Writing-to-Learn in English: In-Class Timed Writing for Content Learning

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Second language writing research has focused on the learning-to-write approach whose analytic and pedagogical goal is to develop L2 learners' writing proficiency. Equally important is the writing-to-learn approach that uses writing as a primary tool for content learning. Drawn from writing across the curriculum (WAC) movement in North America, the writing-to-learn approach integrates writing into content instructions across various disciplines. Considering that Korean universities have increased English-mediated courses, it is timely to explore how the writing-to-learn approach can be used for content learning in English. Writing in this approach is considered to demonstrate whether and how students understand and undertake the course content presented in the assigned readings. The present study examines in-class timed writings produced in a course for English majors at a university in Korea. The student writings were analyzed and classified into four distinctive categories in terms of how they use sources in their writings. The data analysis demonstrates the types of problems these students have in processing complex texts and specifies an array of distinctive skills they need to be fully proficient.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the important research purposes in the study of second language (L2) writing is to develop and improve L2 writing proficiency of nonnative writers; this analytic task can be formulated in learning-to-write in second language (For a review, see Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008; Silva & Brice, 2004). Accordingly, empirical studies in L2 writing often drew on comparative analyses of advanced and novice nonnative writings...
Equally important yet often scarcely explored in L2 writing research is the *writing-to-learn* approach (Anson, 1997; Sorcinelli & Elbow, 1997; Zinsser, 2003) in which writing is used as a tool or resource for content learning. This approach is closely tied to the movement called Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), which has reformed and revolutionized higher education in the U.S. (Bazerman, 1988; Bean, 1996; Fulwiler & Young, 1990; Little, Bethel, & Bazerman, 2005; Murray, 2002; Newell, 2006). The premise of WAC is that “integrating writing and other critical thinking activities into a course increases students’ learning while teaching them thinking skills for posing questions, proposing hypotheses, gathering and analyzing data, and making arguments.” (Bean, 1996, p. 1). In WAC, writing plays an integral role in helping students experience and learn discipline-specific problem solving skills and critical thinking.

The question is whether and to what extent L2 writing can be used for content learning. This is an important question to ponder as a number of Korean universities have increased the number of English-mediated courses across various disciplines. To be successful, the writing-to-learn approach in L2 needs to go beyond traditional emphasis on developing L2 writing competence by taking into account a variety of content related factors such as the nature of disciplinary genres, student reading proficiency, or features of writing assignments.

One way to begin this research is to examine courses in the English department in which English assignments are routinely used as a course requirement. If student writings in these courses show a sufficient degree of diversities and differences with regard to content learning, the findings will benefit those professionals who work with L2 writers across various disciplines.

This paper presents a case study of in-class writings produced by students who took a course on intercultural communication that was offered for English majors at a university in Korea. The students in this course were required to do in-class timed writing (short writing, henceforth) regularly throughout the semester. These short writings assignments were designed to monitor and facilitate content learning as they required students to use source texts in expressing their arguments. Accordingly, the student writings were examined with a view to specifying how the source texts are used in their arguments and what becomes problematic.

About seventy short writing samples were analyzed and classified into four informative categories according to the quality of writings in using relevant sources in their arguments. This method follows the framework drawn from the comparative analysis between advanced and novice writings in composition studies (Barton, 1993;
Colomb & Griffin, 2004; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Miller & Charney, 2008; Witte & Faigley, 1981). In doing comparative analyses, however, the present study did not rely on correlational analysis that connects features of writings to various external criteria such as textual features of writing (Tardy & Swales, 2008), rhetorical features (Miller & Charney, 2008) or second language specific factors (Leki et al., 2008). Rather, the analytic focus was placed on specifying how student writings demonstrate their understanding of the course contents the writing prompts required. Since students activate different resources and deploy various strategies, close analytic descriptions of their writing offers telling examples of whether and how writing-to-learn can be beneficial in L2 writing and content learning in general.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Academic Writing across the Disciplines

The writing-to-learn approach can be traced back to the effort to move away from the exclusive analytic focus on the writing product to the writing process (Emig, 1971; Schultz, 2006) and to incorporate writing into content learning (Bean, 1996; Fulwiler & Young, 1990; Murray, 2002; Newell, 2006; Sorcinelli & Elbow, 1997) in composition studies. This alternative focus on content learning and writing process is adequately presented by Bean (1996) who argued that writing is one of the most effective tools to enhance students' critical thinking and general cognitive capacity required in various academic fields. Instructors in WAC programs use writing not just as a communication tool but also as a resource to facilitate students’ problem-solving skills that are discipline-specific. This movement corresponds to learner-centered and problem-solving approaches in higher education in the US (Anson, 2002; Brookfield, 1990; Murray, 2002).

One of the early clues about discipline specific needs can be found in a study by Bridgeman and Carson (1984) who analyzed surveys of faculty members from 36 universities in the U.S. and Canada on their grading criteria for student writings. The findings suggest that the faculty in general relied more on global characteristics of writing such as organization, quality of content and development of ideas than sentence features. They also reported differences across disciplines; engineering and science faculty prefer description and interpretation of a graph or chart. A similar trend is found in the evaluation of nonnative writings by seventy one faculty members across the disciplines reported in Roberts and Cimasko’s study (2008); they tend to correct errors with semantic gaps more often than errors with grammatical points (cf. Santos, 1988).
With regard to the type of rhetorical features student writing manifests, Wolfe (2011) showed that two thirds of the 71 courses he examined required students to produce some form of argumentation; explicitly thesis-driven and text-centered arguments are the most common. Notable here was that all writing in engineering required argumentation whereas short argumentative answers were the most common in the humanities courses.

Considering the predominant emphasis on argumentation in evaluating student writings across the disciplines, it is important to see whether and to what extent undergraduate students recognize argumentation from their assigned readings. Unfortunately, a recently reported experiment (Larson, Britt, & Kurby, 2009) showed that they frequently failed to distinguish acceptable arguments from structurally flawed arguments that contains unwarranted claims. Some researchers tried to explain this failure in reference to the intellectual development of undergraduate students. In his famous study, for example, Perry (1970) demonstrated that undergraduate students go through stages of development in understanding knowledge and the task of learning. Most beginning students believe in the presence of absolute knowledge and, therefore, conceive the task of learning as the acquirement of correct information; writing at this level is a matter of offering correct information. In the next middle stage, students begin to accept the notion of opposing views and, consequently, the idea that everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion. As a result, they do not see the need to defend any views vigorously; their writings do not demonstrate a rigorous thinking typical of mature argumentation. It is only at the final stage when students become committed relativists that reasoned arguments begin to emerge. Unfortunately, students seemed to remain stuck for several years at the beginner level of absolute truth before moving onto the next levels (Newman, 1993).

The close tie between students’ writing and their intellectual development indicates the need to examine closely the cognitive thinking skills of undergraduate students manifested in their writings. Flower and Hayes (1980) were two of the first researchers to show that advanced and novice writers differ in the manner they represent problems to be solved; good writers represent the problem not only in more breadth but also in depth. Naturally, advanced writers seem to address all aspects of rhetorical problems whereas novice writers are concerned primarily with the features or conventions of writing. This finding is reiterated in various comparative studies of advanced/expert writing and novice/poor writing (Barton, 1993; Colomb & Griffin, 2004; Haswell, 2008). One notable finding is presented in Barton’s research (1993) which focused on how writers express their attitudes toward knowledge. In this research, expert writers produce a clear stance in relation to the source they use whereas novice college writers rarely use counter arguments. From this line of research, we can clearly see the need for undergraduate students to practice text-based argumentation in content areas. According
to the national survey by Melzer (2009), WAC-related courses assigned writing tasks that present more complex rhetorical situations in a variety of disciplinary genres. The question is how to benefit L2 writers through the writing-to-learn approach.

2. L2 Writing Research for Writing-to-learn Approach

In order for L2 writing to be used as an instructional resource for content learning, there seems to be some threshold level of writing proficiency and composing experiences in L2. For example, Kubota (1998) showed that composing experience and L2 writing ability are important factors that influence the quality of English composition along with general English proficiency. In his statistical model for L2 writing, Pae, Tae-II (2008) also called attention to L1 writing ability and free-writing experience as important factors.

Unfortunately, college students do not seem to have sufficient experience with academic writings. In examining one Canadian university, Graves, Hyland, and Samuels (2010) found that only 31 percent of the courses require writing assignments. This phenomenon is even more prominent in Korea. In a comprehensive survey of about 600,000 college students in Korea, Choi, Jung-Hyun, Lee, Jung-Mi, Chung, Jin-Chul, and Sung, Tae-Jae (2007) showed that only 14% of students surveyed had any kind of writing assignment each semester.

Nonetheless, there are a substantial number of empirical studies in second language writing (For reviews, see Leki et al., 2008; Silva & Brice, 2004; Silva & Patton, 2005; Tardy & Swales, 2008) from which we can gain some insights into the interplay of L2 writing competence and various writing tasks. Particularly useful is the comparative analyses between native vs. nonnative writers and advanced nonnative vs. novice nonnative writers. Early on, Connor (1984) argued that nonnative writings lack (1) adequate justifying support for claim statements and (2) linking of concluding inductive statements to the preceding subtopics of the problems. Ferris (1994) confirmed that native writers write longer essays and thus are likely to present the claim more adequately. In his comparison of Korean writers and Australian writers, Kim, Jaehyuk (1995) showed that native writers demonstrate more sophisticated and diverse strategies in deploying their communicative purposes in writing.

In the comparative analyses of advanced and novice L2 writers, we can also infer that advanced L2 writers seem to have better textual knowledge (Victori, 1999), to use more meta discourse and logical connectives (J.-W. Kim, 1999) and move from semantic issues to syntactic concerns in their writing (Johnson, 1992). This difference is probably the result of more active and deliberate planning (Victori, 1999) and more revisions (Y.-H. Choi, 2007). Notable here is the comparison by Keck (2006) in which beginning L2
writers tended to copy the source texts as opposed to more experienced L2 writers who use more moderate and substantial revision.

Given these findings from the comparative analyses, the question to ask is whether the writings of L2 writers should resemble those of native writers. Some researchers argue that there are universal features in argumentation structures (Y.-H. Choi, 1988; Connor, 1987). For example, Kang, Suk-Jin and Oh, Sun-Young (2011) showed that higher level writers resemble English writing in being consistent with positioning their main idea. Other researchers, however, showed that there are distinctive cultural differences between native and nonnative writers. Kamimura and Oi (1998) found that American writers use rational appeal through emphatic devices (should, I believe) whereas Japanese writers uses affective appeal often through softening devices (I think, maybe). For this reason, Villnueva et al (2006) argued that the focus should not be on the assimilation of American rhetorical patterns. Rather, instruction should accommodate distinctive textual and rhetorical patterns in L2 writings.

3. Reading Comprehension Shown in Writing

If writing can be used as a learning tool for content courses, L2 writing should be examined for its effectiveness as a measure of reading comprehension. While L2 learners' reading skills have often been measured through summarizing tasks in L2 writing research, summarizing task seems quite challenging for L2 writers. In her study of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), for example, Wette (2010) showed how difficult it is for second-language writers to process complex texts, to produce accurate summaries and to integrate summaries into their own voices and positions. Similarly, Korean students in a study by Kim, Sung-Ae (1998a) were not strong in summarizing the given content; they tend to focus on surface features of the content and therefore, are not able to restructure the source texts in a coherent manner.

Nonetheless, there are some differences between advanced and novice L2 writers in processing reading materials. Skilled readers in L1 research reported in a study by Britt et al (2008) were more accurate in recalling the main predicate of the claim (e.g., “The US is right to intervene in other countries' affairs”). Similarly, native writers reported in Tynjala et al (2001) showed visible gains from paraphrasing tasks while their counterparts who wrote verbatim from the source text did not. A similar finding was found in L2 writers in Lee, Ji-Hyun and Lee, Hee-Kyung's study (2011) in which advanced writers were better at recognizing the thesis statement and important passages from the source text than novice writers.

To sum up, L2 writing research suggests that despite the difficulties reported in some studies, summarizing and paraphrasing seem to be useful tools for enhancing L2
students’ reading development (Colomb, 1988; Joh, 2006; Keck, 2006; Kirkland & Saunders, 1991; Ko, 2009; Wette, 2010). Nonetheless, there might be an array of factors that contribute to disciplinary differences including course contents, instructional foci, writing genres and teaching methods (e.g., Hamp-Lyon, 1990; Tedick, 1990). This is why there is a need for empirical research on discipline-specific writing in L2.

4. Research Purposes

Following the writing-to-learn approach, the present study is designed to investigate English writings by Korean students who took a content course at a university in Korea. The primary data is drawn from a series of in-class timed writings, called short writing. These short writing tasks are different from term papers that are typically submitted at the end of the semester. First, term papers are used routinely for summative assessment (Bachman, 1990) in which the students demonstrate the cumulative learning of the relevant course contents. In contrast, the short writings in this class were used for formative assessment through which the course instructor monitored and helped students’ progress.

Second, term-papers tend to require students to pull together various course contents from assigned readings, and, therefore, the scope of resources to use is diverse. The short writings in this class, however, prompted the students to write one argument on a particular topic and therefore, the scope was delimited. This makes it easy for the researcher to compare student writings in a focused way. In light of the aforementioned benefits, the present study intends (1) to describe how students respond to the writing prompts that call for the demonstration of knowledge of course contents (2) to infer how they understand the source text and (3) to specify problematic aspects in their writing.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Analytic Precepts

Short writings reported in this paper are organized into four distinctive categories; these categories represent four distinctive ways in which the source texts are used, from outright plagiarized texts to advanced synthesizing. These four categories do not provide an exhaustive list of what students can do with their writing; rather, they are chosen because they are telling examples of the diverse ways in which students make use of the source texts in L2 and what becomes problematic. To some extent, these four categories reflect different competence levels in writing-to-learn in L2 and therefore, should be
seen to form a continuum indicative of the paths towards better writing.

The analysis follows the tradition of qualitative research in writing (Lillis, 2008; Schultz, 2006) that attends to the participants’ (the writers and instructor) perspectives in relation to an array of contextual and situational factors. Therefore, this analytic undertaking traces and specifies what kinds of resources these students make use of and what constraints they face in relation to particular instructional contexts that underlie this writing task. Another useful precept is found in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967, 2002; Lee, 2006, Lee & Takahashi, 2011; Watson, 2009) which traces the distinctive methods or choices in mundane daily tasks. In their writing, L2 writers manifest their choices in various ways, for example, in their selections of passages to paraphrase, in their placement of the thesis or even in their plagiarized passages. Focusing on the writers’ choices has an effect of obliging the analysis to trace contextual, practical, task-related constraints and resources that are enacted within the student writings, rather than relying on corresponding variables often seen in correlational studies.

2. The Course and Participants

The data is lifted from a course on intercultural communication that is offered regularly to English majors. Seventeen students enrolled in the course including one international student from China. All class activities were conducted in English including lecturing, group discussions and students’ presentations. The students in this class were fluent enough in English to understand lectures and to carry out most instructional tasks, and, yet, their production skills, such as speaking and writing varied. In particular, their writing proficiency showed a substantial variation although most students were able to write 150-300 words in about 25-30 minutes for the short writing assignments.

The researcher taught the course during the fall semester of 2011 as part of the regular teaching load. This class was designed as a writing intensive course utilizing the writing-to-learn approach; writing was used as one of the primary instructional resources to facilitate students’ learning processes. First, the students were asked to write regularly during class sessions; on a given day, students wrote 3-4 times on a particular aspect of the course content for about 3-4 minutes respectively. They were also required to submit three formal writings: a book review, a research draft and a final paper. The students received feedback on these formal writings.

Short writings were spread out throughout the semester; three short writings were assigned before the mid-term and two after the mid-term. The mid-term exam was similar to the short writings in format except that the students answered three writing prompts. The course textbook contained a number of articles on intercultural
communication that included such topics as theories of intercultural communication, comparison of Eastern and Western cultures, and nonverbal communication.

3. Procedure

All short writing prompts in this course required students to use the course content from the assigned readings. During the short writing exercise, the students were allowed to consult any resources including the textbook and their notebooks; this open-book policy ensured that students were graded on their ability to utilize the course content in their writing rather than on their memorization skills. The students were given a sheet of paper and asked to complete their writing in about 25-30 minutes. The collected writings were then scanned and transformed into a pdf file for close analyses. Out of seventeen students, three did not want their work to be used for this research, and, therefore, the following analysis is based on the writing samples of 14 students, which amount to 70 short writings.

The writing prompts reflect the teaching goals the instructor intends to establish, namely, developing their comprehension of the assigned readings and ability to present an informed argument. The first short writing was given in the fourth week of the semester. By this time, students finished reading chapters that introduce theories and key concepts in intercultural communication. The prompt asks the students to demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts in one of two scenarios. Since this was the first short writing assignment, the prompt gave the students some flexibility in choosing key concepts for their answers.

Short Writing Prompt 1

Choose one of the following questions. Be sure to base your answer on some of the theoretical/conceptual principles you have read in the textbook.

a. If one Asian person begins his/her life in a Western country, what kinds of problems would be most challenging to him/her?

b. If a Westerner begins his/her life in an Asian country, what kinds of problems would be most challenging to him/her?

The second short writing task was assigned one week later after the students finished another section of the chapter that features articles on the cultural identities of various ethnic groups in the US including Jewish, Chinese/Asian and White Americans respectively. The writing prompt is still broad in scope allowing students to choose any factors from the articles they had read.
Short Writing Prompt 2
In section II, we discussed four ethnic groups (Jewish, Chinese, Korean or White Americans). What are some important factors that help shape distinctive identities for one minority group as they lead their lives in the US? Offer your arguments based on what the text presented and use examples/evidence to support your argument(s).

The third short writing task was given two weeks later in Week 7 right before the mid-term week. The writing prompt requires students to address one of two views on multiculturalism (pluralism and assimilationism) in order to interpret various conflicts described in various articles in the textbook.

Short Writing Prompt 3
Consider pluralism and assimilationism featured in Kim’s article. Use these concepts to explain one of the following problems.
   a. Ethnic tension between Blacks and Latinos
   b. Intercultural communication with persons with disabilities
   c. Problems that face gay and lesbians

The next short writing task in week 11 was about non-verbal communication. Similar to the third short writing, this task requires students to refer to at least two articles from the textbook.

Short Writing Prompt 4
Anderson & Wang (2009) offered several conceptual categories through which nonverbal communication is to be understood. Using two dimensions (high/low context and individualism/collectivism) explain why Hall argues that monochronic and polychronic cultures do not mix.

The last short writing task asks students to consider two distinctively different cultures, Japanese and German, to describe possible problems that might arise if they were engaged in business negotiations. The students had to refer to two different articles about German and Japanese business cultures respectively.
Short Writing Prompt 5
Given Japanese business decision making, what kinds of issues could become problematic if they conduct business negotiation with German and why?

Since all writing prompts require students to base their writings on the assigned readings, the students demonstrated a variety of ways of using sources in their own writing. The patterns reported below therefore show differences, not just in how they write but also in how they process the assigned readings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Minimal or Uncertain Use of Sources

Students’ writing in this category shows a minimal use or misuse of the sources from the assigned readings. Typically, a few technical terms or concepts are mentioned in passing but they are not adequately utilized or sufficiently developed in the writings. When this happens, these writers rely on commonsense knowledge or personal experience to draw recognizable arguments. Excerpt 1, for example, is a response to the first short writing prompt about a potential problem that a Western immigrant to Korea might face. Note how the author mentions a few technical terms from the textbook but does not develop them in her argument.

Excerpt 1
I think Asian people’s manner are the most challenging to Westerners. I have a friend who is from America. He is a teacher in public school and he told me he had a fight with his co-worker at first time. He fought with her because she was rude to him. She asked his age, family members, marriage, and things like that even though she has no relationship with him...Westeners are individualist but Asian people are more like collective. And Korean society is very suppression culture. People shouldn’t expose their emotions in front of everyone...

The author in this writing features “Asian people’s manner” as the source of the problems for Western immigrants. This thesis is followed by an anecdote the author gathered from her friend. It is only in the concluding part that the author uses a few technical terms from the textbooks such as “individualist,” “collective” and “suppression.” By deploying these terms at the end, the author seems to want to characterize the problem academically taken from the assigned readings. Unfortunately,
the brief allusion is not sufficient in making clear the connection that the author intends.

The excerpt below provides another example of uncertain use of the source text. In this writing, the author uses technical concepts at the outset but without providing explicit connections to the subsequent examples.

Excerpt 2

Eastern culture defined as a tightness, Horizontal cultures. Because when we think about especially Korean Culture, that is strictly affected by Confucianism, We find out that Korean people always teach their children to respect older people and to use polite expression to elderly people. And they can’t accept the other cultural concept or behavior based on another culture easily...

The two technical terms in the first sentence, “tightness” and “horizontal cultures,” were drawn from the assigned readings. This is followed by a brief comment on “Confucianism”; the subsequent sentences seem to illustrate the theme of Confucianism. Embedded in this layout is the assumption that Confucianism is related to the two technical terms, “tightness” and “horizontal culture.” Unfortunately, this thematic connection is not established in the writing explicitly, which creates a logical gap.

The following excerpt illustrates another case of uncertain use of the source. This example is taken from the short writing 3 about two theoretical perspectives in multiculturalism literature, namely pluralism and assimilationism. While the writer chose “assimilationism” to be a topical anchor for his writing, what follows in the main body of the paper does not demonstrate, clearly, whether the author understands the concept correctly.

Excerpt 3

I will talk about assimilationism with people with disability. People who believe that we have to treat people same way that may have some kind of problems. In Braithwaite’s article, we can see Jeff’s case. He is non-disabled person who hang out with person with disability, Helen, He had a problem with her not because he had prejudice to her because he was obsessed this kind of thinking that he has to treat her as a person not a person with disability...They have to know they are different so they have to do different behavior to each other.

According to the source text (Y.-Y. Kim, 2009), assimilationism takes on a particular stance toward equality and the distribution of resources in a society by emphasizing each individual’s ability and achievement whereas pluralism pays attention to group differences that are beyond individual control.
Writing to learn

While the author of the excerpt offers an example in the writing, its relation to the theme of assimilationism is uncertain. This uncertain use of the source often leads student writers to rely, often excessively, on commonsense knowledge or simplified generalization of the phenomenon, a tendency recognized by Lee, Seong-Woo (2008). In the above excerpt, the author explains a case described in a source text but there are no explicit connections as to whether and how this episode reflects assimilationism.

Note that the lack of explicit connections among technical terms or concepts is quite prominent in the data corpus as at least one third of the writings show this tendency. The reason why these writers often make passing remarks without elaborating on them seems to indicate that these writers do not have a solid understanding of the target knowledge, probably because of a lack of reading proficiency or effort. It is also conceivable that these students do not have sufficient writing experience to identify the logical gap in their brief reference to the technical terms or concepts. Without explicit connection, their writings resort to commonsense knowledge or personal experience while technical concepts or terms become supplementary. This is often in contrast to the instructor’s wish that student writings should be framed in reference to the relevant conceptual principles or theoretical purviews in the reading assignments.

This problem could also be attributable to the nature of the prompts from which students are working. The presented scenario in the first writing prompt and the issue of ethnic relations in the third prompt are encompassing and, therefore, flexible, which invites student writers to refer to their commonsense knowledge or personal experience. The problem is that these resources become primary topical anchors and thus move away from the target concepts or principles from the textbook. The lack of developed ideas is often typical of nonnative writings reported in various L2 writing research studies (Connor, 1984; Johnson, 1992). One way to address this problem might be to encourage student writers to define or elaborate the target terms, which then become resources for building their main arguments.

2. Excessive Reliance on Summarizing

Since the prompts are organized to make sure that the students read the assigned texts, students are bound to do some amount of summarizing of the source texts. Ideally, these summaries should be purposeful to help shape the main argument the author wants to advance. Some student writers were, however, absorbed too much into summarizing tasks, and therefore, they were not able to address what the prompt calls for. In the following excerpt, for example, the author spent too much space and time explaining Japanese and German decision making processes one by one.
Excerpt 4
When two cultures meet, there can be unexpected problems because each culture has its own contextual meaning. In business negotiating process, that kind of problem can be increased. Many Japanese companies are still group-oriented so bond and relationship are very important. Ringi style which is the Japanese decision-making way reflects Japanese culture considerably. In German, corporations have two board's: Management board which has to manage the company and supervisory board which exercises control over management. Japanese and German have distinctive culture so they cannot avoid the problems when they negotiate business situation.

This writing task required students to base their arguments on two different articles, and, therefore, the author spent too much space, and probably time explaining German and Japanese cultures respectively. As a result, the author did not probe into the nature of the cultural conflicts people from these two nations might face if they were involved in a business negotiation.

The following excerpt shows another case in which too much summarizing prevents the author from addressing the primary point. The author is responding to the prompt that asks her to relate assimilationism and pluralism to ethnic conflicts in the U.S.

Excerpt 5
According to Kim's article assimilation celebrates personal achievement and self-reliance. This message places the individual identity above the group identity. This concept says that prejudice based on group membership is morally wrong because its focus on social categories contradict the intellectual or moral prescription to value the unique qualities of every individual. On the other hand... In conclusion, all these problems are related to every kind of culture, not just to the gay culture. The most important thing is trying to understand the other culture and not be afraid of the perspective on the society.

The author took great pains to explain the concept of assimilationism, first, and gay and lesbian culture, second. Similar to Excerpt 4, this excessive summary leaves the author space and time for only one general and prescriptive remark on cultural differences in the last two sentences. About 10 percent of the writing in the data corpus shows the type of excessive summary reported here.

One notable problem caused by excessive summarizing is that some students are likely to copy the source texts in their writings. The following excerpt illustrates the case in point. The author in this writing is responding to the fourth prompt that asks about
relating nonverbal communication to monochronic and polychronic cultures.

Excerpt 6

...High-context communication features pre-programmed information that is in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message.

Low-context transactions are the opposite. Most of the information must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context. Because they accommodate change easily and rapidly, low-context message and prevalent in technologically driven societies like the United States. High context messages are the norm in most collectivistic societies. A great amount of information is held in common among members, and so less needs to be said explicitly....From those suggestions, monochronic and polychronic culture do not mix.

Similar to the two excerpts above, the author of the writing expends too much space explaining the concepts of high-context and low-context respectively. The majority of the language is copied from the source text, except for the last sentence.

This phenomenon of excessive summarizing is important and interesting because it indicates the writer’s problem, not only with L2 writing proficiency, but also of reading comprehension. It is clear that these students are not yet capable of generating their own arguments using sources just as prior research has suggested (S.-A. Kim, 1998b; J.-H. Lee & H.-K. Lee, 2011). More importantly, though, the excessive reliance on the source text might indicate that these students are struggling with their reading comprehension; for example, they may not be able to recognize argument structures especially from complex source texts.

This point confirms what Colomb (1988) pointed out a few decades ago. As novice academic writers, undergraduate students often look for a resource to use for their writing tasks. Without substantial experience and knowledge of argumentative writings, they often rely on the ready-made structures provided in the source texts or prompts; this is why they often copy the source texts or use the language of the prompt without developing them. The problems are twofold; the lack of reading proficiency to tease out argument structures in the source text and the inability to choose relevant parts from the source text. These problems indicate the need for explicit pedagogical interventions and strategies for training these writers to process complex academic texts.

3. Using Direct Quotations

In general, academic authors use direct quotations for their effective language use, among others, for example, expert declaration, direct support and/or rhetorical flavor
(Harris, 2002). Several nonnative writers in this study, however, use direct quotations as part of their argument trajectory rather than using their own paraphrasing. The following excerpt illustrates the case in which direct quotations are used as part of the argument being deployed.

Excerpt 7
When a Westemer come to Korea, he or she would have tough periods to live with Asians in various ways as their cultural differences. And the most challenging problem would be the communication itself. “We do know that Western individualist cultures sample mostly the content of communications, whereas Eastern collectivist cultures sample mostly the context of communicator” (Gudykunst, 1993, Triandis, 1994). The ton, gesture, facial expression and all the way you speak matters in Korea.

Note, first, a few problems in the way the author uses sources. For example, two authors are listed for one direct quotation and no page numbers are listed. What is more important is the relation of the quoted passages to the ongoing argument. The first two sentences in the excerpt offer a general remark on communicative problems that might occur to a Western immigrant to Korea. Ideally, the next passage should move the argument ahead by, for example, specifying the nature of the problem or offering examples among others. Instead, this writer uses a direct quotation to carry out the aforementioned function; it is the quoted passages, not the author’s writing, that direct the argument ahead. When this happens, the writing is likely to lose the authorship, confusing who is claiming which argument.

The next excerpt illustrates a more complex use of direct quotations. This is a response to the fifth writing prompt that calls for comparison of German and Japanese business negotiation practices. Note how the author uses the direct quotations as part of the argumentation trajectory.

Excerpt 8
On the other hand, Germans avoid group discussions and conference on their decision making. They more prefer to break down all the tasks and specialize into one field. Hence, in Germany, “Germans are usually are not compatible to each other’s fields as they have no knowledge.” Therefore, “Germans to consider small talk to be a waste of time in a business context” whereas, Japanese appreciate maintain close personal contacts and having alcohol “nomini-cation” drink and communicates in their business context. Also, “since everyone is a specialist in their own field, there is little to talk with others” and “subsequent meanings are only necessary if an intermediate meeting had been scheduled previously, or if there is an unanticipated problem” (Hinner, 310).
Similar to the previous excerpt, direct quotations are used as part of the primary argument the author is building. Notable here is that after proposing the thesis about German’s decision making, the author uses a series of direct quotations to characterize German cultural features in business practices. These direct quotations are what constitute the main argument and therefore, there is no strong evidence of authorial stance towards the source texts.

The use of direct quotations tells us about the author’s choices from the assigned readings while demonstrating their skills and experience with reading and writing. The use of direct quotations involves the ability to choose relevant passages from the sources, to place them in appropriate locations and to characterize them in relation to his/her arguments being developed. The excessive use of direct quotations seems to show how the authors are struggling with the issue of where to draw the line between one’s own argument and the arguments from the source texts. There are two out of the seventeen students whose writings consistently use direct quotations in this way. To some extent, this type of writing demonstrates the writers’ attempt to use sources faithfully while avoiding plagiarism. The problem is that excessive quotations often disrupt the flow of the argument and confuse the authorship, which leads to a lack of strong thesis to oversee the entire flow of the argument.

4. Cases of Advanced Writers

Among the student writers, there were a few who demonstrated dexterity in using sources to produce coherent arguments. This section offers cases of advanced writings to show how these writings are different from the problematic cases illustrated above. Advanced writers seem better at all aspects of writing as Flower and Hayes (1980) argued. However, it would be useful to know what makes advanced writings good in reference to the problems illustrated so far.

Advanced writings found in this data corpus seem to address the writing prompts adequately. This means that these writers are selective in choosing what sources to use while specifying the relevant terms and concepts. The following excerpt illustrates the case in point as the author uses conceptual terms and principles to address cultural conflicts as the prompt calls for.

Excerpt 9
If a Westerner was to live in an Asian country, the person would face certain difficulties that derive from their cultural differences. The difference includes more than just people’s way of living but people’s way of perceiving and interacting with the world. Trandis explains Western and Eastern cultures according to ‘cultural syndrome’.
He defines it as ‘a shared pattern of beliefs, attitudes, self-definition, norms, roles and values organized around a theme.’ This cultural syndrome is what lies beneath the superficial aspects like customs and tradition—things that are relatively easy to see and acquire—this is harder to understand because the people who belong to a certain culture takes it for granted and rarely explains it. Largely, the Westerner would be individualist and the people in Asian countries would be collectivists. And since these two cultural traits are almost the opposite it would be hard for the Westerner to adjust to the Asian society lest he tries to understand the collectivist culture...

Note how the author uses the conceptual term “cultural syndrome” to explain the cultural conflicts she proposes in the first sentence. This author dwells upon this concept by providing a definition and explaining its key feature, “This cultural syndrome is what lies beneath the superficial aspect...” From this feature, the author derives the point about what makes intercultural communication difficult. This seems to be an effective way to use technical concepts as a topical anchor without being absorbed into commonsense knowledge or personal anecdotes.

The following excerpt shows another case of advanced writing in which the author uses summaries effectively in deploying her own arguments. This writing is particularly effective in pulling together a series of technical concepts from two different articles while coherently maintaining the topical theme.

Excerpt 10
At first, Japanese and German business organization seems to have a lot in common since both cultures value procedures in decision making and gaining approval in steps instead of having CEO make the call. However, when looked deeper, Japanese and German business style differ greatly in terms of personal relationship between colleagues and the way in which business meetings are held. Above all, Japanese value personal contacts and relationship at workplace while German strictly separates work and private matters. Japanese often reach consensus by having informal discussion outside working time called “nemawashi”. In this way, Japanese make sure that objections or different ideas could be brought in altogether in advance to the actual “ringi”, the official face-to-face meeting. They often go out drinking alcohol with one another in order to have “nomini-cation”, in which they can share candid opinions of the business matters. However, for Germans who considers personal relationship and time-spending with their colleagues as “pep-talk” and inefficient, such Japanese business culture would strike as odd and unacceptable. Japanese, on the other hand, may be offended by Germans who refuse to have nemawashi or nomini-cation...
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The author begins with a summative remark about the two cultures by discussing the common features of the two target cultures. This is followed by a thesis-like statement that characterizes difference in cultural practices in the two cultures "...differ in terms of personal relationship...the way in which business meetings are held." From then on, the author is able to juxtapose Japanese and German cultural practices on decision making to explain the types of cultural conflicts that may arise in their business negotiation (the last two sentences). In carrying this task out, the author needed to offer brief but efficient summary of Japanese cultural practices (e.g., nemawashi or ringi) and German practices on personal relations. These summative remarks are purposeful while addressing what the prompt called for.

The advanced writings illustrated above demonstrate a few important points about using source texts. First, these writers demonstrate the ability to choose relevant selections from the reading passages. This indicates that they are capable of prioritizing sources in terms of importance and relevance to the topical theme they want to develop. Second, the advanced writers tend to make the most of technical concepts or terms from the source text by providing efficient definitions or discussing their key features. These discussions allow them to focus on the source texts in deploying their arguments lest their writings become too loose with commonsense based evidence or too dense with heavy summarizing. Third, the advanced writing suggests that they have some degree of writing experience; this is most visible in their ability to bring out coherent arguments in a timed condition. About one fifth of the writings in the data corpus show the advanced level of writing reported in this section.

V. CONCLUSION

The present paper examines nonnative writings from a writing-to-learn perspective in order to explore how L2 writing can be used for content learning. The writing-to-learn approach is somewhat different from learning-to-write focus in L2 writing research. First, L2 writing research focuses on improving formal accuracy and functional efficiency of L2 writings and therefore, the presence of objective criteria is important. In contrast, the writing-to-learn approach has an effect of obliging analysts to go beyond external criteria in evaluating nonnative writing in order to see student writings in reference to the instructional contexts of content learning. For this reason, the alternative presented in the present study traces how students writings are enacted and made relevant to the nature of the course content, features of writing prompts, instructor's teaching objectives and student writing proficiency.

One way to realize this analytic precept is to treat student writings as the outcome of
particular choices by the writers in response to the kinds of constraints and resources these contexts afford. For this reason, student writings were examined, not only for what they cannot do, but also what they can do in working through contextual resources and situational constraints in responding to particular kinds of prompts or source texts. This allows us to produce close descriptive accounts of student writings in its production context and possibly infer developmental paths in L2 writing.

A particular emphasis is placed on tracing how source texts are used in student writings as they are indicative of their understanding and undertaking of the source texts. Some students use sources in an uncertain and sketchy way without demonstrating a clear stance towards the source text. Other writers rely excessively on their commonsense knowledge and personal experience without elaborating on the source texts they used. Some students rely on heavy summarizing or excessive use of direct quotations. These choices often lead to the absence of authorial voice in the writing or leave no clear sense of direction.

A close examination of advanced writings also show us what good writing looks like in choosing and using resources. Advanced writers seem able to select particular types of information from the source and to reorder and restructure them to fit their own arguments. By specifying distinctive skills required in text-responsible writing, we can devise ways in which summarizing and paraphrasing can be used more strategically to fit the needs of those less advanced writers according to the nature of the problems they have.

While college instructors wish that students have basic writing skills before taking their content courses, the research seems to indicate that it takes time and systematic intervention for L2 writing skills to develop. Several researchers (Morss & Murray, 2001; Williams & Colomb, 1993) argued for explicit teaching in order to address particular kinds of problems writers demonstrate. For example, having students do free-writing or make simple responses to the assigned reading may help students feel less anxious while allowing them to work with manageable tasks. Content learning can often be supported by short writing tasks because they provide students with tangible resources in a workable condition. Those students who make cursory reference to the source texts might need a training to stay with the text by practicing paraphrasing, defining key concepts and illustrating them. Excessive summarizers may also need some training in strategic summarizing and synthesizing so that they can draw their own thesis from the source text.

To sum up, the problematic writings are correctible through explicit instructional interventions. Yet student writers would not respond equally to any uniform instructional measures. Some students need free writing practices (Elbow, 1981) to make writing a more accessible and convenient thing to do while others need more focused training on reading comprehension. This is why it is important to specify what students do with the academic source texts by tracing their choices and constraints enacted in their writing. While the writing-to-learn approach may turn out to be useful, its success depends on close
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analytic renderings that bring into view students’ perspectives and choices embedded in their writings. The present study is designed to explore some possibilities for developing an alternative approach to L2 writing research.

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