversational and academic vocabulary and grammar represent the impetus for several studies carried by Hinkel (2002a, 2003a, 2004a, 2005). Hinkel's (2002b) study focused on 68 linguistic and rhetorical features of text (e.g., vocabulary and grammar) in a corpus of 1,457 essays (434,768 words) written by native and nonnative speakers of English enrolled in degree studies in U.S. universities. The purpose of her corpus analysis was to identify the frequency counts of language features that occur or do not occur in student writing and compare those in L1 text to those in L2 learner prose. The objective of such comparisons is usually to provide empirical information about similarities and distinctions between the language uses and types of language features in native and nonnative student writing to guide L2 teaching and curricula.

The language features addressed in Hinkel's analysis included both advanced academic vocabulary (e.g., *account, anticipate, controversy, occurrence*) and syntactic constructions such as complex sentences with various types of subordinate clauses (e.g., *[2]*Things I have learned will not be only for my benefit but also to increase the business quality in the country* or **Interacting with people that [are] already successful will help you decide weather looking into future opportunities a must or not*), passive voice constructions (e.g., **It can be seen on my experience, such as at high school and college*), and the uses of English tenses (e.g., **After our graduation, most of us have been adults*).

A large majority of the L2 students whose writing was included in the study were not new arrivals. These writers had spent a few years in the U.S. while they were learning L2 and working their way through the first two years in general

education courses in colleges and universities. This particular demographic characteristic of the learners in Hinkel's 2002 investigation highlights the extent and the kinds of students' language exposure.

> Conversational vocabulary and grammar provide poor coverage for academic text, and having a large conversational range does not necessarily enable L2 learners to read and write academic prose.

The results of Hinkel's (2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2004b, 2005, 2009) investigations are summarized in Table 4.5. The language features identified in students' L2 writing are divided into two broad classes: those that need to be persistently and intensively taught and those that should be un-taught. Relative to the writing of novice first-year students who are native speakers of English, the vocabulary and language features of L2 students with years of exposure to conversational interactions in English leads to their developed conversational language skills but a prominent lack of academic vocabulary and advanced grammar construction (as in the examples above).

> The written prose of experienced L2 writers contains important shortfalls of academic vocabulary and grammar. On the other hand, however, the language of conventionally skilled L2 writers includes an extensive range of colloquial and conversational constructions, such as *guys, a lot, everyone, like he has a problem, dude, someone, thing, something, everything, never, nothing,* and *always*.

Studies of vocabulary, grammar, and morphological (word form) characteristics of L2 text, as well as error analyses (see a discussion later in this chapter), are typically quantitative. Such investigations allow for identifying statistically significant differences between the textual properties of L1 and L2 prose. A large body of research reports has been published in the past several decades. These deal with a broad range of lexical and syntactic characteristics of L2 prose, such as the uses of personal and other types of pronouns, sentence structure (e.g., subordination and coordination), phrase and sentence conjunctions (e.g., sentence transitions), prepositional phrases, concrete and abstract nouns, verb tenses and aspects, cohesive devices (e.g., lexical repetition), lexical synonyms and ties, active and passive voice constructions, and lexical and grammatical errors. Many studies, for example, have investigated the uses of discourse markers (e.g., *well*, *you know*, or *I mean*), cohesion and coherence devices (e.g., *so, the cause of, a result*), modal verbs, hedges, and modifiers in L1 and L2 prose (Field & Oi, 1992; Flowerdew, 2000; Hinkel, 1995, 2001b, 2002a, 2004b; Johnson, 1992; Khalil, 1989; Mauranen, 1996; Swales, 1990).

For this purpose, researchers may compare the frequencies and contexts of sentence conjunctions (e.g., *furthermore, however,* and *thus),* coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, yet*, and *so*), and/or summary markers (e.g., *in short* and *in sum*) (e.g., Field & Oi, 1992; Hinkel, 1999, 2001b, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2002). Similarly, to analyze the uses of modal verbs, usage measurements can be computed separately or together for possibility and ability modals (e.g., *can, may*) or obligation and necessity modals (e.g., *must, should*).

Overall, based on a vast body of research, limited vocabulary and grammar are the most frequently cited/noted properties of L2 text. Some of these examinations are summarized in Table 4.5, and the curricular guidelines presented below are based on the data discussed in Hinkel (1999, 2002c, 2005, 2009). Speaking generally, the vocabulary and grammar constructions that need to be intensively taught are those that fall dramatically short in L2 writing but are found in the prose of basic L1 writers. The academic vocabulary and grammar constructions outlined in Table 4.5 are frequently found in virtually all academic writing of L1 students

TABLE 4.5 The Vocabulary and Grammar Features That Need to Be Intensively Taught

Top and Urgent Priorities

<u>*Vocabulary*</u>

Academic collocations and formal idiomatic phrases (e.g., *The purpose of this essay/paper/analysis/overview is to . . . The main emphasis/focus/goal/purpose of this essay/paper/project is to . . .*)

Academic nouns of all types, such as:

- Abstract and academic nouns, and nominalizations (nouns ending in *-ion, -ity, -ness, -ment*) and gerunds (nouns ending in *-ing*)
- Commonplace and catch-all academic nouns (e.g., *advantage, approach, aspect, category, characteristic, class, method*)

<u>*Grammar*</u>

- Complex sentences with subordinate clauses of all types

Second Priorities

<u>*Grammar*</u>

- Highly prevalent and academic impersonal *it*-constructions (e.g., *it seems/it appears/it is clear that . . .*)
- Descriptive adjectives (e.g., *an important project* vs., for example, predicate adjectives, as in *this project is important*)
- Passive voice (e.g., *the article was published*)

Third Priorities

- Hedges of all types, such as:
  - Frequency adverbs (e.g., *frequently, occasionally, often, usually*)
  - Contextual and possibility hedges (e.g., *comparatively, likely, possible(-ly), probable(-ly), relative(-ly)*)
  - Modal verbs[3] as hedges (e.g., *can, may, could*)
  - Conditional clauses (e.g., *if the author shows facts . . .*)

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beginning in the 8th grade and are usually well established in the range of high school writing (NCES/NAEP, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2004).

Academic collocations and formal idiomatic phrases have to be taught to both L1 and L2 writers simply because these advanced expressions do not occur in naturalistic settings. That is, just like abstract nouns, these constructions are found predominantly in textbooks or academic prose. The difference between L1 and L2 writers, however, is that by the time L1 learners reach the 8th grade, they have encountered and had numerous opportunities to acquire such nouns as *democracy, random,* or *monarchy*. For many—if not all—L2 writers, impersonal *it-* constructions, extensive uses of passives, and hedging represent new, and often difficult, domains of language that have to be explicitly taught. According to Schleppegrell (2004, p. 81), many L2 writers in schools and colleges "haven't had the opportunity to develop academic registers in their first languages" (register is a variety of language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting; e.g., academic language includes formal grammar or formal words). In addition to learning conversational English, L2 academic writers have to learn an entirely new range of grammar and vocabulary that do not occur in casual speech. On the other hand, many L1 writers develop an ability to distinguish between spoken and formal written registers between 4th and 6th grades, and sometimes even earlier (Kress, 1994, 1996).

Talking Shop

Can you identify some of the grammar and vocabulary features of casual conversations or formal writing? How can you tell the difference between conversational and formal grammar and vocabulary? When and where did you learn the differences between the two styles?

In your experience, what are the most prominent characteristics that distinguish the two? What are the reasons that conversational register often finds its way into academic writing?

Many people hold the view that the informal written style is not necessarily out of place in academic writing. So, why is it important for L1 and L2 students to learn to use academic grammar and vocabulary? Discuss your views with your classmates.

As has been mentioned, colloquial and conversational vocabulary and grammar constructions dominate in L2 academic prose because many L2 writers have far more exposure to conversational discourse than they do to standard and formal writing in English. In many cases, however, L2 writers may not be aware, for example, that such vocabulary as *dude, stuff, guy*, or *gal*, or constructions such as *he's gonna be late because he is always late* are inappropriate in academic writing. Much

research has demonstrated that the distinctions between academic language and that found in casual conversations needs to be emphasized throughout the teaching of formal writing required in schooling at any level (e.g., Chang & Swales, 1999; Hinkel, 2002a, 2003a; Schleppegrell, 2002, 2004; Shaw & Liu, 1998). However, an additional reason that colloquialisms are typically found in L2 academic prose is that L2 writers simply lack vocabulary and grammar essential for producing written academic text.

Vocabulary and grammar constructions outlined in Table 4.6 rarely occur in academic writing and need to be "un-taught"—i.e., students need to be taught not to use these features in their academic writing. Alternative and more academic

TABLE 4.6 Conversational Vocabulary and Grammar Constructions That Need NOT Be Taught

Top and Urgent Priorities

Vocabulary

- Indeterminate and vague nouns (e.g., *human(s), human being(s), people, society, world, stuff, thing(y), -ever nouns such as whoever* and *whatever*)
- Tentative verbs (e.g., *like, plan, try, want*)
- Thinking/feeling verbs that rarely occur in informational texts (e.g., *believe, feel, forget, guess, hear, know, learn, love, prove, remember, see, think*)
- Phrase conjunctions (*and, or, but* vs., for example*, in addition or however*)
- Repeated and simplistic sentence transitions (e.g., *moreover, furthermore, thus, therefore*)

Grammar

- First and second person pronouns and contexts that require their uses (e.g., personal narratives/examples/experiences) in lieu of rhetorical support

Second Priorities

Vocabulary

- Intensifiers and emphatics of any type (e.g., *absolutely, a lot, complete(-ly), deeply, for sure, hugely, total(-ly)* or *I do agree that this method is better*)
- Indirect pronouns (e.g., *everyone, no one, nothing; anyone, some, something*)

Grammar

- *Be* as a main verb and predicative adjectives (e.g., *John is tall*)
- Modals of obligation (*must, have to*)
- Contractions (*don't, can't*)

Third Priorities

Grammar

- Future tense verb uses (e.g., *the income of these people is going to/will rise if they get education*)
- Progressive verb uses (e.g., *I am explaining my point of view clearly*)
- *Some-, any-, no-* (indefinite) pronouns (*some-/any-/every-/no- words,* e.g., *somebody, nothing, everyone, anything*)
- Rhetorical questions (e.g., *Do you know what the purpose of life is?*)
- Causative constructions (e.g., *because, because of*)
- *by*-phrase passives (*the depth is determined by the technician during the experiment*)

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lexical and syntactic means of constructing text and discourse have to be taught (see Table 4.5)

Many L2 learners can engage in fluent and unconstrained conversational discourse. In a great number of cases, when listening to a conversation between two individuals it is not possible to tell the difference between those to have access to academic language in English and those who do not. As an outcome, such academic L2 writers need to attain proficiency in academic language simply because without it they are unable to succeed in their academic tasks.

However, for L2 writers to produce academic prose, intensive vocabulary work is required. To replace the occurrences of *human beings, thing, people*, and *whoever*, more formal vocabulary needs to be taught and learned. For example, contextually appropriate vocabulary is relatively easy to find:

> *People—adults, employees of local businesses, individuals, persons, population, the public, residents, community/group members, workers*

To replace personal narratives as evidence, instruction in what represents evidence is also requisite, as well as how to build arguments and evidence for persuasion (see chapter 3 for additional discussion), and how to structure information in writing. Causative constructions, such as *because* and *because of* can be substituted by *reason* and other words a great deal better suited for academic writing:

> *Reason—aim, basis, cause, consideration, expectation, explanation, goal, purpose, thinking, understanding*

Similarly, asking rhetorical questions does not replace providing informed answers based on sound facts. These curricular considerations will be addressed in chapter 5.

Action Point

Writing samples of school age children are relatively easy to find online. Or maybe you can locate pieces of writing produced by your own children, nieces, nephews, or second cousins. How old are these children? What type of writing do they need to produce?

In these writing samples, identify and count the number of occurrences of formal grammar features or formal vocabulary, and then do the same for the occurrences of informal grammar or vocabulary. Count the number of words in each sample. The easiest way to approximate this number is to locate a typical single written line, count the number of words in it, and multiply it by the number of complete lines in the sample.

Then to determine the rate of occurrences of formal or informal grammar constructions and vocabulary, divide the number of occurrences by the approximate number of words in a writing sample. For example, 8 formal grammar features divided by 40 words = 0.2. Then multiply this number by 100 to get a percentage. For example, 0.2 times 100 = 20%.

As the next step, locate the writing sample of an academic L2 writer—of any age—but not a university student writing a class paper (say, an email message), and repeat the procedure. Are these rates similar or different? For writers of similar or different ages? What would such a mini research project demonstrate? What conclusions can be made based on your computations?

L2 Academic Writing and Areas of Difficulty

As early as the mid-1980s, specialists in the teaching of L2 writing and language began to sound the alarm regarding the applicability of methods and techniques adopted for teaching L1 writing to the instruction of L2 learners. Many researchers investigated the range and types of the language learning needs of L2 students in the U.S. academy (e.g., Hinkel, 2003a; Horowitz, 1986a, 1986b; Leki, 2007; Santos, 1988; Swales & Feak, 2012). Their studies, as well as those of other L2 writing experts, have shown clearly that academic ESL and EAP programs do not adequately prepare their L2 students for the writing tasks that predominate in the academy (e.g., Hinkel, 2002b, 2004b, 2011; ICAS, 2002; Rosenfeld et al., 2004). A great deal of research carried out in the 1980s and 1990s has determined unambiguously that the expectations of academic and assessment writing have remained consistently focused on the quality of the student prose that invariably includes such considerations as the vocabulary range and sophistication, the type and complexity of the sentence structure, phrase-level grammar, word order, word morphology, inflections, verb tenses and voice, and pronoun uses, as well as spelling and punctuation.

To demonstrate that L1 approaches to writing instruction cannot and should not be used for teaching L2 writers, Silva (1993) synthesized the findings of 72 empirical studies that compared an extensive spectrum of characteristics of L1 and L2 prose, including language features, discourse structure, rhetorical development, elaboration, persuasion, clarity, specificity, and audience orientation, among many others. His synthesis showed that while L1 and L2 writing "are similar in their broad outlines, they are different in numerous and important ways" (p. 671). Specifically, Silva underscores that a great number of disparities exist between L1 and L2 uses of language. He emphasized that the language learning needs of L2 writers were crucially distinct from those of basic or proficient L1 writers. Silva further states that L2 writing pedagogy requires special and systematic approaches that take into account the linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural differences between

L1 and L2 writers (see also Silva, 1997, for a discussion of the ethical issues that accompany the applications of teaching methods for L1 writers to L2 learners).

According to Silva (1993), pronounced and crucial differences manifest themselves in practically all facets of L1 and L2 language usage: fluency, accuracy, range, quality, and structure. Producing L2 text is far more work- and time-consuming, and revision is demonstrably more difficult. To summarize Silva's conclusions specifically as they pertain to text and language quality, empirical comparisons of L1 novice college-level writing with L2 prose of university students have identified numerous systematic and significant disparities. Silva concludes his overview of research by saying that L2 writers have needs that are "distinct from those of L1 writers, whether they be basic or skilled." The author also points out that it is necessary "for L2 teachers to work to enhance their L2 writers' grammatical and lexical resources" that can allow students to build syntactic and lexical repertoire. That is, instruction must provide students the language options indispensable for producing competent text.

Along these lines, Schleppegrell (2002, 2004) undertakes an extensive and thorough investigation of the language (i.e., grammar and vocabulary range) as well as discourse features L2 students need to learn and deploy for success in their schooling. Her analysis identifies the challenges that academic language presents to L2 learners who are often unfamiliar with the typical "literate" variety of features employed at school. Like Silva, Schleppegrell finds that L2 learners and speakers of nonstandard dialects often have no access to opportunities for advanced literacy development outside of school. For such learners, an explicit focus on language is critical if they are to do well in their subjects.

According to Schleppegrell's (2004) conclusions, in schooling, students attain new knowledge through language, and in practically all contexts of schooling, the language is complex, dense, and abstract. In particular, in various subject areas, such as science, history, and social studies, the linguistic features of writing require students to identify, understand, and construct disciplinary meanings by means of which knowledge is shared and developed. To this end, to be able to come to knowledge and demonstrate it, L2 learners have to achieve a level of language that enables them to obtain education. That is, in order for students to "engage in critical dialogues with institutions and social forms," they need to understand how ideas and beliefs comprise a world view, a political outlook, or literacy practices, all of which are expressed and conveyed through language. Schleppegrell calls for an increased awareness among teachers of language expectations entailed in schooling and the linguistic elements that are valued in school.

Talking Shop

According to several authors cited in this chapter, in the schooling and education of L2 learners, a lack of emphasis on the development

of their language proficiency seems to lead to continued and persistent social inequalities. In your view, how can these be overcome? What can be the reasons that language proficiency continues to be neglected in teaching?

If you were designing a curriculum for an ELA class in, say, elementary or junior high levels, how would you undertake to incorporate language teaching? For your consideration:

- What should be short-term and long-term priorities in language teaching?
- What does research have to contribute to creating strategic language teaching priorities?
- What specific areas of language development would your curriculum emphasize?
- What additional training would the teachers of L2 learners need to enable them to add a language focus?
- How does language education at your institution prepare you for working to overcome long-standing inequalities in the education of L2 learners?

Speaking broadly, virtually all studies to date have identified fundamental and pronounced differences between all facets of writing in L1 and L2 discourse and text. For example, the process of constructing L2 discourse is consistently and significantly different from that involved in producing L1 written prose. Based on the findings of hundreds of studies, compared to the discourse structuring and ideational development in L1 writing, the following characteristics of L2 writing seem to be prominent:

- Organization and structuring of discourse moves and their contents inconsistently with the conventions of formal written English
- The unsystematic construction or placement of thesis statements, as well as their complete omission
- A failure to account for counterarguments and anticipate audience reactions
- The support for contextual arguments and claims by means of statements of personal opinions and beliefs in lieu of more substantive information
- A preponderance of unsupported argumentation
- Reliance on simple grammar, conversational vocabulary, and short sentences
- Preponderance of text-level errors of practically all types (i.e., grammar, word-form, vocabulary usage and meaning, verb and noun usage, meaning, and form, preposition, and article errors)
- Non-academic language, style and tone that can include, for example, direct and authoritative admonitions, warnings, superlatives, rhetorical questions, ornate analogies, and direct appeals to the reader

- A lack of clarity, developed coherence, and consistent specificity, explicitness, and cohesion
- Weak lexical/semantic ties and theme connections, and a prevalence of overt phrase and sentence conjunctions, such as *and, first/second/third*, or *moreover*
- Ineffective strategies for exemplification, extracting and citing information from sources, as well as paraphrasing, quoting, and incorporating source material

To date, a large number of studies have focused on a broad range of lexical and syntactic features of L2 text, such as the uses of personal and other types of pronouns, modal verbs, sentence structure (e.g., subordination and coordination), phrase and sentence conjunctions (e.g., sentence transitions), prepositional phrases, concrete and abstract nouns, verb tenses and aspects, cohesive devices (e.g., lexical repetition), lexical synonyms and ties, active and passive voice constructions, and lexical and grammatical errors (e.g., Flowerdew, 2000; Hinkel, 1995, 2001a, 2002a, 2004a; Johnson, 1992; Khalil, 1989; Mauranen, 1996; Swales, 1990).

Overall, based on a vast body of research, limited vocabulary and grammar are the most frequently cited/noted properties of L2 text, noted in declining order in Table 4.7.

At present, research has clearly and unambiguously demonstrated that L2 writers' skill level in vocabulary and grammar disadvantage the quality of their formal prose. A number of studies report that, even after several years of language learning, the grammar and vocabulary in L2 academic text continues to differ significantly from that of novice L1 writers in regard to a broad range of properties. In many

TABLE 4.7 Grammar and Vocabulary in L2 Writing

Compared to L1 written text, L2 formal prose exhibits the following prominent characteristics:

- Significantly fewer academic and collocational expressions
- High rates of incomplete or inaccurate sentences (e.g., missing sentence subjects or verbs; incomplete verb phrases; sentence fragments)
- Repetitions of content words more often (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs)
- Frequent simple paraphrases or a lack of paraphrasing
- Uses of shorter words (fewer words with two or more syllables), and conversational vocabulary, and high frequency words (e.g., *good, bad, ask, talk*)
- A limited repertoire of modifying and descriptive prepositional phrases, as well as a higher rate of misused prepositions
- Little subordination, but two to three times more coordination
- Inconsistent uses of verb tenses and few passive constructions
- High rates of personal pronouns (e.g., *I, we, he*) and personal narratives, as well as low rates of impersonal/referential pronouns (e.g., *it, this, one*)
- Markedly reduced rates of abstract and interpretive nouns, and nominalizations (e.g., *rotation, cognition, analysis*)
- A preponderance of conversational intensifiers, emphatics, exaggeratives, and overstatements (e.g., *totally, always, huge, for sure*) and conversational hedges (e.g., *sort of, in a way*), together with few possibility/probability hedges (e.g., *apparently, perhaps*)

cases of undergraduate L2 writers, for example, a restricted access to advanced language features results in simple texts that rely on the most common language features that occur predominantly in conversations. Currently, in light of a large body of research findings obtained after about a half a century of L2 text analyses, this conclusion seems rather obvious (Carson, 2001; Hedgcock, 2005; Hinkel, 2009, 2011; Leki et al., 2008; Paltridge, 2004).

> The ultimate goal of developing L2 writers' language skills is to give them "an equal chance to succeed in their writing-related personal or academic endeavors" (Silva, 1993, pp. 670–671).

In his extensive book-length survey of the language skills required in higher education in a number of English-speaking countries, Jordan (1997) presents the following summary of language areas that students consider to be most difficult. The participants of the studies included mostly undergraduate, as well as a few graduate, students. These learners ranked speaking in front of small groups as most difficult (participating in seminars), followed by two writing tasks (written assignments and note-taking), and noted that their receptive skills—understanding lectures and reading at an adequate speed—were least difficult.

Jordan's investigation further looks into the elements of students' writing skills to identify those most in need of improvement to enable students to succeed in their studies. The responses to questionnaires were solicited from both students and faculty, and it appears that, despite a few minor differences, these are similar overall.

The results of Jordan (1997) show clearly that, although the order of language learning priorities identified by university students and faculty are not identical, in general terms, they seem rather uniform. The areas of difficulty include the student's ability to write in an appropriate academic style that in fact consists of a solid range of academic vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation skills. A close look at the elements of writing skills that are difficult for L2 students enrolled in colleges and universities in Jordan's survey is also largely similar to that found in the study of the California college and university faculty, discussed in detail in

TABLE 4.8 Rank Order of Language Difficulty in College/University Studies

Rank Order of Difficulty	*Percentage of Students That Assigned #1 Rank to Most Difficult L2 Skills*
Participating in seminars	28%
Writing	23%
Taking lecture notes	11%
Understanding lectures	9%
Reading at a satisfactory speed	4%

(Adapted from Jordan, 1997)

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TABLE 4.9 Rank Order of Language Difficulty in Academic L2 Writing

Elements of Writing Skills	*Students' Ranks of Most Difficult L2 Skills*	*Faculty Ranks of Most Difficult L2 Skills*
Vocabulary	1 (62%)	3 (70%)
Academic style	2 (53%)	1 (92%)
Spelling	3 (41%)	5 (23%)
Grammar	4 (38%)	2 (77%)
Punctuation	5 (18%)	4 (23%)

(Adapted from Jordan, 1997)

chapter 2. According to that survey (ICAS, 2002; see chapter 3), the quality of students' language in the state's 109 colleges and 33 universities required intensive and extensive work on the following elements of writing:

- Sentence structure
- Appropriate academic vocabulary
- Error correction/editing
- Spelling and punctuation

Action Point

Do you have access to a few (4 or 5) L2 learners? Possibly at your institution? Or among students at a local language-teaching program or school? If so, you can ask them several questions, similar to those in Jordan's (1997) study. Your questionnaire does not have to be extensive, but it would be interesting to find out if the responses of the learners you are familiar with align with or differ from the responses in Jordan's investigation.

Some examples of the questions you can ask are listed below:

For you, what are the most difficult aspects of writing in English? Spelling? Punctuation? Grammar? Academic vocabulary? Correcting/editing errors in writing?

In addition, you can ask these learners about the curriculum in their classes:

- What aspects of language receive a great deal of attention and which ones less?
- If these learners could change what they are taught language, what would the changes be?
- If they could alter how they are taught language, what would such changes be?

Error Gravity, Frequency, and Pattern Studies: The Editing Focus

Primarily due to the prevailing research interest in contrastive and error analyses in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, an enormous body of work has been published on the types, patterns, and causes of learner error in speech and writing. The early interest of researchers in error analyses has also been taken up more recently in the 1990s and 2000s with the goal of developing L2 course curricula and enhancing learner error identification and editing skills in writing.

Some of the error analysis studies also set out to determine the severity and importance of L2 errors in the perceptions of university faculty who evaluate—and grade—L2 writers' work (e.g., Raimes, 1991; Santos, 1988). Other researchers similarly focused on the gravity of L2 errors in large-scale assessments and ratings of writing (e.g., Sakyi, 2000; Vann, Meyer, & Lorenz, 1984; Vann, Lorenz, & Meyer, 1991; Vaughan, 1991). Pedagogically oriented publications build on this foundation to refine and supplement course curricula for L2 writing instruction and develop L2 writers' error awareness. All these studies attempt to prioritize errors and establish a hierarchy of L2 errors in writing to help teachers and learners focus on the most important of these (Bates, Lane, & Lange, 1993; Ferris, 2002, 2003, 2004; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Holt, 1997)

A summative overview of key error gravity studies presents a relatively complete picture of what is, in effect, de-valued in student academic prose. Table 4.10 consolidates the findings of several influential studies, based on large sets of data and faculty survey research. Bates, Lane, and Lange (1993) provide guidelines for teachers that are intended to supplement a textbook on error awareness and editing. Ferris (2002, 2003, 2004) develops a detailed and comprehensive program for teachers to deal with learner errors systematically and thoroughly. Ferris' program is based on the results of her earlier study on the severity and frequency of L2 errors in writing (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). Raimes (1991) conducted a similar study of L2 errors in compositions and the evaluations of these errors by composition faculty. The findings of Raimes' study are reflected in her textbook for students (*Grammar Trouble Spots*, 2nd ed., 1999). Vann et al. (1984) reported the hierarchical severity of 12 common ESL errors in the perceptions of over 320 faculty in 8 disciplines, such as biology, education, engineering, humanities, physical and mathematical sciences, and social sciences, in a large U.S. university. The summary of research on the severity of errors in L2 writing is presented in Table 4.10.

It is important to note at the outset that L2 writers' abilities to identify and correct grammar and vocabulary errors is a developmental process at least to some extent. That is, as their experience with constructing L2 text grows, the frequency of errors in many instances of L2 writing can decline.

TABLE 4.10 Types of Errors in Declining Order of Severity

Bates, Lane, and Lange (1993)	Ferris (2002, 2003) and Ferris and Roberts (2001)	Vann et al. (1984)	Raimes (1991, 1999)
Most Egregious Errors			
Verb tense form modals	Sentence structure: boundaries, unnecessary/missing elements; unidiomatic expression	Word order	Sentence structure
Conditional sentence/clause	Word choice: meaning, prepositions, pronouns	*It*-deletion	Sentence transitions, coordinating conjunctions
Active/passive voice	Verb tense form	Verb tense	Punctuation
Dependent clauses	Noun endings, singular and plural	Relative clauses	Verb tense
Sentence structure	Punctuation	Active/passive voice	Subject-verb agreement
Word order	Articles/determiners	Word meaning	Active/passive voice
Sentence transitions	Word form: morphology	Subject-verb agreement	Modal verbs
Less Severe Errors			
Subject-verb agreement	Spelling	Pronoun agreement	Verb form
Articles	Run-on sentences	Prepositions	Nouns and quantifiers
Noun endings, singular and plural	Pronouns	Spelling	Articles
Word choice: morphology, meaning	Subject-verb agreement	Run-on sentences	Pronoun reference
Prepositions	Sentence fragments	Articles	Adjective/adverb form
	Miscellaneous: idioms, inappropriate register		Prepositions
Other Types of Errors			
Nonidiomatic expressions			Relative clauses
Wrong word meaning			Conditional sentences
Inappropriate register/ conversational style			Quotations, citing sources
Lack of coherence/ unity			
Unclear/illogical expressions, text			

> However, researchers have also found that, for a majority of L2 learners, eliminating all grammar and vocabulary errors is virtually impossible. Furthermore, while some types of sentence- and phrase-level errors can be reduced with experience, other classes of errors are a great deal more difficult to eliminate.

Although studies of L2 writing have shown that errors can occur in the L2 uses of a broad range of language constructions, the following error types have been recognized as highly common and pervasive (e.g., Cutting, 2000; Ferris, 1995, 1997, 2002; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; McCretton & Rider, 1993).

Examples of Frequent Error Types in L2 Writing

- Sentence divisions, fragmented and clipped sentences, and run-ons (e.g., **And he brings.* **Because of creative teacher.*)
- Subject and verb agreement (e.g., **Good education support students in their studies.*)
- Verb tenses and aspects, and verb phrases (e.g., **To find a good technician was very difficult at present.* **It also important in process teaching.*)
- Word-level morphology (i.e., absent or incorrect affixes) and incorrect word forms (e.g., **using limited budgetary,* **High standard educator want to have a higher prices to pay for their service*)
- Incomplete or incorrect subordinate clause structure (e.g., missing subjects, verbs and clause subordinators, as in **when some of teacher teach learning language,* **an engineer who design creative can't taught at school*)
- Misuses (or under-uses and over-uses) of coherence and cohesion markers, such as coordinating conjunctions and demonstrative pronouns (e.g., **To begin with, this is my conclusion.* **Adding, many surveys find this result.*)
- Singular or plural nouns and pronouns (e.g., **Western parents works with the child to find out the problems.* **They know how marriage are important to rise kids when the average age of marriage are 25 to 27.*)
- Incorrect or omitted prepositions (e.g., **from my opinion,* **At some time there is this young businessman who just about takes a taxi of the airport.*)
- Incorrect or omitted articles (e.g., **Treasure hunter found gold in bottom of a hole, but he maybe closing on treasure.* **Many people use cellphone to make phone call to family, but some use internet.*)
- Incorrect modal verbs (e.g., **The feature of those technology can be discussed in my paper in following paragraphs.* **Meaningless work will make people feel boring, which must lead to poor performance.*)
- Spelling errors

(All examples in this list are from actual L2 student writing.)

Since the 1980s, analyses of L2 language errors have become a familiar venue in investigations of written computer corpora of learner writing (Granger, 1998; Granger & Tribble, 1998; Green, Christopher, & Lam, 2000; Nesselhauf, 2005). In general terms, the analysis of grammatical and lexical errors in L2 prose is rooted in the contrastive (error) analysis that predominated in L2 learning research between the 1950s and 1970s.

One of the most popular comments on the studies of errors in L2 writing is that L1 writers who are native speakers of English also make mistakes. This observation is unquestionably true. A recent empirical study of L1 undergraduate writing in 24 U.S. universities (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008) identified the most frequent types of L1 errors (in declining order):

- Wrong word
- Spelling (including homonyms)
- Incomplete or missing documentation
- Mechanical error with a quotation
- Missing comma after an introductory element
- Missing word
- Unnecessary or missing capitalization
- Vague pronoun reference
- Unnecessary comma
- Unnecessary shift in verb tense
- Missing comma in a compound sentence

It seems clear from this list that the L1 errors in formal prose are fundamentally distinct from those in L2 university writing because the former are unlikely to impede comprehension (see also studies of error gravity in L2 writing, e.g., Vann et al. (1991), Vann et al. (1984), and Santos (1988)).

Talking Shop

Most work on the severity of L2 errors in writing was carried out between the mid-1980s and early 2000s. Looking at the summary of several investigations from a contemporary perspective, do you agree with the rankings of errors, as they are classified in Table 4.9? Why or why not? Discuss your views with your classmates.

How would you re-order the ranks of error severity in L2 writing? Would your ranked order stay the same if the purpose of writing were social (e.g., an email message or a journal entry) rather than academic?

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In the list of Examples of Frequent Error Types in L2 Writing, each L2 text excerpt includes errors of more than one type. In these excerpts, which types of errors are more severe than others? Do you agree with the classification of the errors in the example list? Why or why not?

Applications of L1 Composition Pedagogy to Teaching L2 Writing

Extensive research in the teaching of composition to native speakers of English began in earnest in the early 1960s. At that time, large numbers of students started to enter U.S. colleges and universities without much formal preparation for writing papers in the canonical courses in literature and the history of Western civilization. Faced with increasing numbers of students from all walks of life, the teaching faculty in English departments across the U.S. began to realize that in fact little research had been undertaken into how coherent writing was achieved or how best to teach academic writing skills to students with diverse backgrounds in schooling.

The process approach to the teaching of writing took the composition world by storm in the 1960s and 1970s. The process-based method pivots on an ideal that each individual writer can and should be encouraged to create their own original discourse and style. Such a democratic philosophy for teaching composition to students with limited experience in writing presented a world of opportunities.

When composition instruction can focus on developing the writer's personal and academic maturity and their own unique process for constructing an essay, then the need to teach and require students to learn such restrictive features of academic writing as rigid and formulaic patterns of discourse organization, sentence structure, or text cohesion is greatly reduced. Thus, both the teacher and the students can in fact enjoy the process of writing and composition classes where creativity, invention, and the development of the students' writing processes are valued above the artificial and outmoded features of formal writing such as paragraphing or constructing a thesis statement.

In addition to a diverse population of native speakers, however, in the 1970s and 1980s, large groups of nonnative speakers also arrived in the academic arena. For the next three decades or so, the process approach for teaching composition to native speakers has been widely and practically exclusively adopted in the teaching of second language writing to students who often did not have the essential language proficiencies to enable them to construct school-based prose.

Applying the writing and composition pedagogy for native speakers to teaching L2 writers appealed to many ESL instructors. The teaching of L1 composing skills and processes relied on the research and experience of the full-fledged and

mature discipline of rhetoric and composition, which continues to occupy a prominent place in the U.S. academy (Krapels, 1990; Reid, 1993; Zamel, 1982, 1983). Thus, in the teaching of L2 writing, it was possible to find a few short-cuts that, theoretically, could allow ESL teachers and curriculum designers to accomplish their instructional goals based on solid research findings and pedagogical frameworks (Leki, 1995). However, the L1 composition pedagogy was developed for a different type of learner. In addition, because many ESL practitioners were trained based on methodologies for teaching the L1 composition and writing process, employing these approaches, techniques, and classroom activities entailed working with known and familiar ways of teaching.

A number of prominent experts in language learning and development began to voice concerns that L2 learners were in fact being short-changed in their foundational need to develop a language base and skills, without which it may simply not be possible to produce competent academic text. L2 researchers, teacher trainers, and teachers have argued that a lack of explicit and thorough language teaching serves to exacerbate the social, economic, and vocational disadvantages of minorities and L2 learners and ultimately reduces their options (e.g., Christie, 2012; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Martin, 1989). These specialists have repeatedly noted that, for these types of learners, social access and inclusion can be achieved through a facility with language and writing. Like native speakers, L2 writers have to achieve proficiency in writing because their linguistic repertoire and writing skills often determine their social, economic, and political choices.

> However, as the studies discussed in chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, the defining characteristics of socially valued writing skills crucially hinge on a developed facility in grammar and vocabulary (e.g., a command of standard written English). For many a student, the incremental skills that undergird a demonstrable written proficiency require instruction.

For instance, Frodesen (2001, p. 234) states that "the wholesale adoption of L1 composition theories and practices for L2 writing classes seems misguided in light of the many differences between first and second language writers, processes, and products." According to Frodesen, the neglect of language instruction for L2 writers is most prevalent in the U.S., where many continue to believe that comprehensible input is sufficient for language acquisition. Frodesen and other experts, such as Birch (2005), Byrd (2005), Byrd and Reid (1998), and McKay (1993) point out that curriculum design in L2 writing instruction has to include grammar and vocabulary to enable L2 writers to communicate meaningfully and appropriately.

Action Point

A short excerpt from an L2 academic paper written for a class assignment in an undergraduate psychology course is presented below. What types of errors can you identify, count, and classify? Can you correct all of these? Can you explain the errors and how to correct them to the L2 writer? What do you think the reasons are that an advanced academic learner enrolled in a university degree program has continued to make so many errors?

The Excerpt

**It has been criticized that the Internet generation spents much time to surfing the web, watching television, and playing game. A concern, which are mostly mentioned about this generation is that the youngs adults in the generation a lack of concentration, or have trouble to read long text. Its decreased reading ability is interupted as the result of increase uses of the internet and other media platforms. However, it required to consider that there is only negative effect on the Internet generation's reading skill. Also, if so, there a need to find how to handle the problem.*

To begin with, it is necessary to check the currency status. Two main focuses to analyze the situations are: (1) Are there a true negative effect coming from the increase Internet uses? (2) Does it only consider the young adults? It is hardly able to say that here is a clear relationship between decrease reading habit and Internet. However, it is time that less people are reading than the past.

L1-Based Analysis of Learning Needs: Discourse Organization Skills

Because much of the L2 instructional methodology is derived from the prevalent approaches to teaching L1 composition to native speakers, the analysis of L2 learning needs similarly stems from the research on L1 writing (Ferris, 2002, 2003). Typically, in the teaching of L2 writing, discourse organization skills can be found under the labels of "rhetorical shaping," "essay form," "shaping ideas," "logical organization," or "global organization." In practically all cases, the idea shaping or form metaphors applied to writing are not easy for L2 writers to grasp because in real terms little is in fact "shaped" in L2 academic prose such as that presented in the "Action Point" feature in the previous section.

The summary of a large body of work on discourse organization and text structuring skills is presented in Table 4.11. Practically all academic writers who have experienced the struggle of organizing their own ideas in text or helping

TABLE 4.11 Teaching Priorities in Discourse Organization Skills

The Structure of the Text

Overall: writing fluency, the development and specificity of ideas/examples/illustrations

- Introduction: the thesis/position to signal the structure, order, and flow of information/ideas
- Conventionalized discourse organization: the structure, order, and flow of information/ideas
- Connectedness of ideas/cohesion: globally to the thesis and locally to the main points
- Supporting information/ideas/facts: globally related to the thesis and locally to the main point; explicitly stated
- Major supporting points/arguments
  - Paragraphing: division (coherence) and connectedness (cohesion)
  - Cohesion and cohesive ties: lexical—rephrased ideas, phrases, and words (synonyms); pronoun reference
- Avoiding: digressions, repetitions, and interruptions
- Conclusion/Closing statement(s)

Academic discourse-driven vocabulary and grammar

- Conventionalized and discourse-functional collocations (e.g., *the purpose of this paper is to/this essay will discuss, the main point, to conclude*)
- Various types of academic hedges (e.g., *often, usually, possibly, perhaps, may, seem, appear*)
- Grammar accuracy (sentence construction and word forms)
- Complex sentences with subordinate clauses
- Editing and error identifications skills

others produce formal and structured prose may have little trouble concurring with these priorities for teaching learners how to organize their ideas in written prose.

All textbooks for teaching writing, writing handbooks for students, and manuals for professional writers are likely to emphasize clarity of the discourse structure. It is considered to be a top—if not the top—priority in spoken discourse, such as lectures, presentations, explanations, and discussions. In formal written discourse, where the writer's idea organization can be scrutinized and examined, there is probably no priority higher than the clarity of the structure. The old mantra that every piece of academic writing has to include a thesis statement has remained a consistent characteristic of formal prose since time immemorial (see chapter 3).

> The vital need for a thesis statement and its supports has endured as a mainstay of all writing in schooling and education.

The rigid and conventionalized discourse structuring along the lines of the thesis statement has also been an abiding expectation of how academic writing is constructed. What represents major supporting points and fact-based argumentation has been a matter of some debate among academic writing specialists. Nonetheless, their presence in formal academic pieces of writing has continued to be a high priority in the teaching of writing to L1 and L2 students alike. The critical need for accurate and edited text cannot be over-emphasized in teaching L2 academic writing.

Action Point

Below, another short portion is extracted from an L2 academic assignment in philosophy on whether schools and colleges should teach ethical and social values. Can you re-organize the text to make it easier to follow? What types of problems with the discourse organization can you observe? Can you build a mini-lesson on how to organize the ideas in writing? Can you demonstrate how written academic discourse in English has to be constructed?

And most importantly, can you explain to the L2 writer the reasons that written discourse in an academic paper has to be structured in a particular way?

<u>The Excerpt</u>

**Walking on campus of the University, I do feel that it looks like a city. In every city, it would be essential for people living there to know ethical and social values. Schools are not only a place for learning academic subjects, but also for learning ethical and social values. That is because students live in school every day in a very prominent stage in their lives, because they live with variety of personalities and characters, and because there is no other place where it teaches these value.*

These days, people spend a main part of their lives in school. For one thing, it is a very good time for students to learn ethical and social values, since they are young enough and their personalities are flexible and ready to accept values. For another, they spend most of their time in school. Sometimes, they do not have time to attend other social events. Furthermore, they usually stay long enough in school to practice those values and get ready for a real society.

Chapter Summary

A vocabulary size of approximately 5,000 word families is requisite for relatively fluent L2 reading, even though a dictionary is still necessary at this level. In fact, basic written prose can begin to emerge only when the learner's vocabulary range

exceeds 2,000 words. Conversational vocabulary and grammar provide poor coverage for academic text, and having a large conversational range does not necessarily enable L2 learners to read and write academic prose. The written prose of experienced L2 writers contains important shortfalls of academic vocabulary and grammar. On the other hand, however, the language of conventionally skilled L2 writers includes an extensive range of colloquial and conversational constructions.

For L2 writers to produce academic prose, intensive vocabulary work is required. Academic L2 writers need to attain proficiency in academic language simply because without it they are unable to succeed in their academic tasks.

Hundreds of studies have identified fundamental and pronounced differences between all facets of writing in L1 and L2 discourse and text. Based on their findings, compared to the discourse structuring and ideational development in L1 writing, a broad range of characteristics of L2 writing seem to be urgent, important, and prominent. Research has clearly and unambiguously demonstrated that L2 writers' skill level in vocabulary and grammar disadvantage the quality of their formal prose.

In addition, error gravity studies and other pedagogically oriented publications have the goal of refining and supplementing course curricula for L2 writing instruction and developing L2 writers' error awareness. A summative overview of key error gravity studies presents a relatively complete picture of what is, in effect, de-valued in student academic prose. However, researchers have also found that, for a majority of L2 learners, eliminating all grammar and vocabulary errors is virtually impossible. It is important to note that L1 errors in formal prose are fundamentally distinct from those in L2 university writing because the former are unlikely to impede comprehension. Furthermore, while some types of sentence- and phrase-level errors can be reduced with experience, other classes of errors are a great deal more difficult to eliminate.

The L1 composition pedagogy that dominates in teaching writing at the college and university level was developed at a different time and for a different type of learners. The defining characteristics of socially valued writing skills crucially hinge on a developed facility in grammar and vocabulary. For many a student, the incremental skills that undergird a demonstrable written proficiency require instruction. Research on basic L1 and academic L2 writing has also established clear baselines in terms of curricular and instructional needs of learners.

Notes

1. Full citations of Michael West's (1953) General Service List, which consists of over 2,000 of the most frequent words, are easily available online.
2. According to the linguistic tradition of data designation, * (an asterisk) designates data and examples that are ungrammatical or otherwise incorrect. A question mark (?) designates questionable—but not necessarily incorrect—data.
3. A few terms as they occur here are based on the definitions and Glossary of Terms of the California Department of Education Draft of ELD Standards (2012), found at www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/caleldstdintro.pdf and retrieved on July 21, 2012.

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